



ONLY BELIEVE

Video Sermon, Easter Sunday 2023

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Each sermon is published in large print for use in preaching, and for easy reading by several people gathered around the computer monitor.

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**A SERMON ORIGINALLY DELIVERED AT
THE HIGH HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
AND
THE FEDERATED CHURCH OF ATHENS**

On 15 APRIL 1990

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SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES:

2 Kings 5:1-27

Mark 16:6

Luke 24:10-11

John 20:1-31

Acts 26:23

Colossians 1:18

Preparation Verse: (Mark 16:6)

And he said to them, "Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him."

This is Easter Sunday or more correctly, Resurrection Sunday.

It speaks to us of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Why is this important?

Paul explains it in part in Colossians 1:18.

18. He is also head of the Body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything.

Also listen to what Luke says about this in Acts 26:23.

23. that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He should be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."

What does "light" mean in this verse? It means that in Jesus came the everlasting truth.

And what does "first" and "first-born" signify in these verses?

It means that Jesus Christ was the first-born of those never to die again.

Many before Jesus' death and after His death were raised from the dead, but they all died again; for theirs was not the final resurrection.

All who are raised in Christ Jesus will have eternal life.

This is the key to our celebration today.

But also key to our understanding and celebration today is the fact that we can rise above all death, and no longer be a part of it.

We are to be celebrating love and life.

One of our Scripture reading this morning is about Naaman, a leader of the Syrian army, from 2 Kings 5.

Some of you are probably thinking, "What does the Scripture reading about Naaman have to do with Easter?"

The answer is: nothing.

It has nothing to do with Easter, but it has much to do with the people who give Easter its meaning.

It is a story of belief and non-belief, and hopefully it will give us some help in understanding ourselves and those who were with Jesus, as well as with our struggles with believing, and stepping out in faith to truly follow Jesus.

Naaman was the captain of the Syrian army, a valiant warrior, but he was also a leper (2 Kings 5:1).

And he had a captive Israelite girl working for his wife, who told her that there was a prophet in Samaria who could cure her husband's leprosy (2 Kings 5:2-3).

And Naaman believed her!

So Naaman goes to his king and tells him all that the slave girl had said, and the king sends him to the king of Israel with a letter and gifts to seek his cure (2 Kings 5:4-5).

It is obvious that the king of Syria also believes.

Naaman goes to the king of Israel and this king, who doesn't believe, is shocked and believes only that the king of Syria is trying to pick a fight with him. Thus he tears his clothes (2 Kings 5:6-7).

This brings us to the reading for this morning, when Elisha enters the picture.

When Elisha heard about this, he sends word countering the king's unbelief by saying (2 Kings 5:8):

8. ... "Why have you torn your clothes? Now let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel."

So Naaman comes to Elisha, and Elisha wouldn't even come out to meet him, but sends him a messenger to tell him to go and wash himself in the Jordan River seven times for his leprosy to be healed (2 Kings 5:9-10).

Naaman becomes furious because of the casualness of Elisha's response, complains that the rivers of Damascus are better than the Jordan, and then goes off in a rage (2 Kings 5:11-12).

Now think about this: Naaman had enough faith to come all the way from Syria, but when it comes to receiving his healing, he loses his faith because of the simplicity of the method of receiving his cure.

People treat their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ in the same way.

We think that we have to do all kinds of things to earn our way into heaven; but when we find out that we can't do that, but only have to believe and repent, most people don't want to do it.

They don't want to make that final commitment.

They don't want to turn away from death.

We don't want to accept the way of God. And that's what happened to Naaman.

Now listen to what his wise servants said to him (2 Kings 5: 13).

13. ... "My father, had the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?"

So Naaman takes the advice of his servants, does as the prophet told him, and he is cured.

And like so many of us, Naaman doesn't understand the free gift of our cleansing from sin and death, which his leprosy represents.

So Naaman comes back to the prophet and tries to pay him for what he has done, but Elisha would not accept anything.

Naaman grows in faith because of it, and he departs after asking for a blessing and future forgiveness for being in a pagan land (2 Kings 5:15-19).

But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, who had been with him for some time, doesn't believe as does his master; and he goes after Naaman, seeking the gifts that Elisha refused, and he receives them only to also receive the leprosy that had been Naaman's (2 Kings 5:20-27).

That's similar to what happened to Judas; but Gehazi appears to have repented, for he stayed with Elisha, but still with his leprosy.

We so often make the mistake of not believing the word of God, and we end up not only without the blessing, but all too often with the curse.

This unbelief also was a problem with those who followed Jesus.

Mary Magdalene, early on this morning, came to the tomb, and finding the stone rolled away and the tomb empty, couldn't believe that Jesus rose from the dead (John 20:1); so she goes off and tells Peter (John 20:2).

2. ... "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him."

So Peter and John go racing down to the tomb to see if what they heard was true.

Not only could they not understand that He might have just risen from the dead as He said, but they didn't even believe Mary, and had to go and see for themselves (John 20:3-8).

So they get depressed at not finding the Lord's body, and go home (John 20:9-10).

Listen to what John wrote later about this in verse 9.

9. For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.

Did you hear that?

Must rise!

Jesus must rise from the dead!

But we all know that today, even if we all don't believe.

Then why is it so hard for people to believe?

Why did it take me so long to come to believe?

My pride!

If you don't truly believe, or are struggling with believing, do you think that your pride may be standing in your way?

Peter's and John's pride let them go away. But Mary had lost her pride, and she just stood outside the tomb weeping.

And as she is standing there, she is drawn to take another look into the tomb (John 20: 11).

And she sees two angels where Jesus' body had been (John 20:12).

13. And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."

14. When she had said this, she turned around, and beheld Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus.

15. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away."

16. Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher).

Because Mary had lost her pride and waited for the Lord's answer, even though she didn't believe that Jesus had risen from the dead, she received an answer and clung to the Lord for reassurance (John 20:17).

Then she goes off to tell the disciples (John 20:18); and as we know from Luke's recording of this event, they didn't believe her at first, either (Luke 24:10-11).

And later that day, when it was evening, Jesus Himself appeared to the disciples, so that they would believe and understand (John 20:19-23).

But Thomas, who was not with them at that time, would not believe the others, and said (John 20:24-25):

25. ... "Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

Why are we so stubborn that we have to see everything for ourselves, and we don't believe those who have seen?

So the Lord, in all His love, eight days later appeared to them again, and this time Thomas was present (John 20:26).

And Jesus speaks directly to Thomas' unbelief, telling him to touch the wounds in His body, so that he would come to believe; and Thomas does believe (John 20:27-29), and –

29. Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

We are some of those who haven't seen.

But unless we believe, we forfeit the blessing.

Then John concludes this chapter by telling us:

30. Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;

31. but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

Do you believe?

Or, are you still struggling?

Are you instead thinking of a baked Easter ham dinner following our service, which speaks of death and not life.

Why do so many people think that causing pigs to suffer horribly, and then eating their tortured remains will in any way celebrate life?

It because most people don't think, which explains, in part, why they don't fully believe.

We are to turn away from death and suffering.

We are to seek a new life in Jesus Christ.

We are to rise spiritually from death and destruction, just as Jesus did.

So, if you are one of those who are struggling with unbelief, reach out to Jesus and wait for Him to reveal Himself to you through the Holy Spirit and His Word.

All that we need to know and understand, in order to believe, has been laid out before us.

The only thing you have to do is open yourself up to receive what the Lord has for you.

Only believe, and it will come true.

Only believe!

Only believe!

Amen!