

20/4/14

Theme: The Saviour King

Readings

Isaiah 53.1-12

1 Cor 15.1-8

Last week I had a visit from a Jehovah's witness inviting me to an event at Easter.

I politely declined and invited him to come to our Good Friday walk through the village.

He asked what we did then.

I told him about the Stations of the Cross and walking with the cross as a witness to what Jesus has done for us.

He was puzzled by this and told me in his faith they didn't celebrate Easter.

To illustrate his reasons for this he asked me, if I had a son who was executed would I want to be reminded about it every year? He explained that the death of Jesus was in the past and we shouldn't keep going over the events of his death, because God wouldn't want to think about it.

I gave a bit of an explanation of why we remember Jesus death on the cross, but he wasn't convinced.

The death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus are at the heart of the gospel, and that is our focus today.

A special welcome to people who are visiting with us today – we are glad you are here. We hope you sense the presence of God as we meet together, and that you feel part of our church family as we worship and honour him.

We are three quarters of the way through a sermon series called **the Big Picture**.

We are trying to get an overview of the bible in 14 big pieces.

We have looked at the OT and just last week we began to look at Jesus. We had an overview of his birth, his baptism and his teaching.

This week we continue to look at Jesus, his death, resurrection and ascension.

I want to give you a quick summary that may help put these three events in perspective

Jesus' death reveals the extent of his love
Jesus' resurrection reveals the extent of his power

Jesus' ascension reveals the extent of his authority.

Jesus died for our sins

The human problem is sin, which separates us from God.

It began with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden – a creation which God declared was very good.

Despite the goodness of God in providing this ideal place, Adam and Eve sinned.

We constantly see even the best of humans fail.

Noah was a righteous man, but his story reveals that even starting again with one man and his close family cannot repair the rift. It is not only animals with Noah in the ark, sin lurks in his heart.

Abraham was a man of faith, and while he had a number of times when that faith shone brightly, he also sinned and fell short.

We see the same with each of the bible heroes. God called the **people of Israel** out of slavery in Egypt. He did this with a demonstration of miraculous power, taking them through the Red Sea, leading them by fire and cloud, giving them the city of Jericho as the walls miraculously fell, providing them with priests and a sacrificial system so they could maintain their relationship with God.

Yet even in the best conditions the people of Israel failed. They worshipped other god's. They mistreated the poor. They abandoned God's laws. They became so mixed up that they called evil good and good evil.

They ignored the messengers God sent them, sometimes killing them. Even in Israel they stooped to sacrificing children to false gods. The OT serves to show us that humanity cannot save themselves and even when God gives them every advantage they still fall short. Perhaps this is best seen in David, who God called, a man after my own heart. As righteous as David may have been at times he falls miserably, taking Bathsheba in adultery and murdering her husband Uriah.

Humanity is revealed as helpless and hopeless in regard to sin.

Isaiah underlines this in the OT saying, *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way;* Is 53:6

Paul underlines it in the NT saying, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...* Ro 3:23

For this reason God sent his own Son to die for us.

The Apostle John summarises this in chapter 13 of his gospel.

He is about to tell of Jesus' last hours:

Washing the disciples feet and comforting them

Sharing the last supper

Teaching about the Holy Spirit

His arrest, trial and execution

And he summarises it saying, *It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, **he now showed them the full extent of his love.*** Jn 13:1

In love, God's solution to humanities problem of sin was to send his son to die for us and by doing so to reveal the full extent of his love.

Jesus' death is both theologically profound and gloriously simple.

Hundreds if not thousands of books have been written on this.

During this weekend alone, millions of sermons will be preached around the world on this.

The Easter story is so profound that no one can fully explain it.

Yet it is so simple a 5 year old can understand
Jesus died for me.

*Jesus loves me! He who died
Heaven's gate to open wide;
He will wash away my sin,
Let His little child come in.*

Refrain:

Yes, Jesus loves me!

Yes, Jesus loves me!

Yes, Jesus loves me!

The Bible tells me so.

Jesus rose from the dead

Jesus' death is not surprising – everyone dies! What is surprising is his resurrection!

In Jesus' day the Romans executed many hundreds of people by crucifixion.

Even on the day Jesus died we are told that there were two others dying with him, one on his left and one on his right.

Jesus had tried to prepare his disciples for both his death and resurrection

Jesus had told people about this and several times he predicted his death to his disciples.

On one occasion he got into trouble when saying, *Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.*” The Jews replied, *“It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?”* But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

Jn 2:19-22

These words were later used against him at his trial, and again as a mocking insult when he was dying on the cross.

This prediction of resurrection was known to the Jewish leaders.

They didn’t seriously believe it but they were concerned that his disciples might steal the body and falsely claim Jesus had risen from the dead. To prevent this they convinced Pilate to have soldiers guard his tomb.

Even though Jesus had spoken of his resurrection – no one believed it would happen.

Initially the women who found the tomb empty were not thrilled he was risen, but distressed because his body was missing and they thought the gardener had moved it.

The disciples who ran to the tomb were not filled with praise at his resurrection, they were perplexed that his body was gone.

The disciples who left to go to Emmaus were not joyful, rather they were despondent.

When the others tried to convince Thomas they had seen Jesus, he was not thrilled by the wonderful news, rather he doubted their story.

The resurrection of Jesus is perhaps the single most wondrous event in human history.

I suppose it is hard to choose between Jesus birth, death and resurrection – they are all amazing.

Yet without the resurrection, we might see Jesus as little more than a good man.

Without the resurrection, his death might lead us to believe he must have been a bad man or at best a man of questionable background who was caught up in something he couldn't avoid. The resurrection sheds light on his birth and his death, confirming the claims that are part of these events.

The resurrection is an act that underwrites every promise Jesus made.

It endorses every statement he made about God.

It vindicates everything he claimed.
All that he said about forgiveness; all he said about eternity; all he said about peace with God; everything is proved true by his resurrection.

The resurrection of Jesus, points to the resurrection of his people.

In the OT Isaiah puts it like this: *On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever.* Isaiah 25:7-8

And picking up on OT themes it inspires Paul to say, *Death has been swallowed up in victory.* “*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?*” *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* 1 Co 15:54-57

I believe this so strongly, I know it is true, yet recently it was brought to my attention in a way I had never heard it before.

It was at the funeral of our dear friend Ted Tucker. One of his Christian friends speaking

about Ted's faith said, *This is not the last we have seen or heard of Ted.*

Of course I knew this to be true, but just the way it was said brought that truth home in a fresh way.

Today as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, we see in this miracle the certain hope that we too shall rise.

Paul wrote, ***By his power*** *God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.* 1 Co 6:14

In the resurrection we see God's power to raise Jesus from the dead and the promise that power will also raise us.

In another letter Paul describes this power in greater detail saying, *That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.* Eph 1:19-21

The resurrection reveals the extent of Jesus power, a power that is greater than all other power.

Jesus ascended to heaven.

After the big events of his death and resurrection, the ascension of Jesus can seem a little low key, however it is still very important and it reveals the extent of Jesus authority

The OT indicates two people went to heaven without dying.

Elijah is the most well-known. Some of you will remember the story of his final day on earth as the prophet Elisha followed him around.

As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. 2 Ki 2:11-12

The second was **Enoch who was a righteous man.** We read of him in a list of 9 people which follows the pattern x lived so many years, had children and died aged ...

Enoch is the notable exception to the pattern because it doesn't record his death, rather we read *Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away. Ge 5:24*

The writer of Hebrews in the NT clarifies this saying Enoch did not experience death.

Jesus ascension into heaven is similar, but not identical to the other two accounts.

It appears that on extremely rare occasions God takes people into heaven in a special way.

When you see Jesus ascension in the context of the others you begin to see the ascension as a sign of God's acceptance and approval on Jesus. It says that like Enoch, Jesus walked with God; and like Elijah God took him to heaven.

Jesus' ascension reveals his authority.

In Jesus' birth we see his humility giving up all the majesty of heaven to be born among us. In the ascension we see the approval of God, who begins to restore and return to Jesus to his rightful place in heaven.

While this will not be seen to be complete until Jesus returns, the ascension allows us to see Jesus return to heaven to sit at the throne of God.

We read that Jesus is seated at God's right hand ... *in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.* Eph 1:20-21

The extent of Jesus' authority is seen in his position at the throne of God, with authority over all powers, from all ages, both in the physical and in the spiritual realms.

We begin to catch a glimpse of Jesus as the king of kings and the Lord of Lords.

We don't have time to do justice to these ideas, but the ascension of Jesus points to

God approval of him

His ability to intercede for us

His authority over all things

And that there is more to come when Jesus returns

We have covered a lot of ground this morning and there is so much more that could be said about Jesus, death, resurrection and ascension.

We cannot understand the Big Picture of the Bible if we ignore or reject the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

Jesus death reveals the extent of his love for us
Jesus resurrection reveals the extent of his power

Jesus ascension reveals the extent of authority

And all of this together prepares for the next part in God's plan for salvation – the second coming of Jesus and all that involves.

All this builds our faith, strengthens our convictions and gives direction to our lives.

If he died for us – we owe our lives to him.

If he rose for us – we know God's power is at work for us/in us

If he ascended for us – we know he has authority over all things.

Anyone who has put their faith in Jesus has felt a small measure of the extent of his love, power and authority.

When we have experienced this we can never be the same.

While we can enjoy the blessings of this world we can never be fully satisfied by them.

We have tasted the love of God and caught a glimpse of eternity.

We have the Holy Spirit empowering our lives.

We know what it is like to have forgiveness from God and to have the burden of sin lifted from us.

We have felt his peace and we know the heartfelt joy of worshipping God.

If all this is true – then we have a mission in this world and purpose for our lives.

It is not to make ourselves comfortable until he returns.

It is to give ourselves to him in service.

To follow his commands

To fulfil his commission.

This is life changing and world changing.

Therefore let us be a church of people who recognise and respond to

The extent of his love

The extent of his power

The extent of his authority.

Let us go into this day and this week in the joy of his resurrection.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Eph 3:20-21