

Have we missed the Point?

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[0 : 00] As we sit, let's pray together. Our gracious Father, we thank you that we're not here today to worship a dead hero.

But in this season of Easter, we remember especially that we're here to worship our living Lord Jesus. And so, Father, we pray as we study your word now.

So your Holy Spirit would reveal to us in new ways the risen Christ. And we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

Peter wrote, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In a recent book written by Sam Knight, a journalist, with the somewhat disconcerting title of Premonition Bureau, Sam investigates the weird and uncertain world of premonitions.

Some people have premonitions, usually warning them of some kind of impending disaster. Some of you will recall that in 1966, there was that shocking disaster in Wales in the village of Abavan, where 150 tons of slurry from coal mines came crashing down the mountain, enveloped the school, killing 116 children and 28 teachers.

[1 : 42] Immediately on the day after the disaster, a psychiatrist called Dr. John Barker arrived in the village to study a child who'd been saved from the mess that the disaster had caused.

Sadly, the child died of fright, and he wasn't able to investigate it. But what he did discover was this very strange phenomenon. That in the week before the Abavan disaster, children, note, children, had these premonitions of things to come.

A 10-year-old girl dreamt of the school with something black all over it. An 8-year-old boy had drawn figures digging in the hillside and had written, as a kind of annotation on his drawing, the end.

Most of Sam Knight's book is based on the research done by Dr. Barker. And so, you'd be probably keen to know, does the author, does Sam Knight, is he convinced that premonitions actually are significant?

This is what he writes. Premonitions are impossible, and yet they come true all the time. The second law of thermodynamics says it can't happen.

[3 : 17] But you think of your mother a second before she calls. So, is Knight a believer in premonitions? Well, the answer is, he kind of reserves judgment.

He thinks there might be something in it, but he's not convinced. And I wonder how many there are in our churches in the 21st century who have a similar view of the resurrection.

They think there might be something in it. But if push comes to shove, they're not quite convinced. And so they suspend their judgment.

Paul, writing in Romans, wrote these words. This is how central to Christian belief Paul thought the resurrection was.

If you declare with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. He goes on, for it is with your heart that you believe and are justified.

[4 : 34] And it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. Or again, Paul wrote, if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless.

And you may have a view on that anyway. Our preaching is useless and so is your faith. So in the minds of a founding father of the church, and in the minds of the patristic fathers, the resurrection was not a kind of belief for religious fanatics and enthusiasts.

Not a bolt-on belief. But critical, the focal point, the fundamental principle of Christian living.

And of course, for centuries, in the church, in the creeds, we've stood up and we've affirmed that we believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

There was an American bank robber called Willie Sutton. And he was being arrested for the umpteenth time for robbing banks. And somebody shouted, a journalist shouted in the crowd, Mr. Sutton, why do you rob banks?

[5 : 48] Because, Willie Sutton said, because that's where the money is. I wonder how many of you would answer, why are you a Christian?

Your response would be, because I believe it to be true. I think it makes sense of life and death. And that's why I believe. Some of you might say, because I think it makes me feel good. Some of you might say, because I think living in the way that Jesus taught might lead to a kinder society than the one that we have.

I must confess that, I think this is true of me, that for years as a Christian, I went to church. I said the creed, and I tried to falteringly model my life on the example of Jesus Christ.

But if by some chance, the bones of Jesus had been discovered somewhere in a suburb of Jerusalem, I'm not quite sure that it would have made that much difference.

[6 : 55] How wrong was I? Because the resurrection really should make a difference. And this morning, I hope to show you in the limited time available, as Peter and Paul clearly tell us, that everything to do with the life of discipleship hinges on belief in the resurrection.

Three questions. Did it happen? Does it matter? And in the light of it, how now shall we live?

Did it happen? Of course, some of you may have picked up some popular, and in the end, facile science, written by people like Professor Dawkins.

Professor Dawkins said, the proof for belief in the resurrection, there is more proof in the story of Jack and the Beanstalk. Wrong.

The crucifixion and the resurrection was an event in human history, observable and detestable. Let me give you very quickly five reasons why I think it happened.

[8 : 12] And this is not an exhaustive kind of work on the proof of the resurrection. But it might just help you. The first thing is, if you wanted to create a fantastic story that would be easy to discredit, then you would only need to read the gospel narratives to see that in the culture of the first century AD, the idea of resurrection would be easy to discredit, not least, not least, because the first witness to the resurrection was a woman and a prostitute.

That is not me attempting to be sexist. But in terms of gender equality, the first century AD was not peculiarly advanced. Women had no rights whatsoever in relation to men.

Luke tells us in his gospel that Mary Magdalene, Mary Magdalene, had seven demons thrown out of her.

Can you imagine in a court of law today a less reliable witness, a prostitute who probably had severe mental illness and she is the person chosen to be the first witness to the resurrection.

In the world in which Jesus died and rose again, it would be inconceivable that this could be true.

The second thing is, just about everybody everybody who has ever tried to write a book to disprove the resurrection has failed.

[10 : 13] And indeed, Frank Morrison's book, Who Moved the Stone? Frank Morrison was a barrister who put all the evidence together for the resurrection and amazingly ended up becoming a believer.

Theologian Tom Wright has written a book more recently called The Son of God and the Resurrection. People with great minds, clear analytical thinking who are able to say when you look at the evidence it is incontrovertible.

The third thing is, this is a belief that has survived for the best part of 2,000 years. Most lies die a death, don't they?

But this has sustained generations of people. Fourthly, it has helped people in dire circumstances.

Believing that Jesus is risen has given hope to people maybe in a way that nothing else has. I always used to think, you know, God's great when you're at the fun fair, but he's amazing when you are at the funeral parlor.

[11 : 37] And the fifth thing, and Peter gives us a clue of this in the reading that Ros read for us earlier. It gives human suffering a new context. Verse 6, in this, in this, said Peter, you greatly rejoice, in this the resurrection, you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

These have come so that your faith of greater worth than gold, which perishes, even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine. believing in the resurrection doesn't mean that your life will be pain

free.

Somebody sticks a pin in you, you'll still feel it. If somebody you love dies, you will still feel it. But belief in the resurrection means that you will always maintain your hope.

Second thing, does it matter? I say, yes it does, although you're sitting there thinking he gets paid to say that. Well, I don't get paid anymore. Yes, it does matter.

The whole of our Christian faith pivots on this foundational truth. For without the resurrection, Jesus' claims about himself would be null and void.

[12:57] They would mean nothing. He would just come across as a kind of rather naive, charismatic, but dangerously deluded person. Without the resurrection, the atoning work of Jesus on the cross of Calvary would not be complete.

Without the resurrection, you would have no hope. Without the resurrection, you would have no assurance of eternal life.

And it changes everything. One of my favorite speakers is an American Presbyterian called Tim Keller. And Tim Keller retired about 18 months ago.

And literally, within months of retiring, he was given a terminal diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. In an interview with the New York Post, he said this, if the resurrection of Jesus Christ really happened, then ultimately, God is going to put everything right.

Suffering is going to go away. Evil is going to go away. Death is going to go away. Aging is going to go away. Pancreatic cancer is going to go away. Now, if the resurrection of Jesus Christ did not happen, then I guess all bets are off.

[14:24] But if it actually happens, then there's all the hope in the world. Here's the point. The resurrection really does matter and should be the very foundation of the faith that we're here to express and the Lord that we're here to worship this morning.

The third thing is, how should this belief impact the way that we live? If the resurrection is truly the focal point of Christian discipleship and living, let me first tell you what it isn't.

It's not a formula for complacency in this life. We're really not people who are hanging around waiting to die so that we can be raised to a brilliant new life in heaven.

We're not dispassionate about the world we live in with the view that if it goes to hell in a handcart, that's fine by me. No, God loves the world and invites us, his disciples, to love it as well and to live the life that he's described to us in Holy Scripture.

neither is the resurrection the hope of an eternal life that is simply an extension of this life because for some people that would be unbearable.

[15:59] This will be a completely different order of being. we shall see the Lord face to face. We should be given a new body that will never age.

We shall have all our unanswered questions about life clarified for us. It will be life or maybe more accurately a way of being that will be of a totally different kind.

So to conclude in the church's calendar right now are the 50 days of Easter leading to Pentecost.

And I want to end by suggesting one or two practical things you might do to help you position the resurrection in your thinking and in your life to where it should be if you are a disciple of Jesus.

Jesus. The first thing is what I call the mirror exercise. I'm imagining that at some point when you crawl out of bed you look in a mirror.

[17:09] For some of you that's more pleasurable than for others. Here's my suggestion. When you go home you write on a piece of paper he is risen and you slot it in the mirror.

so that every time you look at that mirror for the next 43 days of Easter you remind yourself that Jesus is risen.

I apologise if you think this is some weird crackerjack kind of exercise. But actually repetition does help us to kind of settle things in our minds.

look at the mirror and tell yourself Jesus is alive. The second is the reality of the resurrection in the lives of believers will be fulfilled when we die but life resurrection life begins the moment you start to trust in Jesus.

God wants us to rise above our problems of unforgiveness our errant behaviour our habits that we find difficult to kick.

[18:32] God really wants us to rise above these things. Tell God daily what it is you want to rise above and claim the power of the Holy Spirit to help you.

And the third thing is this if you lose your dignity you lose something important and your life will be marked by terrible low self esteem but if you lose your hope you're really done for.

Hold on to your hope in any and every situation. I don't know about you but one of the things that I have found admirable about those people who come on our television screens from Ukraine Ukraine is a deeply devout country incidentally the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is a big deal out there and what's amazing is in the face of circumstances that would finish off most of us off mentally they retain their hope.

Tim Keller said this in that article I find this utterly moving writing about the resurrection he says yet if we come to the place where we truly accept it then suddenly there's no limit to what kinds of things we can look forward to.

I know he writes some of your readers are thinking I can't believe there's a person with more than a year three education that actually believes it but I do and these last few months as we've gotten in touch with these great parts of our faith Kathy his wife and I would both say we've never been happier in our lives even though I'm living under the shadow of cancer.

[20 : 44] friends he is risen let's start to think and live in the light of that staggering truth let's pray who would believe Lord that any of us could sit on earth with the terminal prognosis and affirm that as we've gotten in touch with these greater parts of our faith we would say we've never been happier in our lives Lord we find that so difficult to imagine but Lord wherever the centre of our faith is Lord we pray that we might put the resurrection nearer to the centre of our lives

Lord that in any and every situation in the face of suffering we may find hope that one day Lord we shall live that life with you that your resurrection makes possible come Holy Spirit reveal this truth to us this Eastertide in new ways we pray these things in Jesus name and the people who agreed said together in a loud voice Amen Amen