

Easter Sunday See the Lord

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. If you were here on Friday, I encouraged you to look to Jesus on the cross and believe for forgiveness, for reconciliation with God.
- This morning, I invite you to not just look, but to see the Lord for eternal life, for meaning, for life, for hope.
- So for that to happen, we need to pray that God would help us to see what we cannot see with our own eyes, that he might give us eyes so that we might see the glory of the risen Lord.
- Let's pray. Father, I pray that as we come to your word this morning, we pray that it would come alive, just as alive as Jesus is now and reigning.
- So we need your spirit to come to help us to see what we cannot see with human eyes, lest we walk out of here like Thomas, doubting, questioning, refusing to believe.
- [1 : 0 3] So help us in our unbelief so that we might see the risen Lord, we pray, for your glory. Amen. There are two questions for us here on Easter Sunday, the truth question and the meaning question.
- Whenever you talk about the resurrection of Jesus, the truth question and the meaning question are intertwined. The truth question is, did it really happen? The meaning question is, who cares?
- What's the point? There are people who reject Christianity because they don't think it's true. Jesus didn't die because dead people don't die and that's that.
- That's the truth question. But there are other people who reject Christianity, not because they are convinced it's not true, but because they can't see why it would make any difference in their life if it were true.
- In other words, the meaning of it is insignificant or irrelevant for what really concerns them in life. And to answer a little bit of that, I have written a blurb on the front of your bulletin.
- [2 : 1 7] I encourage you to read it at some point about just very briefly five things that the resurrection does for us. Forty years ago, there was an assumption that there are fixed laws that make the world understandable and scientifically manageable.
- These laws, however, did not allow for the truth of the claim that someone could rise from the dead and live forever. The world at that time, with its scientific understanding of natural laws, did not allow for resurrections, so unbelief was often connected to that kind of assumption, to scientific facts.
- Today, there's a different assumption behind unbelief. Today, the assumption is that there is a personal law inside of me, not natural fixed laws, but personal laws inside of me.
- It's a law that says, I don't have to adapt my life to anything that I don't find helpful to be. That is, truth for me is what I find acceptable and what I find helpful for my life.
- So in the end, it doesn't matter whether Jesus rose from the dead because whether he did or whether he didn't, my issue is, I don't care. And if I don't care, then I will just view the resurrection of Jesus in the same way that I would view UFOs.

[3 : 41] It may, may not exist. Don't care. It doesn't bother me unless it's Independence Day and one is right on top of me. Some of us think that way without even knowing that's the way we think.

We have just simply absorbed the culture in which we live. I think both questions are important to address at the same time. As the world has made rapid advancement in scientific understanding, there has been a chronological snobbery that assumes any conclusions made in previous centuries were just based on ignorance.

That truth is in my century or in my era, in my time and those other people were just ignorant, gullible, foolish people. So the people around when Jesus rose from the dead were just that.

They were gullible and ignorant and foolish. It's a bit odd because when you look at the first response to the empty tomb, we don't find gullibility.

Have a look at it there. John chapter 20. It was just read out to us. If you haven't got your Bibles open, please open them. I want you to see these words. John 20 verse 1. 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.

[5 : 12] So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciples, the one Jesus loved, and said, they have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have put him.

The very first response to the resurrection of Jesus is there must be another explanation. Mary, one of the disciples of Jesus, did not believe in the resurrection.

Her first assumption was that the body had been moved. We also see in verse 13, she was working on the assumption that the Jewish leaders had come and taken the body of Jesus and disposed of it outside of the holy city, gotten rid of it somewhere.

Mary is slow to believe Jesus had been risen, but she's not the only one. Even Peter and John, though somewhat puzzled at the disturbed grave clothes in the empty tomb, didn't automatically jump to the conclusion that Jesus had been resurrected.

Verse 8, finally, the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in. He saw and believed. Now, you think, he believes in the resurrection, but no, verse 9, they still did not understand from scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

[6 : 35] I think John's first assumption is that Jesus has gone from the tomb straight to heaven. That tells me that these disciples were not easily excitable or gullible people.

They weren't actually looking for a resurrection. But what they were confronted with on that morning was a bodiless tomb.

That's what they were confronted with. There was no body in the tomb. You cannot play around with the resurrection of Jesus and can see that maybe it was just some sort of spiritual resurrection. The body wasn't there.

And one of the great historical evidences of the resurrection is that the tomb where he was buried was emptied on the third day and the enemies of Jesus could not produce a body.

The assumption of Mary that the Jewish leaders had taken the body of Jesus away was her first assumption. And all the Jewish leaders needed to do was to kill off Christianity was to go boom there's your dead Lord.

[7 : 48] In fact it's one of the striking things about the resurrection of Jesus is that in the days and the weeks and the months that passed nobody was able to be reduced in order to kill off the things that both the Jewish and the Roman rulers hated so much.

the advancement of this cult called Christianity. Some have tried to say well he didn't really die he was revived in the cool of the tomb and moved the stone away on his own.

This goes against the horrible realities of crucifixion and against the rigorous steps that Pilate and the leaders demanded to make sure that he was in fact dead.

John chapter 19 you can read that. Others have tried to say that the disciples stole the body. A couple of things about that one.

It would seem a bit odd that if they stole the body that they would actually unwrap the grave clothes first and leave. I mean who wants to do that? Who wants to unwrap the grave clothes and cut away a bloody beaten naked body?

[9 : 04] No one would do that. But more significantly if they took the body it would mean that the disciples began to risk their lives and in fact give themselves up to martyrdom for the sake of a hoax that they knew was false and was worthless.

Who dies for a lie? So how else do you account for the dramatic change in the disciples as well? After Good Friday if it wasn't for the resurrection the fact is that they were utterly dejected, they were terrified after the death of Jesus that they too would die.

The people who had killed their boss, their leader were potentially going to kill them too. They did not have a hope for resurrection, they were ready to go back fishing but were scared of the authorities that put their teeth to the death and so they hid themselves in a room, a bunch of cowards, hoping not to be found, hoping not to be put to death.

And then Jesus appears to them. And in the next coming weeks these men went from cowards to courageous, bold men willing to die.

what had happened to them. Their own account was they had seen the Lord alive.

[10 : 42] The evidence is there for sure. But doubting the resurrection of Jesus is common. Strangely enough though, it's the first person to doubt the resurrection, the first person who was to actually specifically doubt the resurrection, not just question whether it happened or not have a confused assumption about it, but to say I will not believe it, was in fact not an opposer of Jesus but one of his closest supporters, Thomas.

Thomas wasn't there when Jesus first appeared to the disciples. Have a look at it there in verse 24. Now Thomas called Didymus, one of the twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 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 in his side, I will not believe. Unless I see it for myself, I will not believe it.

I will believe if Jesus comes and shows himself to me. The odd thing is that for Thomas, like the other disciples, the resurrection was not a new idea.

As an Orthodox Jew, he would have believed in everyone being resurrected to face judgment when God calls the end of the world to be. But he doubts the resurrection of Jesus here.

[12 : 13] His response to the news is absolute. He makes his demands in absolute terms. Unless I see and place my hands, I will not believe.

He demands tangible proof. He rejects the witness of ten or more of his closest mates. He dictates absolute terms to God about believing, which reveal a lack of wisdom and humility.

What he has not yet grappled with is that seeing does not equal believing. You see, many people saw the miracles of Jesus and yet they didn't believe.

They in fact plotted to kill him when they saw Jesus command Lazarus to walk out of the tomb. Dead man walking. They saw it happen and instead of going, my goodness, who is this man?

They went, right, it's time to kill this guy. Seeing doesn't equal belief. And it's a mistake that's so easy to make. The assumption that if God would appear to me or directly intervene in certain aspects of my life for my good as I determine it, then I would believe.

[13 : 28] In other words, if God would appear to me on my terms, then I would believe he is God. Of course, the irony of that is that a God who submits to my terms isn't so much of a fancy God after all.

I remember going through US customs. Here's another one of those US customs stories. Going from Canada into the US, walking up to the counter, handing over my passport, and the custom guy takes a look at it, big long pause, and he says here, you're a clergyman.

Yes, yes I am. Right, I've got a question for you, and it was like, is this like one of those test things? You know, I'm saying I'm here on business, I've got something to declare, is he trying to check me out, what's the deal here?

And he said, what would you say to a person who says to you, show me God and I'll believe in him? And so I'm thinking, oh, in that moment God help me, you know, I might be stuck in Canada, I mean, please help me in this moment.

And I said to him, Jesus said, you see me and you see the Father. So God actually has revealed himself, he has come into this world and revealed himself.

[14 : 58] And he's done sort of things, not just makes claims that he's God, but he did things to prove he was God, he raised people from the dead, he healed the sick, he calmed the waters, and I said historical facts that prove that he was who he said he was.

But let me say that plenty of people saw Jesus and they saw the miracles he did and yet they still plotted to kill him. I said, I would say to that person, don't make this mistake of thinking that seeing equals believing.

And I said, the reality is I could be God right here, right in front of you now and prove it to you, but if your heart is one where you were determined to will to not to believe, you won't.

I said, that's basically what I would say to that person. I said, there is plenty of evidence. I said, I would encourage that person to go and read the evidence in the Gospels and ask for eyes to see.

He gave me my passport and he slid it across and said, okay, you pass. So what happens with Thomas?

[16 : 05] Reading on in verse 26. A week later, his disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, peace be with you.

And he said to Thomas, over here, put your hand, put your finger here and see my hands and reach out your hand and put it into my side.

Stop doubting and believe. When Jesus did finally appear to Thomas, he says, just stop doubting and believe. So the call from Jesus to Thomas was to stop his disbelief.

And Jesus in that moment was incredibly merciful to him and came to him in demonstration of his resurrection and Thomas believed. The interesting thing is though, that when you go through the gospels, the latter part of the gospels, and you move even into the early parts of Acts, Jesus' intention was not for everyone to see in the same way.

In fact, Jesus did not appear to everyone after his resurrection. He could have just wandered up to Pilate one day and said, wrong. But his intention was not to reveal himself to everyone.

[17 : 26] Yes, he did appear to well over 500 people at different times. Enough saw him alive. But his intention was not for everyone to believe him in that way.

John, who wrote this biography, was one of the eyewitnesses. And this is what he says about how we come to see 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, is everything that you need to believe.

In fact, he says, Jesus did plenty of other stuff, but I haven't written them down because you don't need to know about it. We have everything that we need to believe right in front of us.

So can I encourage you this Easter to read one of the biographies of Jesus, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. Just read one of those biographies and ask for eyes to see the risen Lord.

[18 : 50] Of course, there are also those who refuse to accept the evidence of Jesus' resurrection or even look into it because it's not a matter of historical facts. It's not a matter of historical evidence.

It's a matter of the claims that Jesus made. And this is the unbelief of the will. That is, if Jesus rose from the dead, then he is who he says he is and he is king and he is Lord.

He is God and he commands our allegiance. And so the rejection of the resurrection then is a rejection of the will. It's not about the intellect. It's about the heart.

It's about the will. Look at what Thomas says when he realized that Jesus had come back to life. Verse 28 reveals the consequences of the resurrection of Jesus.

The meaning of it. Thomas said to him, my Lord and my God. His first questions were not, how are you walking around with a hole in your side?

[19 : 53] The first thing that impacted him was the meaning of the resurrection. My Lord and my God, it's true. Everything you said about yourself is true. He is God.

He is the king of the universe. He is my Lord. He is my king. He is my boss. He is my ruler. He is my God. Belief in the resurrection of Jesus for Thomas and for many of us may just simply be in the end of the matter, a matter of the will.

It is about who's in charge of my life. It's about who's in charge of my world. God. And we don't have Thomas' direct evidence. We are more like Peter and John in the tomb.

There is evidence and either we see through it or we don't. And the issue for us here this morning is do you see?

This is what I mean. Your doorbell rings this afternoon and one of your friends asked to come in and have a chat with you. He comes and says, I have some really bad news.

[21 : 05] Your brother has just died. And you say, shaking your head, no, I don't believe it. I saw him this morning and he was fine. I don't believe it. It can't be true.

And your friend says, well, we went off to the Easter show together and as we were leaving, this car went out of control, jumped the curve and hit him.

And I knelt over him and I waited for the ambulance and I saw it and he died in my arms and he is gone. And you say, oh, I see.

What do you mean? Oh, I see. What you mean in that moment is the witness of your friend has become a window and the reality of the window has become plain.

You were not there. You did not see the accident. But still you say, and it is right to say with all your heart, I see. I now understand.

[22 : 20] And God has brought you here this morning, my friends, for this message and for this Bible passage and for this story of the resurrection of Jesus so that you might go, oh, I see.

Through the witness of John, John says, I see. I understand. I see. I understand. And that in seeing you might believe in Jesus and have life in his name.

John says, but these things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

And so my prayer for you this morning is that you will now, before this service is over, or very soon, by God's grace, say, oh, I see.

And in seeing the resurrected Jesus, we'll live like he lives forever. Amen.