

Unexpected Departure (Easter Sunday)

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] Hi there, this is Pastor Kent Dixon from Bramard Baptist Church. Unfortunately, we had some technical difficulties with our Sunday morning sermon, so the recording didn't turn out quite as great as we had hoped.

But, that being said, I wanted you to be able to hear what we managed to capture because I think it's important. So please enjoy what you can from the following sermon from Easter Sunday. I want you to respond loudly for me, will you? Don't be shy. He is risen. He is risen indeed. He is risen.

He is risen indeed. You know, I've been thinking about that phrase, that greeting more this year. I've been considering the seemingly odd wording of it.

So bear with me. Many of you know that I'm a language guy. So ever since I was old enough to understand language and structure of it, I've thought, well, that wording seems wrong somehow.

[1 : 01] He is risen. Have you ever thought about why we say it that way? I've been thinking about that a lot lately. And maybe it's never crossed your mind. Maybe you've just thought, oh, this must be from the King James. Good enough.

But bear with me here for a second. Wouldn't it be more correct to say he has risen? It's an event that happened in the past. Maybe even he rose, right?

We say up from the grave he arose. And it seems, in lots of ways, like it would better suit something that happened in the past, wouldn't it? The main reason for it being worded the way it is, is that in this Easter phrase, it's not used as a verb to suggest tense.

He has risen, he rose, he will rise, is, was, etc. like that. It's used as an adjective to describe Jesus. Does that make sense?

He is risen.

[2 : 29] And that event is still the new reality for us here and now. We save our risen Savior who is in the world today.

This morning we're going to be focusing in on Luke 24, verses 1 to 12. So let's hear that now. Go ahead and turn in your Bibles if you have them with you.

Luke 24, 1 to 12. Luke 24. 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 him, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.

In their sight, 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.

[3 : 32] He has risen. Remember how he told you while he was still with you in Galilee, the third 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. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and all 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.

If you were here last week or listened to the sermon online, hopefully you remember I titled that message, Unexpected Arrival.

We considered the events of Palm Sunday and the unexpected way that Jesus arrived in Jerusalem. He revealed himself to be the kind of Messiah that people weren't expecting. [4 : 44] And he revealed his kingdom as something that may have initially even disappointed them. This morning as we recognized Jesus' resurrection, our sermon is titled, Unexpected Departure.

So to say that the resurrection of Jesus was unexpected is probably one of the biggest understatements in human history. Fair? He had been publicly executed in one of the most horrifying ways possible.

Many of his friends, his family, his followers, and even his most passionate and vocal enemies had been present to witness the events in a very intimate way.

They had front row seats. The Roman soldiers who attended his crucifixion would have made quite certain, and we read about it a bit in scripture, that Jesus was very dead.

Jesus' death isn't generally the assertion that people struggle with the most, believe it or not. So that's where things drew to a close on Good Friday.

[5 : 56] Hope had been murdered. But we all know that wasn't the last word. Thanks be to God. Far from it. And as we just heard Luke's account of the events after the crucifixion, Jesus' body had been laid in a stone tomb.

That tomb had been sealed by a huge, supposedly immovable stone. Maybe you know some about it. I've talked about it in Easter's past. But huge stone.

And it was rolled in place to make it a little easier for the people doing the rolling. A little bit downhill. So once that tomb was in place, moved by many men, it was there.

It was not intended or easily moved. So have you ever doubted the truth of Jesus' resurrection? I'll just let that sit for a second.

If you love and follow Jesus, and yet you have doubts and questions, that's okay.

[7 : 06] Because it certainly was an unexpected departure. So as we reflect on the resurrection this morning, I'm going to take a bit of a different approach.

I talked to a couple of pastor friends of mine and said, Oh, it's Easter again. What are you doing? I don't know. How do you tell the same thing over and over and keep it fresh? Some of them said, I'm preaching what I preached two years ago.

No one will remember. I thought about it for a nanosecond. But then I thought, wait a minute. Something really popped into my mind and on my heart that I wanted to do.

And so here we are. We're going to look at four of the arguments that have been made against the truth of Jesus' resurrection. And then we're going to take it from there.

So my goal, to be clear, is not to have you leaving. See, I knew it. And go on with your life in a different direction. Not at all. I'm going to anchor us, re-anchor us in truth.

[8 : 10] So maybe some of these arguments will be familiar to you. We studied them in seminary. I knew some of them before. But some may not be true. Or perhaps all may not be true.

And to be clear, this also isn't an exhaustive exploration. I have picked four. There are more. And maybe you know others as well. Argument number one.

The swoon theory. So this first theory suggests that Jesus didn't actually die. Maybe. But he fainted, actually.

He fainted from the severity of his wounds. The blood loss. And he fell into a deep coma or swoon. From that severe pain and trauma of the crucifixion.

But then in the cooler atmosphere of the tomb, once he'd been placed there, he revived, quatey fingers, and was somehow able to get out of the strips of cloth that had been wrapped tightly around his body, move that huge stone I just mentioned, and then appear to his disciples.

[9 : 22] So remember, the Roman guards were actually the first to report Jesus' death in John 19, 33 to 37. And as we touched on a bit ago, these guys were experts at execution.

They also would have been put to death themselves if they allowed a condemned man to escape death. Pretty good incentive, to be sure.

So in fact, they were so certain that Jesus was dead, they didn't even bother to break his legs. And we read that in the crucifixion accounts. That was customary.

Customary. That was an end point. This is done. And then when the spear they used to pierce Jesus' side caused blood and water to gush out, that essentially also would have been final proof of his death.

Because experts suggest that that type of blood and water, exsanguination out of his side, would have only been possible once his heart had stopped beating.

[10:29] Another thing about the swoon theory that would need to be valid, this would have to happen, Jesus would have had to survive massive, massive blood loss from the scourging, from the nail wounds, from the spear piercing his side.

And then in addition, in this impossibly weakened state, he would have had to endure 40 hours in the tomb without anything to eat or drink.

He would have needed to manage to unwrap himself from his grave clothes, roll away that massive stone, maybe with help, but then also to convince all of his followers who saw him in the days ahead that he had in fact risen from the grave.

I don't think the resurrected Jesus seemed tired or wounded or discouraged, but that kind of massive injury, that's how he would have seemed.

And yet he didn't. The enemy would have had to travel countless miles in that condition to make many appearances to his disciples over 40 days.

[11:42] He would have also had to somehow trick the disciples into thinking that he could simply appear in a room without using the door. That's in the gospel accounts as well.

So this theory, in my mind, seems to take far more suspension of disbelief than believing in the resurrection itself. Yet it's a theory that people do hang on to in disbelieving the resurrection.

Argument number two. The narrow burial theory. This second theory suggests that Jesus was never put in the tomb to begin with.

He was instead, according to Roman custom, thrown into a massive grave for criminals. So for this theory to have been true, neither the Jewish leaders nor the Roman soldiers would have bothered to seal the tomb.

Why bother if there was no body in it? Knowing his body wasn't even there, they wouldn't have bothered to seal that tomb. Matthew 27, verses 62 to 66 makes it clear that Pilate himself had guards posted in front of the tomb to prevent Jesus' followers from stealing his body.

[13:05] So to have disproven Jesus' resurrection in this case, they would have not only had to retrieve the corpse from this mass grave, but then also put it on display somehow.

But nobody was around. Argument number three. The mass hallucination theory.

This one is fun. This third theory suggests that everyone who claimed to have seen the risen Lord was hallucinating.

Albeit out of a sincere and passionate desire and delusion, people argue, to see Jesus alive again. They were so passionate about their Lord that they saw him, but didn't really see him.

So we know from passages like Mark 16, 10, and 11 that Jesus' disciples hadn't expected to see him arrive again. No kidding, right?

[14:06] Especially for those who were at that crucifixion, it was done. It was finished in the way they understood it, not the way Jesus declared it. And then the info from the women at the tomb came as a complete and total shock to them.

Right? They didn't expect that news. Scripture tells us that 500 people saw him on one occasion alone. That's a big hallucination.

That may be a bigger hallucination than Woodstock occurrences. So that depth and breadth of mass hallucination to me, again, seems more difficult to believe than the resurrection itself.

We read in Matthew 27, verses 63 and 64, that the chief priests and Pharisees came to see Pilate, and they said this, So that we remember, while he was still alive, how the deceiver said, After three days I will rise.

Therefore, command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and said to the people, He has risen from the dead.

[15:19] So the last deception will be worse than the first. So here the Jewish religious leaders clearly remembered Jesus' words, that he would rise again, that his resurrection would come to be.

But the disciples had apparently forgotten those words. Maybe you got that reference there. So the religious leaders and Christ's enemies remembered clearly, Okay, we've got to get an end run around this, we've got to stop that, we've got to do this.

And the disciples just went, He's dead, I guess. Argument number four. This brings us to our fourth and final theory.

And I'll expect everyone's papers on it in my office by next Sunday. Okay. So this brings us to the fourth and final theory that suggests that Jesus' disciples took the body, stolen body theory, sorry, by the way, took the body so that Jesus' words could seem to have been fulfilled.

According to Scripture, in fact, this theory goes back to the day when the guards who stood watch at the tomb told the chief priests what had happened. You can read about it in Matthew 28, 11 to 15.

[16:39] Guards came to the chief priests and said, The body's gone, what do we do? And that passage tells us that the chief priests bribed the guards. They told them to spread the story of the stolen body instead of what they had witnessed.

See, again, his enemies were doing an end run around the actual events. And the guards, we read in that passage, did what they were asked. So that's how old that theory goes back, how far it goes back.

Scripture makes it really clear that Jesus' friends and followers left that crucifixion site convinced that Jesus was dead. So it's really unlikely that they would have taken his body.

I think they would have wanted him to have a proper burial befitting a rabbi and a teacher and someone they loved. So when the women reported Jesus' resurrection to the 11 apostles, remember one's gone at this point, and the other believers in Jerusalem, Scripture tells us that people thought their words were nonsense.

Remember, we heard that a little bit earlier. And they don't believe them. They don't believe that they have just come from the tomb. They don't believe that Jesus is gone. And so we can also acknowledge that the apostles had no reason to take Jesus' resurrection as fact because, as we've just recognized, they didn't believe it themselves.

[18:12] I was talking to a friend this week, and he said, you know, I was just reading through the Gospels again, and I was thinking about some of the stuff around Good Friday and Easter and the resurrection and all those things, and he said, they still didn't believe him.

And then I shared the passage from John that says, blessed are you who have not seen and yet believe. Jesus values the fact that we were not there.

We did not witness it firsthand, and yet we're here because we believe. How likely would it be that the same men who fled for their lives while Jesus was still alive could suddenly muster the courage, the ingenuity necessary to steal the body from a guarded tomb and then broadly start preaching, we learn about it in Acts, preaching and teaching things about Jesus that they actually knew were false. They put their lives at risk for a lie. I don't think so. So folks, there you have it.

Four of the main theories that seek to disprove the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I have a couple of quotes for you. One of my favorite authors, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, created Shaw Combs.

[19:48] One said, once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth.

See what he's getting at there? Once you eliminate the impossible, even if the end result seems improbable, it must be the truth.

And here's where we land. One of my favorite preachers, maybe yours too, Billy Graham once said, there's more evidence that Jesus rose from the dead than there is that Julius Caesar ever even lived.

Or that Alexander the Great died at the age of 33. Less evidence of those two legendary historical figures. versus Jesus' resurrection.

So I hope what we've explored together this morning has helped you eliminate some of these theories against the resurrection of Jesus. And maybe you haven't even put these theories into words in your mind.

[20:57] But maybe some of the doubts or the questions that you've had, I hope, have been addressed by some of these things. And if not, come and talk to me. Despite the seeming improbability of this event, I hope that you're able to anchor or re-anchor yourself in the truth of Jesus' resurrection.

Friends, the resurrection of Christ isn't simply an historical fact. it has miraculous implications for anyone who believes and follows Jesus.

The actual and factual resurrection of Jesus is actually the only way to make complete sense of what happened. Only that reality ties together Jesus' words, his teaching, his example, and his death.

the events that surround his burial. And then the total shock and disbelief of his followers who had just learned he had risen.

So what can we take away from this today? First, Easter reminds us that Christ's death was not meaningless. It was the only way that everyone who follows him, you and me and anyone else can be forgiven.

[22 : 28] Some might say that you don't really have to believe in the resurrection to consider yourself a Christian. Have you ever heard that argument? But the resurrection of Christ Jesus isn't a peripheral issue.

It's an essential one. The resurrection of Jesus is foundational to our faith. In fact, it sets the Christian faith, maybe you didn't realize this, apart from all other faiths.

Second, Easter also reminds us that we are people of hope. Endowing Jesus defeated death as the final enemy.

We no longer need to fear it as those who have no hope. Scripture powerfully states, maybe this has been on your mind. Death has been swallowed up in victory.

Where, oh, death, is your victory? Where, oh, death, is your sting? 1 Corinthians 15 is the apostle Paul's powerful defense for the resurrection of Jesus.

[23 : 43] And I encourage you to read that yourself, maybe even today. 1 Corinthians 15. In that message, Paul makes it very clear, makes a very clear case, that if Jesus has not been raised, our preaching and ultimately our faith is useless.

but my friends, Jesus has been raised from the dead. He is risen.

He is risen indeed. Amen.