

Recently, Jane and I had the privilege of hearing John Lennox (**picture**), Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford speak. During that talk Dr. Lennox shared this:

“Stephen Hawkins was just ahead of me at Cambridge, I can remember him quite well although I did not know him. I was rather amused when the Times interviewed him about religion; he said: *‘Religion is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark.’* I was asked to comment, so I said; *‘Atheism is a fairy story for people afraid of the light.’*”

Yet, we have no light, we have no hope, we have no faith...there is no Christianity without the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. **The Foundation of our Faith is the Resurrection.**

If you’re here today and have difficulty believing in Christ’s resurrection, it’s understandable. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is so incredible, so outside our human experience that we ought to have difficulty with it. The biblical account of the resurrection means we’re asked to believe that someone dead and decomposing for three days became alive again. If initially you’re a skeptic, you have good reason to be. Christianity doesn’t mean we park our brains at the door. It’s not a blind leap of faith, but it does require faith.

As we come to the end of our series in Luke’s gospel, *Finding Jesus*, Luke’s account of Christ’s resurrection is remarkably brief given its significance in the gospel message. Luke simply reports the words of the angels: *“He is not here, but has risen.”* It seems that his goal is not to interpret the meaning of the resurrection, but rather to establish the reality and historicity on the basis of solid, eyewitness testimony. Please turn in your Bible to Luke 24:1-12 (p. 884). As we work through this, let me suggest that...

Without the resurrection, life has no purpose. Let’s consider the alternative. If there is no resurrection, then Sartre (**picture**) is right, *“Life is an empty bubble on the sea of nothingness.”* Some years ago a British minister was interviewed and he insightfully said: *“What makes life purposeless and petty and vain and indeed intolerable to thinking men and women? It is the thought that it leads nowhere and means nothing.”* Isn’t that the case if there is no life after death? If this is all that there is?

Frank Sinatra (**picture**) made that famous quote seen on bumper stickers, *“He who dies with the most toys wins.”* But wins what? If there’s no resurrection, you just die. It’s running a race that has no goal. It’s building something that will be left unfinished. There’s no ultimate purpose or meaning and that’s the way it is for much of the world. Life is a dead end street.

Is it any wonder that people with no certainty about the future are easily depressed? Is it any wonder that there are hundreds of thousands of students in our universities that have no meaning for life? How awful to find oneself taking part in such meaninglessness.

One college student with a month from graduation, when asked the inevitable question: *What are you going to do after graduation?* responded: *“I have no idea. It seems as if I’m just a part of a terrible death march.”* The more secular and atheistic our culture grows, the more hopeless and suicidal it becomes. If this is all there is, is it any wonder so many succumb to despair?

Jesus’ resurrection gives life purpose. Death has been conquered. This isn’t all there is. We can have a sense of meaning because we can live for something more. There’s more than just getting up in the morning, going through the routine, going home at night, going to bed, getting up in the morning, going through the same routine with no goal, nothing in mind as to what’s out there.

It’s the difference between an elderly believer and an unregenerate one. A believer at the end of life knows life is about to begin. An unbeliever is miserable without real hope that there’s something more.

Those who know the Lord should be the most hopeful and joyful. We’re going somewhere. Christ’s resurrection changes this life from a senseless runaround to a significant enterprise. The resurrection makes all the difference. The one who knows Christ is a different person. That’s why...

2. The resurrection is foundational to Christianity. It’s called “the Graceland Hoax.” There are actually people who don’t believe Elvis (**picture**) died. This despite the fact that he was pronounced dead by several physicians, autopsied, the cause of death determined, and prepared for burial by two morticians, dressed by his wardrobe manager, made-up by his personal cosmetologist, his hair colored to jet black by the famous Larry Geller, and then viewed by his entire family before closing the seamless copper casket. All this from an article in *The American Funeral Director* entitled “Elvis Has Really Left the Building.” Many treat Christ’s resurrection like that, suggesting it’s a big hoax. British philosopher and cultural critic, Matthew Arnold (**picture**) said, *“There are no resurrections because there are no miracles, and therefore no man has ever been raised, truly, who was dead.”*

The Christian faith is unique out of all of the world's major religions. It's founded on the living person of Jesus Christ, who was raised bodily from the dead. It's not primarily a system of moral or doctrinal beliefs, though it has definite moral standards and doctrinal truths. Christianity is founded on the living Lord Jesus Christ, crucified for our sins, risen from the dead, ascended into heaven, and returning soon in power and glory. *"Christianity is in its very essence a resurrection religion,"* says Dr. John Stott (picture). *"The concept of resurrection lies at its heart. If you remove it, Christianity is destroyed."*

The resurrection of Jesus Christ affirms to us that He is indeed the Son of God, just as He claimed to be. It proves that His sacrifice for sin has been accepted and the work of salvation is completed (Rom. 4:24-25). Those who trust in Him can live a new life because Jesus is alive and imparts His resurrection power to them (Rom. 6:4). Then, our Lord's resurrection declares that He's the righteous Judge who will return one day and judge the world.

It's no surprise that Satan has attacked the truth of Christ's resurrection. If Christ is not risen from the dead, then Jesus was a liar. The Lord Jesus predicted His own death and resurrection on numerous occasions. Why believe or follow a liar? If Christ didn't rise from the dead, His death on the cross didn't secure the forgiveness of our sins.

The resurrection was God's seal of approval on the sacrifice that Christ offered, so that the Apostle Paul could rightly say, *"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins"* (1 Cor. 15:17). His resurrection guarantees us that He conquered sin, death, and hell, and He will keep His promise to return and take us to be with Him eternally in heaven. A dead man couldn't do that, the risen Savior can! A dead Savior is no Savior. Everything in Christianity rests on this historical fact.

Through the centuries there have been those who've tried to explain away the resurrection. Two theories most often mentioned to deny the resurrection are the (1) **kidnap theory** and the (2) **swoon theory**.

The kidnap theory proposes that Jesus' body was stolen by His disciples and hidden, then the disciples said that He was alive. The Jewish leaders tried to promote this theory, but the Roman guards would have prevented it. They wouldn't have risked their lives which was the penalty for not properly standing their watch for a bribe. The disciples couldn't have moved the heavy stone and stolen the body without the Roman guards' knowledge or permission. Besides, the disciples were too depressed, confused, and fearful to pull off a daring grave robbery. If they'd done so, it's inconceivable that they'd have boldly preached the resurrection in the face of persecution.

The initial thought of the women was that someone stole Jesus' body. If that had been confirmed, the apostles wouldn't have preached the resurrection as they later did. Of the twelve disciples only John is believed to have died a natural death. The others were tortured and executed. Yet, all of the disciples went to their deaths confidently affirming the resurrection. Who dies for a lie?

The Swoon Theory proposes that Jesus never really died but merely *swooned* on the cross. When He was placed in the tomb, the coolness revived Him and He escaped by removing the two ton stone and overpowering a detachment of Roman soldiers. Most liberal theologians deny the bodily resurrection of Christ, suggesting that He didn't really die. But the Romans were very good at what they did and wouldn't have botched the job. There's no denying Jesus died on the cross.

The late J. Vernon McGee (picture) received a letter from a lady who listened to his radio program. She wrote: *"Our preacher said that on Easter Jesus just swooned on the cross and that the disciples nursed him back to health. What do you think?"* McGee replied, *"Dear Sister, beat your preacher with a leather whip. Nail him to a cross. Hang him in the sun for six hours. Run a spear through his heart. Embalm him. Put him in an airless tomb for three days. Then see what happens."*

On top of all that, the burial of Jesus in the never used tomb of Joseph of Arimathea is reported by all four Gospel writers, providing solid evidence that there was a tomb to be discovered empty. It's impossible to imagine that the name of this individual was invented by the church.

The core truth of the Christian faith is that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. The gospel rests on the death and resurrection of Christ. This explains why Luke culminates his gospel with a report of some of the appearances of Jesus after He'd been raised from the dead.

3. The Christian faith rests on the historical evidence of Jesus' bodily resurrection, not on subjective experience or feelings. In this account in Luke, we have most of the major lines of evidence given to us very clearly. It's noteworthy that none of the four Gospels describe the resurrection, because no one saw it. What we have is evidence after that fact. It's like a crime scene. No one saw the crime take place but conclude what happened based on the evidence. That's how we must approach Christ's resurrection.

We don't know what time Jesus arose from the dead, but it must have been very early. The earthquake and angel (Matt. 28:2-4) opened the tomb, not to let Jesus out but to let witnesses in. *"Come and see, go and tell!"* is the mandate for the Church! *So, what's the evidence?*

The day of the resurrection. The gospels emphasize that the resurrection occurred on the 1st day of the week, Sunday. The fact that the early church changed the day of worship from the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday) to Sunday can only be explained by the fact that Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday morning.

The apostles were steeped in Judaism with its strict observance of Saturday as the day of worship. Why change from Saturday to Sunday? It wasn't some strategic planning decision made to distinguish Christianity from Judaism! With Jesus' resurrection the last Jewish Sabbath ever recognized ended. They changed to Sunday to celebrate Christ's resurrection. Sunday became "the Lord's Day" when the church gathered for worship and instruction. We worship on Sunday to celebrate that our Savior has risen from the dead!

The women came prepared to take care of a corpse. Since we're familiar with the events, it's difficult for us to appreciate the shock these women felt when they discovered the empty tomb. They didn't have a lifetime of Easter church services, Easter baskets or dinners creating space in their brains for the resurrection. When they showed up at the tomb, they were absolutely expecting to find Jesus' body still in it. They're depressed and mourning with no hope. They didn't expect anything but more sorrow and tears.

If you take flowers to the cemetery, do you expect to see an empty grave? If you do see one, would it occur to you that the deceased had risen from the dead. Of course not! The empty tomb compounded their grief.

And the church would never have invented the account of these women. Women in that culture weren't considered reliable witnesses.

The stone was rolled away. Luke merely records the fact that when they arrived, they found the stone rolled away. It would have been a large, round stone placed in a groove in front of the tomb. It would take several strong men to roll that stone out of the groove. The soldiers guarding the tomb wouldn't have moved the stone or allowed anyone else to do so.

One attorney, Frank Morison, set out to refute the resurrection. While he appreciated Jesus' life, he thought that early followers had attached the myth of the resurrection onto the story of Jesus. But as he examined the facts with his legal background, he eventually wrote a bestselling book, *Who Moved the Stone?* (**picture**) in which he set out the evidence for Christ's resurrection.

Jesus' body was missing from the tomb. The women expected a corpse and an occupied tomb. The empty tomb didn't produce *belief*, but *bewilderment*! Their first response was to assume—not that Jesus rose from the dead—but that His body had been taken. The empty tomb intensifies their distress.

Does the empty tomb intensify your distress? It should, if you have doubts about the resurrection. Because you must explain what happened to His body. Something happened, either natural or supernatural. Who took Jesus' body?

Jesus' resurrection is announced by angels. The women encounter two men in dazzling apparel who gently rebuked them for seeking the living One among the dead. "*He is not here, but He has risen.*" They remind them of Jesus' prediction that He'd rise again on the third day. If there's any doubt to the identity of these "*men*," verse 23 affirms they're angels. While critics doubt the existence of angels, they do so because of naturalistic bias and must deny the testimony of several credible witnesses to the event. Just as God sent angels to announce the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, He sent angels to announce the resurrection to these faithful women.

Jesus had prophesied His own resurrection. There's a whimsical story about a town suffering from a serious drought. It was farm country and the crops were dying. The local preacher decided to hold a prayer meeting to ask God to send rain. He asked all those who believed in God's power to join him at the church for a prayer meeting. When the time came for the prayer meeting, the church was nearly filled. But when the preacher got up and looked around, he said, "This prayer meeting is called off. We don't have the faith to pray. I don't see a single umbrella."

Repeatedly, Jesus had told them He'd be crucified and then resurrected. The resurrection is inseparable from Jesus' prophetic word about His death and resurrection. It's the Word of God that makes sense of everything. The angels remind His followers to remember Jesus' words. His atoning death is only fully understood in the light of the Bible. His resurrection is only understood in conjunction with His Word. There's a connection we must not miss – those who reject God's Word, also reject Jesus' resurrection.

The point in unmistakable – we're to be people of the whole Book. We're to devour the Word. Our minds and hearts will begin to understand and embrace the massive dimensions of Christ only through the light of Scriptures.

Are you a person of the Book? Is reading God's Word part of your daily routine? If it's not, is your heart troubled today? If we don't fill our hearts with God's Word, they'll be filled with everything else. It's why some of you struggle with anger, fear, anxiety or depression – you're not a person of the Book. How sad it is when believers forget God's Word and live defeated lives.

The empty tomb isn't self-explanatory. It's Jesus' word, it's the word of angels that explains it. It's this word that sums up the gospel message – Jesus died and rose again with a glorious, everlasting body that'd never die again.

They're frightened and confused because they didn't yet believe what Jesus had said. Unless and until we believe God's Word, life is confusing. When we're in the Word and believe the Word, life begins to make sense.

Friend, are you in the Word? One reason that Billy Graham (**picture**) was such a powerful preacher is because his constant refrain was, "*The Bible says...*" Graham's sermons were powerful examples of biblical exposition, pointing people to the truth of God's Word, challenging his listeners to believe God's Word because the Bible is in fact the Word of the living God.

The witnesses are identified. "*Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them...*" (vs. 10). Often we hear the term, "unnamed sources." That should create a question mark about the reliability of the information. But these women are identified. Since they were likely known to the early church, they could give testimony to the accuracy and truthfulness of Luke's account. They were excited to tell everyone the good news that Jesus rose from the grave, He was alive. Truly understanding the good news about Jesus always compels us to tell others.

4. Everyone responds to Christ's resurrection.

The women believed. These women didn't expect Jesus to be alive. They came to care for a corpse. After finding the empty tomb and being rebuked by angels because they'd forgotten Jesus' words about His resurrection, they became ecstatic witnesses that Jesus is alive! They became as Augustine (**picture**) said, "*the first preachers of the resurrection.*" Women were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb. Sadly, some religions denigrate women. A popular daily prayer of Jewish men during the time of Jesus was, "*I thank you, God, that I was not born a dog or a woman.*" Islam teaches the absolute subservience of women, equating them with pets. But Christianity was launched by men and women together. In Christ, there is no male or female, Jew or Greek, slave, or free—we are all one in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:28).

Jesus' disciples didn't believe. Jesus' chosen men weren't impressed. They thought the women's story was "nonsense." Luke underlines this, adding "*they did not believe them.*" They weren't poised on the brink of belief. Even when women they knew well told them of their experience, they're skeptics. They refused to believe and poured cold water on this exciting news.

But we probably would have done the same thing, given our own sin and dullness. They were the ones Jesus had prayed over an entire night before calling them and who He prayed for on the night He was arrested. Jesus had explicitly told them about His death and resurrection. But they dismiss the women's witness and angels' words as ludicrous. They ridiculed these women as being out of touch with reality. Alexander Maclaren (**picture**), "*The evidential value of the disciples' slowness to believe cannot be overrated.*"

Like us, they'd heard and not heard God's Word. Most of Scripture is very clear and intelligible. Mark Twain (**picture**) said, "*It's not what I don't understand about the Bible that bothers me. It's what I do understand.*" The disciples failed to put into practice what they understood. Our spiritual growth begins by obeying and applying what we know and understand in God's Word.

And what hope this gives us for the many that we love and pray for that they will come to know Christ. Like the disciples, they may still come through their unbelief and into faith in Jesus Christ. MercyMe (**picture**) released their hit song *I Can Only Imagine* in 1999. That song has been played numerous times at funerals as one imagines being in heaven and in the presence of God. The movie by the same name was released last year with much greater success than ever expected. The problem with Jesus' disciples who had Jesus' own words and promises was that they just couldn't imagine. But what about us?

Peter at least investigates for himself. Anyone who doubts the resurrection would be wise to at least follow the example of Peter. He went to check it out for himself. At this point, he marveled but did not yet fully believe. But at least he was considering it and would not stop until he was sure that he understood what God wanted him to know about Jesus.

What could have later changed these men into bold witnesses, willing to suffer persecution and death, if not the fact that they saw the risen Lord Jesus?

Conclusion: One remarkable thing about our passage is that the announcement of the resurrection is initially met with skepticism and unbelief.

Why were the women initially perplexed? Why did the apostles not believe? Jesus had told them multiple times that He'd be raised from the dead. They heard it over and over again. They should have known.

I think it's because it's easy for us to believe in death, but hard to believe in life. We see so much death all around us. It's easier to believe in what we see than what we hear in the gospel. We see sickness. We go to funerals. The ones we bury don't come back. It's easy to believe in death; that's what we see.

Jesus' resurrection calls us from our old belief in death to a new belief in life. It calls us to move from simply believing in what you see, to believing in what you hear in the gospel. Maybe you accept the historical fact of the bodily resurrection

of Jesus, but don't understand what it really means? In other words, there's the fact of the resurrection, but what about the impact of the resurrection of Jesus? Here are **three things** it means to us:

It means that Jesus is more than just a man. Had there been no resurrection, we'd never have heard of Jesus. His influence would have been buried with Him in the tomb. History is full of obscure characters that gathered a small group of followers and are forgotten today. If there is no resurrection, we're just a bunch of fools. The Apostle Paul contemplated that issue when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:13-18: "*If there's no resurrection, there's no living Christ. And face it— if there's no resurrection for Christ, everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you've staked your life on is smoke and mirrors. If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot. But the truth is Christ has been raised up...*" (The Message). Thousands of Jewish rebels were crucified and buried. Only One came back from the grave. That's what makes Jesus totally unique. He is more than just a man. He's the God-man.

It means that we can be forgiven. The two biggest problems we all have are sin and death. Everyone on this planet has done or said the wrong things—that's sin. Nobody is immune. The other problem, death, is related to sin because the Bible says, "*The soul that sins—it shall die.*" So obtaining forgiveness for your sins deals with the death problem as well. The Bible calls that salvation or "*being saved.*" One of the clearest salvation verses is Romans 10:9: "*If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the death, you will be saved.*" Why doesn't the Bible say, "Believe in your heart Jesus was born of a virgin?" Or, "that Jesus walked on water?" Why? Because it's the resurrection that makes Jesus totally unique.

The only way you can go to heaven is to have your sins forgiven, and the only way you can have your sins forgiven is to believe in Christ's resurrection.

It reminds us that the grave isn't the end. One out of one people dies. We don't like to talk about death. We use words like, "So-and So passed on" or "So-and-So is no longer with us." We have a hard time saying, "He died." Death is inevitable, but the bigger question is: *What happens to a person after they die?* Jesus' resurrection lets us know for certain the grave isn't the end.

Before He was resurrected, Jesus taught that each of us would also be resurrected. Jesus said, "*Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned*" (John 5:28-29).

Many don't believe in life after death. Just because you may not believe in God or an afterlife won't change the fact there's something beyond the grave.

In January 2000, leaders in Charlotte, NC, invited their favorite son, Billy Graham, to a luncheon in his honor. Billy hesitated to accept because he was struggling with Parkinson's disease. But the Charlotte leaders said, "We don't expect a major address. Just come and let us honor you." So, he agreed. After wonderful things were said about him, Dr. Graham stepped up to the podium and said: "I'm reminded today of Albert Einstein, the great physicist who this month has been honored by *TIME* magazine as the 'Man of the Century.'

Einstein was once traveling from Princeton on a train when the conductor came down the aisle, punching tickets of each passenger. When he came to Einstein, Einstein searched everywhere but he couldn't find his. The conductor said, 'Dr. Einstein, I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it.'

Einstein nodded appreciatively. The conductor continued down the aisle. As he was ready to move to the next car, he turned and saw him down on his hands and knees looking under his seat. The conductor rushed back and said, 'Dr. Einstein, don't worry. I know who you are and I'm sure you bought a ticket.' Einstein looked at him and said, 'Young man, I too, know who I am. **WHAT I DON'T KNOW IS WHERE I'M GOING!**'"

Having said that, Billy Graham continued, "See the suit that I'm wearing? It's a brand new suit. I went out and bought a new suit for this luncheon and one more occasion. This is the suit in which I'll be buried. But when you hear I'm dead, I don't want you to remember the suit. I want you to remember this: ***I NOT ONLY KNOW WHO I AM...I ALSO KNOW WHERE I'M GOING!***"

Friend, do you know where you're going? Jesus said, "*I am the way and the truth and the life!*" (John 14:6). Have you trusted Him as your Savior? You too can be resurrected to life, eternal life But you only have life after death if Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior? Is He? If not, please ask Him to come into your life today.