

Implications of a Resurrection¹

Luke 24:1-35

April 5, 2015

Dan Hoffman

[Pray]

Good morning and welcome to Easter Sunday. If you brought a Bible with you this morning please open it up to Luke chapter 24. If you didn't bring a Bible you will find one in the pew in front of you and I encourage you to turn to page 748 – Luke chapter 24, and follow along.

Now I want to start by acknowledging that on days like Easter Sunday and Christmas there is a higher than average level of diversity in the people who show up. What I mean is that on an average Sunday there are mostly two kinds of people who come, but on a Sunday like today there are at least four.

So first there are the two groups who are always here. Some of us come simply because this is what we have been doing for as long as we can remember. And others of us are here because we've actually had an experience with the risen Christ; He has called us to Himself and changed our lives so much that there really is no where else we would rather be than with a bunch of other people who were interested in worshipping and pursuing Jesus.

But then at Easter there are two other groups who find themselves in church.

So maybe you are here because you grew up as a Christian and you consider yourself a Christian but that pretty much boils down to attending church a few times a year and being a really good person – and you are. You're better than your co-workers and perhaps you even do more nice things than the Jehovah's Witness who lives down the street. And so you don't feel you really need to practice Christianity more than you already are because you are good enough.

And then there are others here who are really here because you've been dragged here kicking and screaming. Maybe you did the screaming in private and the person who invited you doesn't know this, or maybe you were a bit more vocal about it. But regardless, attendance today is strategic for you. Your hope is that by coming today you will pacify whoever invited you so they won't pester you until at least Christmas. You don't believe in Jesus or the Bible, and you are just hoping this service will finish quickly and you can escape.

I think that pretty much sums up everyone who is here. And I tell you this because I want you to know that I'm not going to take for granted that we all believe the same things today.

¹ Sermon outline adapted from Pastor Matt Chandler

<http://thevillagechurch.net/resources/sermons/detail/implications-of-the-resurrection/>

But I also want to establish a foundation. As Christians we've gathered here today for a very specific purpose. We really do believe that 2000 years ago something incredible, actually something miraculous happened.

We believe that Jesus Christ, a real man, lived a perfect life, and then was crucified and died on Good Friday. But then, proving everything He said was true, and so paying the penalty our sins deserved, He physically came back from the dead Easter morning.

We actually believe that. Now we know what that sounds like. It sounds crazy. But in spite of the fact this has never happened any other time in history, and so can't be scientifically proven, we aren't troubled. And that's because we believe this didn't happen naturally, we believe God stuck His fingers into our world and made this happen.

So that's all of us. But regardless of where you come down it is a historical fact that something happened 2000 years ago. I mean Jesus is the most famous person ever to live. The calendar uses His life to mark 0. He's been the topic of more debates, He's been on more magazine covers and He actually shows up in more world religions than anyone else. And so to be intellectually consistent we need to decide what we believe about Him. That's what we're looking at today.

And when it comes to Jesus the place to begin is His resurrection from the dead. This is the lynch-pin of everything in Christianity.

If Jesus didn't physically come back from the dead the rest of Christianity crumbles because then the things Jesus taught can be proven to have problems. And ultimately His words about paying for our sin and making us right with God would be worthless. And that would make Christianity the biggest April Fools prank in human history, and Christians the most pitiable suckers of all time. And actually the Bible agrees with that!²

So what I want to do this morning is look at Luke 24 and deal with the resurrection. Now if you aren't a Christian then you don't believe the Bible is true and so we will get to the secular perspective in a bit, but first let's hear the oldest written explanation for what changed the world 2000 years ago.

Luke 24 starting in verse 1.

[Read Luke 24:1-12]

This is the account the Bible gives for the resurrection of Jesus. These few verses, and others like them, are how the Bible describes the one event that turned the world upside down. And the Bible's explanation is that God did a miracle. And it was that miracle that changed the course of human history.

² 1 Corinthians 15:14-19

...

Now there are many who don't want to accept this because they can see, as well as we can, that if the resurrection was really a true miracle then there are serious implications. And so these people have worked to produce four theories that have been used throughout the years to explain this event away.

Now these are theories that have been presented by secular scholars who know something huge happened Easter Sunday 2000 years ago. And they are trying hard to explain away the resurrection by giving the Easter phenomena a natural explanation. And you will hear these theories presented by Natural Geographic or other generally good scientific sources.

1.) The first theory is that on Easter Sunday the women went to the wrong tomb.

So early in the morning these women wake up and get ready to go and take their spices and wrap Jesus' body – that's what they did in the first century. But they are so overcome by grief that they simply took a wrong turn. And the tomb they found was empty because it wasn't Jesus' tomb.

Now this is possible. I mean I don't know about you, but I've been lost before. And I know for a fact that when people experience extreme stress they aren't all that good at following directions, so this could have happened right?

Sure, except that you have to remember that the whole reason Jesus was killed on the cross was that the leaders of Israel and Rome hated Him so much and wanted His message stopped so badly that they actually plotted to kill Him – think about that.

...

And now imagine word started getting out that Jesus had come back from the dead. All these leaders would have had to do was produce the body and no one would have believed Jesus was back. And these Jesus haters would have done this in a second!

So really this theory has no possible foundation in reality.

2.) The second major theory that secular historians have produced in order to explain away the resurrection is that Jesus' followers hallucinated it.

In this theory the idea is that the disciples were distraught having all their hopes and dreams smashed, and perhaps they were medicating their pain a little too much, and they started hallucinating.

After all they wanted Jesus back so badly! And it's happened in other places that people have hallucinated things they really wished were true. So possible right?

...

The problem with this is that the resurrected Jesus didn't just appear to one guy over here and another guy over there. He actually appeared to groups at once. Now there is no evidence whatsoever for group hallucinations – where two or more people see the same thing – that just doesn't happen.

But that's what these encounters would require. And some of them are really bizarre, like Jesus shows up in a locked room where the 11 remaining disciples are huddling in fear, and He lets them touch Him, and then He eats some broiled fish.³ Now I like broiled fish as much as the next guy, but that is a very hearty hallucination that can pull that off!

And then it's not just the 12 who saw Jesus. When the Apostles spoke of the resurrection they didn't appeal to faith, instead they appealed to eye witness accounts. So for example once Paul was telling the Corinthians about the good news of Jesus and he said:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. (1 Corinthians 15:3-6)

Now if you commit a crime and it is just my word against yours, you could get off. But if I have five hundred eye witnesses who saw the same thing you are going to jail.

And so the idea that the resurrection could have been some kind of strange multi-person hallucination is just absurd.

And then ultimately this theory has the same problem the first one did – all the enemies of Jesus would have had to do to shut it down would have been to produce the body. Friends it is amazing what lengths people will go to in order not to believe.

...

3.) The third major theory people looking for alternatives to an actual resurrection have come up with is called the “swoon theory.” This one has gained a fair bit of traction over the years.

The idea here is that after Jesus was beaten and whipped and nailed through the hands and feet to a tree, and then hung out in the hot sun for hours and finally pierced in the side with a spear... He blacked out – He didn't die. He was exhausted and suffering a massive loss of blood so He fainted and appeared dead. And so mistakenly He was buried alive.

³ Luke 24:36-43

Now this is gross, but people have been mistaken for dead and buried before. Then afterwards when people have gone back for one reason or another and exhumed the grave there has been evidence that the person revived only to wake up inside a buried casket. Terrible right?

And so some people think this is what happened to Jesus. He didn't actually die, He just appeared dead and recovered... At least that's the easy way of saying it. Here's what this theory would actually mean.

After surviving an incredibly brutal session of torture at the hands of professional executioners, Jesus would have had to pull off an Houdini like escape from yards and yards of tightly wrapped linen. Then He would have had to crawl out of the tomb, pushing aside the boulder that blocked the entrance, and then made off battered and naked without attracting any attention.

I mean can you imagine what Jesus would have looked like? He would have been a walking corpse. He would have needed immediate medical attention, and then if He survived He would have died for real sometime later.

But one thing is for sure, He wouldn't have looked like He came back from the dead, He would have looked like He narrowly escaped death. And He wouldn't have been able to convince anyone that He had been resurrected. But that's not the account we get.

...

Earlier in the service we read the story of the Road to Emmaus. And if you have your Bibles open you will see that this is the very next thing that happened. So look again at verse 13.

[Read Luke 24:13-16]

Jesus walked with them and they didn't know it was Him until, verse 30 and 31 tell us, they got to Emmaus and Jesus broke bread with them. Now what's the point here?

Verse 13 starts with the words "The same day." That's Sunday. That's a little later in the same day the women and Peter couldn't find Jesus in the tomb. These two disciples were walking to Emmaus 7 miles away – that's 11.27Km for anyone who doesn't know.

And Jesus showed up with them and started walking. Now please notice that these disciples don't think Jesus looks like a zombie. They don't notice anything remarkable about Him and just keep on commiserating about what happened over the weekend!

...

And they walk all the way to Emmaus. 11.27Km! Jesus took a walk, a long walk, with a couple unsuspecting witnesses, the same day He supposedly recovered from crucifixion.

I don't know when the last time you walked 11.27Km was –I've never walked that far. And Jesus pulled this off the same day – 7 miles!

Friends it is absolutely ridiculous to think that Jesus could have done this after having been tortured for around 20 hours by professional executioners intending to kill Him just two days before.

Secular sociologist and skeptic David Friedrich Strauss talks a bit about this theory in a really honest way. Even though He doesn't believe in the resurrection he says:

‘It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulcher, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to his sufferings, could have given the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave... Such a resuscitation could... by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship.’⁴

That's a secular scholar who doesn't believe in the resurrection talking. And yet history is clear these disciples did have their sorrow changed to enthusiasm and then they turned the world upside down. So the swoon theory is probably the craziest thing a person could believe about what happened Easter Sunday 2000 years ago.

...

4.) That leaves us with the last major theory people have come up with in order to explain away the resurrection.⁵ And it is the idea that the disciples stole Jesus' body from the grave and made it all up in order to keep Jesus' teaching alive.

Now there is a precedent for this kind of thing. Crazy cults and conspiracy theorists have done stuff like this over the years. People have agreed together to intentionally lie in order to achieve a certain deception. So possible, right?

...

But the problem here is that this doesn't make any sense with the rest of the Biblical record. Here's what I mean: If the disciples were making this up why would they write themselves in as being so stupid.

⁴ David Frederick Strauss. *The Life of Jesus for the People* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1879, 2nd ed.), Vol. 1, p. 412.

⁵ This theory is also in the Bible. See Matthew 28:11-15

I mean for the three years that Jesus spent time with them they continually couldn't understand what He was talking about. Towards the end of His life Jesus asks Peter, the number one disciple, "who do you think I am?" And Peter says "you are the Christ" – He gets it right! Then immediately Jesus tells them that He is about to die and Peter objects. And then Jesus turns around and says to Peter: "get behind me Satan."⁶

Now I don't know how many of you have ever had someone say something that absolutely crushed you. I mean someone you loved, who said something that just completely deflated you. But if I was making up history, I wouldn't put that part in the story.

And then there is the simple fact that all of the disciples were killed for their beliefs in Jesus and refused to recant. Peter got crucified upside down. James, Jesus' half-brother and one of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem was thrown from the roof of the temple and clubbed to death because he wouldn't deny that Jesus was God. Tradition tells us John, the longest surviving disciples was boiled alive but didn't die so they banished him to the island of Patmos to live out his last days in solitude. And none of them recanted.

Now remember the disciples aren't a bunch of navy seals – they are terrified fishermen! While Jesus was being beaten Peter was asked three times if he was one of Jesus' followers and he denied it each time even calling down curses upon himself saying I don't even know who this guy is!⁷ That's Peter the coward!

And then less than two months later this same Peter was preaching in the synagogue and the religious leaders command him to stop but he responded:
 "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to Him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19-20)

Something happened that transformed Peter the Coward into Peter the Rock willing to die for what he believed. And there are no other examples from history where agreeing on a lie brought about this kind of transformation.

...

So that leaves us with the biblical story. The Bible says that the women didn't go to the wrong tomb, they didn't experience a corporate hallucination, Jesus didn't survive the crucifixion, and his disciples didn't steal His body and lie about it.

The Bible tells us God brought Jesus back from the dead – now that's a miracle – we don't deny that. And we aren't saying we can reproduce it! But the biblical account makes sense of history and explains how a bunch of timid and uneducated fishermen could turn the world upside down like they did. They saw God at work! And that's what I'm praying happens here today.

⁶ Mark 8:33

⁷ Luke 22:54-62 and Mark 14:66-72

...

Now none of what I've said provides absolute proof for the resurrection. Another way of saying this is that faith is still required. But that's what Jesus asked for. And so my cards are on the table – this is where I've put my faith. The question is where have you put yours?

Obviously something happened 2000 years ago that changed the course of human history, what do you believe it was?

Now if you are someone who refuses to believe, then you will already be working on another outlandish theory. But perhaps this Easter God has begun softening your heart and calling you to something else – to Himself.

And that's my hope and so I want to leave us with a couple of implications if the resurrection is true – and I believe with my whole heart that it is.

First, if Jesus actually came back from the dead then His claims that our sins are real and are separating us from God and ultimately will result in death and eternal punishment are also true. Jesus says none of us are as good as we like to think. Instead all of humanity is full of rebellion against God. I see this in my 1 year old boys, and it doesn't go away when you turn 80.

The reality is people prefer to do things our own way not God's. We lie, we steal, we lust, we selfishly use each other and in so doing have rebelled against the very God who created us and ordained the way we are to live. None of us are exempt from this. Really from Mother Theresa to Hitler we've all fallen short of God's perfection. And so we all deserve the consequences of our sin.

That's the bad news of the Bible. That's the message Jesus brought. And then He died and came back to life so He's worth listening to.

But He didn't just leave us with bad news; ultimately Jesus' message is a good news message. And the good news is that Jesus' life, death and resurrection completely takes care of the penalty of sin for those who trust in Him – even though we are full of rebellion Jesus offers forgiveness.

...

Now maybe you are someone who doesn't think you are good at all, instead you think you are too bad to receive Jesus' forgiveness – you've done too much. But that belief is just as wrong as the belief that we are good enough.

The problem here is not too much sin, but too small a view of Jesus' sacrifice. But if Jesus came back from the dead then He really is the God of the universe and His sacrifice on our behalf is infinite!

When Jesus was on earth His message was that a new Kingdom was coming and He is the King. And if Jesus is the King and is writing the rules, and He says His sacrifice is good enough then that's the way it is.

...

And this leads us to the most interesting and counter-cultural conclusion. If Jesus is the King then everything in the universe including us, exists for Him. That means when we live our lives in a way that honours Him we find ourselves living in line with what we were created for, and that's where we flourish.

The contrast to that is what our culture says – everything here is about you. So pursue what you want, live for yourself. But we all know the result of that – misery, loneliness and everything else unfulfilling.

But the message Jesus brings breaths life into that exact situation. Jesus says "It's not about you. Your money isn't about you. Your time isn't about you. It's all about Me, and My Kingdom, and My glory." All of us have been created for His glory. We are all part of God's story.

Now that means if we refuse to repent then we are going to part of the story that proves His justice. But if we repent and come to Him for salvation we will join the part of the story He wants us to be in. We will reflect His grace and mercy.

And this is what we celebrate at Easter. We celebrate that Jesus came back from the dead defeating sin and death for Himself and for all those who trust in His name.

...

That's the good news of Easter that since the bodily resurrection of Jesus actually happened everything in this world has been affected including the way we live our lives. And so I urge you today to decide what you are going to do with the central event in human history.

Would you pray with me?