

Sermon Notes (Why do you Believe?) Easter

- **As we celebrate Jesus' resurrection today, I want to take us back. Back to that very first Easter morning. And the setting is this:**
- **Jesus has been publically humiliated and died a horrible criminal's death. Stripped and beaten and nailed to a cross.**
- **This bizarre torturous death the Romans used to strike fear in their subjects. To minimize rebellion against their rule.**
- **Jesus' eleven closest disciples [By now Judas Iscariot has committed suicide]. The other eleven have all abandoned Him. They're hiding behind locked doors somewhere in Jerusalem.**
- **They're scared out of their minds.** Frightened that the same death Jesus got awaits them, IF the Roman authorities find out where they are.
- **Devastated that Jesus is dead. The hope for a new Kingdom of God, a messianic deliverance is gone. The eleven disciples' dreams for Jesus and his leadership are**

shattered. That's the picture on that first Easter morning.

- **And that is where we pick up in the Gospel of John 20:1-8. And it reads like this:**

SLIDE 1:

“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” 3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.”

(John 20:1-8)

- **Let's look closely at this account. I've found that if you approach the Bible almost with a Sherlock Holmes or detective curiosity, you will find powerful treasures. And these seemingly small things reveal how true the account really is. Ok, Verse 1.**

SLIDE 2

“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.”

(John 20:1)

- **Early and dark. Why then? Trying to avoid being seen by authorities and guards posted at tomb. Mary was scared too.**
- **She waited until the First day of the week because the Sabbath and Passover was over; now, she could do the religiously unclean work of preparing a dead body for permanent burial.**

- It is telling that Mary Magdalene, a former prostitute, had more bravery than the men. She and the other women had the guts to go to the tomb AND finish anointing Jesus' corpse for a proper Jewish burial.
- So, Mary gets there, and the stone covering the tomb has been rolled away. She realizes Jesus' body is gone, and gets very upset. Now, what does she do?

SLIDE 3

“So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

(John 20:2)

- **Mary runs to find Peter. Interesting that SHE knew where the disciples were hiding.** Peter is still considered to be the leader of the disciples; though he denied even knowing Jesus after he was arrested.
- **Probably out of breath, Mary finds Peter and it says “the other disciple whom Jesus loved.”** The language here is like a young one Jesus

took under his wing. The youngest of the twelve: John. John probably was 15 or 16 years old.

- Notice what Mary says. **“THEY”** whoever **“they”** is have taken Jesus’ body. She likely is referring to the chief priests or the Romans. It also says **“WE”** do not know where they have taken him.” The **“we”** refers to the other women who accompanied Mary.
- I find it amazing that it doesn’t even enter Mary’s head that Jesus was raised from the dead. **She does not assume a resurrection.**
- Skeptics say that the disciples later made up the story of Jesus raising from the dead.
- Now, if you were trying to cook up the idea of Jesus being raised from the dead, would you write your account like this? First, would you have women be the first to find the empty tomb and later on see the risen Jesus? Especially a former prostitute. **Great pick.**
- The status of women in that time and culture was so low that they couldn’t even testify in a court of law. Most women were illiterate and not valued as reliable witnesses. But there they are at the tomb. First to see Jesus alive.

- **And second, would you have Mary, your first witness, assume that grave robbers had taken the body? That's exactly the same lie the chief priests put out that happened. Would you put into your gospel account the same story that your enemies made up?**
- **It would be utterly stupid to concoct a resurrection story and use women as primary witnesses AND have them first assume what happened to the body was grave robbery: The same explanation as the priests and Romans who wanted Jesus to be dead and forgotten.**
- **But that's what John did in this account. Why? Because that is in fact how it happened. He wrote the account this way because he was writing history. NOT an invention.**
- **So what happens next?**

SLIDE 4

“So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent

over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.

(John 20:3-5)

- Peter and John hurry toward the tomb. In fact, you can sort of picture them looking at each other and start to run. They want to find out what happened.
- Peter can't keep up with John who is younger and in better shape. I can identify with that; I would never want to race with my 18 year-old son Philip anymore.
- So, John gets there first, **but he waits.** Probably out of **respect for Peter.** Maybe he was a bit afraid to go in too. You can picture him at the door of this chamber, carved out of rock. Looking in at the linen grave clothes. **And thinking very hard.**
- Peter comes up, probably a bit winded. I would be huffing and puffing. What's next?

SLIDE 4

“Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had

been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen.

(John 20:6-7)

- True to form, the bold fisherman Peter goes in right past John. You can feel the eerie silence as Peter looks around at the vacant tomb.
- Now pay attention here. John's account describes this as an orderly scene, not a vandalized setting. This is where our detective hats come on again.
- **Would grave robbers neatly fold up a burial cloth? NO, they would not.** They would have been in a mad rush to get the body out as quickly as possible. Robbers would NOT have taken care about anything left in the tomb.
- But there it is. This strange little detail recorded in the account. **Folded grave clothes.** It's too odd of a detail for a made up story. It adds **nothing** to the claim of resurrection.
- I mean, later on, there are many accounts of actual encounters with the risen Jesus. The ten see him first, minus Thomas.

- Later on Thomas even touched the remaining wounds in Jesus' hands and side. Why include this detail of the **folded cloth** in the gospel?
- I think it's there because **John wrote what he saw**. He wanted to record the details of what **actually happened** that first Easter morning. What stuck out in his mind.
- And in doing so, he unwittingly would demolish the later postulated grave robbery story.
- So, why did this stick with John? Let's look at v 8:

SLIDE 5

“Finally, the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.”

- **He saw and believed**. What did he see? The empty tomb. The grave clothes with no body. And a profound thing happened in John's spirit. It rushed on him like wind.
- Suddenly, John's mind flashed with **memories** of Jesus' predicting that he would

be killed by the chief priests, and three days later, **he would rise from the dead.**

- Now, seeing the empty tomb and grave clothes, it all became clear for John. He saw Jesus do all kinds of miracles for three years. He had seen healings and demons cast out—even people raised from the dead.
- In all that time, Jesus was never lied; **everything Jesus said he would do, He did.** Now, before John was evidence that Jesus had indeed done it again.
- **John saw and believed.** John's faith was kindled. What Jesus predicted, happened. Jesus is risen, just as He said. **He's alive.**
- This week, I looked at that last verse, and it jumped off the page at me. He saw and believed. And I asked myself, "Why do I believe?" Why do I believe that Jesus is risen from the dead?" Why do you believe?
- After all, John and many others, they had the blessing of physical encounters with the risen Christ. Yet, Jesus said to doubting Thomas as he touched his wounds: "You believe because you have seen; blessed are

those who have not seen and yet have believed.” That’s us.

- **I believe in the resurrection with both my mind and my spirit.** My mind looks at the evidence for God and for the resurrection. **Life is far too complex to be a meaningless accident.**
- **We now know that one single-celled organism is more complex than a city the size of London. Organs like eyes and the power of the human brain did not simply come together by chance.**
- **It’s naïve and mindless to believe that. It takes more faith to believe that than to believe in God.**
- **I believe because there is no one like Jesus in all of human history. He exposed the sin of humanity for what it is; He exposes us for who we really are.**
- **Yet, Jesus loved us enough to fight for us. To come and provide what we lack. Cleansing of sin and evil. Giving us His pure life by dying our deserved death. Giving us new life and power to change.**

- **I believe in Jesus because even his closest disciples never doubted his claims to be without sin. To be the Son of God. If anyone would discover his faults or weaknesses, it was the disciples.**
- **After the resurrection, they ALL believed in him, AND went to their deaths preaching the faith.**
- **Think about it. The disciples all deserted Jesus when He was crucified. Peter even denied knowing Jesus right before the crucifixion. But, not one of the disciples deserted Jesus AFTER the resurrection. Not one. WHY?**
- **Something supernatural changed those scared to death disciples into fearless preachers of the Gospel. Unless Jesus was raised from the dead, and filled the disciples with the Holy Spirit, there would be no church here today.**
- **I believe in Jesus because he is not like other cult leaders we have seen in Texas and other places. Jesus did NOT hold up in some fenced compound.**

- **Jesus did not get private revelation, and then form an army and conquer his followers into submission, like Mohammed.**
- **His entire ministry was public. Out in the open for all to see. Jesus came publically to the very people who would reject him. No secrets. No hiding.**
- **When they did come to get him, he came willingly. He knew his mission was the cross.**
- **The payment for the sins of every man and woman; so that trusting in Him, we can have the gift of eternal life. We can share in Jesus' resurrection too.**
- **I believe because the Word of God, the Bible, has been proven true by archaeology over and over again. A book that has changed millions of lives because its words are filled with real spiritual power. They pierce deeply into our hearts and reveal the Truth.**
- **There are nearly 600 prophecies in the OT about the messiah—written centuries before his birth—and Jesus fulfilled them all. Even things Jesus could not control, like his birthplace and his death.**

- **I believe because the Bible has the ring of truth to it, and Jesus never wrote a single page.**
- **The Bible exposes the weaknesses of its writers. **I like that**; it's real instead of like so many other religious writings.**
- **I believe in the resurrection because of the existence of the church. I know this is a small congregation, but we are part of the largest institution in human history. Even today, there are more than 2 billion people around the globe who follow Jesus celebrating this Day. Easter.**
- **This did not come into being because a few illiterate fishermen and former prostitutes made up a story. It exists because God Himself sustains it.**
- **I believe because when I received Jesus into my life in 1975, my life was changed. I felt Jesus come inside and begin to make me a different person, with different values. Even a love and compassion for people I never had before.**
- **I believe because I have experienced many tangible encounters with the Holy Spirit, just**

like the Bible says. Even signs and wonders and miracles.

- **I have seen people healed in Jesus' name. With others, I have prayed in Jesus' Name, and a little girl that was going blind now sees perfectly.**
- **I believe because I have even seen people delivered from demonic oppression by the power of Jesus' Name. I cannot pretend I have not experienced these miracles from God.**
- **I have felt the tangible presence of God in worship here and overseas in China and Latin America.**
- **I believe because the tomb of Jesus still is empty. And because I have seen Him change my life and the lives of countless others. I have seen and I believe.**
- **Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!**