

The Resurrection: Rethink the Future
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That's easily my favorite Easter reading of the appearances of...all the varied appearances of Jesus after the resurrection. The one that Dave read earlier has gotta be my favorite. And I'm gonna take you back to it. It's Luke chapter 24, begins at verse 36. And we're not gonna read the entire passage like Dave did, but we're gonna read a portion of it. And this is the day of the resurrection. And the disciples are starting to hear reports that the grave is empty! And they're in a room; they're concerned, they're weary, they're fearful, they're confused, they don't know what's all going on. And we're told that, verse 36, that suddenly, in their midst, Jesus appears. And (make sure I got it here...there we go) it says

While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst. And He said to them, "Peace be with you."

'Calm down, it's ok.'

But they were startled and frightened, and they thought they were seeing a spirit.

...that they were just dealing with a ghost, or maybe His soul has come back, or something. And so they just think they're dealing with a spirit of some sort. And He says to them

"Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

See, He had told 'em before something like this was gonna happen. And He goes on to them and He says

"See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit doesn't have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

Flesh and bones...He was there in person, in flesh, the same one they had seen buried, put in a tomb. It says

And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. And while they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement...

...it sounded too good to be true...

He said to them,

...and this is my favorite part. He says

"Have you anything to eat here?" And they gave Him a piece of broiled fish; and He took it and He ate it before them.

And then He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you."

'This is exactly what I was telling you would happen.'

He ate a fish and a bit of honeycomb. He was no ghost; He was no mirage; He was no mere spirit. It was Jesus, the One they had walked with, they had talked with, they had listened to, they had seen, they had watched be crucified. He was now with them—alive, suddenly appearing in their midst!

It's an astounding report. It is so out of the ordinary. And the other reports that came in with it that resurrection day...those are so astounding, they're so unusual, they're so unique that there's question among many that 'Did that really happen? It couldn't have!' So astounding that many refused to believe it, and would discount it as myth or legend, or something else.

The fact of the matter is the resurrection, that unique event that took place, is very defensible. You don't have to check out your mind, and your reason, and your logic, to believe that event. It's very defensible with just simple, historic research principles and applications. You just think things through, and it's a very defensible premise that yes, indeed, He was risen in their midst.

See, you have two facts if you're doing historical research. You have two pieces of data that are not debated, not debated at all. One is that Christ was crucified. There's no debate about that. He was crucified by the Romans. And independent resources outside the early church...others confirm that. There's no debate about that. There's also no debate that there were early and persistent records and reports and claims that He had risen from the dead, that people had seen Him and talked to Him; and not only seen Him and talked to Him...they had touched Him. They had seen Him eat fish. The reports were 'This is no ghost, this is no mirage. This is a real person, back from the dead, unlike anything else in history!' Those claims came early. They came immediately. And they have persisted since. There is no doubt that those claims were made, just as there's no doubt that Jesus was crucified by the Romans in Jerusalem.

Those two facts are historical data. The question is how do you put 'em together? What's the explanation for that? What's a reasonable way to explain these two historical facts that He was crucified, and immediately and persistently people began to claim that they had seen Him, they had touched Him, and He was a live from the dead? How do you put those two facts together? What's your explanation for that? Historians working with integrity have to answer that question.

Some of the proposals, some of the explanations that are made are maybe that it was a conspiracy. Maybe His disciples arranged to get that body out of the tomb, and then they began to pass the rumor and the report, and they just generated something because they wanted to start a new movement. There's the myth theory, that this was just something that grew up as a legend, that really, at first nobody really saw Him, but they began to tell stories; they wished they had, and it became a myth and a legend that was passed on generation by generation by generation. The only people that say this don't understand how myths and legends develop. There was not the time allowed for a myth or a legend to develop in this. Those reports were immediate.

So maybe it was delusion. Maybe there was what some people speak of as cognitive dissonance, where what they wanted so bad conflicted with reality so much that finally their minds just made this leap to grasp at "He's alive, because we really want Him to be alive, though we saw Him dead." Or there's the resuscitation explanation—that maybe He really didn't die; He was put in that tomb, He revived, and somehow He managed to get out, and greeted some of His followers, and then went off into the wilderness. And that's how the story began.

Then there's the other explanation—He rose from the dead, as a resurrection. That's a sufficient explanation for those two pieces of historical data and how to put them together. That's a sufficient explanation. I think when you go through and you compare the other theories and ideas, it becomes the necessary explanation; because I don't think the others can cut it. I don't think they can fully explain the fact that He was dead, and immediately and persistently the reports of Him being raised again were published and went out. Now I say that...it's defensible. I don't say that lightly, and I don't say that tritely, and I don't say that argumentatively. Anybody can pursue that kind of thinking process. What I encourage you to do is pursue it as a thinking process. *Process it.* With integrity; and wrestle with it. It is a very defensible position. I'm convinced of it.

It's not a very explainable event, though. It itself can explain why we have the reports and the crucifixion. It can explain why we have those two things—the resurrection report and a crucifixion report. You know we can explain that data. But it doesn't explain itself. I mean, a resurrection is beyond me. How do you explain that a person is tortured, beaten, is put on a cross, hung there 'til He dies, a spear is thrust into His side, and water and blood gushes out, they confirm He's dead, they wrap Him, they put Him in a tomb, and they seal it. And for three days He's in that tomb. That body is dead! Lifeless. Destroyed. And yet, it appears three days later, out of nowhere, in the middle of a room—eating fish. How do you explain that? I can't. I can't explain what was happening at the molecular-cellular level, and what was happening and all the workings that brought that body back to life, renewed it, restored it, and made it a body that will never die. That's mystery...that's God doing something by the exertion of His power that is beyond our comprehension and explanation.

I look at the resurrection, I see it as defensible, I don't try to explain it, the mechanics of it; but I move right to the question that always gets me most on Easter. Defending it—I'm comfortable with that. Explaining it—I don't even try. The question I wrestle with on Easter, and I think it's a question most of us wrestle with, is the practical implications. If we decide that this unexplainable event, and yet very defensible and believable, if we decide that it really took place, then what does that mean for us and how we live? I mean, what do you do if you believe that?

And all the other explanations and possibilities just don't hold it, and you come to this position and say, "He did—He's raised!" What do you do? How does that shape your life? I'm gonna give you two things today. Two things that result, when you take that reality and you say 'I believe it...even though I can't fully explain it, I believe it'...how's it gonna shape my life?

And the first thing that happens if you respond to that and you grip that—the resurrection is gonna call you to rethink the future. We don't think very well about the future. We really don't. In fact, I find that many Christians don't think very well about the future. The resurrection calls us to rethink the future, and to think about it clearly, concretely, and confidently. In a culture that looks to the future and is fuzzy, is hazy, is unsure, is complicated and speculation, that can't say 'I know for sure,'—the resurrection calls us to be a people who look to the future, and to look to it clearly, concretely, and confidently.

It does that on two levels, and let me talk about that a second. It calls us to rethink the future on a grand scale in terms of where the world is headed, what is the flow of human history, what lies out there ahead for this mound of dust we're floating on in the middle of space. The Bible tells us when we look at that the whole grand scheme of things, that resurrection of Jesus was not an isolated, random event. But it fits in a very definite and distinctive plan and process and sequence that God has for this earth. You see, the day Jesus chose to go to the cross, the day He carried the cross, the day He went to the grave, He broke the power of darkness. He defeated the power of darkness and of evil. And the day He was raised to rule, the day God brought Him up from that grave as King, as Messiah, as Lord of all, He started the renewal of all things. The Apostle Paul refers to Jesus and His resurrection as the beginning. It is the beginning of setting all things right. When Jesus rose from the grave the entire course of human history changed and was set in a new direction. The Apostle Paul speaks of that. And I kinda...not kinda. I *want* you to hear this in the words that the scripture speaks of as it looks to the future clearly, confidently, and concretely. It says, in 1 Corinthians 15, and that's the text I'll take you to. And it says in 1 Corinthians 15

But now Christ has been raised from the dead...

...Paul's sayin' that's happened...

...the first fruits of those who were asleep...

In other words, He's the beginning of it all. He's the first one to come back from the dead. But the word 'first fruits' means there's gonna be others. And he goes on and expands on that a little bit, and then he comes down to verse 23 and he says it's gonna be in a sequence, an order. He says

...first Christ is raised, and after that those who are Christ's will be raised at His coming, and then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. And the last enemy to be destroyed will be death.

Quick highlights from there. Number one—Christ, He's been raised. That's what Easter is about. But that's just the first step in this sequence of renewal. Verse 23 says those who are Christ's, those who are entered into a faith commitment to Him, who have committed their allegiance and their lives to Him, who have trusted Him, who name Him as their Messiah and King...they will some day be raised like Him. His body is the prototype. Some day you will be able to appear in a room and eat fish, even though you've died. And people will recognize you; they'll be able to touch you. Only that new body will never, ever feel sickness or death—ever.

But it isn't just that there's a renewal of Christ's body after His death, and the reversal of evil, and the resurrection of His people. There's this one...it says "Then comes the end." And it speaks of that as He hands over the kingdom after He's abolished all power and rule and authority. And it goes on to say even death, all darkness is defeated. There is gonna come a time and a place when Jesus comes to the Father and He presents to Him this world the way it was meant to be, and all that is wrong will be set right. And there will no longer be any injustice, inequality, there will no longer be any sorrow, any pain, any sickness, any dying. There will no longer be any pride and lust and greed. There will no longer be any sorrow. When Jesus rose from the grave as King over all, as Messiah, He started this sequence. And it will end when we are like Him, in a kingdom that has been totally transformed and presented to God. This world, the way it was meant to be. That's the future—clearly, concretely, confidently, viewed through the resurrection.

What does that mean for us, though, on a personal level? When we look at the future, for me personally? That's where the world is headed as a result of the resurrection. What can I say about the individual, people like you and me? And here what I'm gonna do is I'm gonna read a teaching from Jesus. It's one of my favorites. It's the first time He...actually the first record we have of Him teaching His disciples. Crowds had gathered around, and He'd gone up to a mountain so that they called this eventually the Sermon on the Mount. And He went up there, and we're told that when the crowds gathered He sat down and the people gathered around Him. His disciples, those who had decided, 'You are the Messiah,' gathered around Him. And He began to teach them, and this is what He said to 'em. And it's a familiar passage to many. He says *"Blessed are the poor in spirit..."* Blessed are those who have no claim on God's goodness other than to cry, "Father, have mercy on me. I'm a sinner!"

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God."

"Blessed are those who mourn..." Blessed are those who care enough to have sorrow at loss. Blessed are those, in a world that pursues happiness with desperation; He says blessed are those who know what it is to hurt.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

"Blessed are the gentle," those who will persistently pursue the good without pressing things and forcing things that should not and can not be forced, but will leave them in God's hands.

"Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth."

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," who have a drive...a drive, a deep desire to not only do what is right, but to see right done. He says *"...they will be satisfied."*

"Blessed are the merciful," those who look with sorrow upon those, and pity, and goodness, and extend help to those who are hurting, even when their hurting and their suffering is a consequence of their sin.

"Blessed are the merciful," He says, *"for they shall be granted mercy."*

"Blessed are the pure in heart," those of one devotion, of one allegiance, of one affection, those committed to God with all their heart, with all their soul, with all their mind. He says blessed are they, *"for they shall actually see God."*

"Blessed are the peacemakers," those who, instead of driving people apart, bring 'em together; those who turn anger into acceptance and alienation into affection. He says blessed are those, *"for they shall be called the sons of God."*

And then he says, *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,"* those whose commitment to what is right, and pursue it no matter what the cost, He says blessed are they, *"for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

And He goes on and He says even more blessed are those who are committed to the right One, Jesus, and will suffer insult, persecution, and all manner of things said falsely against them. *"Blessed are they, for their reward in heaven is great."*

What I just read is one of the most common passages ever preached. And there's commentary after commentary preached on it. And usually what you'll find when you read through there is it's taught, and it's presented, as a list of commands, that this is Jesus telling His disciples what they must do. Or others will say, 'No, it's not commands. This is His list of values. He's trying to outline for you that this is what really matters.' Listen...these are not commands, and these are not a list of values. *This is what Jesus says will be. This is the future...spoken by the One who will bring it to pass.* The Resurrected One looks to the future, and He says if you're poor in spirit you're gonna inherit the earth. If you mourn, you're gonna be comforted. If you're gentle, this earth is gonna be yours. If you hunger and thirst for righteousness, you are gonna be satisfied. That's what will be, told us by the One who will make it happen. That's the future; worldview, personal view.

What do we do? Said I'd tell you two things. Number one, you rethink the future when the resurrection. Number two, is you follow Jesus forward into that future. He's not a speculative philosopher. He's not a theologian putting together all the theories of life after death. He is the Resurrected One who has initiated and started the future progression of renewing all things. And He is the One who has said, on the personal level, what that means. You rethink the future, and you follow Him with that first basic, basic step of saying, 'I trust You. I believe You.'

And then you follow His commands. You heed His warnings. You pursue His promises. You cherish His teachings. You follow Him. It's not about following a pastor; it's not about following a church; it's not about following some system of theology. It is *you follow Him*. You take His word and you answer to it, beginning with 'I trust You,' and you begin to live it out. That's the way forward after the resurrection.

Two last comments—to those that have been thinkin' about Jesus, wonderin' what it's all about, and you've just been thinkin', you know, 'What's this Easter all about?' I've tried to make it simple and clear. And I've tried to make it very clear, concrete, and frankly, unemotional. I'm convinced that a commitment to Christ needs to be a clear-headed faith. There's a lot of emotion to Christianity. There were songs we sang today I could not sing because of the emotion. But that's not what I'm calling you to. All that emotion, everything else that's involved in Christianity, simply comes from a quiet heart that looks at the resurrection, rethinks the future, and says, 'I believe. I'll follow You. I'll follow You.'

Now, for those who have looked at the resurrection, rethought the future, and have committed to following Jesus, I have a quick comment for you. Jesus says to you, and He said in this passage in Matthew 5 when He was done with His teaching and He looked at His disciples who believed Him, who accepted that view of the future, who understood that that's the way things are gonna be on the world scale and the personal level, He looks at 'em and says,

"You are the salt of the earth...you are the light of the world."

You are the people who have the taste of truth. You are the people who shine a light. And so you're called to be witnesses of that. And that's our commitment as a congregation.

And I'll ask you to stand with me as we close, and Joel's gonna come and lead us in a congregational song that we have committed to as a congregation. It's not just a song; it's a prayer. As a people who look at the resurrection, have rethought the future, and have committed to following Jesus, this is our prayer. And Joel, if you'll lead us...

[Congregation sings the prayer song]