

April 21, 2019 – Elmont Baptist Church

Easter Sunday

“...This Jesus...”

Text: Acts 2:22-41

J.D. Greear –

Introduction:

One of the things that have puzzled historians for years is why Christianity spread so fast in its earlier days.

- The group Jesus left behind was relatively small, and they weren't very influential people—they were fisherman and carpenters.
- And Christianity didn't advance through conquest. For the first 400 years no one really picked up a sword in defense of it.
- It didn't make its followers rich. In fact, it usually led to them losing their homes and fortunes.

In fact, it produced communities unlike any the world had ever seen:

- Peaceable (there were lots were persecuted religious groups in those days; only Christians refused to fight back, praying for the forgiveness of their captors and going joyfully to their executions)
- That welcomed the outcast (they had the first multi-racial communities on the planet; they taught that all people were of equal worth in the eyes of God: Jews/Gentiles; rich poor; masters/servants; men/women)
- Generous... (Julian—who was not a Christian, lamented...)

But where did that all come from? Kenneth Scott Latourette, a professor at Yale—said, *“The more one examines the various factors which seem to account for the extraordinary victory of Christianity, the more one is driven to search for a cause underlying them all. It is clear that at the very beginning of Christianity there must have occurred a vast release of energy virtually unequalled in history... Nothing else could explain the surge of the early Christian movement. What caused this release of energy...lies outside the realm in which modern historians are supposed to move.”* But then he goes on to say, *“But before I am a historian, I am human... How can I close my eyes to the obvious explanation that something supernatural happened?”*

The past 2000 years are wildly different because of the life of one man named Jesus. We can all recognize that, but we still need to ask...

Jesus Christ changed the world, but has He changed yours?

The reality that Jesus was a real historical figure who lived and died during the time the Bible attests to is not the debatable topic. Where the debate comes in is not when we ask “Was Jesus a real person?”, but rather when we ask other questions like, “Was Jesus who He said He was?” and “Did God raise Him from the dead?”. These are big questions and deserve consideration. They're questions that have changed the course of human history more than any others have.

Questions that Change Everything

✓ **Was Jesus Who He Said He Was?**

- God in human flesh – v 36
- Only Savior of the world – John 14:6
- Rightful Ruler of creation – v 36

From fulfilling prophecies written hundreds of years before His birth, to the miracles He performed, and the things that He said about Himself, if we believe the Scriptures to be true, then it would be difficult to arrive at a different conclusion about Jesus other than that He is God. Again these first followers of Jesus got nothing but a painful death for their allegiance to Him all because they declared, like Jesus did, that He was God and rose from the dead. We may still have questions and some of those never get answers that remove all doubt, but to look at the evidence available over that past 2000 yrs and even before that into OT prophecies and dismiss Jesus as just a good guy or nice teacher, isn't taking a serious look at things. As C.S. Lewis made famous, we either have to discredit Him a liar, dismiss Him as a lunatic, or declare that He is Lord. But He can only be Lord depending on how we answer the next question that changes everything.

✓ **Did God Raise Him from the Dead?**

- Central truth of Christianity – 1 Cor 15:14
- To defeat our sin and death
- To give us His life – v 28 – Phil 3:7-11; Col 3:1-4

Without a resurrected Jesus, there is no Christianity. If it didn't happen, we are as Paul said in 1 Cor 15:19 "...of all people most to be pitied." "Our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Peter preaches in this sermon just a few weeks after the resurrection. The tomb being empty has never been debated. What is debated is what happened to the body? Of all the possibilities, the resurrection is the most plausible. The gospel of Mark was written so close to the actual event, that it would have been easily discredited if just a fable or fiction. Again, the first followers of Jesus and their willingness to perpetuate a lie that gained them only death doesn't make sense. They were the eyewitnesses and we know that only a few weeks before at the crucifixion of Jesus, they ran scared for their lives. But now just a few weeks later they are openly declaring what they know to be a lie? They weren't strong enough to overpower Roman guards at the tomb. They weren't smart enough to get away with a con for decades after Jesus' death. They saw the resurrected Jesus and testified to that for the rest of their lives. We stake our lives on the same claim because of their witness and the life-change Jesus has made in our own lives. No matter where are you in here today in regards to faith, God, and the Scriptures, there is one more question that we can all answer.

✓ **What Will I Do with This Jesus?**

- Be open to consider Jesus – v 22 "Hear these words..."
- Repent and be forgiven by Jesus – v 38 (v 23,36 – we all has a part in Jesus' death)
- Keep pursuing joy in Jesus – v 28

My hope is that those of you on the two extremes haven't just zoned out for the last few minutes. The two extremes are those who are resistant to the claims of Jesus or have major objections to Jesus and the Scriptures, and then those who almost too easily claim to know Jesus and believe the Scriptures, but lack any biblical evidence of salvation. My hope for the ones here that may have major objections was not to try to dispel any or all of those questions, but just to ask you to just consider Jesus. Have you really taken a look at the evidence with an open mind? Would you?

To the other extreme, are you pursuing joy in Jesus? Vs 28 is taken from Psalm 16 which ends by saying *"in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."* Jesus never condemns our pursuit of joy or even happiness, but rather does condemn our laziness in settling for pitiful and empty sources of it. The question for the religious folks in here isn't "Are you saved?" but "are you pursuing continual joy and happiness in the presence of Jesus?"

And then the group in the middle. Those ones who know they need help. You're either an unbeliever that is ready to come to Jesus. You have no major objections to the gospel, and you're tired of trying to live without Jesus. You're ready to find forgiveness and rest in Him. Or you are a believer and you know you need help. You know you're living in a way that is not God's best and you are ready to confess that and find renewal in Jesus.

Take that green Welcome Guest card that was talked about at the beginning of the service and look on the back. Do any of those options apply to you? If so, check that box. I'm going to pray for us in just a moment and then we are going to stand together and our music team will lead us in another song. If you checked any box on that card and would like to talk to someone about that decision, I'm going to encourage you to do that right after I pray. There will be couples and ministers standing in the back and others standing right up here. If you need prayer, come be prayed for. If you need to trust Jesus, let one of these ministers help you. I'll pray, then we'll stand, and you can go to the back or right up here. Let's pray.