

THE WONDER OF THE RESURRECTION

This Resurrection Day we once again tell that story we are so familiar with. We have heard it over and over again and of course that old story never gets old. We cannot hear this gospel message enough, and if we didn't hear about the death, burial, and resurrection today, we would feel cheated. But maybe we are all too familiar with the Easter story in that we can take on the attitude that we have heard it so much that we lose the excitement and wonder that the resurrection first did. We can tend to forget that the resurrection is everything as far as our faith goes. It is so important that if it were not true, we would be people to be most pitied.

This morning I want all of us to grab a hold of the emotions that were exhibited by the witnesses involved. Realize that these were real people who knew Jesus and were so surprised, amazed, and astonished at one of the greatest happenings that this world has ever known. Christ and His resurrection from the dead is what separates all other religions from Christianity. No other religion or philosophy has a risen Savior. This is why we can say that Christianity is the only way and truth. Jesus Christ lives and He is life. He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one will have eternal life without Him and He backed this up with being raised from the dead. We can absolutely say that we have life that is eternal because of the One who defeated death and conquered sin.

This is why we need to renew our thoughts on this awesome resurrection story. We need to have that awe and wonder of this most amazing, supernatural event. We should have a child-like wonder as we approach the truth of the Scriptures that proclaim this message of the good news of the risen Lord.

We will look at the witnesses who couldn't help but be filled with all sorts of emotional responses to a humanly unbelievable happening. Try to put yourself in their places.

1. WITNESSES OF THE EMPTY TOMB

We will start with the first Gospel, Matthew, and see how the two Marys respond to this great surprise.

A. REVERENCE AND WORSHIP -----Mt 28:1-10

1. Earthquake

As Mary Magdalene and the other Mary approached the tomb the ground shook under their feet. Earthquakes are not a common occurrence, so that in itself had to be disturbing.

2. Angel—lightning face, snow white clothing

The earthquake was followed by a blaze of lightning, which turned out to be an angel.

3. Guards in shaking fear

With the earthquake and the lightning, the guards who were guarding the tomb were put out of commission. They were totally frightened and fell down to the ground in a dead faint.

4. Marys ran with fear and joy

The ladies remained on their feet as they had experienced what the soldiers had and heard the angel address them with "Don't be afraid" and "He is risen." They had to have fear and yet they are calmed down with these words. Seeing an angel is not an everyday experience. By seeing this angel, they had to be overwhelmed and then to hear this statement that Jesus was alive must have staggered them. They ran out of there with fear but also joy at the same time. They were extremely excited and deep in wonder as they ran to tell the disciples.

5. Jesus appears

They didn't get far as they were stopped in their tracks. They ran right into Jesus, up from the grave and He gave a welcome greeting. They fell to their knees and worshipped Him in awe and reverence.

What else would want to do. They were intimate in their reverence

6. Held Jesus by His feet---They were intimate in their reverence

as they held on to His feet, yet still frightened. Jesus tells them not to fear. Think of the kind of fear the Roman guards had as they had fainted to the ground and compare that to the women on the ground worshipping that was energized by fear. It was a different fear. It was a fear of God that gets oneself off their own circumstances and puts the attention on God.

7. Tell the good news

B. TREMBLING AND AMAZEMENT—Mark 16:1-8

Mark adds another woman, Salome.

1. Saw the stone rolled away

They were at the tomb to do a job, embalming Jesus. They knew they would have a problem with the stone they wouldn't be able to move themselves. No problem, it had been rolled back already. What a surprise. They are surprised even more as they walk into the tomb,

2. Angel appears in the tomb—They are alarmed as an angel is there waiting to talk to them. I'm sure we would've been alarmed also.

They were told not to be alarmed and that Jesus was alive. First, the stone, then the angel, and now Jesus is alive. The angel says the comforting words.

3. Fled, trembled, amazed

When they left, they ran trembling, being besides themselves, and were in fear.

C. THEY REMEMBERED-----Luke 24:1-12

There were even more women unnamed in this account.

1. Saw the stone removed and body of Jesus not there

2. Perplexed

They were puzzled. What's going on here?

3. Afraid at appearance of 2 angels in shining garments

They became totally frightened as they saw these two angels and fell down, their faces to the ground.

Why are you looking for the Living One in a cemetery? Remember how He told you He would rise after three days after being crucified.

4. Remembered

They did remember. They had heard this from Jesus, but they didn't believe it. They were disoriented but they could not forget what Jesus had told them.

5. Told the news but were not believed---The disciples think they are just making this up. They are not thinking of the supernatural.

D. CONVINCED BY THE GRAVECLOTHES—John 20:1-10

John takes this up one more notch as far as wonder goes.

1. Grave robbery?

This would be the conclusion that one would think of. Grave robbery was common in those days. So, why else would the grave be empty? Mary ran to tell Peter and the other disciple.

2. Ran to the tomb

3. Clue that convinced them

John first sees in the tomb and realizes it is not a grave robbery. The grave robbers would not have unwrapped the corpse and then folded the kerchief. With Peter going in and seeing it for himself, there is no doubt, this was a resurrection.

E. RABBONI-----John 20:11-18

This takes us back to Mary. She still thinks that the grave has been robbed.

1. Mary Magdalene weeping at tomb

She is heart broken and weeping. Then the two angels.

2. Jesus calls her by name

He is the man who appears to her who she doesn't recognize at the time. Then He spoke her name and she recognized Him.

3. Her response of reverence and affection

By calling Him Rabboni, she is showing her respect and reverence with intimacy. It was like my dear Teacher.

She had gone from tears to worship.

Our sense of wonder should be heightened as we see how these people responded to this manifestation of God's glory.

Now much of the people of the world do not believe this happened.

Even though there has been more than sufficient evidence, they either want to ignore this most important happening or they try to provide an alternative. They have no wonder and awe of this glory of God. It is one of the best tools we can use to describe the lost the gospel. If Christ arose, Jesus is Lord and all of His claims and statements are true and they are without excuse. If He did not rise, then we are a people most to be pitied.

The burden of proof is on them to disprove the resurrection. It has been tried for 2000 years and it has failed.

Here is how the reasoning goes for the ones who oppose the resurrection and have to do something about it.

The people of the time could have easily fallen prey to the reports of the resurrection because they believed a resurrection could actually happen.

The disciples were heartbroken when Jesus died but they believed He was still with them to guide them as he lived on in their hearts in spirit. Some may have felt that they had visions of Him. As time went on stories developed that Jesus actually raised from the dead physically.

That is why the four gospels were written. This sounds very reasonable to the contemporary person today.

2. IN DEFENSE OF THE WITNESSES AT THE TOMB

A. FABRICATIONS?

So the skeptics say the gospels were written much later.

1. First written account found in Paul—1 Cor 15:3-6

Paul wrote this letter before the gospels were written, so the account of the resurrection was written early. Paul speaks of the empty tomb and lists witnesses. This was a public document spread everywhere for all to read. Paul challenged anyone to prove those eyewitnesses didn't exist. Paul had faithfully recounted the testimony that had been handed to him. Critics say early Christians used folktales that changed the telling. But ancient cultures clearly distinguish the difference between fictional stories and historical accounts. Paul had an historical account.

2. First eyewitnesses were women

We have just seen that each gospel account shows the first eyewitnesses were women. Women had a low social status and would not have been an advantage to the church to mention them. It could only undermine the credibility of the testimony. There must have been tremendous pressure on the writers to remove the women from the accounts. They couldn't do so, the records were too well known. The accounts of the first witnesses would have been life changing. The story would have been more known than any other story of the life of Jesus.

3. Combination of eyewitness sightings and empty tomb

N. T. Wright says that these two have to go together because if you would have an empty tomb but no witnesses no one would conclude that it was a resurrection. It would be taken as the body was stolen. If you have sightings and no empty tomb, it would not be seen as a resurrection. People think they see their departed loved ones all the time. There was an empty tomb and if it were not empty, skeptics could have retrieved the rotting corpse and marched it through the streets of Jerusalem.

4. Multiple eyewitnesses documented

Paul could not have been telling that there were hundreds of eyewitnesses in this public document if there were not.

B. IDEAS OF RESURRECTION IN THE WORLD

To all the worldviews at the time, it was inconceivable that there could be individual bodily resurrections.

1. Greeks----impossible

To the Greek the spiritual was good and the physical was weak. Salvation to them was liberation from the body. Once the soul was free, it was never to have a body again. This is the idea that Paul ran up against as he proclaimed the resurrection.

2. Jews---impossible at the time,future renewal of the world
To the Jew, the physical was good and the spiritual was good.
They did look to the future and there being a resurrection of everything. The whole world would be renewed. This didn't happen. They would say how can this be true? There is still death and disease and injustice. So the Jew would not have bought in to this resurrection very easily.

Hallucinations? Imaginary sightings? Not possible, too many witnesses.

Conspiracy theory The disciples stole the body and claimed there was a resurrection. But Jews would have a hard time believing this, there is no evidence. To a Jew resurrection was impossible.

C. THE EXPLOSION OF A NEW VIEW

This movement based on this resurrection sprang up full blown immediately after the death of Jesus. It was not a process or development that all other religions and philosophies have had. They were not debating. They were just telling others what they had seen. There had to be repeated encounters with Jesus. How could first century Jews have come to worship a man as divine? Yet Jews began to worship Christ almost overnight. What enormous event broke through the Jewish resistance? If they would have seen Him resurrected, that would account for it. People died for believing this account. People would not die for a lie knowingly.

People must face and answer all these historical questions. They don't have the right to just dismiss the most remarkable event in the history of mankind. They must come up with a historically feasible alternative explanation for the birth of the church.

3. OUR WONDERS OF THE RESURRECTION

This is a historical fact much more proven than other events in history we take for granted. The resurrection has the most evidence than anything else. Written documents that could be used in court, hundreds of witnesses, changed lives, people willing to die for this truth, etc.

People should want this to be true. It is the only hope for the sinful world we live in.

The resurrection is not just a wish that we Christians have. It is a reality and means everything to us. If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept everything He said. If He didn't rise, then dismiss everything He said.

If He rose from the dead, we don't have to be afraid of anything, especially death. All sin has been defeated and we are on the side of the Conqueror.