

JUST AS HE SAID

How many of you in here this morning have ever made a promise to someone? [raise hands]

Has anyone here ever broken a promise? [raise hands]

Sometimes it's because we've got wicked, sinful hearts...often it's because we're just not strong enough or smart enough to foresee obstacles.

Lydia had been sick a few days and I was sleeping down in the basement to try and keep myself from catching whatever plague it was that was ailing her. But seeing her struggling to sleep while caring for 2 sick kids and being sick herself, I finally told her - hey, I'll at least take the baby monitor and be the one to get up with Deacon should he wake up for any reason.

One problem, I forgot to turn the sound up on the monitor.
AND my phone was only on vibrate.

I slept soundly through the night and woke up at 6AM to several texts from my wife saying - "Deacon is up, please come help."

My inability to keep my promise to my wife wasn't because I was being wicked and selfish - although she may very well have felt that way in what I can only assume were exhausted internal curses against me that night. I just didn't think everything through.

Let's do this. Kids, how many of you would say right now, "I'm stronger and smarter than my mom"? Raise your hand, but be careful. I'm just saying be careful.

In the end, the reason Mom and Dad are probably better at keeping their promises right now is they are stronger than you and they are smarter than you, although one day you will more than likely be as strong and as smart as them.

You already saw Mom and Dad and the other men and women in this room raise their hand and say, "I've broken my promises."

There is a limit on our strength, and there is a limit on how smart we are.

But this is not true about Jesus. Jesus, being in the very same nature as God the Father, has both all knowledge and all power. That is why when God makes his promises, God is able to keep his promises, because he knows everything. He is stronger than everything that is.

So when Jesus makes promises, we can know they aren't just empty words.
Jesus means the things that He says!

Now we just finished a series last week looking through the Gospel of Matthew at 5 teachings that Jesus gives throughout His time in ministry - with promises tied to each:

1. Sermon on the Mount - He taught of a deeper, more genuine kind of faith life possible if we build our life on the foundation of God's grace and guidance.
2. Instructions for Outreach - He equipped the disciples to go out and do the things that he did, preaching the nearness of the Kingdom of Heaven; and He promised that even when it got hard, He would be with them.
3. Ears to Hear - As the religious leaders started ramping up criticism of Jesus, He began teaching parables about the generosity of God giving this valuable message of the Kingdom to all, and yet acknowledging that only few will receive it. There was a promise that those who receive it would be transformed, but those who reject it will remain lost.
4. On Being Great - Later as the disciples argued over who was the greatest, Jesus taught them that greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven is measured by humility and love for others. The promise here is that when we surrender we find life to the full.
5. Concerning the End - Finally, as the disciples are impressed by the architecture of the Temple, Jesus predicts and laments to them that it won't last long and that things will get much worse in the world on account of sin before it gets better. But in the midst of a bleak picture, Jesus promises that those who wait, endure, and maintain a spirit of love for God and for others - they will experience the fullness of the Kingdom.

He taught all this, and his closest friends and followers were inspired.

They didn't seem to really grasp what he meant about the teachings about suffering and all this talk about being handed over to die and then being raised to life again. I imagine they must've thought it was some parable kind of teaching that they just hadn't figured out yet.

But then he WAS crucified. He died. People don't come back from that kind of thing, not even people that walk on water.

Jesus had made a lot of promises about a Kingdom that would not fail...but it seemed an awful lot like His had.

That's where we pick up in our scripture reading for this morning. Turn with me to...

READING

28:¹ After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, *just as he said*. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Pray with me this morning.

I. JESUS MEANS WHAT HE SAYS (5).

Studies in Behavioral Psychology have shown that only about 18% of folks scores high on a scale that favors assertiveness and directness. The remaining 82% of people tend to shy away from conflict and prefer to either not address things and just tolerate uncomfortable situations.

And y'know, that can be fine - it's sometimes even a good and necessary skill set to have when you need to show grace in a situation that is just really not a big enough deal to worry about.

But SOMETIMES this tendency can keep us from really understanding something or taking hold of the most that life has to offer.

For instance - my mom raised 3 boys, me and my 2 brothers and did the best she could but there were some things she just didn't know how to do. One of the most common issues we ran into around the house were broken bed slats - whether it was from jumping around on our beds or me doing flying pile driver on my brother, we tended to break bed slats a lot. And then they'd just be broken.

Well fast-forward to when Lydia and I are getting married, we bought our first bed for our apartment, and my mom and step-dad are helping us get some stuff moved in and we realize - oh, hey, we need some bed slats.

My step-dad is just like, “Yeah, alright, I'll just go to home depot and get them to cut some boards to size and be back in a bit.”

My mom just stares at him like, “Wait a minute... that's a thing? It's been that easy all these years and we've just been laying around on beds macgyvered together with broken bedslats?”

All we ever really need to do was ask someone, but for whatever reason we all had it in our heads that this was just the way our life was. We just didn't really think about it. We were content enough.

Now, that's a small thing, but it was significant in my life.

Think about how much MORE significant it is to know that Jesus was risen! That Jesus meant what He said all those times that he predicted his death and resurrection.

All of the disciples walked away from the crucifixion that last Friday assuming that this was just the way life was now - the miraculous teacher they'd put all their hopes in turned out to be helpless in the face of the chief priests and the power of the Roman Empire.

Even the women disciples who show up here only see to be here to pay their respects. We actually know from the other Gospel accounts that they had come with spices and materials to finish the anointing and burial process for Jesus that they'd been able to finish that Friday night because of the Sabbath.

None of the disciples ever really expected a risen Jesus, because they had no categories for what that would even look like in their heads.

Risen in some spiritual sense, maybe, or exalted and risen with everyone else in the last days - but surely not a literal, physical resurrection of a single body in the here and now.

Explanation - I love the sass the angel gives the ladies here, "Who are you looking for? Jesus isn't here; He's risen - JUST LIKE HE SAID - quite a few times actually.

Three separate times, Matthew records Jesus saying that he'll be delivered over into the chief priests hands, and he'll be killed, but 3 days later he'll rise again (Mt 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). But from the way Matthew talks about it, we're led to believe Jesus said it more frequently than just the 3 times.

"Hey guys, pretty soon they're going to kill me, and I'll be dead for 3 days, but don't worry, then I'm coming back to life."

Then again a bit later: "Just a reminder everybody: totes gonna die; like I said, I'll be gone for like 3 days, but then I'll be back."

For their part, the disciples have a hard enough time grasping that Jesus is going let himself be killed, much less that he would raise from the dead 3 days later.

But it's EXACTLY the way it all goes down.

There's a very important lesson that we learn from all this: JESUS MEANS WHAT HE SAYS.

There may be times when we're confused by what He says, but He still means it, and it's important that we seek to understand it. For many of us it can be tempting to just let it be, because we don't want to appear doubtful or questioning.

Before Lydia and I began dating, I'd been in one other pretty serious relationship that I really thought was heading toward marriage - but for one reason or another, to be honest to this day I still don't know, my girlfriend at the time broke things off and I was completely crushed.

I had felt like God had told me somewhere deep in my spirit that I'd be a husband and a father someday, but I was so wounded by that break-up that it was difficult for me to really trust another woman with my heart for years after that.

I started wondering if maybe Jesus had something different for me. Maybe there was some different, more spiritualized way He'd planned on fulfilling that call in my life - like doing mission work in some orphanage in a foreign country.

And y'know, yeah, that could've been a really meaningful way to spend my life. But it turns out, Jesus meant what He said when He told me the plan He had for me.

He wasn't content for me to serve others while my own heart remained broken. He had more.

What is He saying to you today that you just don't see how He's going to accomplish?

ASK HIM.

Jesus means what He says, and He means to keep His promises - just like He promised He'd conquer the grave - just like He promised to restore my heart.

But it will be difficult for us to live according to His teaching and promises if we don't even understand them.

ASK HIM. So that you don't have to have an angel give you sass just to get the point through.

II. THE DEVIL MEANS TO DISCREDIT THE TRUTH (27:62-66).

Another funny thing here is that while the disciples don't seem to have remembered or understood any of Jesus' teachings about what was going to happen, the chief priests sure appear to have been listening.

In the passage right before this (27:62-66). They remember that he said he'd rise again, so they do everything they can to make sure the disciples don't get up to anything tricky. It says they go to Pilate and tell him THEY remember Jesus saying something about rising again on the 3rd day, so they should secure the tomb with a stone and armed guards so no one steals the body and falsely claims he's risen.

Pilate gives permission and that's exactly what they do - and we saw how that worked out.

THEN, when the tomb is found empty and they have no good explanation for it (the armed guards were bested - by 2 women? - the huge stone was rolled away, and there was no body to be found), they came up with an alibi and paid the soldiers off.

This reminds me of the time I was sharing my testimony with a guy I'd met, and as we were talking it felt particularly appropriate to share with him about all the work Christ had done in my life helping me to get closer with my dad and restore that relationship that had been strained at times during my childhood.

The guy kept pressing back - well, yeah, but couldn't that stuff have conceivably happened without Jesus in the picture?

I was like, "Well, yeah, maybe - but it didn't. This relationship was repaired in my life because of the way Christ showed me grace and taught me about love. He removed my anger and gave me motivation to keep the doors open with my dad and hope for something greater."

This guy had already decided he was against Christ, so he was looking for any possible explanation other than the obvious to explain away my good news.

Same thing with the chief priests. They'd already decided Jesus must be a fraud - so now they're looking for every possible excuse to dismiss this. They even go through the effort of fabricating evidence and paying off the guards who were eye-witnesses so that they can discredit what happened.

WHILE JESUS MEANS WHAT HE SAYS, THE DEVIL MEANS TO DISCREDIT THE TRUTH.

There will always be reasons to doubt.

And there will never be a shortage of people who want to keep you trapped in disbelief to maintain the status quo.

The question is, what will you do when confronted by the empty tomb?

III. THE EMPTY TOMB MEANS EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED (9).

It's one thing to say you believe that Jesus died for our sins and rose again.

It's another thing to realize this means Jesus really is LORD and that means a change for our lives.

Explanation - It is a historically attested fact that a man named Jesus lived and taught and was crucified by Roman authorities. And it is also true that no body can be found linked to that man.

That may not be enough for some to accept this as Gospel - but it was enough for the early church.

They believed it so much that they died for that belief - because for them there was no other explanation.

Not only was there an empty tomb where there used to be a body; they literally had encounters with the risen Jesus. They spoke with Him and touched Him. They ate meals with Him. He wasn't just an apparition or a figment of one of their imaginations. He appeared to whole groups of people.

HERE'S THE THING: If one of them had simply stolen the body, that surely wouldn't have been a story they were all willing to be persecuted and put to death for. And it would be far more likely that they'd come up with a better story.

When the Gospel writers tell the account of the resurrection, all the leading men of the early Church are MIA at the beginning. It's the women - who had little credibility as witnesses at that point in time - who were the first witnesses to the empty tomb and the risen Lord.

- The embarrassing honesty with which the Gospels speak about the disciple's struggles attest to its authenticity.
- They're writing because it happened and they think it's important for the world to know.

THE EMPTY TOMB MEANS EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED.

Jesus really did rise from the dead.

And if Jesus rose from the grave, then everything else that he said was true as well - more true than they had even realized.

It meant that Jesus hadn't just been the Anointed kingly figure they'd been waiting for - He was God in flesh - worthy of worship.

It meant that this Kingdom of hope and righteousness really had begun in their midst.

It meant everything Jesus taught about forgiveness, and equipping, and restoring people into wholeness is the real deal - that it's really possible.

It means that He really has conquered sin and death, and He meant it when He said that He's coming back to finish the job and make all things new.

And it means that all have a responsibility to live our lives in response to who He is.

CONCLUSION

Jesus is risen, Just as He said.

So what will you say?

Will you trust in His word?
Or Will you look for excuses?

There's really no in between.

If you're here today and it's your first time hearing any of this and you have questions: Ask them. Please don't let that tugging feeling go by without following up on it.

We don't have Sunday School after service today so I've got time to hang out and chat if you need to.

Maybe you have nagging doubts or something you need to process through - we can talk about that too.

Or maybe you're here today and you're sensing that there's some deep change that needs to happen in your heart in response to the reality of His resurrection and Lordship.

We can talk about that too. Whatever it is that the LORD is putting on your heart - don't let it pass you by.