

“Living as People of the Resurrection: PARADISE”

Luke 24:1-12

1 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.
2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,
3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.
4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.
5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?
6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:
7 ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” **8** Then they remembered his words.
9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others.
10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles.
11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.
12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Introduction

The Resurrection of Jesus offers the only hope of a life with lasting meaning now and a life of perfect fulfillment to come. Someone said that “Hope is to the spirit what oxygen is to the body.”

But what is hope, anyway? Wishful thinking? Naïve optimism? We say things like, “Hope it doesn’t rain... Hope the economy bounces back... Hope the sermon doesn’t drag on too long (now that’s wishful thinking)... Hope the Utes beat Gonzaga (oh yeah, we got crushed).

Bobby Knight is the legendary basketball coach for Army, Indiana and Texas Tech. He added much to the Madness of March! He’s famous for throwing chairs and chewing out officials, players, fans, anyone within reach. He recently wrote a book about his career and coaching methods: *The Power of Negative Thinking*. He says that “hope” is the worst word in the English language. It’s foolish and just plain “lazy” to tell yourself that things are going to be all right. He says, “They’ll only be all right if somebody steps up and DOES something.”

I always disliked his demeanor on the court. But here I think he’s right. Hope needs a

reason; someone or something to change the negative direction. Without a reason, hope is just wishful thinking. Grace Chapel pastor Bryan Wilkerson preaches it: “If life has a way of killing dreams, Christ’s resurrection has a way of bringing them back to life.”

How is that working for you? Is Jesus’ resurrection just a legend that symbolically represents the spiritual experiences of his first followers? Or is the First Easter a shattering historical event? Is Jesus that **SOMEBODY** who stepped up and **DID** something?

I. Resurrection Reaches the Past

The eyewitnesses tell us. “On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the garden tomb.” Now, there’s a reason to discount the story – it was “the women.” Actually, it’s a good reason to believe the Bible. If you were making up a legend in the first century, you would never put women in there as the first eyewitnesses. The only reason Luke put them in his account is if they really were the first to the tomb and the first to hear the good news, “He is not here; he has risen!” It says they “told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense (typical men! they had to see it for themselves). “Peter got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.” When Thomas heard about it, he famously said, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

When Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others set out that early morning after the Sabbath to sweeten the smell of death by preparing the spices for the body of Jesus, they went with deep grief and no hope. “If only he hadn’t come to Jerusalem during this time of trouble... If only the disciples had hidden him somewhere else... If only Peter and the others had been able to fight with their swords... If only...”

All of us think or say this at various points of life, “If only...” What are the things in your past that you would like to reverse, go back in your story to change or erase? I wish I had been kinder, more loving and understanding when my father struggled with lung cancer and died 30 years ago at age 63 (how my perspective has changed as I turn 64 this week).

If only I’d been a better dad... a more nurturing spouse... There are probably a thousand different stories in this room this Easter morning saying, “If only...”

In January, NPR ran a heartbreaking interview with Robert Ebeling, an engineer who worked on the *Challenger* launch thirty years ago. In January 1986, Ebeling and four other

engineers pleaded for the launch to be delayed; they anticipated the precise failure that would destroy the shuttle. That night, he even told his wife, Darlene, “It's going to blow up.” The engineers' pleas were refused.

Ebeling retired soon after *Challenger*. He suffered deep depression and has never been able to lift the burden of guilt. He said, “I could have done more. I should have done more.” He says the data he and his fellow engineers presented with persistent and sometimes angry arguments, weren't enough to sway Thiokol managers and NASA officials. This is something he struggled with and prayed about for the last 30 years of his life. “I think that was one of the mistakes that God made. He shouldn't have picked me for the job. But next time I talk to him, I'm gonna ask him, ‘Why me? You picked a loser.’”

Well, I have some good news for him and for you. I have some good news for me! Jesus took his place, your place and mine on the Cross to forgive us, to free us from guilt and he rose up from the grave to give new life. Jesus reversed the curse. He reaches into my past and yours to bring healing and hope. The Resurrection reverses alienation and condemnation. Paul preached it so strongly in Romans 8: “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.” Do you believe it; trust it to be true? Do you have confidence in the power of the Resurrection? Because it really happened. I just learned that Bob Ebeling died this past Monday at the age of 89, in Brigham City, after a long illness. (You can hear an excerpt of NPR's interview with Robert Ebeling on npr.org).

II. Resurrection Touches the Present

Christianity in Europe and North America has been in decline for four or five generations. Mainline churches like Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopalian have been in serious decline since 1960. Although we are now trying to do all the right things to renew and re-grow, we are what someone likened to “the patient in the midst of the most contemporary hospital with the best facilities and highly trained doctors, and is still dying.”

And yet Christianity in other parts of the world is growing at a rapid pace. The church isn't dying; but it is shifting: South and East. Twenty-five percent of Christians in the world presently live in Africa. And the Pew Research Center estimates that will grow to 40 percent by 2030.

Asia is also experiencing growth as world Christianity's center has moved. Asia's Christian population of 350 million is projected to grow to 460 million by 2025. The global

religious wildcard is China. Even today, demographers estimate that more Christian believers are found worshipping in China on any given Sunday than in the U.S.

In the United States, about 43 million residents were born in another country, and immigrated here. About 74% claim the Christian faith (5 percent are Muslim, 4 percent Buddhist, 3 percent Hindu).

What do these groups of believers have that we seem to have lost? Truett Seminary's Joel Gregory says that it's a passion for Jesus, a deep desire for his presence above all else. We seem to lack the one thing they seem to have: a burning, vivid sense that when we come together, we are in the presence of crucified and risen Lord Jesus, the One who has conquered death and brought life and immortality to all who trust in him.

“Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ Then they remembered his words. When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others.” The early church had the overflowing joy of Jesus' resurrection.

As the single-most important event in history, the Resurrection reaches to the past and touches the present. Professor Gregory poignantly wrote, “To loyalties partially given, resurrection is partially revealed.” Your present life and mine can be immeasurably blessed as we seek, even crave the presence of the Risen Lord. If we would say, “I will seek him when I'm elated and when I'm depressed, when I see him and when the darkness seems to hide him,” we would know his presence. Jesus was serious when he said, “Seek and ye shall find; ask and it shall be given; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

Conclusion: Resurrection Assures the Future

Easter Day reaches the past, touches the present, and then assures the future, the hope of a real future for you and for me. Some say that when you die, you only become part of the earth; like *The Lion King's* circle of life, part of the fertilizer for new plants that other living things eat. “Not so!” declares the Risen Lord Jesus. The future holds a certain, unimaginably wonderful resurrection in the love of Christ with all loved ones who have accepted the meaning of his Cross and Empty Tomb.

The Bible says that “the wages of sin is death.” Jesus Christ went into death make that payment for us. And when he came up from the grave, that meant it was paid finally and fully.

Presbyterian pastor Tim Keller says, “If you're in a department store and you buy

something but then still walk around the store, a security person stops you and says, ‘Excuse me – can I look into your bag?’ You reach in and hold up the receipt and say, “Oh, plain clothes security person, trouble me not because this proves that this has been paid for and I do not have to pay for it again.” The historical fact of the Resurrection is a “giant receipt” stamped for all to see, that you can know that your future is certain if you believe in Jesus Christ.

Wishful thinking? Or sure hope? You know what Jesus offers. Hope because he stepped up and did something. Let us pray with and for one another.

I Corinthians 15:51-57

51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—

52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

55 “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.