

Easter Reality

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 00] It's great to be here this morning. On Easter Sundays, we celebrate life and new life. And that's the segue into announcing that Sam and Sal are expecting a second child.

So, what a great day. But wait, there's more. Adam and Brenda are expecting their first child.

Fantastic you guys. Good morning. My name is Steve Jeffrey.

I'm one of the ministry team here. I grew up one of three boys. My cousins, all the ones we had anything to do with, were all boys.

I grew up on a farm, motorbike riding, shooting guns, explosives licensed by the age of 18. So, my life was surrounded like that, flanny shirts, boots.

[1 : 00] And I'm the dad of three girls. And so, I've been introduced to a world that I've never had any interest in or was unaware of, a Barbie world.

And so, 7,000 kilometres in a car last August and September with Barbie playing in the TV screen behind my headrest causes one to be familiar with Barbie world.

What I discovered with all the Barbie movies was that there was a good versus evil plot. And there's always a tense moment in the middle of the movie with a protagonist who looks like Barbie, but is more evil than Barbie.

And it appears in that tense moment that evil will win the day. But with a quick change of clothes and a reapplication of make-up and a little dose of self-confidence, Barbie's character always comes through at the end to win the day.

What I find interesting, though, is in that moment, the concern which is expressed on the face of my daughter is that evil will triumph.

[2 : 15] The youngest, or the middle one, would say, Turn it off, Izzy! Turn it off! Yell in the back seat. And she could not cope with the fact that evil was going to win the day.

Oh, there was an attempt to fast-forward that bit of the movie. What is surprising to me is that they've seen it a dozen times. They know how it's going to end up.

And they've seen a dozen of these movies and they always know that Barbie will win in the end. It's a world of pink and purple and good always triumphs with flowers and colour and delightful stuff.

And it surprises me because a number of times I would say, But you know how it's going to end.

And yet it's something delightful as well.

The storyline has not lost its thrill. Although I must say, several months down the track, it has lost its thrill. I don't hear the crying out, Turn it off, Izzy!

[3 : 19] Turn it off! Which, of course, is my concern with Easter. It was bad news for Jesus on Good Friday, but we all know how it works out.

You know the end of the story. So in preparing for today, it makes me feel like I'm talking about something, talking about a book, and you've all read the end of the book.

And so where's the surprise in it? Where's the thrill in it? Of course, the temptation is to have a mere historical or academic engagement with Easter and to miss its impact for us today.

And so I'd like us to recapture some of the awe. I'd like to see that for myself, to marvel at the resurrection, even though we know how it works out. To walk out of here with hearts filled with joy and hope and purpose and expectation and love.

Let's be astonished at the resurrection. And to do that, you must begin with understanding. You need to know the story and how it ends. If you make less of the truth and the facts and the reality, then your wonder of it all will just be shallow.

[4 : 38] Take, for instance, the article that was printed at the Sydney Morning Herald on Good Friday in 2005. It was written by Hugh Mackay, social commentator, and he made this comment about Easter and the resurrection of Jesus.

He says, Christians celebrate new life at Easter, but in a religious sense. The focus of their festival is the belief that tragedy and grief, symbolised by the crucifixion, can give way to new life, symbolised by the resurrection, and that pain and loss are essential steps on the journey towards enlightenment.

And so he says that Easter is a festival of hope, a celebration of faith in the future, and a reminder that despite our failures and frailties and flaws, personal resurrection is always a possibility for us. It's positive. And yet, Mackay's point is that the resurrection is symbolic. Whether it happened or not is not the issue for him.

He suggests that what it's all about is symbolism, and that symbolism is positive and powerful in your life. It's an example and a metaphor for our life.

[5 : 58] New life and growth through suffering. To grow, we're going to need to suffer a little, just like pruning a rose. That's the point of the resurrection.

And I think Mackay's representation of Easter is probably the view of a number of people when it comes to the resurrection. And while many would see his view as intelligent and conciliatory and positive and rational, it fails to grasp is that the resurrection is not merely symbolic.

It is not a myth that is okay to believe if it works for you. And so as I look at the Bible, as we're going to do that together in Philippians 2 and 3, and so grab your Bibles in preparation for that and turn to Philippians 2 and 3, the passage we just read out for us.

As I look at the Bible, as we do this together and speak about the resurrection of Jesus, I'm not merely putting another alternative in front of you this morning. The resurrection of Jesus is not a satisfying myth that helps some people, us in this room maybe, to interpret life so that it becomes livable and even possibly more enjoyable for us.

Easter is about real persons and historical events and divine intentions that really happened. The resurrection is more real and more exciting and more terrifying and more life-changing than any myth or any other truth claim.

[7 : 43] Now friends, this is Easter. It is the celebration of the historical resurrection of Jesus from the dead. He is alive.

He is not mere memory, a mere historical figure like a Julius Caesar or a Shakespeare or an Abraham Lincoln. He is back from the dead with a new glorious body.

He is alive. He is reigning as the king of the universe as Philippians 2 says and he is making this offer of real life and hope to us today.

Now I know that I'm taking a lot for granted when I say that. So let me put it into some sort of context. We Christians believe that what the 27 books of the New Testament record about Jesus are true.

These books uniformly teach or assume that Jesus lived in history, that he died as a substitute for sinners and he rose on the third day and that he ascended to heaven and rules the world as the God of all the universe.

[8 : 47] These 27 books are riddled with references to the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead as we declared together a little bit earlier in our service reading out from 1 Corinthians 15.

These accounts of what happened in the life of Jesus are totally different than myth like Greek or Roman mythology which is shrouded in a distant past that does not connect with real history.

The New Testament books are talking about real history. Pilate, Roman governor, Herod, the king from Galilee, Caiaphas, the high priest.

They are not mythical figures. These people are known from history outside of the New Testament. The accounts of the New Testament were all written while eyewitnesses were still alive.

We said that a little bit early in our service. Paul's letters were written 15 to 30 years after the death of Jesus. As we just read, he mentions the fact that 500 people had seen the risen Jesus at one time and that most of them were still alive as he pens the history.

[10 : 05] Most of the books, maybe all of them were written before 70 AD, 40 years after the death of Jesus. This is not mythology. This is history.

It is remembered history. It is eyewitness history. And add to this that the enemies of Christianity would have loved nothing better than to wheel a dead body in a wheelbarrow into Jerusalem to prove that it was all a hoax.

And they couldn't. The Romans themselves stationed their own soldiers at the entrance of the tomb and it was empty. There was no dead body.

And the thought that the scared disciples who abandoned Jesus at his crucifixion for fear of their lives, that they would suddenly come together and agree amongst themselves to create a hoax, that they would steal the body and then that they would die for that hoax is ludicrous.

These disciples of Jesus were not wacko. They were witnesses. And what we have in the New Testament is not mythology. But Jesus as eyewitnesses remembered him.

[11:22] And the point of all this is simply to say that when we Christians say Jesus is risen from the dead, we're not speaking mythically.

We're not speaking blindly. We're not speaking symbolically. We're not speaking spiritually or just emotionally. We're speaking historically.

Now, of course, the aim of all this history is that we might be astounded at the majesty of Jesus Christ this Easter.

The point is that we might marvel and stand in awe and be amazed and get the impact of Easter Sunday in 2013.

Some of this majesty and impact was there for us in Philippians 3 verses 20 to 21. So if you want to go there, Philippians 3, Adam read out to us.

[12:21] Have you got a page there on your Bible, Adam? Sorry? 1140. Page 1140 in the pew Bibles if it's there in front of you.

Philippians 3 verses 20 to 21. 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.

What an astounding couple of verses. Now something is assumed there in verse 20 and 21. What is assumed is that Jesus was raised from the dead and that he is now alive and is now very powerful to put it mildly.

The reason Paul assumes it here in chapter 3 is because it's what he said in chapter 2. It's what was read out to us as well. And so let me go back to chapter 2 and make it explicit and clear for us. And let me say by way of introduction you will never read anything anywhere in any literature more sweeping and important and true than these verses in chapter 2 of Philippians.

[13:33] Let's start at verse 6 referring to Jesus 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 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 day 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.

There is Easter impact. Christ was and is equal with God he is God he became human being he obediently suffered and died and that means that it was a planned death it was not an accident of history it was a planned death and the point of the plan was that the Lord Jesus Christ be a substitute for all sinners who would trust in him that was God's loving plan for the salvation of sinners like us and then it says therefore God exalted him to the highest place in other words because of his obedient and successful life and death God raised him from the dead and gave him great glory as the Lord of the universe that is the astounding assumption behind Philippians 3 20 to 21 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 when you put Philippians 2 and Philippians 3 together we see that because of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus he has astonishing power to subject all things to himself this is resurrection impact that is relevant for us right now that is he rose victorious from the grave never to die again and he rules over all time and space you see it there again in verse 21 by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control in one sense Jesus has the right to rule the universe because he is God not just because he died and rose again he did not have to die and rise in order to be who he is and what he is from all eternity is God and this gives him the right to exercise authority over all things but in another sense God decreed that the one who would rule in power would be a saviour who suffered with us and for us in this world the Lord and judge and saviour over all the universe was tested and found perfect through human suffering and now he is doubly suited for his role as

Lord of the universe he is God by God with all the natural rights to go with that and he is saviour with purchased rights and so he can put his foot on Satan's neck and not just because of the raw

divine power he has but also because he exposed himself to Satan's temptations and to Satan's biggest weapon death and he broke it on Easter Sunday he is doubly suited to rule the universe he has creator rights and saviour rights and the impact of Easter Sunday morning is that there is no higher authority there is no place or sphere or realm or dimension of existence anywhere in the universe that is not under the absolute authority of Jesus Christ and when the world in which we live doesn't look like it's under the authority of Jesus it would be wiser for us to marvel at the mystery of his ways than to question the scope of his power

[18:05] Christ's power pervades the universe from the largest to the smallest elements of reality no galaxy no atom no demon would stay in being without the authority of the Lord Jesus so be astonished at his power to subject all things to himself Easter Sunday is no mere symbolism of how to endure hard things in life it means that Jesus rules the universe as the name that is above every name and he does it out of love for us notice that there are two astounding implications for us in this power of the resurrected Lord Jesus they are staggering and they are filled with hope and joy and life for us verse 20 our citizenship is in heaven citizenship means you belong citizenship means you are protected we take it for granted but become a refugee and be a person of no fixed abode with no one in the United

Nations speak it on your behalf and see how secure you feel and our citizenship is in heaven the power of the Lord Jesus guarantees our citizenship of heaven and if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus you don't have to wait for the second coming of the Lord Jesus to know where your home is when you trust in Christ your name is sealed on the citizen roles of heaven because your king is there where he is there you have the privilege to be and so you will be with him forever and your amazement and your wonder and your awe will never cease it will only increase with him forever and ever which leads to the second implication Jesus will use his power to transform your body into a resurrected body like his Philippians 3:21 the Lord Jesus Christ who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control will transform your lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body all that power that

Jesus has will be used to take our dead bodies and raise them from the dead no longer to be sick and disabled or frail or mentally ill or addicted or weary or tempting or tempted but rather it will be like his glorious body this is not a mere symbolic hope if you belong to Jesus Christ by trusting in him he will give you a new body fit for eternal life with him not a ghost not a spirit you'll be recognized by your mates and you will eat and drink with Jesus in the kingdom of God just like he did with his mates when he was here after he rose be astounded therefore that Jesus will use his infinite authority and power to raise you from the dead to give you a body like his that will never wear out and to live forever the aim of all this is that we might be astounded at the majesty of Jesus Christ this Easter rather than a mere intellectual awareness of history I want us to marvel at the truth and the hope and the joy of Easter I don't want it to be a mere take it or leave it symbolism where you respond after this service thanks for a stimulating service now off to the Easter egg hunt this is life transforming this is not just a mere gathering of historical facts this is a marvelling at those facts and the difference is this suppose you hear that last year in Chatswood 10 children were hit by cars while playing it's there on the news you read in the paper and you wince and you think what a tragedy that must have been really hard for those parents and then you read the next article you look at the next bit of news and then suddenly the front door bursts open and your 10 year old daughter comes screaming into the house with the news that it was your 9 year old son has just been hit by a car playing in the front yard and now the news is different news the first piece of news was true you didn't doubt it good evidence for it but now there was a piece of news that goes to the core of your being it shakes you everything in you comes alive to this reality that it's your son it touches your existence it will change everything in your life it will break your heart it will shatter things in you more deeply than you have ever touched before and so here again the news of Easter Jesus died in your place for your sin against God Jesus is risen from the dead Jesus will never die again Jesus has been appointed as ruler of the universe and all who trust in him will be raised like him and live forever with him my friends I long for you here today not just to hear that truth as merely provable reports of some religious claim but as the cry of your child bursting through the door it has to do with you this is your death and your life and your hope the resurrection changes everything it did for the bigoted hate filled proud Paul who approved of the murder and the imprisonment of Christians and then he met the all powerful risen Jesus and everything changed for him this is how he puts it in Philippians 3 from verse 10 but for whatever was to my profit

[24 : 18] I now consider loss for the sake of Christ what is more I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord for whose sake I have lost all things I consider them rubbish that I might gain Christ and be found in him that is through faith in Christ the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith this is how he sums up his life I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings becoming like him in his death and so somehow to attain to the resurrection of the dead everything changes because of the resurrection it is the core of his being in which he views his life what about you is your citizenship in heaven have you laid down the arms of unbelief and rebellion against

Christ have you received the blood bought amnesty that we celebrate at Easter have you bowed the knee of submission and loyalty to the king of the universe my friends do it today let your response be a life of faith and love and joy and worship and join today the citizens of heaven who 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 we'll be like his glorious body Amen