

Why Do You Seek the Living Among the Dead?

Bible Verses Mentioned: Luke 24:1–12

Heavenly Father, thank You for the love that You showed to us. And chiefly in that love is a demonstration of that on the cross and in the resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ, where you illumine our hearts and minds with the knowledge and love of Your Word, and the love of Your Son, Jesus. May the preaching of Your Word be Your Word for His sake and glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Please be seated.

Now, the children are going out there to do what is called digging up the hallelujahs. We tried to do this last year, but I messed it up. But they're going to dig up the hallelujahs that they buried at the beginning of Lent, and they're going to yell Hallelujah. And our job is to answer them. I don't know exactly when it will happen. One thing I want to confess to you is, and I don't know all I can't remember all the things I've told you about myself, but at one point, I was an atheist.

I didn't believe that there was a God. And this was during my high school years, actually was going to Episcopal High School, which is probably not the place where you would think that you would become an atheist. But I was listening to actually religious people who didn't believe in the historicity or the historical reality is a better way to maybe say that, of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

They would teach things like Jesus didn't raise Lazarus from the dead. They just discovered that he was buried alive. And when I listened and heard this kind of teaching that was basically taking the stories of the New Testament and essentially saying that they were mythological, maybe having a moral point or making a good thing or making something that maybe Jesus did, like shared his lunch, and so everybody kind of shared their lunch, and that was the feeding of the 5,000.

Maybe you've heard something like that before. But I would go home and argue with my mother with things that I had learned from religious leaders. And I would say, "How can you believe in this stuff, Mom?" It's a bunch of made-up stories. You know, it's just myth.

I didn't really come to a faith until I was in college when I really started to hear the Lord speaking to me through the power of His Holy Spirit and through the testimony of people that actually believed in the story of Jesus Christ and not only believed it with their message and their teaching, but also believed it in the way that they manifest it in the testimony of their lives.

And I actually kind of got upset about that, that why hadn't I been shown and given this kind of authentic representation of the Christian faith when I was a young person. And when I really began to dig into the Bible for the first time, I realized how profoundly true it is on all levels, not just good moral ways of living. Like if you followed the Bible, there would actually be most of the problems of the world would be gone.

You know that, right? I mean, the scriptures reveal to us what it truly means to be a human being, and if we will just follow it, almost 99% of the world's problems would disappear overnight. But more than that, the historic realities and claims of the gospel are true and based in history, and in fact. But they are at times very hard to believe.

And even on the day of Jesus' resurrection, there was a perplexity that was manifest both in those who first went to the tomb, the women that had gone with all of their preparatory spices to anoint the body of Jesus and to help prepare His decay in the tomb.

You know We would put a body into a rolling stone tomb, and essentially, over time, it would decay, and then eventually you'd go back and gather the bones and put them in what was called an ossuary. And so they were preparing all of that for that process to happen as Jewish burial customs. And so they were very surprised and perplexed to find an empty tomb.

And then when they went and told the disciples, their experience at first was one of thinking that they were telling in the words of our gospel today, idle tales. I've often thought about some of the-- Are they

finding the hallelujahs? I'm kind of wondering about no sign of them. Are there any out there? You know what Hallelujah means, by the way?

It comes from the Hebrew word "Halel," which we actually get the letter "H" from that. It's the praise, and "ya" is the Hebrew word for "Yahweh." And so, "Hallelujah" is "Praise Yahweh." Praise the Lord. And so we praise the Lord, and every time you see a H now, I want you to just think about that. Praise the Lord. They can't find them. You know, these kids, they bury them and then they can't find them.

So basically, over the years, I've been very interested in skeptical scholars, and I actually had an opportunity to discuss the resurrection with a New Testament scholar who didn't believe in the historicity of the resurrection. His name's Marcus Borg. I've told you about this before.

And Marcus basically believed that the stories of the New Testament were meaningful and had truthful morals to them, but they were more like parables, and he described it as being a parabolic reading of Scripture, that these aren't actual history. And as I was in the discussion with him, one of the things that I was trying to press him on and get him to say out loud, was what was the presupposition that led him to that type of skepticism?

What was it that was the underlying doubt that was preventing him from accepting and receiving the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And you know on the face, he would give intellectual objections like, "Well, you know virgins don't raise, you know give birth to babies and dead people don't rise from the dead." There's no scientific proof. Two minutes?

They must have dug them deep. So, you know, the scientific excuses for this. But when it really came down to it, and I actually, I felt successful in the discussion, even though I was probably hitting above my skis on that. But he said, "I can't bring myself to believe in a God who intervenes for some and not for others.

I can't bring myself to believe in a God who intervenes for some and not for others." And his basic problem was that he did not believe in a God who actually can change things in time and in space that God wants to actively interact with our-- Here we go.

Hallelujah! I think the kids were a little louder than us. So, you know, over the years, there have been other scholars. There was a Bishop Spong that didn't believe in the resurrection. And I actually had a chance to interact with him once, and we asked him, you know, what was behind your rejection of the historicity of these things?

And what he said was, is, "I have an atheist daughter who is an MIT professor, and I want to create a Christianity that she can accept." Wow. And this is what we do in our brains. You know, we have a hard time allowing God's truth to penetrate into our hearts and into our minds such that He intervenes in us.

And the resistance is that fundamentally we simply don't want to have to change. I like my atheist daughter exactly the way she is. Thank you very much. Let me change Christianity to make it more palatable to her. I don't believe in a God who would intervene for some and therefore others. Therefore, I'm going to change Christianity in order to make it more palatable for my intellectual satisfaction.

And I could list on and on and on the ways in which we water down and adjust the faith in order to prevent it, actually, from impacting the reality of our lives and laying claim to us that Jesus Christ is Lord and His lordship will not leave us unchanged.

It has tremendous implications for every single thing about us, from the way that we think about things, to our emotional state, to the ways that we relate to one another, to the way that we have in a sense of vocation and calling in this world and in this life.

In fact, what the gospels reveal, and this was our passage for this morning as well, is while we have this perplexity about God and the things of God, it's actually the Lord who has a certain perplexity at why we keep doing the things that we do. And here these women come to the tomb expecting to find a dead Jesus. And there are the angels of the Lord sitting on the stone waiting for them to arrive.

And they ask them a question, which is not just a question for the ladies of that day, but a question for us to wrestle with. Why are you seeking the living among the dead? Why is it that you are pursuing life here in a place that is manifesting an empty tomb to you? Well, that is a good question to ask, isn't it?

Why are you seeking the living among the dead? I'll confess another thing to you since I'm in a confessional mode. I was an atheist. I also have a record, a criminal record. I didn't tell him this in the interviewing process. But I'm revealing it now. I'll just go ahead and come clean on all my sins today. I actually was arrested at Disney World when I was a kid. Yes, it's true.

I was with my cousins. We were on the sky ride and we were doing something that I would never endorse. Do not do it if you're a young person. I think we ended the sky ride after they arrested us. I don't think they have it anymore. But we were throwing pennies off the skyride. And I actually threw a dime off. But we were met at the end of the skyride ride, and there was the Disney Police.

And did you know Disney World has police? They do. I've met them. And they were so upset with us as young kids, and they took us back to what I affectionately call the dark side of Disney World. There's a whole thing behind Disney World. And that's back where the police station is, and the characters are back there walking around with their heads off, smoking cigarettes.

I mean, it's bad. It's a dark, dark place. That's not true. It's not true. Didn't see any headless people or characters. But one of the things about a place like Disney World is that it is presenting itself as the happiest place on earth. And the reality of it is it's all a facade.

In fact, every employee at Disney World is called cast. Did you know that? You don't go and interview for a job. You rehearse for an acting role in order to be on the staff at Disney World. Because Disney World is one big giant act. It's one big giant hypocrisy.

And even there are trees at Disney World that are made out of plastic and vinyl. The Swiss Family Robinson Tree is all concrete. I hope I'm not destroying things for you that you really have faith in. But this is the mentality of so many in our world, and if we're honest ourselves, that we are constantly searching for life among things that really actually have no life.

And that may be in the form of relationships where we think, "Well, if I could just meet the right person, my soulmate, and Mr. or Mrs. Wonderful, then my life will be filled and I will be so fulfilled and rich." And, you know, marriage is great. I don't want to tell you that it's not, but it's not going to fulfill every longing and desperation of your heart, is it?

I mean, those who are married, am I right about that? I mean, it's good. It's great. It's wonderful. It's a blessing. It is a thing of beauty that the Lord has given to us, but it's not the end-all, be-all of our life. And if we put too much pressure on things like relationships, or we nurse old wounds or old shames that we have in our life, or we try to create that Disney world-like life, the beautiful, wrinkle-free life.

And we find that ultimately all of these things fall short. And I think at some point or another, we become disillusioned with the things that we think have life. I got disillusioned with Disney World that day. But I can tell you when I was a young kid, I used to think it was the most magical place on Earth. Now I don't like to go there.

And I'm sure I'll like it when I have my grandkids and all of that. I'll like going there again. I'm not knocking Disney World too much. But that's not where we'll find life. And this is what the angel of the Lord says to the women. "Why do you look for life among that which is dead?" It's a deep question for us to wrestle with on this Easter morning.

And I want to encourage you to take that question to heart because it's in the reorientation of our hearts and our minds and our lives to setting the risen Lord Jesus Christ at the heart of who we are and the heart of our being that we actually find the source of life. I was so grateful back in my college days that I met some people that had done that for themselves.

Marcus Borg would have said, "You know, science could never prove the resurrection of Jesus." And I think, generally speaking, that's probably true. Science deals with repeatable things where you can't

take Jesus and put them back in the grave and then bring them out again and measure them and get proof of life. I mean, there's no instruments that day, and we didn't have instruments back then to measure that.

But in another way, there is a certain proof to the Christian faith and the Christian life, and that's the testimony of those who believe. And it started that day with those women who ran from the empty tomb and shared the message of Jesus Christ and His resurrection with the disciples. And at first, it was met with skepticism. They're speaking idle tales.

But then, one by one, those disciples would make their way to that empty tomb beginning with Peter and come to a place of belief and amazement and the power of the resurrection. And none of them remained the same. And it was from that seed of the testimony of those believers that the proof of the resurrection of Jesus Christ remains as valid then as it is today.

And it's a belief that is manifest in the testimony of your life and my life as we take that proclamation that Jesus Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. And what do we say? Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. Amen.