

Vision Series 2023

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning everyone. My name's Steve Jeffery. I'm a senior pastor here at St Paul's. I got a sense this morning someone in this building is walking with a significant limp. That's not a spiritual moment. It's because the sole of your shoe was just down the front here.

And so if that's yours or your kids, you might want to come and grab that because they're going to be suffering by the end of the day. I'm grateful that you're in here today in this building on this special occasion.

So why are we here? Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus was born in 10 BC and he died in 1854.

He was as surprised as anyone else in the world at the time that he became the most powerful person in the world in AD 41 when he became, at the age of 50, emperor of the Roman Empire.

When Claudius was a child in an obscure part of the Roman Empire, a poor teenage girl gave birth to a son and named him Jesus.

[1 : 1 2] Unlike Claudius, Jesus was born in obscurity. He wasn't born in a palace. Just before Claudius became emperor, this same Jesus was crucified by the Roman Empire on a cross just outside of Jerusalem.

Jesus lived roughly half the time that Claudius lived and he died a public, shameful and excruciating death.

Claudius was an accomplished historian, an accomplished writer. Jesus, on the other hand, never wrote a book. Unlike Claudius, Jesus never raised an army and expanded an empire.

And in fact, Jesus never ruled over a realm in his short life. And yet 2,000 years later, you could be forgiven for not knowing anything about Claudius at all.

On the other hand, Jesus became, by any measure, the most influential person who has ever lived in the history of humanity.

[2 : 3 5] Why? Even to this day. Why? One reason throughout history, scholars have said, one reason for that is because of his exquisitely beautiful life.

Only two people in history, only two people in history have ever caused so many people to wonder if they were in fact more than just human beings.

Two people. Buddha and Jesus Christ. Jesus of Nazareth. Unlike Buddha, Jesus was the only one of those two who claimed to be, in fact, more than just a human being.

The main reason for his influence, though, is not just the exquisiteness of his life, but is why we're here today. And in the next little while, I want to just take a look at that outrageous claim that around about 2,000 years ago, a man who died an unbelievably horrible death came back to an unbelievably wonderful life and offers to include us in that life if only we would align ourselves with him.

And so I got three points. If you got the St. Paul's app in front of you, you can open this up and follow along. Really simple. Well, resurrection is reasonable. Resurrection is relevant.

[4 : 02] And the resurrection is good. That's kind of where I'm heading in these three points real quick. So the resurrection is reasonable. The fact that Jesus was crucified was not unusual.

Around Jesus' time, there were dozens of little movements within the Roman Empire where the leader declared themselves to be the Messiah of the Jewish nation, but also the Messiah of humanity.

As Jesus himself did. And in every case, those leaders were executed for leading some kind of a rebellion. And in every case, those little rebellions, those little movements collapsed the moment the leader was executed.

Except for the Christian faith. Except for Christianity. It exploded from that moment. So how is it possible that Jesus, a born into Jewish man, was able to get the Jewish people around him to believe that he wasn't just the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, but that he was, in fact, God himself?

That was incomprehensible to the Jewish nation. And it still is this day. And how is it possible that within 200 years of Christianity beginning, that it was dominant in the Roman Empire, despite incredibly significant attempts by every Roman emperor to stamp it out throughout the empire?

[5 : 47] How is it possible that today Christianity is the largest and most widespread culturally and geographically of all religious faiths?

Of all the major faiths in the world, they normally dominate one area in the world and have a smattering here and there. The Christian faith is equally spread across cultures and continents around the globe.

It is spread into all layers of society, into very different cultures and languages. How is it possible? Well, the Bible says that after Jesus was killed, he came back to life and appeared to his followers.

And so Paul wrote this in 1 Corinthians 15, a public document in the Roman Empire. I'll pick it up at verse 3. What I received I pass on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve.

After that, he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. And then he appeared to James and then to all the apostles.

[7 : 06] And last of all, he appeared to me also as to one abnormally born. The historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is formidable.

For one, British scholar N.T. Wright wrote a very significant work attesting to the historical evidence simply called the resurrection of the Son of God. And in that book, he suggests that if you don't begin with an imposed philosophical bias, against the possibility of miracles, the resurrection has as much attestation as any other historical event.

And if you do have a philosophical bias against miracles, he suggests you must be able to explain every event in the world. What that means is whether you believe it or whether you don't, you are taking a step of faith.

Which is the very first message that we preached in this whole series way back in February. There's no 100% watertight argument for the existence of God.

And there's no 100% watertight argument for the non-existence of God. That means every single person is taking a step of faith. Every single person is a believer in something.

[8 : 32] And yet, I know this is 2023 and most people around us just don't believe that, don't believe in the possibility of resurrection.

It comes as shock to us that they didn't believe it in the first century either. The very first believers in Jesus didn't believe in the resurrection, weren't expecting it, weren't looking for it. As you read through Mark's account of the life of Jesus, you notice that Jesus tells his followers very clearly on three separate occasions that he will die and that he will rise again.

And the weird thing is, third day after his resurrection, no one's expecting it. You see that in the Mark passage that was just read out to us.

You know, the followers of Jesus, those early disciples, the blokes, you know, they're not hanging around on the first Easter day wondering whether they should at least go to the tomb and check it out.

You know, wake up for breakfast. First, hey guys, you think we should just wander down to the tomb and just, you know, Jesus mentioned it. Should we just check it? The women have bought spices to anoint a dead body.

[9 : 52] They were expecting to prepare his body for burial. The three women who eventually go to the tomb were wondering who's going to open the tomb for them.

They prepared everything except how to get in. And their first thought at seeing the stone rolled away and the tomb empty was not that Jesus had come back to life, as he said he would.

Their first thought was that someone had stolen the body. That is, the point is, the resurrection was just as difficult for these guys as it is for us.

What Christians believe is that the New Testament record about Jesus is true and that these accounts of what happened in the life of Jesus are totally different than myth.

They're not even written the way myth is written in the first century, in the way that Greek and Roman myth is written. Mythology in the first century is shrouded in a distant past that does not connect with real history.

[11 : 08] The New Testament books are talking about real history. Pilate the governor, Herod the king from Galilee, Caiaphas the high priest, these people are known in history outside of the New Testament.

The accounts of the New Testament were all written while eyewitnesses were still alive. I could spread a rumor to say, someone I've just known has just come back to life.

Someone that you all know has just come back to life. It would take no time at all to disprove that if it wasn't true. These New Testament accounts were written while the eyewitnesses were still alive.

Paul's letters were written within 15 to 30 years after the death of Jesus. This is not mythology. Scholars call it eyewitness history. And what's more, the enemies of Jesus would have loved nothing better than to be able to wheel the body of Jesus back into Jerusalem in a wheelbarrow, dump it in the center of the town and say, there you go.

There's your Messiah. What a hoax. The Romans stationed their own soldiers at the entrance of the tomb. They were protecting it themselves and it was empty.

[12 : 30] There was no dead body. And the thought that these cowardly disciples who abandoned Jesus and his crucifixion for fear of their own lives would suddenly agree amongst themselves to come up with the classic April Fool's joke, steal the body and then die themselves for that hoax is just nonsense.

It's lunacy to think that. The point of all this is simply to say that when we Christians say that Jesus risen from the dead, we're speaking historically.

It's not a spiritual thing. It's not mythology. It's not emotional. It's historical. The New Testament uniformly teaches and assumes that Jesus lived in history, that he died as a substitute for sinners and that he rose again on the third day.

Which brings me to my next point. What's the relevance of the resurrection? Philippians 3 verse 20 to 21, which is just read out to us by Aidan, reveals at least some of the relevance of it.

But our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

[14 : 10] What is assumed in Philippians 3, in those verses right there, is that Jesus was raised from the dead, that he is now alive and very powerful.

And the reason why Paul assumes it in Philippians 3 is because he clearly states it in Philippians chapter 2. And in Philippians chapter 2, you will never read anything anywhere in any literature more sweeping, more important and more true.

Referring to Jesus, it says, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. And therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

That's why Christianity has spread the way it has. And 50,000 people a day are still becoming Christians because of that statement there, of who Jesus is and what he's achieved.

[15 : 32] Jesus was and is equal with God. He is God. He became a human being. He obediently suffered and died. That means that his death was a plan.

It wasn't an accident of nature. It was a plan. And the point of the plan was that Jesus Christ would be a substitute for sinners, as Ash has just indicated, and that everyone who trusts in him would have sin forgiven.

This was God's plan for the salvation of humanity. And it says, Therefore, because of that plan, God exalted him to the highest place, raised him from the dead and exalted him to the highest place.

Because of the obedient and successful life and death, God raised him from the dead and gave him great glory as Lord of the universe.

That is, this day, we don't just celebrate Jesus came back to life, but we acknowledge that he rules. He reigns.

[16 : 43] You see it there in verse 21, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control. Now, in one sense, he's got the right to rule because he's the God who made everything, not just because he died and rose again.

That is, he did not have to die and rise again in order to be who he actually is. This gives him, however, because of his death and his resurrection, not just the right to rule because he's God, but right to rule because he suffered and redeemed all of humanity.

And the impact of Easter Sunday is that there is no higher authority, but this higher authority lived, who lives now and reigns now, sacrificed his life for our life.

That's the kind of authority you'd want to submit to. There is no place, there is no sphere of reality, there is no dimension of existence anywhere in the universe that is not under the absolute authority of the merciful, loving, benevolent Lord Jesus Christ.

And when the world in which we live doesn't look like it's under the authority of this God, it would be wiser for us to marvel at the mystery of his ways than to question the scope of his power.

[18 : 20] Christ's power pervades the universe from the largest to the smallest elements of reality. There's not a single area of his life, of our lives, that is not to be surrendered to this Jesus.

That's the point of Easter Day. This Easter Day is not mere symbolism of how to endure hard things in life and to rise above difficulties.

Easter Day means that Jesus Christ rules the universe as the name, as Philippians 2 says, that is above every other name and he calls all people to surrender to his loving authority.

And 2,000 years later, that continues to happen across every generation, culture, language, people, group, and nation. Easter Day is a public declaration.

This is news. Not symbolism. This is news for all people. It's not like the news bulletin on TV about something that's happened that doesn't cause you to stop cooking dinner in order to turn it up.

[19 : 37] It's not one of those kind of news bulletins kind of things. This is life-changing news. This is stop and listen and reflect news.

The difference between the bulletin news and the life-changing news is this. Suppose you hear the news on the TV that 10 children in Chatswood were hit by cars while playing in their front yards in the last 12 months.

And you hear that news and you go, what a tragedy. That was really hard for those parents. And you continue to cook your dinner.

And then, as you do that, suddenly the front door of your house bursts open and your 10-year-old son comes screaming into the house with the news that your 8-year-old daughter has just been hit by a car in the front yard.

It's exactly the same news. But this time it's different. The first piece of news was true.

[20 : 52] There was good evidence for it. Now there's a piece of news that goes straight to the core of your being and it shakes you. Everything in you comes alive to the reality that this news is now about you.

It's personal. It will change everything in your life. It will break your heart. It will shatter things in you more deeply than has ever been touched.

That's the news of Christmas. Easter. Come back for Christmas. That's the news of Easter. Jesus is God. He died for your sin against God.

He was raised triumphantly from death for life eternal and he will never ever die again and he rules over the universe. And he has been appointed as ruler of the universe and he offers every single one of us life as he himself is alive.

What that means is that this resurrection of Jesus is so, so good. It's so good. It's not just plausible and relevant. It is good. Jesus comes to every individual, every culture and he offers to fulfill their deepest desires and their best aspirations.

[22 : 17] As we've been investigating here in the last couple of months of the church, we're running with the theme Jesus is all about life. We've seen that Jesus offers us this stuff on the board, meaning, satisfaction, freedom, identity, hope, justice, a whole range of things.

Fundamentally though, because of his resurrection, he offers us the thing that we all want to hang on to. Life. The free gift of life.

And he's not calling us like every other religion in the world, like every other philosophical system, earn your life. He's giving it to us. He's not showing us the way to live in order that we might find ourselves acceptable.

He's achieved it for us. He's swapped his eternal life for death so that we who are enslaved to our own sin, enslaved to our own selfishness, who deserve death, are set free and given life forever.

Did you notice that? I know it was really quick. The two massive implications for us in Philippians 3. They're staggering and they're filled with hope and joy and life.

[23 : 36] The first is in verse 20 where it says, our citizenship is in heaven. The resurrection of Jesus guarantees an eternal home. Life beyond this life. It's another way of saying that the person who trusts in Jesus, you have security forever.

nothing can take it away from you. I went to a funeral on Thursday for a young guy, 37, and there was a little video clip.

This was someone who trusted in Jesus. There's this little video clip where they just, he died from cancer, he could hardly speak and his last words on the screen were, don't fear for me, I am home and I am happy.

I am home and I am happy. You see, what Jesus promises is where he is there, you have the privilege to be as he is alive forever so you can have life forever.

Which leads to the second implication which says that very simply in Philippians 3.21 that Jesus will transform your body into be like his resurrected body.

[24 : 51] The Lord Jesus Christ who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. The resurrection of Jesus is the answer to our deepest longing in life and that is to live life well forever.

We want to be young and vibrant and healthy because those were the days before emotional pain, the burden of responsibility, the frailty of a life slowly epping away.

In fact, this is unique about the Christian faith. The Christian faith is the only philosophical system, it's the only religion in the world that actually promises renewed new and perfect minds, new and perfect hearts and bodies that are new and perfect forever.

It's the only religion and philosophical system that says that life beyond this world is as physical and real, more physical and real than this world. It's the only one.

It's not clouds and harps and that kind of stuff. The message of Easter is not that Jesus died so that we can float around in disembodied souls in some fluffy realm somewhere.

[26 : 25] the physical resurrection of Jesus guarantees a physical life. The resurrection changes everything in life.

This is hope. Hope for the wheelchair bound. Hope for the person with crippling emotional pain. Hope for every human being who is yet to face the thing that we fear the most, death.

the message of Easter is that the creator and ruler of the universe has died for us and that if we trust in him he'll one day bring us back to physical life.

Richer and fresher and more beautiful than anything that we've ever experienced before. if you can't imagine a life with everything evil with everything broken with everything frail with everything dark with everything horrible taking out of it and all that's left is just the sunshine and the beauty perfection if you can't imagine that neither can I our frail imaginations frankly cannot take it in because we've never experienced it but as you read several chapters earlier in 1 Corinthians it says what no eye has seen what no ear has heard what no human mind has conceived the things that God has prepared for those who love him the resurrection means the maker of all time and space has stepped into this world his world out of love for us it means that we are worthy of his death and he wants us in his life it means that we are more seen we are more known we are more loved than we could dare to hope it means the greatest offer ever the greatest offer that has ever been made is sitting on the table waiting to be taken up so friends

I'm not sure how you feel about Jesus today I get the mood of our culture that the Christian faith feels like old clothes you've long got sick of or clothes you would mean seen dead wearing at all or even clothes from a different culture not your own maybe you've been hurt by Christians or you've seen Christians hurt others and I'm sorry for that if that's your experience or it's quite possible that you've already rejected something that you don't even really understand you've never really thought about maybe you've tuned in today living the dream or maybe you've tuned in today trudging through a muddy field of hopelessness none of us and I mean none of us come to today none of us come to questions of faith without some experience or some feelings good or bad just or indifferent we're all in that boat if we dig deeper though and allow ourselves to pause long enough we all long for hope beyond the grave we all long for it some kind of happy ending in our lives that's why we love

[30 : 17] Hollywood and we hate movies that don't have a happy ending we love the happy ending for our lives and for our loved ones so whether you think that hope of everlasting life is pure naivety or wondering if there might just be a God who you can know I want to tell you Jesus is for you I want to encourage you don't bury your brains don't bury your brains I would ask you to ask the awkward questions to reckon with the hardest truth that shadow each one of our mortal lives take a fresh look at the resurrection claim and consider if it is just wishful thinking or whether it might be against all odds be all our wildest dreams come true

Jesus is all about life the how love God