

John 20:24 - 21:17

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 April 2020

Preacher: Iver Martin

- [0 : 00] Today I want to ask a very simple question in relation to the resurrection of Jesus. We're focusing on this great momentous event that we believe to be physically historical.
- We believe that Jesus, who was really put to death and really buried in a real grave, three days after he was buried, came to life again.
- Because God the Father brought him to life again. And this actually historically really happened. Now I would so love for you to think about that.
- We're not talking about just a good idea. We're not talking about the kind of nebulous, nice thoughts that people have at this time of year. People will talk about light out of darkness and a new life appearing and an Easter time being the end of winter and the beginning of better weather and brighter days.
- And representative of a brighter hope and all of these things. These are all nice ideas. But what we believe as Christians is that Jesus Christ actually rose from the dead.
- [1 : 23] Now think about that. Think about that. It was just as impossible for the disciples to get their heads around it as it is for us. And I'm going to ask a very simple question.
- By which and through which I think some of the other questions I hope will be answered. The question is this. Why did Jesus, after he rose from the dead, wait for 40 days before he ascended to heaven?
- We know that 40 days after the grave was found to be empty, Jesus ascended to the right hand of God. He went back to where he had been before, at the Father's right hand in heaven.
- But why did he wait? Why the 40 days? The Gospels give us an account of what happened during those 40 days.
- And it is in these events that we get to find out the answer to the question. Or rather, the answers to the question. Because I don't believe it was just one reason.
- [2 : 28] I believe there were several reasons why Jesus chose to stay for this little time period. And appear to his disciples.
- There was quite a difference between his appearances after his resurrection compared to his ministry before the resurrection. Remember what it was like before his death.
- Jesus went about preaching and teaching and appearing in public. He worked miracles. He touched the deaf and the blind and cured their diseases.
- He changed water into wine. He walked on the water. He even raised others from the dead. At least three occasions. But now none of that's happening.
- Once he's risen from the dead, his appearances are no longer public. He appears only to a select number of people. And he only appears, I think, about five times.
- [3 : 28] You can check this out for yourself. But my record is about five times he appears to people during those 40 days. Now my question is, again, why?
- Why did he wait for 40 days? What did he do during those 40 days? And here are my answers. Number one is this. He waited in order to expound the necessity of his death.

Now that sounds very complicated. I'll just explain what I mean by that. The disciples found it massively difficult to understand why he had to die.

For them to watch him being arrested and mocked and tortured and crucified on a Roman cross was unthinkable.

They had come to believe that he was no less than the Son of God. They had come to put their faith in him. How can God die? How can God give himself into the hands of evil men?

[4 : 36] Was he once and for all overcome by evil? How can that be? They simply couldn't understand that the person they had believed to be the Son of God, the Messiah, could be arrested and crucified on a Roman cross.

Even after his resurrection, overjoyed as they were, they still couldn't put it all together.

Someone had to explain that it was absolutely necessary for him to have died. That his death wasn't an accident.

It was all in the plan of God. God had masterminded the whole thing. But why? Someone had to explain that to them.

And that's what Jesus did. You remember how in Luke's Gospel chapter 24, on that first day of the week, that he joined two people as they made their way from Jerusalem to a little town called Emmaus.

[5 : 49] And there we read that he asked them why they were so downcast. They told him that they had been in Jerusalem and they had watched Jesus, who they had come to follow.

They had watched him being put to death. But they were confused by the reports that he was now alive again. They didn't know what to make of this. So Jesus, we're told, then explained to them why it was necessary for him to die.

And he did this by taking what we call the Old Testament, which was their scriptures, and he opened it out to them in reference to himself. Later on that day, we read that he met with the disciples, the other disciples, the ones that we know.

And he explained to them once again. He opened their minds to understand the scriptures. And it was then that the penny dropped, that things came together, that they began to see that his death was planned by God, because his death was the sacrifice by which our sin would be removed and by which we would be given newness of life.

So there's the first reason then. He waited before he ascended in order to expound and to explain why it was necessary for him to die.

[7 : 27] Here's the second reason. The second reason why Jesus waited was to authenticate the reality and the nature of his resurrection.

It was, first of all, to authenticate the reality of it. What do we read? We read there that when he met with the disciples on that first day of the week, the disciples were confused, they were afraid, the doors were locked because they were so terrified that they would be caught, and he mysteriously appeared amongst them.

The first thing that happened was he showed them his hands and his feet. Now that's a really important statement. He showed them his hands and his feet.

Why? Well, it's obvious. Because his hands bore the marks of the cross. His hands and his feet displayed that this man standing alive in front of the disciples had been crucified.

And yet, no one ever survived a Roman cross. No one ever lived to tell the tale.

[8 : 37] The Roman cross was a one-way journey, and that always ended in death. It was a way of execution, and it was never until the victim was dead that his body was taken off the Roman cross.

And thus it was with Jesus. It was only when the authorities were absolutely sure that he was dead. They knew when a person was dead.

There was no mistake. Only as and when the life had gone was his body taken down, and it was wrapped, in Jesus' case, in linen, and placed in a cave.

A great stone rolled over the mouth of the cave. But now, here is this man bearing the marks of the cross, and he's alive.

The last thing that the disciples expected. You don't need to live in the 21st century to know how impossible it is for someone to come back from the dead.

[9 : 46] It has always been impossible. You don't need to know the science behind it. Those of us who have lost loved ones know the awfulness of separation that death brings.

And that's a separation that cannot be reversed. And yet, here is Jesus alive. And he shows them the proof that he is alive.

Now, I can't begin to explain how important this is. Because the message of the gospel that was inaugurated there and then was to last for 2,000 years and into the future.

It's a message that is as vibrant today as it ever was. And it begins with this foundational fact that Jesus Christ of Nazareth rose from the dead.

Now, that is an earth-shattering, momentous truth. It's either true or it's not. If it's not, then, to be honest, I think we should just pack up and go home.

[11 : 08] You might be surprised to hear me saying that. Honestly, if I was to find out that Jesus didn't actually rise from the dead, I would forget the whole thing.

I would tear up my Bible. I would never read it again because I could never trust it again. You might be shocked at that. But I'm not saying anything that the Apostle Paul didn't say.

He said that if the dead were not raised, then Jesus hasn't risen from the dead. Our preaching is in vain. Our faith is in vain. We might as well just eat and drink for tomorrow we die.

The whole message of the gospel rests on this one foundational truth. Jesus rose from the dead. So it either did happen or it didn't.

Now, it is so important, not just as a one-off historical event, but because it has a bearing on you and me. And I'll show you how.

[12 : 09] Remember when Jesus was at various points in his ministry. He made the most extraordinary statement. One of them was at the grave of Lazarus, his friend who had died.

Jesus was absent when Lazarus had died. And he arrived too late for his sisters. The sisters were really upset that Jesus hadn't been there because they believed that if he had been there, he would have prevented their brother from dying.

So he met with Martha. And when he spoke to Martha, he said the most extraordinary thing. He said, I am the resurrection and the life.

He who believes in me, even though he was dead, yet will he live. Hold on. Run that past me again.

He who believes in me, even though he was dead, yet shall he live. Now, that's a promise.

[13 : 12] It's not just a meaningless, nice, nebulous, light out of darkness thing to say. That is a promise that's either true or it's not.

So how do I know if it's true? Well, let's carry on with the story. Because the very next thing, Jesus went straight to the grave of Lazarus. And he spoke not to Mary, not to Martha, but to Lazarus himself.

And he said, Lazarus, come out. And Lazarus came to life again. And he walked out of that grave with the grave clothes on.

And now here is Jesus himself. And he is literally standing in front of his disciples, alive, showing them the marks of his hands and his feet.

As final proof of the reality of the event. Can I just get you, please, to think about this?

[14 : 25] In all your priorities, there cannot be anything more important than this. Because this affects where we stand with God. It affects the forgiveness of sins.

It affects who we are. And it affects what God can give us. So, if it's not true, then it's worthless.

But if it is true, it means that this man, Jesus, has the key to life and death. I don't need to tell you how crucial that is.

Jesus has the key to life and death. Now, if that's the case, I need to know why I believe that. And this is why I believe it.

Because Jesus showed himself in front of many, many people. Paul says there were 500 different people who saw him alive again.

[15 : 30] Now, that's a fairly decisive eyewitness account. And it proves to me beyond any reasonable doubt, historically, that this actually happened.

And that Jesus rose from the dead. What that means is that I can have confidence in everything that Jesus said. I can also have confidence in that Jesus was truly the Son of God.

And I can have confidence that his death was accepted by God as the payment for my sin. And so, when he says to me, believe in me, I'm happy to do so.

I'm happy to trust in him. And I've discovered that by trusting in him, there is a newness of life that no one else can give me.

A life that extends beyond this life. And a promise that one day, all those who believe in Jesus will be with him forever.

[16 : 40] Let's think about that promise this morning. Because that's what his resurrection is all about. There's one more thing about the reality of his resurrection which fascinates me.

It's not just that he rose from the dead. It's the nature of his resurrection. He wants the disciples to be absolutely sure that he didn't leave his human nature in the tomb.

It's not some apparition that they're seeing. So, what he does is he sits with them and he actually eats and drinks. He has the fish and the bread. Remember the shore of the Lake of Galilee when he tells the disciples to bring all the fish that they've caught and he cooks them on a fire and he himself eats them.

Now, that's really important because it shows us that Jesus kept his human nature. He didn't leave his humanity in the grave.

And it also means that he still remains human. To this day, he ascended as God and man. I often find it quite paradoxical that John's Gospel begins with the words, In the beginning was the word and the word was God and the word was with God.

[17 : 56] Now, these are profound, mysterious statements that talk about the essence of God, the Trinity. But John's Gospel ends with this really simple statement where Jesus sits with the disciples in the Lake of Galilee and he says, Come and have breakfast.

Here is the human nature of Jesus. He's one of us and he always will be. One of us. Here's number three. Number three is to reiterate their calling.

Jesus stayed in the world 40 days to reiterate their calling. What did we read in that chapter? We read this. Jesus said to his disciples, As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.

It appears that, understandably, that the disciples had maybe lost sight of something Jesus said to them three years beforehand when he said, I will make you fishers of men.

So their default was to go back to fishing. That was the only way that they could earn money and survive. So they went back to the Sea of Galilee and they were fishing.

[19 : 10] But Jesus wasn't finished with them. Even although they had forsaken him the night he was betrayed, he wasn't finished with them. He found them on the Sea of Galilee fishing.

And there's a reenactment of three years ago. Remember, way at the beginning when they met him at first, Jesus had known where the fish were.

He told them on that occasion, Throw your nets out the right side of the boat. That's where the fish are. And Peter said, Okay, just because you say so, I'm going to do it.

And he did it. And they caught a multitude of fishes. Now here is Jesus exactly the same situation. And he's telling them exactly the same thing. And once again, they're catching this huge number of fish.

So they know that this is Jesus. But this is Jesus' way of reminding them that their future was not one which was as fishermen.

[20 : 20] Their future was to be as preachers. And so he's reminding them in these words, As the Father sent me, even so I am sending you.

That was to be their calling. That was to be the purpose of the church. To go out into all the world with this great message that Jesus is risen from the dead.

So, number three is to reiterate their calling. Number four is to empower their calling. Here's the fourth reason why I believe Jesus waited. To empower their calling.

Look at what we read when we read on in chapter 20, verse 22. He then breathes on them. And he says, Receive the Holy Spirit.

It's kind of a mysterious action to take, isn't it? Did anything happen when he breathed? Did the Holy Spirit come upon them? Well, we know that the Holy Spirit came upon the church, the disciples, beyond that moment, 50 days into the future, on the day of Pentecost.

[21 : 34] So, what does this mean? Well, I can only tell you what I believe it means. I believe that this was a prophetic motion, a prophetic gesture that Jesus made when he breathed.

And as he breathed, he said, Receive the Spirit. And in saying this, he was pointing forward as a word of prophecy to the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit would come upon them in great power and he would empower their message.

Remember what happened on that day? Peter stood up in front of this multitude of people. Three thousand people came to faith in Jesus. And from then on, the church has been sharing this message.

And God has been working in the lives of men and women and boys and girls, changing them by bringing them to faith in Jesus Christ. And that can only happen by the power of God himself.

And God has promised to empower the church in their message as we faithfully seek to share that message with others. I think of today and how awash the internet is right now with sermons and words and Bible studies and it's all over the place.

[22 : 55] People who want to share this great truth. Who knows what God is going to do by his own power in bringing people to himself. Here's the fifth reason.

I believe that Jesus waited in order to characterize their missional calling. What do I mean by that? Well, again, same chapter, chapter 20, verse 23.

He said to his disciples, once he had breathed and once he had said receive the Holy Spirit, he said this, and these are strange words. He said, if you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.

Hold on a minute. does that mean that the disciples had the authority to go to somebody on the street and say, you, your sins are forgiven?

Did they also have the authority to go to someone else on the street and say, you, your sins are not forgiven? Did they have the power? Did they have the authority to be able to decide who was forgiven and who wasn't?

[23 : 59] Well, that cannot be true because only God has the authority to forgive sins. So, if Jesus is somehow giving that authority to the disciples, that doesn't make sense.

What it means is this. Remember, this is the context of the disciples going out with the gospel and it's the gospel that proclaims the forgiveness of sin.

is the gospel that tells us that God can and does forgive people their sins through Jesus Christ.

Now, as the disciples went out with the gospel in the future, they would make this known to everyone. They would explain why Jesus had died as a sacrifice for our sin.

They would explain that the proof of the sacrifice was his resurrection from the dead. And some people in response to that message would say, I believe.

[25 : 08] To that person, the disciples could say with all the authority of God, in that case, your sin is forgiven.

Not because I'm forgiving it, but because God's forgiven it. I can say that same thing to you this morning. Not because I have the power to forgive sins.

I don't. I've got plenty of sins to confess myself. But I can say to you with all the authority of God, if you believe and trust in Jesus Christ as your saviour, God says your sins are forgiven.

No question. However, if the answer, if the response is no, I do not believe, with that same authority I can say in that case, your sin is not forgiven.

Not because I decide it, but because that's the gospel. It's a very really solemn thought, isn't it? And that's why I really hope that you do believe and that you do trust and that you do follow Jesus Christ.

[26 : 29] Last thing, the last reason, the sixth reason why Jesus remained in the earth for 40 days between his resurrection and his ascension was to initiate the pastoral calling of the disciples to restore, to forgive two disciples who were either in danger of or who had gone wrong.

Just like all of us have at some point gone wrong as disciples. First of all, Thomas, he wasn't with the disciples on that first day of the week when they met with Jesus.

So do you know what the other disciples did? They went after him in love. They went after him and they said, Thomas, you missed it. We saw Jesus.

You missed it. Thomas characteristically said, unless I see for myself, I'm not going to believe.

nonetheless, he was with them on the next occasion and he did see and he did believe. That was his restoration. Jesus spoke so gently to him, so lovingly to him.

[27 : 55] It was understandable that Thomas in all the confusion had decided to opt out to take a step back. He was wrong, but understandable.

But Jesus doesn't come to him accusingly. He wants to restore him into a right relationship with himself again. Same with Peter.

Peter had denied Jesus the night he was arrested. You remember how three times Peter had said, I don't even know the man. And now comes the day of reckoning because now Jesus is alive again.

What's he going to say to Peter? Peter? There are no accusations. Peter knows what he's done. He doesn't need to be reminded. He knows he's full of shame and embarrassment.

He wishes he could turn back the hands of time, but he can't. Neither can we. So what's Peter? What's Jesus? Jesus has every right to say, do you realise? Do you realise what you did, Peter?

[29 : 00] But he doesn't say anything like that. He just asks the all-important question that is going to determine Peter's service and devotion to Jesus in the future.

Peter, do you love me? And in that conversation Peter was restored to a right relationship again with Jesus.

That's Jesus' business. Psalm 23 says this, He restores my soul and makes me to walk in the path of righteousness.

I wonder today, do you need restoring? Have you gone astray? Have you lost sight of the grandeur, the glory, the wonder, the love of Jesus?

Jesus, remember, is the good shepherd. He comes after the lost sheep in order to restore our soul and to make us to walk in the paths of righteousness.

[30 : 07] So the sixth reason why Jesus remained on the earth before he returned to his father was so that he could display his pastoral, loving, shepherding concern and love for his disciples.

and that hasn't changed. He still restores us and welcomes us back as we come to see his grace, the grace that saves us and the grace that sustains us.

Six reasons that I can think of why Jesus remained before he ascended to the father. To explain the necessity of his death, to authenticate the reality of his resurrection, to reiterate their calling, to empower their calling, to characterize their calling, and to leave us as the good shepherd that takes care of his sheep.

We worship today the risen, ascended Lord Jesus. We love him because he first loved us and we want to remain in his love.

We want to share that love with others and we want to celebrate the joy of this great truth that has changed us and that will continue to change the world until God brings it to a conclusion.

[31 : 53] our father in heaven. We want now to rejoice in this day. We want to rejoice in it not just in the event itself but in what it signifies and what it inaugurated.

We ask father that you will open our hearts and our understanding so that we're able to rejoice together in what you've done for us and we want to look forward for to that day when he comes again in all his glory.

In Jesus name. Amen.