

This Is Us
The “Do Over”
April 21, 2019

Good morning everyone.

What makes Christianity unique among all other spiritual or religious pathways is not *belief in a superior code of morality* and ethics (though Jesus of Nazareth certainly did give us one).

What makes Christianity unique is not *the Bible or what the Bible says*. Contrary to what you may have heard, the Christian faith is not dependent on the Bible (though the Bible – in particular the New Testament – helps us better understand what it *is* dependent on).

Furthermore, Christianity is not linked to *any political ideology* though every political camp (from ultra-conservative to ultra-liberal) has tried to claim Jesus as the champion of their cause.

What makes Christianity unique ... what Christianity is fundamentally dependent on ... what Christianity is linked to ... is something that *happened*:

- Something that changed the course of human history.
- Something that addresses the emptiness we all encounter at some point in our lives

- Something that alleviates our greatest fear (which is death).

... which is why, if you are *not* a follower of Jesus or a Christian and you gave me just one shot to explain why you should consider becoming a Jesus-follower – a Christian ...

- I wouldn't try to justify or explain the embarrassing actions of "the church" through the centuries.
- Nor would I try to make excuses for the behavior, values, or discrimination of hypocritical Christians you may have encountered.
- And I wouldn't even try to convince

you that the Bible is true ... because there were thousands and thousands of believers in and followers of Jesus hundreds of years before church leaders got together and decided we should have a Bible. And many of those people became Christians long before they ever heard of Adam and Eve, or Noah.

So I wouldn't start with that.

Instead, if you're not a follower of Jesus, what I would do if you gave me just one shot to explain why you should consider it ...

What I would do is to focus your attention on is *The Event* . . . the thing that

happened that started it all . . . the event we have remembered and celebrated today: *the resurrection of Jesus*.

And where I would begin is by explaining *why* we believe it really happened; why we believe that Jesus was crucified and buried on a Friday and on Sunday morning, He was alive again: and not just metaphorically or even spiritually but in a flesh and blood physical body that could speak and touch and even eat.

There are many reasons Christians why believe this (which is why countless books have been written on the subject), but I want to share just two with you today.

Historical Witness

First, we believe this really happened because of what those who were closest to Jesus did, which is exactly what you would have done if you ...

- Had seen a man die.
- And knew where he had been buried.
- Then, a few days later, had breakfast with him on a beach.

They took to social media – at least, the first century form of it. They began talking about it and writing about it.

See, Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead not because some book says so.

1. We believe it because men who *were* eyewitnesses or *knew* the eyewitnesses to *a real historical event* talked about it and wrote about it.

For instance ...

- There was a Jewish guy named Matthew who was a Jesus-follower – one of Jesus disciples – and after the resurrection he wrote out an account of Jesus life from his perspective as an eyewitness.
- And there was a Gentile (or non-Jewish) guy named Mark who knew Jesus' first disciples – and, based on

what they told him, he also wrote out an account of the life of Jesus.

- And there was a guy named Luke who researched what had happened and wrote down what he discovered. In fact, at the very beginning of what is labeled *The Gospel of Luke* in the New Testament, he writes, "I have endeavored to write an orderly account of all the things that have happened among us."
- Then there's a guy named John – one of Jesus' 12 disciples and an eyewitness of everything. As he became an old man, he, too, realized that he needed to write

down what he had experienced, so he also wrote an account of the life of Jesus.

- Then there's Peter – another of "The Twelve" who later wrote letters to believers-in-Jesus all over the Roman world.
- Then there's the guy who's the most compelling of all, and that's James, the brother of Jesus. James didn't believe in or follow Jesus before the crucifixion. In fact, at one point, he tried to have Jesus put away because he thought he was crazy!

However, not long after the crucifixion, James became one of

the senior leaders in the early Christian movement. And he wrote a letter to the churches and believers scattered all over the Roman Empire, and in this letter (which we have in the New Testament), it is very obvious that James had come to the conclusion that his brother was his Lord and Savior.

Now, if you have a brother what would it take for you to be convinced that he was the Son of God? Probably something like ... coming back from the dead.

Point being ... we don't believe in the resurrection because "the Bible says" as if the Bible is some magical book that

dropped from the sky with a list of “things that must be believed.”

It’s way better than that.

We believe it because men who were eyewitnesses or *knew* the eyewitnesses to *a real historical* event talked about it and wrote about it.

And you can still read their writings today.

Of course, that raises the question of whether it really was historical and not just a story or legend that evolved over time and then, years later, written down.

That’s what a lot of universities and atheistic authors are teaching and

claiming these days: "Yes, there was a guy from Nazareth in the first century named Jesus. And he gained a big following. However, he was killed.

"But, as time went on, his legend grew bigger, and bigger, and bigger and then, many years after the fact, people started saying that He rose from the dead."

And, again, volumes have been written in response to that claim but let me give you just one of many reasons why it's reasonable to believe this is not a story made up after the fact, and that it is "real" history.

There's another first-century guy you should know about. His name is Nero;

Emperor Nero to be exact.

Two things are important to know about Nero for purposes of this discussion (and this is “secular world history” – this isn’t in the Bible):

1. About 30 years after the crucifixion of Jesus (A.D. 62), for reasons that aren’t totally clear, he set fire to the city of Rome.

2. He blamed the Christians.

You probably already know those two things. You probably learned them in school.

But what you probably didn’t learn is *why it was even possible* for Nero to

blame (and then persecute) Christians in Rome 30 years after Jesus died.

You know why?

Because there were Christians ... people who believed in the resurrection of Jesus ... not in Jerusalem, not in Judea, but right there *in Rome*. 1,500 miles away from the event, thousands of Roman citizens believed that a Jewish man, Jesus of Nazareth, had risen from the dead 30 years earlier.

And if there were thousands of Christians in Rome 30 years after the event, that meant there were thousands of people there 20 years after the event, which meant there were at least several hundred just 10 years after the event.

Now this is really important: research has shown that it takes 40 to 80 years for something to become a legend. The reason it takes so long is that all the people who witnessed the original event have to be dead; otherwise, they would refute the exaggerations, and that would kill the legend.

And, in this case, when you do the math and look at the timeline, there simply was not enough time for a myth like “Jesus rose from the dead” to develop to the point where people so far away from Jerusalem would hear it and believe it.

There would have been too many eyewitnesses still around to refute it; eyewitnesses who would have said, “No,

that's not right. Jesus didn't come back from the dead."

And that would be the end of that.

But that's not what happened. From the very beginning, the testimony of the eyewitnesses was "Jesus was killed, then buried and then He was alive in the flesh. We saw Him. We touched Him. We ate with Him. For weeks. And then he disappeared into another dimension called Heaven."

And that's one of the reasons why Christians believe "The Event" really happened ... and, if you're not a follower of Jesus and you're giving me one shot to convince you to consider it, it's the first reason I would share with you.

Men who were eyewitnesses or *knew* the eyewitnesses to a *real historical event* talked about it and wrote about it.

The Story

The second reason I would encourage you to consider following Jesus has to do with the nature of the resurrection story itself.

2. The resurrection story is too real, too raw and too authentically human to be made up.

And for you to understand what I mean by that, we need to go back to when Jesus arrived on the scene at around age 30 – or about three years before the

events of Easter morning.

The eyewitnesses tell us that pretty much the whole area of Jerusalem and Judea at the time was riveted by a guy they called "John the Baptist." Thousands of people would regularly go out into the desert to hear him preach.

One day, as John is preaching, he looks up and sees Jesus in the crowd. And he stops and points to Jesus and says, "Behold!" ... not the king, not the warrior, not the lion ...

He says, "Behold, the *Lamb of God*, who comes to take away the sins of the world."

And Jesus then begins his ministry and

it's incredible. He goes around doing miracles, preaching and teaching in a way people had never heard before.

And the crowds that followed John begin to follow Him and it all keeps getting bigger and bigger until one day, Jesus raises a man from the dead; a man that everybody knows; a famous wealthy man from the village of Bethany by the name of Lazarus.

After this happens, the crowds not only continue to grow but they become more animated and excited, which leads the religious leaders to conclude "If we don't do something, the whole world will start following Him and the Romans will come and destroy us and our Temple."ⁱ

And so they do "do something."

- Jesus is betrayed by a friend.
- Condemned by the temple leadership.
- And then crucified by the Empire.

And then he is buried by two unnamed wealthy men who went to Pilate, the Roman governor over that area, and asked for his body.

They probably had to pay him a bribe because, in those days, if you were crucified, you were not allowed to be buried. Your body was removed from the cross, put in a wagon, taken down to the valley of Gehenna and burned or left to rot.

But these two guys somehow get permission to take the body of Jesus.

And as the sun sets and the Jewish Sabbath is about to begin, they quickly prepare his body for burial and put it in a tomb one of them owns. Then they seal the tomb with a boulder and leave.

And on that day that Jesus was crucified and buried – this is so important, and if I were talking to you and trying to convince you to consider Jesus I would say, “Don’t miss this” ...

On the day that Jesus died, when Jesus was crucified, everybody unfollowed Jesus.

There were no Jesus-followers after the

crucifixion.

- And it's not that they didn't appreciate what He had taught them.
- And it's not that he didn't say a lot of memorable things and tell a lot of deeply meaningful stories.
- The problem was that Jesus *claimed too much about himself*.

So, when He died, it undermined *everything* He said and did.

- For instance, Jesus once said "I am the way, the truth and the life." But how can the way, the truth and the

life die?

- And he once said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Well, if you really are all that, how can you be dead?
- He also claimed to be the prophetic "Son of Man." He inferred that he was the "Son of God." He even let his inner circle know that, yes, he was the expected Messiah.

But the Messiah can't be crucified, the Son of Man can't be killed and the Son of God would never allow himself to be buried. Right?

So, when Jesus was crucified and died,

even though people had extraordinarily high hopes, even though he had done all those miracles, it was all over. Everybody's faith in Jesus disappeared.

There was no more movement to keep alive. There was no message worth repeating because Jesus said too much about himself and then He allowed himself to be taken into custody, convicted, tried and crucified.

... which means ... and again, don't miss this:

There was no one outside the tomb counting down on Easter morning.

Ten, nine, eight ...

And, by the way, what's interesting about the guys who eventually wrote down the story as they remembered it is that none of them wrote themselves in as the faithful hero.

"No one else believed Jesus would come back, but I did. No one else was there waiting for Jesus to come out of the tomb, but I was."

Instead, in every single narrative they all admit, "None of us believed Jesus was coming back. None of us believed we would see him alive again. No one was expecting *a resurrection*."

Not a very flattering self-portrait.

John – one of the guys who later wrote

down what he had experienced ...

Tells us that ...

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb ... John 20:1 (NIV)

Now, Mary Magdalene was a woman that Jesus had healed. And she became one of those who had high hopes for Jesus. She believed that he was everything he claimed to be.

She woke up early that Sunday morning and even though her heart was broken, even though none of this made sense, she was still so grateful for what Jesus had done for her. So, she decided to go

to the tomb and see if she could get someone (or a lot of someones) to move the boulder so she could prepare Jesus' body for its final burial.

We're not really sure why she thought that needed to be done but the point is ... *she was expecting to find a body to prepare.*

But when she got there ...

*... and saw that the stone
had been removed from
the entrance. John 20:1
(NIV)*

Her assumption wasn't "He's alive! He's risen from the dead!"

Not at all.

Instead, Mary assumed that someone had broken into the tomb and stolen the body ... because she was not expecting a resurrection. Nobody was.

So, the text tells us ...

She came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one that Jesus loved ... John 20:2 (NIV)

Which is how John often referred to himself in his account. I suspect he found it hard to believe that someone like him could be that loved by God, but that's just a guess.

So anyway, Mary finds the tomb to be empty, but she does not jump for joy,

"He's alive, He's alive."

Instead, she runs all the way back to the city and into the house where Peter and John are still sleeping. Unlike her, they are *not* up early. They're not at the tomb waiting and counting down.

In fact, they're very afraid because they're thinking "if they came for Jesus, they're probably going to come for us."

And then Mary crashes through the door and says not "He's risen, he's alive."

Instead she says ...

*"They have taken the Lord
out of the tomb and we
don't know where they*

have put him." *John 20:2*
(NIV)

Now, we don't know what she was thinking, but it would not be a stretch to believe that she reasoned that Jesus' enemies had discovered that Pilate had allowed someone to bury His body instead of letting it rot.

And since the last thing His enemies wanted was for the place where Jesus was buried to become a shrine where people came "to keep the dream alive," it would not be beyond them to ...

- Hire somebody to break into the tomb
- Steal His body
- And completely desecrate it so that

no respect could ever be given to it.

So, when Mary saw an empty tomb she probably assumed the worst.

"First, Jesus allowed himself to be taken as a prisoner, then he allowed himself to be tried and then crucified, and now someone has stolen His body."

Anyway ... Peter and John get up and they run to the place where Jesus was buried and they look into the tomb and see that there's nobody there - literally.

And there's no "glory hallelujah" moment for them either. There's no impromptu chorus of "Death Was Arrested."

Instead, John tells us, they quietly go back into the city because they don't know what else to do.

Meanwhile, Mary Magdalene slowly makes her way back to the tomb.

And when she later told John this story, this is how it went.

*Now Mary stood outside
the tomb crying. John
20:11 (NIV)*

Imagine her emotion.

"This man changed my life; the greatest man who has ever lived; the man who touched people no one would touch, who spent time with people no one would spend time with. And he was

crucified."

"And now, they won't even leave his body alone. What am I going to do now? Who can I trust like I trusted Him?"

And as she is crying, John tells us ...

She bent over and she looked into the tomb and saw two angels in white [she obviously doesn't realize they are angels] seated where Jesus body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

John 20:12 (NIV)

They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" John 20:13 (NIV)

She tells them what she told Peter and John.

*"They have taken my Lord
away and I don't know
where they have put him."*

John 20:13 (NIV)

Again, she isn't thinking Jesus has risen from the dead. She still believes His grave was robbed.

But then she hears something stirring behind her.

John writes ...

*At this, she turned around
and saw Jesus standing
there, but she did not
realize it was Jesus.*

John 20:14 (NIV)

And we don't know why she didn't.

- Maybe it was still dark or shady.
- Maybe he was a ways across the garden.
- Maybe it was because the last time she saw Jesus, He had been beaten to a bloody pulp and this man did not look like that.

But she sees Jesus and she doesn't recognize him.

So, she turns right back around and keeps staring into the tomb.

And Jesus asks her the same question

the angels asked.

"Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you're looking for?" John 20:15 (NIV)

And I think at this point, Jesus might be feeling some emotion, too, because He *knows* who she is looking for. He knows that she is in pain. He knows that she believes it's all over and there's no hope.

And then John tells us, and I think this is one of the hilarious moments in the gospels that we don't think is funny because when we read the Bible, we read it so seriously ...

*Thinking he was the
gardener ... John 20:15
(NIV)*

Bur I think whenever Mary would tell this story throughout the rest of her life, when she got to this part she would say, "You guys aree not going to believe it. I'm staring into the tomb, I'm talking to this guy behind me and *I thought he was the gardener.*"

And everybody laughs.

And do you know why she thought he was the gardener?

Because nobody expected a resurrection. Everyone expected Jesus to stay dead.

Anyway ... Mary's staring into the empty tomb and she's talking to "some guy" over her shoulder.

And she says ...

"Sir, if you have carried him away, if you know where he is, would you tell me and I will go and get him?" John 20:15
(NIV)

And Jesus says ...

"Mary." John 20:16 (NIV)

"Mary."

"Mary."

And when she hears her name and when she hears that voice, it all comes together for her and everything changes.

And the text says this, because she told John this ...

*And she turned toward him and she cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means teacher).
John 20:16 (NIV)*

And then she runs toward Jesus but He says – and we don't understand why he said this, but he does ...

He says ...

"Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to

*the Father.” John 20:17
(NIV)*

And then he says,

*“Go instead to my brothers
and tell them I am
ascending to my Father
and your father, to my God
and to your God.” John
20:17 (NIV)*

In other words, “Mary, I know you’ve already been to the city once, but I need you to go back again. This time, however, you’re not going to tell them that the tomb is empty and you don’t know where the body is. This time, you have a completely different message.”

And that’s what she did. She ran back to

the city ...

And told the disciples the good news

...

"I have seen the Lord!"

John 20:18 (NIV)

By the way, because you and I live in a world where men and women are considered "more equal" than ever before in all of human history, we miss how big of a deal that it is that Mary – a woman – is *the first* to see Jesus alive and the first to announce the news.

That's because, in the ancient world, women had no credibility. They weren't allowed to testify in court because no one would believe them.

So, if you were fabricating a story about something you wanted people in the first century to believe, you would *not* cast a woman as your star witness. This is not the story you would tell if you were trying to keep a movement alive.

But all four of the gospels do tell us *exactly that*: that a woman saw the resurrected Jesus *first* and then told the men ... because, as crazy as it might seem to people of that day, that's what happened.

"Guys and gals," Mary said, "Listen to me: God has come through for us! Jesus is who He we thought He was! Death has been arrested and our lives can begin again!"

And although nothing in the world that she could see had changed, and nothing in her circumstances had changed, *everything* had changed because Jesus was alive.

And, friends, for those of us who believe in Jesus and follow Him, that changes everything for us as well.

- It is the context for every decision
- It is the context for every relationship
- It is the context for everything we do with our time, the way we dream, the way we plan, the way we treat other people

...that Jesus is alive.

What It Means

And, if you're not a Christian and you gave me one shot to convince you that you ought to take Jesus seriously I would want you to understand *that*, too, because as important as it is that ...

- People who were eyewitnesses or *knew* the eyewitnesses to a *real historical event* talked about it and wrote about it.
- And the resurrection story is too real, too raw and too authentically human (unflatteringly so) to be made up.

I would want you to understand that what makes Christians so excited – the reason we sang the way we did at the beginning of this service and the reason we gather every Sunday – is what the resurrection *means*; the implications.

And there are so many – which is why, as I said earlier, we have a book called “The New Testament” filled with the writings of the eyewitnesses and early church leaders which enumerate and explain those implications.

For example (and I’m sharing these things very quickly because time is short) because of the Resurrection ...

1. You can trust that what Jesus

taught is true and you can build your life on it.

As we say all the time around here, following Jesus will make your life better and make you better at life.

Plus, if a guy predicts his own death and resurrection and then pulls it off, you *should* trust what he says.

Because of the Resurrection ...

2. You can know that nothing in your life is irredeemable.

If Jesus can be physically raised from the dead, your life can be turned around and raised from the ashes. God has that kind of power.

Because of the Resurrection ...

3. You can be assured that your troubles are temporary.

No matter what happens to you, no matter the depth of tragedy or pain you face, no matter how death stalks you and your loved ones, the resurrection promises you a future of immeasurable good.ⁱⁱ

Because of the Resurrection ...

4. You can know that death is not “the end.”

And I’m not talking about just going to Heaven when you die because those who believe in Jesus are promised the same exact “Easter experience” when

He returns.

One day, we too, will be raised in a body like His that will never die.

Finally, because of the Resurrection ...

5. You can be sure that God's faithfulness and love trumps your sin.

Because *that*, in the end, is what this whole thing is all about: God undoing the mess of sin that has cursed His creation and each of us.

As we have talked about in the weeks leading up to this day, we are each created in the image of God. But because of sin, our desires are warped, we are deceived and trapped, and

spiritually dead.

But, in that moment when resurrection life entered into the body of Jesus, something perfectly new in the history of the Universe had happened.ⁱⁱⁱ

God literally began a cosmic and eternal “do over” that will one day culminate when Jesus returns to make all things new.

Conclusion

And the list could go on and on of the implications of what happened that first Easter.

But as we bring this to a close I hope it is

clear that the issue isn't ...

- What "the church" has done.
- Or what hypocritical Christians have done.
- Or even what "the Bible says."

... because every "what about" you can think of is subordinate to the event – the resurrection.

If that really did happen then the only question, really, is "who is Jesus and what are you going to do about Him?"

- Because what makes Christianity unique ...
- What Christianity fundamentally

depends on ...

- What Christianity is linked to ...

... is something that *happened* on that first Easter Sunday.

Let's pray.

Father in Heaven, I pray that it wouldn't simply be the fact of the resurrection that we celebrate, it would be the implications.

I pray that that we would understand that our lives can be lived within the context of your love, and that you have us to call You father; that you are a Savior who died for us and rose from the dead to give us hope every single day in every single facet of our lives.

Take what we've heard this morning and drive it deep into our hearts.

Then give us wisdom to know what to do with what we've heard and give us the courage to do it.

In Jesus name. Amen.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Next week starting a brand new series ... check it out:

Who this is for ...

- In a relationship and wondering where it's going or where it should be going, this series will help you.

- If you're single and think that someday you will be in a relationship (which is statistically likely by the way), this series will help you.
- If you're married and your marriage is good but could be better this series will help you
- If your marriage is in trouble, this series will help you
- If you're new to church and wondering if there is any of this "Jesus stuff" is relevant to real life, this series will show you.

So ... I encourage you to come back

next Sunday. We won't have quite as big of a production as we did today but the band will still provide us with some great worship music plus a song by some chick named Bey Once ... oh, that's Beyonce'.

Anyway, I hope you'll be here ... and feel free to bring a guest, too. You can use the card in the program as an invitation, plus that video will be posted on our Facebook page so feel free to share that as well.

Stand for a blessing as we leave.

May the peace of God be in your heart

The grace of God be in your words

The love of God be in your hands

And the joy of God be in your soul

Amen

Endnotes

ⁱ John 11:48

ⁱⁱ Josh McDowell, quoted at <http://www.communicatejesus.com/40-quotes-life-changing-power-resurrection/>

ⁱⁱⁱ C.S. Lewis, quoted at <https://thevalueofsparrows.com/2016/04/11/resurrection-the-strangest-story-of-all-by-c-s-lewis/>