

The Doubt of Joy
Luke 24

From a cultural standpoint, Easter is a time that brings us signs of rebirth in nature, fun activities, new hats, family photos of everyone dressed up, chocolate eggs and chocolate bunnies (why???).

From a religious standpoint we have those who observe Lent, formally or informally. We have a special focus on Holy Week – the last week of the life of Jesus. This focus is NOT out of line with scripture since a disproportionate amount of attention is given to the last week of the life of Christ in the four gospels. This would cover the period from the Triumphal Entry on Palm Sunday to the resurrection one week later.

Matt ch 21-28 28% on one week

Mark ch 11-16 37%

Luke ch 19-24 25%

John ch 12-21 47%

Here we come to the central focus of the life of Christ – His death and resurrection.

It should not surprise us that those are the two things that those outside the church, and sometimes inside the church, DON'T WANT to focus on.

Jesus still tends to be viewed 'favorably' by people outside the church as long as they just consider SOME OF HIS TEACHING. But they would like to avoid the issues of his death and resurrection and what they mean.

There are those who would seek to pick apart some of the teachings of Jesus or some of the miracles of the Bible. Easter gives us the yearly reminder to make the main thing the MAIN THING.

If someone is going to have problems with the Bible, God or Jesus, at least focus on the MAIN thing – THE RESURRECTION.

This the point on which all of it stands or falls.

1 Cor 15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;

Easter is a time for this kind of certainty, right?

It is also a time for doubts.

When it comes to the resurrection, there are two kinds of doubt:

- 1) **This is simply impossible-** just "follow the science". "Dead people don't come back to life". I get it and so did the Christians of the 1st century. Nobody expected to find NO BODY in the tomb. Even the simple uneducated folk who followed Jesus weren't too keen on all the talk of resurrection.
- 2) **"This is too good to be true" kind of doubt. THAT IS THE doubt that we find identified in the gospels.**

Can you identify with that kind of doubt?

When things looked bleak, have you ever seen a sudden turn of events and you thought or said, "This is too good to be true."

Things turned around in such a way that you were surprised by joy and found it hard to believe.

This is the kind of doubt that some disciples experienced after the resurrection.

Luke 24:36 While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and *said to them, “Peace be to you.” 37 But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. 38 And He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” 40 And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet.

41 While they still could not believe *it* because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?”

42 They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; 43 and He took it and ate *it* before them.

Chad Bird: So, when the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples, “they still disbelieved for joy.” This is a different kind of doubt. A joyous doubt. A happy incredulity at the marvelous ways of God. It’s not really unbelief as much as over-belief—an overwhelming flood of happiness based on God’s shocking love.

If you’re here this morning and you have doubts, let them be doubts rooted in an understanding that it just seems too good to be true.

We see another interesting encounter with the risen Christ in Matt 28

16 But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. 17 When they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some were doubtful.

They worshipped but were doubtful. Why?

We don’t know exactly, but it seems likely that they were doubtful because they saw Jesus die and now, he was alive.

What do we do with our doubts like this?

Worship our way through them. Reckon them as too good to be true and lean on the character of God to keep us anchored. We don’t count on our faith per se. Christianity is not faith in faith. It is faith in Christ. We count on God as he is revealed in scripture.

The psalmists often process their doubts and questions in the context of worship. They cry out to God in pain, despair, and frustration, but they do it from a heart that is trusting in ultimate goodness of His heart.

There is historical reliability of the biblical record. This book has been poked and examined by skeptics for hundreds of years and no one has offered a better explanation for what happened than that given in the gospels – Jesus rose from the dead.

I’ve heard the argument that “something unusual or extraordinary happened that Sunday after the death of Christ, but it wasn’t a physical resurrection. The resurrection story was pieced together to form an explanation.”

BUT WHY? If there were a plausible explanation, why make up another story? If something happened that was so extraordinary that it changed the lives of the fearful disciples and gave them courage to defy the Jewish leaders and the Romans at the risk of death, why make up a lie?

Just go with the truth. They DID.

“BUT WAIT....the whole resurrection thing is impossible.”

Why? It’s only impossible if you say and believe that there is no God. Can you prove there is no God? Deep down in the places in your soul that keep you awake at night, do you ever doubt your unbelief?

Do you ever doubt your doubts? IF NOT, WHY NOT?

Do you ever doubt that there is NO EVIDENCE FOR God?

I'm afraid that when it comes to the issue of Christ and the resurrection, too many people are too comfortable with spiritual apathy. Biblically, that apathy is not neutral; it is a form of hostility toward God. In their apathy they willingly ignore some evidence in order to avoid the implications of what the existence of God means.

EX: Young man in France the existence of God and he reaches this conclusion:
"If there is a God, then he can tell us how to live. If there isn't a God, then life has no real meaning. If the first, then I don't want to live that way; if the later, I CAN'T live that way."

There is a problem for the response of secular naturalist, i.e. the who says "This resurrection can't be."
Why is he so sure that "this can't be?"

Because the philosophical secular naturalist has a prior commitment to a belief that the material world is all there is. But there is NOTHING about the nature of this world or our experience in this world that DEMANDS a pure naturalistic approach. It is a choice, not an empirical necessity.

C.S. Lewis -Reflections on the Psalms: The real reason why I CAN accept as historical a story in which a miracle occurs is that I have never found any philosophical grounds for the universal negative proposition that miracles do not happen.

In that naturalist worldview, there is no such thing as God or supernatural intervention. Thus, a resurrection is impossible, or so the naturalist believes.

The secular naturalist can only BELIEVE there is no God. He certainly can't prove it. Science doesn't even have the proper categories to prove the non-existence of a spiritual being. The naturalist approach demands more of science than it can produce.

If he is consistent, the naturalist would admit that his or her system is built on faith, not scientific or philosophical necessity or certainty.

The bottom line is that there is a faith component to belief in God and to unbelief.

There is a faith component to believing in the resurrection AND TO NOT believing in the resurrection.

At least the biblical account gives a plausible and consistent explanation for what transformed the early disciples from fearful followers to world changing witnesses (martyrs).

If we experience times of doubt, we can pray like the father in Mark 9:24

"Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief."

If you are going to doubt the resurrection, the doubt should be grounded in joy and amazement because it simply seems too good to be true.

GIVEN THE REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION, HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

Jesus didn't just rise from the dead for show. He rose and came back to give his disciples their primary mission. Jesus gives his disciples some final words of encouragement and instruction.

Luke 24: 44 Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are

witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

The disciples weren't motivated by warm fuzzy feelings of nostalgia in remembering what Jesus said or did. They were captivated and commissioned by the Risen Lord. They wanted to proclaim light in a world of darkness. They proclaimed Good News of Christ and the kingdom of God. With the good news was a call to repent, which didn't always go over to well. People don't like to admit that they are wrong. WE don't like to admit it. The flip side of faith in Christ is repentance, not just of the “sin” we were doing, but of being our own arbiter of truth, of being our own God.

At the core of what we call unbelief isn't unbelief at all. It is a competing belief, a belief in self.

The resurrection of Christ shows that there is one greater than us who is worthy of our trust and worship. The Christ followers acknowledged their need for a savior, not just another good example to follow. In walking with Christ, they'd seen too much, they knew too much to deny.

The lives of the early disciples were transformed because they saw Jesus die and come back to life again.

We all know that we often need a passport to legally travel from one country to another. There was talk of a vaccine passport in certain states or certain areas of business.

One day those issues will come to an end for us, either by our death, the total breakdown of society or the return of Christ.

Ultimately, the only passport that is needed is a Resurrection Passport, which is stamped on the hearts of those who trust Christ alone for eternal life.

Have you trusted Him?

- The ABC's of a Trust Transfer –
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- A - Admit that you can't save yourself and that you need grace – That means there is GOOD NEWS FOR YOU
- B- Believe that Jesus is the only Wisdom and Savior who can forgive your sin and heal your heart
- C- confess to God that you want to trust Jesus as your savior and Lord. (Rom 10:9)

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