He Really Died Upon the Cross

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[0:01] In preparation for Easter, I read The Da Vinci Code. I'm serious. I read The Da Vinci Code as preparation for Easter. I figured it sold like 30 million copies or something like that in hardcover.

It's going to be a movie with Tom Hanks in a couple of weeks. And I thought, you know, I should read this book. And you know what? I'm really glad I read it because I discovered that I'm a direct descendant of Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene.
So listen, I want a bit more respect from you folks. I have to confess that when I read that, I came downstairs to tell my wife, and she wasn't particularly impressed, that I'm a direct descendant of Jesus and Mary Magdalene.
But if you read the book, it's right towards the end it's revealed that there are two family lines which are direct descendants of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. I can't remember what the other one is because that doesn't really matter.
But one of them is St. Clair. And St. Clair was originally St. Clair. When the French St. Clairs invaded... That's the truth, folks.
[1:07] So really, I'm a St. Clair. And therefore, when Jesus and Mary Magdalene married and had children and all that stuff, I'm a direct descendant. So me, I want a bit more respect, not all this laughter.

Gosh. Gosh. I have to confess that as I read the book, I would often have this experience that probably the author hadn't intended. I would break out laughing as I read the book, which I'm sure wasn't the intended part.
But it's like a few weeks ago, I was talking to a doctor friend. And I asked him as we were talking, if you ever watched CSI or ER or those shows. And he said, well, the last time you watched CSI, they were saying how something...
This proves that somebody died in such a way. And they threw up the x-ray to look at it. And the x-ray actually indicated the exact opposite of what they interpreted in the show. I mean, CSI got it completely wrong.
And he said he has a hard time reading it, watching CSI, because they get things wrong all the time, or ER. And I guess, you know, I would... The Da Vinci Code gets things so spectacularly wrong time after time after time that it was...
[2:17] I found it funny, actually. But I kept reading it, and I really am glad that I did, because then I found out that I'm descendant of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. And, of course, it really begs the question all the way through, if Jesus had just not died, if he really just had been a little bit of a failure, you know, he had this three-year career, like some pop group in the 60s, you know, and then completely fades out of...

Like, why would anybody bother? Like, why would it matter that I'm the descendant, or anybody else is a descendant? But I'm here to share with you that the Da Vinci Code got it completely wrong, and that Jesus did die on the cross, and he rose again on the third day.
And it doesn't matter whether you are a supposed direct descendant of Jesus. What matters is that you can become the child of God by adoption and grace through faith in Jesus Christ, who tasted all there is to taste of death.
And after bearing our sins and our rebellion in his body, and on the third day, he rose again. He rose again. The story which we have before us today, that text in the Bible that we have before us today, it begins with an experience that, well, it probably for the disciples, some of them thought they were maybe having an experience that they'd had before.
And in fact, some of them maybe were thinking it had an experience like what some of you might have had happen to you. I don't know if you know this, but it's quite common that after a loved one

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has died, that people believe they see their loved one within several days of their death.
[3:52] In fact, just somebody connected to this congregation, just a couple of months ago, they were telling me that after their loved one died, that within the next couple of days, there were two particular times when they saw their loved one.

Now, I don't know what that means. Like, I'm just going to say they think they saw them. I don't know what that means. I'm not a psychologist. I'm not a doctor, and I don't really know what I think about it. But in fact, many people have told me over the years that shortly after the death of a loved one, they believe they see the loved one, and that the loved one, they believe they see them.
And so the story of the gospel today begins with the disciples seeing Jesus. And at first, they don't really think it's like Jesus physically. They think it's something else.
They, in fact, think that it's a spirit or a ghost, and they're terrified by what they see. You know, part of the reason I think they're terrified is, and this is another very common experience which people often don't like to talk about unless it's with their very closest friends, but it's a very common experience that when somebody dies suddenly, our last words with that person weren't always good.
I mean, many people have had the experience that they've had a terrible fight with the person. They've been very angry at that person, and then the person has died suddenly.
[5:14] And it can often be something which causes a lot of grief and guilt because of the parting being so terrible and maybe so vitriolic. And all of the disciples, with the exception maybe of John, who had a bit of an ambiguous last few hours with Jesus before his crucifixion, other than John, the beloved disciple, who had a bit of an ambiguous thing, the other ten of them had failed miserably.

I mean, quite bluntly, they had failed miserably. They had abandoned Jesus. They'd been hiding. Peter had denied them, and they had not done a really good—they hadn't really been very courageous or even just good friends.
And so I guess they're troubled with a guilty conscience, and then all of a sudden they think that they see Jesus in this locked room, and they're terrified, and they're spooked.
And part of the reason that they're spooked—you know, it's one of those—probably those experiences—all of us have had experiences, you know, where the hair in the back of our neck starts to rise. And for them, it was—they're just literally talking about Jesus, and there they think they see him.
In fact, you see, what had happened is that they were discussing that at least four times that day people had seen Jesus. Mary Magdalene had seen Jesus.
[6:38] The women in the garden, the women leaving to tell the disciples had seen Jesus. Peter had seen Jesus. And then these two men who'd been walking to Emmaus on their way back, they had seen Jesus.

And they're all in this closed room talking about it with their guilty consciences, and there Jesus is standing in the middle of a locked room. And they are spooked.
The hair goes up in the back of their necks. They are scared. And Jesus is so kind. He says, peace to you. They're still terrified and frightened.
Actually, I'm going to just look at a few of the things in the text. If you want to follow along, it's page 917 of your Pew Bibles, Luke 24. And I'm just going to read verse 38, and we'll just sort of look at the story in detail.
And Jesus said to them, why are you troubled? Verse 38. And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.
[7:42] Handle me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have. When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

See, one of the things which the text, even as Luke is recounting this true incident of how Jesus appeared after his death and resurrection to the disciples, even as Jesus is convincing them that he is alive, he is also convincing them that he really died.
At the same time, he's convincing them of both at the same time. And that's why he's saying, you know, listen, I want you to come up. I want you to touch me. You know, in a sense, you know, you can punch me. You can do whatever you want.
I want you to feel that I am a completely solid person. You're not just having an experience of seeing a loved one and in grief after they've died. And I'm not a ghost.

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You can come and touch me. But one of the things is even when he's proving that he's alive, he's proving that he had died. He said, come and look and look at the nail prints in my hands and look at the nail prints in my feet.
[8:49] And there's a similar story which is told in John of the same incident. And, you know, he's even saying, you know, he's almost offering to remove part of his robe so you can see where the spear went in.

That the risen body of Jesus bore the marks of the show that he had suffered and he had died. It's a real characteristic of Gnostics, of many mystical types, of many people who were very, very spiritual, of Muslims as well, to not want to believe that Jesus actually died.
They all have different theories about it. You know, Holy Blood and Holy Grail and the Da Vinci Code and the Koran. And they all have different theories of what happens. But they don't want to actually say that Jesus died upon the cross, died a shameful death.
And yet in the actual evidence that's given, in the eyewitness accounts of what happened after the death and resurrection of Jesus, we see that Jesus himself wants to convince the disciples that he really had died.
I mean, they already had seen that he had died. They knew about the spear going into the side. They knew about the blood and the water coming out.
[10:05] They knew where he had been buried. Everything about this account shows that the disciples believed Jesus to be dead and expected him to stay dead. And even as Jesus is proving the resurrection, he wants to show them that he really had suffered and that he really had died.

Yet he wants to show them that he's really alive. And then the story goes, they obviously have touched his hands and his feet.
But in verse 41, it says something which is a little bit puzzling at first. It says, but while they still did not believe for joy and marveled, he said to them, have you any food here? So they gave him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb and he took it and ate it in their presence.
See that phrase, but while they still did not believe for joy and marveled? Quite a few years ago, my wife and I were in a real financial crisis. And just a terrible, terrible, terrible, we have never been in such a bad financial crisis as quite a few years ago.
And needless to say, we were praying about it a lot. And then one day out of the blue, a check came for us. And I opened the check up and I thought, oh wow, this is going to really help.
[11:18] Because we were wondering if we were going to have to declare bankruptcy, which we didn't want to do. And we were just, and we got this, I got this check and I opened it up and I just thought, this is just so fantastic.

This is just going to really help. And then I put it in my pocket and I'm starting to go home. And then I look at the check again and I realize that there's one zero more there than I had thought the first time.
An extra zero in a good place. Not only was that check there to help me cover my expenses, but there was ten times more money in that check than I had thought.
And I had this experience. I'd look at the check and I couldn't believe it. And then I'd put it back in my pocket. And then like 15 seconds later, I'd look at the check. And then I'd put it back in my pocket.
And then I'd look at the check. I just couldn't believe that not only had God answered prayer by sending a check, but the check had an extra zero in it. Ten times more money, which was, it was like literally one of the most spectacular answers to prayer that had ever happened in my life.
[12:21] It cleared up our financial problems. That extra zero made that much of a difference. But I literally at that time had that experience of believing but not believing because of joy.

I had to keep looking and looking and looking at that check because it was so hard to believe that not only I'd had it, but it had that extra zero. And that's exactly what is being described here.
But while they still did not believe for joy and marveled. They just, they look at Jesus. They touch Jesus. They hear Jesus. He's not angry at them.
He says peace to them. And they know it's Jesus. There's something about him which, you know, you know one of the things, a lot of the gospel accounts, I was thinking about this all week.
You know, a lot of the gospel accounts, people don't recognize Jesus at first. They recognize him but don't recognize him. You know, I'm just going to give you my pious imagination about this.

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[13:22] Okay, folks. But you know what I wonder if it, you know what I wonder if it was? Remember, over the last couple of weeks we've been talking about the fall in the church. And in the fall I've said how every single thing in the universe has been sort of bent or twisted, is now slightly out of shape as a result of man's fall.

You know what I think it was? I think in a world where everything is slightly bent and we don't see that everything is slightly bent because everything is slightly bent. But after the resurrection, Jesus was the one unbent thing in the entire universe.
And they couldn't figure out how he looked like Jesus but didn't look like Jesus. And that's also maybe one of the reasons why people were so startled and so fearful when they first see Jesus. Because it would be as if the entire room and the entire universe all of a sudden feels like it's slightly out of whack.
And as if the ground that we're standing on isn't quite level. It's as if gravity isn't quite just pulling us towards the earth but maybe pulling us a little bit to the side. And everything is profoundly disorienting because the one unbent thing in the universe is standing in their presence.
And so they're startled. They're afraid. They're overcome with wonder. They're overcome with joy. And they actually take, Jesus takes a piece of fish and some honeycomb and eats it in their presence.
[14:52] Which in Jewish custom of that day, that means he's having table fellowship with them. It means he's their friend. Verse 44. Then he said to them, These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms concerning me.

Jesus said that when we read the Bible, the Bible is a story of Jesus. And he opened their understanding. He opened their mind that they might comprehend the scriptures.
Then he said to them, Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and arise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sin should be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem.
And you are witnesses of these things. You know, when I read the comics on Saturday, I still miss Calvin and Hobbes.
And I still miss The Far Side. And I think that comics have never quite recovered from those two writers retiring. But the one comic strip I always read is Dilbert.
[16:06] And you know, there is the pointy-headed boss. Isn't that what his name is? What's the boss who's completely clueless? And I still remember this one time. He would take his computer mouse and he would talk into it.

And he couldn't understand why talking into the mouse wouldn't bring the secretary or wouldn't bring anybody. Like, he didn't understand that the mouse was connected to the computer. He thought it was some type of phone or intercom or whatever.
And of course, they make a whole series of rude jokes about the boss who's so completely and utterly dumb. And, you know, it's because that the mouse is designed to fit in with the computer in a particular way that it only works and such.
Well, you folks know this better than I do because I can hardly work a computer at all. And what Jesus is saying in all of these things is that even though the disciples at times thought that things were going way out of whack and that everything was way out of control, what Jesus is saying is that while everything might look like it was chaotic and right out of control, in fact, everything that happened happened because it was God's plan with nothing left out.
There wasn't a part of God's plan that didn't work. There wasn't a part of God's plan that got done a wrong way. That every single thing that happened had been promised over centuries and centuries and centuries.
[17:29] Jesus fulfills all of those promises. And at the very, very pinnacle of God's promises are these three things. The first one is that Christ would suffer.

And that means that he was to die upon the cross. The second thing that was necessary was that a part of God's plan is that Jesus would rise from the dead on the third day. And that's what Luke is trying to share with us as to what in fact happened.
And the third thing, and the third thing involves you and me. The third thing is that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem.

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That's what I'm doing today. My job is just what the apostle's job is. That's your job as well. That we are to go out and tell the world that Jesus really did die.
And that he died upon the cross. That we are to tell the world that Jesus really did conquer sin and death and hell and the evil one when he rose from the dead. That it all was part of God's plan.
[18:31] That it was something that God had created and set up. And the third thing is that there's something that fits with this. Remember the story about the boss.

And he talks into the mouse. Thinking it's like a telephone or an intercom or a radio. And he doesn't understand why it doesn't work. Well it doesn't work because the mouse is designed to work with the computer in a very, very particular way.
And part of God's plan is that the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus. That his plan is that we human beings respond to what Christ has done in a particular way.
And that response is to turn from our preoccupations. To turn from our self-centeredness. To turn from our own plans. To turn our back in all of these.
And to look to Jesus. And to come to him. To come to him. And that as part of God's whole plan. After what Christ has done on the cross.
[19:33] After his triumph in the resurrection. And as we respond appropriately to him. By turning towards him. And in a sense opening our arms. So that he might embrace us.

And he might take us to himself. That a wonderful transaction happens at the exact same time. That we not only know the end of our longings and our yearnings. But that all that separates us from God is completely and utterly removed.
And God designed this whole thing to fit together. Mouses work with computers. You know. The parts of the car are all to work together. And God designed this whole thing.
And promised it in the scriptures. Of the death of Christ. The resurrection of Christ. A proper human response. And an unbelievable unmerited gift. That comes as we turn to him.
And that gift is to be even deepened. As we move towards Pentecost. We'll see that the gift is to be even deepened. With the coming of the promise. Which means the falling of the Holy Spirit. Upon those who have repented and turned to Christ.
[20:39] You know. Holy blood and Holy Grail. And the Da Vinci Code. And modern skeptics. You know. There's one thing that none of them can really properly explain.

And that is. How is it. That the disciples who were so scattered and dispirited. All of a sudden. There was an explosion of Christian faith.
Thousands and thousands of thousands. Right in the place where Jesus had died. Thousands and thousands and thousands. Came to believe that he had risen from the dead. I believe that he really did rise from the dead.
I believe that is what explains the facts better than anything else. And if that is the case friends. That means that there is a God. That he loves you. That it was part of his plan.
To launch a rescue mission. And as part of his plan. His son died. His son rose. And the father invites us to turn from our preoccupations to Christ.
[21:41] And in turning to Christ. Receive. Vermission. Forgiveness of sins. And the promise of the father. Which is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Father, thank you for the promise.
Which is the Holy Spirit. And Father, pour out your Holy Spirit richly and fully and deeply upon us. Father, those amongst us who have never turned to your Son Jesus in repentance and faith.
May your Holy Spirit fall upon them and help them to so turn. And those of us who have turned to your Son in repentance of faith. Father, deepen our repentance.
[22:44] Deepen our faith. Deepen our surrender. Fan into flame within us ever deeper longings and yearnings to see you and to know you and to live as your adopted children. Fan that into ever deeper flame.

And fan into flame within us an ever deeper ability to receive the ministry and the indwelling presence and power of your Holy Spirit. All this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior.
Amen. Amen.

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