

## How Do You Know That?

Mark 16:1-8

The Resurrection of Our Lord, April 5, 2015

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Christ is risen!

How do you know that?

It is important to ask how you know that. It is important to ask how you know that Jesus is risen from the dead because your children are asking that. The unbelievers are asking that. It is important that you ask how you know that Jesus is risen from the dead because we have a lot riding on whether or not He is risen from the dead.

First of all, our entire understanding of everlasting life and everlasting salvation rides on whether or not Jesus is risen from the dead. The Scriptures clearly teach that our everlasting life consists in rising physically from the dead. The Bible teaches that when Jesus returns on the Last Day He will raise us physically from the dead. We will physically come out of our tombs and graves. If we were buried at sea, we will come out of the deep. If we were dismembered in our death we will be remembered when He raises us from the dead. If we died by fire, He will reconstitute us.

When Jesus raises us from the dead He will reconstitute the entire universe. The current universe will melt in the heat and the fundamental principles of the universe will be dissolved. Out of that Jesus will make a new heaven and a new earth. In the new creation we will live forever with resurrected and eternal bodies. That is the eternal life that the Holy Scriptures prophecy will come to pass for you.

When Jesus raises you from the dead, your bodies will also be recreated by His almighty power. They will be remade without sin and without death. There will be no more mourning or crying or pain. The old order of things will have completely passed away. The new order things is upon us. In the new order there is no decay or corruption. There is no death.

Now if Jesus has promised us a physical resurrection for our everlasting salvation then it only makes sense that He rises from the dead also. If salvation is nothing more than a soul residing in heaven, then why did Jesus bother to physically rise from the dead? He could have come back some kind of spirit and that would have been sufficient. But He does not come back a spirit. He comes back physically raised from the dead. He comes back soul and body. If He is going to promise us a physical resurrection unto everlasting life, He had better come back physically. His promise to physically raise us from the dead does not mean a lot unless He is also physically raised from the dead.

Secondly, the cross of Jesus Christ does not mean much unless He is risen from the dead.

We have attached a lot of significance to the cross of Jesus. The Scriptures use all kinds of means to describe what Jesus was accomplishing when He died upon the cross. The Scriptures talk about Jesus making the atoning sacrifice that takes away our sins. That means that His death upon the cross was a blood sacrifice that takes away all of our sins. Jesus fulfilled and surpassed the Old Testament sacrifices when He died. We say that this forgiveness makes us holy. We say that this forgiveness gives us access to God's presence. After all the curtain of temple was torn in two from top to bottom when Jesus died.

If the death of Jesus has forgiven us of all of our sins, it has taken away the sole cause of our death. The wages of sin is death. If Jesus has taken away our sins, He has by definition also taken away our death. Jesus will fulfill the promise of having taken away our death when He raises us from the dead. Therefore the cross of Jesus Christ is crucial to our salvation. The death of Jesus and its significance is vital to our everlasting life.

But what makes the death of Jesus so different from other deaths? All kinds of people die. Jesus is no different. All kinds of people died in ancient times. In fact all of them did. Jesus was no different. All kinds of people died cruel and painful deaths. Jesus was no different from them. All kinds of people died at the hands of the Romans. Jesus was no different. All kinds of people died unjustly at the hands of the Romans. Jesus was no different. If Jesus was no different than anyone else who died at the hands of the Romans in an unjust way dying for what He believed in, then why is His death so special that we attach saving significance to it? Why do the Scriptures attach saving significance to the death of Jesus? The only thing that sets apart the death of Jesus as special is His resurrection from the dead. If He is not raised from the dead, then He is simply another Jewish idealist of the first century who died for His ideals. But if He is risen from the dead, then His death is an atoning sacrifice that forgives us of all of our sins.

Thirdly, the resurrection of Jesus proves the veracity of Jesus. Whether or not Jesus was right about our salvation goes together with the question about whether or not Jesus was right about anything. Jesus said a lot of controversial things that people argue about nowadays. Some people are just convinced that Jesus is right. And some people are just as convinced that Jesus was wrong. If some people think that Jesus was right and some people think that Jesus was wrong, how are we supposed to tell whether or not Jesus was right or wrong? And since Jesus says things that pertain to our everlasting salvation to say nothing of our lives in this age, we need to know whether or not Jesus is right.

Jesus proves that He is right by predicting His resurrection. He predicted that He would be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and that they would kill Him and on the third day He would rise. This is quite the prediction! There is nothing greater about Himself that He could predict. Anybody can say that they will live on as a spirit. There is no way to prove that one way or the other. But since Jesus promised that He would physically rise from the dead, He puts Himself in a position where His word can be tested and it is not just any word it is a word over life and death itself!

Now if Jesus is right about something so difficult as His own rising from the dead, then He is right about everything else as well. If Jesus is right about something hard, He is right about anything that is easier also. If Jesus can lift 150 pounds, He can lift 50 pounds. So if Jesus is right about His own resurrection then He is right also about what He says about divorce and remarriage. He is right about what He says about children and the Kingdom of God. He is right when He says that the Kingdom of God grows all by itself without any effort on our part. He is right about what He says about sin. He is right about what He says about service. He is right about what He says about money. And on and on it goes. The Scriptures bear witness to what Jesus said about these subjects. Those statements of our Lord are only right, if He is right about His own resurrection. If He is wrong about that, then He is wrong about everything else too. If He is right about that, then He is right about everything else, including what He says about your forgiveness.

So we have a lot riding on whether or not Jesus rose from the dead. So I return to my question, "How do we know that Jesus rose from the dead?"

When we ask how we know things evidence must be considered.

First of all, I think that it is necessary to produce an empty tomb. While I realize that there are other explanations for why tombs may be empty besides the fact that the one inside rose from the dead, I also know that if Jesus did not rise from the dead the tomb would not be empty. Therefore it is still necessary to produce an empty tomb. So the women go out to the tomb and they find it empty.

Secondly, such evidence will need to be examined. While evidence in court is accepted especially if more than one witness agrees on it, it is nice to have some physical evidence to verify the women's testimony. In order to examine such evidence the stone will need to be rolled away. The stone is rolled

away. The women reported that the stone had been rolled away. The disciples later confirmed that the stone had been rolled away. Therefore the tomb is open for examination. It is not like the women or the disciples were trying to keep the tomb from being examined. At this time the disciples did not even know that He had risen from the dead.

Thirdly, since the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is a unique event in the history of the universe most modernists label it supernatural. All that means is that nature does not behave in a way that is expected and the only explanation for such behavior is the intervention of God. Never mind the fact that nature often behaves in unexpected ways. Since it is what we moderns would call supernatural you can expect some kind of divine sign that Jesus rose from the dead. And so there is a youth dressed in white. Mark's Gospel records the clothing that he wore so that you know that this youth is not an ordinary youth. This supernatural youth reports to the women that Jesus had in fact rose from the dead.

Fourthly there is the testimony of the witnesses themselves. The women testify that Jesus rose from the dead. Mary Magdalene reported a conversation that she had with Him in the garden. The disciples who examined the tomb reported that it was empty just as the women had said. The disciples also later reported seeing and interacting with Jesus again after He had died. His appearances were what we moderns would call supernatural, but that is not surprising since He rose from the dead. The Scriptures record that on one occasion 500 people saw Jesus alive after He had died. There are plenty of witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus from Nazareth.

Now I realize that some people question the witnesses. Some people say that the witnesses hallucinated the risen Christ in their desperation to have him alive. The problem with this is that in every scientific study of hallucinations, no two hallucinations are alike. Yet the testimony of the apostles is congruent with people who say that they saw Jesus risen from the dead. And their testimony is congruent with each other.

Some people point out the discrepancies between the Gospel accounts of our Lord's resurrection. They say that if they all saw the same thing, they should have reported the same thing, but they don't report the same details. People who say things like this are unfamiliar with how testimony works. If the testimony of all of the apostles were identical that would be cause for suspicion because it would mean that they had all agreed beforehand on their story before they told it. That would call into question why they would want to agree on their story beforehand before they told it. Would it not be because they were trying to perpetrate a lie and in order to look as if they told the truth they all agreed to say the same thing? The fact that the Gospels differ in their accounts of the resurrection is indication of their veracity. People who see the same thing see it from their own perspective and report it from that perspective. Therefore anyone who sees anything nowadays and delivers testimony in a court of law will deliver an account that differs in some details from other people who saw the same thing because of what each person thought was important to tell or because of the person to whom the witness is reporting the account.

Other people figure that the apostles are just plain lying. Some people say that the apostles were wrong about Jesus and the apostles wanted desperately to be right about Jesus. That being the case some people postulate that the apostles came to the tomb at night, rendered the Roman soldiers unconscious, stole the body of Jesus, and proclaimed that He had risen from the dead and conveniently only they had seen it.

Well, folks, if the apostles are lying, they gave their lives for that lie. All of the apostles except for John died a martyr's death. They died because they testified that Jesus rose from the dead. It would be expected that if someone were threatened with death for a lie that they were preaching that they would

back off from that lie. Only a person who believed that they were preaching the truth would die for it. The apostles died for it.

Then some people who doubt the resurrection say that the apostles believed that it was true even though it was not true. Such people are claiming that they know more about what happened in these ancient events than the people who were there. Such people reveal that they don't believe in a resurrection from the outset and no matter what evidence or testimony is brought forward they will not believe it. Such people are obtuse and stubborn. They are like people who refuse to believe the world is round even when the evidence is presented.

And then there is the word of Jesus Himself.

Our Lord's prediction of His coming resurrection is not the only thing that He predicts. It is not the only thing that He says. Some of the things that Jesus said could be tested right away.

For example, on Palm Sunday when Jesus wanted to secure a colt for His grand entry into Jerusalem, He told His disciples to go into a village across from them and that they would find a colt tied in the street. Jesus accurately predicted what the people standing in the street would say. Jesus tells the disciples what to tell the people standing the street in order to get them to let the disciples have the colt. It all goes just as Jesus had said it would.

There is also the business about Jesus securing a place where He would eat the Passover with His disciples before His death. He told them to go into the city and find a man carrying a water jar. Even though men carrying water jars in the ancient world was rare as that was considered women's work, when the disciples went into the city they found things just the way that Jesus had told them. He told them that the man carrying the water jar would lead them to a large upper room furnished and ready. Even though thousands of pilgrims would be occupying upper rooms that night and one would expect that every space would be taken, the disciples followed the man with the water jar and found everything the way Jesus had said it would be.

Then there was also that mysterious incident with the fig tree. A fig tree did not produce figs when the Lord wanted some and so He cursed the fig tree. A day or two later the disciples passed the fig tree and it had wilted. The word of Jesus comes to pass.

Then there are the incidents of healing. Jesus said to a paralyzed man, "Get up, take your mat, and go home." The paralyzed man got up in front of everyone, took his mat, and went home. The Word of Jesus came to pass. Jesus said to the blind man that his faith had saved him and the blind man saw again. Jesus addressed Himself to the ears of a deaf man and said, "Be opened," and even though the deaf man could not hear Him the ears of the deaf man were opened and he could hear again. Jesus found a man with a withered hand in a synagogue. He told the man with the withered hand to stretch out his hand and he did and it was restored. Those are examples of the word of Jesus doing what it says that it will do.

Then there are more examples where the word of Jesus alters things on a larger scale. Jesus repeatedly says to demons, "Be gone." The demons obey Him on every occasion. Jesus tells the wind and the waves to be calm and still and they are calm and still. Jesus says to the dead, "Arise," and they return to life and get up.

On every occasion the word of Jesus does what it says.

So it should be no surprise us at all that the Word of Jesus raises Him from the dead. He said that He would rise from the dead. Everything else came to pass that He said would come to pass. He said that the resurrection would come to pass. It has come to pass for Him. It will come to pass for you.

And that in the end is what faith is. Faith lives in between the time when its Lord says something and when He does the thing that He said He would do. Since the Lord has done everything else that He said, faith is confident that He will do the things that He has said that He would do that remain to be done.

This places you into the exact same position as the women at the end of Mark's Gospel account of the resurrection. They have heard that Jesus is risen but they have not seen Him yet. You have heard that He is risen but you have not seen Him yet.

But in due time the women did. And in due time so will you.

Christ is risen!