

EASTER EVENING - Remember What the King Says

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Date: 05 April 2015

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[0 : 0 0] today? Good. Yeah. I don't know how your Easter has been going or your Good Friday and Easter weekend, but sort of being a friend to many other ministers, Facebook friend that is.

I mean, I'm friends with them as well, but they're Facebook friends. You just can't miss that is Easter today. They keep sending tweets or little status updates about the fact that Jesus is risen. So I've been getting that all day. And if you subscribe to things like the Gospel Coalition or other things, they send you articles about why today is the most special day and all that. So, you know, I've been sort of spending the whole day reflecting on Easter, and we're going to get to do that a bit more as we look at this chapter.

Well, how about I pray for us? Father, we thank you that you have left us a record of what did happen on that Easter day. And we thank you that because of what we read, we can have assurance that Jesus is alive. So help us to take that in and change us and transform us even as we reflect on that.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, my name is Mark. If you're new here, and I'd just like to welcome you. I'm the pastor of what is a combined service today, both the Word, which is 1.30, and the 6 p.m. service.

Well, if you've got an outline, you particularly need that today because you're going to have to do some little exercise. But if you need, if someone missed an outline on the way in, they can just raise their hands and my two lovely daughters will grab one for them.

[1 : 3 9] Yeah, thank you. That's Emma and Lauren. Okay, so keep your hands up and thank you. Now, have you ever noticed that examples come in threes?

So, for example, examples of twos are used to draw a contrast, right? Like comparing what girls get up to during their school holidays. I've got a slide of that there, I think.

Yep. Compared with what boys like to do. So, when you use examples of twos, it's by way of contrast. But when you use examples of threes, normally that's to establish a pattern or to show what's common between all three.

So, many preachers like to do what they call a three-point sermon, often with the same word or letter in the heading. Or take this week when firefighters started to become suspicious when there was a third fire in the Catholic Church in Melbourne.

They started noticing a pattern, which was that all these churches were related to, unfortunately, pedophile priests at one time or another. Now, even Jesus did things in threes. Remember how he asked Peter on the beach after his resurrection, do you love me? How many times did he ask Peter that? Three times.

[3 : 1 5] So, there are a lot of examples, isn't there, of things and learning things in threes. And surprise, surprise, I've just given you three examples into introduction.

Now, you may sort of have guessed where I'm heading with all this, because Luke does a very similar thing with our passage tonight. He's given us three separate accounts with Jesus, each of which was read by a different person tonight.

And although it's not obvious, there's actually a common pattern in all of these three. And Luke is actually trying to teach us something about the resurrection with these three encounters.

So, well, what is it? That's what we're going to be looking at tonight. But the first thing I want all of us to do together is together in groups of threes and quickly answer the questions in the box on that outline.

So, you've got an outline at the top. There should be three questions there. And how we'll do it is this. So, if you're on the left here, just look at verses 1 to 12. If you're in the middle, look at verses 13 to 35. And if you're on the right hand, smallest group, just look at verses 36 and 49. So, it's not meant to be a big exercise.

[4 : 27] Three simple questions. Just quickly glance over the passage and then just maybe jot down one or two things related to that question. So, off you go. Give you a couple of minutes. Okay, let's come back together again. Doesn't matter if you haven't finished everything.

That's fine. It was just a little exercise. Well, let's look at the first question. How did the women and disciples feel initially? Well, clearly the disciples and women were feeling sad and downcast.

Jesus, their master, is dead. And they were trying to make sense of it all. But I think they were more than just sad. They were confused as well. And the events of the day merely added to the confusion.

So, with the first story, the women make their way to Jesus' tomb in the dark. But when they get there, they find the stone had been rolled away. And Jesus' body was no longer there. So, in verse 4, Luke says that they were wondering about this.

But actually, the word wonder is actually stronger than that. It actually means they were perplexed or at a loss as to what to do. Likewise, in the second story, when Jesus meets the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, he finds them in a state of confusion.

[5 : 36] In verse 17, their faces were downcast. But what's adding to their confusion is what has just occurred. So, they explain in verse 19 to Jesus, saying, Jesus was a prophet, although they didn't know it was Jesus.

Jesus was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God. And yet, he was crucified. When they had hoped that he would actually be the one who was going to redeem Israel.

But now, in verse 22, some of our women amazed us by telling them that angels have appeared to them and told them Jesus is alive.

And that's exactly what the disciples found when some of them went to the tomb. Something was up, but they couldn't make sense of it. Likewise, the third story, and by this time, a lot has happened.

So, the disciples knew about the women's encounter. However, they've heard from Cleopas and his friend. And even Peter, it says in verse 34, has met the risen Jesus.

[6 : 34] And yet, instead of clarity, they were still confused. So much so that when Jesus appears to them, verse 37, they were started and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.

And Jesus asked in verse 38, Why are you troubled and why do doubts rise in your minds? Implying that they shouldn't be. And even after Jesus shows them his hands and feet, it still says that they did not believe because of joy and amazement.

Now, perhaps this was because it was just too good to be true, right? That sometimes happens. But I think something else is happening. Because you would have thought that after all these multiple appearances, they would have got it.

They would have at least understood what was going on. But they didn't. So all of them, whether it's the women or Cleopas and his friend or the disciples, all of them needed more than just the appearance of Jesus to understand.

They needed something else before they could believe. And yet, if you notice at the same time, what the angels and Jesus say to each of them amounts to rebuke.

[7 : 47] And so in verse 5, if you go back, we're going to sort of jump to and fro between the stories today, but just to show you how the three are linked. But if you go back to verse 5, and this is by far the mildness of rebukes, the angel says, why do you look for the living among the dead?

He's not here. He's risen. Then with Cleopas and his friends in verse 26, Jesus says this, how foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

Again, another rebuke. And then with the disciples in the end in verse 38, why, I've said this already, why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your mind? And each time, the expectation is that they should have known.

They should have believed. Because not only have they seen the empty tomb and the risen Jesus, Jesus has told them these things before. These should come as no surprise.

So verse 6, the angel says, remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee, the Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified, and the third day be raised again.

[8 : 52] And again in verse 26, did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and enter his glory? You should know this. And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scripture, concerning himself.

And then finally to the disciples in verse 44, he says again, this is what I've told you while I was still with you. Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms.

So none of this should have been a surprise. And yet it was. Now why is that? Because it says that they were blinded and their hearts were hard.

And God had to open their minds and their hearts for them to believe. It even says in verse 16 that they were kept from recognizing Jesus. And so in answer to the second question, it is only when Jesus opens the scripture to them, not just physically in explaining the scripture, but spiritually in opening their minds and hearts, it was only then that they became convinced that Jesus is alive.

God had to actually do a work in them before they could believe. And so if you notice, in each case, it's not Jesus's appearance, that's the turning point for them.

[10 : 09] It wasn't even when Jesus showed them his hands and feet or ate fish with them. I don't know how broad fish tastes, but it doesn't sound very appetizing anyway. But it wasn't any of those things.

Rather, it was when the word of God is open to them, that was the turning point. So for the women, it's when the angels tell them to remember Jesus's words.

Verse 8, and they did remember Jesus's words. And by the way, Jesus's words were actually words from scripture as well, because Jesus taught from the scripture. And so if you came last week or on Friday, you would have seen that Isaiah 53 speaks exactly of that, of Jesus as the suffering servant dying on the cross.

As for Cleopas and his friends, their turning point is captured in verse 32, when they say, were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?

It burned when scriptures was opened to them. And the same thing happens to the disciples in verse 46, because Jesus opened their minds so that they could understand the scriptures.

[11 : 17] So I wonder whether you're beginning to see a pattern here. Can you see how Jesus gives them confidence that the resurrection has happened by using scripture?

He shows them that he's the chosen one, the chosen king by using scripture. And that's similar with us. If you're wondering how we can have confidence that the resurrection did occur, God gives us great confidence because he's given us a threefold witness to the risen king.

And that's what we're going to look at in the second heading. It's just like if you're in a court and you need multiple witnesses corroborating the evidence in order to convict a person.

So here God has provided us multiple, three types of witnesses, each corroborating each other, so that we can then have certainty that Jesus did rise from the dead.

So what are these witnesses? Well, as it says in the outline, the first we've already touched on that, and that's scripture. And here, when Jesus uses the word scripture, or Luke does, he's referring to the Old Testament.

[12 : 21] In verse 44, Jesus calls it the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms. So hundreds and thousands of years before Jesus came, God caused his prophets to speak to give us a first witness, foreshadowing his coming, his suffering, and his rising from the dead.

And so in Isaiah 53, as I said, we saw Isaiah foretelling the Savior as the suffering servant. And last week, we looked at Psalms as well, Psalm 118, speaking of the rejected Messiah.

So in the Old Testament, are many references to the coming Messiah. Now, not everything in the Old Testament are predictions. God also uses what we call types, objects or symbols, which are shadows of pictures of what Jesus Christ will do.

So the sacrifice of the Passover lamb is a picture of God's own sacrifice. The high priest as a mediator between God and humans points to the greater high priest in Jesus.

And then the temple, God's dwelling place among his people, points to Jesus, the ultimate in God's dwelling with his people. And there are many more types, but all of them serve as a witness so that when Jesus comes, he fills out these pictures and we see how rich and deep Jesus' words and actions are.

[13 : 41] But the second witness is that when Jesus comes, he too is a witness. He's the second witness. He points his disciples to Scripture to show how he is fulfilling what is written in it.

So if you look back in Luke or to any other gospel, we don't have time to do that today, Jesus predicts his own death and suffering three times. That's why he can now say that he's actually told them all these things before.

It's nothing new. He's actually said it before he's done it. But his witness continues even after he's risen because as we see here in Luke 24, he keeps teaching them from Scripture.

And because Jesus uses Scripture, what he does is reinforces the testimony of the first witness. Right? Jesus' words has authority in its own right, but he uses authority of the first witness, the Old Testament as well.

And then we come finally to the third and the final witness, which is that of the disciples themselves. So see in verse 48 what Jesus says of them, You are witnesses of these things, Jesus says.

[14 : 52] And then he says, To help you, Jesus will send the promised Holy Spirit that is piled from on high in order to witness to the resurrection. By the Holy Spirit, God will speak through them as his third witness.

And what the disciples bring as a third witness is their eyewitness accounts. They are the ones who have seen firsthand the risen King. But they are also witnesses in another sense because they are witness to Jesus' teaching.

They are passing on everything that they have learned as Jesus opened the Scriptures to them, showing them in verse 46 how the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations beginning in Jerusalem.

And that's a summary of the Gospel in essence. So turn back with me to Luke chapter 1 verse 1 to 4 and I think I've even got another slide. But as you do, I want to show you Luke's purpose statement at the start of his Gospel and you'll see exactly what he's trying to do with his third witness.

So he says at the start of his Gospel, which is, you know, right at the other end of what we've read, many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who were from the first, eyewitnesses and servants of the Word.

[16 : 14] Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

So see how the disciples are both eyewitnesses, but servants of the Word, and that what they're testifying to are the things that have been fulfilled in their midst in the Old Testament.

And what is Luke's purpose for writing the Gospel? It's right at the end, so that we can be certain of the things that we've been taught. So you see how the disciples, as the third witness, brings about, brings together both the first and the second witness, as it were, into a little package, so that we can, with all these three witnesses, be certain of the things that we have been taught.

Now if you read Acts, Jesus spent some 40 days between His resurrection and ascension doing just that, teaching the disciples about the Kingdom of God. And sometimes I've wondered, wouldn't it be good if they had actually recorded everything Jesus said in that period?

So I know that they don't have video recordings in those days, like what you do with uni lectures now. But why didn't they take it all down and leave transcripts for us?

[17 : 31] That would be great, wouldn't it? Then we would have Jesus, the Old Testament lecturer, showing us exactly how to interpret the Old Testament in light of His coming. But really, when I think about it a bit more, that's in effect what the Gospels are, aren't they?

The Gospels in particular, but the New Testament in general. Peter, John, Matthew, these disciples actually wrote down what they saw, but they also wrote down having had the benefit of Jesus' teaching over those 40 days.

Others, like Luke and Mark, may not have been there, but they would have been taught by those who were. And even Paul learned from Jesus because Jesus appeared to him. And so, if we read the New Testament carefully, what we should be able to see is the writers using the Old Testament pointing to Jesus, just as Jesus would have taught them.

And so, this Old Testament, Jesus' Old Testament, and the New Testament, all these three witnesses are like three strands to a cord, tightly woven together, strong, unbreakable.

and that is the basis on which we're given a secure basis for our faith. So, in answer to the question, whether we, wouldn't it be better if we saw Jesus alive?

[18 : 54] Wouldn't we have more faith? Well, no, we don't need to see Jesus physically to believe in him. I mean, it didn't do the disciples any good, did it? Not by itself, anyway.

Rather, what we're given is this threefold witness of the Old Testament Jesus and the New Testament to give us the confidence that Jesus is alive. We have all we need, in other words, to know that Jesus is alive.

And so, by way of application, I have three. The first thing I want to say is that sustaining our faith, then, requires us to keep coming back to these events.

That the events of Good Friday and Easter, of the Messiah's suffering, and then being raised on the third day, and knowing that that's the basis for our forgiveness, should be what we keep coming back to as a church and as individuals, as Christians.

We must never tire of Easter, no matter how long we've been Christians. Because everything in life and everything that our Christian faith is about hangs off these very events.

[20 : 02] As Paul says in 1 Corinthians, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then we, the church, those who believe, are the most pitiful of all people. But if Jesus did rise from the dead, then we have the most secure basis for hope in life.

So that no matter what's going on in our lives, whether it be trials or suffering, we can actually look to Jesus' resurrection and have confidence that if he rose again, then we too will rise from the dead.

and that as we come before God on the final day, we will have no need for fear because our sins are forgiven. And as we look out at the world and see all that suffering and evil, we can hope in Christ because we know that every wrong will be right on that final day because Jesus is alive.

So friends, I want to encourage us to keep coming back as a church to the cross, to the empty tomb, to the gospel, because that is what sustains our faith. That is what will help us to persevere in our walk with Christ.

And secondly, the second application, the way we do that is by applying ourselves to understanding the Bible because, as we've seen with the disciples, that's how God opens our minds and hearts to him.

[21 : 27] So it's normal even as Christians to have doubts and lack faith from time to time, but even as we ask God for understanding and we ask God for faith, then what we need to do is open our Bibles as we do that because that is where God will answer our prayers.

I mean, I just love verse 32, the way Clopas and his friends describe it. Just look with me again. They said, were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?

What an amazing experience, isn't it? Our hearts burning. They're describing the amazing power of God's word at work in us, transforming us, shining a torch into our hearts.

So it's at once a most humbling and yet most uplifting experience because we get to see ourselves as God sees us and we get to see the world the way God sees it.

So let me encourage you again to maintain a habit of studying the Bible, whether it's individually or in small groups. Long to do that, be eager for those times and engage in it prayerfully and humbly.

[22 : 45] And if you need ideas on how to do that, then come and talk to me. I'll be more than happy to encourage you in that area. And third and finally, Christ's resurrection compels us to be witnesses ourselves.

Now some of you may have noticed that I've skipped the third question and you might be wondering, has he forgotten? Well, let's answer that now. What did they do after they realized Jesus is alive? Well, many things happen, but the common thing is that they actually go and tell others, don't they?

The women told the eleven and other disciples, Cleopas and his friends actually got up and returned to Jerusalem immediately, seven miles worth. And the disciples, even though it's not told at the end of Luke, they are charged by Jesus to be his witnesses, but they were to wait in Jerusalem until the Spirit comes.

And so when we turn to Acts and the Spirit does come, we see that they do become powerful witnesses to Jesus. None of them could actually keep the good news to themselves.

And that should be the way, isn't it? That if Jesus is alive, that must be the most amazing news in the world. And it should compel us to want to tell others if we are benefiting for it, then really we want others to benefit from it as well.

[24 : 11] But more, when we do that, that's part of God's plan as well, isn't it? Because in verse 47, part of what was being written and is being fulfilled is that forgiveness of sins, verse 47, will be preached in his name to all nations beginning in Jerusalem.

So the preaching, the witnessing wasn't an afterthought, it was part and parcel of the suffering, dying, rising, and then the preaching in his name to all nations.

And that particular phrase is itself a fulfillment of the first witness in the Old Testament in Isaiah 49 and verse 8 where God says that the servant will both restore the tribes of Jacob and be a light for the Gentiles so that his salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

So hundreds of years before Jesus came, this was already part of God's plan, the witnessing of the gospel to others. So if you're here today and you're not yet a Christian, then part of what we're doing tonight is to tell you, to witness to you, that there is forgiveness in his name.

That message has come down to us all the way from Isaiah and now we're passing it on to you. Jesus is alive and there is salvation for all who trust in him.

[25 : 32] And we have said any of that because of the threefold witness to that fact. Many of us here tonight have already put our hope on that. The Easter message has changed us forever and would love for the same to happen to you.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you again that we can each year reflect over Easter on the great news that Jesus is alive, that you raised him up.

Help us to do that not just on Easter, but help us to do that each and every day, each and every Sunday as we gather as a church. But more than that, help us not only just to remember, but may the fact that we remember change our lives, change the way we live for you, and compel us to tell others about it as well.

So we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.