

EASTER SUNDAY - An Idle Tale?

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Date: 20 April 2003

Preacher: Paul Dudley

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 20th of April 2003.

The preacher is Paul Dudley. His sermon is entitled An Idol Tale and is based on Luke chapter 24 verses 1 to 12.

Please be seated. I've always loved Easter time. From a very early age, I remember my parents writing little notes about where the Easter bunny had left the eggs.

And we were traipsed all around our farm trying to find these Easter eggs. Inevitably, they'd be under one of our beds. But it was fun walking all around the farm trying to find the clues.

As I grew up, I came to realise the deepest significance of Easter. The great message of resurrection. It was a great time for us, for Michelle and I, for the past ten years prior to coming down here to Melbourne.

[1 : 17] We would go up to a convention and we would hear the great news that Jesus was indeed alive. But not everyone sees the significance of Easter.

For many, it is an idle tale. Michelle this week was doing some shopping and overheard a discussion between two women. One of the women declared that she would not give Easter eggs this year.

She decided that she would not perpetuate the silly myth of Easter. That Easter was about an Easter bunny giving Easter eggs. She would not perpetuate that anymore.

For this lady, the meaning of Easter, according to myth, was that it was about an Easter bunny who gave out Easter eggs. For her, the only reality to Easter was the chocolate.

Nothing but the chocolate. For her, Easter was an idle tale. But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared.

[2 : 33] The women that had followed Jesus from Galilee, they had seen his great and marvellous deeds. They had seen him die a horrible death. They had seen him been laid in the rock-hewn tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

They saw all these things. And early in the morning, they were returning. Returning with the spices and the ointments they had prepared. You see, Jesus was placed hurriedly into the tomb.

There was no time for preparation of the body. It was the Sabbath. The beginning of the Sabbath. A time where they were not to do any work. So the women were returning early in the morning to prepare Jesus' body.

For them, it was the only thing left to do. For both them and the disciples, a terrible thing had happened.

All the past certainties that they had, had been stripped away. Had been destroyed. All their future promises, they had been told, were in question.

[3 : 46] The man that they had followed and trusted, Jesus, lay dead in a tomb. Or so they thought. A tomb that was sealed and silent.

But this was not to be the last word about Jesus. As the women returned to the grave, we read that they were caught off guard.

They were surprised. It was a day of surprises. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. But when they went in, they did not find the body.

You can just imagine them there. Arriving, looking at the tomb. The stone had been moved. And they went in. Expecting to see the body. The body that was laid there.

And it was gone. You can see their mind just ticking over. What's happened to this body? Has someone stolen it? Where has it gone?

[4 : 56] Who would have taken it? What is the meaning of this empty tomb? Well, what is the meaning of this empty tomb indeed?

What does it say? What does it mean? If you look in your Bibles at verse 4, we see what it means, this empty tomb.

While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground. But the men said to them, Why do you look for the living among the dead?

He is not here, but risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.

What is the meaning of the empty tomb? Jesus is alive. Jesus has been risen from the dead by the power of God.

[6 : 03] The angels pointed it out. They reminded the women of all that Jesus had spoken about. And he spoke about it on many occasions, predicting that he would die, but that he would come back to life again.

We saw it in some of his parables, in some of his teaching. He predicted it directly and indirectly. But they fail to understand the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection.

But once they had been reminded of these words, we see in verses 8 through to 10 what their reaction was. We see that they remembered Jesus' words.

They came to an understanding of what had happened. And so they returned from the tomb to go and tell the disciples and all the other, the 11 apostles and all the rest of the disciples. They were going to tell them the great news.

Then they remembered his words and returned from the tomb. They told all this to the 11 and to the rest. But listen to verse 10. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles.

[7 : 18] Luke takes a moment just to make us reflect that it was the women who were told first. Not the disciples, but the women. This is quite striking for this culture.

For a woman, you know, law of court, a court law had no weight of testimony. They were not to be trusted in court.

But here it is, the women being told. Well, maybe because of this fact, we see that the disciples and their reaction in verse 11.

But these words seemed to them an idle tale and they did not believe. For the disciples, the words and the story that the women had just spoken was nothing but an idle tale.

Here were the first sceptics of Jesus' resurrection, his own disciples. For them, it was nothing but a rabbit bounding around with a basket cocked up on its arm, handing out chocolate chicken eggs to people as it came along.

[8 : 31] It was nothing but an idle tale. The women were viewed with suspicion, dismissed as nonsense. The disciples knew that there would be a general resurrection one day.

They knew the teaching that one day all would rise up. But for someone to, one individual, to come back to life again? Nonsense.

An idle tale. They saw their Lord Jesus laid in a tomb. A rock-hue and tomb.

A tomb that was empty. It's interesting that right at the end of the passage, Luke notes Peter's reaction.

Peter got up and ran to the tomb. Stooping in and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves. Then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

[9 : 32] What is Peter's reaction to the empty tomb? Amazement. This is only slightly better than the reaction to the women when they first arrived at the tomb.

Remember, when they arrived, for them, they were bewildered. But for Peter, he's amazed. There's still a hint here that he has no idea what has happened.

Why was the tomb empty? Where was his master's body? What had happened that morning? We live in a world today where philosophers tell us that God is dead.

They tell us also that language has no meaning. We live in a society where the religious structures seem to be crumbling, crumbling without a voice.

We live in a society that is crying out for meaning, wanting to hear a voice that points them to some roots, something to cling on to.

[10 : 44] It's interesting, as I was reading an article from the Good Weekend, it was entitled From Here to Eternity. And it's interesting that in this article, a team from the Australian Museum went about trying to do a survey, trying to discover the attitudes to death in the 21st century.

The results, they found, was that there was a new curiosity about what happened at death and what happened after, about this to the boo subject, and how people were loved and lost should be both disposed and remembered.

It's interesting, some of the ways that people thought that they would be disposed of now. Philip said, I'm going to live forever. I've made arrangements for my body to be chronic, to go into chronic suspension.

I think that's right. I think I said that right. But he was going to be frozen forever. Another person, Elizabeth here said, I plan to be cremated and my ashes placed into a rocket and shot into space where it will explode into a thousand stars in ten years' time.

She was only 15 years old, of course. Two of interest. My idea would be to be laid out on the cliffs in Africa and fed to the vultures.

[12 : 07] Dad told me he really wanted to be mulched and fed to his tomato plants. It's interesting from this survey that people are a little bit more interested in what happens after.

But at the end of the article, there is no solution about what happens after death. No solution whatsoever. And we look at God's word today.

God's word speaks. We see there that at the centre of today's passage is an empty tomb. An empty tomb that screams out that Jesus is alive.

That he is no longer there but risen as testified by the angels. This is no idle tale. This is no myth but reality.

Jesus is alive. It's interesting to note the other striking feature of the passage today. The complete failure of the disciples to understand and trust in the full significance of Jesus' death and resurrection.

[13 : 26] When the women arrived at the tomb expecting to find a dead body which they could put their spices and that they prepared on the body of Jesus, it was not there and they were perplexed.

When Peter returned from the tomb after seeing it empty, for him all it was was amazement. After all that Jesus had spoken about, all that he had predicted, after trying to explain the significance of his death and resurrection in the Last Supper, they failed to understand its full significance.

It was not till later that the disciples came to a full understanding of what happened on that first Easter. It was not until they had met the risen Lord and they had the Holy Spirit given to them at Pentecost did they come to understand the full significance and richness and message of Easter, of Jesus' death and resurrection.

They came to see that when Jesus died on the cross he paid the penalty for them. Jesus took the punishment upon himself that the world deserved, that he paid the penalty and nailed them to the tree.

But also they came to see the victory of the cross, of the resurrection, that Jesus had indeed conquered that last enemy, the enemy of death.

[15 : 01] Because he had risen, Christ had risen, the disciples came to understand that one day they too would rise from the dead. As we heard from 1 Corinthians 15 and as that great chapter goes on to explain, in a twinkling of an eye each one of us will be raised from the dead.

At that last trumpet we will all be raised imperishable, given glorious bodies. This is the Christian's great hope. This is guaranteed by Christ's resurrection from the dead.

my wife bought a little box of chocolates and it was interesting to note on it, it said, it was entitled Nothing But Chocolate.

That's all it is. Nothing But Chocolate. How do you understand Easter this year? How do you understand the resurrection of Jesus?

Is it nothing but chocolate? Are you living here for the here and now? Not fully understanding the great significance of Easter, of the great future.

[16 : 19] the passage tells us today that we are far more than mulch for tomatoes or a lunch for vultures on the cliffs in Africa.

We are far more than these things. We have a great and certain future. A future of resurrection, of being with our Father for eternity.

It was interesting after reading this article I sat down and wrote my last will and testament. I hadn't written one and I'd always thought I'd get around to it one day but I thought I should do something about this.

So I sat down and started writing my last will and testament and I decided that my puppets they'd go to my children. I thought they could definitely have them so sorry about that David.

I thought that my books a good friend of mine in Sydney could have the first pick of them and then the rest of them would go to Ridley but the rest of it Michelle could sort out. I sat down and worked out my hymns that I'd have at my funeral and it was interesting just sitting trying to work it out.

[17 : 31] There was actually a little bit of excitement about it all. A little bit odd actually but I guess I realised that it doesn't end at my death.

That is not the end of the story but because of what Christ has done that he has been raised from the dead is my guarantee that I will be raised one day as well.

Christ is risen. Risen indeed. Christ is risen. Thank you. That is your question. Thank you very much and thank you. Yes. Thank you. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Amen. Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[18:35] Amen.