He’s Alive – Do you really believe that?

Final teaching on the “How a proper understanding of our faith helps us in everyday life” mini-series

Johnny was five years old, but was sick on Palm Sunday (which we celebrated last week) so he stayed home from church with a sitter. When the family returned, his brothers and sisters were carrying palm branches. Johnny asked “What are those for?” ‘The people put them on the ground to honor Jesus when He walked by.’ With a sigh Johnny replied, “Wouldn’t you know it, the one Sunday I don’t go and He shows up!”

He’s Alive – Jesus is here with us today and willing to be in a personal relationship with anyone here who are willing to humble themselves and follow Him in faith. Someone has put words to the interaction between Joseph of Arimathea and Pontius Pilate after Jesus’ crucifixion when Joseph asked permission to have the dead body of Jesus to put in Joseph’s own recently purchased family tomb.

Pontius Pilate: ‘Joseph, I don’t understand. You are one of the richest people in the region. You have just made this brand new tomb for you and your family and now you want to give it to Jesus?’

Joseph: ‘Don’t worry – it is just for the weekend!’

Because Jesus is alive!

This past week we have been focusing on the last week of Jesus’ earthly life – starting with the triumphant entry which we celebrated last Sunday on Palm Sunday. Jesus then went through many challenges and threats especially from religious leaders. By the end of the week, Judas, a close associate to Jesus, had betrayed Jesus. Jesus was then beaten and put to death on a cross. We solemnly remembered this on Friday at our Good Friday candlelight service. Now we have come to the end of that week – the bodily, physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead, which we celebrate today on Easter Sunday! He’s Alive! This single week was so intense, so significant, so transformational, and so powerful that about 1/3rd of all the words in the gospels are just centered on this final week. Many of us read about these events in either Matthew, Mark, Luke or John in our personal Bible reading this week. Now ~2,000 years later, this Resurrection, or Easter, Sunday is celebrated as the high point of the year in Christian churches across our planet and in every nation. The bodily, physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the foundational truth of our faith. Without it, we have no confirmation that Jesus’ words are true, that there is life after death, that our sins can be forgiven, that Jesus is victorious over death or has more power than any enemy we face. So let’s go back see what we believe about Jesus’ resurrection from the dead in Luke 24. Just previous to this, Jesus had been put to death on the cross by the Romans, His body removed and given to Joseph of Arimathea to bury in a new tomb he had. Because it was late on Friday afternoon, when they received Jesus’ body and since the Jewish people were to do no work on the Sabbath, which starts around 6 pm Friday, Joseph, Nicodemus and the women did the first part of the embalming process and had a stone rolled in front of the tomb – expecting to go back and finish the embalming on Sunday morning.
PROPOSITION: Jesus’ bodily & physical resurrection from the dead shows Jesus’ power, truth and victory over our greatest enemies.

I. The resurrection is central to our Christian faith

A. Jesus died and was buried

So what do we believe about the resurrection. First, we believe Jesus actually physically died and then His clearly dead body was placed in a 1st century tomb with a large rock rolled in front of it. That is reflected in our first 3 verses. READ v 1-3. Jesus died around 3 pm on Friday afternoon and was buried in Joseph’s tomb, but because the Sabbath would soon start (around 6 pm on Friday), they had just started the embalming process and now were coming back to finish it. The women had been to the tomb before and the only reason they would bring those spices was to finish the embalming process on a dead body they fully expected to be there. Jesus’ death had also been confirmed by a centurion who was a seasoned executioner; the spear cut in His side before they took Him down from the cross because it showed how the blood had already started separating as it does after death; and by the Roman ruler, Pontus Pilot, who asked for confirmation of Jesus’ death. We have a lot of evidence that Jesus died and was buried. Now the women are shocked to find an empty tomb.

B. Resurrected bodily & physically

Second, we believe Jesus rose bodily and physically from the dead – not just as a spirit or soul or inner essence. Jesus’ body was missing from that tomb. READ v 4-7. Later Jesus will appear to them in His new resurrection body which they could physically touch and see that He could eat physical food. But Jesus could also do some cool new stuff in His new resurrection body including concealing His identity from those who knew Him, entering a room with a locked door and teleporting from one town to another instantly. Jesus had told them ahead of time that He would suffer and die and THEN on the third day He would rise from the dead. He meant what He said and now Jesus’ body is missing, because Jesus rose from the dead physically and bodily taking on a new body.

C. Actually happened in history

Third, we believe the physical bodily resurrection from the dead actually happened in history – our current time/space continuum. Interestingly, none of the early followers were expecting the resurrection of Jesus to be a literal event that genuinely happened in their history. In v 1 we see some women taking spices early on Sunday morning to finish the job of preparing Jesus’ dead body for the grave. There is no other reason to have those specially prepared spices except to put on a dead human body. The women expected Jesus’ dead body to still be there. In v 4, the presence of Jesus’ dead body from the tomb where they had clearly left it left the women wondering what happened. A physical, bodily resurrection was not even a remote thought in their minds. In v 4-7, it took two angels dazzling some of their brilliant glory and clearly repeating Jesus’ promise that He would rise from the dead to even get in their head the
thought of a physical, bodily resurrection actually happening! Clearly that is not how they originally took Jesus’ words. And when the women came back and told the apostles that there was no body, the tomb stone was rolled away and two angels told them Jesus is risen just like He promised – we find in v 11, that the disciples thought the women’s words were nonsense. They also never conceived of a physical, bodily return actually happening in history this way. Finally in v 12, even after Peter saw the empty tomb, the stone rolled away and the grave wrappings lying there like Jesus’ dead body had just passed out of them like a Star Trek beaming up – Peter still couldn’t comprehend this bodily, physical resurrection from the dead happening in history – just as we saw in the video.

D. Transformed the early believers
But boy did that resurrection change those early believers. The bodily resurrection is mentioned in a prominent way in all the early sermons where the disciples called people to repent and follow Jesus. The early disciples went from being afraid to boldly proclaiming about Jesus and His bodily resurrection from the dead despite increasing opposition. All of the apostles except John were later killed for their faith. The first 3,000 who repented & turned to the risen Jesus were so transformed that they freely gave away their possessions to the Lord’s work. Despite their strong Jewish background, we have evidence in the New Testament itself of worship moving from the Jewish Sabbath to the first day of the week – renamed the Lord’s Day because that is the day Jesus rose from the dead. And as an article in your bulletin points out – why would anyone become a Christian the first 300 years when it meant being ostracized, persecuted, beaten, lose jobs, imprisoned or even killed. And those transformations continue today all over the world in the toughest places including the 100 house churches since 2010 in a small region of the middle east we talked about 2 weeks ago.

II. The resurrection shows Jesus’ power, truth and victory

Revelation 1:17-18
Now turn to the last book in the Bible – the book of Revelation – Revelation chapter 1. The real physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead transformed the lives of the earliest believers, but what about us today? How does Jesus’ resurrection affect us today?

This is the last book of the Bible written. As we read together earlier, in Revelation 1:9-16, the apostle John is given a vision of Jesus. That vision is so powerful, regal and awesome that John immediately falls to the ground and doesn’t move. He’s totally overcome. Notice the core of how Jesus reassures and strengthens John. READ v 17-18. Do you see the clear foundation of the resurrection in v 18? “I am the Living One; I was dead and now look, I am alive for ever and ever.” The resurrection gives us continuous evidence of Jesus’ power, truth and ultimate victory.

A. Power over fear

The bodily, physical resurrection of Jesus gives us power over fear. READ v 17b-18a. The apostle John is so afraid it is as if he passes out. Now Jesus tells him NOT TO BE AFRAID and that courage is based on Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus was
genuinely dead – in the terms of the *Princess Bride*, Jesus was all dead not mostly dead. His body was in the grave for days. Now Jesus has come back to life – and that life is never going to end. By the way, to claim to be the first and the last is to claim what only God is – eternal.

The resurrection takes our greatest fears away – the fear of death, destruction, failure, and annihilation. It doesn’t matter what happens to us now, Jesus is always with us and we will live with Him forever if we put our faith and trust in Him. I remember being afraid of some bullies in High School – they were way stronger than I was. My youth pastor challenged my fear – ‘why are you afraid of them?’ Because they could kill me. ‘Great’, he said, ‘then you will be with Jesus.’ What else are you worried about?’ They are going to beat me up. ‘Then you will experience Jesus being with you in the hospital. He is alive and powerful.’ This went on for about 5 minutes until I realized, Jesus has power over any of the things I fear – and He demonstrated that power by rising bodily from the dead.

B. Truth of life after death

The bodily, physical resurrection of Jesus confirms the truth that there is life after death and Jesus is the way to that. READ v 18. How could any human know for certain there is life after death? Skeptics are correct when they say that just because a person wants something to be true, it doesn’t make it true. Someone had to overcome death, and prove they overcame death, for us to truly know there is life after death. The resurrection guarantees that God can raise us from the dead to immortal life.

Jesus’ physical, bodily resurrection from the dead gives us the evidence we need that Jesus’ words are true (since He alone predicted the resurrection and then carried it out exactly as He said). The resurrection confirms Jesus is the only way to the Father as He claimed. The resurrection confirms the inspiration of the Bible. And the resurrection confirms Jesus can bring all of His followers back to life.

C. Victory over death and hell

The bodily, physical resurrection of Jesus also assures us of victory over death and hell. The resurrection proves that the penalty for our sins has been paid in full. Jesus alone has the keys of death and hades that is, authority over death and the place of the dead. READ v 18b. Though the glorified Christ is to be honored & revered, faithful believers, like John, can be sure they are fully accepted. Jesus alone holds the remedy for death and the grave. The resurrection guarantees Jesus’ return and our rising again to new life forever with a resurrection body. The resurrection is the guarantee of ultimate justice. The resurrection is the anchor of every hope we have (Hebrews 6:17-20).

III. Transforms our daily struggles and brings hope

As we have been going through this series on some basic beliefs of our Christian faith and how they directly affect our daily lives I usually share 3-4 direct illustrations – 2 weeks ago I shared 20 – too many to write down. So we’ll end our time today the opposite – I’ll just
share one so we can go into more detail – then I trust the Holy Spirit will open your eyes to how that may apply to your own daily struggles. At the core, when we truly believe in Jesus' physical & bodily resurrection from the dead, it brings hope into our lives. This illustration comes from the testimony of Sabrina McDonald a few years ago entitled “How My Husband’s Death Changed the Way I see Easter”. These are mostly her words …

"How many times in my Christian life have I heard that Jesus rose from the grave and that I would be resurrected from death. These were facts that I knew, but until I personally walk through the valley of the shadow of death, that knowledge was only in my head.

September 24, 2010 was a beautiful autumn day. The weather was perfect. My baby girl was 3 months old, and the happiest baby you’ve ever seen. My 2-year-old son loved her, and we were looking forward to a fun weekend with my husband, David, who had recently done a lot of traveling. Life couldn’t have been better.

I knew something was wrong when I came home from a doctor’s appointment and my husband wasn’t home yet. I called his cell phone but it went to voicemail. I became more frantic calling people who might know where he was and then driving around town trying to find him. When I returned there was a police car in the driveway waiting for me. “Ma’am, your husband is dead.” Those words blared in my head so loudly, I struggled to hear anything else – something about a head-on collision and dying instantly. No last words, no hugs and kisses goodbye, he was just… gone… forever.

I loved that man with all my heart – how could he be dead? That meant it was all over – the happy ending, the laughter, the private jokes. He was the one I trusted with everything, the father of my children, my very best friend. He couldn’t be dead! That was a day that death became real to me. It wasn’t just for the elderly or criminals or people who live in an unhealthy lifestyle. It doesn’t discriminate; and no matter how well you live, eat, or treat people, no matter how godly you are, death will come to the flesh of all of us, and there’s no way to stop it.

The next several months were a blur of paperwork and legal issues, and then the winter set in with its cold, isolating darkness. The house seemed so lifeless when the kids went to bed, except for my sobbing and desperate pleas for God’s help. I had many wonderful people to help me through, but on the inside I was fighting a serious spiritual battle between darkness and light. ‘If God really loves you, why did He let this happen?’ ‘If God is really in control, why didn’t He stopped that wreck?’ The book of John became my lifeline, especially the story of Lazarus’ death. I held onto every word of Jesus. As much as Satan tried to separate me from the love of God, there was no other place to go. No one could offer hope except Christ.

I came to realize how much Jesus understood my grief. Lazarus had been dead 4 days when Jesus arrived. Both of Lazarus’ sisters said, “Lord if you had come, our brother would not have died.” Those are the same words I said so many times after David was killed! It was...
like I was hearing my own voice. Then Jesus said these powerful words to Martha: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” Jesus is not just saying He has power over death, but that He is the very essence of life. Resurrection from the dead to new life! Yet, even in His confident power, Jesus was compassionate in the midst of those mourning people. He wept. I knew then that Jesus wept for me also. Inside of His sovereign control, He could feel my pain. He wasn’t looking down at me from His throne demanding, “Get over it, Sabrina. If you really trust me, you wouldn’t whine like this.” No, He was there with me in the depths of darkness weeping with compassion for me. BUT THEN Jesus rose Lazarus from the dead. Jesus conquered our greatest enemy – death. *(He’s Alive)*.

I made it through the winter beaten and bruised and battle weary – then came Easter. I saw it for all its glory for the first time in my life. Resurrection seemed to be everywhere as the blooms of the Dogwood and Redbud trees peaked out of their bare branches. Leaf buds portrayed promise; birds sang with the sun; and the daffodils were reaching for their sky with their yellow petals of praise. It was Resurrection Day, and I could see life coming from death all around me, just as God promised through His Son Jesus. Lazarus was alive; Jesus was alive; David and all the rest of us who proclaim the name of Christ are alive for evermore! That’s where the hope is. If death hasn’t been conquered, then what is this life all about? It all fades into nothing. Life has no meaning without the work that Jesus accomplished on the cross and in His own resurrection. But because Jesus’ own tomb is empty, we can face tomorrow with all its trials, tribulations, and even the death of our most precious love ones.

How underrated we have made the Easter holiday! It should be a celebration of epic proportions. Something happened to me that bright Easter morning after David’s death – a miraculous healing of sorts. *The grief was not gone, but the hopelessness was.* Heaven opened up to me, in a way, and everything shifted into an eternal perspective. I realized Easter isn’t just about the day the stone was rolled away from Jesus’ grave. No, it’s much more than that. It’s about the day that Jesus rolled away the stone of every believer’s grave. Easter is about our own resurrection, through him. Because of Jesus, we are alive. For the believer, our story does not end in death but in resurrection.” *(He’s Alive)*! Let’s keep overcoming, especially in the power of the resurrection!

The power of Jesus’ Resurrection changed how I view problems. The promise of our own resurrection changes how I view problems. It doesn’t take away problems or feelings, but it takes away hopelessness and allows us to see the future possibility that will surely come.