

Intro: What are you afraid of? **What do you fear?** There are many things we fear in life. According to *The National Institute of Health*, here are some common fears people share.

Aerophobia (Flying) – 6.5%

Acrophobia (Heights) – 10%

Arachnophobia (Spiders) – 30.5%

Glossophobia (Public speaking) - 74% microphone anyone? ☺

Necrophobia (Death) 68%

Since all of us will face death one day and not everyone has to speak in front of large groups of people, it seems to be the more serious one to consider. ☺ Not to mention it seems to carry greater consequences! Are you afraid to die? Do you ever wrestle with your mortality? Most people are reluctant to face their mortality. Ernest Becker won the Pulitzer prize in 1974 with his book *The Denial of Death*. In it he argued that most people are reluctant to face their mortality because it so difficult and painful to consider. So people try to ignore death, but it won't just go away. But, it's hard to run from reality. As much as we try to ignore or deny it, death is tracking us down. It's only a matter of time.

What is unique about the picture we have seen of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, is that he is fully aware of his mortality. In fact, since the end of Luke 9, we have seen Jesus with his face set toward Jerusalem, the place he knew he would die. From that time, the cross has cast its ominous shadow across every word and every step of Jesus, until finally, as we looked at last week, Jesus was crucified on a Roman cross for the sin of the world.

So while we may deny our mortality, Jesus stared death in the face. And he could do so, because he knew he possessed the power to defy death and defeat it.

“The Death-Defying Work of Jesus”

Luke 23:50-24:12

Death was the focus of chapter 23. Life triumphing over death is focus of chapter 24. This morning I want us to see that it is . . .

The Point: Through the death-defying resurrection of Jesus, we too can live the resurrected life. Let's first examine how...

I. Jesus defied death through his resurrection (23:50-24:6a)

Luke, as a researcher and historian, is careful to establish the reality of *the death of Christ*. Look at v. 50 of chapter 23. (*Read 23:50-56*)

- Verse 46 told us Jesus said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit,” and then he breathed his last.
- Joseph of Arimathea was a credible and righteous man who was looking for the kingdom of God. He was also a member of the Jewish council, known as the Sanhedrin, which meant he would have more readily had Pilate's ear to request a proper burial.
- This was necessary because “the bodies of crucified criminals were usually left hanging and then cast into a common grave.”
- So Joseph sought Pilate's permission to give Jesus an honorable burial. Jewish graves were often natural or manmade caves in the sides of hills, large enough for a person to enter, and would have a large stone covering the entrance.
- Because the Sabbath drew near, Joseph had to move quickly to take Jesus' body from the cross to the tomb before the sunset. Luke tells us some women who followed Jesus went with Joseph because they would return with spices and ointments to anoint his body for burial.
- Luke also notes that they were careful to keep the Sabbath, which meant they would rest and worship before completing proper burial customs on the following day, Sunday.
- These verses establish the death of Jesus and show that though he was crucified as a criminal, he was buried with honor and esteem by his disciples.

Trans: After they rested on the Sabbath, the women took the spices they prepared to anoint his body for burial, and to their great amazement: the stone is rolled away and the tomb is empty. (*Read 24:1-6a*)

- The “body” of Jesus was gone. As they were in the middle of looking at one another with complete confusion and perhaps beginning to try and figure out what is going on, two angels in dazzling white apparel appeared in the tomb.
- Naturally the women are frightened, bow their faces to the ground, and the men say these powerful words: “*Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.*”
- The man you saw crucified on a Roman cross less than 48 hours ago is alive! Some might say, “Well, other people were raised in the Bible. What’s the big deal?” Here’s the big deal: the other people who were raised, (Lazarus, Jairus’ daughter, the widow of Zarephath’s son in 1 Kings by Elijah), all of them were raised but died again. Jesus was raised from the dead to never die again!
- And at this point, most honest people are asking the question: “Did Jesus really rise from the dead?” For the past 2,000 years, many have refused to believe in the resurrection of Jesus.
- They reduce the stories of resurrection to being symbolic of higher realities. The resurrection merely tells us of a greater hope. Jesus’ conversation with Peter in John 21 tells us of forgiveness after failure.
- All kinds of theories have been raised to try and refute the resurrection: Jesus did not really die. Someone stole his body. The disciples went to the wrong tomb. Maybe they were hallucinating.

Let me give you seven pieces of evidence that point to the veracity of Christ’s resurrection.

A Case for the Resurrection of Jesus

- **The empty tomb.** Both skeptics and believers in the 1st century agreed there was an empty tomb outside of Jerusalem that was supposed to contain the body of Jesus. The question was: “How did it become empty?”
- **Women were the first witnesses to the resurrection.** Women were held in low regard socially in that day, so much so that their testimony was not admissible in court neither in Roman or Jewish court. Unless it were true, Luke, along with the other three gospel writers, would have been foolish to report this way.
- **The intricate historical details of the gospels.** [point to the validity of resurrection] Remember, Luke told us in his opening verses that he is writing a historical account. He has gathered his information through painstaking research. A few details: The *Roman soldier*, who certainly knew how to kill people, confirmed the death of Christ to Pilate. After all, they drove a spear through his side to confirm (John 19:34). The *women saw the tomb*, where no one had been laid. This was not the wrong tomb or another body. The *grave clothes* were left behind. Who would steal a body, but leave the grave clothes? And then there’s the *precise detail of names*. NT scholar Richard Bauckham says these names were like footnotes. Why does he name the women? As we’ll see next week, why does he only name one disciple of the two he appeared to on the Emmaus Road? He’s saying: “Go check the sources.” Not to mention Paul says Jesus appeared to over 500 people, most of whom are still alive, as we saw in 1 Corinthians 15.
- **The initial shock and unbelief of the disciples.** They were not expecting resurrection. We’re talking about a person being raised from the dead! This doesn’t happen everyday. Jews believed in ultimate and final resurrection from the dead at the end of the age, but they never anticipated someone rising from the dead before the final judgment. That’s why they went to prepare spices. This also helps refute the hallucination theories. They touched Jesus’ body. They ate with him.
- **The early church worshiped on Sunday.** The early church transferred their day of worship from the Sabbath on Saturday to Sunday as Acts 20:7 to celebrate Christ’s resurrection from the dead. This reveals a deep conviction about what happened on that particular day.
- **The disciples worshiped him and died for him.** Luke 24:52 “And then they worshiped him.” Why would his disciples, again and again, die for something they knew to be a hoax?
- **The church exploded.** There were many messianic movements in the 1st century, but every time the leader was killed or died, the movement fizzled out. Every movement, that is, except one. The most probable explanation for the expansion of a tiny group of people exploding into the world’s largest religion is that a tomb outside of Jerusalem was no match for Jesus of Nazareth.

When you take all of these factors together, the pieces of the puzzle begin to fit together and together they point to the validity of the claim that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. But what does it mean? People can sign off on the resurrection as a historical fact and still miss the theological significance. What does his resurrection mean?

II. The resurrection of Jesus changes everything for those who believe (24:6b-7)

(Read 6b-7)

- The angels highlight the divine necessity of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ on the third day. By the way, we usually think 72 hours when we talk about three day, but it was the third day when he rose: Friday, Saturday, Sunday (1, 2, 3).
- Remember, he told you this in Galilee on at least three separate occasions as we saw in Luke 9:22, 9:44, and 18:31-34.
- So much of our Christian life is wrapped up in remembering what Christ has said and what he's done. It's as simple as that: Remember what Jesus said, and live accordingly. This is why practice the Lord's Supper, remind one another of truth, and preach the gospel to ourselves.

So if Jesus is alive, what does this mean?

- It means everything he said was true. We can trust him. His resurrection validates everything he said and did before he was crucified. His perfect life and his atoning death were stamped with God's vindication!
- That's why it is impossible to underplay the enormity of the resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus was raised, everything changes! To deny the resurrection is to deny biblical Christianity. You can have no part with Christ if you do not embrace his death & resurrection.

*If Jesus is alive, what does this mean for us? **The Implications of Christ's Resurrection***

- **Salvation is found in him!** Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 15 that if Christ has not been raised, then he cannot save and we cannot count on him for our present need or future hope. Christianity is quickly reduced to an ethical system, a path of wisdom, but holds no power to bring ultimate and final salvation. **“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:17-19)** Jesus conquered sin, Satan, and death. Our salvation alone, and the knowledge that Christ has been raised, should fill us with life & joy. We should not mope around through life, but exude fullness and joy. His resurrection also gives us
- **We have immense hope. . . . “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,” (1 Peter 1:3-4)** We all need a little hope that life can be better than our current experience, and that hope is found in Christ. That is one reason we are very excited to launch our counseling ministry to RHC & to our community. This was one of our 2013 goals. The pastors and other leaders will offer biblical counseling, free of charge, in order to share God's help and hope found through Jesus.
- **We possess divine power.** All of the resources of God are available to us. How does Paul pray in Ephesians 1? “that they might know **“what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,” (Ephesians 1:19-20)**
- **Our lives matter.** His resurrection guarantees that everything we do for him, every good deed, is not in vain. **“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” (1 Cor 15:58)** This week at Soccer Nights, every time you display Christ's love: kindness during registration, patience when kids won't listen to your amazing coaching, know that all of your effort has eternal weight behind it because Jesus is alive. Finally,
- **His resurrection guarantees our resurrection.** The power of death was shattered in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Just as “it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.” (Acts 2:24) so it will be impossible for death to keep its hold on us if we are united to him. What does Jesus say in John 14:19? **“Because I live, you also will live.” (John 14:19).** The Christian should not fear death but welcome it!

- The resurrection of Jesus confirms what we already know to be true in our hearts: there has to be some kind of answer, some resolution to the brokenness within us and the brokenness all around us, and the Resurrection is the beginning of the resolution of the story, not just the story of Christ and the cross but Christ and cosmos.

“If Christ is risen, nothing else matters. And if Christ is not risen, nothing else matters.” – Jaroslav Pelikan

Do you get that? If Jesus is still dead, “eat, drink, for tomorrow we die,” BUT if Jesus is raised, there is no greater reality to live by and live for. “nothing else matters” compared to this.

Trans: So in light of all of this, let me encourage every person here no matter where you would locate yourself on the spectrum of Christianity...

III. Respond with faith in Jesus and experience his resurrected life (24:8-12)

(Read 8-12)

- To our great surprise, the women returned to the apostles and they were stupefied by their report! Luke says the men who were the closest to Jesus received it as “idle talk.” “Nonsense!” It was a medical term used to refer to the delirious talk of those extremely sick. Understanding that, it’s not surprising that the rest of verse 11 says: “And they did not believe.”
- The witness of the women fell on skeptical ears.
- App: Do not be discouraged if you are skeptical or if your witness is received with skepticism.
- And remember the irony: their unbelief should serve as a catalyst for our belief. The disciples were not expected Jesus to be raised and most of them believed after they witnessed the risen Christ with their own eyes and touched him with their own hands.
- Let’s not miss verse 12. “BUT Peter... ran to the tomb...sees the linen clothes behind and goes home marveling at what had happened.” Peter was astounded. Though we cannot know for sure, I have to think Peter went home saying, “Jesus did what he said he would do. He’s alive!”

Conclusion:

- Do you believe Jesus rose from the dead? If so, have you surrendered your life to him? Intellectual assent is not enough. We must not only *understand* and *approve* of the central tenets of the gospel. The Bible says the demons believe in God and they tremble. We must also *trust* in them and receive Christ’s work.
- Did any of you see **Nik Wallenda (PIC 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)** walk 1,500 feet across a tightrope over part of the outer edges of the Grand Canyon? Palms were sweating... Stomach weak. What are you smoking, man? There is a story of a tightrope artist, from the 19th century, named Charles Blondin.
- Get in the wheelbarrow! Stake your life on the work Christ has done for you.
- If you have trusted Christ and his work for you through his death and resurrection, then live in the power of that resurrection every day!
- Let’s pray: I’m going to pray a simple prayer, with pauses, and when I pause, I want to invite you to pray the same thoughts silently after me.

Praying in light of the resurrection...

“God, give me a joy that reflects the fact that Christ has been raised.”

“God, give me a love that reflects the fact that Christ has been raised.”

“God, give me a peace that reflects the fact that Christ has been raised.”

“God, give me a hope that reflects the fact that Christ has been raised.”

“God, give me a heart to serve that reflects the fact that Christ has been raised.”

“God, give me a confidence that reflects the fact that Christ has been raised.”

“God, give me a vitality in life that reflects the fact that Jesus is alive.” In his name we pray, amen!