

**Defining Moments:  
The Defining Moment of all of History  
Acts 2:22-38**

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**Text Introduction:** Earlier this year I started a series of messages called Defining Moments. Here is the origin of that series. You may not be aware of this, but it is hard for me not to be thinking about preaching. Last year, while touring Washington, D.C., I saw a billboard that read “Defining Moments.” I don’t know the meaning of the billboard, but I jotted down that phrase. I was struck by just that phrase. Our lives are sprinkled with defining moments—moments that shape the rest of our lives, moments that are so important that the rest of our lives hang in the balance of these moments. We put this series on hold for the month of March, but we are returning to that topic today.

We have talked about such topics as our births—both our physical births and spiritual births, baptism, and marriage. On the week that we put this series on hold, we had talked about how even historical moments become for us defining moments. Today, this Easter Sunday, I want to talk to you about “The Most Defining Moment of all of History”—the resurrection of Jesus.

**Text:** <sup>22</sup> “Men of Israel, listen to these words: This Jesus the Nazarene was a man pointed out to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did among you through Him, just as you yourselves know. <sup>23</sup> Though He was delivered up according to God’s determined plan and foreknowledge, you used lawless people to nail Him to a cross and kill Him. <sup>24</sup> God raised Him up, ending the pains of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it. <sup>25</sup> For David says of Him:

I saw the Lord ever before me;  
because He is at my right hand,  
I will not be shaken.  
<sup>26</sup> Therefore my heart was glad,  
and my tongue rejoiced.  
Moreover, my flesh will rest in hope,  
<sup>27</sup> because You will not leave me in Hades  
or allow Your Holy One to see decay.  
<sup>28</sup> You have revealed the paths of life to me;  
You will fill me with gladness  
in Your presence.

<sup>29</sup> “Brothers, I can confidently speak to you about the patriarch David: He is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. <sup>30</sup> Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn an oath to him to seat one of his descendants on his throne. <sup>31</sup> Seeing this in advance, he spoke concerning the resurrection of the Messiah:

He was not left in Hades,  
and His flesh did not experience decay.

<sup>32</sup> “God has resurrected this Jesus. We are all witnesses of this. <sup>33</sup> Therefore, since He has been exalted to the right hand of God and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, He has poured out what you both see and hear. <sup>34</sup> For it was not David who ascended into the heavens, but he himself says:

The Lord declared to my Lord,  
'Sit at My right hand  
<sup>35</sup> until I make Your enemies Your footstool.'

<sup>36</sup> “Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah!”

<sup>37</sup> When they heard this, they came under deep conviction and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: “Brothers, what must we do?”

<sup>38</sup> “Repent,” Peter said to them, “and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Introduction:** Christianity stands or falls on the validity and certainty of the resurrection of Christ. It is as Paul said to the Corinthians, “And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty....your faith is futile, you are still in your sins, those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished, we are of all men the most pitiable.” (1 Corinthians 15:14-19)

The absolute certainty of the resurrection is the most important topic that I could ever choose as a topic for preaching—not just on Easter Sunday. We should not be surprised that the resurrection is the topic for the first public sermon preached after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus by his followers who have remained. That is the context of our text today. Peter has come to the end of this stirring sermon of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The message pierced the hearts of many who listened that day. We pray that this same message might pierce many hearts today. I want to raise three fundamental questions today in regards to the resurrection.

**Did Jesus really rise from the grave?**

**If He did rise from the grave, is this an important event?**

**If the resurrection did occur and it is an important event, what should be my response?**

**Did Jesus really rise from the grave?**

The first question that needs our attention is the most fundamental question of all: “Did Jesus really rise from the grave?” Realizing that most everyone here affirms the resurrection of Jesus, I still think this is an important question for our consideration today. The things that I share today may help you in sharing your beliefs with other. Remember as I said last week, we must be ready to give a defense for the hope within us.

If we cannot give an affirmative answer to this most basic question, then we have no need to ask the other two questions or any other question about Christianity for that matter. Again, this question is the one question that all of Christianity either stands or falls.

Two Possibilities

Would you not agree that there are two possibilities? Jesus either did or did not rise from the grave.

Those who have argued that Jesus did not rise from the grave have historically argued from one of five possibilities.

1. The resurrection is just a story. Those who believe this would argue that the Bible is not to be taken literally.
2. The disciples hallucinated that they saw Jesus resurrected.
3. The Wrong Tomb Theory—The women and later Peter went to the wrong tomb.
4. Jesus faked his death or the swoon theory. Jesus didn't really die, some skeptics will say, He just appeared to have died.
5. The Stolen body theory—This theory is actually as old as the resurrection and is the "cover-up of the Jewish authorities as recorded in Matthew 28. This theory has two accounts—one with the enemies of Jesus stealing the body; the other with the disciples of Jesus stealing the body.

There is much that we could say to shred these five explanations of the empty tomb. For example, have you ever known 500 people to all have the same hallucination? Or, isn't there great irony in believing that not only did the women and later Peter go to the wrong tomb, but also that the angel appeared in front of the wrong tomb and the soldiers were in front of the wrong tomb? The stolen body theory? If enemies of Jesus stole His body, all they would have to do is present the body of Jesus once Christianity really starting gaining momentum. What about the disciples stealing the body of Jesus? People will die for a lie when they do not know something is a lie, but would people be willing to die for what they know to be a lie?

The Proof—In addition to these questions of logic, I want to pose four proofs of the resurrection.

1. The Empty Tomb
2. The Eyewitnesses—The eyewitnesses believed that the tomb was empty. In our text today in Acts, there is the indication in verse 32 that "we are all witnesses to this." Even to those Peter was preaching to (unbelievers at the moment) had no trouble believing that Jesus was resurrected.

Biblical Eyewitnesses:

Outside of the Gospels we have two summary accounts:

- (1) Acts 1:1-3
- (2) 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 (Note His appearance to 500)

Extra-Biblical Eyewitnesses:

- (1) Ignatius (c. 50-115) "He was crucified and died under Pontius Pilate. He really, and not merely in appearance was crucified, and died, in the sight of beings in heaven and on earth, and under the

earth. He also rose again in three days....He was crucified in reality, and not in appearance, not in imagination, not in deceit. He really died, and was buried, and rose from the dead.”

- (2) Josephus , a Jewish historian, writing at the end of the first century—“ Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man if it be lawful to call him man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive truth with pleasure. He drew over many Jews, and also many of the Greeks. This man was the Christ. And when Pilate had condemned to the cross, upon his impeachment by the principal man among us, those who had loved him from the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive on the third day, the divine prophets having spoken these and thousands of other wonderful things about him. And even now, the race of Christians, so named from him, has not died out.
3. The Emergence of the Church—The eyewitnesses believed so solidly that the tomb was empty that the church experienced great growth even in the midst of persecution.
  - Change in Witnesses
  - Courage to Witness
  - Changes in Worship—They started meeting on Sunday.
  - Capable to Withstand for over 2,000 years. (Gamaliel’s counsel in Acts 5:32-39)
4. The Effect on People’s Lives today—Yes, just as the hymn proclaims, “He lives, He lives! You ask me how I know He lives, He lives within my heart.” Modern song writers have echoed that same truth in the song, *My Redeemer Lives*. The song says, “I know my redeemer lives—I talked to Him this morning.”

### **If He did rise from the grave, is this an important event?**

Now, if Jesus did rise from the grave, our next question is “Is this an important event?” The answer is a resounding “yes!” There are multiple reasons that the resurrection is an important event, but I want to mention three today.

1. The resurrection validates that Jesus is God.
2. The resurrection validates that all else is true about Jesus.

One of the remarkable features of the resurrection is that Jesus prophesied his resurrection—even to the day.

3. The resurrection validates our hope for eternal life.

Our hope in eternal life is rooted in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Mike Bryan, an agnostic journalist, wrote a book titled, Chapter and Verse: A Skeptic Revisits Christianity. He did his research for the book after spending 6 months taking classes at Criswell College, a Bible college associated with First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas. He befriended many of the students there and professors. Danny Akin, who was at the time of Mike’s research in 1991 a dean at the college, writes about his friendship with Mike.

After spending almost 6 months with us: going to classes, attending a major pastor's conference in Jacksonville, FL., traveling on a mission trip and observing a Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting, it was time for Mike to leave and return to his home in New York City. My wife and our 4 boys had fallen in love with Mike and so we had him over for dinner before he left. After dinner, as we were sitting around talking, I asked Mike this question: "Thinking about all you have studied and experienced, what is the bottom line as you see it?" With no hesitation at all Mike responded, "That's easy. It's the resurrection of Jesus from the dead." Mike then proceeded to set forth the logic of the issue. "If Jesus rose from the dead then 1) there is a God and 2) He is that God. Furthermore, 3) the Bible is true because He said it was true and believed it was true. And, 4) that means there is a heaven and a hell, and 5) one's relationship with Jesus is the deciding factor as to which way you go." I have often wished my seminary students and fellow theologians saw the issue as clearly as this agnostic/atheist. (From sermon by Danny Akin)

### **If the resurrection did occur and it is an important event, what should be my response?**

As you know, I am fond of coming to the conclusion of a sermon and asking the question, "So what?" Part of the reason that I do this is because this is the sermon technique displayed in this first sermon. In the case of the first sermon though, the hearers asked the question "So what" when they said, "What must we do?"

1. Believe—The resurrection is not an issue in which you can remain neutral. You must believe that either it happened or it did not happen. I've tried to present the evidence today in a way that is Biblical, but also logical and historical. The decision is yours to make. However, once you make that decision that the resurrection is a historical fact, you must have a response. You cannot sit on the fence. I trust that many today will be like those who heard Peter as recorded in Acts 2 when they responded, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter's response gives us our response.
2. Repent—Repentance means to turn away from something. When the Bible speaks of repentance, the turning away is from sin. Now, when we turn away from something, we must understand that we also should turn to something. Instead of turning, though, to something, we must in repentance turn to somebody—Jesus.
3. Baptism—The next thing that Peter gives as a response is to be baptized. Now some teach that this means that a person must be baptized in order to repent or be saved. However, the whole counsel of the Word of God helps us to understand that the two are separate. In fact, just a few verses later, in Acts 3:19, we read "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." How do you take care of salvation? Repent! What follows? Baptism! You need to respond. You can't wait. The resurrection demands a response. Think about that now as our choir sings of the hope that is in the resurrection.

Some years ago, I was preaching on Easter Sunday. In the spur of the moment I said, "For some of you this is your defining moment." It is not something that I necessarily planned to say. When we extended the invitation to respond, the first person to come forward said, "This is my defining moment!" I pray that there will be those who say that right now.