

Luke 23:50- 24:1-12  
No Idle Tale!

Many of us have heard the Easter story- the account of the empty tomb- dozens of times in our lifetime. Easter is a story of new life and endless love, as well as a lesson on sin, redemption, and holiness. It is the story of a victorious Christ and a defeated Satan, a story about a resurrected Christ and a resurrected people. Easter brings us hope and assurance that our temporary bodies will one day be restored just as our Lord's broken and bleeding body was restored on that first Easter Sunday some 2000 years ago. 1 Corinthians 15:53

It all sounds too good to be true. Can dead people really live? At least nine of Jesus's remaining eleven disciples didn't think so. Upon hearing the good news that Jesus was risen they thought it to be "an idle tale". Things that seem too good to be true typically aren't, so there is no shame in admitting we may need help grasping the miraculous events of that first Easter Sunday that took place so long ago. One way we can do that is by asking questions. Depending upon how we ask, they can be an expression of doubt or a search for truth and understanding. As Jesus once told his disciples, seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall be opened unto you. If we truly seek truth and understanding, by God's grace we will find it.

Like many questions in life, some answers come easier than others. If I asked who rose from the dead three days after being crucified most of you would answer Jesus Christ. However, we will see in a few moments that answer is only partially correct. If I were to ask you who first refused to believe the Good News that He was risen, you might say the disciples, perhaps minus Peter and John. If I were to ask you who crucified Jesus, you could say the Roman soldiers and be correct. They drove the nails into His hands and feet and pierced His side with a lance to make sure He was dead. But in a sense, you would also be correct if you said the Jewish religious leaders crucified Him, because they were responsible for the false charges levied against Him that ultimately led to His execution. Others might say you and I were also to blame, for the Scriptures tell us that Jesus gave His life to atone for our sins, He gave His life as a ransom or penalty for many. The question the hymn writer asks: "were you there when they crucified my Lord?" is certainly one we must answer for ourselves. If we are truthful, we will have no choice but to answer yes.

Easter is certainly about Jesus, but it is also about those who believe and follow Him. We know who Easter is about, but do we know what it is about? Is it about Jesus' death, His resurrection, or something else? Easter comes two days after Good Friday, but it actually began at Christmas with His virgin birth. Jesus came into the world so that we might know who God is, why we were created and what our creator requires of us.

Jesus also came into the world for another purpose. He came to break the cycle of sin and death, to conquer the forces of evil and to bring hope to a broken and bleeding world by reconciling us with our creator. He did all of that by dying on a Roman cross for the sins of humanity. Christmas and Easter are two miraculous events that truly changed humanity forever. Christmas is the story of Jesus entering the world and Easter is the story of Jesus leaving the world, a factual account of His crucifixion, death, and resurrection. The big question is why. The answer is found in Jesus dying words. In his last moments here on earth, moments before giving up His life on the cross, Jesus asks His heavenly Father this why question. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why was He crucified? To show the world that sin separates us from God. Why did He die? He died because of sin, and to satisfy God's demand for holiness and justice.

Those questions help us to understand why Jesus was crucified and why He had to die. But why did He rise from the dead? The simple answer is that without a resurrection, there would be lingering doubt that Jesus is who He said He is- God in human flesh. Only God can bring life to the dead. The resurrection of Jesus brings us hope and assurance that there will be life after death. The question in verse 5 is not just for Mary. Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here!

Jesus rose from the dead as a sign to the world, a world He created by the way, that He is the true God, the God that offers us new life. Luke gives us the incredible details. Joseph of Arimetha pulled the nails from His hands and feet, took down His dead and mutilated body from the cross, and laid it in a new tomb in the presence of several women. Two days later, two heavenly messengers told the embalmers that there would be no need for their burial spices and ointments. He is not here but has risen.

Soon after, His disciples and numerous others saw the resurrected Jesus on multiple occasions. Even doubting Thomas placed his hands in Jesus wounds and finally believed that He was alive. Some two thousand years later, new evidence of the resurrection comes in the lives of those that are radically changed when they confess Jesus as their Lord and place their faith in Him. There is no good reason to doubt that Jesus is risen. My hope is that we will all be like Peter, going home marveling because of that first Easter Sunday.

We should marvel and be amazed, but we should not be surprised. Easter is no idle tale! More than two thousand years after rising from the dead Jesus is still doing amazing and miraculous things. That long list would include raising people like us from the dead. Let us never forget that our resurrection begins at the very moment we ask Jesus to save us from our sins. His love and power are beyond human understanding. Let us respond in humility and gratitude by doing two things that will change the world. Let us love Him and love each other. Amen