

## Talk It Over

## EPICENTER (Week 2) The Resurrection

### SMALL TALK

1. When have you ever felt the constricting grip of fear?

### VIEWPOINT

2. **READ Ephesians 1:18-23.** Describe in your own words what Paul describes that cannot be seen with human eyes. What “incomparably great power” does he describe and what does this have to do with Easter? And how is this available to each of us?
3. **READ John 20:2; Luke 24:11-12.** What is the surprising first reactions to the empty tomb? Why is this detail an important consideration for us?
4. **READ Acts 17:6.** Why is this quote from the opponents the Jesus movement significant? (Hint: This event described in Acts 17 took place about AD 50).

What I have called the epicenter, is the foundation of our faith! It exploded into reality because of what Jesus accomplished! Check this chain reaction out!

*Acts 17:6 (ESV) “...These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also...”*

This is a quote from events in AD 50, just 17 years after the crucifixion and already those who didn't believe them see a massive chain reaction that they describe as a movement that is turning the world upside down! Think about this, something huge happened that caused this reaction immediately after the very leader of the movement was crucified as a criminal! The whole movement is built on the evidence that so many witnesses and eyewitnesses brought forward!

If your life is turned right side up by Jesus, it will might feel like your life is being turned upside down.

### GETTING PERSONAL

5. What do you think of Blaise Pascal's quote: "Belief is a wise wager. Granted that faith cannot be proved, what harm will come to you if you gamble on its truth and it proves false? If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation, that He exists."? How does one do this if he or she is not sure?
6. What evidence for the resurrection seems most compelling to you?

Personal experiential evidence? Eyewitness evidence? The changed lives of the first followers from fear to fearlessness? The changed lives of people like Paul and James from chief persecutors to chief promoters? The miracles that continued in the movement? That historic evidence that the movement exploded immediately after Jesus was executed as a "criminal" and long before it was documented?

Did you know that James the half-brother of Jesus, who was skeptical of Jesus all through his ministry, became the leader of the movement in Jerusalem almost immediately after the resurrection! He was a chief spokesperson in the Jerusalem council in Acts 15.

This is huge. How many of you have an older brother? What would it take for you to be convinced that your older brother was the son of God!? Do you see what I mean? It took the resurrection to do that! James saw him crucified but then met him resurrected! Everything changed for him.

*1 Corinthians 15:7 (NIV) Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,*

Meeting his brother resurrected is what changed James.

What changed Paul from the strongest opponent persecutor to the strongest proponent evangelist, missionary?

## MAKING PROGRESS

7. One of our core statements is: "Followers say, 'Follow me.'" The chain reaction from person to person from the epicenter is Christ's design and great commission to us. How are you doing? Who are you praying for? Who are you impacting?

April 21, 2019

## Resurrection

Series: Epicenter (week 2)

We live in a world filled with darkness. The suicide rate in the United States has gone up 33% in the last 20 years. Suicide is now second leading cause of death for young adults. Now only accidents out pace suicide for young adults. We learn 2 things from this. 1) We need to spread the news: Jesus is alive. And 2) We have need to stop looking at our phones when we drive.

Jesus claimed to be the answer to the darkness we experience. Is there any evidence that can substantiate such a bold claim?

Let's begin with a curious statement from Paul that can serve as common ground between believers and unbelievers alike.

*1 Corinthians 15:14 (NIV) And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.*

This should help everyone, whether you believe or don't believe to see what's at stake here today.

The resurrection is the Epicenter of what we believe. Paul says, if you don't believe this, then your faith is useless.

This is incredible! Why would any modern mind believe this story? And yet so many do.

The surprising thing about the Christian faith is that from the beginning, the best evidence has been the thing that most people have the hardest time believing.

The world's population is now 7.7 billion people. And according to the studies, nearly 1/3 of the globe's population believe Jesus actually rose from the dead.

Now let me just say at this point, that if you find it difficult to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, I'm really glad you are here today. Although I can't prove it to you, I hope I can explain why so many of us believe it.

*John 20:1 (NIV) Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.*

Mary Magdalene's life was hopeless until she met Jesus. She was a mess. If she lived in Cottonwood today, I think she would be someone who took a lot of pills for a lot of different symptoms. The medical field would have prescribed the best they could, and the mental health professionals would have prescribed the best they could, and yet, she still felt tortured and trapped by deeper and darker problems.

But then she met Jesus, and Jesus set her free. She experienced peace like she had never experienced in her life before.

But then one bad Friday she heard some rapidly spreading news that he was arrested and that his enemies were asking Pilot to execute him. She got there as quickly as she could. What she saw startled her. What had they done to him? Then what they were saying startled her even more. What would you do if you were there? She tried to make her way closer. She did her best to catch his eye, to try to let him know she was here and she would do anything she could. But everything inside of her was shaking and crumbling away. The details were ghastly. Then it got dark at noon. Then when he died there was a terrible Earthquake. It felt like the whole world was coming to an end. It felt like her whole world was coming to an end. Everyone seemed to want to hide. She stayed. She stayed to see where they would take his body. They rolled the stone in place, then she fell apart. Can you imagine what she went through from Friday night till Sunday Morning? Questions plagued her. Was she going to go crazy again? Was all the hope and joy she felt a lie? We read this verse with hope. The stone was rolled away. That was not Mary's reaction.

Did you know that at first the empty tomb did not bring comfort, it brought greater distress? So distressed was Mary that she runs to tell the others.

*John 20:2 (NIV) ... "They have **taken** the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where **they** have put him!"*

As we piece together the total story, Luke let us know that after Mary left the garden tomb some of the ladies who were with her and stayed behind met some angels who told them Jesus had risen, so they came running too. Ah, we think. Ok, so now this will do the trick. This is when faith and hope explodes! But no. Here is what we read!

*Luke 24:11 (NIV) But they did **not believe** the women, because their words seemed to them like **nonsense**.*

## **I. Does it sound like NONSENSE to you?**

If this sounds like nonsense to you, then know this, you are in good company. The closest friends and most loyal followers of Jesus reacted like this. It seemed like nonsense to them also! Why? They assumed what most people like you and me naturally assume, there has to be some better explanation for this!

They saw him die. When he died they thought they had put all their hopes in the wrong guy! If Jesus couldn't stop these wicked people from crucifying him, then he can't be the Messiah! And having seen him die, they totally expected him to ... stay... dead!

Nevertheless they go try to figure out what is going on!

*Luke 24:12 (NIV) **Peter**, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and **he went away, wondering** to himself what had happened.*

This is incredible. If the story of the resurrection was made up, nobody would tell it this way with all the key leaders and chief eyewitnesses documenting their own disbelief! But that's what they do. If this story of the resurrection was made up, is this how you would make it up and tell it?

I encourage you to read the accounts of the eyewitnesses for yourself and see what you think! Read through the entire New Testament for yourself. It isn't that long. So many after reading all of it think, "Wow! This is true. This really happened!"

What happened? And what evidence is there? So here's the next question.

## **II. What adequately explains the CHAIN REACTION?**

*Luke 24:48 (NIV) You are witnesses of these things.*

None of the Apostles relied on hearsay. They knew one thing. They were absolutely convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that he died, but then they met him and spent time with him for a period of 40 days on and off and became absolutely convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that he had risen from the dead.

If you think the resurrection is hard to explain, the immediate chain reaction is even harder to explain if there was no resurrection. How did the movement explode immediately like it did if the resurrection didn't happen?

### **A. FAITH didn't cause it.**

Most people today think of faith as blind faith. You believe in spite of the evidence. Jesus does not teach this. Jesus told us to love God with all our heart, soul, and MIND and strength. He gave evidence for our brains to trust. The disciples were all skeptics until they had more evidence. I urge you to look into the evidence and follow the evidence.

### **B. DOCUMENTS didn't cause it.**

Most people think we believe in the resurrection only because we believe in the Bible. The foundation of our movement is Jesus and what he did. The chain reaction took hold before the documents were even written! There is incontrovertible evidence that the movement exploded very soon after the crucifixion! The witnesses preached about it. Then in several decades, the letters and documents written by these Apostolic and commissioned witnesses and people who were closely with them and their preaching, wrote about it. The New Testament is a collection of these ancient documents that explain what happened, why it happened, and how it make a difference for you and me. But make no mistake the documents didn't cause it.

### **C. JESUS caused it**

Jesus crucifixion and resurrection is the "Epicenter." Earthquakes are measured from their Epicenter.

*Ephesians 1:18-20 (NIV) I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in*

*order that you may know... {19}... his **incomparably great power** for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength {20} **he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead...***

Incomparable? Nuclear bombs can also be measured from the epicenter of their blast. If you didn't see it happen, but you came to the blast site, you would know something very powerful happened, and you would have to explain it somehow, even though you didn't understand it.

Nuclear bombs have a lot of power. Nuclear bombs are almost the greatest power harnessed by humans so far. And yet, there is no comparison to the unseen Spiritual power of the resurrection! Nevertheless, a comparison is instructive.

Nuclear bombs are weapons of mass destruction. They harness the forces that hold the nucleus of an atom together by using the energy released when the particles of the nucleus (neutrons and protons) are either split or merged [fission or fusion].

From a British website dedicated to nuclear disarmament

The resurrection was an epicenter flashpoint that set off a powerful chain reaction that continues to this day. It follows the pattern of both fusion and fission by "merging" with Christ then "splitting" resurrection life from person to person.

Even if Paul witnessed a nuclear bomb, he'd say that every other power we compare it to is so small it doesn't even compare. In the spiritual dimension if we had the senses and ability to compare the resurrection flashpoint with the largest nuclear blast, the nuclear blast would sound like an inaudible gnat's sneeze by comparison!

If you are not experiencing the earthshaking power of Jesus Christ, the problem is in one of two places. You are missing either the FUSION power, when your life is merged with Christ, or FISSION power, when the power flows through you and splits off in a chain reaction with someone who has not yet experienced Jesus resurrection power.

There is a lot of historical evidence. Jesus is alive. Death was conquered. But personal evidence feels even more powerful. Our eyes become open. We know from experience that the stone that was rolled away wasn't just the stone at Jesus tomb. Jesus has rolled away the stone of pride over the tomb of my heart. This is what I know and have experienced, and I want it for you also. His resurrection life has entered into my formerly self-centered, sin deadened life. Jesus has done something for me that I cannot scientifically prove. There is power in the fusion, and great joy and more experienced power in the fission. If you haven't yet experienced how your own sin deadened life can be resurrected to a living powerful life here is what you need to do! Step toward trusting the evidence of history. Look at the evidence again. Approach God in prayer again on the basis that Jesus did this for you, and he loves you, and wants you to approach him.

**III. BET on it today!**

“Belief is a wise wager. Granted that faith cannot be proved, what harm will come to you if you gamble on its truth and it proves false? If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation, that He exists.”

Blaise Pascal (mathematician, physicist, inventor, follower of Jesus)

*“God, I know I’ve let a lot of death into my life. I’ve messed up. I need Your grace. I need Your forgiveness. Thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for me. Thank You for raising Him back to life. I’m ready to put an end to all the death in me and start living for You. In Jesus’ name, amen.”*

If you need FUSION, and you prayed this prayer, a chain reaction may already be taking place inside of you. Talk to one of us, you need to complete the fusion, you have conception, now you might want to consider being baptized. We’d love to talk to you about how to merge your life with Christ!

And now, here is a little intro about the new 4 part series that starts next week.