



THE LIE

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I am one of those who believe that the darkness of Good Friday, when Jesus was executed, and the emptiness of the Saturday that followed, were eclipsed by the glory of Resurrection Sunday. And that's why we are gathered together here today.

Some people have proposed that Jesus never actually died; He fainted, exhausted in body (from severe beatings and crucifixion) and in mind (due to anguish and abuse), but was revived after being taken down from the cross.

I'm aware of at least four reasons this could not be true:

1. The Roman guard found Him dead and did not break His legs, which was their way to hasten death before nightfall.
2. For confirmation, the guard pierced His side with a spear; out flowed blood and water (serum), as evidence that He has already expired.
3. His disciples took Him down and placed Him in a tomb, and made no effort to revive Him.
4. The women returned after the Sabbath to complete the preparation of the body, while the rest of the disciples cowered behind locked doors.

Yet, the more difficult thing to believe was that He came alive after all that! Regardless of what He Himself had predicted, even His closest disciples could not wrap their minds around it. And if you've wrestled at times about this, you're in good company!

But add to Jesus' own prediction, the sightings and encounters with Jesus *after* His burial, for He spent the next 40 days offering to His disciples indisputable proofs of His resurrected life, and speaking with them about the Kingdom of God. Still, they were a difficult lot to convince.

The women were astonished and terrified when they saw Him alive at the gravesite. When they reported what they had seen, the rest of the disciples refused to believe them.

Peter and John ran to the tomb to see for themselves. They found the tomb empty, and John, recalling Jesus' prediction, believed, but Peter, not seeing Him with his own eyes, could not.

The two disciples traveling to Emmaus, so distracted by grief over the events of the past few days, did not recognize resurrected Jesus when He joined their journey, until He prayed and broke bread with them (recalling, I imagine, their last supper with Him). Immediately, they returned to Jerusalem to tell the others.

Then, Jesus appeared in the upper room where they were staying, but when they told Thomas (who had been absent) about it, he refused to believe their story.

A week later, He appeared again to them, with Thomas this time, and, touching His wounds and sharing a meal, they were, at last, persuaded.

Then, He met them again in Galilee (the region they were from), where He ate with them, He spoke to them, He gave them instructions. Finally, He was even seen by *"more than 500 persons at one time."* Then, from the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, He ascended into the sky before their wondering eyes.

Many people today scoff at the notion of the resurrection, saying it's just beyond reason and believability. They consider it the Great Christian Lie.

Other people today, even followers of Jesus, still relate to His first disciples' skepticism—and why not? When have we ever seen someone who died return to break bread with us? Yet, we are moved by Jesus' words to Thomas (who had doubted): *"You believe because you have seen Me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing Me."*

Some of you here today, have embraced the resurrection of Jesus as fact, based on these Biblical reports from eye-witnesses, but still wrestle with an almost silent, but lingering uncertainty, mingled with hope, because you have not personally touched Him or heard His voice or seen His face. You try to live as though it's true, and you hope, one day, to be proven correct.

And some of us here today, have become fully convinced of this reality, for we *have* experienced His presence (though not physically), or heard His voice (though not audibly), and been touched by Him—accompanied and protected by Him, guided and instructed by Him, comforted and consoled by Him, encouraged and empowered by Him.

Sometimes, while reading the Scriptures with a thoughtful, listening ear.

Sometimes, while pouring out our hearts to Him in prayer.

Sometimes, in the midst of exuberant praise and worship.

But most often, while simply going about our day, doing the normal things required of us, and catching our breath as we pause to recognize a providential, serendipitous moment—where things just come together fittingly, often in unexpected, and over-the-top ways.

The truth is still the truth even if no one believes it, and a lie is still a lie even if everyone believes it.

Whether or not you are convinced that the resurrection of Jesus is true, does not prevent you from experiencing for yourself some of the wonder of its outworking.

And just what are some of the results that we should expect *if* the resurrection of Jesus is true?

If He is alive—and not just alive, but alive after death—it is plausible to conclude that everything else He said about Himself and His purpose and plan is also true and assured. How wonderful!

We might expect that:

When He said, *“Your sins are forgiven,”* that they really have been!

And what would *that* mean? It would mean that your sins—past and future—can no longer separate you from the Father’s love and care, for He has chosen sinners (and who has never sinned?) to be His friends and His children.

Jesus told the story of a great wedding feast, which some of those invited refused to attend, that finally was populated by guests who were described in the Bible as *“both good and bad.”* You will not be disqualified from His table on the basis of your deeds alone. If you will respond to His invitation to *“Come and eat,”* and come with an honest, penitent heart, you will be accepted.

We might expect that:

When He said, *“You must be born again,”* that it’s not an option—we really must.

And “new birth” is something that happens *to us*, not something we produce. It is an act of God—the intended culmination of every previous experience or encounter we’ve had with God’s mercy and grace. He has been leading you toward that very moment of grand awakening, breaking through to newness of life—where you begin to live and grow, with God *present* in your life.

We might expect that:

When He said, *“Your faith has saved you,”* that it really has.

And what does that suggest? That you will never be lost again. That God will keep tabs on you forever. He knows you by name. He knows your thoughts from afar, even before you speak them. He knows when you sit down and when you stand up. He knows when you come in and when you go out. He will always be with you. He will never abandon you. He is yours and you are His. This love is true.

We might expect that:

When He said, "*The one who lives and believes in Me will never die,*" that we really won't.

Life is more than breathing air and pumping blood—more than a physiological function. The spiritual life which is in us did not come from within, but was given to us by our Maker, and can be sustained even after the body has perished.

You know that you could lose a limb and still be alive, still be you. And what if you could lose the whole thing (your whole body and bodily existence) and still be alive, still be you? That's just what He meant!

We might expect that:

When He said, "*Be healed,*" that He really can and does heal us.

Some scoff at this notion because *every* sickness we experience is not miraculously healed, or because not every sickness has been *completely* eradicated.

But if it happens to you—if the healing power of the Lord touches your body—will you reject that one healing because you haven't experienced healing in every case of sickness in the past? Will you reject a partial healing because you didn't receive *complete* healing? Will you reject healing today, on the chance that you may not be healed again tomorrow?

Most, if not all, of us have experienced healing by the very God-given constitution of our bodies—our immune systems and healing functions. Many are healed through what we have learned, by the grace of God, concerning the functions and care of the body, and through medicines that have been developed by that knowledge.

And some have been healed in truly miraculous ways, beyond medical help, beyond natural hope. Because the Risen Christ can give life even to dead tissues and organs. He is "*the same yesterday, today, and forever.*"

We might expect that:

When He said, "*Rise and walk,*" that we really may do something today that we've never done before, or do something again that had been interrupted by a life event. That nothing is any longer impossible to us, if He says "Do it."

The power of Jesus' words is truly remarkable! In fact, His words carry with them the power necessary to perform them. If He says it to you, then you *can* do it. Even if you've never done it before. Even if you've never studied to learn the process (He'll teach you on the fly). Just get up (mentally, first) and take the first step. He'll be with you and help you with each successive step.

We might expect that:

When He said, "*Be merciful, as your Father in Heaven is merciful,*" that we really have been deputized to extend His mercy and compassion to others.

"Freely you have received; freely give." Carrying grudges will only break your back. Being stingy will only cripple your grip. Jesus said, "*This is My command: Love one another, as I have loved you.*" He meant it.

If we build a dam in the middle of that river of grace, we ourselves will experience parched souls. For He also said, "*If you don't forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart, then your Heavenly Father will not forgive you your sins.*"

And when we've been wronged, or injured, or abused, and our minds are filled with grief and vengeance, how shall we find the capacity for such mercy? The Risen Christ will provide it. He will provide for us to give to others the same generous mercy that He has shown us when we stumbled and failed.

Forgiveness and kindness are not the end of the matter (that is in God's hands entirely), but they are the right way for us to get started toward the just and proper end.

We might expect that:

When He said, "*As you go, make disciples from among all people,*" that we really can impact other people's lives, just as our own lives have been impacted by the Resurrected Jesus.

His words were not intended to convey a simple pattern of communication, nor a formula for faith. Discipleship is a lifelong process of learning and growing to trust the Holy Spirit, whom Christ has given to us. It is about developing a right heart, more than right doctrine—a heart that is faithful to Jesus, a heart that receives His love readily, and gives love, loyal love, generously.

This is what turns skeptics into seekers, and seekers into disciples, and disciples into servants, and servants into sons and daughters of God.

Now, it's your turn. It's your turn to reject The Lie and embrace The Truth.

Jesus did die and ransomed us from our bondage to sin. And Jesus did rise on the third day, in the power of an endless life, through the Holy Spirit. And Jesus did ascend back to Heaven to intercede for you—to pray that you would turn to Him; that your sins would be forgiven; that you would be born again to an endless life; that you would be saved and filled; that healing would come to your spirit, mind, and body; that you would rise from your brokenness to walk in spiritual freedom; that you would love others as you yourself have been loved by Christ; and that you would bring others with you into this journey of faith.

Jesus has had His eye on you, and He got here ahead of you today to prepare a meal that would satisfy more than your bodily hunger. He came to bring you to God, and then to send you back into your world with His grace and truth and power working inside of you.

This morning, I'm going to ask you to "rise and walk." I'm going to ask you to get up from your seat and meet me here so that I may pray for you.

In the very moment that I pray for you, the Spirit of Jesus Christ is going to fill you. When I lay my hands on your shoulders, the Holy Spirit is going to move inside you—confirming His Word in you, and lighting a fire within you that will not die, and that shines out for others to see.

This Easter Sunday, you're going to get up and run right out of the grave you've been buried in.