

# NOTES FROM PASTOR TIM'S SERMON 9th April 2023 am

## Easter Sunday – Part 2 – “The witness of doubters”

### Scripture references from the ESV

**Luke 23:50-24:12** Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, <sup>51</sup> who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. <sup>52</sup> This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. <sup>53</sup> Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. <sup>54</sup> It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. <sup>55</sup> The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. <sup>56</sup> Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

<sup>24</sup> <sup>1</sup>But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. <sup>2</sup> And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. <sup>5</sup> And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup> He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” <sup>8</sup> And they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup> and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup> Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, <sup>11</sup> but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. <sup>12</sup> But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

On Easter Sunday, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. 2000 years ago, on a Friday, Jesus died on a cross just outside the city of Jerusalem. This was a real historical event and it was a real death. Before the sun set, his lifeless body was taken down and laid to rest in a tomb, where it would decay. That decay never happened because three days later his body was raised to life.

It was the same body, but different. It was still a real human body, recognisable as the body of Jesus Christ, but it was a body suitable for eternity, one that would never wear out or experience death again.

**2000 years later, Jesus is still alive and his body is as fit now as it was when he walked out of the tomb.**

- Do you really believe that and if so, what difference is this truth of the resurrection making to your life?
- How does this truth change the way you think about the world and your place in it?
- How does it change the way you think about your own suffering and the prospect of your death
- How does it shape the way you use your money?

What is your response to this truth? It is likely to be one of the following three responses

**a) You might not believe it at all and consider it to be just a fairy-tale.**

**b) You might believe it but it doesn't make any difference to how you live.**

You do not recognise it as a truth that enables you to rejoice in the face of suffering, or see it as a burning reality that enables you to face the prospect of death with courage. Instead, like many of us, you have unconsciously bought into the worldview that says this life is all there is. That view says:

- You need to stay healthy so that you can live as long as possible here
- You need to make sure we save the planet because if we don't it is heading for extinction.

It is true that we are not to be reckless because God expects us to be good stewards of all he has given us, but there is a problem with that worldview.

- It makes us our own saviour. We must keep ourselves well. We have to save the planet by our own efforts.
- It fails to take into account the truth of the resurrection. Because Jesus is alive, God will also make us alive

and God is going to renew this world so that we have somewhere to live.

If we don't fight the worldview that is pushed on us from all sides, it is probably because subconsciously we too think we have to be our own saviour and do not believe there is a resurrection. The third response is this:

**c) You do believe the truth of the resurrection and it is changing the way you think and live.**

- You are facing your physical suffering with hope that one day you will not be suffering
- You are being responsible over this planet but looking to Jesus to renew it when he returns
- You are not afraid of death because you know it does not have the final word over your life
- You are confident that this body will be raised to life again and you will enjoy living in it again
- You are confident that Jesus' resurrection means God has accepted his sacrifice and there is real forgiveness.
- The truth of the resurrection assures you that you will get back what death and decay takes from you.

Most of us experience some doubts about this truth but we can be encouraged because the first witnesses to the resurrection also doubted. Yet they came to believe and their lives were radically changed.

- 1) **The unbelief of the women (vv1-4 above).** The women were going to the tomb with burial spices to anoint the dead body of Jesus. They were not expecting Jesus to be alive. They were perplexed by the missing body and could not work it out (vv4-7), although Jesus had told them what would happen.

**The women's problem was unbelief**

- 2) **The unbelief of the disciples (vv8-11).** When the women came to tell them, the disciples dismissed their testimony. Yet Jesus had also told them three times what would happen: **The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.** (Luke 9:22, see also 9:44-45, 18:31-34). When the women report that the angel told them to remember Jesus' words, they dismissed what the women were saying and didn't even try to believe it. The disciples are going to be the men who Jesus will task with telling the world that he is alive and yet

**The disciples just don't believe it!**

- 3) **The unbelief of the two** – find out what happened with these two next week!

These early followers of Jesus did not find it easy to believe but they did come to believe.

How did this happen? Read Luke 24:36-49 in your Bible.

They had an encounter with the risen Lord Jesus who opened their minds to understand the scriptures and then commissioned them to be witnesses to the resurrection. We need these things to happen too.

### 1. We need the witness reports of the resurrection.

Remarkably, Jesus commissioned these doubters to be his witnesses. These disciples, who failed to believe all that was told them, became eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. They saw Jesus alive after they had seen him die, and they spoke this message to the people in Jerusalem. This gospel account is an eyewitness account.

When Luke writes about their doubts, he helps us to understand that this must have been a true account.

These were not gullible people, despite our desire to think of them in that way. We like to think that we

are more enlightened than they were, which is a form of generational pride.

However, the disciples did not believe the message without having real evidence.

That real evidence was Jesus standing in the room where they were hiding from the authorities.

If you were making up this story, you would not write that the first witnesses doubted!

In addition, their lives were radically transformed. They had been hiding from the authorities, but after seeing Jesus,

they stood in the temple where those same authorities ruled, and declared that Jesus was alive. They endured suffering and death, declaring that they had seen Jesus. 2000 years later, 2.3 billion people claim to be followers of Jesus. Other so-called messiahs have been put to death, and when they died their followers gave up.

Yet from 11 frightened men have come the 2.3 billion adherents to Jesus. Why?

**Jesus is alive.** The witness statements are true. In order to have that belief ourselves, we need to hear these statements and read and study them carefully, setting aside all the false messages the world gives us. In addition:

**2. We need our minds opened.** When Jesus spoke about his death and resurrection to the disciples, **they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.** (Luke 18:34). They did not believe what they were told by the women and the angels, nor even the words of Jesus himself, because their minds could not grasp what they were told.

That changed when they saw Jesus, who **opened their minds to understand the Scriptures** (Luke 24:45). Many people have closed their minds to the claims of the Bible, accusing Christians of being gullible, when in fact they are the ones acting gullibly. Christians are to use their minds to understand the witness statements and work out the meaning of Bible text. It is a thinking person's faith. We need our minds opened to the truth, which means:

**3. We need Jesus to act.** The disciples had a real encounter with the living Lord Jesus who opened their minds to understand.

**Because Jesus is alive, he can be known personally today**

Because Jesus is alive, we can have a real encounter with him, whereby

- He opens our minds to understand the eyewitness statements that we read
- He brings us to believe that this is true
- He changes our lives so that we live differently

Have you had a real encounter with Jesus so that:

- You know Jesus is alive, you know the scriptures are true and you know the resurrection is real
- You know that you will rise from the grave, and you know that your resurrection means hope for this earth because God is going to redeem the whole of creation

**Have you had that encounter and is that your experience on a daily basis?**

If so, then you can face an uncertain future with confidence, knowing that God will accept you on the day of judgement. We can know that Jesus' death was enough to satisfy God as atonement for every sin of his people because Jesus was raised to life from the grave. If it had not been enough, then he would have remained dead in the tomb. The resurrection assures us that sin has been atoned for completely and there is nothing left to pay.

You can also face the uncertainty of ill health, death and a changing planet. **The resurrection is coming** so:

- Just as Jesus was raised to life again in a body that will never suffer the effects of the fall, so we too will be raised to life with bodies that will be free from pain, weakness and decay
- Just as we will be raised to life, so creation, currently groaning under the weight of the curse as it struggles to cope with the demands of 8 billion people, will be redeemed and God will give us back this world with all its beauty so that we will have a place to live forever.

**The resurrection assures us that what death takes we will get back.**

**We do not need to grasp on to what we have here**

**We are spared from the despair that those around us experience.**

**This truth of the resurrection changes the way we think and live.**

**Do you really believe it?**