

Easter Sunday 2010

Verification

People all over the world are searching for Jesus. Now, I don't necessarily mean what you might think I mean when I say that. I mean it literally. They're LOOKING FOR JESUS. They're looking for his bones. They're looking for a sarcophagus. They're looking for some fragments, an inscription. SOMETHING. That they can point to...and say – THERE IS JESUS. There he is. He died. And he's still dead. He DIDN'T RISE. He's THERE (DOWN) – not THERE(UP).

Now you've got to ask – why? Why are they doing that? Why 2000 years later are people still hell bent on the search for Jesus body?

I mean. I haven't seen anything this year so far. But usually there in the easter weekend newspaper will be some article about another theory that DISPROVES the resurrection.

And it's strange. Because if Jesus really did rise from the dead. Then here's someone who's the key to eternal life. Here's someone that can show us how to beat death.

And I'm not saying we shouldn't look at something like this with a reasonable amount of critical thinking. We should. We should look carefully at the evidence. But why go to great lengths – to prove that death is death is death - That resurrection simply didn't happen?

I get the feeling that if they could find what they were looking for. And if christianity is true they won't. But if they could find what they were looking for. There'd a great party. To celebrate – that death is death is death. Hooray. Chink chink.

Why the quest?

I suspect. It's because of the implications.

I mean no one really likes the thought of death. But our desire to avoid death. I think....is equally matched by our desire that LIFE..... be on our terms. And Jesus resurrection doesn't come that way.

It comes freighted with meaning and implications.

And in a way. The veracity of the need to disprove the resurrection actually confirms the fact that if it did happen. Then there are big implications.

I watched a great escape the other day on Tv– A man went underwater into a shark tank and he had himself tied up with chains, and about six padlocks, as well as having his feet in concrete blocks. And he had to get himself out. And it took him about three minutesbut he did it. And it was amazing. It was a fantastic escape.

But it wasn't much more than an interesting couple of minutes of entertainment on a weekday morning.

And whether he cheated or not makes no difference to me at all.

But if Jesus rose from the dead. It's more than just an interesting fact.

And we'll get to that a bit later. And we're going to look at three things this morning. We're going to look at **verification** first of all. Then we'll go on to look at **explanation**, and then **implication**. That's sort of the way things unfold in the biblical accounts. The event itself. The confirmation of what's happened. Followed by explanation of what it means. And then the implications flow from that.

So let's just start with VERIFICATION.

Which is important. Because ground zero for Christian faith is FACT. Which is what people who are trying to disprove the resurrection have understood I think. In 33AD Jesus Christ was put to death on a Roman Cross and three days later he rose bodily from death. That needs to be true.

If that didn't happen. I'm going to get some boardshorts on. I'm going to put some zinc on my nose. And I'm off to the beach. I'll see you there.

Because if it's NOT TRUE. Then the whole house of cards comes tumbling down. Paul says if Jesus did not rise. Then our preaching is USELESS and so is your faith.

So it needs to be true. Not partly true. Not metaphorically true. It needs to be TRUE TRUE. And this morning we're reading John's account. But we have four gospel accounts that record for us, that verify, that give us evidence of Jesus' resurrection.

Now I'm not going to go into an apology for why the evidence stacks up. I'm just going to briefly outline the facts as put forward in the accounts we have.

SLIDE

Number one. Jesus died. He didn't hold his breath for three days. He DIED.

The very experienced death squad put a spear in Jesus' side. And out came water and blood. He was dead. So they took him down from the cross.

Number two. Jesus body was put in a grave, there was a large stone rolled over the entrance to the grave, and the grave was guarded by soldiers.

Number three. When some of the disciples went to the tomb on the third day after his death. The stone was rolled aside. And the tomb was empty. They found only the burial cloths inside.

And number four. The risen Jesus appeared to witnesses.

He appeared to Mary. He appeared to Peter and eleven disciples. He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers.

His body was real. It wasn't just a ghost or a spirit. He walked and he talked and he ate and he was touchable. Which Thomas found out in a pretty graphic way. It was real. But it wasn't the same. He was able to appear in a locked room. HE was able to disappear as quickly as he appeared. So it was real. But changed.

And the last fact which is important.

Jesus ascended into the air and his followers went out and proclaimed the fact. That Jesus had risen from the dead.

They're the facts from which our explanation and implications will arise.

Explanation.

Immediately after Jesus ascended. His disciples went and did exactly what he told them to do. They did nothing.

They went to a house. And they sat there. And they waited. And then one day there's a violent wind and the house shakes. And people come outside to see what's going on. And they find the disciples speaking in all different languages. What's going on? Is the question.

And by way of explanation Peter says this.

Acts 2:16-36 this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness

and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. ²¹ And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' ²² "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³ This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. ²⁵ David said about him: "I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ²⁶ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, ²⁷ because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. ²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.' ²⁹ "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰ But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹ Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. ³² God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. ³³ Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. ³⁴ For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, "The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand ³⁵ until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" ³⁶ "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

On the day of Pentecost God pours out his spirit. Which is just the next part of the plan. This is what the prophet Joel said would happen Peter says. This is all part of God's plan.

As is Jesus' death and resurrection. King David saw it from far off. Centuries ago. And now it's happened. God made this Jesus, the one you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

That's pretty much the explanation from Peter. The risen Jesus – whom you killed. Is both Christ and Lord. Exalted to God's right hand.

And that's a term that comes over and over again in the NT. 101 times the term Lord Jesus. Or Lord Jesus Christ is mentioned.

Jesus is not just any man.

Christ means king. And Jesus is God's promised king. Risen from the dead. And he's also Lord.

And our implications flow from that.

IMPLICATIONS.

In the 19th century there was a great American evangelist by the name of DL Moody. He wrote a number of articles for one of the local newspapers. This is what he wrote in one of them.

Some day you will read in the papers that DL Moody of East Northfield is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now; I shall have gone up higher, that is all, out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal – a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint. A body fashioned like unto His glorious body. I was born of the flesh in 1837. I was born of the Spirit in 1856. That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit will live forever.

The implication of Jesus' life from the dead. Is life from the dead for his followers.

That's the good news of the gospel.

If Jesus defeated death.

If Jesus is risen from the dead.

If Jesus is the Christ who's been raised to God's right hand.

It's more than just another interesting fact.

The apostle Peter again.

1 Peter 1:3 ³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Jesus' death and resurrection isn't just an interesting piece of historical data. It's not just an amazing feat. Jesus' defeat of death is the beginning of the reign of life. Jesus is the Christ. He's the king. And he's defeated death. And if you're IN HIM. That's what you can look forward to as well.

And look carefully. Peter doesn't say. He WILL give us new birth. Future tense. It's PAST TENSE. In his mercy he HAS GIVEN US new life.

It's new life. Forgiven by God. One of God's children. Part of his church, part of his kingdom NOW... and the expectation that your body will be raised to life. In the same way as Jesus' body was.

Jesus is LORD. And if Jesus is YOUR LORD. It's great news.

But let me just take you back to Peter's speech again.

'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand ³⁵ until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" ³⁶ "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Now those words were no comfort at all to Peter's hearers. Because in relation to Jesus. He might be THE LORD but he's not their lord. They're the ones who had him put to death. They're more in the category of enemies.

And their response isn't relief or joy. It's FEAR.

When the people heard this they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, Brothers, what shall we do?

And Peter says repent and be baptized in Jesus' name.

And we're told 3000 of them got the point that DL Moody got as well. That the offer of new life. Means shedding the old one. That's what repentance is about.

CS Lewis put it like this. He said fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement; he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realizing that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the ground floor – that is the only way out of our hole. This process of surrender- this movement full speed ahead is what Christians call repentance. Now repentance is no fun at all. It is something much harder than merely eating humble pie. It means un-learning all the self conceit and self will we have been training ourselves into for thousands of years. It means killing part of yourself, undergoing a kind of death.

And that's the message of the gospel that went out from Jerusalem 2000 years ago. And hasn't changed.

We have a risen saviour. Who calls people to turn away from living for anything else. To turn to Jesus as their Lord. To take up the new life he offers.