

# Easter People 1

## Searching for Resurrection

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### **INTRO**

Happy Easter! He is Risen! Hallelujah! Today is a good morning! Today is the day that we've waited for. Through the long, 40 days of Lent. Through the excruciating pain of Holy Friday.

And now, finally, here.

### ***Resurrection.***

What an amazing impossibility. I mean, really. It's impossible. Dead is dead. We all know that. We've all been to funerals. This church knows too much about death. We know that dead is dead. So, what is this resurrection? What does it mean?

### **DAVID M BAILEY**

When I was a kid, my favorite musician was a singer-songwriter, David M. Bailey. I idolized him. I loved the stories in his songs, the mellow tone of his voice. And I loved his faith.

His music career started with a brain cancer diagnosis. He chronicles his story in song. "Well I'm gonna live forever. I've got a home waiting for me up above. And as long as you keep these songs inside your heart, I'll live forever in this home we call love."

At age 30 the doctors gave him 6 months to live. That diagnosis led him to leave his job and take up a music career. And he lived another 14 years and 3 months and died in 2010. Amazing. And what a life he lived! Touring all over the world and talking about how God is the reason he's still on this earth!

### **TURN (not a reprieve)**

*Amazing. But listen up*, that is a blessed **reprieve**, not a *resurrection*. I am not talking about a prolonged life. I am talking about total transformation!

This resurrection story may be about our life after death, but it's also about **Thy Kingdom Come, thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven!** It's about our mini resurrections and our glimpses of the kingdom in the here and now. *You don't have to wait to die to witness a resurrection.*

### **BETRAYAL STORY**

On Friday, the impossible happened. The man we all follow has a fall from grace so dramatic that we not only leave him. —leave him immediately after our professions of faith, I'll add.— Immediately after proclaiming that he is our king.

He doesn't meet our expectations. He doesn't save us the way WE want. So, his fall from grace was so dramatic that we not only left him, we crucified him.

Jesus had been so promising, so interesting! He taught and healed. He fed us and befriended us. **He did more than kiss babies and show up at rallies.** He showed up with the healing grace of God. We all invited him in gladly.

When he rode into Jerusalem... we thought, this is it! He's going to do it! He's going to overthrow the government, put some good people in charge, and fix the laws so we aren't oppressed anymore! He'll roll out the vaccine, and stimulus packages, and solve all social problems! He'll toss those Romans out and we'll be free!

So... what happens when he doesn't do it? I mean... God is all powerful... right?

## **POWER OF EVIL?**

Have you ever asked that? The, "well if God is all powerful, why doesn't God do something?" I imagine that's what the Israelites following Jesus were asking.

"Come on Jesus... We know you have the power... let's get a move on!"

Meanwhile the Powers of their world, *well*, our world, were conspiring. Jesus was too disruptive. Maybe they could see that Jesus wasn't after an earthly throne before the people did. He rode in as a King does, but he did it all wrong. Feet dangling, weeping. Jesus wasn't coming in to take over the city. Jesus was coming to take over hearts. He didn't want power. He doesn't want power. He wants *total transformation*.

And nothing is more threatening to Power than people whose hearts have been changed.

"We better do something about this guy."

So they had a 1-week rapid smear campaign and by Friday, we were convinced.

"Nope. I see too much evil in the world.

I see too much addiction.

Too much violence in our communities.

Too much division.

Too much COVID.

**Too much.**

[despondent] There's no way this God cares. If God cared, God would act. **Crucify this imposter with his false promises.**"

Jesus disappointed us by not taking control of the government, the church, the school, our power authorities. But Jesus doesn't want corporate power. Jesus wants to bring your heart to life so you can fully enjoy the world.

**But that's not what we wanted.** And, *oh!* How quickly we change. [NEXT: JUDAS BETRAY]

And Jesus. *Oh Jesus.* He knew. He knew all along! Do you know that even as Judas planned his betrayal, Jesus served him the first communion? Jesus was already forgiving him and loving him, maybe also mourning him, even as Judas went to collect his 30 pieces of silver.

What do we do with that depth of love?

So, Jesus was crucified.

And God died.

And so, on the third day, Mary entered the garden where Jesus was laid—*Looking for death*. She was there to find death so she could mourn over and care for his body.

## **LOOKING FOR DEATH**

### **Do you go out looking for death?**

Do you meet with people you know will disappoint you, so, before you go, you take a deep breath and remind yourself not to trust this time?

Do you turn on the news bracing yourself for disappointment and fear?

Do you check your Facebook readying yourself for your next argument?

Do you wander through malls and stores wondering who is safe and who is not?

### **Do you go out *looking* for death?**

## **WARINESS MAKES SENSE**

## WARINESS MAKES SENSE

Maybe you've earned that wariness! Maybe you've been hurt so many times that you can't stand to let your guard down one more time. Maybe the people around you have hurt you, betrayed you, disappointed you one too many times. That is, of course, a kind of death. A death of trust. A death of faith. A death of a relationship. It may not be permanent, but it may certainly feel that way. We learn to protect ourselves.

*So of course you aren't expecting life when you've been **taught to expect death**.*

So what do we do with this empty tomb? Is the body stolen? Moved? There aren't any other possibilities.

## IMPOSSIBLE?

*Resurrection is an **impossibility**.*

But we worship a God who deals in the impossible! Our God makes the impossible, possible.

I mean, water into wine, water out of rocks, splitting the ocean in half to walk across!

Calming the seas, healing impossible diseases, casting out persistent demons.

Working with the pariahs of the time.

Talking with women, lepers, tax collectors!

Talking theology with people who are from *THAT* religion or *THAT* denomination.

Jesus' whole ministry he is doing what cannot be done! What **should not** be done!

Of course his death would be the same.

So Jesus died, and yet, the tomb was empty.

## **DISCIPLE REACTION/FINDING JESUS**

Mary runs into town as fast as she can to breathlessly tell the disciples what she found. Most ignored her. In other gospels it says they believed the women were telling an idle tale. A nonsense, garbage story. But not Peter and the disciple Jesus loved. They had to see for themselves. They're still looking for death, but they're starting to see that something isn't right. Their expectations aren't adding up.

The three go back to the tomb and the men determine that, indeed, Jesus's body is gone. It says the men saw, and believed. Believed what? We don't know. It says they still didn't understand about the resurrection. They go back to town. Mary remains, weeping.

In the garden.

Does this start to feel familiar? In a *garden*?? God is doing a new thing in an old place. God is redeeming the irredeemable. It is the morning on the first day, and the sun is just rising.

**And then things start happening.** Mary looks in again and sees angels sitting there. She **knows** they weren't there before. After talking with them she turns around and sees Jesus but does not recognize him *until!* **"Mary."** Jesus says her name. He calls her by her name. And she instantly knows him. "Rabboni!" My teacher.

A resurrection. *THE* resurrection. The resurrection to defeat all death.

Mary goes to tell her story, "I have seen the Lord!"

That means so much more than just the words.

**It means that when she looked for death, she didn't find it.**

**Death was not there because death did not win.**

And that's what I'm talking about. Heaven on earth. Christ won. Death can't hold you. Death can't hold your loved ones. There can be resurrection. True resurrection. Not just a reprieve.

### **FRIEND'S PASTOR/RESURRECTION**

One of my favorite stories is about **my friend's pastor**. He preaches at a United Methodist church in Ohio. 18 years ago he was a lying, stealing, dying alcoholic. That's what addiction is. It's a death. This man had an encounter with God that changed his life. It changed him so much that he knew he had to follow his call into the pulpit. I imagine that a lot of people looked at him and only saw death. People he had lied to, cheated, deceived. **But like the prodigal son**, he was dead, and now he is alive and pastoring one of the most creative and rapidly growing churches in Ohio.

That's a resurrection.

Addiction is a death. But it can be an opportunity for new life.

*We are an Easter people! That means we believe the impossible.* We believe that when something has died, **maybe just give it some time and see what happens**. We believe that people who have died can come back to life.

(Jesus only took 3 days, but he's God. The rest of us may need a little more time.)

### **DEATH DEFINITION**

So what is death?

You know it. I can't name it for you.

Its broken relationships, fear, separation.

It's not being able to trust the people you love because you *know* you can't.

It's not being trustworthy yourself.

But we are an Easter people, so we believe that the impossible is possible. They **will** get clean, you **will** have a relationship again, you **can** build trust. It *is* possible.

“But Pastor, some people never change.”

Maybe so. I don't want to tell you not to be realistic. Sometimes loving someone is very risky and even dangerous. Sometimes it's dangerous for your heart. And the best thing you can do is leave. We can't go around assuming resurrection is going to happen just because WE are ready for it. Sometimes giving space or separation is the most important part of the resurrection possibility. They have to be ready, too.

### **BELIEVE IN RESURRECTION MORE**

But, wait. We are a *resurrection* people.

How can we be careful *when we need to be* while also believing in resurrection?? Isn't that a contradiction?

*Listen. You can believe in Jesus **more** than you believe in death.*

I'll say it again. **You can believe in Jesus more than you believe in death!**

You can *believe* that Christ's resurrection is **stronger** than any death you encounter.

That means when you look at someone you can believe that they are on a path but that *they haven't yet arrived*.

You can believe that while it may *look like* they are dead in heart, in spirit, to **other** people, but **YOU** are a resurrection person and you **know** better.

You know that they may **look dead**, but they are *just sick*.

Sick in body, in mind, in spirit. And they are on a journey of their own.

And **YOU** can see the finish line. You can see the resurrection potential. You can see the potential for life when others see only death. What a gift.



*A few years ago, I killed a sunflower plant. I killed it dead. I do not have a green thumb. Anyone could look at it and say, yep. That's dead. But I brought it to my church. And there were some women there who believed in resurrection. They looked at my poor sick plant and said, "ah, no. There is still life here."*

Within months, my dead plant was more alive than it had ever been.

**Death is not stronger than the possibility of resurrection.**

That's what Jesus was doing. Jesus Christ is making a way where there is no way. Making possibilities where there is no hope. God is taking the impossible and making it *real*.

[PAUSE]

**So, why do bad things still happen?**

I don't know. I don't have all the answers. If I were a disciple I'd be right behind Peter asking all the wrong questions at all the wrong times.

But, you know, I don't need to know it all. That's what it means to have faith. And I have faith in a God who conquered death and continues to resurrect my family, friends, community, even my world, and yours, too. If only I would have faith to believe in the impossible and ***look for resurrection***.

Jesus came back for us to have *the world*.

Look, God loves doing good things in gardens and its *spring*. Go out and enjoy the life you have been given, this reprieve from death. Go out and look for resurrection. It's all around you. And it's the Easter people who can see it.

He is Risen!

Amen.