

This Changes Everything **Acts 25:23 – 26:26; Philippians 3:10-14**

This is my 11th Easter at LAC and therefore this is my 11th Easter message. So, I think I'll speak about the resurrection of Jesus this year! Actually, each year I prepare an Easter sermon, I realize that there are two main parts of the resurrection message that most pastors address at Easter, i.e., on whether the resurrection of Jesus 1) is news to be believed (or, whether it happened) or 2) an experience to be lived (or, does it make a difference). So, I've decided this year to speak simply and directly about each of those. As we come to our Scripture reading today, let's look at passages from the life of the Apostle Paul that speak to those two parts of Easter -- beginning with whether the resurrection happened in history as Paul described it in **Acts 25:23 – 26:26**.

What we will see in this passage is presented to us as a news report. It's a part of a courtroom thriller in a section of the Bible we might call, "*The Real-Life Adventures of the Apostle Paul*." The chief priests and Jewish leaders, knowing that the Roman Governor Festus was going to be in Caesarea (see <https://goo.gl/images/2fwm17>), went there to accuse Paul of breaking the Jewish law. But, Paul had heard that these leaders had devised a plot to kidnap him in this process. So, being the Roman citizen that he was, Paul had appealed to Caesar. All this led to a courtroom-like meeting that included the Roman Governor Festus, local King Agrippa and the Apostle Paul. **Let us stand now for the reading of this account in God's Word:**

The Resurrection Is News To Be Believed

I want you to notice several things about this report. First, the Apostle Paul, one of the best educated men in his country, knew that Jesus had died. Then, one day, the recently-crucified Jesus met Paul. For the rest of Paul's life, in good times and bad, he insisted with objectivity and conviction that the event we celebrate each Easter had really happened – and that he was a personal witness to that fact.

I also want you to realize that Paul was just one of many people who were witnesses to Jesus's resurrection. A **group of women** were the first to see him. That's recorded in **Matt 28:1-7**. Then some **followers of Jesus along the road to Emmaus**, people who were convinced that Jesus had died and that death was the end of things –but, then met him. Their account is located in **Luke 24:13-35**. Then, the **11 disciples** met him as Luke reports it in **Luke 24:36-49**. In fact, Jesus met with those disciples a number of times. And, then the big one – about **500 people** gave personal testimony to the fact that they had seen the resurrected Jesus. We read about that in **1 Corinthians 15:1-8**.

All these reports undergird what I just read to you about in Acts 26. Roman Governor Festus was listening contentedly to Paul's words, until Paul spoke about resurrection from the dead. When Festus heard that, he shouted in **26:24**: "*You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane.*"

To this Paul said, "I'm not out of my mind. I'm quite rational. I'm just telling you what happened. And, you can ask King Agrippa about it." Here, we find Paul making a remarkable statement in **Acts 26:26**: "*The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.*"

In other words, this claim that a man who was truly dead had risen from the dead had been witnessed all over the country. Paul is saying, "We know he died – really died. But, we also know he is not dead anymore! He has risen."

And, do not miss this point: All this had happened just about 15 years before Paul spoke with Herod and Agrippa about it. In other words, the witnesses were still alive. Paul was saying, "The king knows that what I'm talking about is true. The evidence of Jesus being alive is indisputable. I'm not out of my mind."

I tell you this as we gather this Easter 2018 to let you know that our Christian faith is rooted in history. This one of a number of things that sets our Christian faith apart from most religions. Most religions are either philosophies that need to be grasped (like many Eastern religions) or techniques that need to be practiced (like many rules-based religions) but our Christian faith is founded on news that is to be believed. Jesus really lived. Jesus really died on the cross. And Jesus really rose from the dead. As Paul would say in **1 Cor 15:14**, "*If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then our faith is void – useless – dead!*"

After an Easter message, I gave in Chicago a number of years ago, I had a delightful man come up to me and said, “Pastor Waybright, I’m not religious but you gave a good speech today. My wife has been coming to your church and she said you are an educated man. So, I know you had to talk about resurrection today but right now, just between you and me, tell me – you don’t really believe that story happened, do you?”

He went on to tell me what I had heard before, i.e., that he loved Easter as a metaphor of what seems to be dead coming to life, of hopeless people finding hope renewed, etc. He told me Easter is like Spring – with buds coming out on a tree that once seemed to be dead. He told me that it may be that the ancient people were gullible and uninformed and believed in things like miracles. And, he said, some few gullible people still hold on to old religious superstitions but not educated people...”

So, listen to me today: Ancient people were not as gullible and uninformed as we moderns like to think. In the report we heard in Acts 26, when Paul talked about resurrection, the Governor mocked and called him insane. The people back then were not less intelligent than we – and they knew that when a person dies, really dies, that person should not be expected to be eating fish and having meetings (as Jesus did) afterward.

So, if that’s true, why did people all over the world believe in the resurrected Jesus before the end of a century? And the answer to that is found in what Paul said to Festus, “*Look at the evidence as the answer to your questions. This resurrection really happened in history. Credible witnesses saw Jesus crucified and then risen. Hundreds of us are witnesses to this. It didn’t happen in a corner. It’s true.*”

So, I urge you to face up to your questions about the resurrection of Jesus. Look intently at the evidence. Be skeptical today about your own skepticism. As I said to that skeptical scholar in Chicago, “I do believe Jesus rose from the dead. And I believe if you will look at the evidence carefully, you will too.”

An Experience To Be Lived (Philippians 3:10-14)

I must tell you that simply believing the news that Jesus rose from the grave may not change your life. There are many people who go to church and believe in their heads all that the Bible says about Jesus – but do so and then keep living as they would live if it hadn’t happened at all.

So, let’s now take a moment to see how Paul said the resurrection continued to direct and transform his life. Let’s look at a few words from his testimony about this written while he was in a prison. Let’s turn to **Phil 3:10-14** and again stand for the reading of God’s Word.

Today, let’s focus only on those words in **v.10**: “*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.*” I want you to see the context into which the Apostle Paul wrote that sentence.

Before Meeting Jesus: “*...of the people of Israel..., of the tribe of Benjamin..., zealous (3:5-6)*” Paul’s words that precede this statement wanting to know the power of the resurrection speak of the life he had lived for before he met Jesus. And, for the people of his world, Paul had lived a pretty sweet life – one that all them would have envied. He mentions just some of the things that he was glad about and proud of:

- That he was a Jewish man –which he still was after meeting Jesus that and was glad about it;
- That he had a good and respected family – and he still had that and was glad about it;
- And, that he had tried to live a good life and keep all of God’s laws – and he still wanted to do that and was glad about it.

But, after he had met Jesus one day on the road to Damascus and experienced God’s mercy, power, love and forgiveness, Paul had developed an identify and longing that eclipsed all the earlier things. He had a new longing, i.e., to know Jesus and to become like him. He would say in a later letter, “*I live for the one who loves me, gave his life for me and rose from the dead (2 Cor 5:14).*”

After Meeting Jesus: *...becoming like Christ...* (3:11-14)

Paul followed verse 10 by helping us to know God’s promise for his future. The Apostle Paul knew well that, when we place our faith in Jesus, we are promised that God begin a work in us that he will never give up on. Using Paul’s language from other letters, God promises to make us “complete in Christ”.

So, Paul knew that God wasn't finished with him yet. See **Phil 3:12**: "*I'm not saying that I have already attained this or arrived at my goal.*" But, Paul said, "*While I live in this world, I take hold of that promise for which Christ Jesus took hold of me (3:12).*" In other words, Paul knew that Jesus didn't die for us in order to leave us messed up. God is committed to our complete re-making. What does that look like?

- The trials we face (like being in a prison or any other tough place) – will someday be no more.
- The anger that so often consumes us – will be changed into forgiveness.
- In insecurity we so-often grapple with – will be transformed into confidence.
- The sin and failure we give in to – will be turned into deliverance and victory.

How will that happen? I have to invite you back next week to continue with that beautiful story. We'll be pulling back to look at the larger and wonder-filled story of the Bible that we're calling "**The Biggest Story.**" Don't miss the next 6-7 weeks – and, especially it's beginning next weekend.

But now, **look again at v.10**: "*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.*" This is what changes us from our current lives into what God says we will be. It starts by knowing Christ. You begin that relationship with Jesus just as Paul did, i.e., by turning your life and all its failures and sins over to him, receiving his forgiveness, and placing your faith in Jesus. That brings you into a relationship that then must grow – as all relationships must grow. But, we need power if our lives are going to be changed.

And when you place in him, you receive the Holy Spirit into your life. This is how what Paul calls the "power of the resurrection" comes into your life. **Listen carefully: That is where a new future begins.** With the resurrection power of God within, you will see that things can happen that you always longed for but could never do on your own. Paul is saying from this prison, "Even here! -- I have found joy and peace even in a prison because I know Christ is greater than any problems in this world. I even long to share in the fellowship of his sufferings. After all, if Jesus overcame death, then my problems are small for him"

To help you see what this is like, I want to tell you about the most popular tourist attraction on the grounds of St. Peter's Church in Tewin, England. It's a tree. <http://www.hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk/images/1/tewin/tewin-1.jpg> What people from around the world go to Tewin to see is the massive single tree with four trunks that grows over the grave of Lady Anne Grimston, who was buried more than 200 years ago in the church cemetery.

Apparently, Lady Anne Grimston did not believe in life after death so she said to her friends. "*It is as unlikely that I shall live after death as that a tree will grow out of my body.*" So, she directed that, after her death, a massive concrete slab would be placed over her grave, secured with marble, and locked down, with a fence around it. On the marker were inscribed these words: "*This burial place must NEVER be opened.*"

In time, an acorn, covered over by the stones, began to grow. Slowly it pushed its way through the soil. I want you to see a brief clip of Lady Anne's burial place now: (**Play video here**)

It's true: Growing right from the heart of Lady Anne Grimston's grave in St. Peter's churchyard is one of the largest trees in England. The trunk of the tree has grown through the heavy iron railing and the marble masonry of the tomb has shattered to pieces. Be sure of this on Easter 2018: **If an acorn has the power to do that – then the power of the resurrection in you is sufficient to change your life.**

So, you can leave church today with hope – because the good news of Jesus's resurrection is not fake news. **It's news to be believed:** Jesus is risen! Do you believe it?

But, the resurrection is also an experience to change your life: Through the resurrection power of God at work in you, tomorrow can be different from today. Miracles can happen in you and through – to the glory of God.