

RESURRECTION DAY Overcoming Unbelief

4-24-2011

Luke 24:1-11 – “But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. So they went in, but they didn’t find the body of the Lord Jesus. As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes. The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, “Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day.” Then they remembered that he had said this. So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn’t believe it.” (NLT)

Luke 24:35-40 – “Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognized him as he was breaking the bread. And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. ‘Peace be with you,’ he said. But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost! ‘Why are you frightened?’ he asked. ‘Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it’s really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don’t have bodies, as you see that I do.’ As he spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet.” (NLT)

Unbelief in certain circumstances seems to be a rational and sensible conclusion. But in reality, it is potentially one of our greatest enemies.

In the late eighteen hundreds, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche observed the religious trends developing in Western Europe, and made his famous declaration, “God is dead.” However, since then, we’ve come to realize that Almighty God, the creator of the universe, has never been limited by the lack of adoration received from either Pharaohs or Europeans.

Nietzsche’s proclamation has been proven false, although his lies continue to be propagated by the deceived and gullible. Nietzsche is dead, God is not. No! God is still transforming and redeeming lives all around the world through the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

I can just imagine the sense of relief expressed by the Jewish religious leaders once Jesus was taken down from the cross and buried; but then they remembered that he said he would rise on the third day. So they went to Pilate and had the tomb sealed and a guard posted to keep the disciples from any tricks.

However, they didn’t count on the reality of a supernatural resurrection and an angelic visitation that overwhelmed the guards.

Once again the antichrist forces of darkness seem to be gaining the upper hand and the forces surrounding Israel are growing in anticipation of dealing a fatal blow to that nation. But what they don’t realize is that a third day event of divine intervention is on the horizon.

The world is presently witnessing a tremendous explosion of religious growth, predominately among Muslims and Christians, with Christianity being the fastest growing, although you don't hear about it in the media; somewhere between 175,000 to 225,000 new believers, each day, are confessing Jesus of Nazareth as the Lord of their lives.

A crisis is mounting and the conflict as recorded in the book of Revelation is, I believe, about to unfold for this generation.

Amazingly, what is happening in third world countries is not happening in our western culture. Christianity in Northern Europe and North America is experiencing minimal growth at best. Here in the West, too many have embraced **liberal** Christianity.

Liberal Christianity is essentially a nonexistent force for good within the Muslim world. Don't get me wrong. Muslims are turning to saving faith in Jesus, but it is as a result of the demonstration of the Holy Spirit and supernatural power of the gospel. Muslims are receiving dreams and visions of Christ and turning in faith to the Lord.

Liberal Christians, however, have become the world's missionaries to the church. What do I mean?

Well, they devote their moral energies trying to make the church more democratic, by denying the virgin birth, the inspiration of Scripture and Biblical miracles, by seeking to legitimize homosexuality, and by making sure women have the right to take the life of the babies still in their womb. They fail to realize that children belong to God and are not ours to do with as we wish. Historically, God has judged nations that sacrificed their children in the fire to the gods of personal pleasure. Abortion is the catalyst for the approximately 20+ million illegal aliens that have crossed our porous borders.

Our inability to deal with this situation is costing taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars and that is only a part of the way God is **judging** America; He's filling up the human void we have created by **mercy**ing those who have come from south of our border. He's allowing them to fill in the population gap created by abortion and in the process; they're earning an enhanced living.

Liberal churches are losing members in droves. However, the Evangelical, Bible-believing branch of the Church is experiencing increase. In 1960 the Southern Baptist Convention reported a membership of 8.7 million; now they have 16.4 million. The Assemblies of God has only grown to 3 million members here in the United States, but has grown to 65 million worldwide. In addition, several new Evangelical and Charismatic fellowships of churches have been birthed here in the U.S. and are continuing to grow.

Today America is reported to be the most religious country in the Western world. However, the latest observable trend is that the Western world is becoming more secular, while third world countries are becoming more religious.

Christianity is a force on every continent and in every major region of the world, but the vital centers of Christianity today are no longer identified as being in the key cities of Europe or the United States. They are Buenos Aires, Manila, Seoul, Kinshasa, and Addis Ababa.

In 1900, more than 80% of Christians lived in Europe and North America. Today, over 60% live in the developing world. More than two out of three evangelical Christians now live in Asia, Africa, and South America.

A century ago, there were 9 million Christians in Africa, but today there are more than 400 million. Third world Christianity is on the march. “South Korea has become the world’s second-largest source of Christian missionaries, with over 20,000 preaching the faith abroad.” Only the U. S. sends more missionaries to other countries.

Not surprisingly, the *Washington Post* reports that there are 150 churches in Denmark and more than 250 in Britain, which are led by foreigners as “part of a growing trend of preachers from developing nations coming to Western Europe.” Today, the largest church in Europe is pastored by a Nigerian.

In light of the obvious decline of Christianity in the west, I believe the greatest hindrance to the vitality and growth of the Western church stems from our **unbelief**. Younger generations are not receiving and embracing the faith of their fathers.

The acceptance and support of our godless educational system has resulted in the effective impartation of the vain philosophies of the world-system. Our “Christian” young people are drinking in the intellectual lies of Satan, more rapidly than they can down a power drink.

The large portion of Western Christianity is drowning in a swamp of unbelief and only the Bible-believing Evangelical part of the church is keeping its head above water.

Yet, what we face today is no different that what Jesus faced in His days on earth. Over and over again, Jesus confronted this same crippling handicap of unbelief in the hearts of people. Jesus had just taken Peter, James, and John to the top of the mountain to be alone. There he was transfigured before their eyes. As they descended the mountain, Mark records:

Mark 9:14-29 – “At the foot of the mountain they found a great crowd surrounding the other disciples, as some teachers of religious law were arguing with them. The crowd watched Jesus in awe as he came toward them, and then they ran to greet him. ‘What is all this arguing about?’ he asked.

One of the men in the crowd spoke up and said, ‘Teacher, I brought my son for you to heal him. He can’t speak because he is possessed by an evil spirit that won’t let him talk. And whenever this evil spirit seizes him, it throws him violently to the ground and makes him foam at the mouth and grind his teeth and become rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn’t do it.’

Jesus said to them, ‘You faithless people! How long must I be with you until you believe? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.’ So they brought the boy. But when the evil spirit saw Jesus, it threw the child into a violent convulsion, and he fell to the ground, writhing and foaming at the mouth. ‘How long has this been happening?’ Jesus asked the boy’s father.

He replied, ‘Since he was very small. The evil spirit often makes him fall into the fire or into water, trying to kill him. Have mercy on us and help us. Do something if you can.’

‘What do you mean, if I can?’ Jesus asked. ‘Anything is possible if a person believes.’

The father instantly replied, ‘I do believe, but help me not to doubt!’

When Jesus saw that the crowd of onlookers was growing, he rebuked the evil spirit. ‘Spirit of deafness and muteness,’ he said, ‘I command you to come out of this child and never enter him again!’ Then the spirit screamed and threw the boy into another violent convulsion and left him. The boy lay there motionless, and he appeared to be dead. A murmur ran through the crowd, ‘He’s dead.’ But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him to his feet, and he stood up. Afterward, when Jesus was alone in the house with his disciples, they asked him, ‘Why couldn’t we cast out that evil spirit?’

Jesus replied, ‘This kind can be cast out only by prayer.’” (NLT)

There are many occasions in life that call for a different kind of faith than you and I are able to muster. That’s why it is so important that we learn to meditate on God’s holy Word on a daily basis. It’s from God’s Word that the Holy Spirit reveals who Jesus really is and that He is sufficient for any kind of challenge we face.

This desperate father had no hope within himself and in asking the disciples to help, the need remained unmet. The fact is that apart from Jesus there is no hope. So he cried, “Help me overcome my *unbelief*.”

Mark 6:5-6 – “And because of their unbelief, he couldn’t do any mighty miracles among them except to place his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their unbelief...” (NLT)

Following the resurrection, Mark tells us:

Mark 16:14 – “Still later he appeared to the eleven disciples as they were eating together. He rebuked them for their unbelief—their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.” (NLT)

The first step in overcoming any deficiency or limitation in your life is to honestly acknowledge that you need help. This man is an example of what a loving father should be: caring and willing to humbly and persistently seek help on behalf of his son.

Matthew also describes Jesus confronting unbelief as a hindrance to having a vibrant faith in God.

Matt. 22:23-33 – “That same day some Sadducees stepped forward—a group of Jews who say there is no resurrection after death. They posed this question: ‘Teacher, Moses said, if a man dies without children, his brother should marry the widow and have a child who will be the brother’s heir. Well, there were seven brothers. The oldest married and then died without children, so the second brother married the widow. This brother also died without children, and the wife was married to the next brother, and so on until she had been the wife of each of them. And then she also died. So tell us, whose wife will she be in the resurrection? For she was the wife of all seven of them!’

Jesus replied, ‘Your problem is that you don’t know the Scriptures, and you don’t know the power of God. For when the dead rise, they won’t be married. They will be like the angels in heaven. But now, as to whether there will be a resurrection of the dead—haven’t you ever read about this in the Scriptures? Long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died, God said, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ So he is the God of the living, not the dead.’

When the crowds heard him, they were impressed with his teaching.” (NLT)

Previously, the Sadducees had used a particular question to stump those who believed in a bodily resurrection. And in their attempt to confirm their own unbelief in the resurrection, they used the same question in their attempt to stump Jesus, but this time it didn't work.

Their **personal error** lay in the fact that **they** were in a state of spiritual *blindness* because they lacked the revelation knowledge of God. **They couldn't believe** in a bodily resurrection because they didn't know the scriptures and hadn't personally experienced the transforming power of God.

This morning I want to declare to you that I believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. I believe because of:

(1) Centuries of Specifically Fulfilled Messianic Prophecies. The Old Testament prophets prophesied some 300 specific prophecies concerning the Messiah; his place of birth, the details of his life, his mission, his nature, his death, and his resurrection. These were more than predictions, because a prediction can be a vague guess. A prophecy is a revelation from God about the future and contains irrefutable specifics.

(2) Jesus prophesied his own death and resurrection. And He cannot lie.

Num. 23:19 – “God is not like people. He tells no lies. He is not like humans. He doesn't change his mind. When he says something, he does it. When he makes a promise, he keeps it.” (GW)

(3) I believe in the Resurrection because God, through Jesus, the living Christ, has supernaturally changed my life. I am well aware of the evil tendencies of my own flesh and were it not for the abundance of God's mercy and grace, plus the liberating power of the truth in Jesus, which is spoken into my heart by the Holy Spirit, I would still be a slave to my sin nature.

He has set me free and He continues to keep me free as I look to Him for His saving grace. And I'm only one of billions of transformed believers, many of whom are dying for their faith.

1 Pet. 1:3-5 – “All honor to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for it is by his boundless mercy that God has given us the privilege of being born again. Now we live with a wonderful expectation because Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. For God has reserved a priceless inheritance for his children. It is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And God, in his mighty power, will protect you until you receive this salvation, because you are trusting him. It will be revealed on the last day for all to see.” (NLT)

John 8:32 – “And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (NLT)

Rom. 6:14 – “Sin [the rebellious nature] is no longer your master, for you are no longer subject to the law, which enslaves you to sin. Instead, you are free by God's grace.” (NLT)

(4) I believe in the Resurrection because the exalted man Jesus, the Lord of glory, who died and rose again, is now seated at the right hand of God Almighty interceding on our behalf.

In numerous situations in my life, not all due to my own foolishness, I have come extremely close to entering into eternity prematurely. Yet, God, in His grace spared me. I am sure many of you have had similar experiences.

1 Pet. 3:22 – “Now Christ has gone to heaven. He is seated in the place of honor next to God, and all the angels and authorities and powers are bowing before him.” (NLT)

Heb. 7:23-25 – “Earlier there were a lot of priests, for they died and had to be replaced. But Jesus’ priesthood is permanent. He’s there from now to eternity to save everyone who comes to God through him, always on the job to speak up for them.” (Msg)

(5) I believe in the Resurrection because the faith (or revelation knowledge) God has given me helps me keep life’s daily struggles in proper perspective, and that means with an **eternal** point of view.

Even if a person is involved in Pastoral ministry, you can experience **discouragement** and get **depressed**. [Remember Elijah running from Jezebel]

Plus, physical **aches** and **pains** may become your frequent companions, yet, just as the resurrection turned the apparent defeat of Calvary into victory, the Holy Spirit heals and revitalizes us over and over again. God is able to make all things work together for good.

Rom. 8:11 - “If the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.”

(6) I believe in the Resurrection because I enjoy the wonderful blessings of Pentecost, promised by the resurrected Christ. Jesus instructed His disciples to “wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Since initially being baptized in the Holy Spirit, I endeavor to daily yield to the Holy Spirit and as Paul stated in **1 Cor. 14** - “I pray with the Spirit (in tongues) and I pray with the understanding also.”

(7) I believe in the Resurrection because all over the world there are people, not just converting to Christianity, but who are being transformed by the power of the resurrected Christ.

Desperate people from all over the world are crying out to God and are being delivered from drugs, alcohol, demonic oppression, and bondages of lust and greed, yet many in the west fail to find freedom simply because they are not desperate enough to ask Christ for help to overcome their unbelief.

Conclusion: Jesus told Thomas, the doubting disciple, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (**John 20:29**)

I am determined to receive that blessing – How about you?

If you have not believed and subsequently asked Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Savior; I invite you to do so this morning. If you would like prayer, please come to the front as we sing.