

April 17, 2022

Text: Isaiah 65: 17-25; John 20: 1-18

Title: "Eyewitness News"

Country music star Kenny Chesney sang a song that had this refrain, "Everybody wanna go to heaven; Hallelujah, let me hear you shout; Everybody wanna go to heaven; But nobody wanna go now." Deep in our hearts we know it's true. We talk about heaven, but regardless of how wonderful we've heard it described, most of us, are not eager to make the journey right now. And why is that? For some, I think, there are some doubts about it. Some may think the Gospel story's just too good to be true. Or maybe it has to do with a difficulty in accepting by faith what we can't yet see.

Back where we used to live there was a freeway that had started to be built back in the 70's and I guess they ran out of money and the road just stopped. If you didn't exit you would drive right into a bunch of trees.

That's how some people view death, a place where the freeway of life goes nowhere. Or perhaps, instead of a bunch of trees, they see a veil of fog and aren't too interested in going on ahead by faith. One of the reasons we come to this place on Easter Sunday is to be reminded that because he lives, we too shall live.

**NOW HOW DO WE KNOW THAT CHRIST IS ALIVE, THAT HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD? HOW DO WE KNOW IT'S REAL? FOR ONE THING, WE HAVE EYEWITNESS REPORTS.** There were people who were there. They saw him. They saw the nail prints in his hands and the mark of the sword in the side

that was pierced. Their eyewitness testimonies are quoted and described in the Bible.

Peter was one of them. We have his testimony in Acts 10. He was preaching in Caesarea to a non-Jewish audience at the home of Cornelius, a Roman army officer. He said, “You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ – he is Lord of all...We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead” (Acts 10: 36, 39-41). Paul writes in I Corinthians 15:6-8 that there was 500 such eyewitness to Christ’s resurrection.

These eyewitnesses were so sure that Jesus rose from the dead that they were willing to **die** rather than recant their testimony. As a result, most of them died some pretty awful deaths. Peter was crucified upside down. Paul was beheaded. Thomas was killed with a spear. James was executed with a sword. Phillip was crucified. It’s hard to dispute the testimony of an eyewitness, particularly one who will die rather than recant his testimony.

**SECONDLY, ALL OF CREATION TESTIFIES TO THE WONDER OF THE RESURRECTION.** I came upon this story from Pastor Billy Strayhorn who visited a woman whose husband had died and whose funeral he’d held about two months before. It was a dark, drizzly day. The pastor wasn’t even sure if Emma was home. The house was dark, and all closed up; all the blinds and curtains were closed.

He rang the doorbell, nothing. He knocked and then heard a quiet voice say, “I’ll be with you in a minute.”

Emma finally came to the door. As they walked down the hall to the living room, he couldn’t help but notice how dark the place was. It was all sealed up like a tomb. They sat down and started talking about the weather when all of a sudden Emma burst out with a question for her pastor. “Is the resurrection real?” she asked. Strayhorn answered, “Yes.” She asked, “Well, how do you know?”

They talked about the passages of scripture that dealt with the resurrection. They talked about those where Jesus foretold his own death and resurrection. They talked about how they had to accept it on faith. Evidently, it wasn’t enough. With a deep sigh Emma said, “I want a sign.” The pastor told her the only sign he knew of was the empty tomb. Emma said, “That’s not enough. I want more than that.”

It came time to go. The pastor felt kind of depressed. He’d come to help and hadn’t done a very good job. Before he left, they prayed and he prayed for a sign for Emma. Something to ease her grief and to help her know the resurrection was for real.

When he opened the door, the first thing Pastor noticed was that it had stopped raining and the sun was starting to peek out of the clouds. About the same time that he heard the door close, he looked up. And he immediately turned around and rang the doorbell.

The door opened and he took Emma’s hand. He pulled her outside and pointed. They both stood there in stunned silence as they looked at one of the most beautiful

rainbows either one of them had ever seen. It was a full horizon to horizon rainbow. The colors were brilliant. Emma started crying. And then she started laughing. She looked at her pastor and said, “He’s alive!!!” She gave him a hug and immediately ran inside and started opening curtains and blinds. All of creation bears eyewitness testimony to the truth of Christ’s resurrection.

But there’s one more eyewitness that we need to take into account. **IT IS THE TESTIMONY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN THE HEARTS OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE.** Paul writes in Romans 8, “The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you” (vs 11 NLT). This is the ultimate witness to the truth that Christ lives. Do you know the hymn called “He Lives” that ends like this, “You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.”

I quote Pastor Rick Calhoun who writes, “The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was never meant to be proved but experienced. As a matter of fact it can’t be proved. None of us were there. We have to take the word of others who were. But ultimately the resurrection is to be experienced not proved. The most convincing evidence of it is the transformation of the people who know Jesus and believe in Him. Can you sense that Christ is alive today? Open your heart to him now. Amen.