

EMS: Easter Made Simple

Resurrection

March 24, 2013

PRELUDE – Love the Lord

Worship Songs – Great God Who Saves /
Alleluia / Before the Throne

We are in the final week of our series, *Easter Made Simple*, looking at the three main components of Easter.

- **In the first week, we talked about Jesus and what makes Him unique.**
- **Last week, we looked at the crucifixion and why Jesus had to die in that way.**

- **This morning, we're going to look at the third component of Easter – the earthshaking event that happened on that first Easter Sunday morning.**

Drama – “Lonely at the Top” (5)

Good morning everyone!

As Kitti said, we are in the third and final week of *Easter Made Simple* and I'm sure you know “what was so earthshaking that it couldn't wait until Monday morning.” On that very first Easter Sunday morning after being crucified on a Roman cross Friday afternoon, according to his disciples, Jesus of Nazareth was alive

again – raised to life by the power of God.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us that ...

Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb. Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint.

Matthew 28:1-4 (NIV)

Then the angel spoke to the women. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying." Matthew 28:5-6 (NIV)

And they did. Then they went back to the other disciples to report what had happened.

Matthew tells us that ...

While the women were on their way, some of the

guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money ...

... telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble."

**Matthew 28:11-14
(NIV)**

... which is where the drama this

morning ended – with the chief priests coming to Pilate to do some “damage control.”

Later that evening, as the disciples and everyone else were meeting together, discussing not only what the women had said but also the reports of other disciples who claimed to have seen Jesus and talked with Jesus; two who claimed to have even *eaten dinner* with him ...

Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them.

“Peace be with you,” he said.

But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost!

“Why are you frightened?” he asked. “Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it’s really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don’t have bodies, as you see that I do.”

As he spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet. Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder.

Then he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it as they watched.

Luke 24:36-43

(NLT)

The Gospels go on to tell us of other appearances Jesus made to his disciples and even to larger groups of people but the bottom line is this:

- On Friday, Jesus was crucified, dead and buried. All hope was lost.**
- On Sunday, he was alive again.**

And not just alive "spiritually" as if

the disciples could somehow “sense his presence” in a supernatural way or not as if they’d seen him as a ghost. “He has risen from the dead” the angels had said, and that meant exactly what it sounded like – that the one who had given up his life *in the flesh* had now taken it up again *in the flesh*.

This is the third component of Easter – the literal resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And this morning I want to talk to you about why we believe this to be true, why it matters and what it means.

Why It Matters

And I want to start out with the “why it matters” issue first because of its supreme importance: *without the resurrection of Jesus there is simply no reason whatsoever for the Christian faith to even exist, a conclusion well stated by the chief proponent of Christianity, the Apostle Paul.*

Paul wrote:

If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be

pitied than anyone in the world.

***1 Corinthians 15:17-19
(NLT)***

“Our faith is so tied to the in-the-flesh resurrection of Jesus,” Paul is saying, “that if it didn’t really happen, then we have got to be the most pathetic people on the planet because we have staked our lives on a fairytale.”

If you’re a believer in Jesus, have you ever thought about that?

It took me a long time before I did. I wasn’t raised in church, so I didn’t become a Christian – a follower of Christ – until I was a teenager. And because of who I was as a teenager

and some of the struggles my family was going through, that was a life-changing experience for me. All I knew was that my life was different – *better* “different” – because of Jesus, and that was good enough for me. I really didn’t worry too much about whether or not the claim concerning His resurrection was true. The Bible said it. I believed it. And that settled it. Maybe some of you can relate to that kind of thinking.

But as I got older, I began to see what Paul was saying here: that if Jesus didn’t really rise from the dead, then this whole experience, regardless of how helpful it had been, was a sham. And I would have to be a fool to

continue in it – at least in the way I was practicing my faith.

Why We Believe

So, not wanting to *be* a fool, I was compelled to understand how something so *unbelievable* could actually be *believable*. I began to study things that were written and said – pro and con – by people much smarter than me about the supposed resurrection of Jesus. And I became (and still am) convinced for many reasons that Jesus really *did* rise from the dead on the third day following his crucifixion, and I want to share some of those with you this morning.

First of all (and these are in no specific order) ...

1. In the biblical accounts of the story of the resurrection, the first eyewitnesses to what had happened are women – not men.

We just saw an example of that in what we read from Matthew's Gospel.

The reason this is important is because, in the patriarchal culture of that day and time, women were not considered to be trustworthy witnesses about anything. If you wanted to verify that something really happened, your last resort would be to rely on the testimony of a woman. You wouldn't make that your

first move. But that's exactly how the story goes. The first witnesses to what had happened were women ...

... which means that if the leadership of the early church was making up a story in order to justify their existence - which many people will claim that's what was going on - they sure thought of a dumb one! The only reason you would ever tell a story like this publicly - and they did, over and over - is if it really happened that way.

The second reason why I am convinced that the resurrection of Jesus really happened is that ...

2. It is the best explanation of the transformation of the disciples from cowards to missionaries.

As one Orthodox Jewish scholar has written:

"If the disciples were totally disappointed and on the verge of desperate flight because of the very real reason of the crucifixion it took another very real reason to transform them from a band of disheartened and dejected Jews into the most self-confident missionary society in world history."ⁱ

... which is exactly what happened to them.

On Thursday evening, after Jesus was betrayed and handed over to the chief priests, they all ran and hid. And they remained in hiding throughout the weekend out of a very real and justifiable fear that what happened to Jesus might soon happen to them.

But less than six weeks later, they stood in the public square of Jerusalem and the biggest coward of them all, the Apostle Peter, preached an incredible and fearless sermon. He said:

“Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by

**God to you by miracles,
wonders and signs, which
God did among you
through him, as you
yourselves know. This
man was handed over to
you by God's deliberate
plan and foreknowledge;
and you, with the help of
wicked men, put him to
death by nailing him to
the cross. Acts
2:22-23 (NIV)**

**"But God raised him from
the dead, freeing him
from the agony of death,
because it was impossible
for death to keep its hold
on him ... Therefore let
all Israel be assured of
this: God has made this
Jesus, whom you**

crucified, both Lord and Messiah.” Acts 2:24, 36 (NIV)

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Acts 2:38,41 (NIV)

3,000 men plus women and children joined the very first church that day. And at the center of it all was the proclamation not of some generic “better way to live” but that Jesus of Nazareth had been raised from the dead by a man who not too long before denied he even knew the man!

The only reason Peter and the others would have had the confidence to put themselves in such a perilous position and preach such an incredible thing is that it really happened!

By the way, this story of rapid and massive growth of the church

continues throughout the book of Acts and beyond ... and leads to the third reason why I believe in the reality of the resurrection.

3. And that is that other “I am the Messiah” movements of that era *died out when the leader died*, but Christianity did not.

This is something I learned several years ago from New Testament scholar and author N.T. Wright, who is one of the leading authorities on Palestinian Jewish culture in the first century.

“There were,” he writes “... a dozen other [messianic] movements that arose in Palestine within about 100 years either side of Jesus.”

In other words, there were guys 100 years before the time of Jesus and 100 years after who were going around the Palestinian countryside saying "I am the Messiah. I am the chosen one. I am the one God has put here to redeem Israel and put it in charge of the rest of the world."

And in each one of those cases, Wright says, the death of the leader meant the death of the movement or it was taken over by someone else in his family.

The rule of the day was ...

"If you follow a messiah and he

gets killed, then you obviously backed the wrong horse. You should either give up or get yourself another leader from within the same family.”ⁱⁱ

But that’s not what happened in the case of Jesus. *His* followers didn’t quit. And they did *not* choose another leader from his family even though there *was* one available: James, the brother of Jesus, who, according to the scripture, eventually became the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

Now, some have said “that sounds like the same thing. Jesus died and then his brother took over the operation.”

On the surface, maybe, but the problem with that is that no one ever suggested "James, you should take Jesus' place and be *messiah*." And they didn't go around proclaiming "well, you know, Jesus was killed, so he couldn't be the Messiah; it's got to be James, his brother. Let's all worship James."

No. The disciples – including James – were quite insistent that Jesus, in spite of the fact that he had been crucified, was, indeed, the messiah sent from God.

And the reason they were so insistent about that is because they believed

that following his execution and burial, Jesus was raised to life in the flesh.ⁱⁱⁱ They were so convinced of what they had seen and experienced – and its significance – that they were willing to *risk everything* to hold on to that belief ...

... which leads to the fourth reason why I believe in the literal resurrection of Jesus.

4. Jesus' followers suffered rejection, torture and death for this claim, yet that did not stop them.

They were thrown out of the synagogues; thrown out of their families and persecuted with beatings and executions not only at the hands

of the leaders of the Jewish community, but also from the Romans.

All but one of the disciples/apostles died a martyr's death. Jesus' brother, James, was thrown off the temple in Jerusalem and then clubbed to death for believing this. There was nothing good to gain whatsoever for any of them to persistently lie about Jesus' resurrection – it only brought them suffering! Yet they did not recant or walk away.

Why? There's no other reason that makes sense other than they believed Jesus really was alive because they had seen him, they had walked with him and they had talked with him.

Ok, one more reason to believe in the resurrection that I want to share with you this morning.

5. Given first century Jewish theology, the only rational explanation for the disciples' belief in the resurrection of Jesus is that it really happened.

Here's what I mean by that.

For centuries, Jewish theology (based on the Old Testament) had taught that, one day, there was going to be a literal physical resurrection. So, in the minds of Jesus' followers (who, remember, were Jewish), the thought that God might raise people from the

dead wasn't strange. However, *no* first-century Jew would expect that to be anything other than a large-scale event happening to all God's people, or perhaps to the entire human race, at the very end of time.

The idea that it had happened to just *one person* – Jesus of Nazareth – in the *middle* of history is a radical shift in their theology for which there is no justification other than ... they were totally convinced that it really did happen.^{iv}

Now, I'm not saying these five things are proof that Jesus really did rise

from the dead on Easter Sunday. I'm just saying that, in addition to the eyewitness reports we have in the Gospels, there is a pretty big pile of circumstantial evidence for which most reasonable explanation is that Jesus was raised to life again; that the disciples really did hang out with Him and have dinner with him like the scripture says.

And several weeks later, as He was returning to the Father in Heaven, He really did give them a commission to go and tell the rest of the world the good news of what He – God in the flesh – had accomplished in his life, in his death and in his resurrection ... and what it all means.

What It Means

And that's what I want to talk about next because, without understanding what it means, this is just kind of a fascinating event that happened – like having six inches of snow in late March in Kansas City. It's impressive. It makes the news. But it really doesn't affect your life next week. At least we hope not.

So, what does it mean that Jesus was raised from the dead? What are the implications? There are many more than we have time for this morning so I want to focus in on just three that I think are very powerful.

First of all, the fact that Jesus rose from the dead means ...

- 1. The Christian faith truly is unique among world religions.**

One of the great misconceptions of our day is that all religions are basically the same – they’re just different pathways to the same goal. But that simply isn’t true.

Yes, Christianity does share several moral and ethical principles with other religions, but in the case of Christianity those principles aren’t the main thing. *The main thing* – the reason Christianity started in the first

place and survived against all odds – is the conviction that God entered the world as a human being and then rose from the dead after being brutally executed. No other religion or “spiritual pathway” has anything close to that as its foundational truth claim.

And I think this is important to remember because it’s very easy to begin thinking of the Christian faith as just one of many good self-help or self-improvement programs; as just another option out there you can choose if it “works for you, you should go with it.”

But that’s *not* what Christianity is at

all. The Christian faith is primarily about what *God*, in a display of divine supernatural power that caused the unexpected and unimaginable to take place, *has already done* to improve us and not about what *we have to do* to improve ourselves. No doubt – it does *affect* what we do (i.e., how we live) but only as a response to what God has already done. That concept is unique among all world religions and spiritual pathways.

By the way, this raises a very interesting question – one that I hear almost every time I talk about this subject – and that is “do you have to

believe in the literal resurrection of Jesus in order to be a Christian?" I mean, if you're going to be a Christian, do you really need to believe that he was dead and then three days later he was alive again? I mean, it really is "out there" in terms of things that a person might believe "really happened."

It's a fair question based on what we see (or don't see) happening in everyday life: people don't rise from the dead and live forever. It's also a fair question because *there are some stories in the scripture that are debatable as to their literalness.* In our doubt series last fall, we talked about several of those, such as the

story of creation in the first three chapters of Genesis, and we saw that it's possible – maybe even likely – that some of those stories are not meant to be taken literally.

However, this is not one of them.

And I think (I hope) you can see from everything we've talked about this morning why that's true: belief in the literal Resurrection of Jesus is what distinguishes the Christian faith. It's what makes it unique.

Or, as the Apostle Paul went around preaching ...

***Say with your mouth,
"Jesus is Lord." Believe***

in your heart that God raised him from the dead. Then you will be saved. Romans 10:9-10 (RNIV)

There is no salvation apart from faith that Jesus had been raised from the dead. To not believe that and yet think of yourself as a serious Christian is like not believing in free enterprise and still thinking of yourself as a committed capitalist. It's like not believing in antibiotics and thinking of yourself as a good doctor. It's like not believing in quantum mechanics and thinking of yourself as a world-class physicist. It's a contradiction in terms. It's nonsensical.

Now, that doesn't mean you're not a nice person (if that's important to you). It doesn't mean you're not a spiritual or religious person. But it *does* mean that you are *not* a Christian in the purest sense of the word – one who believes in Jesus for who He truly is: the crucified savior and risen Lord.

And that's a pretty strong implication. Here's another.

2. The resurrection of Jesus means that God's salvation goes far beyond "forgiveness from sin and Heaven-when-you-die."

... which, honestly, is what most people expect and hope for out of

Christianity ... and for good reason: *as Christians, we spend a lot of time talking about forgiveness of sin and Heaven-when-you-die.* We talk about how Jesus lived the life of perfect virtue that we each should have lived and then how he bore the punishment on the cross that we each should have received for our sin and how that's what makes forgiveness possible.

And that's great. It's wonderful. It's true. It brings great comfort when we or a loved one faces death.

However, if that's *all* God wanted to accomplish – forgiveness of sin and "Heaven when you die" – then the cross was enough. There was no

reason for a resurrection. Jesus could have just gone to Heaven as a spirit after his death.

***But he didn't.* In a mind-blowing, shocking twist to the expectations of Jewish theology, He was raised from the dead ... *because* ... the salvation that God wants to work out in you and me and in this whole sin-cursed world goes far beyond forgiveness and "Heaven when we die" ... and Jesus is the prototype of what God intends. He's the first of many.**

The Apostle Paul described it like this.

Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the

first of a great harvest of all who have died. Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. 1
Corinthians 15:20, 22 (NLT)

In other words, what happened to Jesus in his resurrection is eventually going to happen to everyone who believes in Him. In fact it's going to happen to all of creation ...

... which is why Paul writes elsewhere ...

All creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to

the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering.

We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. We were given this hope when we were saved.

***Romans 8:22-24
(NLT)***

I think that's fascinating. The hope God wants us to have in our salvation

isn't heaven-when-we-die (though we do get that!) It's a renewed, restored and regenerated body that will never break down, will never get sick and will never die in a renewed, restored and regenerated creation – all of which Jesus will bring to pass when He returns.

Paul continues:

There is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back. 1 Corinthians 15:23-24 (NLT)

Raised to be not angelic spirits

floating on a cloud with a harp somewhere "out there", but raised to live forever in a real body in a real world doing real things that real human beings do *without the curse of sin at work in us and in the world.*

It's going to be awesome, friends, just like God intended at the very beginning when He brought it all into existence ... only better.

As Paul wrote elsewhere:

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him. 1

Corinthians 2:9 (NLT)

As the Apostle John writes:

***He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All of these things are gone forever.
Revelation 21:4 (NLT)***

And all of this is guaranteed because it's already happened in the body of Jesus in his resurrection.

See, God's salvation goes far beyond "forgiveness and Heaven-when-you-die," as important and as wonderful as those things are. I don't know about you, but to me that is extremely motivating and extremely

exciting!

And it gives me a great deal of hope whenever I hear stories about tragedy in this world, like that kid who was killed in that freak accident at the airport in Alabama last week; or the father and daughter who jumped off the Bond Bridge last week. What was going on in their lives that they would say this is the sane thing to do; or the guy who was in the Iraq war and was wounded within the first couple of days he was there. His body is so racked with pain that he's decided to stop trying to live any longer. He said, "no more medicine, no more food - I'm checking out." One day that kind of suffering will be gone from this earth

forever and ever, amen, to the glory of God. And it's not a pipe dream or an empty promise. The seed of that has already been planted in the resurrected body of Jesus.

Ok, very quickly, one more implication. And maybe this is just stating the obvious but sometimes we miss it.

3. The resurrection of Jesus means that he is alive today in a "glorified" human body in Heaven.

Somehow, in a way I don't understand, when Jesus returned to Heaven, he went in a body that was

flesh and blood like ours (remember, we read stories of him eating), yet it was different from ours and even the one he had before his death, because He had the ability to appear and disappear, to move from the realm of the spirit world to the realm of the physical world, back and forth.

And that's the body that Jesus has even to this day, the body in which He will return at some point in the future, and the body in which we who follow Him will see Him for all of eternity.

Of course a good question to ask is ... what's He doing in that body right now? Well, there are lots of things the

**Bible talks about but I want to read
you just one thing that I think sums it
all up.**

**Paul writes to the Christ-followers at
Ephesus:**

***I pray that you will
understand the incredible
greatness of God's power
for us who believe him.
This is the same mighty
power that raised Christ
from the dead and seated
him in the place of honor
at God's right hand in the
heavenly realms.
Ephesians 1:19-20 (NLT)***

***Now he is far above any
ruler or authority or***

power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come.
Ephesians 1:21 (NLT)

It's the resurrection that gives Jesus his authority.

But check this out:

God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.
Ephesians 1:22-23 (NLT)

Not only does Jesus have a literal body in Heaven, he has a literal body on earth, too, people like you and me who have come together to form this church and people who have come together and formed other churches all over the world.

Conclusion

So, what are we to do with all of this information? I think there are several responses that need to be made this morning.

1. Some of us need to come to the place in our life where we cross the line and say, "I need to say with my mouth 'Jesus is Lord' and

believe in my heart that God raised him from the dead. I've been coming to this church, and other churches, and I've been hearing this stuff for years and years. I'm kind of on the fence, but today is the day. I'm stepping over the line and I'm going to say I believe Jesus rose from the dead. It doesn't make sense. It seems crazy but there's no other answer. He is Lord."

2. Some of us need to stop focusing on the misery of life – our life, the life of people around us, the misery of the world, and being so sucked into that and being so negative and despondent. And

instead of doing that, begin to borrow hope from the incredible future that God has already begun to prepare for us through the resurrection. See, everyone has a core set of beliefs out of which they operate. Some of us need to let this resurrection truth reshape the core belief structure of our lives. Not playing some kind of silly game, "oh yeah, it's really better, praise Jesus! I'm so happy I lost my job." No. That's not what we're talking about, but saying there's more to life, there's more to you, there's more to your future, there's more to God's intention than you going through whatever you're going

through right now. That's what the resurrection is about.

3. And, finally, some of us need to take seriously the authority of Jesus in our life. He is Lord and that means some things to us. Some of us maybe know what that means and need to get serious about that. I was going to say this, but I won't say this because of who is here this morning, that some of us need to take more seriously the body of Jesus, the church. But, given you people got up and slogged here through the snow, I would say Jesus is watching and there's probably applause in Heaven for

you guys. Way to go. Way to take the body of Christ seriously this morning and being here and I think Jesus is happy that you've done that because that's part of the implication of him being the risen Savior.

I don't know what you need to do with this or how you need to respond but I want to pray for you.

God, thank you so much for what Jesus did and for the power and the wisdom and the plan of how you've intervened in this world.

God, I pray that some of us who need to take that step of faith and say "time to stop waffling;

time to get in (or even get out), but I'm going to make a decision this morning that I'm going to follow Jesus. He is Lord. I believe in my heart that you raised him from the dead."

Some of us, God, we just need to stop being so focused on what's right in front of us and lift our eyes to see the salvation that's coming. Not to play a game, not to pretend that things are better than they are, but to have a different hope in us. Some of us desperately need this and I pray we would say "yes" to that this morning.

I pray that some of us would say "yes" to what it means for you to

be the authority and Lord of our lives.

We thank you for loving us so much and for what you did for us in Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.

Feature – “Glorious Day”

Some of you were wondering ... but why are we talking about the resurrection today? Easter is NEXT Sunday!

Experiment next Sunday ... what do people who only show up at Easter hear about every year? The resurrection. What if we surprised

them? What if we started a new series that day instead of the following week as we usually do?

That's what we're going to do.

Next Sunday we're going to begin a six-week series called "Toxic People" – how to keep them from ruining your life.

We're going to discover how knowing God can help us deal with the difficult people in our lives.

Of course, it *is* Easter Sunday so we will celebrate the resurrection but that won't be the main point of the service. However, I think you'll be pleased at how we tie the new series

and Easter together. If you think about it long enough you can probably even figure out how we're going to do it.

Two other things regarding next week:

1. We have mailed out 27K invitational brochures and we have a bunch for you to give away so next week – unless it snows! – is going to be packed. Get here early and don't park on the street – save that for first time guests.

2. We're going to try something in the service next week and in the weeks to follow and I want to test

it right now.

If you have a cell phone or a tablet, would you take it out right now?

I want you to take a brief survey which is going to come up on the screen right now.

Survey slide: which movie in the recent series was your favorite?

Ok, one more question ... and this is just to see if a different kind of survey works on this system.

Survey slide: how many games will the Royals win this year?

OK, great, thanks! Next week and beyond we're going to be using this so you might want to hang on to the numbers and/or website.

Finally, for anyone thinking, "Well, this is great Rick, but we're missing out on the whole Holy Week experience" ... no, we're not.

- 1. Tenebrae service Wed PM – see program**
- 2. "Walk to The Cross" display Wed PM- Sat AM – see program.**

Ok, see you next week!

Endnotes

· **Pinchas Lapide, former Chairman of the Applied Linguistics Department at Israel's Bar-Ilan University quoted at http://www.ccl.org/contrib/exec_outlines/why/why_10.htm**

· **N.T. Wright, *The Original Jesus*, pg 70**

· **Wright, pg 71-72**

iv Wright