

A Few People Meet the Savior

Series: Journey to the Cross

Luke 24:1-12

April 16, 2017

Thank you again for being here today on Easter Sunday. Whether this is your 1st time, 10th time, 100th time, or you've been here a long time, Easter is a special day... THE day, in the Christian faith. It was a turning point.

Many, many people can tell you of a turning point in their lives, some event that changed the course of their future. It was the night that the Beatles were on Ed Sullivan that inspired probably thousands of future musicians. Or the launch and landing of Apollo 11 and those immortal words, "That's one small step for man..." that change the life of future astronauts and astronomers. Or it was a television show like Star Trek that set a new course for a future scientist, or CSI for a future forensic investigator. Or maybe it was someone's first baseball game or football game or basketball game, or seeing the incredible skill of a Tony Hawk, Serena Williams, or Tiger Woods, that moved someone towards the goal of being a professional athlete. Turning points. Moments when a person's life pivots towards a new future.

Any historian will tell you that there have been turning points in human experience where everything changed after that: creating fire, the invention of the wheel, gun powder, navigation by the stars, the cotton gin, electricity, the telephone, the automobile, the airplane (one I'm particularly fond of), penicillin, television, and of course the internet. Cell phones, smartphones, have changed life so much in just a short decade or so. Don't think so? How many of you do not have a cell phone?

So it's easy to see how turning points like these change everything. And I contend that the resurrection is the biggest and most important turning point in all of human history. Nothing else is even close. Everything changed that first Easter Sunday.

You see, there's nothing unique about a baby being born, even if it is in a little town of Bethlehem. Every single one of us was born, at least I think so; some I'm not sure. Probably every single one of us got lost sometime in our lives; maybe not 3 days in the Temple, I'll grant you that, but we've gotten lost. There have been plenty of good teachers, really good teachers, throughout human history. And there have been many of them who died for what they believed.

But never, ever, ever has any of these fine teachers, inspirational leaders, persons of change and revolution, ever raised from the dead. That's unheard of; that's unique; that's special.

But it did happen to one person. One person who predicted it multiple times before it happened. One person on a Roman cross in a backwaters town of Jerusalem, one person, who claimed to be God, died, was buried, then rose on the third day.

For the last several weeks, we have been talking about the "Journey to the Cross." We have seen that Jesus was singularly focused on going to Jerusalem. Matthew 16:21 reads:

From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the

*elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead.*¹

Two more times, He foretells this fate to the disciples. He predicts what will happen to Him in detail.

Now, it's one thing to be a traveling preacher gathering large crowds in the countryside. It's one thing to speak out against the establishment and predict they won't like it and might try to silence you. It's one thing – a crazy thing – to say you are the Son of God. But it is something else to predict your death, and say you will be raised from the dead on the third day... and it happens.

Here is the key today. I want you to fill in the first blank in your notes: The Gospel **stands or falls** on the resurrection of Jesus. Christianity stands or falls on the resurrection of Jesus. You can't just teach about being a better person and loving people; plenty have done that. You can't just die for a cause; plenty have done that. But predict your death and resurrection... and it happens... that is completely unique to one man, and if it didn't happen, we are wasting our time here this morning.

After he wrote his famous passage that we often call "The Love Chapter, the Apostle Paul writes this:

*And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost!*²

This is all meaningless if Christ was not raised. Yet for such a turning point in human history, there is something that is amazing to me. There were so few people to witness it. I guess that shouldn't surprise me; the only witnesses to this man's birth were His parents, a few shepherds, and some foreign wise men. Likewise, when Jesus is raised from the dead, who witnesses it?

Look in your bulletin and follow along as I read from Luke 24:

*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. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. 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? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, 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. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 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.*³

Notice something in the text. Did anyone actually see the resurrection? The Bible says, "No." And one more thing? Who are the first witnesses on the empty tomb? A few women. That's funny. At that time, women were not allowed to testify in court. They could

¹ Matthew 16:21 (NLT)

² 1 Corinthians 15:17-18 (NLT)

³ Luke 24:1-12 (NIV)

not tell their story with any assumed credibility. But it was to women the angel announced the news of the resurrection.

Today, there is still a great stir over the Resurrection, and there are still only two choices: to be closed to the truth (denying it, ignoring it, or trying to explain it away), or to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. And if Jesus, who predicted His own resurrection, was indeed raised from the dead, then one should consider the other things that He said as something we should listen to.

But it all comes down to the resurrection. What are the truths of the Resurrection? Let me share with you 7 truths of the Resurrection.

First, No one expected Jesus to rise from the dead.

In verse 5, the angels said to the women:

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”⁴

In John’s Gospel, Mary Magdalene meets angels at the tomb and they ask her:

“Dear woman, why are you crying?” the angels asked her. “Because they have taken away my Lord,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him.”⁵

These women had gone to the tomb that morning, not looking for a risen Lord, but a dead friend, whom they needed to put spices on to finalize the burial. When you go to a funeral home for a visitation or a service, are you looking for someone alive? No, you are paying your respects to a dead person. That’s what the women were doing because no one expected Jesus to rise from the dead.

Second, Everyone doubted it at first.

The women went back and told the disciples what they had discovered. But look at verse 11 & 12:

But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 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.⁶

Later when Jesus did appear to the disciples, Matthew records:

When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted!⁷

Even when Jesus is standing right before them, they doubted at first.

Third, Only later did the disciples remember Jesus predicting it.

Look at verses 6-8:

He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” Then they remembered his words.⁸

They did not remember what He had said over and over again. They wouldn’t have brought spices to the tomb if they did.

Fourth, The stone was rolled away not to let Jesus out but to let the disciples in.

Verses 2-3 read:

They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.⁹

⁴ Luke 24:5 (NIV)

⁵ John 20:13 (NLT)

⁶ Luke 24:11-12 (NIV)

⁷ Matthew 28:17 (NLT)

⁸ Luke 24:6-8 (NIV)

Do you think the power that raised Jesus from the dead could not have rolled the stone away, not because Jesus needed out, but so that the women and the world could see that death had lost, the grave was no longer something to be feared, the tomb was empty, and that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. The stone was rolled away not to let Jesus out, but to let His followers in.

Fifth, Jesus' body was not Stolen.

We know this for three reasons. In the first place, Jesus followers would have had no reason to steal the body. They missed the predictions about His death and resurrection.

Second, the religious leaders did not steal the body. It's true, they were worried about a concocted story of resurrection, so they had a guard posted and the tomb sealed to insure that none of Jesus' followers would try something sneaky. And the easiest way to put a stop to this resurrection business after Easter would have been for His opponents to produce the dead body. They didn't for one simple reason: they didn't have it. They did not steal His body.

Third, the amazing transformation in these disciples had to have had a cause. They were hiding following Jesus' arrest; they didn't go down with the women on Sunday morning in fear for their lives. But after the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit 50 days later, they began to preach and testify with boldness, and most died for the Gospel. No one dies for a hoax. Jesus' body was not stolen.

Sixth, This same "resurrection power" is available now.

Paul wrote in Philippians 3:10:

*I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead.*¹⁰

When we become one with Christ by trusting in Him, we experience the power that raised Him from the dead. That same mighty power will help us live morally renewed and regenerated lives.

Next week, we will start a new series called "It's Somewhere: Looking for Answers." We will explore the Bible to find the answers to some of the most difficult issues of life: Why Do Bad Things Happen, Our Future, Doubt, Relationships, Fear, Assurance, Belonging, and Purpose.

So, if Jesus predicted His own resurrection, then it's probably safe to say that the other things He talked about would also be true. And that same resurrection power would be available to you and me to deal with the very difficult issues of life. So I encourage you to be here next Sunday as we tackle why do bad things happen.

Finally, the resurrection confirms and proves He's still alive today.

Every claim He made for Himself, every promise He gave His followers, and every judgment He delivered to the enemy is confirmed because He predicted His resurrection, and it happened! The Savior who took our sins on Himself and paid for them by His death on Calvary is still alive and loose in our world today.

Edith Burns was a wonderful Christian who lived in San Antonio, Texas. She was the patient of a doctor by the name of Will Phillips. Dr. Phillips was a gentle doctor who saw patients as people. His favorite patient was Edith Burns. One morning he went to his office with a heavy heart and it was because of Edith Burns.

⁹ Luke 24:2-3 (NIV)

¹⁰ Philippians 3:10a (NLT)

When he walked into that waiting room, there sat Edith with her big black Bible in her lap earnestly talking to a young mother sitting beside her.

Edith Burns had a habit of introducing herself in this way: "Hello, my name is Edith Burns. Do you believe in Easter?" Then she would explain the meaning of Easter, and many times people would be saved.

A nurse by the name of Beverly first met Edith when she was taking her blood pressure. Edith began by saying, "My name is Edith Burns. Do you believe in Easter?" Beverly said, "Why yes I do." Edith said, "Well, what do you believe about Easter?" Beverly said, "Well, it's all about egg hunts, going to church, and dressing up." Edith kept pressing her about the real meaning of Easter, and finally led her to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

After being called back in the doctor's office, Edith sat down and when she took a look at the doctor she said, "Dr. Will, why are you so sad? Are you reading your Bible? Are you praying?"

Dr. Phillips said gently, "Edith, I'm the doctor and you're the patient." With a heavy heart he said, "Your lab report came back and it says you have cancer, and Edith, you're not going to live very long."

Edith said, "Why Will Phillips, shame on you. Why are you so sad? Do you think God makes mistakes? You have just told me I'm going to see my precious Lord Jesus, my husband, and my friends. You have just told me that I am going to celebrate Easter forever, and here you are having difficulty giving me my ticket!" Dr. Phillips thought to himself, "What a magnificent woman this Edith Burns is!"

Edith continued coming to Dr. Phillips. Christmas came and the office was closed through January 3. On the day the office opened, Edith did not show up. Later that afternoon, Edith called Dr. Phillips and said she would have to be moving her story to the hospital and said, "Will, I'm very near home, so would you make sure that they put women in here next to me in my room who need to know about Easter."

Well, they did just that, and women began to come in and share that room with Edith. Many women were saved. Everybody on that floor from staff to patients were so touched by Edith that they started calling her Edith Easter. That is everyone except Phyllis, the head nurse. Phyllis made it plain that she wanted nothing to do with Edith because she was a "religious nut". Phyllis had been a nurse in an army hospital. She had seen it all and heard it all. She was hard and cold.

One morning, the two nurses who were to attend to Edith were sick. Edith had the flu and Phyllis had to go in and tend to Edith. When she walked in, Edith had a big smile on her face and said, "Phyllis, God loves you and I love you, and I have been praying for you." Phyllis said, "Well, you can quit praying for me, it won't work. I'm not interested." Edith said, "Well, I will pray and I have asked God not to let me go home until you come into the family." Phyllis said, "Then you will never die because that will never happen," and curtly walked out of the room.

Every day, Phyllis would walk into the room and Edith would say, "God loves you Phyllis and I love you, and I'm praying for you." One day Phyllis said she was literally drawn to Edith's room like a magnet would draw iron. She sat down on the bed and Edith said, "I'm so glad you have come, because God told me that today is your special day." Phyllis said, "Edith, you have asked everybody here the question, 'Do you believe

in Easter?’ but you have never asked me.” Edith said, “Phyllis, I wanted to many times, but God told me to wait until you asked, and now that you have asked...”

Edith took her Bible and shared with Phyllis the Easter Story of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Edith said, “Phyllis, do you believe in Easter? Do you believe that Jesus Christ is alive and that He wants to live in your heart?” Phyllis said, “Oh, I want to believe that with all of my heart, and I do want Jesus in my life.” Right there, Phyllis prayed and invited Jesus Christ into her heart. For the first time, Phyllis did not walk out of a hospital room, she was carried out on the wings of angels.

Two days later, Phyllis came in and Edith said, “Do you know what day it is?” Phyllis said, “Why Edith, it’s Good Friday.” Edith said, “Oh, no, for you every day is Easter. Happy Easter Phyllis!”

Two days later, on Easter Sunday, Phyllis came into work, did some of her duties and then went down to the flower shop and got some Easter lilies because she wanted to go up to see Edith and give her some Easter lilies and wish her a Happy Easter. When she walked into Edith’s room, Edith was in bed. That big black Bible was on her lap. Her hands were in that Bible. There was a sweet smile on her face.

When Phyllis went to pick up Edith’s hand, she realized Edith was dead. Her left hand was on John 14: “In my Father’s house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.” Her right hand was on Revelation 21:4, “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

Phyllis took one look at that dead body, and then lifted her face toward heaven, and with tears streaming down her cheeks, said, “Happy Easter, Edith. Happy Easter!” Phyllis left Edith’s body, walked out of the room, and over to a table where two student nurses were sitting. She said, “My name is Phyllis. Do you believe in Easter?”