

Talk by Tom Yacomeni

Easter Day 09 April 2023

Luke 24: 1-12 Jesus has risen

24 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷"The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" ⁸Then they remembered his words.

⁹When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹²Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

'If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.'

So wrote the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Church in Corinth. And it highlights the magnitude of what we are celebrating today.

The way you understand what happened that first Easter day is of vital importance not only for your life now but also for your eternal security and destiny.

And the thing is I realise it is a big ask to say to 21st century scientifically educated people that at the core of Christian belief is an event which is naturally impossible.

Now I have heard of people reviving some minutes or even hours after being pronounced dead and giving everyone in the mortuary a shock. And in the ancient world we need to admit that it may have actually been more common for people to revive after some time of unresponsiveness, because they didn't have all the medical equipment available to monitor brain and heart activity. But the ancients were not stupid. They knew when someone was definitely dead - *Kaput*. According to Jewish understanding a person was definitely dead after three days when the soul left their body. In addition to that, Jesus had been crucified and it was the responsibility of the centurion to ensure that criminals on the cross were completely killed, and Jesus had been pierced deeply with a spear. Jesus was definitely dead.

The evidence for Jesus life and death by crucifixion is overwhelming. Newspaper articles such as was written in the Guardian a couple some weeks ago or in the National Geographic some months ago all conclude that he definitely lived and that his teaching has had an unparalleled impact on the world.

However when it comes to the resurrection, people are more divergent. And I think that is to be expected because believing in the resurrection denies you the ability to remain a purely objective observer or journalist. If you conclude that the resurrection happened, you are automatically involved, whether you like it or not.

There have been some wonderful examples of journalists who have set out to disprove the resurrection but have ended up as advocates for faith.

Albert Ross, otherwise known as Frank Morrison wrote a book called 'Who moved the stone' in 1930. He set out to debunk Christianity, but ended up writing a book that still provides compelling examination of the facts over 90 years later.

More recently Lee Strobel was an atheist when he began investigating the Biblical claims about Christ after his wife's conversion. With a masters in Law studies, he was a journalist for the Chicago Tribune and other newspapers for 14 years. Prompted by the results of his investigation, he became a Christian on November 8, 1981

Even when both books examine the medical evidence for Jesus' death, the fact that the body was highly unlikely to be stolen whilst under guard and without the valuable grave clothes, and the compelling psychological profile of the confused disciples, the verdict is up to each one of us.

We can simply say 'that's impossible – I don't believe it' and walk away, or we can be like Peter when he heard the women's story that Jesus had risen.

Most of the eleven disciples thought their story was nonsense (or 'twaddle' according to 'Strongs lexicon'!) It is rather an indictment that the men didn't believe the women. The first sin recorded in the inaugurated Kingdom of God is implied sexism but the new Testament is clear that the women were right and the men were cynical. But Peter went to the tomb to see for himself. He couldn't quite bring himself to go right in, but he stooped down and saw the grave clothes lying there.

So what percentage of certainty does it take for us to believe that something is true?

However much evidence you hear, the decision to believe in the resurrection still requires faith. It takes a step of faith.

It is *the* step of faith. The resurrection is not a proven repeatable scientific fact and nor will it ever be. But there is a pattern in this passage for every Christian that follows.

The women didn't get all the facts, just a message about a miracle to believe and share. The disciples just had the legally unreliable testimony of the women to go on. Peter simply saw the grave clothes lying there. Yet as they began to believe, in time Jesus himself appeared to them. He was resurrected, with a renewed body just as a butterfly is resurrected from a cocoon. He explains a little later on in verse 46 'This is what is written: the Messiah will suffer and

rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.’ Repentance, forgiveness, salvation, eternal security – all these wonderful things follow on from the initial belief that Jesus rose again from the dead. Belief is imperative.

I think back to the first time I understood the cosmic significance of the cross, during a rowdy youth group meeting when I was about 12 years old. It was like the cross was lit up by lightening in my mind’s eye and I saw the power of God flowing out bringing love, power and forgiveness to the whole world.

The trouble is that many of us start looking for answers to life’s big questions in all the wrong places. Just like the mysterious Angelic men said to the women “Why do you look for the living among the dead?’ But people today are looking for answers so our job is to share the life and message of Jesus at every opportunity. Sometimes we assume people may not want to listen, but the fact is a moment of belief can change the direction of a person’s life.

I think of Ian Read, a young man who came started hanging out with the young adults at Trinity church in Cheltenham. I got chatting to him one Sunday evening. As I talked with him it was clear that he was feeling a bit lost and he was asking questions about life and faith, so I told him about the Alpha course that was starting after the summer holidays in September. He seemed interested so I told him I just needed to pop over to the church so I could get him an Alpha brochure and I left him sipping his drink. It was as I was collecting the flyer and form that a thought landed in my brain. ‘Dummy! He wants to come to faith now!! What are you waiting for!’ I knew it was the Holy Spirit because it just came out of left field and stopped me in my tracks. I sheepishly went back and sat down with Ian. I just said to him, ‘well I’ve just been thinking. You could sign up to go on Alpha, but it may be that you don’t want to wait till after the summer to invite Jesus into your life. Did you actually want to do that now?’ ‘Yes please!’ Wow, amazing. This guy was hungry to receive the Lord and the Holy Spirit just needed me to wake up. So I led him in a short prayer of commitment and I’m delighted to say Ian got baptised in February 2007 is still going strong today. His life has not been the same since, because believing in Jesus opens the door for him to transform you from the inside out.

How can I persuade you to believe, except to say, in my opinion it is literally true that Jesus rose from the dead. I don't have unequivocal proof, but as my belief gives rise to faith, my experience of Jesus substantiates the hypothesis. I recommend you do the same.