

Easter Messages

Matt 28:1-8;

What If There Were No Resurrection

I think it was last year that an archaeologist declared he had found the body of Jesus

Of course he was wrong – actually he was lying

But let me start this message with a question

What if a credible archaeological team declared to the world

That they had discovered the body of Jesus of Nazareth

And then by scientific means they proved it was His body

What would that do to your faith

Jesus was a great teacher

He said some wonderful things about salvation and charity

About love and purpose

But if Jesus Christ has not risen from the dead – can you hold onto your faith

Paul writing to the Corinthians addressed that question

1Cor 15 – If Christ is not raised from the dead, you faith is - worthless;

It gets worse

If Christ is not risen from the dead your faith is worthless; we are of all men, most to be - pitied

In common language Paul has said

If Christ was just a man who died on the cross and we are worshipping Him

We are fools

Why would Paul write that

Isn't just having faith good

Why is the fact of the resurrection of Christ so important to Christianity

Let me put it this way

If Christ is not raised from the dead – throw away your Bible

It is not only not true

It is from front to back a deceiving lie told by vicious men

Intentionally written with the sole purpose of misleading you
You see the whole of the New Testament is written based upon one premise
Jesus Christ is alive
And if He isn't alive being a Christian might make you a nicer person
But in the end it is just another religion
Jesus death had no redemptive value and Christianity has no power

The apostle Paul set for himself some lofty goals

Phil 3:8-11

I want to know Christ - I want to know the power of His resurrection
Paul's great desire – his primary goal
Is to know the living – the resurrected Christ
And to experience the power associated with that resurrection
This is what Paul wants more than anything else in his life
This is what he lives for – this is what he strives for
If Christ is not raised from the dead
If His bones are buried somewhere in Israel – then we cannot know Him
If He is dead then we might read about Him – we might admire Him
But we cannot now nor will we ever know Him
Furthermore if Christ is not raised from the dead
There is no resurrection power – there never was
And if He is not raised from the dead then He has no power
He is dead – His words might influence us cause us to behave in a certain way
But He has no power
And most importantly –
If Christ has not risen from the dead He was just another innocent man
Who got mistreated by the justice system
Was crucified some 2000 years ago and His death has no benefit for us
In other words – if Christ is not raised from the dead
We are still dead in our sins – separated from God – bound for hell
This is why the resurrection is so central to Christian belief

But He has risen just as He said

You see Paul didn't want to know Christ to prove Jesus was alive

He wanted to know Christ because he knew Jesus was alive

Today I want us to consider Paul's two great desires

Knowing Christ and experiencing the power of His resurrection

First what does knowing Christ mean

It is important to note the Bible repeatedly portrays

The right relationship between man and God as personal

Abraham is described as a friend of God

God spoke to Moses as a man speaks to his friend

David is described as a man after God's own heart

Jer 9 – Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, or the strong man boast of his strength, or the rich man boast of his riches. But let him who boasts, boast about this: that he understands and knows Me

What does the world admire – looks power talent money wisdom strength

The Lord through Jeremiah tells us that none of these

None of these are as important as knowing Him

Knowing God is more important than riches or power or wisdom or looks

Knowing God is central to salvation

On His last night Jesus prayed for His disciples

Now this is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent

Jesus defines eternal life as knowing the Father and the Son

In his second letter Peter wrote

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness How did we get this power - **through our knowledge of Him who called us**

Your knowledge of Jesus Christ

Leads to His empowering you with everything you need for life

Wisdom power and peace and joy

And it leads to godliness – the ability to live a life pleasing to the Father

The apostle John makes a similar point

We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, so that we might know Him who is true

The purpose of Christ's incarnation was that we might know Him

Knowing Jesus Christ is central to the Good News of His coming

There is a vast difference between knowing someone and knowing about someone

I know a lot about George Washington – Abraham Lincoln – Julius Caesar

But I don't know any of them – now listen – and I never will

To know someone you must have a relationship with them

Now most of you have never met my sister Sue

I could describe her for you - looks height close on the weight hair eyes

I could tell you a hundred stories that describe her life

She could stand up here with me and you would have a visual picture

But you still wouldn't know her

Certainly I know a lot of facts about her but I also have a relationship

And knowing her is much different than knowing facts about her

In the same way knowing God is much more than knowing facts about God

Knowing God only comes through relationship with God

How do we acquire this relationship

How do we know God

First we must know about Him

While knowing Suzy implies more than knowing facts

I can hardly say that I know her if I know absolutely nothing about her

So we need to learn about God as well as experience God

How do we go about this

First – God has given us a lot of information about Himself in the Bible

And He has promised that as we read His Word

He will reveal Himself to us through it

So read the Bible – get into Bible studies with others

As you learn about God you will begin to experience Him at the same time

But you must go beyond the facts

My relationship with my sister involved about 20 years of living with her

There was time spent together and mutual events we experienced
To know God you must cultivate a relationship with Him
Experience life together

Let me suggest four steps to help you know God

First – and I mean first - Put your faith in Him

Receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior

Believe in Him – believe in the resurrection

Believe that though He was killed – He still lives

Let Him make you into a new creation

A second step then is to spend time with Him - in prayer

Pray alone and pray with others

In prayer you share your joys frustrations sorrows and your needs

With the God of the universe

And He enjoys hearing from you - He cares for you

He wants you to talk to Him – He wants to talk to you

Then get into His Word

Start off every day reading His Word and He will speak to you through it

His Word has a purpose and its purpose is always fulfilled

The fourth step is following

Listen as you pray and read the Bible

Be willing to do what He asks even when you don't understand it

Depend on God when His commands seem unreasonable

When you do this – when you step out in faith

He will be your support and you will experience Jesus in a new living way

Faith prayer reading His Word and obedience

That is how you get to know God

The foundation is a relationship based upon faith in Jesus Christ

It builds through His Word through prayer and obedience

Paul's great desire is to know Jesus

And Jesus wants to be known by you

The second part of Paul's great desire is to know the power of His resurrection

Note that Paul does not ask God for more power

He asks God that he might experience the resurrection power he already has

Paul prayed this for the Ephesian church

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be opened (why does he want the eyes of their heart opened) I pray they eyes of your heart be opened so that you may know what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. (Now listen) Which He brought about in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.

Now listen – all Christians - all Christians have this power available to them

Your task is to tap into it

Let's think about this power

First you have the power to have your sins forgiven

The world is captive to sin – without Christ people are slaves to sin

But in Christ you are forgiven

Jesus died as the necessary sacrifice for our sins

When you receive Him as Lord and Savior you are declared righteous

Every sin you have ever committed or will ever commit has been paid for

When Jesus was on the cross God laid on Him the sins of every one of us

And the punishment for those sins

That is what the cross is all about

Now listen - If Jesus sacrifice had not been acceptable

God's justice would not have allowed Him to raise Christ from the dead

The very fact of the resurrection proves that Jesus paid it all

Whenever Satan accuses you saying

Your sin is too great - God can never forgive you

You can say – Jesus paid it all and as proof He rose from the dead

I am righteous in God's eyes

I am justified in God's sight – declared righteous by the Father Himself

Charles Wesley wrote – he breaks the power of cancelled sin; He sets the prisoner free;

His blood can make the foulest clean; His blood availed for me

The blood of Jesus can avail for you also

Then the death of Christ gives you the power to conquer sin

Resurrection power doesn't end with forgiveness

Christ empowers you to conquer the sin in your life

You who were once slave to sin now have power over sin

Paul says - Put on the new self; which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth

The resurrection power of God makes you a new creation

Behold the old is passed away – all things have become new

You have a new self – a new life - and a new purpose

God whose power saved us

Now uses His power to conform us to the image of His Son

Truly righteous – truly holy –

God is working in you to become what He created humans to be

His image

God gives you the power to choose to live a holy life – the power to not sin

The power to overcome sinful habits you have had all our life

Now listen

The children of God are the only people in the world with this power

Donald Barnhouse used this illustration

Imagine you are a prisoner of war – Satan is your captor

He has a gun - you must obey him – he is in control

Now God intervenes – He saves you from Satan and gives you the gun

Does Satan go away – no – he is still there yelling orders at you

Telling you what to do – acting like your boss - but you have the gun

You no longer have to obey him

He will tell you the gun is not loaded – that bullets don't hurt him

He will try to convince you to put the gun down and fight like a man

He will tell you that it is in your best interest to obey him anyway

But you have the gun and he knows it – resurrection power is yours

You need to know how to use it

Then you have the power to be God's agent

Christianity is not just about forgiveness and overcoming sin

God has a purpose in your salvation

You are to be His agent to change the world

God has empowered you not only to defeat sin

But also to share and display His message to the world

Paul wrote – He has given to us the message of reconciliation. We are Christ’s ambassadors, as though God was speaking through us

Do you feel qualified to be God’s ambassador – I think most would say no

That is the great part

God’s power is even more powerful when we are weak

If you feel qualified then you probably are not

When you know you are not qualified – that is when God shows up

God demonstrates His power by working through you

By working mightily through you

And He does it best when you feel weak and unworthy

Finally God has given you the power to be like Christ

Resurrection power’s greatest accomplishment

Is conforming ordinary sinners like you and me into the image of Jesus

You have been forgiven of your sins; you are enabled not to sin

You have been appointed as His ambassador

And you are now being perfected in His love

Paul says – you are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord

Changed into the likeness of Christ – think about what that means

Think about all those things about you that are not like Jesus

Your pride your anger your selfishness your lust your greed

God is dealing with every one of them with resurrection power

You are being made by the very power of God into a new creature

That is your destiny

That is the power of the resurrection

READ 1Cor 15:2-8

The truth of the resurrection is central to Christianity

If it were not true we would still be lost in our sins

If Christ had not risen from the grave

Then sin and Satan would still have power over us

We could not be transformed into the image of Jesus

And hell would await us

The resurrection of Jesus Christ makes the Christian life possible

The angel said – Go tell His disciples that Jesus is risen from the dead

What do you want more than anything else – money fame power fun

In the end all of these things people spend their lives pursuing

Are worthless and unsatisfying

God has made you for Himself and until you discover this truth

You will not find satisfaction or fulfillment

You may find a substitute but it is not the real stuff and not good enough

Perhaps you can say that what you want is admirable – a happy life - a good marriage – successful children

I want to call you to something greater

I want to call you to the source of joy and peace and satisfaction

What did Paul want

What did he pray that others might have - To know Christ

Without this you can never know true joy – true peace – true righteousness

And you will never accomplish anything of lasting value

When Christ is your goal – these other things naturally follow

Would you like to know Jesus – do you believe He rose from the dead

Has He been working in your heart

What better day than Resurrection Sunday to acknowledge Him as Savior

Those of you who have already placed your faith in Christ

Have you been putting the cares of this world

Finances relationships or job

Ahead of your relationship to Jesus

Or can you say with Paul that your one great desire is to know Christ

Until that is your desire

You will not experience the power of the resurrection in your life

If you don't know Jesus as your Lord and Savior

You need to make a commitment – right now

If you know Him but you are not experiencing His power

You need to make a decision to depend upon the power of God

A commitment to know Him better and better

To know Jesus and experience that same power that raised Jesus from the grave

Easter is a time of rebirth – a time of new resurrection life

Let it also be the time when you made a commitment

That changed your life – forever

He is risen –

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead - believe it - know Him

Experience the resurrection power available to those who believe