

# The Seismic Event of Easter - Easter Evening Sermon

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[ 0 : 00 ] Amen. So we're going to think for a few moments about the seismic event of Easter. What do I mean by that?

! Well, think about an earthquake. An earthquake is a very dramatic event that causes everything to shake. An event that has a powerful impact.

Matthew's Gospel records that at the time Jesus died and when Jesus rose, there was an earthquake.

And so I was thinking about that and then I came across this from Tom Holland, who's one of the podcasters on The Rest is History, a Roman historian.

They did a few episodes on Jesus, Messiah. And he said, it is clear that a seismic event happened in the first century and its reverberations are still felt today.

[ 1 : 00 ] And he went further and he said, nothing, even closely resembling Christianity, would have happened unless the first generation of Christians believed a spectacular event had happened.

So what is this seismic, spectacular event that took place in the first century? It is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Or perhaps better, it is the combined impact of the life and teaching of Jesus, together with his death on the cross, where he goes as a willing sacrifice, demonstrating a willingness to embrace death on behalf of his people, coupled with the events of Easter Sunday and the resurrection.

And it's those events that have had this dramatic impact on believers on the world ever since. Earthquakes are measured with a seismograph.

So after an earthquake, the instrument, which is now much more high tech, but it used to be just needle points, it would record ground movement. The needles would draw spikes and the level of the spikes would show the impact and the ferocity and intensity of the earthquake.

It would locate both where an earthquake happened and the impact of the quake. And John chapter 20, in a sense, is like a seismograph record.

[ 2 : 33 ] It tells us, it locates the event of this great event. It's in the empty tomb and the risen glorified Jesus. And it traces for us, it traces for us the impact of that event.

It traces the impact as people meet the risen Lord Jesus, an impact that continues to be felt today. So when you look at three features of that first few hours in the Sunday evening and then the week following, and we'll see the impact in terms of Jesus' resurrection bringing peace for troubled people, giving a sense of mission for fearful people, and provoking worship for doubting people. So peace, followed by mission, followed by worship. So let's begin thinking about peace. Consider again these disciples. Consider what's going on in their hearts that Sunday evening.

There is grief in what they have witnessed happening to Jesus. They were there during His arrest. They saw at least something of the beatings and the mockery, and they saw Him hanging on the cross.

They bore testimony to His death and to His burial. Couple that with the grief that they would undoubtedly experience, knowing that they had failed Jesus when He needed them most.

[ 4 : 06 ] So remember, there were three who were invited to watch and pray, and instead they slept. When Jesus was arrested, they all ran and left Him alone. And Peter, under pressure, denied knowing Jesus and being one of His followers.

And as if that wasn't enough, there is also that sense of grief that we get in the accounts of the Gospels at the sense of hope that they have lost, because Jesus has died. So Luke records a couple of Jesus' followers on the road to Emmaus.

Jesus comes to them. They don't know who He is. And they say in conversation, well, we hoped He was the one to redeem Israel. The implication? Hope is gone, because the Redeemer has died. How can the Messiah suffer and die was a question they had always wrestled with, and now they are still living with a sense of grief, because they think the movement is gone and hope is lost. So that first Sunday evening, there is a real storm of emotions going on in their hearts. They are deeply troubled people. But into that scene once again, the risen Jesus appears and three times speaks peace.

[ 5 : 23 ] Again, a demonstration of the wonderful love, the patience, the compassion of Jesus. He doesn't come pointing His finger. Why did you run? Why did you abandon me?

He speaks peace. Why did you get peace? Verse 19, when the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you.

Verse 21, Jesus said, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And again in verse 26, when they're still behind locked doors, Jesus came and said, Peace be with you. Peace. I am really alive. You can have peace because your failure is not the final word on your life. There is peace because your life has purpose. And there is that promise that Jesus would always be with his followers by the Spirit. There is peace that Jesus gives. He'd made that promise at least a couple of times. So, for example, John 16, verse 33, shortly before his arrest, I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world. Now he has overcome. Now he will be the source of their peace. Now he will make good on that promise. These words become a partner to his words on the cross, it is finished. Jesus has come on a mission, a mission to make peace between God and humanity. By way of sacrifice. That we would be reconciled by the way of the cross. And Jesus, now that he has finished that work, can bring that peace to troubled hearts and troubled lives. Notice that John again records for us that this is happening on the first day of the week. John reminds us over and over, by God's design, Easter Sunday represents a new beginning, new creation. Jesus' resurrection is the start of new creation life. Paul will speak about him as the first fruits.

[ 7 : 39 ] And it's a new beginning and there's new life because Jesus has done what he came to do. He has made peace by his blood shed on the cross. He is the answer to the great human problem that emerged all the way back at the beginning in Genesis 3. Human guilt and human sin. Adam and Eve believing the lie, thinking badly of God's character, turning their back on God. And God's answer all the way in Genesis 3 and indeed all the way back in eternity past, was that he would provide a sacrifice to make peace. There was the promise, even to Adam and Eve, of one who would come who would suffer in order to save us.

The only way to true peace, to have peace with God, to have peace of conscience, to have true peace with others, is through the finished work of Jesus. And Jesus, having done his work, comes to his disciples and brings peace. This word peace, the Hebrew word shalom, is much more than a greeting. Sometimes it's used as a greeting and it's much more than the ending of wars. It's the idea of wholeness and flourishing.

It has the idea of knowing that we are at home and we belong and we're part of the family. There's that deep sense of well-being. The complete reconciliation that Jesus brings through his work on the cross brings a complete flourishing to his people. So, we can have this deep and lasting peace because Jesus has gone through that Easter journey. He has died and he has risen again. He has put the relationship between us and God right. And so, Jesus continues to speak peace to troubled hearts.

I am doing all things well. I am the one who can make you whole. I am the one who will bring you home. I will bring you into what you and I were created for. That deep peace, that deep rest of life with God.

When we think about this message that Jesus brings, I think we recognize what a gift this is for the times in which we live, often known as the age of anxiety. There are so many reports that say we've never had it so good in terms of our possessions, but yet there is much less happiness. We have a greater sense of freedom. We can be much more mobile and travel and change our jobs however many times we want, but there is at the same time less satisfaction and greater anxiety. For many people, they're living with a sense of guilt, but there is nowhere to go with it. And into that confusion, Jesus would come and speak peace. In our own stories of faith, I wonder how many of us have discovered this wonderful gift. It's in the storms of life that we become profoundly aware of how

significant it is to have God with us, to have Jesus come and to say, do not fear, I am with you, but I am with you, but I am with you. And I think that's the only thing that we can do in the past.

[ 11 : 10 ] Jesus brings good news in His death and resurrection, and because the sin barrier that separates us from God has been broken down by God's grace, we are truly reconciled and we can live by faith each day enjoying God's peace. So, the impact of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is peace for troubled people.

But it's more than that. As we go on in the story, we see it's also mission for fearful people. I think one of the vital questions that I guess historians, church historians love to wrestle with, is how do you explain the growth of the church? It's a really interesting question. I think it's a really interesting question. You know, how do you move from a small number of believers, so small that they can fit into a single upper room, that they can within just a few centuries go global and come to dominate the Roman Empire? And all of that in the context of conflict and battle of frequent persecutions from the Roman Empire in those early days. How did it happen? Operating as a minority, operating as exiles, being so different from the society around them, but somehow turning this society upside down by preaching the risen Jesus as Lord, being willing to live for Him and to die for Him. How do we explain it?

And when we come to a text like this, the question becomes even more pressing because we look and we think, well, the raw materials are not very promising. Here is a group of believers. Here are the leaders of the church. Verse 19, where do we find them? We find them with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders.

And it's the same again in verse 26. They are in hiding, they are fearful. Now, Jesus said to them, you are the light of the world, but the disciples are trying to hide their light under a basket behind closed doors. So, what is the event that is going to shake the church with sufficient impact that it will move them out to boldly proclaim Jesus as Lord, to live for Him in such a way that these communities of believers would be recognized as the people of Christ and be so different that they would draw all kinds of people into that community and into faith in Jesus? What explains it?

The only plausible explanation is the resurrection, that Jesus truly rose from the dead, and the impact of that as they believed then that all His promises, all that He said about Himself were true, that He is the ultimate good news for the world. That and that alone explains the existence, never mind the growth of the church. And so, here we come to this point where the risen Jesus comes and speaks with them and He shares three truths about the mission of the church, which are hugely significant then and for us today. Perhaps we can identify with the disciples having that sense of being fearful about mission, perhaps enjoying the comfort and security of being behind closed doors. What is it that will move us into this community, into this city with a sense of mission for Jesus? Well, let's look at verses 21 to 23.

[ 15 : 07 ] After Jesus showed them His hands and His side, the disciples were overjoyed. When they saw the Lord again, Jesus said, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. So, here's the first important thing.

It's Jesus' authority. It's this idea of sending. So, notice first that Jesus was sent by the Father. Jesus was the ultimate man on a mission. He understood His purpose. And so, we see Him always obeying, always seeking the glory of His Father, coming deliberately to complete His task, which is to live a perfect life and then to suffer and die in the place of sinners that we might be forgiven and saved.

And now, this one who was sent by the Father says, I am sending you. And so, the disciples and the church, we go under the authority of Jesus our King. And that's important. I think it's important in our age because sometimes we can have the impression that if we share the gospel with someone, it might seem like we are being intolerant. You know, everyone's entitled to their own belief, and that's true.

But it's really important that we are faithful to King Jesus, who tells us to go and bring good news. But it also reminds us as well that Jesus is the one with authority in this mission.

He is the one who will save people. He is the one who builds His church. He is the one who builds His church, our responsibility is to be faithful, to do what we are called to do, to use our spiritual gifts, to be committed to praying, to be committed to seeking the welfare of the church, to look to live as His witnesses, to tell others about His glory and His goodness.

[ 16 : 57 ] but Jesus has authority over the church and over the mission of the church and that's something that's really important I think when we think about the whole idea of mission so there's

Jesus authority the second thing that we see in verse 22 also essential is he talks about the spirit Jesus spirit and there's that idea of breathing verse 22 with that he breathed on them and said receive the Holy Spirit this breathing seems to be some kind of like an acted sort of parable or a sign I think taking us back to a couple of passages in the Old Testament one of which we read in Genesis 2 if you know the account of creation God forms the man Adam from the ground and then he breathes life into the man our God is a life-giving God and then we read Ezekiel 37 God breathing life into the dry bones and so here we're being reminded that Jesus is the life-giving Lord and he gives life by sending the spirit and we see what happens when the spirit comes in the book of Acts and in the history of the church and in our own lives that when the spirit comes he brings new birth when the spirit comes he brings new power when the spirit comes we enjoy the presence of Jesus and the father with us and we have this wonderful thing anticipated by Jesus that the same spirit that came and anointed Jesus at his baptism the same spirit that filled and empowered the Lord Jesus to do his mission on earth is the same spirit that is now gifted to his people there's a wonderful promise for our mission when we feel fearful we don't do it in our own strength we do it in the strength that Jesus provides by the Spirit and the last thing about about mission here so it's the authority of Jesus there's the Spirit of Jesus but there's also the message of Jesus verse 23 if you forgive anyone's sins their sins are forgiven if you do not forgive them they are not forgiven this is all connected to the reality that these apostles are going to be sent out filled with the Spirit to proclaim the message of Jesus that Jesus is the promised King that his life was perfect that his death happened according to God's plan that he would be that sacrifice that would bear away the sins of the world that his resurrection showed his victory and his vindication and that message and people's response to that repentance and faith would bring forgiveness so when he talks there about if you forgive anyone's sins their sins are forgiven that's speaking to their authority as those who would proclaim the gospel and that gospel that has the power to save and that forgiveness that comes if people believe their message so we see how significant the resurrection is for the mission of the church that seismic event has the power to transform the hearts of the disciples from fear to joy but will also have that same power to propel them out so in just a few short weeks they'll go from being those people are hiding behind locked doors to you just can't stop them talking they'll be behind different closed doors because they'll be thrown in prison but they'll still keep talking about Jesus and that's the story of the church ever since that when we really understand the glory of Jesus and we know we operate with his authority and with his power and then

we'll proclaim his message and hearts and lives and communities are changed sometimes our involvement in mission radically changes our lives you know we know of people we support people who are working in different parts of the world because they feel that that God has called them to go so we support the reannuals and they zigzag around Latin America bringing the good news of Jesus but oftentimes it just involves us living our everyday lives but with new purpose that we go into each day in our family as we go to our workplace as we go to our schools as followers of Jesus where we want to represent him we want to bear witness that Jesus is alive and that Jesus transforms lives we act in a sense on mission as the church gathers we represent a small community of heaven bound together with loyalty to Jesus a love for God our King so it binds the people of God together and then the church scatters in the weak and we're invited as Paul puts it to shine shine like stars in the sky as we hold out the word of life so the resurrection has an ongoing impact in terms of mission for the people of God giving power to those of us who would ordinarily be fearful and the one last thing to see another effect of the resurrection is worship for doubting people there is an organization called the CS Lewis Institute and there's a lady there called Jana Harmon who has a podcast called side B stories and there's hundreds of episodes I think and she interviews people who are formerly atheists and she explores their movement to Christian faith and some of them are very prominent folks some of them are just regular church members and but there are certain common themes and that she identifies through all these hours and hours and hours of interviewing people like most of them it would have grown up with negative stereotypes a very negative view of the church for a great number of them it was a difficult life experience that persuaded them that God wasn't real many people had that view that faith was irrational was for you know a crutch for weak people they didn't really need God and most of the people and it's really interesting I think most of the people um on that podcast were not setting out to find God you know we hear of lots of people who are exploring um who you know kind of are looking for they would all testify to the fact that no they weren't looking for God was looking for them but another common

feature in their stories was that sense of dissatisfaction you know even while people were having success while things were going well in their chosen field there was a sense of dissatisfaction and Jana Harmon speaks about it as a disruptive longing something that's that's powerful enough to break in that says I need to re-examine my way of looking at the world I need to reconsider my previous beliefs and it's amazing to think about all these different stories different kinds of people and see some of those same themes and to recognize the mercy of God's providence when he breaks in to disrupt our old way of thinking to awaken in people a longing for something more and there's lots of ways that he does that and if we were to go around the room and and if we were to think about our own experiences and how did we come to faith we would I expect imagine find lots of different ways that God interrupted and God sought us out God changed our previous ways of thinking in a sense is what we see happen with Thomas of course Thomas wasn't an atheist Thomas was a follower but Thomas had a very settled opinion that needed a dramatic disruption in order for him to move on in his faith verse 24 now Thomas also known as Didymus because he was a twin one of the twelve was not with the disciples when Jesus came so the others the disciples told him we have seen the Lord so remember this morning we were thinking about John who wrote this apostle this this gospel he never saw the risen Lord Jesus before he believed he saw the evidence he saw the tomb was empty he saw the grave clothes he saw that the burial cloth was empty he read the signs and he believed at that point then he would see the risen Lord Jesus later Thomas is different Thomas hears the report but he said to them unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side I will not believe unless I have this physical evidence this personal experience I will never believe well we move on in a week and we see the merciful providence of the Lord Jesus is he disrupts Thomas's thinking he intervenes in this unwillingness to believe in a very dramatic way a week later his disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them though the doors were locked Jesus came and stood among them and said peace be with you then he said to Thomas put your finger here see my hands reach out your hand and put it into my side stop doubting and believe put your finger here Thomas if you really need proof and more importantly put your faith here stop doubting trust the message trust the truth of the eyewitnesses and trust now what you're seeing with your own eyes and it's remarkable what happens next

Thomas immediately worships in a profound way Thomas said to my Lord and my God some people raise the question did Jesus ever claim to be God well here is a different way of looking at it here is a moment where Jesus is being worshipped as God and Jesus doesn't say Thomas that's inappropriate rather he praises his faith think about what it would take for a Jewish man to worship another man in the room as God he was raised on the Ten Commandments do not commit idolatry don't bow down to any other images blasphemy was worthy of death Jewish people didn't even take the name of God in their lips but here is Thomas in an instant as he sees the risen Lord Jesus and he falls and worship my Lord and my God that's a shockwave that's turning people's whole belief systems upside down in a moment and that spreads to the same way to the same way to the same way to the same way to the same way he was persuaded that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy he was making his business as a hater of Jesus to try and destroy the church

Jesus disrupted his beliefs Jesus met him on the road to Damascus and maybe 20 or 30 years after the events Paul is already describing Jesus in exalted terms he's the son of God he's the Lord he's the promised Savior and that's the kind of impact that comes as people encounter the risen Lord Jesus by faith whereas perhaps before we may have thought of him as a wise teacher or a good man he you know lots of good sayings all of a sudden by the work of the Spirit we recognize he's none other than the Son of God and the Savior of the world and I imagine in our circles we we can think of people in our lives and we think that's really surprising that that person became a follower of Jesus lots of really unlikely converts because God loves to do that for his own glory to disrupt beliefs and to draw people to faith in the risen Lord Jesus now notice the significance of what Jesus says to Thomas next in verse 29 and this is important for us in our day Jesus told him because you have seen me you have believed blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed where do we get this blessing from God where do we have this joy of knowing Jesus and life with him all being well between us and God it's not notice what Jesus says it's not sharing the same experience as Thomas sort of seeing with our own eyes that the risen Lord Jesus but it's sharing the faith of Thomas and that's important I think when we ask the question well how how should we expect to encounter Jesus today you know should we expect your great visions and blinding lights

and expect to see him appear in the sky and we recognize that that's not ordinarily what happens how did we come to encounter if you're a Christian how did you come to encounter [ 30 : 59 ] Jesus as Lord and as God in his word as you read the Bible as you heard it preached in a church as you heard it shared by a friend it's the point that John's gospel keeps driving us towards it's to remind us of verse 31 again these things these signs including his death and resurrection are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name John's whole gospel every paragraph that he writes down is is written with a set purpose to either persuade us or to assure us that Jesus really is the Son of God he really is the promised Savior that believing in him really does give life with God eternal life to come that the resurrection truly is that seismic spectacular event that continues to shake and to transform lives and so we pray that the life transforming effects of the resurrection would continue to be felt in our own hearts in our church in our city and all around the world to his praise and glory let's pray together

Father again we thank you for this eyewitness account of that first Easter Sunday that first day of the week that new beginning that new life that new creation we thank you for the risen Lord Jesus for his power and his love his willingness and his ability to transform our lives to give us peace that deep sense of wholeness and flourishing and well-being to send us on mission to give our lives eternal purpose and to come to be with us Lord we thank you that you do not leave us alone we thank you that you are pleased to come to us to give your blessing to us leading us to the life that we were made for to worship you through Jesus your son our Lord and Savior we pray in his name and then