

## Easter Sermon Series 2018

By Bob Young

### Introduction: The Easter Story from Four Different Perspectives

Our tendency in Bible study is to smash everything together. We try to get it all into one Easter sermon. This year, four sermons. In biblical order, not chronological, following the way the narratives appear in our New Testaments. Listening, learning. Who is Jesus? Why did he come? What does it mean? What is the essence of the Easter story? What is the importance, the personal impact?

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### Matthew [March 11]

Do you really “get” Matthew’s story? The message? The point? Jesus came to die!

Three weeks until Easter, Jesus knew he was on his way to his death. The disciples did not get it.

The Gospel of Matthew contains two summaries: 4:17, 16:21. Parallel texts—from then on.... Look, listen, compare. Jesus came teaching, preaching and healing; Jesus came dying.

The gospel to the Jews--the Messiah will come dying. Unbelievable, unacceptable. Never did anyone think that the Messiah would come to die.

The son of God will die. Is such even possible? Gods are immortal, gods do not die. Do not be too harsh, too critical. Do we understand it? I suggest that we also want a different kind of Jesus—one that fits our expectations, hopes, dreams. Just as the Jews did.

We want a God, Jesus, Holy Spirit who makes us victorious, helps us conquer, leads us in victory. We get instead a gospel that calls us to weakness and failure as the way to genuine hope. We get a gospel of lowering ourselves, walking by faith because we cannot see.

How often do you hear it? “The Spirit led me....” What we want, what we expect, what we see because we want to compete with religious neighbors. So often too bold. We walk by faith, we cannot see. We see God’s presence and leading best after the fact. Hindsight is 20/20. One cannot see the Spirit leading; Romans 8 equates the leading of the Spirit with living in the spirit rather than in the flesh. The leading of the Spirit is subtle, it is spiritually discerned and not very clear in physical phenomena. The Spirit is part and parcel of our spiritual existence, dwelling of God, entrance to God through the Spirit, dwelling place of God through the Spirit, Jesus dwells in our hearts.

Perhaps off topic—Matthew says little about the Spirit. But on topic in this one thing—the Messiah will not come to meet our expectations. The last half of Matthew’s gospel--Jesus comes dying.

Do not miss the point. The point is our weakness, our inadequacy. The Easter message is not good news until you see the failures, futility, finality of life without God. As those Jesus described in Matthew 9, we also are helpless, hopeless, hapless, homeless.

Jesus came dying for us. Because he came dying, he calls us to die. The resurrection story is important because we recognize our own frailty, our own frustrations, our own death. Seeing our own death, we seek resurrection. Because of the presence of sin and spiritual death, we seek resurrection to spiritual life. Because of the presence of physical death, we seek resurrection.

Multitudes flock to church because they seeking assurance of life after this life. Unfortunately, many are not seeking spiritual life in the here and now, beginning today, spiritual life that calls us to die. Easter Monday comes, nothing much is changed. Church attendance will still hover around 15% on any given Sunday, the result will not more prayer, more gospel sharing, more hope. Sorry to be a spoil sport, but I am trying to read and understand Matthew’s gospel to religious people. Get your once-a-year dose of hope, and hope nothing major

happens, hope that the hope inoculation is sufficient for a while. One day the Messiah will come and all our problems will be resolved! Not!

How wonderful is it to celebrate God's presence in our lives when troubles come? Do not forget to celebrate God's presence in your life when no troubles come.

Jesus came dying. It seems that the call of the gospel and the call of Easter is that we must also die. Otherwise, resurrection is not all that great a story!

### **It's Sunday Again—Jesus came to die!**

Last year, in six sermons I shared the Easter story from the book of Acts. This year, four Sundays, four gospels, four sermons. Jesus came to die, to serve, to save, to arise!

#1, Jesus came dying. He calls us to die! Matthew's gospel is about shattered expectations, replacing our mini-vision with a grand panorama of his presence among us. Rich, full, fulfilling, challenging. Our thinking is so limited!

Easter is only good news if we come to the cross understanding our own failures, futility, frustrations, finality. Resurrection is for those who have died! Do not think that you can live life on this earth with no thought of following Jesus in death, and afterward find resurrection!

The paradox, Jesus comes dying so he can be forever present. Easter points to forever in a meaningful way only when we die daily in our life here.

### **Es domingo otra vez: ¡Jesús vino a morir!**

El año pasado, en seis sermones, compartí la historia de Pascua del libro de Hechos. Este año, cuatro domingos, cuatro evangelios, cuatro sermones. ¡Jesús vino a morir, a servir, a salvar, a levantarse!

# 1, Jesús vino a morir. ¡Él nos llama a morir! El evangelio de Mateo trata sobre las expectativas rotas, reemplazando nuestra mini visión con un gran panorama de su presencia entre nosotros. Rico, lleno, satisfactorio, desafiante. ¡Nuestro pensamiento es muy limitado!

La Pascua es solo una buena noticia si llegamos a la cruz y entendemos nuestros propios fracasos, inutilidad, frustraciones, finalidad. ¡La resurrección es para aquellos que han muerto! ¡No piense que puede vivir la vida en esta tierra sin pensar en seguir a Jesús en la muerte, y luego encontrar la resurrección!

La paradoja es que Jesús viene a morir para poder estar siempre presente. La Pascua señala para siempre de una manera significativa solo cuando morimos diariamente en nuestra vida aquí.

## **Mark [March 18]**

Do you understand the focus of Mark's storyline? The message? The point? "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God!" Clear, concise, no room for doubt. The Good News of the Kingdom, repent and believe. Fear and faith—side by side. Stupendous, astounding!

Fast forward almost three years--two weeks until Resurrection Sunday, Jesus knew he was on his way to his death. Next week a triumphal entry into Jerusalem will introduce one of the most horrendous weeks of history. The Passion Week. The sacrifice is almost ready. The disciples did not get it. Check out Mark 8:31ff, 9:30ff, 10:32ff. Peter did not get it, none of the disciples (the Twelve) understood, James and John certainly did not understand. The inner circle—three most trusted followers—all were clueless. Jesus came to serve, not to be served. AND, to give his life as a ransom to rescue everyone.

Following Jesus is a package deal. The contemporary church talks a lot about service, but not much about sacrifice. Mark makes clear: Jesus came to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. Jesus calls us to serve, not to seek honor and certainty and security.

Can we hear the message? Can we accept the message? Must we continually gloss over it, or outright reject it? We do not serve because we do not have sacrificial hearts. Jesus came dying, and for that very reason he was able to serve. He came to serve AND to die as a sacrifice.

Jesus came serving and sacrificing. Package deal. We do not serve because we do not have hearts of sacrifice. We will never serve until we understand the sacrificial spirit.

Resurrection is not necessary when you are involved in helping a bit, serving, assisting. One may need rest and renewal, but one does not need resurrection. Resurrection is for those who have died—resurrection is for those who are living sacrifices. How easily we misread Romans 12—as though sacrifice is just a little more worshipful spirit added to our days. Sacrifice is total—none of your own life is left when you are a sacrifice. There is nothing left.

The first are last, the last are first. "It shall not be so among you." Service is not demonstrated by governing, leading, administering well. Service is not in good-doing. Service is not a helpful spirit, spending resources that we will never miss. The world sees service in those terms. "It shall not be so among you." Quit exalting those who are helpful—start calling attention to those who make genuine sacrifices because they demonstrate genuine servanthood.

We are so shallow! Help us escape the superficial, help us find the profound. Service is not light; biblical service is dirty. We do not like dirty. We do not like difficult. We do not like the depths, because in the depths it feels like we are drowning.

Jesus came serving—I did not start with the really difficult. I hope I sucked you in, you thought all was well. But you will never understand Easter if you think Christianity is about serving.

Jesus came as a sacrifice, to give his life a ransom for all. Resurrection is important, meaningful, essential, when my life becomes a sacrifice. How precious is the promise of God!

Easter is not primarily about the fact that I will one day die physically and I seek assurance about the resurrection from physical death. Jesus' resurrection as evidence of his power over death is so much deeper. The Good News of Easter declares that I willingly "die daily." Only by dying with Jesus can I hope for genuine resurrection. "United with him in his death, I will be united with him in his resurrection!"

### **It's Sunday Again—Jesus came to serve**

Jesus came to die, to serve, to save, to arise!

#2, Jesus came to serve, AND to give his life as a ransom for all. He calls us to serve—he calls us to be sacrifices!

The focus of Romans 12 is not daily worship instead of weekly worship, Romans 12 is about sacrifice.

Service is dirty, demanding, difficult. We are often willing to help but we do not understand the role of a genuine servant. Service only is not sufficient—imitating Jesus is both service AND sacrifice. How shallow is our understanding! We are not much different than the Twelve! (Mark 8:31ff, 9:30ff, 10:32ff)

Resurrection is for dead people. Resurrection is important, meaningful, essential when I sacrifice my life.

Rethink Easter. Only by dying with Jesus can I hope for resurrection. "United with him in his death, I will be united with him in his resurrection." Easter is resurrection promise. We are journeying toward Easter, are you willing to give your life, anticipating the certainty of resurrection with Him?

## **Luke [March 25]**

Jesus came to die, to serve, to seek and save, to arise!

#3, Luke's Gospel, Jesus came to seek and save the lost (19:10). Obviously, this verse is part of a larger storyline. The Easter story in Luke builds upon a series of sin narratives and sin parables. The Easter story reaches its climax in the way various ones respond to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Can the story of the resurrection open my eyes so I see more clearly? Can the story of the resurrection open my mind so I understand better? Can the story of the resurrection make my heart burn?

I love the last five chapters of Luke. If the gospel is for all, why are we so prone to keep it to ourselves? Why is the universal gospel – the gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins, the gospel that is to be extended to everyone – so difficult for us to grasp.

We pick up in Luke where we left off in Mark. Passion promises, predictions of death, disciples clueless. From 9:51 onward, Luke recounts Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. For most of ten chapters, all is focused on Jerusalem. Just before Jesus arrives at Jerusalem, he comes to Jericho, the last stop before the arduous climb toward Jerusalem.

A well-known story. Zacchaeus. Jesus accepts one who is unacceptable. He reaches out to one who has been rejected by the religious leaders, the establishment, and people. Jesus came to seek and to save. In the Zacchaeus narrative, the reader must find herself or himself in the story. Where are you? Where are we? We should not be so bold as to claim that we see ourselves in Jesus! Are we Zacchaeus -- seeking to see Jesus? Are we the multitudes — keeping people from seeing Jesus clearly? Not many options in this simple plot.

Read, think, understand. The Easter story—clueless followers. A centurion convinced, a thief convinced, but most do not “get” it, even among his closest followers. I have to ask myself: Do I “get” it? I must raise the question to you: Do you really “get” it? Most do not -- the road to Emmaus, throughout the book, the disciples after the resurrection. “That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name.” Is it happening? Why? How? Why not? Are we not committed to obedience? Are we too selfish? Too into self, too distracted? Why are we also without understanding?

Why is it so hard to seek others? Why is it so hard to talk? What do we lack?

The text may help us find answers. Three points from Luke 24 – the heart of the sermon. All that I have written above is introduction. Do not miss the real need. If you want to understand Easter: open eyes, open understanding, burning hearts.

### **It's Sunday Again: Jesus came to seek and save...**

Resurrection is not for celebrating, resurrection is for living – with power, in the Holy Spirit. In Luke, resurrection is about seeing clearly with spiritual eyes, understanding fully with open mind, responding with burning heart.

We simplify, we become superficial, so shallow. How can we think about resurrection separated from daily life? How did Easter become a once-a-year phenomenon in the contemporary Christian church? The early church celebrated resurrection every Sunday! Resurrection is not about the past, it is about the future. Resurrection declares his death, and that he lives until he one day returns. Resurrection declares my death, enabling my daily life. Resurrection is unto life! Can't wait until next week!

## **John [April 1]**

Do you understand the focus of John's gospel? A different gospel, not like the others. They see alike – thus they are called synoptic. What is the message of John's gospel? What is the point? People stories. Miracles. Signs and wonders. All of this to help develop faith in his followers.

John's gospel in a nutshell – Jesus came to rise! He had to rise. The story is complete. The resurrection is the heart of the gospel. It is the center, without resurrection nothing else matters. There is no life, no hope, no faith.

The day has arrived -- resurrection Sunday. We know what they only learned slowly throughout the day. Jesus knew he was on his way to his death. Now the horrific week of suffering is over, the passion week. The sacrifice has been made. We want to read about resurrection, we want to spend time in John 20-21. But let us not hurry ahead to rapidly.

We must learn his teachings before we can understand the point of his dying. We imitate him as servants and in sacrifice before we are his faithful followers. His purpose is our purpose, seeking and saving. The resurrection is promise, hope. But following Jesus is a package deal. You do not get to pick and choose – help from time to time, yes; the kind of service that parallels slavery, no; a little pain, perhaps; death, no; show a little interest in others, at times; intimately share my faith story, no.

In John's gospel, Jesus arrives in Jerusalem in chapter 12. We are barely halfway into the book. What will fill up the last nine chapters of the book? What kind of details accompany the Easter narrative in John's gospel? The disciples must be instructed, slavery (I know we like the word service better) must be demonstrated. Jesus' example is not easy to grasp. The comfort of God's new presence and power. Words passed from Father to Son to Spirit, received by those who saw and heard, and now shared with us. We have heard the story so often that we miss its depth. Faith is hard. Seeing is believing but blessed are those who believe without having seen.

While it would be normal to conclude in the conclusion, I challenge us to look back one more time to one of Jesus' first teachings about resurrection in John. In most modern translations, this is the first mention of resurrection in John's gospel. John 5:28-29. Read the text, hear the text. Did you hear it? Did you catch it?

Everyone experiences resurrection! There are two kinds of resurrection. Resurrection to life, resurrection to death (judgment). Why would people flock to church on Easter Sunday and return to life as normal on Easter Monday? Is resurrection more certain? All will be resurrected!

The Easter story reminds me that the power of resurrection is the hope, yea certainty, of resurrection to life. Those who will be resurrected only to experience death, the resurrection unto death, must be rescued. Jesus came dying, Jesus came serving and sacrificing himself as a ransom for the world, Jesus came seeking and saving, Jesus came to rise, showing us the truth of resurrection. One thing remains—Jesus came showing us how to live abundantly (John 10:10), how to live so that resurrection is to life, and physical death is only a transition from one life to another life.

May we understand. Here is my game plan – I will die with Jesus daily, I willingly slave and sacrifice, I never cease seeking others with the Good News, because resurrection unto life awaits me! May Easter be especially meaningful to you this year!

### **It's Sunday Again: Jesus came to arise!**

Capstone! Resurrection! What does Jesus' resurrection mean? John 5, an hour is coming in which all will be resurrected. Do not miss this -- all will be resurrected – the question is whether your resurrection will be a resurrection to life or a resurrection to death.

People like the idea of resurrection. Multitudes will flock to fill churches on this day. Resurrection will be celebrated. Hope will swell up in the hearts of many. Few have considered the contrast in John 5, the possibility of resurrection to death – resurrection to life, or resurrection to judgment and death. Easter is meaningless unless our resurrection is to life! Easter Sunday must lead us to resurrected living as we anticipate our resurrection to eternal life. Lord, come quickly!