

Easter Sunday

April 16, 2017

Luke 24:1-8 (CSB) – ¹ On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, [the women] came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. ³ They went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothes. ⁵ So the women were terrified and bowed down to the ground. “Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” asked the men. ⁶ “He is not here, but he has risen! Remember how he spoke to you when he was still in Galilee, ⁷ saying, ‘It is necessary that the Son of Man be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day.’ ⁸ And they remembered his words.

Introduction

You expect to find hamburgers at McDonalds. You expect Hwy 41 northbound to be packed with cars a few hours before kickoff. You expect spring to follow winter. You came to church this morning expecting to smell Easter lilies. And you do. You expected to hear some loud and joyful music after the more subdued worship of Lent. And you have. You expected to hear a preacher preach this morning. So I am. You expect all those things. No surprises here.

But there are also times when things aren't as you'd expect. That time when you zipped right along through Appleton or Green Bay without hitting a red light. The time when you were fishing for blue gills and you reeled in a northern instead. The time when you expected it to be just another church service. Suddenly, a single sentence from the sermon or a certain phrase from a hymn verse hit your heart out of nowhere and your eyes began to tear up.

Theme: Repent – Turn to Jesus for Resurrection and Life.

Easter is one of those things we just weren't expecting, but it's exactly what we need! For the next few minutes, let's set aside thoughts of Easter baskets, egg hunts, and family gatherings. Those things aren't going anywhere; they can wait. For the next few moments, let's turn away from the busyness of everyday life and turn toward the ancient message of Easter. **Let's Turn to Jesus for Resurrection and Life!**

Sermon Exposition

Actually, Luke's account of Easter morning begins exactly the way you'd expect: **“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, [the women] came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared.”** It all seems quite normal. All we read about here are dear friends, a dreadful grave, and basic human dignity.

These women had been DEAR FRIENDS and supporters of Jesus and his ministry. It's possible they were even mothers of some of Jesus' disciples. They'd supplied food and clothes for Jesus with their own money. They'd stood by Jesus at the foot of the cross when so many had deserted him. Their loyalty and their love for Jesus were on display in their lives. They'd demonstrate their loyalty and love also in his death.

Where were these faithful women going? They were going to A DREADFUL GRAVE. No one likes cemeteries. We'll do anything we can to “nice-ify” them while we're there. We talk about how pretty the flowers are, how nicely mown the grass is, and how beautiful the memorial stones are. But deep down we know that we can't spruce up death with pretty flowers well-manicured lawns. Jesus' tomb was a brand-new one – loaned to him by a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea. But even this “platinum package” tomb couldn't compensate for the fact that Jesus' battered, lifeless body lay inside on a cold stone slab. What a dreadful end Jesus had endured. What a dreadful place to see him in.

These faithful women would make the best of it. They'd go to that dreadful tomb and supply Jesus with some BASIC HUMAN DIGNITY. Jesus had received a quick burial on Good Friday. On Saturday evening, after the

Sabbath Day rest was over, the women went shopping for burial spices – myrrh and aloes. They'd lovingly clean Jesus' bloody body, gently sprinkle his body with the spices, snugly wrap his body with clean linen, tenderly place a burial cloth on his face, and let Jesus rest in peace. Then they'd return to a life that was going to be dreadfully different without Jesus!

All of this is completely what we'd expect. Nothing out of the ordinary here. A dead man, a grave, and a group of mourners wanting to say a final, fitting farewell. If Luke ended his account here, we'd have no reason to celebrate Easter. This morning would be a colossal waste of time. If the account ended here, then our dreams for heaven would be dashed and we'd have just come face-to-face with the death of the Christian faith!

But then something happened that the women didn't expect: **"They found the stone rolled away from the tomb."** They'd returned to the tomb at the crack of dawn! Who possibly could've beaten them out here this early? And besides, who would've opened the grave? And what about the Roman guards? They'd been watching to make sure none of Jesus' disciples came in the middle of the night, carted off the body, and then claimed that Jesus was alive. Where were they? Roman legionnaires didn't run away from their duty, even if it meant death for them. What in the world was going on here!?

The women stepped into the tomb. When they did, they experienced the first Easter: **"They went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothes. So the women were terrified and bowed down to the ground. 'Why are you looking for the living among the dead?' asked the men. 'He is not here, but he has risen! Remember how he spoke to you when he was still in Galilee, saying, 'It is necessary that the Son of Man be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day.'"**

Instead of linen grave clothes, they saw what seemed to be men dressed in dazzling light! Instead of a cold cadaver, they saw angelic messengers. The rocky slab where Jesus' lifeless body lay became the first Easter pulpit. Instead of the silence of a tomb and the stillness of death, they listened to a sermon – short, sweet, and to the point. This sermon has literally changed the history of the world: **"He is not here, but he has risen!"** The beaten and battered, poked and prodded, whipped and crucified One lives again!

"Just a second, Pastor. Did you say that a dead man literally rose from the dead?" Actually, I didn't say it; angels said it. No, even more than that, Jesus himself said it! **"Remember how he told you!"** the angels said. Whether or not someone believes in the bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead doesn't change the fact in the least: Easter truly, literally happened. Turn away from doubts and disbelief! Instead, turn in joy to Jesus who is the resurrection and the life!

But let's play devil's advocate for a minute. Let's say Jesus didn't rise from the dead. Let's say the Roman guards were scaredy-cats, the women were all delusional, and the angels were purely mythical. Let's go all the way and say that Luke was just making stuff up. What are you left with?

1. You're left with your sin. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."** If Jesus hasn't been raised, then when he said, **"It is finished"** on the cross he wouldn't have been talking about our salvation, but himself. He would've been finished. A dead savior is a dead deception, a buried dream. No, if Jesus is still dead, then we've got a huge problem that's three letters long: S-I-N! And deep down inside of us, every single one of us knows that **"the wages of sin is death."**

2. If Jesus is still dead, then we have no real hope when we take our own trip to the funeral home someday! Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15: **"If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost."** If Christ hasn't been raised, then the funeral home is a hopeless dead-end (pun intended). Even worse – there's that constant nagging in our consciences and in my Bible of what happens to the departed soul apart from Christ. If Christ hasn't been raised, then the thought of eternity can only make us shudder!

3. Finally, if Christ is still dead, then we have no real hope in this life either. Paul says, **“If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”** If Jesus is still in his grave, then this sermon is silliness, your trust in Christ is childish, and your faith is foolish. If Christ hasn’t been raised, then you might as well go home and play a game of *Trivial Pursuit*, because that’s what your life is if Christ is dead – a trivial pursuit, a chasing after the wind.

But Jesus *has* been raised from the dead – really, physically, truly raised from the dead! The crucified one lives again! God stakes his entire reputation upon these historical, unshakeable Easter facts! St. Luke is no liar. The women weren’t delusional – far from it. They were astonished! The angels are no myth. They’re the Almighty’s messengers – proclaiming the greatest truth of all time. God proclaims his Easter truth to us so that we can have a rock-solid foundation to build our life upon: that sin, through Christ, stands forgiven; that death, in Christ, has gone to die; that the devil, by Christ, has been defeated; that life, in Christ, lasts forever! Easter is exactly what we wouldn’t expect, but it’s exactly what we need!

What do you need? You desperately need GOD’S FORGIVENESS! Jesus died on the cross to pay sin’s shocking price tag. On the cross, Jesus said that his work of saving us from our sins was finished. Easter is the proof! The Scriptures tell us, **“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”** Easter is our Lord’s declaration to us that our sin has been forgiven. Turn to Jesus for his forgiveness! He died and rose again to forgive every sin for every sinner.

What do you need? You need HELP WITH DEATH! Friends, in Christ, death has been defeated. The funeral parlor looks like a dismal place. A graveside feels so final. But looks and feelings can be deceiving. Death and the grave isn’t our grand finale. Because Jesus lives again, we can be absolutely sure that death is but a sleep. My alarm clock wakes me up every morning. And so does yours. Our living Lord will one day wake us up from our graves, just as he himself did. In Jesus – the resurrection and life – we live even though we die. Turn to Jesus! His resurrection ensures your resurrection!

What do you need? You need HOPE IN LIFE. Wars drag on. The economy fluctuates. We pray about our problems when we go to sleep. When we wake up, they’re often still there. There are plenty of times when it feels like God is light-years away while our problems are as close as the nose on our face. Your hope for daily life and eternal life isn’t placed in a dead guy. No! Christ is alive, which means that we have all kinds of hope to bring us through this life. The living Lord is with you every single second of this life until he takes you into eternal life. Turn to Jesus! His life is your life!

Conclusion

So, what are you expecting to receive from your celebration of Easter? I suppose that depends on what you personally believe about the reality of Jesus’ resurrection. If the forgiveness of sins and victory over death aren’t really that big of a deal to you, then there’s no pressing reason to come and worship him again anytime soon. And the best you can hope for today is a bunny, bonnets, ham, and a nap. But if Christ walked out of his tomb – truly, bodily, powerfully – then you have every reason to worship him as often as you can! And the best you can hope for today is full forgiveness for all your sins, complete removal of all your guilt, God’s truth to drive out your doubts, joy as you live for Jesus now, hope of eternal life in heaven, and the assurance of your own bodily resurrection when the last trumpet sounds.

Until that last trumpet sounds, may our Lord Jesus keep you in a living Easter faith – a faith that continually turns to Jesus for resurrection and life. Turn to Jesus. He is risen! He has risen, indeed! Hallelujah! Amen.