

Sunday 31st March 2024 - Easter Sunday Service

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Date: 31 March 2024

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[0 : 00] Well, if you've been listening, kind of paying attention during the service, you'll know, really, that there are two big things about Easter that we need to grapple with, that we need to understand.

And the first is this matter of Jesus dying. Why did Jesus have to die? And the second is this whole business about resurrection. If you're paying attention in RE classes, you will have heard of the resurrection. Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Why should we care about that? Why did Jesus have to die, first of all? Let's start there. And the short answer is that Jesus had to die because of who we are and because of who God is.

Now, you'll know if you were here at Christmas that we've got a new puppy in the house and it's now Easter, so I thought it was probably time to give you a pup date. Are you ready? Here she is. Yeah, she's beautiful. She's beautiful. Here's something else I've learned about her in the last few months, apart from the fact that she's beautiful. She's also foolish. She is.

[1 : 11] Because when I let her off the lead, instead of staying nicely by my heel, where it's safe, where there are treats, where things are good, she runs off.

And instead of coming back when I call, when I see danger ahead or she's heading into trouble, she pretends she can't hear me.

And she gallops off to do her own thing because she doesn't know that there are cars and other dogs that are dangerous and people who might be unfriendly.

And she doesn't know that there are certain things that she shouldn't eat. Like wolves. Like wolves. Thank you, Kieran. She thinks she knows everything.

So off she goes because in her own head she's the queen of muck. And actually that's not far off the truth when you look at our house. And she ignores me and she ends up getting in trouble.

[2 : 06] She gets in trouble with me for not listening. She ends up hurting herself. And in fact if she's really bad she ends up hurting other people too. Because she's got teeth. And that's us.

See instead of staying with God, where there is loving care and provision and food for our souls, we run off.

And when he calls us back, away from danger and our own foolishness, do we listen to his voice and come? We pretend not to hear.

Because we think we know best. So that's us. Beautiful. But foolish. But the good news is that God won't stop being God just because of our foolishness.

Just because we ignore our master's voice, he doesn't stop being who he is. You see, if I stopped caring for Cassie, stopped teaching her the things that she needs to know to have a long and happy life and avoid hurting others, then I wouldn't be being true to myself.

[3 : 23] I wouldn't be true to who God has called me to be. Plus you'd probably be phoning the RSPCA because that's neglect, isn't it? And it's the same with God.

God doesn't change his care for us or his claim on our life just because we're foolish enough to ignore him. He's not into disobedient dogs, but he's not into neglect either.

He is love. God remains true to himself even though we don't remain true to him. What is God like?

He is both loving and fair.

He is both just and merciful. Now if he's fair, then he can't let us get away with hurting ourselves or hurting other people. And if he's just, then biting the hand that feeds needs consequences.

He can't ignore our bad behaviour and still be just, can he? But he also won't abandon us to danger and disobedience. So how can he do both?

[4 : 35] He comes to our rescue personally. That's how he does it. He comes in the person of the Lord Jesus. Jesus who lives the life of perfect obedience that we couldn't live.

Jesus who's willing to be separated from God's love in order to pay for us. He's put in the doghouse for our rebellion.

His death pays for our foolishness. And if we trust him, then God counts Jesus' righteousness as ours. Says so in the passage that we read. 1 Corinthians 15 verse 3.

For what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. So anyone who says, yes, Jesus died for me can be forgiven, can come back to God on Jesus' merits.

And when God looks at that person, what does he see? He sees the perfect puppy. And we can stay at his side in safety, cared for, forever.

[5 : 48] See, that's why Jesus had to die. Because Jesus' death and resurrection is how God both deals with the fact that we are like Cassie in our foolishness, and how he stays true to himself, and how he welcomes us back into the family home despite all the mud that we trail in through the door.

Now I want you to just invite, I just want to invite you to ask yourself a question today. Just now for a minute before we go on to the second issue that we're dealing with.

If this is how it is, if I'm like Cassie, running off into danger and disobedience, and if God must be true to himself, just and loving, then here's the question, where do I stand with him?

What does Jesus' death mean to me? I invite you just to close your eyes for 30 seconds and think about that question now.

Thank you. Thank you. You'll notice I said that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is how God stays true to himself and rescues us.

[7 : 29] So if we read on to the next verse, it says, for what I received I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to scriptures, that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures.

So those of you who have been around Beth will know that the resurrection is central to Easter, but it begs a lot of questions, doesn't it? Did he really rise? Isn't it just a myth?

Why should I care? I can remember vividly where I was and what I was doing when I got the news that my grandma had passed away.

I was sitting at a desk looking out over the river trying to do some college work. It wasn't even in this country. And I'm sure lots of you have similar stories where somebody that you know and love has passed away or been seriously injured.

You can remember exactly where you were and what you were doing because your heart leaps into your mouth at that moment, doesn't it? Now if that, if death is the final and ultimate reality, if that is it, then there's no hope of undoing the damage that those moments do to us, is there?

[8 : 58] If there's no resurrection, there's no hope for later. And if there's no hope for later, then what hope do we have for now?

But if we know somebody, if we know somebody who's beaten death and who offers to help us do the same, then there's hope for now and for later. Isn't there?

And that's why Paul says what he says in verse 17 of our passage. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. You are still in your sins.

See what Paul is saying? It isn't good enough to have Christianity as your fallback option. The one you default to if you're asked what you believe. It isn't enough to just have it as a wise way of living or a system of telling you right from wrong.

It doesn't work just to have it as nice metaphors that help you understand your life. Because Paul says if Jesus didn't really die and rise, we might as well all go home. No resurrection means no lasting hope.

[10 : 16] And that's one reason we should care about it. Don't know if you felt slightly uncomfortable when I was talking about death just now. We don't really like to talk about death. In fact, we don't really know how to talk about death sometimes in our country, do we?

Here are some things that we do love to talk about though. Okay. New life. Second chances. Starting over.

Being reborn. Coming up clean. Those are things we agree are good, don't we? They come up again and again in our lives and we think, yes, I can get behind that.

But if we want those things to be forever things then they need a foundation, don't they? A deeper truth that explains why they're good.

Something that makes them right and good now, yes, and anchors them in eternity as well. And that's what the resurrection does.

[11 : 21] See, when the father validates everything that Jesus says and does and his death by raising him again, that anchors all of these new life things in reality.

It's the resurrection that means we can be forgiven. That we can start over. That we can have new life. That we can come up clean. New life is beautiful reality, isn't it?

And resurrection is its anchor. But here's a third reason why we should care about the resurrection. Simply this, the evidence all points in one direction.

Eyewitnesses saw him, the evidence points to it and billions of people now and in history have found that to be completely believable. did a science experiment earlier maybe you're thinking yeah but science doesn't help you does it?

Science means that's not really possible. Well here's something that folks at Barclay University in the States have said about what science can't do.

[12 : 37] Do supernatural entities intervene in human affairs? For instance by raising dead people to life? These questions may be important but science won't help you answer them. Questions that deal with supernatural explanations are by definition beyond the realm of nature and hence also beyond the realm of what can be studied by science.

In other words science doesn't have anything to say about it one way or the other by its own definition. So science doesn't disprove it. And psychology doesn't discredit it either because that's often what you hear is probably just having a mass hallucination.

But people touched him. and saw him and ate with him and talked with him on multiple occasions. If all the men of the church go out for a curry three times over the course of six months they can't all have been hallucinating that.

Can they? That's the order of thing that we are talking about here with Jesus' resurrection.

Psychology has nothing to do with it. and the historical facts support it.

The Romans were experts executioners they didn't make mistakes. There's an empty tomb we saw it explained today. Nobody produced a body because there wasn't one.

[13 : 59] And if you look at the textual evidence it's internally consistent and it's externally authenticated. It makes sense. But I think one of the most interesting things here in terms of the evidence is human nature isn't it?

Because human nature says that if people lie about something like this there's something in it for them. Except there was nothing in it for the hundreds of people who claimed to see him.

Except social exclusion and a good chance of death. And they knew it because Jesus had said that to them before he died. But they insisted it was true.

So the evidence all points one way. Three good reasons to care about the resurrection. That was a joy for me and a privilege to be able to share the hope of the resurrection with you.

Hope of life. Hope of joy. Hope of meaning that nothing can take away. Not even death. And I hope that that is something that you share.

[15 : 09] hope of But if you don't then there's another truth that needs to be shared as well and it's this. Ultimately if you don't put your faith in the man who defeated death for you then you will be defeated by death.

so if you see why Jesus needed to die and if you're beginning to think he maybe did rise then can I invite you to spend some time thinking about this Easter.

Please come and speak to us if we can help you with that. I'm just going to leave you with the words of Jesus from the book of John that we read about earlier. I am the resurrection and the life.

The one who believes in me will live even though they die. Do you believe this? Thank you for listening.