

Risen Indeed **(Luke 23:50:-24:53 April 24, 2011)**



When the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth – he described the gospel with these words:

I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3–4).

In other words, the basic truths of the gospel are these:



Fact – Jesus died

Fact – Jesus rose

These facts are virtually impossible for any rational man or woman to debate.

The Scriptures say – if we have faith in these truths – then we are saved. We are a child of God. We have eternal life.

So why is it so hard to believe?

These truths are so clear – the evidence for them is overwhelming.

So, why did many in the first century deny Jesus was the Messiah?

Why did so many over the last two millennia deny Jesus was the Messiah?

Why do so many today – on this resurrection Sunday – deny that Jesus the Messiah died and rose from the dead?

We gather today to celebrate what we consider the greatest events in history. The death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Truths that make our hearts sing. Truths that angels rejoice over.

And yet so many think we are celebrating a myth and there is no power in the blood and resurrection of Christ. Why?

And furthermore – if it is so hard to have faith – how do we encourage others to know these life changing truths – the truths that save for all eternity?

Our passage this morning helps us understand this.

Turn with me to Luke 23:50.

Verses 50–56:

Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

These verses serve to show us one great truth.



FACT:
Jesus Died

Jesus died

Throughout history – men who have wanted to deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ have tried to deny that Jesus died.

Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* is but one of many attempts to deny Jesus actually died on the cross.

They say that Jesus survived the crucifixion. The soldiers thought he was dead – but He recovered.

But the facts deny this. Joseph of Arimathea came to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Joseph was a prominent member of the Council – the Sanhedrin which ruled over Israel.

He was a good and righteous man. Somewhere in the previous three years, he had become a disciple of Jesus.

In asking for the body of Jesus – Joseph was burning every bridge to his old life.

Two events precipitated this decision. The first happened early that morning. The entire Sanhedrin was summonsed to pass judgment on Christ in the kangaroo court trials that condemned Him to death. The Sanhedrin was called together to rubber stamp the death warrant.

As a member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph had to decide. Would he renounce this man publicly and although reluctantly, add his voice to the others agreeing that He should die? Or would he refuse to consent to their plan of action?

To do what was right would cost him dearly. But, Joseph made that choice and stood against the tide.

Now a few hours later came the second moment when he must act. Mark says:

He gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus.

Jesus had died – but His body was still on the cross.

Without his intervention, the body of Jesus would have been thrown into a common grave with the two robbers. Normally a body would only be released into the care of family. There were no male family members there to claim the body. The disciples had deserted Him. Only John had returned to watch the crucifixion. None would make application for the body.

Now was the moment of decision. And this formally secret disciple summoned his courage and fully aware of the cost approached Pilate to ask for the body.

Joseph knew Pilate may well refuse the request. He had no reason to grant it. Perhaps Pilate just wanted the matter over. Whatever the human reason, God the Father moved him to grant the request. But, first he had to ascertain that Christ was indeed dead.

Mark 15:44 tells us:

Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead.

Crucifixion often took days for the condemned man to die. He was surprised that death had already occurred. He would never hand over a man who was not dead. Rome would not be pleased at such a mistake.

He summoned the centurion, and questioned him as to whether He was already dead. This man was a professional soldier. He knew death when he saw it.

If Jesus or the two criminals died *after* sunset – the Jews were not permitted to take the bodies down on a Sabbath. But to leave them there violated the Law.

So they wanted them off the cross and in the tomb before sunset – before the Sabbath started.

Josephus tells us that the Romans made allowances for the Jews and killed any men on the cross who were still alive as the Sabbath approached.

The Romans had a method of finishing off the death of those being crucified. They would take a large mallet and break their legs. Not only would this cause huge blood loss – but they couldn't push up to breathe. They would soon suffocate on their own secretions.

When the Romans came to the two thieves – they were still alive. Their legs were crushed and they soon died.

But Jesus was already dead. He had been badly beaten – lost a great deal of blood – and died after six hours. So instead of breaking His legs – the soldier made sure Jesus was dead by plunging a spear into His side. Blood and water flowed out.

Most likely what is going on is this. In the beating Jesus suffered – He began to bleed into His chest cavity. The blood separated into the red cells and the plasma. A spear penetrating this cavity would let out the blood cells and then the plasma – blood and water. This only happens when you are already dead.

The point is that a spear through the heart and separated blood meant Jesus was dead – beyond any shadow of doubt – dead.

This soldier would never affirm the death of Christ unless he was certain. If his report on this proved false, then he himself would face death for such incompetence.

Once the centurion affirmed Christ's death, Pilate granted the body to Joseph.

Once permission was granted, Joseph hurried to complete the burial before sunset. He returned to the cross. John tells us that he had help. Nicodemus, another member of the Sanhedrin came to assist.

They came and took His body from the cross and wrapped Him in the clean linen cloth Joseph had purchased.

John tells us that Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds *weight*. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as was the burial custom of the Jews.

The Jews did not embalm like the Egyptians who removed the brain and entrails. The Jews simply wrapped the body. The result was a body that was very heavy and bulky, but the spices masked the stench of decay.

This was standard procedure for Jewish burials. The care taken shows that neither Joseph nor Nicodemus expected Christ to rise from the dead.

Finally, we are told some women who loved Jesus followed the body to the tomb. They made sure He was laid to rest.

Roman law forbade there to be any public mourning over those executed. They wanted to know where Christ was buried for they intended to return after the Sabbath and anoint His body.

Luke tells us that these women prepared some spices and perfume for the anointing in the short time before the Sabbath began.

Here is the point – Luke wants us in no doubt – this was Jesus who died. Joseph and the women confirmed it was Jesus.

He was dead – Pilate and the centurion have affirmed – Jesus is dead.

It was Jesus in that tomb and He was dead.

Humanly speaking death is the end.

One of the most vivid memories I have of my time as a doctor happened one Saturday morning soon after I graduated. I was working in casualty at the Mater Hospital. It was a slow morning.

Suddenly the doors burst open and a man carried a young woman in.

She had been involved in a car accident right outside the hospital. Normally major trauma didn't come to our hospital – but since it happened right outside – she was carried in to us.

Initially, this girl was alert, talking and complaining about how much her side hurt. But she soon went unconscious.

It was very clear that she had major chest trauma. And suddenly doctors and nurses appeared from everywhere.

Within minutes we had her chest open. She had torn the major vessels to her lungs – she was going to die.

And I have never felt so helpless. I looked around. I counted seven doctors and eight nurses around her bed. We were in a major teaching hospital. This girl had come in conscious and talking, mere moments after her accident. And right there before my eyes – she died. *And there was nothing we could do about it!*

That was the first time I saw a young healthy person die. And I knew that was the end. I knew that this girl would never walk and talk and laugh again.

All our medical science could not help someone once they were dead.

Death is the end. Or is it?

Now we come to Luke 24:1–6:

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.

These verses serve to show us a second great truth.



Jesus rose

Jesus' body had been wrapped by Joseph and Nicodemus in strips of linen mixed with myrrh and aloe. But there had been no time to properly anoint the body for burial. These loyal women bought and prepared the spices and perfumes necessary to anoint the body of Christ.

They fully expected to find a tomb, with a body to anoint. They were just coming out of love to do what they could.

Mark 16:3 tells us that on the way they thought of a potential problem.

They were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?"

They had seen the tomb sealed. It would require several strong men to move the stone. Would they be able to move it? Could they find some men to move the stone?

But when they arrived – the stone was rolled away.

Matthew tells us how this large stone had been removed from the tomb. Matthew 28:2-4:

And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men.

At the request of the Pharisees, Pilate had stationed soldiers at the tomb in case anyone might try and steal the body and claim Jesus rose from the dead.

The Lord took care of the stone with an earthquake and the guards were neutralised by the appearance of an angel.

These women arrived and the scene at the tomb was not at all what they expected. Guards like dead men. The stone rolled aside. Angels bright as lightning.

They were petrified.

And what about the body of the Lord?

Mark tells us they entered the tomb – all they would have seen were the linen wrappings. No body.

Had it been moved? Had it been stolen?

The gospels tell us that two emotions gripped these women – fear and alarm. The sight of an angel with unveiled glory always provokes fear among mortal men. But there was alarm over the events that had obviously occurred and the missing body.

The angel sought to calm their fears. Verses 5-6:

“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”

This is the very first proclamation of the gospel. He who was crucified is now risen! Death has been conquered! And here is the proof, the empty tomb. This is what we celebrate today and every Resurrection Sunday – He is risen – He is risen indeed!

Jesus was killed, the women had seen that. He was wrapped in heavy strips of cloth impregnated with spices, they had watched this process. A huge stone was rolled across the tomb. A Roman seal had been placed on the tomb. An armed guard was posted. To enter the tomb meant death. For the guards to allow anyone into the tomb meant their own death.

But despite all of this, the tomb was empty! And the angel proclaimed the good news – Christ the Lord is risen!

Again, many men have tried to deny the resurrection. They have theories – Jesus did not die, he was alive and woke in the tomb, the disciples stole His body, the Romans stole His body, the church made up the story.

Many men like Josh McDowell and Lee Strobel and Michael Green – have examined every theory.

None of them could possibly explain the facts. The only possible explanation is the one the angels gave the women – He is risen from the dead.

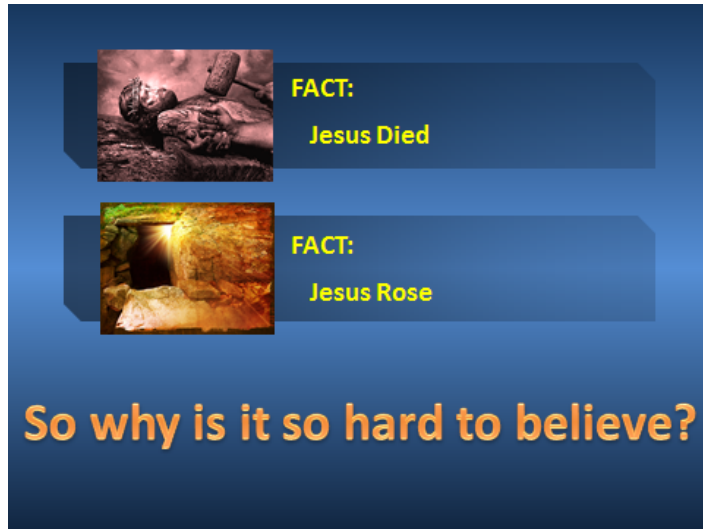
These women have the empty tomb and angels telling them – He is risen.

The gospel of Luke could have ended there.

Jesus died – Jesus rose.

The problem is that for two millennia – many men and women have heard the gospel – but it has not led them to faith. They deny the facts or ignore the facts or simply cannot find a way to believe the facts.

The Luke ends by helping us answer the question:



So why is it so hard to believe?

Luke has been building to this point.

Let me remind you that many times Jesus predicted He would die and rise again.

In Luke 9:22 – He said this:

The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

Pretty clear. But in case they missed it – we have – Luke 18:31-33:

And taking the twelve, he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.”

So what happens? Jesus goes to Jerusalem – is handed over to the Gentiles, He is mocked, spat upon, flogged and killed. Then – on the third day these women go to the tomb with spices – they expect to find a body and they are going to anoint it.

Not one of them said: This is the third day – Jesus will have risen.

This is the Jesus who healed the sick and raised the dead.

This is the Jesus who God addressed at His Baptism and said – This is My beloved Son, listen to Him. No one listened.

The women arrive – the tomb is empty – still no one twigs that Jesus has risen.

They see the angels – still nothing.

Finally, the two angels say to them – “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’”

Why is this a surprise to you?

What are you doing looking for a body? Didn’t He make it clear – on the third day He **will** rise.

Verses 8–10:

And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles.

They ran and told all of this to the disciples. And the disciples said – Hallelujah – we knew it! He is alive! He rose just as He said He would.

Not even close.

Verse 11:

But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

They thought it was all nonsense. You are speaking rubbish women. We saw Him die. Death is the end. We know this has been hard on us all – but get over it – accept it.

These are the disciples – the Apostles – the pillars of the faith on whom the church was built.

Jesus repeatedly said – He would die and rise again. The night before the crucifixion He told them He would die.

He dies – in just the way Scripture described and in just the way He prophesied. Then word comes that Jesus has indeed risen – as He said He would – and their response is – don’t talk such rubbish – no one can rise from the dead?

But Peter was curious – verse 12:

Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

Marveling probably means he was confused, astounded – can’t work it out.

Verses 13-24:

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

Later on the same day, we find two disciples discussing these events.

And here is what amazes me. Again and again – Jesus says – Everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man **will** be fulfilled. He **will** be handed over to the Gentiles. They **will** mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he **will** rise again.

Look at their words:

Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. He is a prophet. A prophet who kept saying – I will die and rise again.

And He died – Our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him.

And He rose – It is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive.

Why did these women say He rose? Some of us went to the tomb – no body. We are confused.

You would think that after the crucifixion – on the Friday or Saturday – *one* of the disciples might have said – guys, guys — it just struck me. Think about it. Jesus came to Jerusalem. He was handed over to the Gentiles. He was mocked, insulted, spat upon, flogged and killed.

Didn't He say this was what the prophets said would happen? Call me crazy – but everything He said **is** coming to pass.

And what is more – He said that on the third day He would rise again. I am going down to the tomb and camping out there – maybe – just maybe He will rise. We saw Him raise Lazarus – maybe He is right. Who is coming with me?

But no. There is not one hint that anyone believed what Jesus said about how He would save them – before **or** after His death.

The disciples are off mourning. Then the women come running and say – He is risen – just as He said He would – remember! And they say – you are speaking nonsense.

Then two of them are talking and saying – wow! We thought Jesus might be the One the prophets spoke of – we hoped He might be the One to redeem Israel – but He died and now we can't even find His body. Yes He said He had to die and rise to redeem Israel – but surely that couldn't be right. He died so obviously He was not the One.

Verses 28-35:

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

What is going on here?

Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday are the greatest truths in history.

Jesus died. Jesus the holy one. The spotless, sinless Lamb of God – died in our place. He bore our sins. He took our punishment. He gave us His righteousness.

Jesus rose. He conquered death. He rose as the first fruits – a promise that one day we too will rise and live forever.

These two truths run counter to everything we know about this world.

The cross. God becoming man.

God dying in our place for our sins.

It makes no sense. How can God become man? How can the eternal, all powerful One who exists beyond the universe – shrink down to become a baby?

How can God die? God is eternal, immortal, beyond death.

And how and why would God die for me?

These are truths that are far beyond our grasp.

And the empty tomb. God rising from the dead.

If God dying is beyond our grasp – what about God rising from the dead?

We all experience death – our dog, our grandfather, a friend. And death is the end.

We have seen death. We have never seen heaven. We can't imagine being sinless, eternal, holy beings.

And God rising from the dead – how can that possibly be?

Again, these are truths that are far beyond our grasp.

What this passage in Luke shows us is that that are so far beyond us – that even when men and women see the truth standing before them – they can't grasp it.

Look again at Luke 24. Verses 36-43:

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 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." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.

Jesus performed the miracles of Messiah – including raising the dead. God the Father testified – listen to Him. He said He had to die and rise to overcome sin and death.

He dies and rises. Angels and witnesses testify to this.

Finally, Jesus Himself appears before them – risen from the dead. They see His wounds – touch Him. He eats to show He is alive.

But verse 41 says they still disbelieved.

With every amount of evidence – the truth was so incredible – they could not grasp it.

There may be some here who are like the disciples – sceptical of the truth that Jesus died and rose. But the evidence, the testimonies, the faith of those in the church – you wonder.

But we don't have the proof those men had.

No one today has seen the resurrected Jesus. No one today has felt His nail pierced hands. No one today has put their fingers into His pierced side.

Today, we don't physically encounter the risen Christ.

So how can you or indeed anyone ever believe? How can anyone come to faith? If the disciples had all that and still disbelieved – what does it take?

Something more was needed.

Verses 44-47:

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." **Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures**, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Most people see Easter cards – an empty tomb – and merely think – quaint belief these Christians have.

We see the empty tomb and know that the greatest event in history has occurred.

What is the difference?

Jesus Christ Himself has opened our minds to see the truth.



FACT:
Jesus Died

FACT:
Jesus Rose

So why is it so hard to believe?
Because we need His Spirit

We need His Spirit.

When I was in fifth year Medicine – two other medical students who were newly minted Christians moved into the rooms next to me.

I became their pet evangelism project. Month after month they shared the gospel with me.

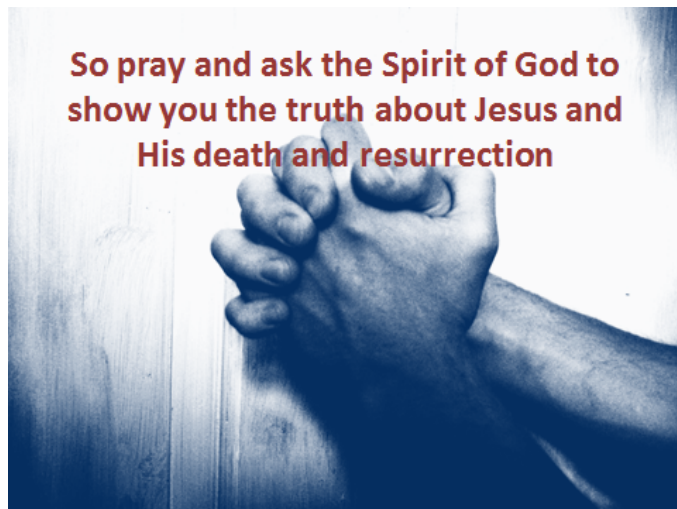
It made absolutely no sense to me. God becoming man – dying – rising – returning. It made as much sense as the Hindu myth that the world is rests on the backs of four huge elephants, who in turn stand on the shell of a turtle.

After many, many months – they gave up on me – I was beyond salvation.

But then soon after, one evening I was bored and pulled down the Bible they had given me – I opened it to Romans and read. Suddenly the blinkers came off – it all came together – I knew it was real.

If you are here this morning and this talk of God dying on a cross – rising from the dead – eternal life means nothing to you. If it makes no sense. If it seems impossible.

Then ask God to open your mind to these truths – to make them live – to make them real to you.



So pray and ask the Spirit of God to show you the truth about Jesus and His death and resurrection.

Because God makes these truths real today. He delights to show us the glory of Jesus.

Verses 48-53:

"You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up

into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.

It is the Holy Spirit who makes these truths live in our hearts.

In John chapter 16 – Jesus repeatedly said that when He died He would go to the Father and then – after He had risen from the dead – He would send His Holy Spirit:

And when He comes, [He] will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

It is the Holy Spirit who is the One who makes these truths live in the hearts of men.

Today – Jesus does not appear and say – feel my hands and side.

No, He says – you are now witnesses to the world of these truths – Jesus died and Jesus rose.

And you will be clothed with power from on high – the power of the Holy Spirit to open the blind eyes of men and women.

When you share the gospel – you need to pray that God would make the foolishness of the cross live in the hearts of men.

The death and resurrection of Jesus are the greatest truths in history. Nothing compares – splitting the Atom, the theory of relativity – nothing.

When you believe these truths – you find the way to God and to eternal life. Sin and death are conquered.

Peace, victory, heaven.

If these truths are meaningless to you – I ask you this day – this Easter to ask God to make them live in your heart. He delights to answer this prayer. He delights to show the glory of the cross and the empty tomb – the way to overcome death and live forever.

Please talk to me – talk to the person who brought you – come to our class – Introducing God – but come to know these truths.

If you know these truths – listen to Jesus – we are to be witnesses of these truths – in the power of the Holy Spirit – to the ends of the earth.

This is the great day. The death of death. The birth of eternity.

Jesus died and Jesus rose.

So by faith we too can die and rise to eternal life.