

The Triumph of Easter

BIG IDEA – The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus gives us assurance in the triumph of the cross over sin, death and doubt.

1. Intro

- Our theme for today is resurrection
- In particular, I want us all to go away from today with a firm conviction and understanding ... that
 - the resurrection of Christ gives us assurance of the triumph of Easter
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- Today is Easter Sunday and it also happens to be April Fool's Day
- First time since 1956 that Easter Sunday and April Fool's Day have fallen on the same day
- As soon as I found out Easter Sunday was April Fool's Day ... I thought two things
 - First was ... this is brilliant
 - Perfect day for us parents to tell the kids to search for the eggs we didn't hide!
 - Did anyone else think of that?
 - If you didn't ... don't worry, you'll be able to try it when the dates match up again in 11 years time!
 - My second thought was ... Oh no ... here we go
 - Brace yourself for an avalanche of April Fools and Easter memes
 - Pictures of Jesus coming out the tomb with the words – April Fools! have been all over the internet and Facebook for weeks
- But it highlights a relevant point ...

- Modern people in the world today are skeptical of the resurrection of Jesus
- They think it's a joke / a meme
- The resurrection certainly not universally accepted ... rather is generally rejected and ridiculed

- And so when we read Matthew's account of Jesus' resurrection, then we need to wrestle with the issue as to whether the resurrection of Christ really happened
- Because if you're here this morning and you're skeptical about the resurrection of Jesus ... then you need to see whether there's sufficient evidence for it
 - Because if we don't ...
 - Then you're going to continue to dismiss Christianity and ignore anything else I have to say this morning about the Triumph of Easter
 - But if we show this morning, there **is** good evidence for Jesus' resurrection ...
 - Well then that changes things ...
 - Because if the resurrection is true ... well then you need to consider the implications of it
 - You can't believe that the resurrection happened ... then live a life as though it didn't happen
 - There'd be no intellectual integrity in that

- If you're here this morning and you do believe in the resurrection ...
 - Then it's important you understand why
 - Because if you're going *to live to be and make disciples of Jesus* ... then it's not good enough to tell others you believe it's true because "my pastor said so."
 - You need to know how to respond to those around you when they ask you "to give the reason for the hope that you have"¹

¹ 1 Pet 3:15

- But then we can't leave it there either
 - We can't just look at whether the resurrection is true or not
 - We need to understand the implications of it
 - We need to see what it means

- So this morning ... as we look at the Triumph of Easter, I want us to look at it under two headings ...
 - Did it really happen?
 - What does it mean?

2. Did the resurrection really happen?

- So ... did it really happen
- I want to show you three reasons from the text that point to the fact that the resurrection really did happen
 - Resurrection witnesses
 - Resurrection conspirators
 - Resurrection doubters

- ***Resurrection witnesses***
- The first thing that points to the reality of the resurrection are the resurrection witnesses
- In v57-61 Matthew makes it clear in that
 - Jesus was dead
 - He was taken down from the cross
 - He was prepared for burial and
 - And laid in a tomb
- What's more, the whole thing was done not by the Apostles, but by some rich bloke we've never heard of before called Joseph from Arimathea.

- Now as an ex-Chartered accountant – I'm loving this 😊
- Joseph's role in all this is music to an old auditors ears 😊

- That's because – in accounting speak, there's 'segregation of duties'!
- In case you lived a sheltered life and don't know what segregation of duties' is
 - It's getting different people to perform different jobs in the accounting process to ensure there is integrity ... especially when it comes to the collection or payment of money
 - For example - you can't have the same person receiving cash, keeping the books, making payments and doing the banking
 - It's too dodgy > too easy for steal the money
- In the case of Jesus burial, the work taking Jesus off the cross, preparing his body & laying it in the tomb is done by someone completely independent of Jesus disciples who wrote the Gospel accounts
- Which means there's less chance of all this being a scam
- And through all of this, who has been there watching it all?
 - Mary and Mary Magdalene
 - They were both there as part of the group who saw Jesus crucified and died (v55-56)
 - They were there to witness Joseph put Jesus body in the tomb (v61)
 - And they were both there again to see the tomb was empty (28:1)
- And so when Mary and Mary Magdalene see Jesus in 28:9, they know that the only explanation ... is that he's risen from the dead
 - They'd witnessed Jesus die
 - They'd seen others bury him in the tomb and roll a stone across it
 - Only moments earlier they seen the angel roll back the stone to reveal an empty tomb

- And so they knew Jesus resurrection was the only explanation for his appearance to them that morning
- It's worthwhile noting that the testimony of women was not highly valued in Jewish culture
 - Very paternalistic society
 - In this time women were not considered full citizens
 - Female testimony was not even admissible evidence
- Only reason Matthew would write an account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and say that women were the first eye witnesses ... was if it actually happened
 - If you were thinking of making these things up ... you would never have women as the key eye witnesses to Jesus resurrection
 - Because it doesn't help the credibility
- Why would Matthew write it?
 - Because they were there – they saw it
- ***Resurrection Conspirators***
- Not only do the witness of the two Mary's point to the reality of the resurrection, but the efforts of the conspiring Chief Priests and guards also testify to the reality of the resurrection
- We see in v63, the Chief Priests & Pharisees have heard about Jesus claim that he will rise again
- And they so go to Pilate and request a guard be posted outside the tomb
- And in v64 we see their concern is not that they think they're going to be able to prevent Jesus resurrection
 - They don't believe that anymore than they believe he is the Son of God
- But their concern is to prevent the fraud of the disciples from stealing Jesus body and fabricating a story of his resurrection
 - This they say would be a greater deception of the people than the claim that he was the Christ

- So they did all they could to make stealing Jesus' body impossible
- The posting of the guards meant it was impossible for the disciples to get to Jesus body without a fight
 - And given the way they deserted Jesus at his arrest just days earlier, it was always unlikely that was going to happen anyway
 - In addition, the placing of the seal on the tomb also ensured that even if they did manage to overpower the guards, the breaking of the seal would indicate foul play
- In 28:11-15 we see the post script to the whole interaction between the guards and the Chief Priests
- With their plans in tatters the CP's are left to resort to bribery and deception to discredit and undermine the reality of the resurrection
- Here we get an indication of how desperate the CP's and Pharisees were and how ridiculous their rumour was ...
 - first of all, how do you move a large tomb stone without waking the guards? and
 - secondly ... assuming Jesus body was stolen from the grave ... how were the guards to know that it was the disciples who did it when they were purporting to be asleep!
- And so we see the stolen corpse myth just doesn't stack up
- Can see the irony here?
 - By ensuring there was no way Jesus body could be stolen, the CP's & Pharisees have only served to strengthen the case for Jesus resurrection
 - The deception that they sought to prevent, they then had to propagate by bribing the soldiers to spread the rumours

- And so those that called Jesus the deceiver [v63], have themselves become the real deceivers ... as they tried to deny the truth of Jesus resurrection being made known
- **Resurrection Doubters**
- Now you might say ...
 - “Oh, people back then were gullible”
 - Really?
- Look at v16-17
 - *Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted*
- Isn't that interesting?!
 - Jesus appears to the disciples
 - They could see him, hear him, touch him – and some doubt!
- If you were making it up would you say that some of the apostles ... the founders of the early church - doubted?
- You'd probably leave that out right?
- That's certainly not the way legends and fairytales operate ... because this how real life would be!
 - I mean if Jesus Christ appeared before you and your friends in your home and you were able to touch him and speak with ... wouldn't you doubt too?
 - You'd probably say “what's going on? What have I eaten?”
- It makes sense that some of them doubt
- Why?
- Because they were just as rational, intelligent and skeptical as we are today
- And if you think
 - that we know better than them
 - we're more sophisticated, and educated
 - they were naïve and unable to discern truth and were gullible

- that's what C. S. Lewis calls 'chronological snobbery'
- People's IQ's have not gotten higher over the centuries!
 - You've heard of guys like Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, Archimedes, Augustine right?
 - They were all geniuses!
- We're no smarter than people of the past
- J. I. Packer says it's the heretical spirit of our age, which holds that:
 - the newer is the truer,
 - only what is recent is decent,
 - every shift of ground is a step forward,
 - and every latest word must be hailed as the last word on its subject

- And if this is what you think about the witnesses to Jesus resurrection ... then you're guilty of 'chronological snobbery'

- Why are they doubting?
 - It's not just that they are normal
 - It's more than that

- What you need to remember is that these guys were Jews
- And the Jews were looking forward to a resurrection at the end of time ... not a resurrection in the **middle** of history
 - And yet here is Jesus ... resurrected from the dead
 - John and Luke record in their gospels how Jesus not only
 - passed through closed doors
 - but that he ate and drank with them
 - and they also touched him ...
 - so this wasn't a ghost and it wasn't a spirit
 - he wasn't just revived back to life before dying again ... like he did to his friend Lazarus and Jairus' daughter
- No Jesus was fully resurrected ... and this was totally outside their worldview

- In addition ... Jews were the last people possible to think that a man would be the son of God who should be worshipped
- They were vehemently against the idea that a human being could be divine

- You might have different reasons to doubt than 1st century Jews
 - You might insist the resurrection can't be true and that it didn't happen
 - But they were just as sure as you to say it couldn't be true and didn't happen
 - They were just as ready to say 'impossible!' as you might be
 - They might be different reasons ... but just as skeptical

- So ... are you skeptical? Are you doubtful that Jesus rose from the dead?
- What kind of evidence would you need to blow them away and believe?
 - It would have to be something pretty strong right?
 - Something pretty convincing

- But **their** doubts were as strong as yours ... and therefore they must have received that kind of evidence
 - They must have!
 - They were not gullible people
 - They were no more gullible than you
 - They were no more susceptible to believe in the resurrection than you
- But they saw Jesus risen from the dead ... and those doubters believed

- So there's good reason to believe in the resurrection
 - Resurrection witnesses
 - Resurrection conspirators

- Resurrection doubters ...
- They all point to the truth that the resurrection really did happen

3. What does the resurrection really mean?

- But even if it did happen – so what?
- What does it mean?
- It's not just enough for you to believe it as a mere fact
 - The resurrection is not just an historical fact that you just believe and that's it
 - If it's true ... the resurrection ought to change your mind and change your life
- And therefore we need to understand ...
 - what's the significance of the resurrection?
 - what difference does it make?
- Significance is ... the resurrection assures us of the triumph of Easter
- Many people look at Good Friday as a defeat and Easter Day as the victory
- But that's not how the apostles looked at it
- As you read the accounts of Jesus death and resurrection ...
 - the victory came on Good Friday at the cross
 - and the resurrection therefore assures us of that victory
- So how does the resurrection assure us of the triumph of Easter?
- **Victory over sin**
- The first is that it assures us of Christ's victory over sin
- You see v51 ... right after Jesus died, Matthew tells us
 - *At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom*

- At the very time Jesus was enduring the wrath of God for sin ... Matthew turns our attention to something that was happening simultaneously on the other side of the city
 - We want us to understand there is a connection between Jesus' death on the cross and the tearing of the curtain in the temple

- The Temple in Jerusalem was where God symbolically dwelt among his people
 - It signified his presence with his people
 - Temple had two rooms > Holy Place > Holy of Holies
 - Inside the Holy of Holies was the Ark (with Ten Commandments)
 - It was separated by a 30ft high curtain ... thick as the span of a man's hand
 - Idea was clear ... curtain acted as a huge barrier that was meant to separate sinful men from a holy God

- Yet at the precise moment that Jesus atoned for our sin ... the curtain was torn in two from top to bottom by God
 - It's as though God was saying ...
 - Now the way is open for people to approach me
 - And that's only possible because Jesus has just paid the price for our sin

- The tearing of the curtain shows that God has reconciled himself to humankind
 - The price for sin has been paid
 - Now the way is open for forgiveness and reconciliation with God

- Just like
 - the curtain was no longer a barrier for people gaining access to the Holy of Holies in the Temple ...
 - sin is no longer a barrier for people having access to God

- In 1 Cor 15:14 the Apostle Paul helps see the necessity of the resurrection to validate the victory over sin at the cross
- He says ...
 - *If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith*

- Why? Why is your faith useless?
- He goes on to explain in v17
 - *If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins*
- What does Paul mean by this?
 - It means without the resurrection Christ's death didn't do the job!
 - It didn't atone for sin!
 - This was the whole purpose of Jesus death

- If Jesus didn't rise from the dead ... and instead remained dead in the grave ...
 - Then his death accomplished nothing for the forgiveness of sins
 - And if Christ's death didn't achieve our forgiveness ... then we're still in our sins and under the judgment of God
- The resurrection assures you of Christ's victory in dealing with your sin

- ***Victory over death***
- The second thing the resurrection does is assures us of Christ's victory over death

- In John 11, Jesus says to Mary and Martha

- *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."*²
- Jesus went some way to proving that by raising his friend Lazarus from the dead
 - But Lazarus wasn't resurrected ... he had only been revived
 - One day he would die again
- But Jesus is promising here **resurrection** life to those who believe in him

- And so how can you and I have certainty that our faith in Jesus Christ will result in our own resurrection and conquering of death?
 - God resurrecting Jesus on the third day

- For as Paul says later in 1 Cor 15 ... that Christ's resurrection is the first fruits of a greater resurrection come

- And therefore, because of Jesus resurrection ... you and I can join with Paul in saying ...
 - "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" [...] But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."³
- You can face death ... knowing for certain it will not be the end
 - For Christ has triumphed over it
 - And all who are in him will triumphed over it too

4. Conclusion

- This Easter friends, be assured of the historicity of Jesus resurrection
 - The facts are there for us to look at

² John 11:25-26

³ 1 Corinthians 15:55-57

- It really did happen
- And be assured of the Triumph of Easter that the resurrection gives us
 - Christ has defeated sin and death
 - And if you're hope is in him
 - If your trust is in him
 - If you are willing to make Jesus Christ your Lord and Saviour
 - then the resurrection gives you a sure and certain hope that Christ's death has paid for your sin and you stand forgiven ... right here, right before your maker and judge
 - And the resurrection gives you sure and certain hope ... that when you die ... death is not the end
 - For his resurrection is proof that that you too will be raised up to new life with him for eternity
- For Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection to eternal life for all who believe

- Believe it and you too will live!

PRAY