

Does Easter Really Matter?
Did Jesus Really Rise From the Dead?
I Corinthians 15:12-20
March 27, 2016

Do you share that excitement?
Are you ready to celebrate the event?
Does Easter really matter?
Do you believe the Resurrection really took place?

If you do, how does that reality impact your life?
Here is Paul's warning.

I Corinthians 15:17-19 "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. All who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost...we are to be pitied more than all men."

Let's put ourselves in that first Easter morning.

Much sadness, despair, fear and a great sense of loss. At least for those who **had followed Jesus. He was now dead and buried.**

The eleven, His closest students, were together somewhere. **Probably hiding out, in fear and disbelief.**

Roman Guards stood at the tomb, **just doing their job.**

The women, found the tomb to be empty Peter and John ran to check it out themselves
There was a conversation, **With a dead, but living Savior. It was a full morning. Found in....**
Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20

Each gospel has different details They all have an empty tomb & **a risen Jesus!**

Do you believe it? Does it matter?

Your answer depends on finding an empty tomb
Knowing that Jesus died and rose for you
Allowing this truth to change your life

Easter is not really about Spring hats, chocolate bunnies and colored eggs. **Easter is about God's love and power over sin and death.** It is the most important event in human history. The truth of the Resurrection, has molded the world. **And it will change your life.**

Did Jesus really raise from the dead?

We could spend many hours together in order to determine this, **let me identify a brief outline of the evidence.**

The grave was found to be empty If not, the authorities just needed to point to an occupied grave, **they did not.**

It is hard to believe that the disciples could have overcome the Roman guard and taken the body. **If they had, the guards would have been put to death,** they were not so punished.

There was no body, there was no other answer.

He was seen more than a dozen times, by as many as 500 people at once, many who knew Him well. **It could not have been a hoax or an apparition.**

We see the reality of this event by the ongoing experience of the disciples. **After the crucifixion they were beaten and fearful men**, whose mission in life had been destroyed, **crucified on a cross and buried in a tomb.**

After interacting with the Risen Jesus, **every one of the Disciples spent the rest of their lives sharing the truth of the Living Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.** Most of them ultimately suffering terrible deaths in defense of this truth. **Their lives, and their purpose for living were transformed.**

I'm show my age, Charles Colson was a key advisor to President Richard Nixon, in the **70s**, much involved in the Watergate scandal and served time for his illegal activities.

"I believe in the resurrection because of Watergate."

Those involved in Watergate believed passionately in the President.

We were some of the most powerful men in the world.

Yet even at the prospect of jeopardizing the President, **even in the face of all the privileges of the most powerful office in the world**, the threat of embarrassment, perhaps jail, was so overpowering and **the instinct for self-preservation so overwhelming, that one by one**, those involved deserted their leader to save their own skin, **they confessed.**

"I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. **Because 11 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead**, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. **Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true.**

Watergate embroiled **12 of the most powerful, educated, confident men in the world**, and they couldn't keep a lie **for three weeks.."**

Only an encounter with the living God could have kept the Disciples steadfast. Those men held to that testimony because they had seen Christ raised from the dead. **They knew He was Savior and Lord!**

We could make a powerful case for the truth and reality of Christianity based on it's explosive growth and significant impact on the world throughout the past 2,000 years. I won't take the time to fill in all of those details.

We see the validity of the Resurrection by the testimony of history and historians. The vast majority of the greatest minds in the history of the western world have been Christians. **Men and women who had no question in their minds** about the truth of the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus.

Countless scholars—among them the apostle Paul, Augustine, Sir Isaac Newton and C. S. Lewis—believed in the resurrection. **We need not fear committing intellectual suicide by believing it also.**

Ignatius, a contemporary of Paul, in the first century wrote, “Jesus was crucified in reality, and not in appearance, not in imagination, not in deceit. **He really died, and was buried, and rose from the dead.**”

We can relate innumerable quotes from most of the greatest minds and best historians throughout the ages that support this event as fact.

Paul L. Maier, professor of Ancient History at Western Michigan University. **One of the great historians of the 20th century.** "If the evidence is weighed carefully and fairly, it is indeed justifiable, **according to the canons of historical research**, to conclude that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was actually empty on the morning of the first Easter. **And no shred of evidence has yet been discovered** in literary sources, or archaeology that would disprove this statement."

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to the changed lives of literally millions of individuals, throughout history and in today's world, who have personally experienced **the reality of the risen Savior and the impact of a new life.**

We heard Robin earlier in our service. I suspect that you have experienced it for yourself, **or you know and love many who have.**

Let me share one more testimony with you.

Lee Strobel was an avowed atheist. As a graduate of Yale Law School, an investigative reporter, and later, the legal affairs editor for the Chicago Tribune.

Strobel **was familiar with the weighing of evidence.** He was familiar with plenty of university professors who knew Jesus as an iconoclastic Jew, a revolutionary, even a prophet, **but not God. He had read just enough philosophy and history to support his skepticism.**

Listen to his story.

Lee has written a number of excellent books to help us better understand the evidence for God, for Jesus and for the truth of Christianity. **They would be a great resource.**

Easter is a day of celebration and worship. It is also an opportunity to revisit the single most significant event in human history. One that has impacted and shaped human history. **Beyond that, it provides the only path to forgiveness, love, wholeness, hope and eternal assurance.**

If you have that personal relationship with Jesus, I hope that our time today had affirmed that, and **even challenged you to be very serious about that relationship on a daily basis.**

If you have not taken that step as yet, **I have attempted to provide you with information that will help you to seek the truth.** And if it is true, **I know it is**, to help you see that you cannot, and should not **avoid the implications in your life.**

I Peter 1:3-6 “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you...In this you greatly rejoice.”

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
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