

He Is Risen: The Evidence, The Meaning, The Decision | Easter Sermon

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Date: 05 April 2026

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[0 : 00] The reading today is taken from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 24, the resurrection, starting at verse 1. But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.

And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. But when they went in, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel.

And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen.

Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and on the third day rise.

And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all the things to the eleven and to the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary, the mother of James, and the other woman with them, who told them of these things to the apostles.

[1 : 18] But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb, stooping and looking in.

He saw the linen cloths by themselves, and he went home, marveled at what had happened.

Amazing. Thank you, Andy. Good morning, everyone.

Thank you to the children for bringing some celebration and excitement to our lives. I personally think that we should do that every Sunday morning. I also want to massively say thank you to Atlas and Violet for actually roasting their dad out the front.

And I think we should do that every week as well. I always appreciate it when someone else is getting a roasting and not me. So I think now we need to put that, Andy, we need to make a note of that and put that in as a weekly occurrence.

Thank you for that, Joseph. So good morning. We are here, obviously, it's Easter Sunday morning. And we've not only just invited you this morning to come to a service or observe a tradition, we're inviting you to consider Jesus.

[2 : 36] And so really to kind of, you know, look again at who he is, what he claimed, and what happened on that first Easter morning that we've just read about together.

And so this Easter, it kind of gives us an opportunity to kind of just pause and ask the questions.

What if he, that's Jesus, what if Jesus really is who he said he is?

Like, what if? And so this morning, we're going to ask you to consider the resurrection of Jesus.

Now, before I do that, I want to share with you a question that I was not confronted with, but just reminded of in a really honest way a few weeks ago.

I was watching a YouTube interview with entrepreneur Stephen Bartlett. Do you know him? And he was interviewing or having a discussion, a conversation with Christian speaker Will Huff.

Did anybody see that video? Yeah, a few of you. So you were among the several million other people that watched this video, right? And he basically starts with this question, which if you know anything about Stephen Bartlett, he doesn't hold back, right?

[3 : 49] And it's almost like he just kind of got, you know, like a wet fish and just smacked it around the side of his face with this question to wake us up. This was the question. He says, Will, am I going to hell?

That's a conversation starter, isn't it? Like, what would you like with your coffee? Well, let me ask you a question. Am I going to hell? Like, I mean, that's an honest, brave question. And Will Huff

answered this way.

He said, we all are. One brave question met with a brave answer, right? And then you can go and check out that video in your own time.

But look, that's a super helpful perspective when we consider the resurrection of Jesus, because we're asking, is he who he said he is? Did he do what he said he was going to do?

And then like, why? And so to bring you up to speed, Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem. And he's claimed to be the king who would do away with evil and wickedness.

[4 : 54] And no one expected that just a few days later that that same king would then go to the cross. So that all of that evil and all of the weakness would be placed on him instead of us.

That's the story. And then he would then be placed in a tomb. He would die the death that we should have died. Now, three days later, you know the story because we've just read it, if you're paying attention.

Three days later, again, we're going to go through this story of Luke's account of what happened on that first Easter morning. And then to consider five things.

Now, I know there's like five, that's a lot. We're not going to be here all morning. I promise you, there's lamb in the oven. So five things I just think we should stop and consider this morning.

I'll read them to you, but they will eventually end up on the screen. The first is to consider love in the shadow of death. Then when reality no longer makes sense.

[6 : 05] Then the words we forget. I don't know about you, but my memory is always brilliant. I remember everything my wife tells me.

We should stop and consider the news that sounds like nonsense. And then we should stop and consider the evidence that demands a response. And so the first thing I want us to see is love in the shadow of death.

This is what we read earlier in verse one. It's going to come on the screen. So you can either turn there or if you look on the screen, it's entirely up to you. This is what Luke says. He says, but on the first day of the week at early dawn, when they went to the tomb, they took spices that they had prepared.

So this is a group of women. They're going to the cemetery and they're carrying spices that they're going to anoint the dead body of Jesus with. And so you see in the story, what it's telling us is that they weren't expecting anything else other than the dead body of Jesus.

Of course you wouldn't, would you? They weren't going hopeful. They weren't going expectant. They weren't having any anticipation in their heart that anything else was going to happen.

[7 : 17] It wasn't Easter Sunday to them. All right. They're not breaking out of the Cadbury's cream eggs, unfortunately. Right. That hadn't happened yet. They came carrying spices.

They came carrying grief. A few days earlier, these same women had watched Jesus die on the cross. And now all they could do was come and anoint the body.

And let's be honest. No one went to the tomb that morning expecting a resurrection because that hadn't happened ever. They weren't looking for a miracle.

They were looking for closure. Their love is real, but their love is in the shadow of death. And some of you know what that means. And so they're come trying to do one last act of devotion.

And again, look, if we're honest, many of us know that place, don't we? We know what it is to love and we know what it is to lose. We know what it is to hope and we know what it is to be disappointed.

[8 : 23] We know what it is to believe and then wonder if that was all in vain. And this is where these women are at this Sunday morning. See, Easter doesn't begin with triumph.

As much as it is great to celebrate, it doesn't begin with triumph. It begins in the messiness of life right there. And so stop to consider love in the shadow of death.

And then secondly, the second thing I want us to consider is that when reality no longer makes sense. And so Luke says in verse 2 that they found the stone rolled away from the tomb.

And when they went in, they didn't find the body of Jesus. Now, of course, that kind of changes everything, doesn't it? The stone has been moved. Traditionally, this has been depicted like a disc, like you'll see in this picture.

And so it was designed to kind of sit in front of the tomb. But in fact, it was probably actually more looking something like this, like a cork design, if you like.

[9 : 38] And why we think that is that out of the 900 burial sites around Jerusalem dated to the first century, only four have a disc.

One of them belongs to Queen Helena. And so these belong to very, very wealthy people. And so more likely it's something that looks like this.

But look, nevertheless, however we depict the stone, the truth is that they found the stone and it wasn't where it was supposed to be. It was supposed to be covering a hole.

And then they went in, they expected to see a body, and that wasn't there either, where it was supposed to be. And Luke wants us to see this really super clearly.

This is not poetry. This is not symbolism. This is not wishful thinking. This is an event. The Apostle Paul says that this event, with this event, Christianity rises or falls on it.

[10 : 37] This is what he said to his letter to the church in Corinth. He said, if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless. Right? If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless.

But if he has been risen, then everything changes. The resurrection isn't merely something to feel, but it's something to consider and then reckon with.

It doesn't come to us in private, like comforting, a comforting idea that we can take or leave, just depending on how our day is going. It confronts us with the claim about reality.

And the earliest Christians were not saying, look, we feel that Jesus lives in our hearts. Isn't that nice? Right? They weren't saying, look, the tomb is empty and we don't know what to do with that unless God has acted.

In other words, the resurrection is not just an emotional experience. It is a historical assertion that presents, that presses itself into your life and my life, whether we're ready for it or not.

[11 : 53] And if it's true, it rearranges everything. It rearranges our understanding of God. It rearranges our understanding of suffering, of meaning and even of death itself. Because if the tomb is empty, then death is not what we thought it was.

That it's not ultimate. It's not sovereign. It doesn't get the final word. And that means that the worst thing that can happen to you is never the last thing. Now, notice in verse 4 how the women respond. Luke says that while they were perplexed about it, that's probably a little bit of an understatement, right? This would have been incredibly upsetting for them and unsettling.

So while they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. Now, we know that these were angels. These weren't just two regular guys who rocked up on Sunday morning, right?

And as they were frightened, So two responses, confusion and fear. And both are totally valid, aren't they?

[13 : 02] And both make absolute sense given the context. The resurrection doesn't begin as something that is comforting. The resurrection begins as something that is unsettling and fearful.

Because if Jesus is alive, it means we're not in control. If Jesus is alive, it means death is not final. And God is more powerful than we thought.

And then look at the announcement that comes. They bowed their faces to the ground and the men said, Why do you seek the living among the dead? He's not here. He is risen.

Which is really the center of everything and the center of this whole narrative that Jesus is alive. And this is exactly what he said would happen.

And so thirdly, fourthly, consider the words that we forget. Because the angels say, remember how he told you while he was in Galilee.

[14 : 06] Remember how he told you while he was in Galilee. And so what did Jesus say when he was in Galilee? Well, look, just to highlight two things that he said. One from Matthew, one from Mark.

In Matthew, Matthew's account says this. That from then on, Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, that he would suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests and the teachers of the religious law, that he would be killed.

But on the third day, he would be raised from the dead. So Jesus was predicting this way before it actually happened. Again, in Mark chapter 8. Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things, be rejected by the elders, the leading priests and their teachers of religious law.

He would be killed. But three days later, he would rise from the dead. And so the angels are quick to remind these women to remember what Jesus has previously said.

Remember how he told you while you were still in Galilee. They said in verse 7 that the Son of Man must be delivered, must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.

[15:25] Now, look, that phrase, the Son of Man, it means something to the Jews living at that time. In the book of Daniel, which took place 650 years prior to this, there is one described as the Son of Man.

And there, the Son of Man in Daniel 7 is given authority and honour and sovereignty over all the nations of the world so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal. It will never end and his kingdom will never be destroyed. That's a statement and a half, isn't it? But that's what the Son of Man would do.

He's talking about Messiah who would reign over sin and over death. And it was actually promised that Messiah would have all of this authority and all of this rule and all of this reign actually over death itself.

And then Jesus comes on the scene. And notice that he claims to be the very same Messiah. Listen to his words in Mark chapter 14.

[16:40] He says, Now, I don't think it's a coincidence that Jesus uses that phrase. I don't think he's just like, oh, you know, I'm a man of a son.

I don't think he's saying that. He's using this specific phrase that Daniel used 650 years earlier to describe or to bring to memory to those Jews exactly who he's claiming to be.

He's claiming to be the one who has all authority, all rule, all sovereignty over death itself. He says, Now, look, it's one thing to say you are the Son of Man with all authority, honor, and sovereignty, right?

It's another thing to see that it's true. Like, I don't know whether you know this, but you can claim to be all kinds of things these days. Did you know that? It doesn't make it true, does it? Good.

Just to make sure we're on the same page. And look, with the same scrutiny that we might have, we would scrutinize this. It is one thing for someone to say, I am the Son of Man with all authority, honor, and sovereignty.

[17:55] It's one thing to say that. But it's another thing to see if it's true. And so Jesus dying on the cross like he said he would and then rising again, authority, honor, and sovereignty over death, means Jesus really is who he claimed to be.

He made a claim. He went to the grave. And he rose again from the grave. He did what he said he would do. And then in verse 8, in the classic way, after they've said, oh, we didn't remember, and then said, no, you do remember.

And then they go, oh, yeah, no, we do remember. This is what happens in verse 8. They remembered his words. And that's when things begin to change because faith doesn't come out of nowhere.

It comes from remembering what Jesus has already said. And that's true for us, isn't it? So often our doubt grows when we forget, when we forget God's promises, we forget what Jesus has done, what Scripture has made clear.

Faith is not blind. It's rooted in truth remembered. And for the women, remembering leads them to do something.

[19:08] And this is important. Remembering leads them to action because verse 9 tells us that returning from the tomb, they told all these things to the 11 and to the rest of them.

Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary, the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles. But these words, notice this, these words seem to them as idle tale and they did not believe them.

So these are the apostles. The apostles didn't believe them. Luke records that this news sounded like nonsense.

That's how the resurrection sounded at first. And let's cut them some slack. Because like we sit 2,000 years on the other side of this, they had not heard of this before.

Or they had heard, but they had forgotten. And it seemed like it was ridiculous. What a crazy notion, even to Jesus' closest followers.

[20:19] Which simply means this, if you hear this and you think, that just sounds hard to believe. Right? It does sound hard to believe. You're in pretty good company.

The first Christians didn't believe easily either. They struggled. They questioned. They wrestled. Because this is not the kind of thing that you expect. Dead people stay dead. And yet the claim of Christianity is not that Jesus inspired his followers after his death.

It's that he rose from the dead in history. Which means this is not just a comforting story. It's a disruptive truth. It confronts your assumptions about what is possible.

And leaves you with a choice. You either dismiss it as nonsense. Or you begin to ask, what if it is true? And then Luke says, finally, that this news demanded a response.

To consider the response. Verse 12. If you know anything about Jesus' followers, you could have probably written this yourself, knowing who it was going to be. It says that Peter, who is always, you know, the first to jump out of the boat to say the awkward thing that everybody else is thinking.

[21 : 39] So Peter rose and he ran to the tomb. He doesn't stay at a distance. He runs. And he stoops in and he looks in and he saw the linen cloths by themselves and he went home marveling at what had happened.

And this is really where it becomes personal. Peter doesn't have everything figured out yet, does he? Like he's still trying to figure that out like most of us. Peter moves towards the evidence.

And really, that's the invitation of Easter. It's not blind belief. It's not forced certainty, but an honest response. To look and to consider and then to be honest and wrestle with that truth.

Because the resurrection is not something that you can remain neutral about. If Jesus died and stayed dead, then Christianity collapses. It's a nice hobby to do with friends, but nothing more than that.

But if Jesus died and he became alive again, then Jesus is who he said he is. And that means his claim on your life and my life are real.

[22 : 55] Which means his word carries authority over our lives. That the truth of him going to the cross and dying for our sins because he loves us, to save us.

So when Will Huff said, well, we're all going to hell, Jesus' mission was to save us from hell. And then to prove that he had, what did he do?

The third day, he gets up and vindicates that story. Would you notice that the story doesn't stay neutral?

The women don't shrug it off. They don't just bring the spices and flowers and leave it there and say, well, I've done my duty for this week or for this year. They go and tell.

Peter, he doesn't just say, well, that's a nice story. Thanks for sharing. I'm glad that's true for you. I'm hoping you have warm fuzzies about it. Peter says, I'm going to run and investigate.

[23 : 55] And we know that the rest of the story, the disciples still struggled with it, didn't they?

Thomas had a real hard time believing. The disciples wrestled with that belief, but no one shrugs it off and neither can we.

The resurrection is not just interesting. It's decisive. And if it's true, it changes everything. And so here's the question we have to face.

If Jesus is alive, how must my life change? If Jesus is alive, my past is not final, my sin is not ultimate, my sufferings are not meaningless, my future is not uncertain.

But if Jesus is alive, then I'm not invited just to admire him. I'm called to trust him and follow him and surrender to him because the risen Jesus is not just to be considered, he's to be followed and obeyed.

I'm going to pray and he's going to come up or someone's going to come up, the band are going to come up and lead us in our final song. Pray with me. Father, thank you for the truth that Jesus is alive and risen from the grave.

[25 : 06] Thank you, Lord, that it's not just a historical fact and reality, but it means something to us that we can be saved from our sins and live with you for eternity. Thank you, Lord, that it means that death is not the king.

You are the king. And so, Lord, we want to consider these things, but we don't want to just shrug them off and say that they are nice things or nice things to be believed.

Help us in our belief and help us in our unbelief. Help us with the things that we struggle and help us today even with one step forward to place our trust in you and to follow you.

Lord, we thank you for what this day means to us. Lord, we thank you, Lord, that we can trust in you and that you're alive today. And we pray, Lord, that you would just continue to speak to us as we, as Peter, run and investigate.

We want to know you more and we want to walk with you more closely. Lord, would you reveal these things to us in Jesus' name? Amen. Amen.