

The Wonder of the Risen Christ

Easter Sunday, March 27 – Brad Bailey

Intro

Like those who rose that first Easter morning...most of us may have had to wipe the sleep from our eyes... as we slowly awake from the state of dreams to the reality of the new day.

This morning I believe **God would encourage us to begin by wiping the familiarity of Easter from our eyes.**

There is a **cultural form of Easter** that now carries a mixture of Spring and bunnies...and pastel colors...with some vague secondary “religious significance.” We do well to wipe that from our minds this morning. There is **even a religious familiarity** that we may need to wipe from our minds this morning. We can find ourselves declaring “He has risen” as if we are just declaring some religious tradition that may or may not really change anything in the life that is at hand today.

We do well to **stop and consider the reality of what the resurrection of Christ** really brings. Imagine you were among those who first discovered that Jesus ...Christ...was alive...that he had risen from death.

As we heard the accounts read earlier...the women came in the darkness...a darkness that represented their sense of defeat. Their hopes had been crucified. The powers of this world... in Rome and the religious leaders...had crucified the only one who appears to be God actually entering their world. They didn't want anyone to identify them in the darkness of morning...but the least they could do was honor him with the proper spices over his now entombed body. (Maybe that's where some of us find ourselves. We think that the world has passed him by...but we still want to give some honor.)

Then we heard about the two who were walking on the road to the town of Emmaus.

Luke 24:13-14

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

One of the marvelous things about this event, is that it **does not involve** one of the **twelve primary** disciples. We **know little about these two...** one is referred to as Cleopas (Clopas) and the other remains un-named. They are simply a part of the mass of lives that began to realize something was different...God may be on the move.

Why would Jesus come to these two on the very first day of his resurrection?

We are not told. He may have come to them because from what we hear in their hearts...they truly desired for this world to be different... they weren't so connected and committed to the status quo so as to resist the radical calling of Christ. God comes to those those who are willing to join the work of change. We do well to open up that sense within our own souls.

Perhaps because they would soon invite him home...and he comes to those who invite him. Perhaps simply because he **cares for each and every one of us...** and comes to all who will welcome Him.

Luke 24:14

“They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.”

So much had happened... beginning with first hearing the news that one who could be the Messiah was on the scene...the promised hope of a savior from God. Then meeting him... and hearing the words he spoke... the Kingdom of God He proclaimed ... the power of signs and wonders he demonstrated... the love he showed. **Now at the climatic point** when he went to Jerusalem during the Passover...the whole city is prepared for a showdown...and then he is suddenly seized in the darkness one night... condemned by sway of the religious leaders... beaten...and crucified. In the power of Roman control, **crucifixion was the ultimate** way of declaring that **“the Romans run this place”** ... and the most degrading and humiliating spectacle imaginable. He’s dead. The tomb was sealed... and with it all their hopes....all their vision of God at work in the world. To see Christ enter Jerusalem and suddenly become captive by the Romans.... was utterly devastating.

Where were they going ? Emmaus... a seven mile walk from Jerusalem.

They are leaving behind the bitter memories of Jerusalem and are walking to the Village of Emmaus. As Frederick Buechner describes,

"Emmaus was not so much a place--as a state of mind."

Emmaus could be any **place we go to avoid dealing with life....and ourselves.**

Wherever it may take us... it’s **ultimately the wrong direction... away from God.**

What they didn’t know was that Christ was right there with them....

Luke 24:15-16

¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him.

We’re not told how they were kept from recognizing him... perhaps it involved the differences of his resurrected body... but clearly in this case God intended that they would not initially recognize him.

Perhaps it reflects their state of mind. We are told...

Luke 24:7

“They stood still, their faces downcast.”

They go from looking up...to looking down.

That is **what life’s disappointments can do...** they bring that which makes the world become darker...and smaller.

At such times, we may try to think good thoughts...see the bright side...but it can be like trying to move deck chairs on the titanic.

But then... each is faced with the risen Christ... and they are faced with WONDER.

In that moment, life is **not just brighter... but bigger.**

On that morning **everything changed... reality became bigger.**
The resurrection of Christ declares that life is bigger than we thought.
It declares that **we have been defined by that which is temporal... physical... worshipped the creation over the Creator.** The result is that **reality is reduced ...we are reduced.**

But in the resurrection of Christ... they stand in wonder.... they are left in wonder.

"Wonder" can mean both "awe" and "question."
To face that which bears amazement and awe...yet often beyond what one can fully understand. It is the wonder that brings aweand the wonder of questions because it opened up life beyond what they could comprehend.

Imagine all that **the wonder that stood before them...and now stands before us.**

In the resurrection of Christ, we discover...

1. There is a plan that is greater than our limited understanding.

Did you catch what each conversation was marked by?
The angel doesn't just tell them he has risen...but says... "just as he told you" (cf Matt. 28:6).

Luke 24:6-7

"He has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'"

This didn't just happen. This was planned...predicted...promised.
So Jesus focuses in the need for them to realize that this is not just something amazing that is happening...it is also what God had been foretelling.

Luke 24: 25-27

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

He reveals the fulfillment of what God has promised and predicted.

For thousands of years God's hand in human history had pointed toward the events they had just experienced, so..."**beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.**"

There are **some 48 predictions...** some **350 statements** in the Old Testament about the coming of the Messiah ...written over a period of 2,000 years. **As some have said, 'God wrote an address in human history.'** [1]

Christ fulfilled every one of them... including being a **descendent of David...** being **born of a virgin...**being one who would **embody both God and man...**being **lifted upon his death...**

without a bone being broken... cursed and hung upon a tree... reigning over an eternal kingdom... and yes rising again. Many of these referred to the sacrifice and suffering of the Messiah who was to come.

The Good News of Easter is not that someone rose from the dead...that would be interesting but if it was random with no particular or understandable reason... it wouldn't mean anything. The good news is that Christ rose...the one who came for a purpose.

The good news of both the crucifixion and the resurrection is that it is 'according to plan'...it is part of God having a plan to rescue and redeem us. It reveals something you and I need to know... that God is over human history.

Jesus is revealing the power that is held in the Word of God... not simply as a book, but as living promises... proclamations by God.

He rooted his declaration with those key words... **"as it is written..." because God had set forth his Word for humankind in the living testimony of the Scriptures.**

> So the risen Christ points them back to the promises of God.... in order to separate them from their own presuppositions that had led to disappointment and losing heart.

> They had been stuck in their own storyline. Many of us have been stuck living in our own storyline...one that hasn't been able to perceive something larger. We have allowed what we don't understand to doubt what we have known.

There is wisdom in the statement:

"Doubt your doubts before you doubt your beliefs." - Walt Allmand

Suddenly their eyes were open...God has been in control...doing what He had said.

We all can get stuck in a storyline that is smaller than God's. The events of Easter... history is "His Story"...God is the one writing the story.

2. There is a love more powerful than we can imagine.

Now they realize...the suffering which they had just watched... physical pain... humiliation...the torture of injustice...was an act of God... and act of love.

It was a love beyond imagination...beyond human...it was Divine.

Now they realize...God had come....for them. Why? Because they were so special? No because God loves in a way we cannot imagine.

Yes...God has come in the nature of human form to reach us. Like a king who wants to love his maiden...but wants to know if she can love him freely...so he slips out and disguises himself as an ordinary man...to seek her love.

But this is not simply the story of the maiden who is so beautiful that she is the lucky one...that captures the king's heart by her beauty. No...it's the a love that that loves **not because of what one gains from us...**but because of who they are.

The wonder of a love that seeks the enemy in us all.

We must not forget that it wasn't simply the Jewish religious leaders that put him on the cross, and it wasn't the Romans. It was my sins, it was your sins, the sins of this world.

We have been part of those who live as adversaries of God...enemies of God...and bound in a prison of separation we have not even realized. What they realize as they look at the sacrifice which Christ just made...but has now defeated...is that it **God is storming the prison** that we were held in.

This is precisely what He did.

“Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” - Romans 5:8-9

And that's an even better story. And it's the one story that the world does not already have, but most needs to hear.

Earthly romance.... Gives us an **'ahhhh'**...but this... leaves us silence and in **awe**.

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus told his disciples:

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.” - John 15:9

In his last moments before suffering and dying for us, he asked his disciples to abide in his love. He was eager that these men, and all who would believe afterward, **would live lives enjoying his love.**

Christ's love for us **hasn't changed** since that Thursday night. It **hasn't faded** in the least. It **hasn't diminished** the way our love often can. **Our Lord's love is unchanging.** The love he feels for us today is just as strong as it was when he suffered and died in our place. Jesus loves us with an **eternal love.**

3. There is a goodness that is greater than all the powers of evil and injustice we face.

They had **known Roman oppression** all their lives. They knew that they as a people had brought this upon themselves. But would God not over throw such powers?

Now they realize...he had done far more... he defeated the ultimate power of evil that rules over all. **Evil was not contained in Caesar.** It ran through all who declared power unto themselves. They had seen it in the religious leaders...in themselves.

The resurrection declares that there is goodness...rightness...and it is rooted in the God who rules over all...and will prevail.

Some of us need to stop and take that in.

- Maybe life's unfairness has seemed to win.

- Maybe you think some losses have the final word.
- Maybe you think the coming election may bring the end of all hope.

The resurrection declares that there is goodness...rightness...and it is rooted in the God who rules over all...and will prevail.

That truth gives rise to the power to rise to join that which is good.

N.T. Wright captures this new life so well [2]

“With Jesus, God's rescue operation has been put into effect once and for all. A great door has swung open in the cosmos which can never again be shut. It's the door to the prison where we've been kept chained up. We are offered freedom: freedom to experience God's rescue for ourselves, to go through the open door and explore the new world to which we now have access. In particular, we are all invited-summoned, actually-to discover, through following Jesus, that this new world is indeed a place of justice, spirituality, relationship, and beauty, and that we are not only to enjoy it as such but to work at bringing it to birth on earth as in heaven. It is time, in the power of the Spirit, to take up our proper role, our fully human role, as agents, heralds, and stewards of the new day that is dawning. [2a]

“Easter is about ... summoning all people everywhere to live in this new world. Easter is about God's rich welcome to all humankind.” [2b]

God was at work in the world. Now they could join such a work by the power of faith to connect to that larger realm.

> **Next week we are going to begin a series entitled “Real Life. Real Faith.”**

Faith the power by which we access the spiritual realm. It is declared to be the essence of what pleases God (Heb. 11) and the core that he looks to find in us (Luke 18:8.) We are going to consider what faith looks like in real life. We are going to explore the nature of faith reflected in the very lives that God says are examples to us all... and the power that real faith can have in our lives.

It begins by discovering that there is a **goodness that is greater than all the powers** of evil and injustice we face.

4. There is an eternal realm that is not bound by time and space as we know it.

Many of us may live with a **strange combination of believing** that everything is **just material** and can be reduced to a material reality... and **yet also** believing there is something **spiritual...not bound by time and space as we know it.** (We live at a time in which science is deemed some sort of enemy of spiritual reality...even while many note that we seem to be discovering that which points beyond the physical world as we have known it. We live at a time in which popular culture is immersed in fleeting temporal pleasure even while fascinated with the spiritual and supernatural.)

Not really new... there were ancients who believed both.

When Christ came... it raised the question...is our world connected to a larger reality?

When he rose... it answered it. While still beyond comprehension ... understanding ... human life was clearly part of a spiritual realm.

He changed how we understand life. “We live and die; Christ died and lived!” (John Stott)

And that defies death...and all that death represents.

For this purpose Jesus partook of flesh and blood (like us), that...

Hebrews 2:14-15

“...through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to bondage all their lives”

He defeated the devil and delivered all of us who were captive to death.

2 Timothy 1:10 (NIV)

“... it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

He literally “nullified” death, putting it out of business. So when we die in Christ, we go straight to Him. To the redeemed, there is no death, in any way that truly matters. [3]

Fear is not itself something we simply denounce. We fear what we believe someone can do to us. Some fear old cabins in the forest ever since they saw one of a hundred movies where something bad happens in that cabin.

Some fear the ocean...ever since they saw the movie Jaws. Because what we believe the ocean holds.

In the same way we fear the death of these bodies because of what we believe their end brings to use...the end of ourselves as people...spiritual death.

The resurrection of Christ has removed that connection that was never meant to be. We were created to live forever with God.

Physical death is no longer bound with spiritual death. Death is no longer the Monster it was.

God has provided a way for our true personhood to live eternally... to be raised again to life everlasting.

The Word of God clearly reveals that man is more than a creature of time. He is destined for eternity!

This is **not a resuscitation** in which someone **regains life only to die again**. Jesus actually completely overcomes death... forever. Christ's resurrection changes what life is. If we receive him...and life in him... we can know that...

- He is like a **preview of the coming attractions**.
- Death is **no longer the end** of the road, **but a turn in which we cannot see**.
- Life **no longer ends with a period** at the end of the sentence, **but a comma**, preparing us for what follows.

Let us discover that **there is an eternal realm that is not bound by time and space as we know it.**

Finally...

5. There is a Lord who is alive and still among us today.

When Jesus ascended **he stated something** that filled them all...

Matthew 28:20 (NIV)

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

This was **yet another wonder...** there was **now an ongoing connection** between the heavenly and earthly realm **in a way that had never been before.** God had broken in and laid claim. God was now the ultimate ruler over the world once again...even if allowing the freedom of humanity to continue for the current age... with all it's temporary consequences.

But **his rule is at hand...** his **authority is now established.**

Jesus would continue to be at work with them...and they experienced that presence...that power...with awe...and with wonder.

His presence is both **real...**even **while beyond our understanding.**

God is here among us today... Christ is alive and still among us today.

Easter is **not merely a memorial day** about **something** that happened long ago.

Our modern culture tends likes to **reduce relationship** with God **to religion...**some set of ideas or beliefs that we can debate...that we can stand over as the all-powerful and superior creatures.

But we will find....that we are **always standing** on the **wrong side of the door...never entering.**

John 11:25-26 (NLT)

“I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. – Jesus

So let's pierce some nice safe distant declaration.

When we declare “Jesus is risen!” let us realize.. “He is here among us today!”...in this place, among us today.

Closing Prayer: God...we stand before you as those too familiar with what is so much bigger. Our sense of reality has become too small.

May we receive that love that we need...that comes to us as those bound and imprisoned as your enemies. We thank you that you have come to bear our sentence....our separation...our sin...our shame. We receive your forgiveness.

We want to follow you Jesus....follow your ways...follow you into the way of heaven...the work of God in this world.

Notes:

1. More information on prophetic fulfillment at

<http://www.accordingtothescrptures.org/prophecy/353prophecies.html>

2a. N.T. Wright – From his book “Simply Christian” pp. 91-92, 220-222, 224-225, 236-237; and

2b. N.T. Wright sermon “[The Uncomfortable Truth of Easter](#)”

3. Phillips paraphrase of 2 Timothy 1:10 reads well...

“Before time began he planned to give us in Christ the grace to achieve this purpose, but it is only since our saviour Jesus Christ has been revealed that the method has become apparent. For Christ has completely abolished death, and has now, through the Gospel, opened to us men the shining possibilities of the life that is eternal.”

And the Good News (GN) paraphrase read...“Now with the coming of our Savior Christ Jesus, he has revealed it. Christ has destroyed death, and through the Good News he has brought eternal life into full view.”