

EASTER MORNING - According to the Scriptures

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Preacher: Andrew Reid

[0 : 0 0] Well friends, while you remain standing, I'll pray. Lord God, we thank you for this glorious remembrance of your sons rising from the dead. And we pray today that you'd help us understand this more, and understanding it to live in the light of it. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, perhaps underneath it all, I'm not a very biblical person at all. That is, after all, I am not very good at anniversaries and celebrations. I don't get very excited about the first day of the year, about birthdays, about anniversaries of events or particular high days.

And that's very different from the people of the Bible, you see. They are not like that. It's also very different from the way Jews and Christians have historically thought about things. After all, even in Scripture, Jews marked days and times out as special in a whole lot of ways.

For example, the beginning of every year for Jews was marked by the Passover celebration, where they remembered God's great rescue from Egypt. Dotted through the year, they had festivals and days that were important for them and for the whole nation.

They had a day of rest once every week. They set it aside for rest and reflection, just as God had instructed them.

[1 : 2 3] They marked out occasions with piles of rocks and a whole lot of other things that would enable them to remember all the time. They were people who were marked by special days.

And, of course, we Christians have followed in their shoes. We have key days as well. We stop on days like Christmas Day and we remember the birth of Jesus and the incarnation of the Son of God.

We stop, as we did the other day, on Good Friday. We celebrate on Easter Sunday, as we're doing today. Friends, we are people who remember days.

And my guess is there's one day that never dropped out of the minds of a group of first century disciples of Jesus. It is talked about in Luke 24, verse 1. It is called the first day of the week.

And I reckon it could have been called the first day of the rest of their lives or even the first day of the new age or perhaps even the first of the last days.

[2 : 2 3] And I suspect that if I'd been there, well, even I might have marked it in my diary as a day I'd remember for the rest of my life. In fact, to tell the truth, I have marked it in every week since I became a Christian on the 7th of December 1976.

It is Sunday, the first day of the week for Christians. And anyway, let's get back to our passage now and have a look at it and rehearse the days that preceded this first day.

Let's remember what made this day a day to remember and a day that you might mark in your diary. And as we do this, we'll work backwards. So pick up your Bibles. Look at look at the verses immediately before chapter 24, verse 1.

Look at chapter 23, verses 55 to 56. Now, let's think about this for a moment.

The day previous to our day, the first day of the week, was the seventh day of the previous week. It is the equivalent to our Saturday. It's the day when Jewish followers of Jesus and Jews as a whole rested.

- [3 : 45] But it was preceded by a sixth day, which is the equivalent to our Friday. And the sixth day was a day when Jewish men and women, well, a day which for these Jewish men and women was a day of particular significance.

For in this sixth day of the week, it was the day that they watched their friend and their teacher die. And they had watched Jesus crucified on that day.

And a supporter named Joseph of Arimathea had obtained permission to take the body of Jesus. He had taken it down from the cross. He had wrapped it in a cloth. He'd placed it in a previously unmarked or unused tomb.

And that's the background to the chapter we're going to look at today. And by all appearances, the events of this chapter all occur on that first day of the week.

So incident one, let's have a look at the structure of the passage first. There are three sections in our passage today. The first section covers verses one through to 12. And those verses we are told happen in the morning.

- [4 : 50] And it concerns a group of women or some women going to the tomb to prepare the body of Jesus, then finding the tomb empty. You might remember they got the spices earlier. They didn't do anything on the Saturday.

Now on the first day of the week, they find the tomb and they find it is empty. And they then encounter some messengers of God. And they report back to the apostles about what those messengers told them.

The apostles don't believe. And they discount the report of the women. However, then Peter runs off to just to check it out. And he finds things just as the women said. And he wonders about it all.

So that's that's our first story. Second one occurs from verses 13 to 35. And verse 13 tells us it occurs in the same day. Verse 29 says it occurs in the afternoon.

And that by the end, the evening is close. Now, a couple of people are there in this incident. They're on the road to Emmaus. And as they walk, they talk about the events of the previous day.

- [5 : 53] Jesus joins them, but they're kept from recognizing him and they engage in conversation. And he quizzes them about what they're talking about. And Jesus rebukes them. He takes them through what looks to me like a bit of a Sunday school lesson in scripture, explaining to them what was said in the scriptures concerning him.

And then he breaks bread with them. And finally, they recognize him. And then he disappears from their sight. And they return to Jerusalem to tell the apostles.

That's incident two gone. Incident three occurs from verses 36 to 53. And it follows on immediately after the preceding one.

And so we gather it must be at night because we had afternoon and early evening. And now we're into the evening. It has two sections in it. Verses 36 to 50, where Jesus appears yet again, this time to the apostles themselves.

And again, he rebukes them for their lack of understanding and explains things to them from the scriptures. Then in verses 50 to 53, they go to somewhere in the vicinity of Bethany.

- [6 : 56] He blesses them and then he vanishes from their sight. So there's the structure of our passage. What I want you to notice is how the disciples are responding to all of these events.

Imagine you were there on that particular day, that first day of the week. Look at verse four. The women enter the tomb. They don't find a body. And so they wonder.

The original language is actually a bit stronger than wonder. They are entirely at a loss. They are perplexed and uncertain and disturbed. There's this sense of hopeless grief that has crept over them.

Now look at verse 11. When the apostles hear the report of the women, they treat it with unbelief and cynicism. It seems, and our text is captured as well here, absolute nonsense to them.

You can almost hear them telling the women to stop their idle talk and speculative nonsense. Look at verse 12. Peter runs to the tomb. He bends over, sees the strips of linen without a body and retreats.

[8 : 01] And we're told that he wondered to himself about what had happened. Now, the English Standard Version captures the sense of this when it talks about them marveling at what, about Peter marveling at what he saw.

In other words, it's not some inner pondering that's going on, but a sense of absolute amazement at what was there. Look at the next story.

Two people on the road to Emmaus thinking about God's plans of redeeming his people and thinking that perhaps they have been dashed on the hard wood of a cross. They are astounded at the empty tomb.

They've heard about it. They're astounded at the news from the women. They're, but they're absolutely clueless about what is going on. And Jesus recognizes it. And he speaks to them as foolish and slow to believe.

You see, like many Jews before them, they are hard hearted. They're blind in their eyes, in the eyes of their understanding. They do not have the wit or the will or the means to understand what has happened.

[9 : 06] And even when Jesus shows his apostles, his hands and his feet in the next incident, they don't understand. And they need the events interpreted.

They need, as it were, the dots to be joined about what has gone on. Friends, we really need to understand this. The empty tomb, you see, is not a self-interpreting event. It's the absence from the body needs explanation.

Jesus and the angel at the tomb effectively tell them that they need, they had enough information to know what was going on. And they should have joined the dots themselves, but couldn't or didn't.

They had predictions of Jesus himself. They had prophecies of scripture. But it had all gone just shooting over their heads as though they had not heard a thing.

They were blinded to the truth. And so when Jesus died, they shut up shop. They went about their business. They effectively did not anticipate what Jesus had explicitly said.

[10 : 07] That is, that he would be raised from the dead. Friends, did you notice that within each of these three encounters, someone gives an explanation as to what is going on? In essence, they tell them they have not listened, that they are being dull of heart and dull of mind.

Look at verse five as an example. And look at what the messengers say. The messengers are amazed that the women are looking for a living Jesus among the dead.

They remind them of what Jesus had taught them ahead of time. Look at what it says. He is not here. He has risen. Remember how he told you that while he was still with you in Galilee, the son of man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified.

And on the third day, be raised again. Now look at the second incident. Look at verse 25. Jesus says to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, how foolish you are and how slow to believe all that the prophets have said.

Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

[11 : 25] Notice the rebuke again. They are unhearing, uncomprehending, foolish and slow to believe the scriptures. Now look at the third incident.

You think the apostles might fare a little better, don't you? Look at verse 44. Notice the implied rebuke by Jesus. He combines the two previous comments made in incidents one and two.

They had information about from the teaching of Jesus and in the scriptures. And look at what he says. He said to them, this is what I told you while I was still with you. Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of the of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms.

Friends, can you see it? In each of these three incidents, there is an explanation by a messenger of God or by Jesus himself as to the meaning of the events they have witnessed.

And in each case, the hearers are assured that what has happened is not an accident, but is actually part of the plan of God. God had planned this.

[12 : 27] What's more, he had ensured that it was prophesied in scripture beforehand, just as Jesus himself indicated. And there are lots of places we can go. But let me just give you one little one.

Did you hear the Daniel 6 passage? It's not a direct prophecy of Jesus, but it has enough in germ to show us what might happen when a group of people plot against someone for their godliness.

That person stands firm. That person is then arraigned before a court. That person then is locked up in a tomb. And that person is then vindicated.

You see, the parallels between Daniel 6 and Jesus are quite profound when you look at it. So there's just one of a whole host of things that might have led the disciples to think Jesus will be raised.

But he'd actually explicitly said it as well. So what does all this mean? Well, it means that in order to understand the death of Jesus, we need to listen to God's explanation. We need an interpreter.

[13 : 29] And we need some divine insight from God himself. And that's why throughout the passage, there are references to opening minds and eyes. In verse 25, you'll notice the disciples are said to be slow of heart.

In verse 31, their eyes are opened and they recognize him. In verse 32, they explain how their hearts burned when he opened the scriptures to them.

In verse 45, he opens their minds to understand the scriptures. Friends, if you are to understand the death of Jesus, then you need to listen to the scriptures which predicted all of this.

You need to listen to Jesus who predicted all of this and explains its meaning. Jesus interprets and fulfills the Old Testament scriptures.

And he alone will give you insight into their meaning. And Jesus makes it clear that what happened to him was not an accident. It was not a terrible and unplanned dead end.

[14 : 35] As it appears as though the disciples were beginning to think, No, it was the planned, predetermined act of God for the salvation of all. The rising of Jesus from the dead was not God's response to some terrible accident that had occurred and he thought, well, I better fix this up, hadn't I?

No, it was the planned, predetermined act of God. And part of his great purpose. Moreover, the resurrection of Jesus validates and authorizes the interpretation of the Old Testament that Jesus gives.

It is God's authorization and validation that Jesus understood and taught. That what Jesus understood and taught was from God. But look at Jesus fill out the implications of these truths.

Look at verse 46, for example. And I want you to soak in what Jesus has to say. It flows from all of scripture and these events. Jesus says, This is what is written.

The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. And repentance and forgiveness for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, and your witnesses of these things.

[15 : 51] Friends, just in the remaining few minutes left to us, I want to speak to you about one of the, about the implications of this passage. First, I wonder if I could just speak to those of you who might be here today, who are not yet believers in the Lord Jesus.

That is in Jesus the Christ. If you are not a believer today, I want you to hear what Jesus says. He is saying that God has had a plan from the beginning of time.

And he caused that plan to be written down ahead in his, in the scriptures, long before Jesus. And then he sent Jesus into his world.

And Jesus explained God's plan to those who were his disciples, referring back to the very scriptures that God caused to be written. And he told them that what was going to happen to him was no accident, but a deliberate plan to enable people to be forgiven of all sin and independence.

He died so that forgiveness might be available. And he rose from the dead that we might know that this plan came from God and it results in life for all who listen and believe.

[17 : 02] So if you're not a Christian today, I urge you to hear what Jesus says this day. I urge you to accept it. Jesus did suffer for sin.

He did rise from the dead. And if you repent of sin, then you will be forgiven. These are the word of Jesus and God the Father, and they can be trusted.

Now let me turn to those of you who are already Christian. Friends, there is a message here for you as well this Easter. You see, we who are Christians know and love the fact that we are forgiven by God and we'll celebrate it in the Lord's Supper as we do so often.

You see, we who are Christians know and love this fact that we are forgiven by God. We rejoice in a dying and a resurrected Messiah. But I want you to notice verses 46 to 49.

You see, Jesus died not just for your personal sins to be forgiven, but Jesus died and rose so that repentance and forgiveness of sins might be preached in his name to all the nations.

[18 : 18] Moreover, God has poured out his spirit upon his people so that this might be done. If you go on from Luke into Acts, you'll find that happening in the second chapter.

Friends, please understand this. The news that we celebrate as God's people today is not just for private consumption. It is to be put out into the public domain.

It is to be preached and proclaimed in word and deed. We too are witnesses to this truth. And that is why we as a church have drawn up a mission.

And that mission is this. You can see it up there on the data projector, although we've added some words since that was there, to prayerfully grow and make disciples of Jesus Christ for God's glory.

To prayerfully grow and make disciples of Jesus Christ for God's glory. So I want to ask you this morning, are you willing to go into the public domain with this?

[19 : 22] Will you go and do this? Will you take this on as your agenda? This is what Jesus died and rose for, that these events might be proclaimed in all the world.

We must now announce this great news to God's world. Let us do this. Let us pray. Father God, we thank you for your great plan formed before the beginning of time, formed before this world began, that your son might come into the world to die and to suffer for human sin and to rise vindicated before you and that through this we might be forgiven and this message of all that you have done in Jesus might be proclaimed in all the world and forgiveness of sin might be proclaimed in his name.

Please help us to do this. Please help us to take these facts on board again and to trust in them and help us to proclaim them in our lives and in our words.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.