



TIME OF GRACE®

Fake News/Real Jesus: Easter Is Powerful for Me

Study Notes

Summary

After Jesus died, his friends were faced with the horror of his death and the grief around it. But then Jesus gave them a powerful hope—the reminder that he is the Resurrection and the Life. In a world where we all are dying every day (and trying to ignore it), Jesus' own resurrection is proof that he is our Savior and our true source of life!

- **John 20:1-9:** ¹ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” ³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)
- Historical = Real _____ . Real _____ . Real _____ .
- **John 20:10-18:** ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying. ¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³ They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?” “They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”). ¹⁷ Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with

the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

- Emotional = My _____. My _____. My _____.

Points to Ponder

1. Read Luke 1:1-4, 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, and 1 John 1:1-4. Upon what evidence do Luke, Paul, and John all base their beliefs in Jesus?

2. Study Peter's message in Acts 2:14-41. How does he use reason/logic/history to convince his audience that Jesus is the promised Messiah? What emotions do you see throughout this same story?

Homework for Next Week

Read John 1:1-18.

Time of Grace Ministry
Fake News, Real Jesus: Easter is Powerful for Me
John 20:1-18
April 12, 2020

Pastor Mike Novotny

I want to talk to you today about a Jesus who is better than the best thing you can imagine and he is much bigger than any problem you will ever face. I'm talking about a Jesus that if you'd need him would be a billion times better than seeing Jimmy Fallon and Justin Timberlake live.

But actually, that's why I'm a little bit nervous because I said I want to talk to "you all," about that Jesus. And as I look out at you all, I have a hunch that you all are not the same when it comes to Jesus. Some of you, maybe a bunch of you here today, are kind of like me when it comes to Jesus. Like, it's Easter and you woke up jacked up, right? You couldn't sleep because Jesus is alive and he's the best thing in your life. I mean, you'd give up anything; Jesus just gets you excited - the thought of him. But I bet a lot of you aren't quite in that spot just yet. Maybe there's some of you who when it comes to Jesus, you have some pretty honest doubts or questions or confusion. There's some reasons, maybe pretty good reasons in your heart and in your head, why you don't gather in a place like this every week to worship Jesus. Why every day, every moment of your life isn't based on the teachings of Jesus or the grace of Jesus or the life of Jesus. I bet lots of you have a whole list of reasons why you're not quite there.

See, I have a hunch with a group of people this big, there are all kinds of things that get in the way both in the head and the heart, both the logical and the emotional, that stop us from worshipping Jesus with the glory he deserves, which is why I'm pretty excited that you're here today. Because there's one big idea that has two parts that I want to share with you today and if you have a pen in your hand and you're taking notes in your program, here's the big idea just so I don't lose you 10 minutes into this message. I want to tell you that Easter is historical and I want to tell you that Easter is emotional. I want to prove to you from the eyewitness accounts that Easter is actually historical; it's logical, it's reasonable, yes, it is miraculous and supernatural, but it is not unbelievable if you know the true story. And I want to prove to you that Easter's really emotional; it's personal, it's beautiful, it's wonderful, and it's powerful. And to prove that sentence, I'm going to run back to one of the first eyewitness accounts of the resurrection of Jesus, written by Jesus' closest friend, a man named John. Let's see what he says in John 20.

It says, "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved," that's John, "and said, 'They've taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they put him!' So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple who had reached the tomb first, also

went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead)."

Now why do I say those verses prove that Easter is historical? Because history is about stuff that's real and if you're taking notes, I think we see three really powerful real things in this text. Here's the first one: We meet real people in John's account. These aren't fictional characters; it's not a fable or a myth. We meet people like Mary Magdalene. Did you know that Magdalene is not Mary's last name? It's the real place where she was from, Magdala. According to my Google maps, Magdala or Migdal, as the locals now call it, was 6.34 miles from Capernaum, the seaside town where Jesus lived and preached and did his miracles. And according to Dr. Luke, another investigator from the first century, it was there in Capernaum where Mary from Magdala met Jesus and he changed her. See, Luke says that Mary had a pretty dark past; like even demonically harassed and oppressed. And no one could help her so she went to Jesus. And when Jesus fixed her, Mary followed him. Like a little puppy, wherever Jesus was, you would find Mary from Magdala. Read all the gospel accounts and you'd find that she's there as Jesus is preaching, she's there as Jesus is teaching, she's one of the few people who's there at the cross, who's there as his body is put in the tomb. And maybe that explains why she was up so early that morning. She was a real person with a real brain and a real heart and both were broken over the fact that her Jesus was dead. And so while it was still dark, John says she went to the tomb; a real person and a real place.

And if you're still taking notes, we also find in this story that they were real places. Not just Magdala and Capernaum and Bethsaida. I notice in this text that there's one word that's mentioned six times and it's the word the "tomb." Mary went to the tomb and she said they've taken the Lord out of the tomb and so Peter ran into the tomb and John looked into the tomb. We hear about this because I think John wants us to know this isn't like some far away magical inn; this was an actual tomb, an actual grave, a place that had GPS coordinates that you could visit on the weekend.

In fact, you still can. Let me show you a picture of the tomb where Jesus is buried. That is the church of the Holy Sepulcher in the middle of the old city of Jerusalem. And it's the spot where most scholars think that Jesus of Nazareth was buried. Now that church right there was built in the 12th century, in the 1100's, by the Christian crusaders. But it was actually built on top of another smaller church that was built in the year 326 A.D. by the Emperor Constantine, just after Christianity became legal in the Roman Empire. Pretty fascinating, National Geographic just ran a story that they were doing some renovations on the tomb where they think that Jesus was actually buried and, you know, this marble slab from the 12th century was on top but when they got underneath it, they found another marble slab and they carbon dated it and it came back to the 300's A.D.; the exact time that tradition says that Constantine had the church built to honor the resurrection of Jesus.

But, the skeptic says, that's 326 A.D., that's 300 years after Jesus died. Well, why did Constantine pick that spot to build the church? It's because there was another pagan temple there, built by the Emperor Hadrian in 135 A.D., to his gods Jupiter and Venus. He built it on that very spot and Constantine built his church on top of that spot and why did Hadrian pick that spot to build his church? Because that was the place for about 100 years that Christians had been

coming to remember their Savior who died and was raised from the dead. Not some magical land. A real place, a real tomb, with real stones, because Easter's real. We have real people, we have real places, and there's one last thing I want you to catch here: That these are also real events.

The word "tomb" is mentioned six times in the Easter story but there's actually another word that's mentioned more. It's the most prominent word in John's account; mentioned seven times is the word "saw" or "looked." Mary saw that the stone was rolled away and John looked into the tomb and Peter saw that the body was gone and the linens were lying there. Do you know what word never comes up even once in the gospels to describe Easter? "Feel." Because the earliest Christians didn't say, you know, I really feel in my heart that Jesus is with us. I just truly believe deep down that he couldn't have stayed dead; he was too wonderful. No, to the early Christians, what you felt was not a testimony. You know, sometimes in our days, Christians give their testimonies; things that God, I feel, is really saying to me. That wasn't the earliest witness. What they said is what they saw. And so John, when he wrote his letters, he would say, I want to tell you about what we saw, what we heard, what we touched with our physical hands. When Peter wrote a letter that you can find in your Bible, he says we weren't following cleverly invented stories; we were eyewitnesses of these things. And when Dr. Luke, who's so meticulous with his details and his history began his gospel, he said, I've made a careful investigation and I've interviewed the eyewitnesses so you can be certain this is not just my feeling; this is the fact of human history. And you put all of it together - real people, real places, real events - and you have a hint that it's not crazy to believe that Jesus rose from the dead.

And that's why I want to challenge some of you here today. Some of you are here and I'm so glad you are because your girlfriend brought you or dragged you. Because if you didn't show up at church this morning, you were going to have Easter brunch with your family and grandma would give you like the Christian death stare, right? If you're not so sure, if you don't think you're going to come back next Sunday, let me ask you this: If there's real proof and you care about real facts, if you consider yourself a person who's driven by reason and logic and the data of science, would you at least explore it? Because when Mary came with the news, like Jesus is alive, Peter and John thought she was crazy, but they had the courage to explore it. They wanted to see for themselves. And so, I want to challenge you to do the same thing. If you're not a Christian or if Jesus Christ isn't so important that you worship him with people like this in a place like this every week, would you take the next step and at least understand it? Talk to someone like me or a really knowledgeable Christian that you know. Sign up for that group that Pastor Michael was promoting on your communication card. It will cost you six hours but isn't it worth it if Jesus is offering you an eternity with God? Because you might think it's just religious fluff but it's not; it's the facts because Easter is historical.

That's what Alex found out. I'm not sure if you noticed when you were singing today but the guy banging on the drums in the corner is a newer member of our church named Alex. He's an attorney in town, spent his whole life studying the eyewitness testimony and actual facts and not just fiction. And for most of his life, he thought Jesus was fictional. He had passionate Christian friends who would invite him to church all the time. His college roommate is actually a member of our church who was praying for Alex for so many years. But Alex honestly thought it was Christian fluff. Christians talk about hope and peace and forgiveness and that's great but we

make these things up to make ourselves feel good. But Alex had the courage to take a step and to investigate and what he discovered shocked him. That Christianity was not as fluffy as he imagined; it was actually based - the original story - on the same stuff that he cared about in the courtroom; what the eyewitnesses saw and heard and touched, what they could testify to. And eventually, he realized that it would be illogical not to seek Jesus, not to pursue him, in fact, not to believe in him, and he became a Christian. Not because he set his thinking aside but because he deeply embraced it.

For some people, like facts and data and official history, it might be true but it's not interesting but that's why I'm really glad that Easter's not just historical. Here's the second thing I want to share with you - Easter is also very, very emotional. I want you to feel the emotions of Easter as we jump back into John's gospel. Verse 10 says, "Then the disciples went back to where they were staying. Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?' 'They've taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they've put him.' At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her," smiling, I imagine, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you're looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you've carried him away, tell me where you put him and I will get him.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said, 'Do not hold onto me, for I've not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them I'm ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' and she told them that he had said these things to her."

You can feel the emotion, can't you? I notice a word that came up three times in the second verses that John writes for us. If you're taking notes, here's where I think the real emotion of this text comes in; it's the word "my." And I notice that Mary talks about my Lord. She's distraught, she's heartbroken, she says, "They've taken my Lord and I don't know where they put him." She says to the gardener, "Even if you stole him from the grave, just tell me. All I want is my Lord back, which is a crazy thing to say.

Do you know what the word "Lord" means? It's someone who gets the last word. It's someone who has authority in your life. And do you ever gush about the lords in your life like that? Are you like heartbroken for your boss who tells you what to do and makes decisions at your job? No, we kind of put up with authority and lordship but not for Mary. Jesus had healed her and fixed her and forgiven her and so he could tell her anything and she would obey. On Easter morning, she couldn't sleep because my Lord was dead and now he's gone. But then Jesus gets more personal. In her confusion, he says her personal name, Mary. And she cries out with - our second blank - she says, "Rabboni" which means "my teacher." You might have seen like the word "rabbi" in Rabboni, which means teacher. But those little letters in the middle, the o-n, mean it's personal; it's Rabboni, this is my teacher. Jesus, you teach me anything about anything; about life, death, about marriage, about money. You teach me anything and I will believe it and when Jesus says her name, she totally fangirls him. Did you notice that detail? He says, "Hey, don't hold onto me." Which means she must have been so moved emotionally, she like fell at his feet and just held onto him because she never wanted to let him go again. It'd be like, you know,

if my wife met Justin Timberlake at the mall and he's like, "Don't hold onto me." Or if I met Justin Timberlake at the mall. Because Jesus was not like some religious teacher to her with some good advice; he was her Lord, her teacher, and her Savior.

But my favorite "my" actually is the last one in this text. It's not from Mary's lips; it's from Jesus. Remember what he said? "Mary, don't hold onto me because you have to go," here's what he said, "to my brothers and tell them I'm about to go back to God, my God, to their God, to our Father." Now if you're kind of new to the Bible, you might not realize how shocking that is because Jesus is sending Mary back to the brothers, to the guys who had just bailed on him and failed him. To Peter who had said, "I don't even know who Jesus is," because he was afraid of what it would cost him. Like most of them had left Jesus in the garden and were not there as he was tortured and alone and crucified. These were guys who were not great; they had sinned in dramatic ways. But some of the first words that Jesus spoke, do you know what he called them? Not you go tell those "sinners" or those weak spiritual hypocrites. He says, "Mary, you go to my brothers." Because their sin will not be the end of their place in my Father's family.

And today, I want to tell you the good news that Jesus would say the same thing to you. He rose from the dead and died on a cross so that whatever has happened in your past or present, Jesus would still call you my brother, my sister. So you wouldn't have to fear that your Father in heaven has kicked you out of the family, Jesus would actually teach us to pray, "Our Father." Not just "the" Father, but our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name. And please, on this Easter, don't play that mental game in your head that you are the exception of the promise of Jesus' forgiveness. Some of you think with an embarrassed conscious, "But Pastor, you don't know what I've done. I've been in some dark places in my life. When I went through the divorce, when I was in college, in the pit of the depression, things I did during my addiction, like, it was dark; it was not church appropriate." Which sounds a lot like Mary. But the dark, demonic parts of her past would not stop Jesus from bursting into her life, forgiving her, and letting light and life have the last word.

You might say, "But Pastor, you don't get it. I've said some things. Like when I was going through the breakup, I said some really, really ugly things. I said them to people and I said them to God. The things I said to my parents before I walked out of the house. The things I've said to my own children in bouts of frustration and anger. You don't know!" Which sounds a lot like Peter who said some really bad things but Jesus said to Mary, "You go tell Peter, my brother, that I'm alive and I'm not done with him yet."

And you might say, "But Pastor, you don't get it. I'm too competitive, I'm too proud, I'm too controlling, I'm too fearful, I'm too sinful, I'm too whatever," which sounds a lot like John who had to tell the world he was first to the tomb three times; the guy who's fighting for a place by Jesus' side because he could be proud and he could be angry. But do you know what John is called in the Bible? The disciple that Jesus loved because all of his sins stacked up would not be greater than the love of Jesus over his life. Listen, Jesus is a personal Savior. He saves people personally and that personally includes you.

So if I could steal a question from the first Easter morning, "Why are you crying? Why are you worried? Why would you ever be afraid?" Jesus Christ, who loves you, who rose from the dead

to prove his divine power, who is sitting right now on the throne with God the Father and is running the show, why are you crying? Who is it you're looking for? Are you looking for someone to help you with your health? Your cancer? Your sickness? Your anxiety? Jesus can. Jesus is. And Jesus will. If he doesn't answer your prayer and fix it this week, before you know it, you will blink and life will be done and he will fix it forever. Are you hoping to heal from the trauma that you've been through? You battle flashbacks and dark feelings and thoughts. Jesus can help you. He is helping you. And he will help you.

The Bible says that because Jesus was raised from the dead, one day God will raise our bodies and they will be glorious and they will not be broken and they will not be twisted and they will not be scarred. Instead, every thought, every word, every feeling we feel will be perfect and powerful and beautiful. Are you looking for love that's consistent because you've been through the rollercoaster of relationships? People who are infatuated with you and then not; people who stand before God and make a vow and then they don't keep it. Maybe you're looking for Jesus. The one who says there's nothing in all of creation - not life, death, angels, demons, anything in the present, past, or future - that can separate you from his divine love. Are you looking for peace? Are you worried about what's coming this next year? Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Are you looking for hope? Just knowing you have a for sure future that no one can touch, Jesus is our living hope. Are you looking for life? Like something to live for? Jesus one day said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Do you know what you're looking for? Jesus. And he's not some tale and he's not in some tomb; he is alive. Because Easter is historical and I propose to you that's what makes it so beautiful and emotional.

Back in 2016, country singer Tim McGraw posted a video to his social media that went viral. In no time, it had 20 million views. A video that he himself hadn't taken, he just shared from a friend. The video was from a Nashville school teacher named Ben Ellis who was beloved by his students. He was happily married, a father of five kids, and sadly, he was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Ben Ellis' body started to wither away to the point that he couldn't even make it into the classroom anymore. So on September 7th, 2016, the school planned a surprise; a field trip to Mr. Ellis' house. They loaded up all the school buses with 400 students, they drove them to his yard, they unloaded, and 400 kids stood in his lawn and they sang songs about Jesus. Someone recorded as this balding, gaunt man with an oxygen tube in his nose and a faithful wife at his side opened his window and he joined his frail voice with the 400 outside. And they sang this song, "Your glory, God, is what our hearts long for." And then nine days later, Ben Ellis' heart got what it longed for. He took his last breath and he saw the Jesus who was very real.

Before he died though, one of his colleagues went to his bedroom and said, "Mr. Ellis, is there anything you want to tell these students outside?" This was his reply: "Tell them that it's all true." It's all true for you, too. Easter is historical and that's what makes it so emotional.

Let's pray.

Jesus, you're alive right now! We're not closing our eyes and talking and listening; we're talking to the God who listens. I'm so grateful, Jesus, that you didn't give us good advice; you gave us really good news. I'm so grateful that the billion things I wish I could redo in my life, you don't think about those for a single second because I and we are forgiven. Thank you, Jesus, that death doesn't have to scare us. Death has lost its sting because you rose from the grave to conquer death itself. And so, I pray, as Christian people we can grieve with hope. I pray as reasonable people, we can seek you with passion and curiosity. And I pray that we as the followers of Jesus would have more peace and more life and more patience and more self-control than anyone because we know a God who's that good.

I thank you, Lord, for this day and I thank you that the joy of Easter is not contained to one Sunday a year; it's every Sunday. In fact, it's every second. Thank you, Jesus, for being with us in a glorious but invisible way today. We can't wait until the invisible becomes visible. With Mr. Ellis, we see you with our own eyes and we celebrate in ways that make this day look so small. Thank you, Jesus, for being alive. We love you and we can't wait to see you. We pray all this in your name, Amen.