

Sermon by Philip C. Herrmann, April 22, 1973, Easter

Willo Bible Chapel, Willoughby, OH (42:49)

... these are passages from the Gospels, and from the book of Acts, which give us a little different picture than what we've been singing about. The singing was about the glorious triumph, the hallelujah, the victory, all of this that's connected with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. While all of that is true, blessedly true, and I suppose that will be the major emphasis in the sermons and the messages this morning, in all the services that are given throughout the land and the earth, what we have in these three passages will give us a little different picture, and it's necessary to have this in order to have a complete picture. While Heaven rejoiced at the rising again from the dead, of one who suffered such an ignominious death, it was not so here upon earth, and if you'll turn to the 16th chapter of Mark, you'll see what I have in mind, see how different it was. The resurrection was something unknown; it should have been known, but it wasn't. And it was the reception the Lord received from the very ones who should have been the first to receive him, for "he came unto his own" we're told in the first chapter of the gospel of John [John 1:11], "and his own," that is his own nation, the people that he came to save, for he came to save "that which was lost," that's only told us in the end of the gospel of Luke, but in the earlier chapters of Matthew we're told that the Lord came to save his own. He came seeking the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But when they rejected him, when they turned away from him and finally put him upon the cross of Calvary, his message then, his service, his work upon the cross of Calvary was for the world, although he had already preached that in John 3:16.

But if you'll notice in Mark 16, verse 9, the casual way in which the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is mentioned in this gospel. "Now when Jesus was risen, early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven demons" (the word is really demons; there are not seven devils, there is only one devil, but there are millions of demons, unclean spirits) "and she went and told them that had been with him" (I take it that "with him" means the disciples, because they had been travelling with the Lord for three and a half years) "and she went and told them that had been with him as they mourned and wept."

We haven't been mourning and weeping, have we. Our theme has been one of rejoicing. But here, the ones who should have been rejoicing were most concerned at that very moment. They were mourning and weeping. We don't read of them mourning and weeping when the Lord was on the cross; but it evidently dawned on them what a great disaster this was. They'd forgotten all about the prophecy, all the words that the Lord had said about how he was going to rise again, and I'll speak of that a moment later, after we read these three passages. Just keep that in mind: they mourned and wept at their great loss.

Now notice something more astounding. "And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed it not." Just think of the unbelief of the human heart. And that of people who were friendly, who were favorable to the Lord, and they could be troubled with unbelief, they didn't believe Mary Magdalene. Now notice how that continues; unbelief only breeds more unbelief. "And after that he appeared in another form to two of them, as they walked and went into the country." I think this refers to the two disciples that were going to the city of Emmaus, and the Lord caught up to them and spoke to them, asked them why they were troubled. And he revealed himself to them in the

breaking of bread. Remember, while he broke the bread, there were his wounds, and he showed himself through that. That caused them to rise up after he disappeared, and they went back to the twelve.

Now notice what happened, “And they went” (these two) and told it to the residue (that is the to the eleven, eleven apostles, disciples), neither believed they them. Afterward he appeared to the eleven as they sat at meat.” All of this took time; this was the first day of his resurrection, the first day of his rising again. He had risen very early in the morning, but by this time now it was probably in the late afternoon or evening. He appeared to them as they sat at meat and upbraided them. Upbraiding in this passage means scolding, reproving, reproaching, as well he might. He upbraided them with their unbelief, and hardness of heart, because they believed not them who had seen him, after he was risen.

Let’s keep this in mind, and see if we can find a reason for this. What is the reason for this unbelief? There he is in the midst, scolding them, and of course then they believe. And it says in the gospel of Luke that they believed not for joy [Luke 24:41]. Just couldn’t believe it! That he had risen again. So little had they understood of his words to them, that he was going to die, he was going to suffer, even detailed the very kind of suffering, that he was going to be beaten, that he was going to be spit upon, he would be branded, and finally crucified, delivered to the Gentiles, to the chief priests, and the scribes, and the Pharisees. All of this was told them, but they believed it not, they didn’t have any ears for that. I’ll go into that a little later.

The next passage is in the first of Acts. This is written by the historian Dr. Luke, and it’s a wonderful record. In this book we get the record of the Acts of the Apostles, but really it was the Apostles worked upon by the Holy Spirit. You see the Lord had promised that he would send the Holy Spirit, after he was gone, gone back to Heaven. and these works, the marvelous works of conversion and of healing, works of power, all these marvelous things that are told us in the book of Acts, they followed the four gospels. If we just had nothing but the four gospels, it would look almost as if all the works that the Lord had done was wasted, lost.

Now just read the third verse of the first chapter. Speaking of the apostles, now, Luke says, “to whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs,” many infallible proofs, “being seen of them 40 days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” You see the Lord not only rose from the dead, but he gave these disciples, and the up to 500 Christians who were in the world at that time who believed on him, for whom this wonderful suffering and glory had been concentrated, had been worked upon, this was the continuation of that, and was to rivet in their minds the fact that he had risen, was alive, and every word he had said before his cross was going to be carried out, was going to be made good.

And then just one verse, you don’t need to turn to it, in the 26th of Acts, something that happened some 30 or 40 years later. The apostle Paul, now, is speaking before a king. The governor had asked this king who was visiting at the time to listen to this man, and give him some reason why he had said the appeal to Caesar, and he had to give the reason to Caesar for this man’s going there. He knew that it was because of the hatred of the Jewish nation, at what this man Paul was preaching, what he was doing, that he was being persecuted so.

And so Paul was allowed to stand before this king, and the governor, and all the mighty hosts, that glorious company, perhaps hundreds of people, soldiers, and famous persons, all to hear this little man tell his story. And in the midst of this story, which is a marvelous story, and I hope you’ll read it in the

26th chapter of Acts, read it at your leisure. Think of: here is a man, standing for his life. What is the crux of the things that he is speaking about? It's the eighth verse, I think. Yes, "why should it be thought of being incredible with you, that God should raise the dead."

He's first addressing this to Herod Agrippa, the king that was in Judea at that time. And it's remarkable that he should be addressing this man because this man's father was the one who had put to death James, at this very time, just before Easter, and was intending after Easter to do the same to Peter. In the twelfth of Acts you will read how Peter escaped, how the mighty power of God brought him out of that prison, added years to his life so he could go forth preaching the gospel.

And every one of these apostles went to different parts of the world, of the then-known world, the Mediterranean and East China, to India, and the countries surrounding them, and they were preaching, and the force of their preaching was that the person who had died upon the cross, the one that was known as Jesus Christ, Jesus the Christ, Jesus the Messiah, had been raised from the dead. He had been killed, he'd been crucified, and been buried, showing that he was really dead, but the third day he had risen again.

And this was what divided every company that heard that message: they either believed it, or they disbelieved it. I'm sorry to say that the majority disbelieved it. But it's the thought that was in the Apostle's heart, and given him by the spirit of God to say, "Why should it be thought a thing impossible, that God should raise the dead." God is the one who gives life, everything that's in our world, the mountains, the stars, everything of creation comes from him and not only has been created by him but is maintained by him. It stands by his word; the Lord is the active agent in that. "who upholds all things by the word of his power."

The Lord didn't seem to manifest that power very greatly when he was here upon earth. He saved a few sick people, according to the records that we have of the 35 healings in the four gospels, but what was that compared to the power of God that he has to maintain this universe. Think of the stars alone, myriads of them. Men now speak of billions of galaxies, not just billions of stars. And each galaxy has billions, so it's billions times billions. The power of God is inexhaustible, but I believe it needed all that power to raise Christ from the dead because it was Satan's interest, he was the one that brought Christ to the cross. Satan was the one that inspired men to do this dastardly deed, and God is holding man accountable for it. Everyone that has ever been upon the earth will stand before God in the judgment day, and have to answer to him for that crime.

But God has made it so easy for each one of us. And thank God for every one that has availed himself of this. That just by the simple fact of believing; it doesn't say how much faith, or how little faith, it's just faith. You believe that Jesus Christ was upon that cross, and that he was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures; that moment you have eternal life.

Of course God expects a new life given you to be lived out. And if there is no change in your life from your old ways, if you've never repented of your sin, then it's very doubtful that that faith has any effect. Faith, as the Apostle James says, is proved by its works. It's not works that save us, faith saves us, but we need the real kind of faith that lays hold on God and lives for Christ, makes him our object, and the one we seek to please.

Well I said before, that in the gospel of Mark we have a different picture, haven't we, from what we usually expect. Thank God for the 40 days that the Lord visited with his people. We don't know

how many times he did; if the fifteenth of I Corinthians is all that he showed himself, then he couldn't have told them too much about the kingdom of God. And that is the real reason why they understood not his sayings about his death. At least five times in the gospel we are told that from that time on, he began to tell the disciples, these twelve, and Judas was among them so he heard this too, that he was going to go to Jerusalem, was going to suffer many things of the chief priests and scribes, and all those that had been his opponents in the three and a half years, he was going to go to Jerusalem and there suffer death. It says first that he would be killed, that he would be delivered to the Gentiles, finally he says that he would be crucified.

But in each case, each case of the five, he tells them that he would rise the third day; the third day he would rise again. Now you would think that five times, if you're told once you're expected to remember it, but five times, on five different occasions he told them that, and perhaps it's not revealed how many more times he must have told them that. In fact the three of them heard Moses and Elias speaking about the Lord's death which he should accomplish at Jerusalem But even that didn't make much impression upon them.

You know the first time the Lord told them about his coming death and resurrection Peter said "be it far from thee Lord. This shall not happen to thee" [Matthew 16:22]. Peter rejected the thought out of hand, and the Lord had to rebuke him. But it wasn't very long, the next chapter, the 17th chapter the Lord again tells him about his going to Jerusalem and suffering. And it says "they were exceedingly sorry." Yes, they might well be.

Why were they exceedingly sorry? You know I think the same thing happened to them that happened to all the godly remnants of the previous generation, way back to Abraham. They were expecting a kingdom to come in power. The Lord was to come back and rid them of their enemies, He was to slay them, dispose of them, bring in righteousness, and they would be with him as part of that glorious scene. That was what they were looking for. They entirely overlooked the other passages in the Old Testament which told of the Lord's suffering. The 22nd Psalm would have told them that this person that they loved would be rejected by the nation, and he would suffer an ignominious death. It isn't mentioned that he would be crucified, but it's demonstrated by the very statements: "they pierced my hands and my feet." That was crucifixion, and yet that was prophesied before there was anything known about Romans, and crucifixion.

It's a wonderful thing that the psalm does not end that way. It doesn't end with the rejection of and the crucifixion of the Lord. but it speaks of the Lord rising up and meeting his people in song. "I will declare thy name in the great congregation, in the midst of the congregation will I sing praise to thee. And then think of the 53rd of Isaiah, right in the middle of the Old Testament, That's the picture of God's servant, holy servant, the one who did his will, came here to suffer for man's sake, who was to experience "the Lord hath laid the iniquity of us all upon him."

And then how wonderfully that chapter ends. The Lord is given the highest place in Heaven, he has victory over all his enemies, and so on. The sufferings of the Savior, the sufferings of the coming Messiah were something they had either misunderstood or overlooked, forgotten, put out of their minds.

Some of the other things that give us an idea how things were held back from them: it said that "they understood not these things." And they were afraid to ask him. Just think of it, the very person who said "I am meek and lowly in heart," made such wonderful statements, such wonderful invitations,

such wonderful promises, they were afraid to ask him. And isn't it just like us. When we don't wish to exhibit our ignorance, we just keep quiet. We don't want to appear stupid, or less brilliant than we are, than we think we are. And so they didn't ask him, they were afraid to ask him.

But it was the thought of the kingdom, and you'll remember that in the verse in Acts that I spoke about, that I read first, where the Lord gave many infallible proofs, divine proofs, that he was alive, and that everything he had said would be made good, the very last question they asked him before he was ready to go back, before he was ready to take that ascent into Heaven, "Lord at this time, wilt thou restore the kingdom to Israel" [Acts 1:6]? You see how earthbound their thoughts were. They hadn't understood at all that the kingdom of God that the Lord was speaking about in the gospels, and that no doubt he was speaking to them about in those forty days, was a spiritual kingdom. He had said as much to Pilate; I don't know whether or not they heard that, but it was a revealing statement, wasn't it, "now is my kingdom not here," not from hence, not here. My kingdom is a spiritual kingdom [John 18:36].

They were looking for the Lord to come in great power and glory. They had seen a little bit of his power. They had seen these wonderful works that he performed in their cities, in Bethsaida, in Chorazin, and other places. They knew he could do it; that's what they were looking for. And the idea of his dying, or rising again, whatever that meant to them, that was just out of the question.

It's a little different isn't it, from the usual resurrection sermon. I thought it would be a little salutary lesson for us. that in the hymns we sing, the prayers we make, we speak about the glory of the Messiah, and the glory of Christ, now upon the throne of God, but we little think how dull our minds are, how little we've apprehended of that glory. We're going to be with it for eternity, but it's a good thing to get cut down to size, so-to-speak, and realize that we need the help of the spirit of God to rise up to God's thoughts.

Well, all of this was changed after the Lord went back to Heaven. they waited for ten days, perhaps in fear, they were in an upper room, they weren't on the streets. They weren't preaching the gospel then, but they were at least obeying what the Lord had told them, "Wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Spirit of God." And on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after the Lord was crucified, that wonderful event happened, the Spirit of God came down and then was power. This was a new kind of power; the world had never seen this before. They preached the gospel, and then Peter who had been the one who had denied the Lord, although Judas betrayed him, was willing to see the Lord die for 30 pieces of silver, yet Peter denied the Lord three times as the Lord had prophesied, but he was marvelously restored. The Lord appeared to him personally, and yet in front of all the disciples the Lord asked him the three questions, remember in the last chapter of John, "Peter do you love me," and "do you love me more than these" [John 21:15].

So Peter was reminded of his sin, of his failure, but he was gloriously restored. And he was the one chosen, to give the gospel in its power, on that day of Pentecost, and 3000 souls believed. Probably never been a day like that, but they were all convicted. Fifty days before they knew that a person had gone to the cross, had been ignominiously crucified, crucified in shame, and pain, and also death. And they were there, Peter was there on that first day, to proclaim that the very person they had refused, they'd rejected, wouldn't have this king reign over them, was now at the right hand of God. He had been raised from the dead by the power of God and was now coming back. Didn't say when, but that was the word that convicted their souls.

And 3000 of them believed and the wonder of wonders was that they gave up everything. A book by Thomas Moore I believe it was on Utopia, gives a similar idea of persons living communally, sharing everything alike. Well that was what happened when these 3000, and they were constantly added to, the beginning of the book of Acts tells that there were always more added. As each one was converted, he got his fellow relatives or family to join him, to come into this wonderful fellowship. They had all things common.

But that was not to last, that wasn't God's mind. God's mind was not for them to stay in one place. You remember the last words he said were to preach the gospel beginning at Jerusalem, where Christ was crucified, where the greatest deed in history was perpetrated, the greatest crime. Going on to Judea, Samaria, and then to the uttermost parts of the earth. But communal living wouldn't allow that, so that fell through. Through murmuring and disagreement it fell through.

But the gospel continued to be preached. And this was the great message of the preaching. We heard this morning that it's the preaching of the cross, preaching that men can be saved by believing on the person who hung upon the cross, but Paul doesn't include the resurrection there. But it's understood, because the 15th chapter makes it perfectly plain that had their been no resurrection, then no one else would be raised. The Lord had showed by his power over the grave, at Lazarus's grave, that he could just by a word bring a dead man to life, and bring him out again, even after he had begun to disintegrate.

And the Lord had brought back from the dead the daughter of Jairus, the ruler, a prominent person. And then he had restored the son to the widow of Nain. Those are the three known cases of the Lord's resurrecting power. And he had so many times himself indicated that he would die and rise again. We have his own words, "therefore doth my father love me because I lay down my life" [John 10:17]. He was the shepherd who was to lay down his life for the sheep, "that I might take it again" he says regarding his life. And that new life that he now has is a new creation. He was the one that brought forth our present creation, what we see all around us, the hills, the valleys, the mountains, the stars, the sun, the moon, all of these things that he has created, that belongs to the first creation. And that will be destroyed by fire according to II Peter, third chapter. That's another chapter to read. That will give one an idea of the possibilities of atomic power, for the Lord controls that too.

But the Lord's wonderful life would have been of no avail if he had not risen from the dead. "Now is Christ risen," says the apostle, "the firstfruits of them that sleep" [1Corinthians 15:20]. You see his resurrection was not the first in time, but it's the first in order, the first in rank, because he didn't go back into death. He died and rose again, and as he said to John the apostle, one of the twelve from the glory, "I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore" [Revelation 1:18].

And so, all the things that our Lord said, what becomes of the chief verse in the New Testament, the one that everybody seems to know, or to have heard of, John 3:16 "God so loved the world" the greatest person, "that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." Would you and I have everlasting life, or anyone else have everlasting life that appropriated that message to themselves if Christ were still in the grave? No.

And then think of the Lord's words that prove his deity, or at least claim his deity. In the fifth of John, where he says the dead shall hear the voice of the son of God and shall come forth. Those that have done good to the resurrection of life, those that have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. A thousand years between those two, because those who have done good will have been the ones who have

believed on Christ, who have received him as their savior, who have lived for him, who are really truly Christians, the really genuine Christians, not the so-called, just the nominal Christians, those that have been going to the churches, and it's just a matter of duty, just a matter of respectability, but haven't lived lives that comport with the truth of God.

And so, how many other things there are. The Lord said "if I be lifted up, will draw all men to me" and he hasn't drawn all men to him yet, has he. That still remains to be done. I believe that refers to the day of judgment, when all men will appear before God to receive the just rewards of their deeds. If they've not believed on Christ, if they've not availed of that death upon Calvary's cross for their sin, they'll go into banishment forever, under the judgment of God.

"And this is the will of him," in the sixth of John, the Lord says, "this is the will of him that sent me, that everyone that believeth on me, that seeth the son, and believeth on him, will have everlasting life and I will raise him up at the last day" [John 6:40]. Whichever that one is, for the believer or the unbeliever.

I'd just like to close with the statement that the Lord's resurrection is the guarantee of our justification. We need not only to have our sins forgiven, the slate cleared about the question of sin, but we need the right standing before God. We need Christ's righteousness applied to us. That's what he says in the fourth of Romans, the last verse, "who was delivered for our offenses," that's Christ's death upon the cross, "raised again for our justification." And the very next verse tells what that justification is, how it's acquired, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

And that Christ's resurrection is also a guarantee, that all men will appear before the one who hung upon Calvary's cross. You may think that it happened 1900 years ago, but that doesn't affect you too much: that's past history. It's past history but it's going to be applied to you. If you're not a believer, if you can sit in your seat and reject the one who died for you upon the cross, who died for your sins, because of those sins, and wants to claim you for his own child, if you can reject him, then you will be the one whom the apostle referred to when he spoke before the greatest audience. He spoke before a king, but I believe these men of Athens that he spoke to, it's recorded in the 17th chapter of Acts, that was the greatest audience, the greatest audience of philosophers, of doers of everything that was great in those days. Greece was the seat of learning for almost everything, and here the apostle closes his message with this statement, that "God has appointed a day in which he is going to judge the whole world in righteousness" [Acts 17:31], going to judge it in justice, divine justice, not man's justice but God's justice, and he's given assurance of that in having raised his son from among the dead.

That's God's guarantee. And ??? believe the apostle spoke that by divine inspiration, and it's been written by divine inspiration, by the historian Luke. You know what their response was? We'll hear thee again about this. Some of them mocked, but some were a little more respectful. They saw this man was sincere, was earnest, was anxious to capture their souls. He was a fisher of men, even if he was just a tentmaker by trade. But he had a message, a divine message that would save every last man who heard it, but these were men who were there for nothing but one purpose, and that was to do or to hear some new thing.

They heard the new thing, but most of them rejected it. At that place he had less success; he had less disciples, less believers than at any other place. And so I'll leave you with this wonderful message: that the person who rose again that third day, having been buried, to give the proof of his death, because

if he hadn't been buried, men would say, well maybe he didn't die. They still have the swoon theory, you know, and other things that are too foolish to mention. And even before the Lord was probably buried and in his tomb, in that cut-out tomb, the new tomb, where never man was laid, even there they had concocted a theory that his disciples are going to outsmart us, they are going to steal his body and claim that he has risen from the dead. So let's seal up that tomb and make sure that he doesn't get away. And you remember how they arranged with the soldiers to tell a lie, to say that his disciples stole him away while the soldiers slept, as if anybody would know what had happened while soldiers were sleeping.

And so there are many infallible proofs; we're not given them, but the proof I believe, the proof of all proofs, that all of this is true, divinely true, and that which will either save or damn your soul, is that these people, these witnesses, these up to 500, preaching all around that the person who had died was risen again, is now at the right hand of God, it was their lives, in conformity with their message. And you know they didn't fare any better than the Lord did. He died for what he preached; he died for what he believed. He suffered greatly. He suffered more than anyone, but his disciples, just as he had prophesied, they suffered the same fate.

A great many of them died in the persecutions of the first, second and third centuries. We don't know anything of that now. Persecution is a thing hardly known. We shudder when we hear of two missionaries in Vietnam or Laos having been captured, and tied to the stake, and then burned alive. Such treatment isn't common in this century. Satan isn't using those tactics now. He is letting us develop this spirit of indifference, of carelessness, and it's not good. But there's a day coming when the very ones who are the successors, who are the descendants of those who put Christ to the cross 1900 years ago and they will suffer for their fate.

Three and a half years, such unparalleled sufferings will take place, and it says unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved. Everyone would die. But they will be raised again; that will be the second part of the first resurrection. But we haven't time for that, and I've overstayed my limit, and so I beg your pardon. I give you thanks for your kind attention. May we pray.

Blessed God our father, we thank thee for such a story to tell. May it have been impressed upon each of our hearts, what a glorious savior we have. How he has glorified thee, just as he said before the cross, "I have glorified thee on the earth. I have finished the work thou gavest me to do." We thank thee that he is now at the right hand of God, ever living to make intercession for his people. Ever living to bring us to that blest place that he promised when he said "I will come again and receive you unto myself. In my father's house there are many mansions." Accept our thanks for the truth of all these things, and we commit the dear children downstairs that they may have heard the word of God too, that it may have been blessed to their souls. Accept our thanks for this day, this day of days, when our Lord not only rose from the dead, but when he ascended to the right hand of power on high. In his precious name we thank thee. Amen. The meeting is over.