Easter 2014: More Than Just A Story

Luke 24:1-12
1 Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.
2 And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre.
3 And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.
4 And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments:
5 And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?
6 He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee,
7 Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.
8 And they remembered his words,
9 And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest.
10 It was Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles.
11 And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.

Visitors To The Tomb
  • It was very early in the morning,
    o in the predawn darkness of a new day.
      ▪ It was a day like every other.
      ▪ Yet, it was a day like no other.
    o No one, especially not the small company of women
      ▪ that hurried through the darkness,
        • had any idea
        • that it was going to be a day
        • that would change everything,
          o for everyone.
    o As the glow of the coming sun
      ▪ began to paint the eastern sky
        • with the subtle hint of vibrant colors,
      ▪ that small group of grieving women
        • quickly passed through the silent streets
        • of a Jerusalem that was peaceful and still.
    o Neither the memory of what had occurred that week,
      ▪ nor the fear of what the future might hold,
        • had yet disturbed the sleep of its citizens.
  • Hidden by the darkness,
they hurried along,
  • each lost in their own thoughts,
  • each replaying the horrific events
    • that they had observed in the days before.

With everything that they had been through,
  • only one thing mattered on that day.

They had a singular purpose in mind,
  • only one reason for visiting the tomb.

Three days before,
  • Jesus had been hastily buried
    • before they could properly embalm
      o his broken body.

That was the only reason
  • that they ventured out on that fateful day.

Personally, I find it interesting
  • that they did not go to the tomb that day
    • with any thought of the resurrection in their mind.
  • It never occurred to them
    • that this was the third day.
  • It never occurred to them
    • that Jesus might no longer need to be embalmed.
  • They never even dared to hope,
    • that on this day,
      o he would rise from the grave.

The Validity Of The Story
  • You’ve probably heard the Easter story
    • many, many times in your life.
      • For many of us,
        • from our earliest childhood
      • we have heard the story
        • of how Jesus Christ was raised from the dead.
  • And each of us, at some point in our lives,
    • has been confronted with the arguments
      • of skeptics who are quick to declare
        o that it is just a story.
  • That the accounts of the resurrection
    • were just wild tales
      • conceived in the minds
      • of grieving disciples
    • who had already been predisposed
      • by the words of Jesus, himself,
        o to expect a resurrection.
  • They would have us to believe
    • that sorrow gave way to fantasy
• and unbelievable tales were created
  • to ease their heartache and pain.
  o The problem with those claims
    ▪ is the fact that the Bible is very honest
    • about the demeanor
    • of the followers of Jesus
      o after his crucifixion.

• When we observe these women
  o on their way to the tomb that day,
    ▪ we don’t see joyful, expectant, worshippers
    • headed out to greet their risen savior.
  o Rather, we see exhausted, disillusioned,
    ▪ hopeless followers of Jesus,
      • struggling to come to terms
      • with the horror that had intruded
        o upon their lives.
  o As a matter of fact, the testimony of scripture
    ▪ indicates that there was more faith
      • among the unbelievers
      • than there was among the believers.
  o The disciples were amazed
    ▪ at the revelation that Jesus
      • had risen from the dead
    ▪ but the chief priests and Jewish leaders
      • would have been surprised
        o if something incredible
        o had not happened on the third day.

• That small company of well meaning believers
  o had no expectation of the miraculous
    ▪ and had given no thought
      • to the significance of the third day.
  o But Matthew tells us that
    ▪ shortly after Jesus was buried
      • in Joseph’s tomb,
    ▪ the chief priests and Pharisees
      • sought an audience with Pilate
    ▪ for the express purpose of warning him
      • that Jesus had claimed
        o that he would rise again on the third day.
  o Apparently, they had so much faith
    ▪ in the promises of Jesus
      • that they asked Pilate to seal the tomb
      • and post a guard
• to make sure that Jesus
  • stayed in the grave.

• You see, the bible is very honest
  o about both the belief of the unbelievers
    • and the unbelief of the believers.
  o Those that should have expected his resurrection
    • were filled with doubt and fear,
  o while those who had doubted the claims of Jesus
    • had every expectation
      • that he would do
      • what he said he would do.
  o These are the kinds of details
    • that lend credibility to the Easter story.
  o The utter surprise of the disciples
    • and the fearful expectation of the Pharisees,
      • help establish the validity
        o of the Biblical account.
    • It is as much a story of doubt
      • as it is a testimony of faith.

More Than They Expected
• As darkness began to fade
  o and the company of women approached the tomb,
    • one of them finally realized
      • that there was a major flaw in their plan.
  o As they hurried along they realized
    • that they had failed to bring anyone with them
      • to move the stone.
  o Suddenly they were faced with the difficult question
    • of how they would gain entrance to the tomb.
  o No doubt, there was a sudden flurry
    • of whispered conversation
      • as they tried to solve this new dilemma.
  o However, at that very instant everything changed.
    • In the morning twilight,
      • as the eastern sky began to burn
        o with the intense hues of the coming sunrise,
    • Mary Magdalene, caught her first glimpse of the tomb a
      • nd realized that the stone had already been moved.
  o Horror-stricken, she assumed the worst.
    • John tells us, in his gospel, that Mary,
      • without going any further,
      • and possibly without even communicating with her companions,
• yielded to the impulse of the moment
  • and ran back to the city
    o to tell Peter and John,
  • that someone had stolen the body of Jesus.

• As Mary ran away, her companions continued on
  o and ventured into the tomb
    • to confirm their fears.
  o However, inside the tomb,
    • they encountered two men
      • in shining garments.
  o No doubt, fear rose in their hearts
    • as those angelic messengers began to speak.
  o Even as they realized
    • that the message was not a rebuke,
      • the importance of the words that the angels spoke
        o must have taken a moment to sink in.
  o “Why seek ye the living among the dead?”
    • Living?
      • Among the dead?
    • No.
      • They saw him die.
    • They were there when his lifeless body
      • was placed in the tomb.
  o But the angel continued,
    • “He is not here. He is risen.”
      • Even then, they failed to grasp the significance
        o of what they were being told.
      • Even then, reality seemed to demand
        o that this simply could not be.

• Finally, the angel reminded them
  o of the words of Jesus,
    • how he promised that after he was crucified
      • he would rise again on the third day.
  o And, in that moment, faith rose up in them.
    • As the sun broke over the horizon,
      • a new day dawned in their hearts
        o and they recognized the wonder
          • of what they were hearing.
  o Joyfully they ran,
    • with everything that they had,
      • to share the good news.
  o With great excitement,
    • they burst into the place
• where the disciples were gathered.

• But Mary had beaten them there.
  o Moments before,
    ▪ Mary had reported
      • what the disciples had dreaded.
  o Moments before,
    ▪ their worst fears had been confirmed.
  o With long faces and doubt filled hearts
    ▪ they turned to greet the excited messengers.
  o And in the next few moments
    ▪ they heard a story that was entirely too good to be true.
  o With words that were doubtlessly
    ▪ saturated with tears of joy,
      • those excited women began to tell the story
        o of what they had seen and heard.
  o With great enthusiasm they proclaimed,
    ▪ Jesus has risen from the grave.
      • He’s alive!
    ▪ Remember when he said
      • that he would rise again on the third day?
    ▪ Remember his words?
      • This is that day!
        o He’s alive!
        o He’s alive!
        o He’s alive!

Idle Tales
• But to the disciples,
  o whose faith had just been crushed,
    ▪ whose hearts had just been filled
      • with the negative report of Mary,
        o the story seemed too good to be true.
  o After all they had been through,
    ▪ they were more disposed to believe the negative
      • than they were to accept the positive.
  o Luke tells us that the story that those women told
    ▪ seemed to the apostles to be
      • nothing more than idle tales.
  o What they heard from Mary seemed believable
    ▪ but what they heard from this pack of hysterical women
      • seemed to be little more than wild fantasies.
  o When they should have believed,
    ▪ they doubted instead.
  o When they should have embraced
• The truth of the eyewitnesses,
  • they chose, instead,
    o to believe an unsubstantiated rumor.

• That’s the brutal honesty of scripture.
  o The disciples were just humans
    ▪ and we humans tend to believe the worst,
      • long before we will accept the best.
  o We love to condemn Thomas for his doubt,
    ▪ but the truth is, that all of the disciples
      • were filled with doubt on that Easter morning.
  o When they should have believed,
    ▪ they doubted.
  o When they should have embraced hope,
    ▪ they yielded to despair.
  o When they should have had faith,
    ▪ they instead harbored deep reservations.
  o In reality, Thomas was no different than the other disciples.
    ▪ They all were reluctant to believe
      • on that first Easter morning.
  o The story was just too good to be true.
    ▪ It seemed like the product of an overactive imagination.

• Perhaps there are some
  o under the sound of my voice this morning
    ▪ that find it easier to identify with those doubtful disciples
      • than to believe the Easter story.
  o Perhaps, you too, have harbored your misgivings.
    ▪ Perhaps you too have hesitated
      • to accept the claims of the gospel.
  o Perhaps you have been slow to embrace the notion
    ▪ of a grace that is greater than all of your sins.
  o Perhaps you have decided
    ▪ that somehow you’ve gone too far
      • or have done too much in your life,
    ▪ that there is no way that God
      • would ever extend his mercy to you again.

• I want you to know two things this morning:
  o First of all you are in good company.
    ▪ Your doubt does not make you unique.
    ▪ You aren’t the first person to doubt
      • the claims of the gospel.
    ▪ The very first evangelists of this powerful message
      • were also filled with doubt.
the first time they heard it.

Secondly, and even more importantly,
- your doubt doesn’t have to be
  - the end of the story.
- The first time the disciples were faced
  - with the incredible news
    - that Jesus had risen from the dead,
- they dismissed the story as a wild tales
  - but, even though they dismissed the risen savior,
    - he never dismissed them.
- They may have rejected the testimony
  - of those excited witnesses,
    - but the Lord wasn’t finished with them yet.
- You need to know that your doubt
  - isn’t an insurmountable obstacle
    - for the grace of God.
- God doesn’t reject you just because
  - you’ve doubted him or his word.
- Just like he didn’t reject the disciples.

Experience
- Instead, he confronts doubt with experience
  - because experience is the one thing
    - that doubt cannot deny.
  - Only one thing would convince
    - those doubtful disciples.
  - Only one thing would cause them
    - to forsake all their doubts
    - and fully believe
      - the wonderful truth of what happened
        - on that Easter morning.
  - They would have to experience it for themselves.
    - They would have to see Jesus for themselves.
  - They would have to behold his hands and his feet,
    - to see the evidence of the cross.
  - They would have to experience
    - the wonder of the resurrection
    - for themselves.
  - And that is exactly what happened.

First the ten, then later Thomas,
- were all converted
  - by an unmistakable experience.
  - They saw him, with their own eyes.
    - They looked upon his hands and feet,
• they saw the evidence of the cross,
  o the prints of the nails in his hands
    ▪ and they were thoroughly convinced
    ▪ that this was more than just a wild tale.
  o Doubt was replaced by unshakable faith.
    ▪ From the depth of personal experience,
      ▪ they discovered the incredible power of the resurrection.
  o Their lives were transformed.
    ▪ Everything was changed
      ▪ and that story that was more than just a story
        o became the center of a message
          ▪ that changed the world!
  o In Acts 4:33 the Bible tells us
    ▪ that the apostles were empowered by that story.
      ▪ With great power they gave witness
        o to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus,
        o and great grace was upon them all.
  o What a wonderful, hope filled message.
    ▪ Doubt was overcome by experience.
  o The first skeptics of the resurrection
    ▪ became its greatest evangelists,
      ▪ all because of the powerful grace of God.
    ▪ All because they experienced
      ▪ the very thing that they first doubted.

Experience It For Yourself
• Seven weeks after the resurrection,
  o Peter preached the very first sermon
  o The content of that sermon should come as no surprise.
    ▪ Standing on the balcony of the upper room,
      ▪ Peter looked out upon the crowd
        o that had gathered in the streets of Jerusalem
      ▪ and began to share with them the gospel message.
  o The life-changing message of the New Testament
    ▪ is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
  o He preached Jesus of Nazareth,
    ▪ a man approved of God among them
      ▪ by miracles and wonders and signs,
        o which God did by him in the midst of them.
  o He preached Jesus
    ▪ delivered by the determinate counsel
      ▪ and foreknowledge of God,
    ▪ taken by wicked hands,
• crucified and slain.
  o The story that he told was familiar to them.
    ▪ Only seven weeks before,
      ▪ it had unfolded in the very streets
        o upon which they now stood.

• But Peter didn’t stop there.
  o He launched into the wild,
    ▪ unbelievable story of the resurrection.
  o He preached that God had raised him up,
    ▪ having loosed the pains of death,
      ▪ because it was impossible for death to hold him.
  o He declared to them
    ▪ that God had exalted him,
      ▪ whom they crucified,
        o to be both Lord and Christ.
  o And I’m sure there were some in the crowd that day
    ▪ that scoffed at such a wild tale.
  o I’m sure there were some that dismissed
    ▪ such an incredible story.
  o But there were some, in the crowd that day,
    ▪ whose hearts were pricked by the gospel message
      ▪ and those men cried out to Peter,
        o “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”
      ▪ In light of such an incredible story,
        o how can I experience it for myself?

• Peter’s response is the cornerstone of New Testament salvation.
  o He told them to repent of their sins.
    ▪ To humble their heart in repentance,
      ▪ to forsake their sins
        o and turn their heart towards heaven.
  o Next he told them
    ▪ that they must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ
      ▪ for the remission of their sins.
  o Once again, that was familiar ground for them.
    ▪ John the Baptist preached both repentance and baptism,
      ▪ however John’s baptism was unto repentance.
    ▪ The baptism that Peter commanded for them
      ▪ was to be done in the name of Jesus
        o for the remission of sins.
    ▪ That was a different approach to baptism
      ▪ than John’s approach
        o but it wasn’t a foreign concept.
  o They were familiar with that kind of message.
No doubt, Peter’s answer
- was pretty much the kind of answer
  - that they expected to hear.

- But Peter didn’t stop there!
  - What he said next was as wild and unbelievable
    - as the resurrection story.
  - He promised that,
    - after they repented
    - and were baptized in the name of Jesus
      - they would receive the gift of the Holy Ghost!
  - He called it a promise
    - and went so far as to say
      - that this promise was to them,
      - and their children
      - and as many as the Lord would call.
  - The crowd gathered there that day
    - had some idea of what the baptism of the Holy Ghost was
      - because this gift of the Holy Ghost
        - was the very thing that had caused them
        - to gather in the streets in the first place.
  - Peter and the 120 faithful
    - had just been filled with the Holy Ghost
      - and had become loud, boisterous
        - and exuberant in their worship.
  - As a matter of fact,
    - they thought that the folks in the upper room
      - might be drunk.
  - But, when they gathered around
    - they marveled at the fact
      - that these Christ followers
        - could be heard speaking in other tongues
        - as the spirit of God gave them the utterance.
  - It was almost unbelievable.
    - It was the kind of thing
      - that, if they had not seen and heard it for themselves,
        - they would never have believed it.
    - It was the kind of thing
      - that you have to experience in order to believe.
  - And now Peter made them a promise
    - as incredible as the resurrection story.
      - If you will repent
      - and be baptized in Jesus name,
        - you WILL receive the gift
          - of the Holy Ghost!
More Than A Story

• What an incredible promise.
  o Once again, I’m sure there were people
    ▪ in the crowd that day
      • that rejected such a notion,
      ▪ people that thought the whole proposition
        • sounded like the wild unbelievable tales of crazy people.
  o But, there were at least 3,000 people in the crowd that day
    ▪ that responded to Peter’s command
      • and repented of their sins,
        o were baptized in the name of Jesus
        o and received the gift of the Holy Ghost!

• We’ve gathered here this morning
  o to celebrate the story of the resurrection.
    ▪ But I’m here to tell you, this morning,
      • that it is more than just a story.
  o It is an incredible truth
    ▪ that has been changing lives
      • for nearly 2,000 years
        o and is still changing lives today.
  o The assurance of the resurrection
    ▪ is the promise of the Holy Ghost.
  o The incredible story of what God did
    ▪ on the resurrection morning
      • serves as our assurance
        o that God will fill us
        o with the baptism of the Holy Ghost.
  o From where you sit this morning
    ▪ it may seem to be too good to be true.
      • It may seem to be too unbelievable.
      • It may seem to be just a fanciful tale.
    ▪ But I’ve come to this pulpit this morning
      • to tell you that you can experience it for yourself.
  o The same experience that they received
    ▪ on the day of Pentecost
      • can be yours today.
    ▪ The same experience
      • that distinguished the New Testament church
        o can be yours today.

• I could try to tell you how wonderful it is
  o to be filled with the baptism of the Holy Ghost
    ▪ but much like that exuberant company of women
• on resurrection morning,
  ▪ my attempts would probably
  ▪ fall woefully short.
  o Instead let me encourage you
    ▪ to taste of the Lord and see.
    ▪ Experience it for yourself.
  o It really is more than just a story.
    ▪ The scripture tells us that it is
      ▪ the earnest payment on our eternal inheritance!
    ▪ To put that in layman’s terms,
      ▪ the baptism of the Holy Ghost
        o is little taste of heaven
        o down here on earth
    o and, according to Romans 8,
      ▪ that spirit of God dwelling in us
        ▪ is what will quicken our mortal bodies
          o on that great day
            ▪ when the trump of God sounds
            ▪ and Jesus catches his church
              ▪ out of this world!

Close
• Today you can receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost.
  o Today you can discover for yourself
    ▪ that it is more than a story.

• **It starts with repentance.**
  o It starts with a change of direction for your life.
    ▪ It starts with you surrendering your life to God.
• From there you need to be baptized
  o in the name of Jesus Christ
    ▪ for the remission of your sins.
• **But the scripture promises,**
  o **if you will God will.**
• If you will sincerely repent
  o and purpose in your heart
    ▪ to obey the word and be baptized,
  o God will fill you with the Holy Ghost
    ▪ right here, right now.

• Taste of the Lord and see.
  o Experience it for yourself.
  o It is more than a story.