

“The Resurrection: Did It Happen and Who Cares? // John 20:1–9; 1 Peter 1:3–4

Happy Easter, Summit Church. I have decided that I need to wear ties more often... before our 1st service I pulled out this tie to ask Veronica if it would match, and Allie said, “Oooh... it ‘dress up funny night at church tonight?”

JOHN 20

I was listening to a Bible teacher named Andy Stanley the other day and he said the way to really understand something is to go back to its starting point.

Everything, he says, has a starting point... Every job; every journey; every living thing, had a starting point. **You** had a starting point. *Some of you* were started on purpose. Others of you, it was on accident... but we’re still glad you made it. **Romances** have a starting point. Some of you remember the start of your first romance. You were 9 and it was your cousin... fortunately you moved on... most of you, that is... depending on what part of North Carolina you are from.

Well, our faith has a starting point, too; a basis... for many of us, the starting point of our faith was what our parents told us was true. Or maybe it was, “What the priest says.” **Or maybe it was,** “What the Bible says.” We had saying in my childhood, *“The Bible says it; I believe it; that settles it.”*

And when you were young, that worked as the foundation for truth. But as you got older you began to be a little uneasy with just that as

the foundation for what is right. ***How do we know what is true about God?***

- Andy told a story reminded me of my own experience... Growing up I was always told the story about God speaking to young Samuel at night and Samuel kept getting confused, thinking it was Eli... Eli said, “Next time this happens...” The application was, “If God speaks to you at night, say, ‘Speak, Lord...’ And my thought was, “God, please don’t call my name like that out in the dark... because I’m not sure my response will be, “Speak, Lord...” If you’re going to do it, do it during *the day*? Otherwise my mom is going to have to put the plastic liner back on the bed...

But, bottom line, I never heard a voice... So the question is, “How do I really know what God has said?”

I would guess a number of you **are like that.** ***How do you know what is true about God?*** “Because my mom said so,” or “because the priest said so,” or “because some book said so,” is just not a sufficient basis for faith.

Believe it or not, **the Apostle Peter** seems to have had the same questions. Peter had **always been a pretty trusting** guy. He had been one of the 1st ones to sign up to follow Jesus and he took Jesus at his word and got a bunch of other people to follow him. **But then Jesus was put** on trial and killed, and everything in Peter’s world came crashing down: *Jesus was **not supposed to die...** he was supposed to save the world.* How could **God let this happen?** And if Jesus was so loving and in control, **why had he left Peter and the other disciples alone by themselves in all this mess?**

Peter’s struggle of faith got so bad he outright denied being a follower of Jesus.

Everything changed for him early one Sunday morning. *The Apostle John records the story:* **1** Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the

stone had been removed from the entrance. **2** So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

3 So Peter and the other disciple (John) started for the tomb. **4** Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter (he was a P90X guy) and reached the tomb first. **5** He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. **6** Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, **7** as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. (Someone had taken time...) **8** Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. **9** (Up until this point, they still had not understood from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) **(John 20:1-9)**

Peter walked into that tomb a discouraged, defeated, doubter. He walked out as the most important leader in the new Christian movement. *From this point on, the disciples are going to look to Peter to lead them.*

What was it that changed him? It wasn't some new flash of insight into Jesus' teaching... (Oh, I get it... I'm like the Good Samaritan/Predestination)... No, he came face to face with a place that *should have* had a body in it, but didn't.

I want to put you in the place of Peter this morning... Because many of us, I would say, are like Peter.

- You have questions. There are some things that just don't add up.
- Maybe, like Peter, you feel like **he's disappointed you**. Or maybe you have **disappointed him**... Peter had denied Jesus so many times he felt like "our relationship is too far beyond repair."

I want you to experience what Peter experienced. So, I want to (1.) **confront you with the fact of the empty tomb.** (I'm going to explain

briefly how we can know Jesus that raised from the dead). *And*, then, 2., I'm going to let Peter explain to you *the implications of the empty tomb.*

I. The Fact of the Empty Tomb

Believe it or not, **that the tomb was empty** that morning when Peter got there is a fairly agreed upon fact. **Obviously not everyone believes** Jesus rose from the dead, but just about every scholar agrees that a man named Jesus really lived, that he was executed by the Romans, was buried, and that on the 3rd day, the tomb where he had been laid was found empty. On those points there is no substantial disagreement.

The question for debate is, "How did the tomb get empty?" There are really only three options:

Theory 1: Someone stole the body.

Someone stole it, and then the myth grew up that Jesus had resurrected.

The question here becomes "who did it?" For a suspect you need means and motive, and there are only 3 possible suspects:

Suspect 1: The Romans

The Romans certainly had the means of stealing the body...

- Pilate had put a garrison of 16 Roman soldiers in front of the tomb. A garrison was a unit of 16 soldiers that stood guard around the clock, with 4 standing and the other 12 sitting around them in a semicircle... they **could have done it**, but what would have been their motive?
- They were the **ones who had him killed** in the 1st place. You say, "Maybe they did it as a joke." Pilate had ordered **an official Roman seal** to be placed on Jesus' tomb, which meant that anyone who disturbed the seal did so on pain of death. Roman soldiers knew that. Would that have been worth it?

- You say, “Maybe they were bribed?”¹

Suspect 2: The Jews

What would have been their motive? The **only motive** I can come up with for them stealing the body is somehow to pre-empt the disciples... to steal the body before they did, and then after the disciples claimed he resurrected, to produce the body.

- But they **never did that**, and they certainly would have if they had been able... that would have been the fastest way to shut the disciples up.

Suspect 3: The disciples

How did they sneak past the garrison? **And that’s where that detail of the neatly folded linen cloth comes in...** Robberies are usually done in a hurry, with not a lot of thought put into tidiness. Someone got up...

And think about this: Would stealing Jesus’ body **really have served** their purposes?

- **In a religious hoax, the leaders gain some measureable asset** like power or money or sex or something through the deception...
- *What did this new testimony get the disciples?*
- Their testimony gained them **no power (for their whole lives, they were pursued to death...** every single one was tortured and killed for their confession. **According to Eusebius, both** Peter was forced to watch his wife be crucified... then he was crucified the next day.
- The testimony gained them **no money** (the Apostles were notoriously poor; and any money they did get they gave away).
- Their testimony didn’t **get them sex...** they taught that sex was only to be only to be experienced between two people in monogamous marriage...

- **So they didn’t concoct this hoax for money, sex or power...** what would have been their motive?
- **They taught Christians to live joyfully without power, money or sexual gratification because, they said, our kingdom is not of this world...** we can put up with misery here because we are assured of a kingdom there, and they based that assurance on the Resurrection of Jesus.
- *Would they have taught that, and lived this way themselves, if they knew it was a hoax and they had just stolen the body?*

So the theory that someone stole the body just fails to be convincing at all. There’s no one who would have had the means and the motive...

So let’s pass on to...

Theory 2: Jesus never really died

- Maybe Jesus didn’t quite die on the cross, he just passed out, and when they put him in the tomb he revived... whereupon he snuck out of the tomb and appeared to a few of his disciples, convinced a few of them he resurrected... and **then he headed off to France** where he sired the Medici family with Mary Magdalene and lived undiscovered until Tom Hanks *broke his code* a few years ago.
- **A number of problems with this theory** other than its utter stupidity: **1. The Romans were experts at crucifixion and execution**, and they knew when someone was dead. **Roman law** said that if they pulled a man down before he died they could be killed in the same manner. **In fact, just to make sure**, they pierced his heart with a spear, and the Gospel accounts say that blood and water came out. **By the way, let me tell you what is significant about that detail: We know something medically now they didn’t know when they wrote that.** After someone has died, the blood in their body begins to clot, so that the blood separates from the watery serum. To have seen “blood and water” would

¹ Eric Metaxas, *Miracles*, 102.

indicate that Jesus was dead prior to the spear in the side.² It is a medical verification of Jesus' death, the significance of which they would have not known when they included the detail. 2nd

PROBLEM WITH THE THEORY THAT JESUS JUST FAINTED is that Jesus had been beaten prior to his crucifixion, which was very uncommon. Usually beating was it's own punishment (*remember that Pilate had intended to beat Jesus instead of crucifying him.*)

- Cicero said that Roman beatings by themselves often ended in death for the victim—Cicero said there was extreme losses of blood; sometimes disembowelment; rib flying off cage.
 - This is **probably why Jesus died** before the other two men he was crucified; they hadn't endured the scourging.
 - **The point:** if anyone were to survive a crucifixion, it wouldn't have been someone who had been whipped that brutally and lost *that much* blood.
- **3. If Jesus somehow had survived**, how did he move that stone and slip past the Roman guards unknown? *And then, in his battered, weakened condition, go and convince his disciples he was the Lord of life and Judge of the earth?*

So, option #2—that Jesus didn't really die—doesn't seem like a good one...

Option #3 is that Jesus really did rise from the dead. It is by far the simplest explanation, and the most compelling. Jesus resurrected, appeared to his disciples and commissioned them to go around the world testifying to it even if it cost them their lives and they did it, gladly, because they had seen the resurrected Jesus with their own eyes.

Well, if this is the simplest explanation and most compelling, why isn't it universally accepted?

² Eric Metaxas, *Miracles*, 107.

Let me answer with the words of the German philosopher, Wolfhart Pannenberg: *"The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live."*—**Wolfhart Pannenberg**,

- **"An unusual event."** Some people just don't want to consider a supernatural explanation. Ironically, they **do this in the name of good history and science**, as if taking those disciplines seriously means **refusing even to consider** miraculous evidence. *But closing yourself off to certain types of explanations, no matter how compelling they are, is the definition of closed-mindedness!*
- Others do it, Pannenberg says, because if it is true, **they'd have to change the way they live.**
 - If Jesus rose from the dead... that means that he is Lord over about morality, salvation, politics, or history.
 - **Aldous Huxley**, the man who coined the term, agnostic, admitted this much: *"I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning. For myself, as well as most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was a philosophy of liberation, and the liberation we sought was liberation from was Christian morality."* **Aldous Huxley, Ends and Means**
 - **Bart Ehrman** says the main reason he won't really seriously consider whether this could be true is because the world has so much suffering in it... There's no way God could have raised Jesus from the dead and left so much suffering in the world.
 - *That's not an honest consideration of the evidence; that is a dismissal of the evidence because you've already made up your mind it could not be true because of some other reason.*
- **Let me ask you this question: Have you ever considered the evidence on its own terms?** Or are there reasons you won't really consider it?

- For example, You say, “Well, if the Resurrection is true, why is **the world** still such a mess? Why did **my life** turn out like this? Or God, why aren’t you **more involved** in the earth? If you showed up every once in a while, it would help... or why are there **so many different religions**?”
- Or maybe you just don’t want anybody telling you what is **right or wrong sexually**...

But I want to challenge you this weekend to be open-minded enough to consider the evidence on its own terms.

To **walk with Peter** into that empty tomb... *The Resurrection meant 3 things for Peter, and these are...*

II. The Implications from the Empty Tomb

1. *Jesus was who said he was.*

- If Jesus really rose from the dead, then Jesus was who he said he was regardless of how it contradicted Peter’s perceptions.
- In Acts 4 Peter gets into a really interesting argument with a bunch of academics and theologians, and they were saying that there was no way Jesus could be the Messiah because of X, Y, and Z... and all the smart people of the day agreed it couldn’t be true: **Acts 4:19** *But Peter... answered them, “Whether it is right... to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge. 20 We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”*
 - **In other words**, “**Look, brothers... we’re not saying we’re smarter.** You guys got more degrees hanging on your wall than a thermometer. But then, on the other hand, we know this guy who came back from the dead. And, no offense to you, his coming back from the dead trumps your *magna cum laude*.”
- Let me ask you to do a **thought experiment**: Take **whatever objection** you have to faith... *“There are so many different religions; too much pain in the world; the Bible says*

homosexuality is wrong...” And suppose that you had been the first one to the empty tomb... Where Jesus says to you, “I am who I say I am; I’m not going to answer the questions now... I will later.” Would you be willing to suspend your objections... To live with some unanswered questions until then?

- You say, “Ahh... but that’s the problem. I can’t go back and see him.”
- *Yes, but even today the evidence for it today is strong enough to reach a certain conclusion about it.* The breakdown is not in the insufficiency of the evidence, but in some prejudice that keeps us from considering it on its own terms.
- **Let me be really personal**: This is how faith worked for me. I had all these questions... terrible doubt, almost lost my faith. Someone challenged me: “What if you were the first one there at the empty tomb?” Would I be willing to rethink my objections, temporarily, until God explained them to me?
- Fav definition of faith: **Faith occurs when the unexplainable confronts the undeniable.** You have questions you think are unexplainable. The resurrection is a miracle, however, that is undeniable.
 - **And one of two things to happen**: *you’ll refuse to even consider the evidence until God explains himself—as if you refuse to consider the possibility that there is a God who runs the universe whose ways and understanding are higher than yours... or you’ll humble yourself before God and say, “OK, God, I’ll consider the evidence on its own terms... realizing that you may have ways of running the universe which, at first, don’t make sense to me...”*
 - **My view of heaven**: Big classroom with us asking question after question. All goes back to the Resurrection.
- **Faith is not having all of your questions answered now.** *It is wrestling with the unexplainable, knowing that the unexplainable has an explanation on the basis of the resurrection*

- *You pride yourself on being a doubting person: Are you willing to, in light of the Resurrection, doubt your doubts?*

Because of the Resurrection... Peter realized...

2. His past no longer defined him.

- As I said, Peter felt like he had let Jesus down so much that his relationship with Jesus was beyond repair.
- But here is what he said in 1 Peter: **“Through the resurrection we are born again into a living hope... (one, vs 4, that is) kept in heaven for us.” (1 Peter 1:3)**
- There are two things in there that totally change how you see yourself. *Born again; living hope.*
- Let me start with *living hope*: Your “hope” is whatever you believe gains you acceptance before God.
 - **Most people believe that God’s acceptance of them is based on good they are;** or how well they keep the tenets of their religion.
 - And that may work fine for you... until you fail, like Peter... and then you start wondering, **“How good is good enough?” Scales.**
 - The gospel is that Christ earned our acceptance in our place... He paid the penalty for sin.
 - LIVED THE LIFE/DIED THE DEATH.
 - The Resurrection is God’s declaration that he has accepted Jesus’ payment on our behalf. In the Resurrection he declared that Jesus’ payment for us was sufficient... and now Jesus stands alive by the throne of God, alive, testifying to that.
 - **That’s why Peter says “I have a living hope, kept in heaven for me.”** It’s safe. The living Jesus stands there as my acceptance into heaven. Whenever an accusation is brought against me; a reason I should be rejected from God’s presence, Jesus says, I paid for that sin.

- **A bold statement:** I am positive that if I died I would go to heaven... he is my salvation.
- **Most people in our culture believe that all religions teach the same thing...** our hope is not in how well we live, but in Christ who took our place.

- So in the Resurrection I now have a living hope that is no longer based on me... and furthermore, Peter says, in the Resurrection, I am **born again**... Which means God has started the process of new life in me.
 - The power of the Resurrection turned Peter, a Jesus-denying coward into Peter, the rock of the church.
 - That is the same power that can work in you.
- This church is filled with people who have stories of a past filled with the most tragic mistakes... they were on drugs; they were unfaithful to their spouses; they were kicked out of school... some have spent time in jail; some were filled with bitterness and racism and hate... but God changed them—not because they were decent people who needed a second chance, but because they were dead people whom he made alive.
- **Do you feel like you’re too messed up for God to be interested in you?** That your mistakes are too severe? Your addictions too strong?
 - **God breathed life into a dead body; he breathed courage into cowardly Peter;** he breathed love into murderous Paul; when you believe, he will breathe new life into you.

3. His future was secure.

- Peter says, **“Through the resurrection... we now have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.” (1:4)**
- One of the things you **learn as you get older** is that everything spoils. Riches (kids fritter it away). Health—specimen? Used to drink 2 liter of Mt Dew... play 4 hours of basketball and get up next a.m. fine. Family: crazy uncle? Don’t have one... You might be him. **You can’t hold on to any of it.**
- **The life of faith and unbelief are never more contrasted than in how the believer and unbeliever approach that reality...**

- **Bertrand Russell**, who wrote *Why I am not a Christian*, said that as he neared death the “darkness that I have always feared is finally overtaking me.” There is no justice; if you happen to be one of the ones whom fortune fills with tragedy, you just have to live as one of the losers...
- I always contrast that w/ Joni Eareckeson Tada. Diving accident, paralyzed. She says how sad she felt... run, walk. One day, she caught herself envying people who knelt to pray. And then it occurred to me... “The first thing I’ll do with my new legs is drop to glorified knees and worship Jesus who saved me.”³ And then I will do a backflip. **That’s the assurance of the Resurrection.**

What are you going to hope in, when death overtakes you?

I have 3 daughters... so, of course, the 1st weekend it was out, we were there to see Cinderella...

- Well, **even if you haven’t seen the movie**, you know the story... Cinderella was a very beautiful girl who, though she had born in privilege to a family who loved her deeply, was **forced to live with a wicked stepmother** and two jealous sisters who turned her into a slave and made her feel ugly.
- One night her **fairy godmother** shows up and gives her a dress and a pumpkin carriage and she goes to the ball where she experiences the love of the Prince. And it all seems to be how it should be, but then the clock strikes midnight, and she is **swept back into** her old situation.
- And **all that is left of the night are the glass slippers**—she has one, and the Prince has one.
- The best part of the story is that the Prince never forgets her, and he won’t rest until he’s found her and brought her back to the palace. So he goes house to house looking for her until he finds her.

³ (My paraphrase, but substance of quote is accurate).

And I’m watching that, and I think, the Resurrection is like that glass slipper. (I’m in a theatre with about 150 8-10 year old girls; the only way I can keep my sanity is to theologize)—we live in a world under the influence of a wicked stepmother, the devil; we’re oppressed by her two wicked daughters, the world and our flesh, who constantly beat us up and tell us we are worthless. **But in the gospel** we meet the Prince. And now we have the shoe—the Resurrection that is God’s promise of what he is making us into and that he will return for us!⁴

What do you do when the stepmothers or stepsisters treat you poorly, or make you feel worthless? You defy their lies with that glass slipper. You tell yourself in the Resurrection that this dirty dungeon is not your home; this wicked stepmother and her sisters are not your family; this drab existence is not your future. ***You are loved by the Prince; cherished by him; and he is coming back for you.***

Faith has a starting point; a basis. It is the Resurrection. The Resurrection tells me that Jesus is who he says he is; this is not just a big fairy tale; that he is making me into someone new and that he is coming back for me.

When Luke wanted to summarize the Apostles’ message, he chose one word: Resurrection. It covered everything.

That Resurrection is a gift to all who will receive it. *You have to receive it!*

Prayer: Salvation

It’s done. You have to receive it.

Maybe you have been in church but this is never been real to you. You’ve never really made your own, serious, decision to follow Jesus..

⁴ Inspiration for this example came from Tony Evans (though I altered the application significantly from his).

Invitation

When you receive it, you are supposed to be baptized. We Every Easter we give you a chance to do that. Many of you never have... Jesus' first command...

- ***Is it really that important?*** Well, it's a command of Jesus.
- **I didn't come prepared to get wet...** We have all the stuff
- Baptized as a baby... This is *your* declaration of faith.

Heads bowed: Three categories of people:

- Those saved and baptized
- Those just now saved, not baptized
 - Maybe you have been in church but this is never been real to you. You've never really made your own, serious, decision to follow Jesus....
- Those saved prior but never have... I want to give you a chance to come!
 - Or maybe unsure... but you know now that it is real... every Easter we have whole families...