

Getting Started

Part 1 - The Gospel Message: Jesus For You

Introduction

This morning we are beginning a series of sermons that will run through the month of April and we are calling the series "Getting Started." Here's the idea: Everybody at some point or another has encountered an instruction manual. Maybe it was a piece of equipment and the manual had that little section where it shows you how to get started. First it has all the death symbols warning you not to kill yourself. Then it's the "getting started" section on how to use it. Or maybe it was a toy you had to assemble...like lego sets with a manual on how to build it. Maybe you just got married and decided to buy some Ikea furniture and now you are in couples counseling because of that manual that had no words and just pictures of people scratching their heads. Whatever. Here's my point: The things we buy which I would call the small things in life...they often come with instruction manuals. BUT the BIG things in life NEVER seem to come with manuals. When you have a baby the hospital doesn't send you home with a "getting started manual." When you graduate high school you don't get a how-to-be-a grown orientation. And many, many people come to God with the same problem. Where do you start with God? "I know there's a bible but it's confusing in places and last time I read a book I was in college. I'm just trying to figure out God and how I relate to God and what I really want to know right now is: Where do I START?"

That's what this series is here to do. To help you get started with God. This month is going to be life changing for many of you. You came here at the invitation of a friend and you had no idea but God is going to change your life starting today. Some of you who've been a Christian for a while may wonder what you are supposed to do with this series: Well, the idea is that this is an introduction to the Christian faith right? So you need to see it as a resource you can use to help you introduce others to the Christian faith and bring them along. Many people may not accept an invite to church but they will read the bible with you. Maybe that's where you start.

Ok so part 1 in this getting started series is the gospel message itself. It's Easter Sunday and we are going straight to the heart of what Christians believe. Today is all about the gospel message. See at the core of Christianity is not a set of doctrines, at the core is an event. The death and resurrection of Jesus...this is what Christianity hinges on. I want to show you the account of the first witnesses to the resurrection. The first Easter. I want you to see how they responded and I want to talk about your response. Because Easter is calling for your response today. In fact maybe that's the biggest part of this morning for you is that easter isn't some annual holiday where we get baskets and eggs. It's an announcement of an event that is calling you to respond. And in a few minutes I'm going to ask you how you will respond. But first let's look at what happened and how the first witnesses responded.

Luke 24:36-48

Setting: Jesus died on the cross. The disciples watched it. He definitely died. Was taken off the cross & put in a tomb. Now it's the third day. It's Sunday which for them is the first day of the week. It's Monday. Some of the women in the Jesus movement had gone to tend to his body and the tomb was empty. An angel had said he was alive just like he said he'd be. They go tell the fellas. He's risen from the grave! They doubt the women. Cause they haven't learned that women catch on faster. Then he appears to some of the disciples earlier on the road that day and now they are all in one of their homes talking about it.

[36] As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" [37] But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.

Ok you catch what happened right? John's gospel says the door was locked just to get the point across. Out of nowhere Jesus appears. Jesus is alive. I can't sit here long but those of you who are Christians have staked your life on this claim right here and I just want to celebrate it with you here on Easter morning. Jesus is Alive. But the disciples couldn't believe it. so their FIRST instinct is fear. It must be a ghost.

[38] And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

I want to pause right here and give some of you the chance to hear Jesus' question to you. When you are hearing about Jesus' resurrection. That he really died and that he really physically rose again...it seems impossible. Even to the disciples...who had heard Jesus say for 3 years. I'm going to be delivered over into the hands of sinners, I'm going to be killed, then I'm going to rise again. In fact, just a few verses earlier when they encountered a stranger who was actually Jesus in disguise they said "Well it's the third day and the tomb is empty but...we haven't seen him so must not have happened." They wanted to believe it but just COULDN'T believe it. And that's where some of you were when you came in here today.

All evidence you know of, the laws of nature, all say that dead people do not come back three days later. and because that mountain of evidence is against it being possible, you are like the disciples right here. You doubt it. Now some of you are not Christians so that is understandable. You need to be convinced and I'm hoping today you will be. But some of you are followers of Jesus yet if you are honest you have a tough time believing this. And this is a pattern in your life. You don't fully trust God, so you don't fully follow him in your life. You kind of sit on the fence when it comes to being a Christian. You are in where its easy and out where its difficult. And you may not realize it but that half-way-in Christianity you've been in really stems back to you not being fully confident Jesus got out of the grave. Because if he got out...then he's God. Period. And if he's really God...then that means he's really in charge of your life. Your doubt is actually your way of preserving your control of your life. We'll come back to that in a bit.

[39] See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” [40] And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

He wants them to see that he isn't a figment of their imagination. He isn't a ghost. He's human. And listen he shows them his hands and his feet. John's gospel says he showed them his side also. He's showing them the wounds that killed him. Nobody has trouble believing Jesus was killed. So Jesus says look where they killed me. And apparently there was the imprint. All death managed to do was leave a scar on the living Jesus. And the scar was only there for the disciples sake.

[41] And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” [42] They gave him a piece of broiled fish, [43] and he took it and ate before them.

THEY STILL DIDN'T BELIEVE! Apparently they needed to see his digestive track properly functioning in order to believe. He eats with them. They are back at the table with their master. The last time they were here he was telling them about his coming death. And now here at the table again here's what he says:

[44] Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” [45] Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

Now finally they are going to understand why all of this happened. He'd told them before, but it was here and now, now that the tomb was empty...now he was ready for them to understand that the whole story of scripture had been building to this point. Listen this is one of the biggest problems people have understanding Christianity. WHY DID HE HAVE TO DIE? And for the third time on Easter, God reminds his closest followers why this has happened. The followers who walked with him for years. They needed to hear it multiple times before it set in. Maybe that's you and you've been to church on easter before but maybe God is going to finally set it in on your heart today.

[46] and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, [47] and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Let me lean in right here and explain this gospel message for you. In three words the Gospel is: The Gospel: Jesus For You. Let me show you the gospel in these two verses.

- Jesus said Christ Should Suffer. And this suffering starts at his betrayal where one of his own disciples handed him over to the authorities. And the authorities treated him as a criminal and though he was innocent they condemned him to

death. **The Gospel: Jesus was condemned for you.** Every single one of us has sinned at some point in our lives. We've known what is right and chosen instead to do what is wrong. We are guilty because of those sins. And even if you live in a relativist world where you are told there is no true right and wrong...people still feel guilty because of their sins. This is a human condition. That guilt is a tuning fork built in by God. Your sin is a rebellion against God and now you are guilty. The sentence for your rebellion, God says, is death. That's the sentence but Jesus steps in and says I will take your sentence. You will not be condemned because I will be condemned for you.

- Which means he would pay the penalty for you. **The Gospel: Jesus died for you.** He was beaten and crucified not for his sins, but for your sins. He was your substitute. That's his love for you.
 - [16] "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3.16

Hear me church: You don't have to suffer for your sins. Oh some of you the guilt of your sin is unbearable right now. LISTEN to me: FORGIVENESS is offered to you. If you say you are not worthy...you are right! But don't you dare say your sins are too great. GOD WENT TO THE GREATEST LENGTHS POSSIBLE for you. Jesus paid your debt with his life. JESUS DIED FOR YOU. So now you are REDEEMED! Your sins are forgiven. But listen while you didn't go on the cross, your sins did. To believe the gospel is to believe you were spared while your sinful old life was put to death. That's why you cannot have the gospel without the resurrection.

Jesus didn't just die for you. Jesus says three days later he had to rise from the dead. Why did he have to rise? Because in his resurrection he defeated the curse of sin! He defeated death! The gospel says Jesus was betrayed for you, suffered and died for you, and **The Gospel: Jesus rose for you.** When you understand this you understand that Jesus defeated the power sin had over your life. There is no gospel without the resurrection. Our whole faith hangs on it. The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that if Christ did not get out of the grave we Christians are to be pitied above all others. We are fools. Because if he didn't rise, we are still in our sins because Christ didn't defeat death. It is his death and resurrection that free us from the curse of sin. This is the gospel message. His condemnation & death were in your place. And his resurrection offers you new life.

The Christian message is foolishness unless the resurrection really happened. I know some of you may struggle, like the disciples did, to believe the resurrection really happened. And you don't see Jesus walking around and you are like...if Jesus would appear then I'd believe. First you need to hear Jesus says to his disciples blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. But let me tell you why I think Jesus' resurrection is a historically reliable fact.

The gospel is too counterproductive to be a legend
Many people believe the gospels were written as a power play by the authors to assert

their leadership, their view of the world, and to really push forward a certain kind of movement. And the resurrection is just made up to help the power play.

But look at what they record in these gospels. There are some very embarrassing events and comments if you are trying to put forward a great leader & his knights of the round table.

Jesus in the Garden - he asks if he can get out of his mission. Why put that in there if it didn't happen? That makes him seem weak. Women were the first to discover Jesus at the tomb. Why make women the heroes, the first to believe in the resurrection...in a society where the status of women was so low their testimony wasn't admitted in court?

Why depict the apostles, the future leaders of the movement...as petty and jealous, and in the end as cowards who either actively or passively fail their master? Peter himself denies Jesus 3 Times in a very crucial moment. Why put that in? that's what reporters do. Report what happened.

The gospel is too costly to be a legend

If you believe this didn't happen. That Jesus wasn't seen by 500 witnesses over the 40 days following his resurrection, you are forced to believe these authors knowingly lied about it. Well they must have gotten something good out of this lie right? No! They didn't get power, money, fame, or anything. On the contrary they were marginalized in society and many of them killed. You need a motive for lying and they had none. The only reason they wrote it down is because it happened!

On the other hand, If the resurrection is true, Christians have great reason to hope. Let me show you the hope of the resurrection.

If the resurrection is true Christianity offers the only real hope of life after death. You and I both know that the death rate of humans remains at 100%. Everyone dies. And one of life's greatest questions is what happens when you die? You can ignore that question but you know it matters. And the older you get the more fragile you get and the more the question haunts you. Paul says that for Christians to be absent from the body is to be present with Christ. That because of the resurrection death has lost its sting! Because SIN no longer separates us from God. When we die...in a moment we are with Christ! You have eternal life with God!

When I came to Christ as a teenager the question asked to me was: if you died tonight, do you know for certain you'd be with Christ in heaven? And I realized I had grown up in church but never believed it for myself. I walked down to the front of that room that night to publicly acknowledge I was receiving Christ's resurrection FOR ME. Listen to me one day you are going to stand before God and your only answer to why he should let You into heaven...a rebel...the only answer you can give is EASTER! I'm a sinner, I can't earn God's acceptance. But Jesus died for me and then he defeated death and I receive that gift of salvation! And ya'll I'm still a sinner but I've found joy in this life. Takes me to the next point

If the resurrection is true, Christianity offers the power for new life now. See when I was asked "If I died tonight..." While that question is fair, it's incomplete. The other half of the question should be "If you wake up tomorrow" will anything be different? And this is where the resurrection of Jesus gives us incredible power for our lives here and now.

[4] We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. Romans 6:4

Paul says believing in Jesus' resurrection FOR YOU releases power. By believing that God has put sin to death in the past you are believing he imparts the power of new life in the present.

See believing what God HAS DONE is what gives you the power to go and do! My old pastor used to say that ironically believing your acceptance before God is not based on whether you 'get better' is the only way to 'get better.'

So what will you do with the Death and resurrection of Jesus? **The Gospel is Jesus Died for you and Jesus Rose for you.** But it is not enough to know it. Romans 6.23 says the wages of sin is death but the FREE GIFT of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus. It's a gift. And you have to receive it.

United States v. Wilson, 32 U.S. 150 Vol. 32 (1833), dealing with one George Wilson, who had pled guilty for (essentially) grand theft & assault. In June of 1830, President Andrew Jackson issued a pardon to Wilson. But Wilson (for reasons undisclosed and unknown) refused it. We don't know what happened to Wilson, but we do know the Supreme Court's ruling on this case:

"A pardon is an act of grace ... which exempts the individual on whom it is bestowed from the punishment the law inflicts for a crime he has committed. ... A pardon is a deed, to the validity of which delivery is essential, and delivery is not complete without acceptance. It may then be rejected by the person to whom it is tendered, and if it be rejected, we have discovered no power in a court to force it on him."

Christ offers you a pardon. And listen many of you know that and you just assume it applies to you and it's not true. A pardon is offered to you, but you must receive it. **AND THERE**, as you receive it...There is where you find redemption. I KNOW God has been working on some of you in this message. In Luke 24 the author says over the course of the Easter day Jesus warmed up their hearts and opened their eyes to who he really was. And I believe that's what he is doing for some of you. You need salvation from your sin and now you are seeing Jesus is the only way. And I'm here on the other side of that saying what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6: Do not receive the grace of God in vain. **NOW, TODAY** is the day of salvation.

You must receive it. How? Romans 10.9 says if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. The mouth confesses what the heart believes.