

Experiencing Resurrection Awe

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. Great to be with you in church this morning. I was not originally scheduled to preach, but because of COVID, I've come off the bench for this morning. And as a senior pastor, I suppose that's okay. This morning, great. I just wish we could just continue to sing, actually. It was just so great to sing the great truths of the Christian faith. I read an article this morning in the Australian newspaper, as a crack of an article, really, which you don't expect. If you think that the resurrection is a miracle, getting an article like this published in an Australian newspaper is in itself a miracle. It says, Easter provides hope because it shows us that death does not have the final victory. But this works for a person. It helps them only if they understand something of the whole supernatural quality of human life. Modern Christians, and I would add modern people, make a tremendous mistake in underplaying the essential supernatural claims of Jesus and the

Christian tradition. It is understandable that modern Christians in sceptical Western societies, phobic about the transcendent, scared of death, and trained to mock belief at every turn, tend to emphasise Christianity's good things, good works, its hospitals, its schools, its shelters for the homeless. But in truth, Christianity, stripped of its supernatural claims, is not just an attractive ethical system or a picturesque and benign myth. It is literally nothing at all.

It's nothing at all. Without its supernatural claims, it is at best delusional. And really, it's a system of lies. As St. Paul says in Ephesians, if Christ is not risen, our preaching is useless and your faith is useless, we are to be, of all people, most to be pitied. The article says Christianity is a power for good because it is true. And if it's not true, if Jesus did not physically rise from the dead, then it's nothing. It's not a good idea. It's actually nothing. But the article says, happily, it's true. Now, that article, and many like it, raises two big questions about Christianity and the central event of Easter, because without the resurrection of Jesus, there is nothing. Christianity rises and falls on the resurrection of Jesus. If

Jesus did not physically rise from the dead, then we are much better off going to the beach today. And you may already be doing that anyway, but we're better off doing something else.

There's the truth question. There's the meaning question. That's what's connected here. Whenever you talk about the resurrection of Jesus, the truth question and the so what question, what does it mean? What's the relevance of a question are intertwined. They're connected. The truth question, did it really happen? The meaning question, who cares if it actually did? And people in our day and age reject the central claims of Easter and the Christian faith on those two questions. And it's important to address them together, which is what we're going to do this morning. So here's my three points, if you like. Is it true? Does it matter?

[3 : 5 7] And experiencing resurrection or on this day? So is it true? The great C.S. Lewis once wrote that in a world that was making such rapid advancement in scientific understanding, he says there's a great danger of chronological snobbery. That's his term. For instance, chronological snobbery might lead some to conclude in this day and age that people who were around when Jesus was around were just gullible peasants who were just really ignorant about life and science and the way the world works. And yet, as we read through John 20, that's not the picture that we're...

Thank you.

Am I on this one now? Okay, brilliant. So by that time, you've now been able to get to John chapter 20. And look at the first two verses of John 20 with me.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. And so she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, and notice what she says here, they have taken

the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they've put him.

Now, Jesus had mentioned several times that he would come back to life after he was executed, but that is not what Mary is expecting in this moment.

[5 : 56] When she went to the tomb, she wasn't expecting it to be empty. Her first assumption is that someone has taken the body, not the disciples, someone else has taken the body.

And it's the same in verse 13. She was working on the assumption, I think that the Jewish leaders or the Romans or somebody have taken this body and dumped it outside the city limit somewhere. Mary didn't just assume, ah, yeah, of course, it's a resurrection. That's not where her mind went immediately. Even Peter and John, two of Jesus' key followers, didn't automatically jump to the conclusion that Jesus had been resurrected.

Notice verse 8 and 9. Finally, the other disciple who had reached the tomb first. Now, let me just pause here. This is not in my notes. I just think it's amazing. I love John chapter 20. As someone who likes to run occasionally, I think John's never been my favourite disciple.

He's becoming my favourite disciple. This guy's obviously a runner. Three times in the first eight verses, he mentions that he beat Peter to the tomb. Of all things I'm going to write about, I want you to know throughout history, I was faster than Peter.

[7 : 08] That's what I want you to know. Anyway, let me get back to that. Finally, the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went inside. He saw and believed. Verse 9.

They did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had yet risen from the dead. What did he believe? He believed of what Mary just told him. Jesus' body's not there. That's what he believed. But he had not concluded that there was a resurrection.

That tells me that these early followers of Jesus were not gullible people. Jesus told them repeatedly that he would come back to life. But that's not what they were looking for in that moment, on that first Easter day.

And yet, what they were confronted with on that morning was a bodiless tomb. One of the great historical evidences of the resurrection is, in fact, that the tomb where Jesus was buried by two of his enemies, the Jewish leaders and the Romans, and his own disciples.

That tomb was empty on the third day. And no one could produce a body. Even the enemies of Jesus could not produce a body.

[8 : 30] And if they could have, they would have ended this whole Christianity movement, which is what they were attempting to do when they crucified Jesus to the cross. They want it done with.

They could have ended it just by bringing his body back from outside the city limits in a wheelbarrow and dumping it in the streets of Jerusalem. There's your Saviour. That's all they had to do.

So what are the possible other alternative explanations for an empty tomb? Some have suggested that, in fact, Jesus didn't really die.

He revived in the cool of the tomb, moved the stone away that took four soldiers to get him to close it off, slipped past the soldiers and disappeared.

That was one view. Obviously, that view doesn't come to grips with the horrible realities of crucifixion. The rigorous steps the Pilate and the leaders, the Jewish leaders, took to make sure that he was, in fact, dead.

[9 : 32] And the steps that were also taken to make sure that no one got in or out of the tomb. Some have suggested the disciples themselves stole the body.

And if they did, then they began to risk their lives and, in fact, even give their lives over to death for the sake of something which is nothing more than an April Fool's joke.

The fact is, they were utterly dejected. And they were terrified after the death of Jesus. They were so scared that they themselves would be treated in exactly the same way that Jesus had been treated.

They were hiding in a secluded room, hoping not to be found, with doors locked, unwilling to believe the first reports of Jesus' appearance three days after he was executed.

And yet, within a matter of weeks, these same men were overflowing with joy and courage to the point where they gave their lives for Jesus.

[10 : 41] And this little band of scared people, ordinary believers, ended up changing the course of human history.

They and those who came to believe through them loved and served their enemies across the Roman Empire in such a way that within three centuries, the world was radically changed. How? What happened? If you asked them, what would they say? The reason? Because of the resurrection. Because we saw Jesus alive.

Now, there is way more historical evidence, rational evidence, than just those things. But doubting the resurrection of Jesus is common, and it started on the day that he rose.

What I would encourage you to do is to investigate these Jesus a little bit deeper. Out there behind the wall out here, there's a bunch of resources on the Connect table.

[11 : 52] Take them. Feel free to go with them if you like. Please leave the hand gel there. That would be great. But any of the resources to do with Jesus stuff would be great. Just take it. Take it. Take it. Take it. And read it.

And investigate it. Even if it's for you who are struggling in your faith right now, or just, you know, not sure about the actual foundations of what it is that you believe.

Take it as well. If you're online and you can't get here to do that, then make connection with us, and we will send you resources. More than happy to do that. You see, the first people to doubt the resurrection were not people opposed to the faith.

Were not opposed to Jesus or to Christianity. And the first one, the major one, was in fact Jesus, one of his closest supporters, a man named Thomas.

Thomas is in fact the most famous doubters of the resurrection. In fact, we even have a saying in our culture for a skeptic.

[12 : 56] We call them a doubting Thomas. Thomas. So poor old Thomas has got a bad rap for the last 2,000 years as a doubting guy, and John's the fast guy. I mean. So for those who are struggling to understand or accept the resurrection, we must wonder if Thomas can help us.

Can Thomas help us here? We are told that Thomas wasn't there when Jesus first appeared to his disciples soon after he rose from the dead. Have a look at verse 24. So the other disciples told him, we have seen the Lord.

But he said to them, unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.

In other words, I will believe it if God shows himself to me. His response to this news is absolute. He makes his demands.

He's got his conditions. I will only believe unless I see and place my hands. I will not believe. That is, he demands at this moment exhaustive proof rather than sufficient evidence.

[14 : 15] Belief in the resurrection comes down ultimately to the battle of the will. Will I surrender my will? Thomas rejects the witness of 10 or more of his trusted friends who like him and with him had walked with Jesus.

He dictates absolute terms and conditions to God about what it will mean for him to believe. Now what we're not told here is specifically why Thomas was so sceptical.

So anything that I say at this point would be speculation. But I'm going to speculate anyway.

Because it might be helpful for us. We tend to think, we tend to think because if you're someone with a Western mindset, you assume that Thomas' doubts are the same as your doubts.

They're intellectual doubts. I don't think that's necessarily the case here for Thomas. Intellectual doubts like dead things don't come back alive again. That may be his case.

But scepticism is not simply just an intellectual issue. Imagine for instance that someone very close to you is dying.

[15 : 31] For some of us that might not be a hard imagination right now. You've finally accepted that all hope of recovery is lost and your loved one is going to die.

It's just a matter of time. And then suddenly someone comes along and says that there's a possibility for a cure in a clinic on the other side of the world.

You see, you had hope at one point of recovery. And then your hope is dashed as those alternatives didn't come to fruition that your loved one is going to die.

And then all of a sudden someone comes along and says there's another alternative. On the other side of the world, there's a possibility for a cure. Most people in that moment don't go, whoopee, great, fantastic, my hopes are now built.

Most don't do that in that moment. Most people in that moment cannot bear to get their hopes up again, only to have hopes dashed again.

[16 : 35] It's too painful to have your hopes dashed once again. And maybe this is what's happening with Thomas in this moment. There is no indication in the Bible at all that Thomas did not love Jesus like the other disciples loved Jesus.

No reason to believe that he was not as devastated as the others were in the execution of Jesus. I'm assuming that Thomas with the other disciples put his hope in Jesus that he is the Messiah. And all of a sudden their Messiah is dead. Three days later, as he's still mourning, his mates come in and say, hey, Jesus is alive. And I'm assuming in his mourning, Thomas just went, oh, don't you get my hopes up.

Don't you do that to me. I cannot bear it. Maybe he was in fact afraid to hope in this moment. Maybe that was his problem. He was afraid to hope that there was in fact an answer in his world of chaos and mourning. Maybe he's been hurt too many times and he's afraid to hope.

[17 : 54] It might be a narrow, secular, materialistic Western worldview that says things like this don't happen.

Resurrections don't happen. It might be a personality that says, I just need a little bit more evidence to be convinced. But it also might be a heart that's afraid.

A heart that's been hurt too many times. To be drawn into something only to be disappointed again. Maybe it's that.

And maybe that's you. In the end, the good news is that Thomas did believe with joy. Have a look at verse 26. A week later, his disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them.

Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, peace be with you.

Then he said to Thomas, put your finger here. See my hands.

[18 : 54] Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe. And then Thomas said to him, my Lord and my God.

What a remarkable statement. Now for us, we don't necessarily think that's a remarkable statement so much. But for a Jewish man, a Jewish man to call another human being, not just their Lord, but their God, was actually incomprehensible.

Incomprehensible. There is no higher confession of faith in Jesus Christ in the New Testament than Thomas's. The biggest doubter to the biggest confession of faith and joy.

Of course, that naturally leads me to the who cares question. And Thomas's declaration is broadly the meaning of the of the resurrection. My Lord and my God.

His first words were not about the facts of the resurrection. Notice here, really crucial. He just comes out with it. What the resurrection meant. My Lord and my God.

[20 : 11] That's what it means when he sees Jesus in front of him, alive from the dead. My Lord and my God. That's the meaning of it all. The whole issue for Thomas was, in fact, I want to see Jesus for myself.

I won't believe it unless I touch his wounds. Jesus turns up and we are told that Thomas doesn't even bother touching him. We're not even told he touched him.

You see, the wounds on Jesus was so much more than the evidence of the resurrection. They were evidence of something so much more powerful. What Thomas is, in fact, saying here is that everything that you said about yourself, Jesus, is absolutely true.

Absolutely true. You are God. You are the king of the universe. You are my Lord. You are my king. You are my boss. You are my ruler. You are my God.

Everything that you declared about the way the world works, every command from your lips is true and right. All of it. Resurrection means that what Jesus promised, he has delivered.

[21 : 24] And what he promised is still, he will deliver. You see, Jesus, sorry, not Jesus, Thomas has just joyfully discovered that the wounds of the cross on Jesus, the ones that he thought had ruined his life, had in fact saved his life.

That's the answer to the so what question. The resurrection means everything Jesus said about himself is right and true.

He is the way for humanity to be reunited with their saviour and their creator. The resurrection means human guilt, human shame has been dealt with.

And finally, fully, completely in Jesus, satisfying God's justice on the cross for us. It means that death has not only been confronted, but it's in fact been conquered.

Death is conquered. The great final enemy of every single human being has been conquered. It means that new life and true life can be experienced before death and eternally after death with

Jesus.

[22 : 40] It means that hope for better things has gone from the category of I wish, I hope, but will be to a definite certainty. It means that a new heaven and a new earth where those who trust in Christ will live forever like Jesus lives forever now is coming.

That's what Jesus offers everyone who trusts in him. Several chapters earlier in John's account of the good news of Jesus, we have Jesus himself declaring the life-changing news of Easter.

He says, I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

What that means is that Jesus isn't just one option amongst many other philosophical systems in our world. Something incredibly unique and life-changing and worldview-shaping has happened in the resurrection.

Of Jesus. Thomas' declaration, my Lord and my God, is the meaning of the resurrection. And I love what this article in The Australian said.

[24 : 03] Let me just quote a little bit of it to you. There is really no halfway house with Christianity. Either Jesus is God and we are immortal beings filled with eternal destiny, moral choice, divine status, irreducible human dignity, and irreducible moral responsibility, and loved as though an only child by God, or it's all lies, and I'd rather be at the races today.

There's no halfway house with Christianity. And there's no halfway house when it comes to his call to submit to him, the one who has conquered death.

And so how do we discover this resurrection all? Firstly, first thing is, it's really important to listen to the eyewitness accounts.

We are told that Thomas wasn't there when Jesus first appeared to his disciples. One week later, Jesus shows up again with Thomas present. And during the week in between, we are told in verse 25 that the other disciples kept telling Thomas over and over again that they had seen Jesus.

And that means that in that spot, that week, we're in the same position that Thomas is in, in that week that Thomas had.

[25 : 37] Like him, we have access to people who saw Jesus raised from the dead. In fact, they're the exact same people that Thomas had seen Jesus raised from the dead.

Their eyewitness accounts are written down for us in the New Testament. Now, several years ago, it was a common accusation that the gospel accounts of Jesus' life are fables that were written down long after the events.

And so therefore, they're not terribly trustworthy. The reality is that statement is a fable. The reality is there is an enormous amount of scholarship, an enormous amount of scholarship that argues that the gospels do not have any mark in them at all of fiction.

At all. They have all the marks of oral history and eyewitness testimony. When these events were written down, nearly all the eyewitnesses were still alive and could vouch for them.

If I stood up here right now and said to you, last week I was on leave and I ran a half marathon, right? So there you go, there's a John connection. If I said to you, I ran it in an hour, you'd go, whoo, until you check the marathon website and the results and you discover it took me nearly twice that time.

[27 : 07] See, it's not hard to find whether or not it's true or not. And they could do that in the first century. When these events were written down, nearly every one of the eyewitnesses still alive and could vouch for them.

John, who wrote this biography, was one of those eyewitnesses. And this is what he says about how we can come to see Jesus, the resurrected Jesus and believe.

Verse 30, Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

What he is saying is that what is written in this biography of Jesus' life, his ministry, his death, his resurrection by an eyewitness, is everything you need for resurrection all.

It's everything that you need to have certain hope. Now that makes pure sense. It's how we operate in life.

[28 : 17] It's how you operate in life. I operate in life every single day. What I mean is this. How many of the things that you believed actually happened in history did you actually see?

I believe World War I happened. I believe it happened. I wasn't there. In fact, I don't think any of us were there, I'm assuming. I believe eyewitness accounts.

We do that in life. We believe eyewitness testimony that has been written down by historically reliable authors. And so why do we not do that with Jesus?

We don't need to know anything more than what is written just even in John's Gospel or the other biographies of Jesus to see and believe and experience resurrection all.

The Christian faith is no mere philosophy, even though it has philosophically viable worldview.

[29 : 29] It is a philosophical viable worldview. It is not merely subjective, even though there are emotionally satisfying experiences for those who follow Jesus.

And the Christian faith is not merely sentimentally uplifting, like a drug or a piece of art or something. Christian faith is nothing.

It is nothing if Jesus did not actually rise bodily, factually from the dead. The truth of this resurrection is not based on experiential methods of natural science, verifiable by test tubes and empirical data, nor is it based on the arguments of logic.

It is based on history, on eyewitness accounts. And so I'd encourage you to read one of those accounts this Easter.

Your life depends on it. Your life depends on it. Get one of these copies yourself, immerse yourself in it, and as you do so, do something supernatural.

[30 : 47] Just say to God, if you are true and Jesus is risen, I want to see him. I want to see him.

The second thing you need to do to move from doubt to receiving resurrection or in a certain hope for this life, is to drop your conditions.

Every one of us moves towards Jesus with a set of conditions. No one ever goes to him purely on the sake that he is resurrected and is great.

No one ever just does that. That is, we don't just move to him for his sake. We move to him for our sake. We always move to move towards him because we want something.

And that means that we have conditions. I've known people who have absolutely refused to become Christians because it would mean that they need to go and repair a relationship.

It would mean that they would need to change a habit. I knew someone many, many years ago who said, there's no way I would ever give up, you know, weekends with family for Jesus.

[31 : 54] I would never do that. There's the condition. It's like eternal life. Sounds brilliant.

Relationship with the created God, the one who gives me life, sounds brilliant. But I don't want him to disrupt my family or to hurt my career or interrupt my weekends.

We need to drop our conditions because they say, I love you, God, if, if.

One of the great things about the Christian faith and what we celebrate Easter time is Jesus did not treat us like that at all. He loves us unconditionally. No conditions.

He didn't say to us, hey, hey, pull your socks up, sort your life out, then I'll interject. Death of Jesus was no accident of history.

He died, he rose to redeem us and reclaim us to God. It was a plan that is historically reliable and experientially satisfying as we navigate life. And so I just want to just say one final thing.

[32 : 58] God has brought you here in this moment. He's the sovereign God, as we've just seen this morning in the kids song. He's the sovereign God. He's brought you here this Easter for this message, for this part of the Bible, for this story of the resurrection of Jesus, for this eyewitness account, so that you might believe.

That's why you're here this morning, so that you might believe in Jesus and in believing in him, have a certain hope of immortality.

Life forever with joy as Jesus himself is alive right now and forever reigning over all things.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.