

THE MAN WHO WOULDN'T STAY BURIED
JOHN 20

INTRODUCTION:

- A. *You've heard the story of the man searching for his keys under the street light? His friend sees him and stops to help. After some minutes he asks, "Exactly where did you drop your keys?"*
"In my house," the man answers.
"In your house? Then why are we looking out here?"
"Because the light is better out here." (Max Lucado, In the Grip of Grace, Word, Nashville, 1996)
- B. Where are you looking for ultimate answers about life and death? I have a big book here called *The Circle of Life*. With text and lavish pictures it travels the world to sample the rites of life in various cultures. In the last section you learn about the Australian aboriginal Tiwi ritual to keep your deceased loved one from dragging you after him. Tiwi mourners disguise themselves to protect themselves from the *pukimani*, or spiritual danger. (223) You wonder at the Kuku-kuku people of Papua Guinea who throw themselves repeatedly on the corpse, eat dirt, tear their hair, and hit their foreheads with stones until they bleed (217). In Transylvania, unwed young adults who die are given ritual weddings so that they will not return as unfulfilled menaces to society. (201) In Buddhist China, death is the gateway to rebirth in an interminable succession of reincarnations. (David Cohen, ed., *The Circle of Life*, Harper San Francisco, a Division of HarperCollins, Publishers, NY, 1991)
- C. So, how do you want it? Or is it, as you no doubt suspect, that it doesn't matter what we want? It is as it is. But exactly how is it?
- D. Among all the voices talking about what happens after death, one drowns out all the others. It's the voice of *The Man Who Wouldn't Stay Buried*. That's what we're going to explore this morning.
- E. ***Have you ever wondered...***

I. WHAT IF JESUS HAD STAYED BURIED?

- A. Nobody Would Have Been Surprised.
1. The empty tomb didn't convince Jesus' followers that He had risen from the dead. Their first thought was the Jesus' body had been stolen by hostile grave robbers.
- **Verse 2**, *"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"*
 - **Verse 13**, *They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."*
2. The Twelve Disciples did not expect that Jesus would rise from the dead. If wasn't even a conscious issue to them.
- **Verse 9**, *(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)*
 - But, I'm jumping around. Open your Bibles and follow along as I read the story:
Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.
2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"
3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb.
4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.
5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.

6 Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there,
 7 as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen.
 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.
 9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)
 10 Then the disciples went back to their homes,

3. Jesus' enemies heard him better than his own followers.
 - **Matthew 27:62**, *The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate.*
 63 "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After **three days** I will rise again.'
 64 So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."
 65 "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how."
 66 So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.
 - It's not as if Jesus hadn't told His disciples about the Resurrection!
 - **Mark 8:31**, *He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. 32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.*
 - **9:31**, *He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." 32 But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.*
 - **10:32-34**, *They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. 33 "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, 34 who will mock*
 - *Why didn't the Disciples "get" what Jesus was saying???*
 - It contradicted their fondest expectations. They had another picture of the future, and they believed it so fiercely that their prejudices filtered out Jesus' words.
4. No wonder they didn't expect it. This is totally unique. No-one has ever raised himself from the dead. Not even one—except Jesus Christ. People never expect things that are completely unprecedented. There is not one other religion in all the world that has a founder that has risen from the dead. Their tombs are occupied. Only the tomb of Jesus is empty.

B. Everybody Would Still Be in the Dark.

1. Aside from Jesus, what would we know about death beyond the grave?
2. Aside from Jesus it really is multiple choice, and a whole lot more is at stake than a school grade...
 - Spiritism, OBE's, Atheism, Islam's paradise, the Egyptian afterlife,
 - Or any of the varieties of Eastern mysticism: **Deepak Chopra** in his, *Seven Spiritual Laws of Success: Your body is not separate from the body of the*

universe, because at quantum mechanical levels there are no well-defined edges. You are like a wiggle, a wave, a fluctuation, a convolution, a whirlpool, a localized disturbance in the larger quantum field. The larger quantum field—the universe—is your extended body. (quoted in Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods*, Word, Nashville, 2000, 68)

- Liberalism: *Marcus Borg, a Jesus Seminar leader, said this of Christ's resurrection: "As a child, I took it for granted that Easter meant that Jesus literally rose from the dead. I now see Easter very differently. For me, it is irrelevant whether or not the tomb was empty. Whether Easter involved something remarkable happening to the physical body of Jesus is irrelevant."* (Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, Tyndale House, Wheaton, IL, 2004, 108)
5. Irrelevant? Really? *Let's make no bones about it: If Easter isn't good news, then there is no good news.* (N. T. Wright, "Grave Matters," *Christianity Today*, April 6, 1998, 53)
6. But if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then Christianity is an empty husk.
- When I was a kid in grade-school, we used to play a trick on each other. We'd take a pack of Juicy Fruit chewing gum and chew all the gum. But we would save all the wrappers. We'd carefully refold the inner foil wrapper; slip it into the skinny paper sleeve, and put all the empty individual pieces back in the outer wrapper. Then we'd approach a friend, hold it out an invite, *Hey, want a piece of gum?* Of course they did, and they got an empty wrapped. And we got a laugh.
 - Hey friend...if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, the laugh's on us. **I Corinthians 15:14**, *...if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men*

II. WHY COULD DEATH NOT HOLD HIM?

- A. Because of Who Jesus Is
1. **Verse 31**, *Jesus is the Messiah* (The "anointed" one of God; Greek word was Messiah)
 2. **Verse 31**, *Jesus is...the Son of God*
 - **The Nicean Creed (First Council of Nicea in 325 AD):** The council was called to address the teaching of the Alexandrian priest, Arius, who was teaching that Jesus was not of the same essence as the Father (but of similar substance), that is, He was, in some sense, an inferior being. **There conclusion:** *We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things, both visible and invisible; and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Only begotten of the Father, that is to say, of the substance of the father, God of God and Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made, both things in heaven and things on earth; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down and was made flesh, was made man, suffered, and rose again on the third day, went up into the heavens, and is to come again to judge both the quick and the dead; and in the Holy Ghost.*
 3. **Acts 2:24**, *But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. WHY???*
 - **John 1:4**, *In him was life, and that life was the light of men.*

- **John 14:6**, *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*
4. Jesus had the authority to raise himself from the dead—all other people raised from the dead were passive recipients of the miracle. Also, Christ is the only person in the Bible who was raised to immortality—in that sense His resurrection was totally unique. Think of people like Lazarus not as resurrected, but as “resuscitated.” Lazarus died again and Lazarus is now waiting the future resurrection of his body just like my Christian grandparents are.
- Aside from Jesus, there are eight biblical stories of dead people being raised from the dead:
 - Elijah raises a young boy (I Kings 17:17-24)
 - Elisha raises a young boy (II Kings 4:32-37)
 - An unknown man comes to life after his dead body is thrown into a pit and contacts the bone of Elisha (II Kings 13:21)
 - Jesus raises the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-16)
 - Jesus raises Jairus’ daughter (Luke 8:49-56)
 - Jesus raises Lazarus (John 11:43-44)
 - Many saints in Jerusalem are raised from the dead after the crucifixion of Jesus (Matthew 27:52-53)
 - Peter raises Dorcas (Acts 9:36-42)
 - The possible raising of Paul from the dead in Lystra??? (Acts 14:19-20)
 - Paul raises Eutychus (Acts 20:9-12)
 - Here’s what’s so unique about Jesus’ resurrection. **John 10:17-18**, *“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life-- only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”*
 - Note that 25 times in the New Testament it is said that God the Father raised the Son and also that the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead (**I Peter 1:18**). We are in the realm of the mystery of the Trinity here, but that does not diminish the clear statements that Jesus rose from the dead by his own personal, divine power. An interesting parallel is that the creation of the world is also attributed to all three members of the Godhead.
- B. Because of the Divine Mission
1. **Verse 21**, *As the Father has sent me...*
 2. We’ve got soldiers in Iraq that are running missions every day and every night. And our hearts are in our throats because no military mission has a guarantee of success. Our guys do a great job—they are the finest army in the world. But some of our missions fail.
 3. This mission of Jesus was one mission that just couldn’t fail. Before the earth was made and before time began, The Plan was conceived in the heart and mind of God.
 - Just three chapters into the Bible, the first hint of the plan is dropped, **Genesis 3:15**, *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*
 - Every few hundred years, God would drop another hint. Like in **Psalms 16:10**, *you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.* [Paul quotes this in a sermon at Pisidian Antioch, **Acts 13:35**]
 - Or like **Isaiah 53:12**, *Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*
 4. Back to our story--What happened after they saw the empty tomb???

11 but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb

12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."

14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

15 "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Now, I have one last question for you...

III. HOW DOES JESUS' RESURRECTION GET PERSONAL?

Let me put it this way...

A. Got Life?

1. Do you know about **Joni**? She's been a quadriplegic since a teenage accident. She is also a vibrant Christian. *Joni Eareckson Tada writes from her wheelchair, "I haven't been cheated out of being a complete person—I'm just going through a forty-year delay, and God is with me through even that. Being 'glorified'—I know the meaning of that now. It's the time, after my death here, when I'll be on my feet dancing."* (Quoted in Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, Tyndale House, Wheaton, IL, 2004, 418)
2. Where did **Joni** get that confidence? **Verse 31**, *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*
3. **II Timothy 1:9**, *This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*
4. I don't want to leave the impression that this Jesus-kind-of-life is just "pie in the sky when you die." It has profound implications for how we live right now.
5. *One of the courses I audited at Harvard was called "Systems of Counseling." We were looking at a case study in which the therapist, using "Psychodynamic Psychotherapy," helped the patient uncover a hidden hostility toward his mother. Naming the problem and understanding what really bothered him made the patient feel as if a great weight had been lifted.*

Before the professor proceeded to the next case, I raised my hand and said, "Let's say the patient returned a few weeks later and said, 'I'd like to get beyond my anger. I'd like to be able to love my mother and forgive her.' How does psychodynamic psychotherapy help am person with a request like this?"

There was silence. Then the professor answered, "I think the therapist would say, 'Lots of luck!' To ask that his hostility magically disappear isn't realistic. He'll have to learn to live with it and hopefully not be driven by it."

That touched off an intense exchange in the class. "Is the most we can hope merely the ability to name and understand our problems?" one student asked. "How do we help our clients find the power to change?"

"If you guys are looking for a changed heart," the teacher responded, "you're looking in the wrong department." (Rebecca Manley Pippert, "Resurrection People," Moody, April 1990, 24-25)

7. We simultaneously recapitulate the entire last weekend of Jesus...
- We live His **Friday** as we share His death. We die to sin when we turn in faith to Jesus. Daily we take up our cross and die to ourselves in costly discipleship. Jesus said, *I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.* (John 12:24-25)
 - We live His **Saturday**, His waiting day, His in-between day, as we wait and watch for His return.
 - We live His **Sunday**, His day of resurrection:
 - The Bible says that the day you became a born-again Christian, you were spiritually resurrected from spiritual deadness to spiritual life. That's past-tense resurrection power.
 - The Bible says that every day of your Christian life is a day lived in the resurrection power of Jesus. That's present-tense resurrection power.
 - The Bible says that some day when Jesus comes back, even your human body will be literally resurrected, and changed into a body like Jesus' glorious heavenly body. That's future-tense resurrection power.

B. Got Purpose?

1. **Verse 21**, *As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*"
2. Let's unpack this statement:
 - There is **authority** here. The Bible says that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. He expects to be obeyed. He deserves to be obeyed. We would be smart to obey Him. We don't really have to spend a lot of time speculating about what our purpose is in the world. Jesus has defined it for us. Ours is but to obey.
 - **II Timothy 2:4**, *No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs-- he wants to please his commanding officer*
 - There is **honor** here. It is a big thing to be picked by God for a strategic assignment. **I Timothy 1:12**, *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.*
 - There is **significance** here.
 - **Steve Jobs** to....Sugar water.
 - In his autobiography, **Mark Twain** reflected on people facing death: *It comes at last...and they vanish from a world where they were a mistake and a failure and a foolishness.* (In Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, Tyndale House, Wheaton, IL, 2004, 7)
3. Much of the purpose of people around us is like a farmer whose barn was covered with targets painted on its side. In the middle of each bull's-eye there was a puncture mark from his arrow. A passerby remarked about what a great marksman he was. He replied, "It's easy. I shoot my arrow at the barn and then paint my target around it." (Joseph Stowell, *Shepherding the Church into the 21st Century*, Victor Books, 1994, , 74)
4. Anonymously written: "The Fellowship of the Unashamed"
I am part of the "Fellowship of the Unashamed." I have Holy Spirit Power. The die has been cast. I've stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of His. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, and my future is secure. I am finished and one with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth

knees, colorless dreams, tame visions, mundane talking, chintzy giving, and dwarfed goals!

I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, positions, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by presence, learn by faith, love by patience, live by prayer, and labor by power.

My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions few, my guide reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, diluted, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of adversity, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity. I won't give up, shut up, let go, or slow down until I've preached up, prayed up, paid up, stored up, and stayed up for the cause of Christ.

I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till He comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till He stops. And when He comes to get His own, He'll have no problems recognizing me...my colors will be clear.

5. *One day Lucy and Linus had a chicken wishbone and were going to pull it make a wish. Lucy explained to Linus that if he got the bigger half of the wishbone his wish would come true. Linus said, "Do I have to say the wish out loud?" Lucy said, "Of course. If you don't say it out loud it won't come true." So Lucy went ahead and made her wish first. She said, "I wish for four new sweaters, a new bike, a new pair of skates, a new dress, and one hundred dollars." Then it was time for Linus to make his wish. He said, "I wish for a long life for all of my friends, I wish for world peace, I wish for great advancements in medical research." About that time, Lucy took the wishbone and threw it away. She said, "Linus, that's the trouble with you. You're always spoiling everything." (in John Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, 144)*
5. *Maybe I've spoiled everything for you this morning. Maybe I've upset your apple cart of what you thought made your life significant.*
6. *The people that make a durable difference in the world are not the people who have mastered many things, who have been mastered by one great thing. (John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 2003, 44)*

CONCLUSION:

- A. *At the end of Peter Jackson's production of The Return of the King, Bilbo Baggins—extremely old, decrepit, and weak-minded—is invited to board an Elven ship to sail from Middle Earth to Valinor (a sort of intermediate Heaven). He smiles, and a youthful energy returns to his eyes as he says, "I think I'm quite ready for another adventure." (Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, Tyndale House, Wheaton, IL, 2004, 419)*
- B. *The adventure starts here!*

21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."
 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.
 23 If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."
 24 Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.
 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."
 26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"
 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."
 28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"
 29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."
 30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.
 31 But these are written that you may {31 Some manuscripts may continue to} believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Josh McDowell wrote a magazine article called, "If I Had Faked the Resurrection." (*Focus on the Family*, April, 2000, 2-4) He points about all the features of the resurrection account that don't make sense if the disciples had faked the resurrection. The last of his list of 9 goes like this: *I WOULD STOP SHORT OF DYING FOR MY LIFE*. Then he quotes Lee Strobel: "People will die for their religious beliefs if they sincerely believe that they're true, but people won't die if they know their beliefs are false.

"While most people can only have faith that their beliefs are true, the disciples were in a position to know without a doubt whether or not Jesus had risen from the dead. They claimed that they saw him, talked with him, and ate with him. If they weren't absolutely certain, they wouldn't have allowed themselves to be tortured to death for proclaiming that the Resurrection had happened."

Make no mistake: if he rose at all it was as His body; if the cells' dissolution did not reverse, the molecules reknit, the amino acids rekindle, the Church will fail. Let us not mock God with metaphor, analogy, sidestepping transcendence; making of the event a parable, a sign painted in the faded credulity of earlier ages; let us walk through the door. (John Updike) What does Updike mean by metaphor and analogy? Here's a sample from the writings of former president Richard Nixon: *The resurrection symbolically teaches the great lesson that men who achieve the highest values in their lives may gain immortality....I believe that the modern world will find a real resurrection in the life and teachings of Jesus.* (Richard Nixon, *In the Arena*, Simon and Schuster, 1990, 89)

Adoniram Judson (missionary to Burma): I am not tired of my work, neither am I tired of the world: yet when Christ calls me home, I shall go with the gladness of a boy bounding away from school.

Easter opened up a crack in a universe winding down toward entropy and decay, dealing the promise that someday God will enlarge the miracle of Easter to cosmic scale.

It is a good thing to remember that in the cosmic drama, we live out our days on Saturday, the in-between day with no name. I know a woman whose grandmother lies buried under 150-year-old oak trees in the cemetery of an old Episcopalian church in rural Louisiana. In accordance with the grandmother's instructions, only one word is carved on the tombstone: "Waiting." (Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1995, 275)

Sometimes I think our hands are cauterized by handling of holy things. We've been there and done that so many times that our hearts get calluses. (Ben Patterson, "Heart and Soul," *leadership*, Summer, 1999, 122)

An old spiritual calls the day of resurrection for God's children *That great getting-up morning*.

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