

Jesus' Resurrection: Not Just a Nice Story.

Lord's Prayer: Rotted & Grounded in Love.

April 27th 2016

The story of the Resurrection.

Millions of people celebrating the resurrection this weekend around the world.

Millions of lives changed because of this story.

But is it just a nice story? Do nice stories have the power to change lives? Transform nations?

Is that the stuff of legends?

Or is there something more going on here?

Read the entire NT...

You will have to face the centrality of the resurrection.

I know many people will have all sorts of questions, and problems with Christianity, or the existence of God.

McLeans Magazine's Easter edition entitled "Did Jesus Really Exist?"

"The science is in, research is casting doubt on the few things we thought we knew about Jesus. Our growing number of experts think he didn't exist at all."

I'd like to see McLeans try this sort of thing with Islam or Buddhism as the target.

It's true many people seem to have philosophical and scientific stumbling blocks around faith, but I believe that at the core of most arguments lie deep untapped issues of personal pain that cause the greatest stumbling blocks to faith.

In 1911 George Bernard Shaw was asked, "How are atheists produced"?

This is how he responded.

"In probably nine cases out of ten, what happens is something like this. A beloved wife or husband or child or sweethearts is gnawed to death by cancer, stultified by epilepsy, stuck dumb and helpless by apoplexy or strangled by croup or diphtheria; and the looker-on, after praying vainly to God to refrain from such horrible and wanton cruelty, indignantly repudiates faith in the divine monster, and becomes not merely indifferent and skeptical, but fiercely and actively hostile to religion."

I believe this evaluation is correct.

O that God would give us the grace to attend to our pain and struggles honestly and with integrity; Lord give us the grace to grieve well the losses in our lives.

In light of these very real questions and doubts to faith I can't help but keep coming back to the centrality of the resurrection and how this answers many of our questions around pain and suffering.

John Stott puts it this way in his book "The Cross of Christ",

“The fact of suffering undoubtedly constitutes the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith, and has been in every generation. Its distribution and degree appear to be entirely random and therefore unfair. Sensitive spirits ask if it can possibly be reconciled with God’s justice and love.”

This is one of the reasons why the cross is so central to our faith. It reminds us that God is a god who willingly suffered. Who left the safe confines of heaven for earth, who showed us what God is like; a servant God who is in the business of laying down his life for all humanity.

A God who weeps, a God who suffers, who understands betrayal, loneliness, abandonment and death.

Tim Keller says it this way.

‘We do not know the reason God allows evil and suffering to continue, or why it is so random, but now at least we know what the reason is not. It cannot be that he does not love us. It cannot be that he doesn’t care. He is so committed to our ultimate happiness that he was willing to plunge into the greatest depths of suffering himself. He understands us, he has been there, and he assures us that he has a plan to eventually wipe away every tear. Someone might say, “But that’s only half an answer to the question ‘Why?’ Yes, but it is the half we need.’

This is why Good Friday and Easter are so pinnacle to the Christian faith.

Skeptics and doubters have many questions, but for me, so many of these questions can be addressed in Jesus’ death and resurrection.

I want to piggyback on the earlier video that considering how quickly the Christian movement began, the eyewitnesses must have seen something.

Not only were the earlier disciples brave, they travelled vast distances to tell this story to others, they risked there very lives, even ship-wrecked, robbed and beaten... they faced incredible opposition, all to proclaim with great vigor that Christ had been raised from the dead.

And that many of the earlier followers paid for this belief with their very lives.

We all know that lies turn men into cowards not heroes...yet these men took the world by storm. Their passionate conviction of the resurrection took them to incredible lengths; and meant everything.

So within a generation the Christian message was spreading into Asia, Africa and Europe at a tremendous rate.

The gospel message spreading rapidly throughout the world was like a missile.

This movement was an unstoppable force.

So we have got to find the launching pad of the missile.

What would it have been?

What sort of events could have caused such a burning conviction in so many people?

To help us discover the launching pad, let's look at what we know.

Now I know some of you have no need to think through the evidence of Jesus' resurrection.

For you the words of that ol' hymn are enough. "You ask me how I know He lives; He lives within my heart."

So true. But are we not called to love the Lord with our whole mind and heart?

A lot of people don't have a problem with God. But bring up Jesus and people get all wiggled out. To follow Jesus isn't politically correct these days at all.

Considering how misrepresented Jesus has been, particularly lately, and how off base the current evangelical movement is, it sounds more like a political party than it does a movement! In light of this growing trend I understand why so many are turned off by Jesus.

Reminds me of Gandhi's statement he once made. *"I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."*

I wonder if this is the biggest stumbling block people have to faith today? It's not Jesus. It's how he is often misrepresented.

This is why we are to focus on Jesus and not get side-tracked.

So many people want to know the difference between Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Bahia, Sikhism, and any other faith. People wonder what the big deal is about Jesus.

I find it interesting that if people tried to worship Mohammed or Siddhartha otherwise known as Buddha, they would have told them not to worship them.

Never happened with Jesus. After the resurrection Jesus' disciples met him in Galilee and scripture said that when they saw Jesus, they worshipped. And Jesus didn't reprimand them, instead he welcomed it.

Matt 28:16-17 says, "Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee going to the mountainside where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him – but some of them doubted."

Doubting Thomas when he saw Jesus' hands and feet post resurrection, scripture said he worshipped saying, "My Lord and my God."

These mono-theistic Jews, who believed God is One, worshipped Jesus.

That should rouse our attention...they must have seen something!

The big deal about the resurrection is that if Jesus did rise from the dead, and ascend into heaven, then it was the public vindication of Jesus radical claims to be the absolute revelation of God.

That he was God.

Did you know that Christianity makes claims that can be investigated historically? It is a faith that is rooted in historical events.

So let's look at the NT not as a holy book but simply a collection of historical documents written in the Greek, handed down to us right from the 1st C. telling this remarkable story of Jesus.

Let's approach this text in the same way we approach other ancient documents throughout history.

You might be surprised to learn that when ancient historians approach the NT documents with this attitude, the majority of scholars today accept the central facts undergirding the inference of the resurrection.

And we're not just talking about conservative scholars but the broad mainstream of critical and historical scholarship today.

Let's look at what contributed to the launch pad of this movement.

Fact #1: They knew where Jesus was buried.

In every one of the gospels we see this fact mentioned. They all mention that Jesus was buried in the rich man's tomb, Joseph of Arimathea.

This was huge because Jesus' tomb was familiar to both Jew and non-Jew.

The disciples couldn't have claimed the resurrection of their master, all the while there's a corpse lying in a tomb right there in Jerusalem.

Paul draws from this same source for his epistle to the Corinthians.

1 Cor. 15:3-5

"I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. ⁴ He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. ⁵ He was seen by Peter^[a] and then by the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers^[a] at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles."

All scholars are convinced here. Paul is quoting from traditional historical documents likely AD 36. Just 3-5 years after Jesus resurrection.

When Paul was in Jerusalem meeting with Peter and John immediately after his conversion, he would have met the people this passage is referring to.

There's also this significant mention of Joseph of Arimathea.

The gospels mention that Jesus was buried in the tomb of this rich Jewish man, a member of the Jewish high council.

Now this is pretty significant. Think about how Jesus' followers were feeling towards the Jews and the Pharisees at this time? The ones responsible for Jesus death.

Not too favorable. Understandably, they had engineered the judicial death of Jesus.

So do you think it would be probable that Christians would invent the idea that a member of the very inner court of the Jewish High Council, that condemned Jesus to death, to give him his grave?

Seems to call into question this idea that the disciples were all making this up as they went.

We also see that there are no other competing burial stories floating around.

If the burial story of Arimathea is a lie, then we would expect to find other historical trace documents pointing to what actually happened to Jesus' corpse or some competing legend but all sources ascribe to Joseph the one who buried Jesus.

In fact the burial of Jesus in the tomb of Arimathea is one of the earliest and least attested facts about Jesus.

Fact # 2: Then there's the issue of the empty tomb.

First we need to pay attention to the simplicity of the facts described in the empty tomb account.

One of the signs that something has been tampered with is this; when it moves away from conveying simple facts to signs of embellishment.

Just read the **Apocryphal Books** that arose centuries after the appearance of the NT.

They contain all sorts of wild legendary accounts.

For eg. The gospel of Peter 2nd half of the 2nd C. after Jesus.

The resurrection story goes like this.

The tomb was surrounded by a Roman Guard, Chief Priests, Pharisees, huge crowd who all came to watch the empty tomb.

Suddenly in the middle of the night, a voice rings out from heaven and the stone over the opening rolls back by itself, and two men descend from heaven and enter the grave, and then 3 gigantic men come out of the tomb, with their head's reaching the clouds. The final man, his head exceeded the clouds. Reached the heavens.

Then a cross comes out of the tomb and a voice from heaven asks, "Has thou preached to them that sleep?" The cross answers "Ye."

These are how real legends look and sound like.

In comparison the gospel accounts are simple and plain.

This is the sort of thing that grabs the attention of scholars and historians alike.

Then there's this issue of women being the first to the empty tomb. This is hugely significant. Why?

How were women viewed in the 1st C?

Their testimony was considered worthless by those in Palestine and in the 1st C.

Yet they were the first in discovering the empty tomb.

Listen to the words of the 1 C. Jewish Historian Josephus.

Joseph illustrates the attitude people would have had of a women's testimony in this Jewish society.

“Due to the levity / fickleness and temerity/recklessness of their sex, women should not be allowed to serve as legal witnesses in a court of law.”

The testimony of women was considered worthless; untrustworthy.

The fact that it was women whose testimony was regarded as worthless, who are the chief witnesses to the fact of the empty tomb is best explained by the fact that they were in fact the ones who discovered the empty tomb and that the gospel writers simply recorded the account as faithful and true – for to them this was an embarrassing and awkward fact, but yet they documented it.

This only adds to the credibility of their witnesses – if the whole account is fabricated, why make women as the first eye witnesses if you are trying to cover up a lie, or make a credible viable “new” religion?

There's also this claim, even among the Jewish elite that the grave was empty.

Read Matt. 28:11-15 says, “As the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and told the leading priests what had happened. ¹² A meeting with the elders was called, and they decided to give the soldiers a large bribe. ¹³ They told the soldiers, “You must say, ‘Jesus’ disciples came during the night while we were sleeping, and they stole his body.” ¹⁴ If the governor hears about it, we’ll stand up for you so you won’t get in trouble.” ¹⁵ So the guards accepted the bribe and said what they were told to say. Their story spread widely among the Jews, and they still tell it today.”

How did the Jewish elite respond to the claims that the grave was empty? As soon as the soldiers came and reported to them what happened?

Did they go to the grave and find a body?

No, they responded that the disciples stole the body.

That's the best they came up with. Which only proves that they themselves couldn't find the corpse.

Even the Jews were trying to explain it away. Trying to figure it all out.

By in far, most historians and exegetes hold to the claims of the empty tomb.

Fact # 3: On multiple occasions and under various circumstances different individuals and groups experienced appearances of Jesus alive from the dead.

We are given a list of people the resurrected Jesus revealed himself to.

Peter, the 12, the 500 and to James. Jesus half brother. The list of eyewitnesses to Jesus resurrected body, which was quoted by Paul, were listed as a guarantee in that he had a personal acquaintance with the people involved.

Any one of these could have come forward, and disagreed with their claims of a bodily resurrection but they didn't.

The appearance traditions in the gospels provide multiple independent accounts of these appearances.

Independent and early accounts all have the earmarks of reliability when it comes to proving the historicity of something.

Then there's this matter of James, Jesus' half brother.

We can see all through the gospels that neither James nor his brothers believed in Jesus or followed him through his earthy ministry.

There's no reason why the early church would generate fictitious stories concerning the families unbelief in Jesus as the Messiah had they all been faithful followers of Jesus all along.

But James and James' brothers all half brothers of Jesus, all became active followers of Jesus after the resurrection.

James in fact eventually rose to the position of the sole leadership and apostle of the Jerusalem Church.

In fact, Josephus says that James' was martyred for his faith in Christ in the AD 60.

Now think about that.

Most of us have brothers. What would it take to convince you that your brother is the Lord, so much so that you would be willing to die for that belief?

Can there be any doubt that the reason for this remarkable transformation in James is because in Paul's words, "He appeared to James."

Even leading NT critics come to the same conclusion (German critic Gount Ludamen).

"It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus' death, where Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ."

Now for the final...

Fact # 4: The disciples had every reason not to believe.

Think about the situation.

Their leader was dead and the Jewish disciples had no belief in a dying yet alone rising Messiah.

The Messiah was supposed to throw off the yoke of Rome – not suffer defeat and death.

According to Jewish Law in **Deut. 21:22** which says "a hanged person is cursed by God."

Jesus execution as a criminal showed Jesus to be a heretic, a person literally under the curse of God.”

The crucifixion was a catastrophe beyond their wildest imagination.

The cross showed in effect that the Pharisees were right all along – that Jesus was a heretic.

This is looking at the situation through the eyes of a Jewish person.

So the best the disciples could have done at this point was to preserve a tomb, maybe make a shrine of some kind, and wait for the coming resurrection at the end of the age.

In spite of this, despite all their Jewish presuppositions, the disciples were all willing to die for the belief of Jesus’ resurrection.

Luke Johnston, a NT critic from Emory University writes that some sort of powerful transformative experience is required to generate the sort of movement early Christianity was.”

Why was the resurrection such a launching pad of this missile called Christianity?

Because it points to the divinity of Jesus. That Jesus’ claims to be one with God were in fact true.

It points to that Jesus’ claims to be the Messiah to be true.

It points to the sound philosophical evidence of the existence of God; that God was the one who raised Jesus from the dead.

If this is true, that the resurrection of Jesus is in fact God’s vindication that Jesus is who he said he was, then he deserves our trust, our hearts, and our very lives.

I find this sort of thing stimulating. Invigorating to my faith. Encouraging.

But for those of us who follow Jesus, we don’t follow Jesus simply because we have the facts straight. We follow for matters of the heart.

We celebrate today because we have come to know that...

Jesus’ death and resurrection saved us from the...

1. Stain of Sin:

Hebrews 10:11-14 says, *“Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. ¹² But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God’s right hand. ¹³ There he waits until his enemies are humbled and made a footstool under his feet. ¹⁴ For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.”*

In Jesus’ death and resurrection Jesus dealt a final blow to sin, in that the stain of it is gone.

In the OT one couldn’t enter into the Holy of Holies because of our sin.

God's holiness is his very essence; he cannot compromise his holiness. To compromise his holiness would make him less than God.

But God so wanting to restore you and I to right relationship with Him; he took care of sin.

The ultimate consequence of sin is death; Jesus knew that sin would take his own life, yet he willingly laid down His perfect sinless life.

So sin and death would be defeated forever.

That's why it is recorded that when Jesus died the curtain in the temple was torn in two.

That which kept you and I as sinners, flawed broken and stained by sin; all that kept us from relationship with a holy God was taken care of.

We can now call God Abba – we are called friends of God; sons and daughters of God.

We can now run into his presence boldly.

We can now be in Christ; in God, not just in proximity, in a temple, but now in Christ – invited into the dance of the Trinity.

On Good Friday each of us wrote down on a paper our sin; and made a mess of the paper much like sin makes a mess of our lives and others lives, and we were reminded that Jesus died to forgive that sin.

Not only did Jesus absorb that sin into Himself, he removed it.

Psalm 103 reminds us that “as far as the east is to the west so far has God removed our transgression / our sin from us. He will remember our sins no more. He will not treat us as our sins deserve.”

Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of this Psalm.

Jesus removed it when he died and rose from the dead.

So I want to invite those of you who pinned a piece of paper on the cross, to come on up and crumple that paper up and throw it into the garbage.

As you do this keep this in mind. Jesus wipes the slate clean. Washes you clean. Removes the stain of sin.

But that's not all. Jesus also dealt with the ...

2. Power of Sin:

The power of sin is not to be trifled with.

The older I get the more I grow to respect the power of sin; give it an inch in you life and it will eventually take a mile.

If it weren't so powerful, why would Jesus have to go to such great lengths to die?

If sin wasn't so powerful, why did the godhead not come up with an alternate plan? That wasn't so costly?

The rescue plan would have to include a death, for the ultimate consequence of sin is death.

One has to fight fire with fire.

1 Peter 3:18 says, “Christ suffered^[a] for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.”

Jesus death and resurrection brought us safely home; Christ made that way available to everyone.

Because of what Jesus accomplished 2000 years ago, the Kingdom of God is available to all of us.

Available to you.

Romans 8:11 says, “The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.”

Now because of Jesus, its not a given that we are ruled by the power of sin’s every lure and whim.

You and I have the power to resist temptation; we have the power over the cycle of sin confess sin kind of existence.

We have the power to cut off cycles of sin passed down from one family system to another, generation after generation. But it ultimately deals with the ultimate effects of sin, which is death.

This is the Passover. Why Jesus came.

Many of you even as Christians have a problem with this side of the Gospel Story.

For you the gospel doesn’t make sense. This idea that God was mad at mankind because of sin so he decided to torture and kill his own Son so that he could appease his own pathological anger.

Many of you have this idea that if God is some angry wrathful God, who wants Him?

That kind of God doesn’t seem attractive? The idea of a God of love doesn’t line up with that.

I would suggest that perhaps you have heard wrong?

I would suggest that if you want to know what God is like, just look at Jesus.

Hebrews 1:3 says Jesus the Son radiates God’s own glory and expresses the very character of God.”

Jesus Himself said, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. I and the Father are One.”

I don’t believe the Good News of Jesus paints a picture of a God who needed appeasement in order to love His creation.

The Father sacrificed His own Son in order to destroy death with His life; not to assuage His wrath, but to heal; not to protect mankind from His fury, but to unite mankind to His love.”

This is the gospel and why it is good news.

Jesus destroyed death, came to heal, and unite mankind and all of creation with His love.

This is what it means to live the Kingdom.

That to live the kingdom is aligning ourselves with Jesus, and his Kingdom.

We have been learning that when we learn to surrender to His control and reign, our lives begin to exemplify His Kingdom.

And as a result our lives begin to reveal a certain heavenly power.

Not an abusive controlling power; not power tripping but power.

Power over sin. Power over fear. Power over addiction. Power over death.

This power is like the very power that raised Jesus from the dead. The power of the 3rd person in the Trinity – the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we align our wills to His, our lives begin to exemplify this same power.

Reminder that our power and authority flows out of our intimacy with the Father, Son and Spirit.

Finally Jesus death & resurrection rescued us from the ...

3. Presence of Sin:

We have been walking through the Lord's Prayer this year.

In the prayer we read these words...

"Thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven."

You want to know what the Kingdom of God is like, look at Jesus earthly life and ministry.

Healed diseases b/c in His ideal Kingdom there will be no death or disease; He was giving us a taste of heaven...what His Kingdom is about.

A kingdom void of broken relationships, evil, darkness, selfishness, abuse or creation including the environment.

This is what the Kingdom of God is like...and we can get a taste of that in this life. Yet this kingdom is not fully realized until we reach heaven.

It's OK to long for God's Kingdom.

It doesn't take long to realize that we are not experiencing God's Kingdom in its fullness.

Therefore we wait patiently, by faith, for that day when we taste it fully.

Rev. 21:4 gives us this hope. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

The day when death and sin will be swallowed up.

But God's kingdom can be embraced and experienced in this life. It's a now and not fully yet kind of kingdom.

Just like a seed, once the seed of the kingdom has been planted in our hearts we can't live the same ol' way we have always lived.

When we're part of God's kingdom we can be a blessing to the world. Rather than contribute and add to the brokenness in the world, we can begin to bless the world and all that are in it.

But God is a gentleman. God doesn't force us to live the kingdom...

We have a choice whether we want to live according to this new Kingdom. Under the reign of this Good King.

Come take a seed, and pray and invite Jesus to plant the seed of His Kingdom in your life.

Pray a prayer.

Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done in my heart as it is in heaven."

Amen.