

April 12, 2020

“The Resurrection”
Matthew 27:62-28:15

FCF: A disconnect with Easter

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The “Easter Message” is a shocking thing.
(magnet) And it raises some questions.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Though not as commercial as Christmas, Easter is the highpoint of the church calendar. “Why is that?” you ask. Because Easter is a celebration of Jesus’ resurrection. And without the resurrection, the Christian faith is empty, pointless, and devoid of any real meaning at all.

But perhaps you feel something of a disconnect to Easter. You can see a lot is made of it. But you’re not sure why. This may surprise you, but I felt that way for a long time. I just had a vague sense Easter was important but couldn’t explain it. All of this is well worth exploring.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 27:62-28:15](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

History is full of stubborn facts - part of which is the beginning of the Church and the counter-cultural convictions that we see from its beginning. George Weigel wrote about this in an oped for the Wall Street Journal a couple of years ago. He notes some historical facts, positions and perspectives of the early Christians, that need to be explained ([READ summary](#)):

- A new dignity given to women in contrast to the classical culture.
- A self-denying healthcare provided to plague sufferers.
- A focus on family health and growth.
- A remarkable change in worship from the Sabbath to Sunday.
- A willingness to embrace death as martyrs - because they knew that death did not have the final word in the human story.
- Living as if they knew the outcome of history itself.

No reasonable historian can dispute these facts. The question becomes, “How do you explain it?” Clearly, something happened in the flow of events. Something new entered the equation.

What was it? It was what Weigel calls “The Easter Effect” - the aftershocks of the bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The witnesses had no expectation of seeing Him again. They had seen Him brutally executed on Friday. Experience told them death was final. Yet there He was, physically raised on Sunday. Note my stress on a bodily resurrection because the soft soap of saying resurrection means “Jesus’ teaching lived on in His followers” simply can’t account for the history. The only thing that can really explain the obvious historical data is the Easter Effect.

Which brings us to this. The “Easter Message” is a shocking thing. It is a shocking thing. And it raises some questions, two of which I’d like to explore with you for a few minutes. The first is, “Is this credible?” And the second is, “Is this relevant?” Those are the questions.

I. IS THIS CREDIBLE?

First, is this credible? Can we believe the accounts? Good question. The answer is yes.

A) The Witnesses

Consider the witnesses for a moment. Who were they? What do we know of them?

1. They were women

Yes, they were disciples. But, specifically, they were women. Keep in mind the status of women in that culture. Their testimony was inadmissible in court. They were second-class citizens.

2. The credibility of the accounts

Which speaks to the credibility of the accounts. No one would think of making it up like this.

B) Their Testimony

So consider the witnesses. And then think about the testimony. How does it read?

1. Difficulties between the texts

There are difficulties between the texts. That is, differences in the Resurrection accounts. Some say they are contradictions. But they are actually complementary, each one giving a nuance.

2. The credibility of the accounts

Which again, speaks to credibility. If you were inventing this story, you would clean all that up.

C) Their Conviction

So we have the witnesses and their testimony. Then their conviction, what they believed.

1. The worship of Jesus

How did these witnesses respond to Jesus? (**READ Matthew 28:8-10**) They worshipped Him. Keep in mind these were monotheistic Jews. To worship a person was sacrilege, blasphemous.

2. The credibility of the accounts

Which again, speaks to the credibility. They knew Jesus to be God. That's the only explanation.

The witnesses, their testimony, their conviction - all of this (and a host of other things) points us towards the credibility of the Resurrection accounts. We can believe it. We can trust it.

Application:

Which means there's no need for foolish talk of our needing to take a "blind leap" of faith. There's nothing blind about Christianity at all. Yes, trusting Christ is a step of faith. But that means taking a step based on what you know. That's not blind. It's an informed decision.

And we do that all the time. When you take the medicine the doctor prescribes, you are trusting their expertise and the pharmacist's skill. That's a step of faith. When you heed the CDC's warnings and recommendations, you are trusting their knowledge. It's the same here.

The Easter Message is a shocking thing. It raises questions. And gives the answers.

II. IS THIS RELEVANT?

So yes, the message is credible. Fine. But is it relevant? What does it matter or mean?

A) A Clarification

For starters, these Resurrection accounts give us a much needed clarification.

1. The spiritual

That is, despite how we live, the physical realm is not all there is. We see there is the spiritual.

2. The eternal

And, with that, we see that physical death is not the very end. There is the eternal, a forever.

B) His Vindication

So a clarification. But the Resurrection is also Jesus' vindication. It gives clear proof.

1. His identity

It proves His identity. He is who He said He is - the Messiah, the Son of Man, the Savior.

2. His mission

It proves His identity. Jesus is who He said He is. And it proves His mission. Jesus did what He said He would do. His rising from the tomb shows He has conquered sin and death. It's proof.

C) Our Anticipation

The Resurrection is a clarification and His vindication. And it shapes our anticipation.

1. His return

We can now look forward to His return. He said He would rise and He did. He said He will return and He will. We cannot know the timing but we can know it's coming, that He is coming.

2. His kingdom

We can look forward to His return and the consummation of His kingdom, when all things will be truly and finally under His good rule - the full reclamation, restoration, renewal of all things.

Is the Easter Message relevant? Does it matter? It couldn't possibly matter more.

Application:

There are a lot of ways to apply this but let me focus on one. We're told that we really shouldn't worry too much about COVID-19 because the statistics show the fatality rate is low. But that is putting your hope in probabilities. We need more. Easter gives us certainty. It means the worst thing that could happen is you die and then finally get to move towards the next stage.

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CONCLUSION:

It's hard to say exactly how this global pandemic will play out. It has had its effects - upon the sick, healthcare workers, the vulnerable, the unemployed, students and families, our leaders, and churches. There are many ways we can be praying. No wonder health officials are searching for treatments and cures. Researchers are pushing ahead, trying new approaches and tapping into solutions from the past. There are different possibilities that have been reported, some said to have "tremendous potential." Which, of course, is tremendously encouraging. But to say something has "tremendous potential" really means it could help but we're not sure.

The Easter message - "Christ is risen!" - has more than potential. There is a certainty to the way it addresses our deepest needs. If embraced, the transformative healing outcome is sure. Why? We were made for it. That's also the reason for the longing we feel. It's why something stirs when we hear it. Our Creator made us for this message. And so it resonates within us.

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