

## Resurrection Teaching

Matt. 12:38-41

He is risen! The resurrection takes to the principle of then and now, more than any other happening of history. Jesus rose and because He did so, His disciples took the good news around the world. Believers became disciples and preachers and missionaries so that soon, the gospel had spread to the ends of the earth. This continues to this day for the resurrection experienced then by the disciples gathered in the upper room, is still just as powerful now as it was then. Our task this morning is to let the then become now so that what happened then can happen now in you as much as it did in them.

Do you know that Jesus said that He would rise from the dead long before the cross and that He continued to teach His own resurrection throughout His ministry? John tells the story of Jesus' first Passover (after beginning His ministry). Jesus went into the temple and was disgusted by the merchandizing of the Passover remembrance. He took a whip and drove the moneychangers and the livestock sellers out of the temple. The Jews challenged Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" Jesus answered, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." The Jewish leaders were indignant at this answer taking what He said literally as if He were claiming the power to rebuild Herod's temple in three days but when the disciples remembered this they understood that He referred to His body as the temple and that He had claimed that He would rise again on the third day.

When the opposition against Jesus had reached the point among the Pharisees that they had come to a consensus that He must be destroyed, they approached Him and asked for a sign? Asking for a sign was asking Jesus to "prove it." Of course they had already witnessed miracles and they had heard Jesus' teaching and Nicodemus, a Pharisee, had already testified, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God: for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him." Their request for a sign was a rejection of the obvious. So Jesus

answered, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and will condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed, a greater than Jonah is here."

The great question of the Jonah story is, why did the people of Nineveh heed the preaching of Jonah and turn from their sin? The answer to this question is unstated but

clearly implied in the Book of Jonah. Jonah was cast into the sea as a last and final attempt by the sailors to save the ship and their own lives. They watched him disappear into the drink and they knew that he was dead. The sailors no longer had a cargo to deliver but wherever they berthed, they had a story to tell. The deadly storm calmed immediately after they had cast Jonah out. Three days later the fish vomited Jonah up onto the dry land. God then repeated His call to Jonah and sent him to Nineveh where he preached that the destruction of their city was imminent. I believe that when Jonah arrived in Nineveh he may have still smelled like fish vomit. He looked like a man who had spent 3 days in the belly of a fish. Furthermore, Jonah must have told the story of his journey as he preached. The sailors may have confirmed the facts or at least their story may have reached Nineveh independent of Jonah. The city was confronted by a message that was supported by a sign. The message - Repent! The sign: Jonah was raised from the dead to come and warn them of the consequences of their sin. The result: the king and all the people repented in sackcloth and fasted seeking a respite from God. God saw their sincerity and relented from the disaster that He had said that He would bring upon them.

The sign of Jonah was persuasive in its day. The "then" was very powerful. It rescued a city from destruction. In the "now" of Jesus day among the religious hierarchy, the sign was scoffed at and rejected. After they had killed Jesus and He was in the grave, they went to Pilate and asked for a guard to be set before the tomb for they remembered that He had said, "After 3 days I will rise."

Jesus' ministry took a turn after the feeding of the 5,000. Before this event, the crowds and enthusiasm was always growing. Afterwards, they diminished. Jesus began preparing the disciples for the trials that were to come. At Caesarea Philippi, He took them aside and asked, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" Then, He asked, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter made his famous confession and then Jesus shared that "He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised the third day." This was something that Jesus taught them from then on to prepare them for what was coming. But, they could not fathom what Jesus was saying. It did not help them then. It would help them later.

Jesus waited until after Lazarus died before He went to Bethany. Talking to Martha, Lazarus' sister, Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha was up on her theology and so she knew about the resurrection on the last day. But Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

When they went to the graveside a little later Jesus prayed and then called Lazarus back from the dead. Lazarus came out of the tomb still bound in his grave clothes and

so Jesus said to them, "Loose him and let him go." A great many of the Jews believed in Jesus on account of Lazarus, so much so that the chief priests also plotted to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus.

Then and now. Some respond to the sign of the resurrection with belief and commitment. Some dig in to their stubborn positions of opposition and resist.

I love the story of Charles Colson. He was a very secular self-made man. He was very successful and became one of the closest advisors to the president of the United States, Richard Nixon. He and his associates were intoxicated with power and they loved it. They were living the dream. Then Watergate happened. Colson was convicted and sentenced to prison. In the process, he came face to face with his own failures. A friend witnessed to him about Jesus Christ. He read C. S. Lewis' book, Mere Christianity. He became convinced that Jesus had lived and died for his sin, and that He was raised from the dead on the third day. Chuck

Colson gave his life to God and never looked back. He wrote the story of his conversion in a book he called, Born Again. He got out of prison and started a prison ministry that became his life's work. He wrote a number of other books with the purpose of calling believers to greater commitment to God and to a holistic view of what it means to be a Christian. Then and now.

Chuck Colson was the Watergate conspirator who turned from that life to believe in the resurrection and follow Christ. Others remained bitter, blaming others and even God for their fall. Then and now.

So where are you at? He is risen! Have you believed? Are you ready to believe? He came out of the grave to rescue you just as much as Jonah came back from the fish to rescue Nineveh. The life you have been living without Him is not ok. Jesus is God. Make Him your God. Live for Him rather than self. Let Him direct your path. He will take you where you never meant to go but when you go, you will discover that it is where you were always meant to be. Then and now.