

You know if you think about it, the message of Easter has never been more relevant for the modern world than it is right now. And the interesting thing is that everybody is sitting up straight and paying attention. I mean the events of Easter are relevant because well they address our deepest and our greatest fears and all of our fears are pretty much front and center right now. Is everything gonna be all right? Is my family gonna be all right? Does God know about this? Does God care about this? Does God care about me? Does God care about my family? Does God hear my prayers? Does God care about our country? In fact, perhaps the only time in history that the events of Easter were more relevant, was the first Easter.

Now, those of us who are Jesus followers we have an advantage. We have an advantage because we have something to look back on and to hang our hope on, but for first century Jesus followers, it was a very different story. And this is the part of the story that I think most of us as believers misunderstand or miss altogether, and perhaps if you're not a Christian this is part of the story that perhaps no one ever told you and I understand why because of the way that a lot of us read our Bibles or the way a lot of us don't read our Bibles.

But here is what was so difficult for first century Jesus followers, and this is the part we miss. When Jesus died, when Jesus was crucified... When Jesus died, their hope died. When Jesus died, nobody believed he was the son of God. Nobody believed he was the Messiah of God. Nobody believed he was the Savior of the world. After Jesus was crucified, there were no Christians because there was no Christ. It was lights out on everybody's faith. There was a brokenhearted mother. There were some disillusion Galilean fishermen who thought they had wasted a season of their life. But there were no Jesus followers. There were no Christians. There were no believers. Think about that.

o, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus go to gonna, they ask for Jesus body. They take his body down from the cross. They put him, in basically a cave. Joseph of Arimathea's family tomb. They roll a stone in the front of it, and they go home. Because it was over. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, all the authors of the New Testament, they're very clear. No one, no one was planning to keep this dream alive and nobody was planning to keep this movement, moving and here's why. If Jesus couldn't keep himself alive. If Jesus couldn't keep himself alive, what was the point of trying to keep the Jesus movement alive because clearly Jesus was not who he claimed to be, and this was the issue.

Jesus teaching... And this is kind of new for us sometimes to understand. Jesus teaching was not the driving force of his movement. It was actually his outrageous claims that he made about himself. It was the outrageous claims he made about himself that kind of kept the band together and kept the movement, moving. And it was the outrageous claims about himself that drove religious leaders crazy. It wasn't the miracles. It wasn't his healing and it wasn't most of his teaching or most of his parables, most people didn't even understand most of his parables, but he was relentlessly attributing to himself things that only belong to God.

For example, he claimed to have the power to forgive sin but only God could forgive sin. He at one point he said he was greater than the temple. I mean, who would say that? He said he was greater than Moses. He was the Lord of the Sabbath. He claimed to be greater than Abraham. He claimed to be greater than the prophets. But he was constantly attributing to himself names and brands and labels that only God carried. And it was their confidence that perhaps or there suspicion that perhaps Jesus was correct about himself that kept the disciples and the apostles following. And Peter and the boys, they didn't choose to stay with Jesus because of what he taught. In fact, they chose to stay with Jesus, in some cases, in spite of what he taught. Case in point.

John tells us about this incident, it's a famous incident you've heard this before where Jesus feeds all these people with loaves and a few fishes, and then the crowd is so big they want to make him king right there because that's what kings did, kings fed the people. So Jesus and his disciples get in

a boat, and they travel across the southern end of the Sea of Galilee just to get a break from the crowd. When they get out of the boat the crowd has found them, and other people make their way around the southern end of the Sea of Galilee and next thing you know Jesus has another crowd on his hand, so he takes advantage of the situation and decides to teach.

And as he's teaching, he says that he is the bread of life that has come down out of heaven. The problem is, somebody in the crowd raises their hand and says, "No you're not". "We know your dad Joseph and we know your mother and you didn't come down out of heaven", this was just weird. And then Jesus continues to teach and he continues to talk about himself in terms that are very confusing and then he speaks of himself in terms that are actually offensive. And the crowd starts to thin. In fact, John says this. He says, From this time on many of his disciples, many of the people who just followed him everywhere he went. Many of the crowd turned back and they hit the unfollow button, they decided they were no longer gonna follow him because this particular analogy and the terminology he was using to describe himself, it was just so offensive.

Well Jesus sees the crowd thinning out. The Apostle see the crowd thinning out, and Jesus turns to his 12 followers and he says, "You guys aren't thinking about leaving too, are you"? Well nobody makes eye contact with Jesus because perhaps that's what they were thinking. They turned to Peter because he's the spokesman, and Peter responds. And what Peter doesn't say in this moment is as instructive as what he does say. Here's what Peter doesn't say. Jesus says, "You guys aren't thinking about leaving too", and here's what Peter doesn't say. He doesn't say, "Lord, leave you are you kidding, to who shall we go? Nobody teaches as well as you do. We've learned so much. Your content is compelling and your storytelling skills, my goodness they are without equal. Now granted today, wasn't one of your better outings. Okay, but one mediocre message is no reason for us to abandon you".

That's not what he said at all. Why, because they weren't following Jesus because of what he taught, they were following Jesus because of who they believed he might be. Here's what Peter actually said in that moment. You guys aren't thinking about leaving too. Peter says, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and then get this. We've come to believe, we're convinced we have come to know that you are the Holy One of God". Translated, you are the Messiah of God.

They followed Jesus because of who Jesus claimed to be and because of who they thought perhaps he was. But now he's dead. And now he's buried. And clearly, they were wrong. They knew they were wrong because the Holy One of God, the Messiah of God, the resurrection in the life, the bread of life. Can't be crucified, can't be executed. I mean God would not allow the Messiah that the Jews have been waiting on for hundreds of years to be executed by a foreign power, that was impossible. Clearly they were wrong about Jesus, and clearly Jesus wasn't telling the truth about who he was. They watched him die.

And it's clear from the Gospels, all of them expected Jesus to do what dead people normally do, stay dead. No one, we find no one standing outside the tomb, on that first Easter morning counting down backwards from 10. And equally as interesting, nobody writes themselves into the story as a die hard believer. Nobody writes themselves into the story as... But I was the one who never lost faith. In the Gospels, they're so honest. They all stopped believing.

So, if we can pause in that extraordinary moment in history. Jesus is dead. Jesus had been buried. And what do we have? We have a corrupt religious system. We have a heartless Empire. We have a relieved Roman governor, Pilate who cannot wait to get out of Jerusalem after Passover and get back to his coastal home. We have some sad Galileans, but there's no Savior. There's no son of God. There are no believers. And there is no hope. Because when Jesus died, hope died with Jesus. There were no Christians, because there is no Christ. And then... something... happened. Then something

happened that changed everything. Because then came that morning, that sealed the promise. His buried body began to breathe, and out of the silent, the roaring lion...

Don't you love these lyrics, declared the grave has no claim. On you, and the grave has no claim on me. That's why I say, Easter has never been more significant for us, because at Easter we celebrate, not something that was written. On Easter we celebrate the event that launched the movement, the church that eventually brought us the Bible, and this is a really important sequence of events. In fact, if you get this out of order it will not only be confusing, get this out of order and your faith will become fragile.

In fact, if you're watching today or listening today, and you're not a Jesus follower any longer, or you grew up in church and lost your faith, my hunch is because no one actually gave you this sequence of events. This sequence is so extraordinarily important and again without it faith becomes so fragile. If you lost your faith, I would say this, if you lost your faith because of something in the Bible, or about the Bible I have some great news for you. The Christian faith did not begin with Genesis. The Christian faith began with Jesus, but not the birth of Jesus and not the teaching of Jesus, the Christian faith began with the resurrection of Jesus, because there were no Christians, there were no followers until after something happened. There were no believers, until after the resurrection. The Bible did not create Christianity. Christians did not create Christianity. The resurrection actually created both, and that's why we celebrate.

Now, whenever I'm talking to a small group of people or an individual about this, somebody always asked this question and it's a great question and if it's the question you have then your tracking with me. And the question is simply this. "But Andy okay, I get all that, but Andy The Bible is how we know about the resurrection". Actually it's not, but most folks think it is and the reason most folks think it is is because of people like me, because the preacher. So listen so carefully, this is so important. The Bible was not assembled until about 350 years after the resurrection. The Bible wasn't assembled and when I say assembled I mean, the Jewish scripture, combined with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the Apostles letters, Peter's letters, the book of Revelation, the Bible wasn't assembled until the fourth century.

So if no one knew about the resurrection until the Bible was assembled, then no one knew about the resurrection until almost 400 years after the resurrection. We don't know about the resurrection because of the Bible. Do you know how we know about it? We know because Matthew told us about it. And Mark told us about it. And Mark got his information from the Apostle Peter. And Luke told us about it. And Luke says this, "I thoroughly investigated everything. I talked to every single eyewitness", and Luke tells us something else as well. Luke says, that many people sat down and tried to put together an orderly account of the life, and the teaching of Jesus.

We know about the resurrection because the Apostle John was an eyewitness and tells us about it. Peter who wrote two letters that ended up in the New Testament. And then my favorite, James. James was the brother of Jesus. And whenever I talk about James I can't resist asking this question. What would your brother have to do to convince you that he was the son of God? And James shows up in the New Testament book of Acts as a leader of the church. James was martyred because he believed, get this, because he believed his brother was his Lord. James was martyred because he believed his brother rose from the dead.

So no, we don't believe in the resurrection because the Bible tells us so. We believe because Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, James and the Apostle Paul, who steps onto the pages of history, trying to put the church out of business. We don't know about the resurrection because of the Bible actually, we have a Bible because of the resurrection. Without the resurrection, there would be no Bible. And the reason we know that is because the only reason and please don't miss

this. The only reason Jesus story was worth telling, it wasn't his teaching. And it wasn't simply his claims about himself. And it certainly wasn't his crucifixion, 10s of thousands of people were crucified. The only reason Jesus story was worth telling... was the resurrection. And as it turns out, because of the resurrection, it was a story worth telling.

So, for over 30 years, the Apostle Peter would tell that story for 30 years after the resurrection he would travel around to villages and towns and everywhere he went, the Christians would invite him into their homes and they would say, "Peter, tell us one more time". So for 30 years he tells this story, and then Peter ends up in Rome, Nero's Rome, and he's imprisoned. Peter doesn't know it the time but he will not leave Rome alive. And he's accompanied by Mark who had traveled with him for several years and Mark had heard him tell these stories over and over and over and Mark coaxes it out of him one more time, and Mark documents it for us and it comes to us as the Gospel of Mark. And just imagine, Peter and Mark sitting there and they're to this part of the story, the resurrection, and Mark says, "Okay, go slow. I gotta get this down". And here's what Peter said. He said, "Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Jewish council", basically their Supreme Court, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God", and Joseph was hoping that Jesus was going to usher in the kingdom of God, and like everyone else he lost faith because God's Messiah couldn't possibly be crucified. He went boldly to Pilate and he asked for Jesus body. And Pilate was actually surprised to hear that Jesus was already dead. And summoning the centurion who oversaw the crucifixion, he asked him, "Has the King of the Jews already died"?

And when he learned that in fact it was so, he gave the body to Joseph, which was very unusual. So, Joseph bought some linen cloth. He took the body of Jesus down from the cross and he wrapped it in the linen, he placed it in a tomb cut out of rock and then he rolled an enormous stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph, saw where Jesus had been laid. And then, when the Sabbath was over, and it was legal for them to come back out. When the Sabbath was over Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James bought spices, so that they might go to anoint Jesus body.

And why did they go to the tomb to anoint Jesus body? Because like everybody else they expected Jesus to stay dead. And then, very early on the first day of the week. Just after sunrise, when they were on their way to the tomb. They asked each other, "Who is gonna roll away the stone from the tomb"? But when they looked up. They saw that the stone that was very large had already been rolled away. And then they did something that I'm not sure I would have done. They entered the tomb, and they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. "Don't be alarmed", he said, "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified, but he's risen. He's not here see the place where they laid him, but you go and tell his disciples", and I love this part, "but go tell his disciples and Peter", make sure Peter knows.

"Go tell his disciples and Peter he is going ahead of you into Galilee, and there you will see him just as he told you". So the women find the disciples... Peter and John rush to the tomb, you may know this story. They look inside. They walk away confused. They do not assume a resurrection. These were not superstitious men. They make their way to Galilee, just as they were instructed to do. And Peter and the rest of the disciples get there and they meet their risen Lord. And they have... this is such an intimate setting, they had breakfast with him on the beach.

And I'm just guessing. I don't know if this is the case, but perhaps they had breakfast with him on the beach in the very location where this entire journey began. Now, if you're a Jesus follower, Peter would tell you and Andrew and James and John would assure you that your faith, your sacrifice, your compassion, your generosity, your loyalty, your love, and most importantly, your hope is not in vain. If you're unconvinced, I think Peter would lean in and he would speak first.

If you're not convinced I think he would lean in and he would say, "Look, I understand. I too was unconvinced. I too, lost faith. I was in the back of the crowd and I saw him die. But then... something happened. Something happened that changed everything. Something happened that changed everything for me. Something happened that caused me to spend the rest of my life, risking my life so that you could know that your Savior lives. And when I saw my resurrected rabbi, it was only then that I finally understood what he had been telling us all along. The time has come. God has done something for the world in the world. The kingdom of God has come near which means you are never far. And then I finally understood what the invitation was all about. The invitation was to repent. The invitation was to turn in his direction, and embrace this kingdom value system, and to embrace this king. To repent and believe what I understand now to be 100% good... news".

Peter would tell you God has done something for you because God is for you. And he simply wants you to receive this good news, and to accept his invitation to follow. After all, Jesus introduced the kingdom of God to earth, and everyone is invited to participate in it.

So, I'm convinced the message of Easter has never been more relevant. This Easter, I hope it becomes more relevant than ever for you. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, give us eyes to see. Give us ears to hear. Please give us courage to follow you. In Jesus' name, amen.

North Point Church.