

A man, his wife, and his mother-in-law went on vacation to the Holy Land, and while they were there, the mother-in-law unexpectedly passed away.

The local undertaker told them, “You can have her shipped home for \$5,000, or you can bury her here in the Holy Land for \$150.00.”

The man thought about it and then told the undertaker he would just have her shipped home.

The undertaker asked, “Why would you spend \$5,000 to ship your mother-in-law home, when it would be wonderful to be buried here and spend only \$150.00?”

The man replied, “A man died here some 2000 years ago, He was buried here, and three days later He rose from the dead. I just can’t take that chance.”

Sometime last month, I asked a pastor friend of mine what he was going to preach on for Easter and he replied, “*Well duh, the resurrection of course.*”

Now, in my question, I was more curious about the Bible passage he was going to preach from. I was curious if he was going to do something really creative – but “*no, it’s the resurrection of course*” and he was right. Easter is about the physical resurrection of Jesus – the resurrection that convinced the first century followers that Jesus was the Messiah – the Son of God, and it’s the same the resurrection that has been convincing people ever since – and let me say, that without the resurrection of Jesus, there is no solid *foundation* for Christianity, our faith is *futile*, and we are incredibly *foolish*.

Our faith revolves around the physical resurrection of Jesus, and if there was no resurrection, then quite frankly, the story of Jesus is really just another story, for without the resurrection, Jesus was just another man who claimed to be something He was not. Without the resurrection, Jesus was just a dynamic teacher with a magnetic personality, who wanted to be worshipped. Without the resurrection, Jesus was just one of the many tens of thousands who had been crucified on a cross by the Romans.

So, the resurrection of Jesus is at very core of our Christian faith – and it’s not a blind faith, for there were many eyewitnesses who heard and saw a risen Jesus after His death and burial. There were many who heard Him and saw Him very much alive for themselves, or they knew somebody who did, and they felt compelled to carefully write it all down.

For example, there was a first century follower named **Matthew**, a Jew – but not just any Jew – he’s a Jew hated by the Jews – a traitor among his own people because he was a tax collector for the Romans. Surprisingly, and this was a head-scratcher to everyone, Jesus chose him as one of His twelve disciples, and Matthew, who must have been a really good recordkeeper as a former tax man, documented the life, the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus.

There was a young man named **Mark**, who was apparently close to Peter – another disciple of Jesus. Mark spent time with Peter, he listened to Peter’s recollections about Jesus, and Mark was convinced that Peter was telling the truth – that Jesus actually rose from the dead, and he recorded it all. And then speaking of **Peter**, he wrote two of his own letters where he also declared that Jesus rose from the dead.

My personal favorite is **Luke**, who I have described in the past as the “*Paul Harvey*” of gospel writers because he seems to give us the *rest of the story*. Luke was Greek, a well-trained physician, who thoroughly investigated the story of Jesus from beginning to end, and after his investigation, after talking to just about anybody who knew anything about Jesus, Luke came to the conclusion that Jesus had died, was buried, and then He was alive again. He documented all of this.

There is **James**, the half-brother of Jesus, and what’s interesting about James is that during the earthy ministry of Jesus, James found it hard to believe that Jesus was who He claimed to be, in fact, none of the Lord’s brothers believed. They all thought that Jesus had lost His marbles. James heard about the things that Jesus was *saying* and the things that Jesus was *doing* – but these things apparently did nothing to sway James, but then later, after seeing his resurrected half-brother, James ends up as a pillar in the early church in Jerusalem and he declares that Jesus is the Lord and Savior.

Then you have **Saul**, who was a one-man Jewish wrecking machine against the early church. He was hunting down Christians left and right, thinking he was doing God a great big favor, until one day on a road to Damascus, he had his own experience and was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah who rose from the dead. Saul then became **Paul**, he was called by Jesus to be an apostle, and he wrote much of the New Testament.

Now, this morning, we are going to look at another eyewitness account, and it comes from **John** – another disciple of Jesus. If you remember from last week, Jesus and His disciples were in Bethany, a village just two miles away from Jerusalem. In Bethany, they are at the house of Simon who used to be a leper,

relaxing and enjoying a supper, and at the house there was also **Lazarus** whom Jesus had previously raised from the dead. Out of curiosity, many who had heard what Jesus did to Lazarus, came by the house to see them both for themselves, and as a result, many believed in Jesus – in fact, *too many* believed and the Jewish religious leaders had enough. They needed to deal with Jesus once and for all.

On the next day – a Sunday, Jesus and His disciples leave Bethany and make their way towards Jerusalem for Passover. Passover is a celebration commemorating the release of bondage from Egypt, and the people were hoping that Jesus was the one who would deliver them from their bondage. They were hoping Jesus would deliver them from the power of Rome.

As Jesus makes His way into Jerusalem, riding on a young donkey, He is met by the crowds with palm branches declaring Him *King*. Later, He makes His way through the city and throughout the week – this final week, Jesus is teaching and preaching, and while all of this is occurring, **Judas** goes to the religious leaders and says “*I know you want Jesus and I can deliver Him to you. What will you give me?*” He is given thirty pieces of silver to do his dastardly deed.

A few evenings later, Jesus celebrates the Passover meal with His disciples and it’s here that Jesus adds a whole new dimension to the meal – it becomes something new and different – it becomes what we call the “*Lord’s Supper*” where Jesus asks His followers to remember just how much He loves them – and at this point, the disciples still had no earthly idea what that love would ultimately look like.

That night, after the meal, they head over to the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas has his money, and he knows where Jesus is. In the Garden, Jesus is arrested. He’s taken to the High Priest where He’s falsely accused. He’s beaten. Later the religious leaders take Jesus to the Roman Governor **Pontus Pilate** because they want Jesus dead. They want Pilate to do their dirty work.

Well, Pilate doesn’t want to have anything to do with Jesus, he finds no fault in Him, but hopefully to appease the religious leaders, he has Jesus beaten until He is a bloody pulp. Surely, when Jesus is brought back out, it would be enough to satisfy the hatred of the religious leaders – but Pilate was dead wrong – it’s not enough. The religious leaders demand that Jesus be put to death because He claims to be the Son of God. He must die because He claims to be a King, and Pilate, if you are a friend of Caesar, you cannot let this man live. The mention of Caesar’s name sends Pilate over the edge, and he gives in.

So, with all of that as our setup, if you have your Bible, turn to **John 19** and we will begin with **verse 16**. John, who was there for all of this, says,

¹⁶ So he then handed Him over to them to be crucified. ¹⁷ They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha.

This passage is pretty straight forward, **isn't it?** No details were given because, for John's readers, no details were needed. It's to the point, because in the first century, everybody knew what was involved with a Roman crucifixion.

So, John was there at the cross to witness all of this. He was there when Jesus asked him to take care of Mary. He was there when Jesus asked for something to drink, and He was there when Jesus spoke these words ***"It is finished."***

John said he watched as Jesus took His last breath, bowed His head, and gave up His spirit. Jesus was dead, and just to make sure He was dead, John watched as a Roman soldier took his spear and thrust it into the rib cage of Jesus. There's no movement – there's nothing but blood and water. It was over. Jesus was dead and His *movement* and His *message* that changed the lives of so many people was dead with Him. It's all over.

Now, we come to a passage where John inserts a personal comment for his readers – for us. In **verse 35**, written some 60 years after the fact, John says this:

And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe.

Here John interrupts the story he's telling to speak to us on a personal level, and in so many words, John says this:

"I was there. I saw what happened, and I'm still seeing it. It's just as real and vivid to me as an old man as it was back then when I stood at the foot of the cross. I can't get it out of my head. What I am telling you is absolutely true, I was there, and I'm telling you this, so that, just like me, you also may believe."

You can feel the deep emotion stirring in his words – you want to believe him – **but believe what?** Well, thus far, we know that Jesus was very popular, He had a large following, and He became a threat to the religious establishment. They wanted Him gone. Jesus made some claims, and His claim to be the Son of God

sent His enemies through the roof. Jesus was arrested in the Garden, tried in a kangaroo court, charged with blasphemy, beaten to a pulp, and crucified by the Romans. Jesus was dead and John saw it. **Is that hard to believe?**

No, that's not hard to believe at all. If you think about it, even an unbeliever can believe that, but there's more that John wants us to believe – it's this next part, and beginning with **verse 38**, John says:

³⁸ After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body. ³⁹ Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. ⁴⁰ So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹ Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. ⁴² Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Notice how specific and how detailed John is with this, and again, this was written some 60 years after the fact, so John can mention these secret followers from the Sanhedrin – **Joseph** and **Nicodemus** by name, for by now, they have already passed away.

It's Friday, and John tells us that after the confirmed death of Jesus with a spear, Joseph goes to Pilate and asks for the body. Usually, the body of someone who had been crucified was left on the cross to decompose to discourage people from committing crimes, and other times the bodies were buried in unmarked graves, or just thrown in the city dump and sprinkled with sulphur and left to burn and rot. This is what normally happened, but John tells us that Joseph with the help of Nicodemus get permission to take the dead body of Jesus.

So, they wait for the soldiers to lower the body from the cross, and then they take the body of Jesus to a nearby **garden** – and at this garden there was a **new tomb** – it's a cave. With about 75 to 100 pounds of spices and resin and linen wrappings to embalm the body of Jesus, they do a *rush job* – they're in a hurry because the sun was close to setting and the Sabbath would begin and they could do no work. When they could do no more, a team of men rolled a massive stone in front of the cave and **Matthew** tells us it was sealed and Roman soldiers were posted there as guards. No one is getting in. No one is getting by them.

Meanwhile, the disciples have scattered – there’re in hiding – there’re thinking that what happened to Jesus could happen to them. They could be next. They don’t want to die. So, they are hunkered down somewhere waiting for all of this to blow over. It’s clear that Peter and John are together, maybe others as well, and then early Sunday morning, someone is banging on the door. It’s **Mary Magdalene** and she’s freaked out, and in **John 20:2**, she says to them,

“They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.”

After the Sabbath, very early in the morning, Mary Magdalene and several other women go to the tomb to pay their final respects and to make sure the body of Jesus was properly prepared. They were all expecting to find a dead body – a dead Jesus, but when they get there, there were no soldiers to be found, the large stone was rolled away, and the tomb was empty. Mary, and the others with her, assumed there was foul play – that someone had broken into the tomb and taken the body.

Well after hearing this, John tells us that he and Peter run to the tomb to see for themselves. John gets there first, he peeks in, but he doesn’t go in. Then Peter catches up and he bolts right into the tomb. John follows him in, and it’s here that he describes something odd. Beginning with **verse 6**, he says,

⁶ And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself.

In this passage, John describes something no one would expect to see. If someone is going to steal the body, they would have taken everything with it – I mean it would be much easier and more pleasant if it was left wrapped, but here the linens were left behind – not hurriedly thrown on the ground – instead they are neatly folded and rolled and placed in the tomb. It’s as if someone got up in the morning and made their own bed.

It’s at this point that John tells us this beginning with **verse 8**:

⁸ So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. ⁹ For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.

John says **he saw** the empty tomb – he perceived and he **believed** – we might say “*he got it*” but I don’t know exactly what *he got* because John then admits, that at that time, they – the disciples didn’t **understand the Scripture**. Even though Jesus had told them many times, the disciples – just like everybody else, thought that when Jesus died, He would stay dead, but little did they know, the Scripture had foretold all along that the Messiah must die and **He must rise again from the dead**. It must happen, but at this point, I’m not sure if anybody *fully* got it – at least not yet.

Now as we know, that Sunday evening, John and the rest of the disciples, who were still in hiding and still scratching their heads, would see Jesus alive for themselves, except for one. Thomas wasn’t with them, but he hears the news, and he makes his way back to the others. Thomas tells them, “*I hear what you’re saying, but unless I see Jesus for myself, I will not believe*” – and before we get too harsh with Thomas, let me remind you that the other disciples did not believe either until they saw Jesus.

Well, the following Sunday, this is what happened beginning with **verse 26**:

²⁶ After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then He said to Thomas, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” ²⁸ Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed?** Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.”**

So, Jesus walks through a closed door and He says “**Peace be with you**” which are some good first words after a surprise like that. We are told that Jesus addresses the doubts of Thomas, and then Jesus says something with you and me in mind.

“Thomas, you believe because you saw Me, but there will be a host of people who will never see what you have seen, and they are going to believe on the basis of the evidence. There’s a blessing for those who do not see, and still yet believe.”

We have God’s Word – the Bible – the Holy Spirit inspired written record, which includes all the evidence and all the eyewitness testimonies that reveal Jesus is the crucified and buried and resurrected Savior and Lord, and that by believing in Him, being transformed by Him, you and I may have life – a meaningful life in the here and now, and eternal life in the hereafter.

So, do you believe? Are you convinced that Jesus is the risen Savior and Lord? If not, what will it take?

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