

# “LIVING... FOR WHAT?”

LUKE 6: 12-16

APRIL 8, 2012, 11:00 AM SERVICE – DR. JACK GRAHAM

Take God’s Word and turn with us and zone in on what God wants to do in your life this very day. But the claim of all claims, the evidences of all evidences concerns the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not ah... a peripheral issue; it is foundational, it is fundamental, it is essential to the Christian faith. Without the resurrection there is no Christian faith! And we are still in our sins and we have no hope. Now it is a bold and believing claim that we make that Jesus is alive, but it is true.

Former atheist turned Christian apologist Josh McDowell writes in his classic Evidence that Demands a Verdict these words: “After more than 700 hours of studying this subject and thoroughly investigating its foundation, I have come to the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the most wicked, vicious, heartless, hoaxes ever foisted upon the minds of men, or it is the most fantastic fact of history!”

I say, if the resurrection did not happen then nothing else matters! Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die! Life doesn’t matter, eternity doesn’t matter if Jesus is still in the grave! But if Jesus did rise from the dead then nothing else really matters because He is Lord of love and Lord of all.

Now there are reasons to believe in the resurrection. I could mention many of these reasons... evidences that prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Jesus is Lord, that the resurrection is real. One, of course, is the empty tomb. The fact that the resurrection is rooted in fact, not fantasy or fiction. But there is an empty tomb that stands to say, “The Savior lives!”

Now, of course, skeptics have concocted all kinds of ideas regarding ah... hoaxes and ah... and ah... plots among the disciples and others to produce a resurrection story. Ah... swoon theories and stolen body theories, both by the friends of Jesus and stolen body theories regarding the enemies of Jesus. The wrong tomb theory, that the women got misdirected, along with the men, and went to the wrong tomb, and that’s why the tomb ah... was empty. But these are all bogus, of course. These are feeble attempts to explain away the reality of the resurrection. There’s no plausible explain for the empty tomb beyond the fact that Jesus came out of that tomb.

When we go to Israel, we visit the great sites of Israel, from the Sea of Galilee where Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount, walked on the ... ah... water, ah... fed the multitudes, healed the sick. We go to Jerusalem and see the sights, and Bethlehem. But the site of all sites, the moment of all moments is when we go to Calvary, the place called the Skull or Skull Hill, and we see where Jesus died on the cross. And there on the side of the hill you can see even now, the etching of a skull in the side of that mountain, thus... Skull Hill... the place called Calvary. And right next to Skull Hill is the Garden Tomb. Many believe that the Garden Tomb is the very place where the body of Jesus was laid. And you can walk into the tomb today and when you walk out of the empty tomb, you see the words written: “He is not here for He is risen!” [applause] The empty tomb stands as an eternal testimony that Jesus is alive.

I can speak of the appearances of Christ to 500 people at one time, to all of the disciples, and, of course, this was at the time of the resurrection so anyone could have asked if it was real, did you see Him. Peter said[2 Peter 1:16], “*We are eye witnesses of His majesty.*” They all claimed that they saw the Lord Jesus Christ. And the strong testimony of... of these men and women who went to their grave saying, professing, believing that Jesus is alive!

But I believe, perhaps, beyond the empty tomb itself, the most compelling, convincing evidence for the resurrection is the transformed and triumphant lives of the first followers of Christ, namely the disciples. These friends of Jesus... intimates of Jesus who spent hours, days with Him throughout the three years, and though they denied Him and doubted Him and fled in the presence of... of the... of the cross of Christ, they rallied back together and it was all because of the resurrection.

So in the Gospel of Luke chapter 6 we meet the Master's men, and how they were chosen, because these men give us such strong testimonies as to what we believe about Christ and His death and His resurrection. They were with Him; they knew Him and they gave us the story. Verse 12 of chapter 6 says:

*12) In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. 13) And when day came, he called his disciples and chose them twelve... or from them twelve.*

In other words, He gathered many and there were many followers of Christ. We don't know how many. There were thousands of people who were following Jesus at this time. But He chose from these twelve who He named apostles. Disciples or apostles. And then they are named.

*14) Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, 15) and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, 16) and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.*

Now over the next several weeks we're going to be talking about each one of these men individually; a kind of biography as given to us in the Scripture, as to what happened to each one of these men. And if you're looking for purpose in your life and significance, you're going to find incredible inspiration through the compelling, heroic lives of these men, the Master's men, the twelve who were His disciples, who became apostles.

But there are two important facts regarding these followers of Jesus that I'm going to mention today. Two observations... and then I'm going to ask you life's most important question.

Observation number one, Jesus chooses... Jesus calls common, ordinary people. If you were starting a movement to change the world... if you were choosing people to carry on this mission and this message to the world, what kind of group would you gather? Interestingly enough, Jesus did not choose His earliest followers from among ah... the religious and ah... rabbinical schools of His day, the seminaries, the training centers. He did not choose His followers ah... from the elite sophisticates of His time. He did not choose icons from Jerusalem. He did not choose religious professionals to be His earliest followers and intimate friends. But He chose common ordinary people. Four or five of these were fishermen; others were tax collectors. There's a religious zealot... Simon Zealotes, the zealot among these.

But the common bond is that they were a rag-knot team ah... of ne'er-do-wells... many of them, who were just living ordinary lives, common lives, but Jesus called them, prayerfully, for He prayed all night; purposefully... He chose them one by one. There was a reason for each one. And He made them a part of His apostle's band. He gave them a purpose and a passion for living. A disciple is a learner. It literally means to sit at the feet of another. You could be a disciple of anyone in that day. But these were the disciples of Jesus. And something about the compelling call... the commanding call of Jesus... These men just left their old lives behind them—even their jobs and... and they begin to follow Jesus.

Ah... they were not perfect by any means. These apostles did not live in stain-glasses, that you... that you see on the... ah... on the churches of Europe and America. These were... these were rough men... rough-hewn men. These were men who made mistakes. They mis... misspoke; they misstepped often. They were failed! They were

flawed men! But one thing held them together—they were called by Christ! They were converted to Christ, they were commissioned by Christ and they were convinced that Jesus is alive.

Thus, the second observation is that Jesus calls us to a relationship with Him. Jesus calls common ordinary people. You know it’s encouraging to me to know that Jesus doesn’t just call the best and the brightest, but all of us! The Scripture says [1 Corinthians 1:26], “*Not many mighty, not many noble*”, not the greatest of the great, but for the most part just ordinary people like all of us, but something extraordinary has happened to us and that is, because Christ lives we now have a relationship with Him. These disciples walked with Him, they interned with Him, they listened to His every word, they endeavored to walk in obedience to Him and with Him.

When it come down to the end... when Jesus went to the cross... arrested, beaten, went to the cross, the Shepherd, Jesus said, would be stuck and the sheep would scatter. And that’s exactly what happened. These men scattered to the wind. They ran in fear for their lives. They weren’t expecting a resurrection. Though Jesus had told them that He would rise from the dead, they didn’t yet believe it. They were skeptical themselves. But something happened that turned everything upside down, and that something is this: On the third day Jesus came out of the grave. And these same me who were so fearful and cowardly, ran... not away, but ran to Jesus. Because He came out of the grave, He showed Himself to them and they believed to a man! They believed! And they held together with this belief all the way to death, to martyrdom!

Now if the resurrection was a hoax... a conspiracy, the disciples knew it! They may have even conceived it... probably did if it was a hoax. But everything that we know and see about the character of these men is a rebuttal to any idea that they were conspirators. Their sincerity, their morality, their conviction, their compassion, their boldness, their courage. You could hate them, threaten them, beat them, imprison them, kill them, stone them, hang them, put them on crosses, boil them in oil, flay them alive, skin them alive, put them on exile on islands apart from everyone else, but every one of them to a man went into eternity believing and proclaiming as eyewitnesses of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ! [applause]

If only one... if only one had bent under the pressure and bowed to the pressure and said, rather than die, “O... We did it! We... we... we made the whole thing up!”, then Christianity would have died immediately. For you see, men won’t die for a lie! Men may live for a lie and men may die for a lie... a lie if they don’t think it’s a lie. We know many people, of course, who have died for lies that they think is true... religious zealots of all kinds, and others. But people will not die for a lie if they know it is a lie! And again, all it would have taken would be one of these men to recant, to say, “It didn’t happen... never happened!”

But these men stand together strong as witnesses of the resurrection. And this became their message... the message of Jesus; that Christ died on the cross according to the Scriptures, that He was buried and on the third day rose again, according to the Scriptures. This is the good news! This is the Gospel! These men were convinced and that changed everything. It changed their lives; it changed history. All of history is even divided on the person of Jesus Christ.

I’m so thankful that millions of us today and millions through the centuries, though not eye-witnesses, but experience witnesses... witnesses of the Scripture, can also say He’s alive! The transformed lives of millions and millions of people who have responded to Jesus and the resurrection give evidence that He is alive and He rose from the dead.

Thomas was one of those disciples who doubted at first. In fact, he said, “I’ll not believe until I see it first; until I touch Him physically.” And so on the eighth day... the next Sunday following the resurrection Thomas was present when Jesus appeared again to His disciples, and Thomas saw the living Christ, and he was so overwhelmed he... he got down on his face before Him and said [John 20:28], “*My Lord and my God!*” And Jesus

said, “Thomas, that’s a good thing. You’re blessed because you believe. But blessed are those who having... haven’t seen, believe!” He’s talking about you!

You see, the world says, “Show me and I will believe!” But Jesus says, “Believe, and I will show you.” And when you believe... when you put your faith in Christ, coming either with your questions, fears and doubts... When you believe, when you receive and respond to the living Christ in your life, then the reality of this truth... the reality of this... of this truth will transform your life.

So that brings me to the most important question. Two observations: Jesus called common, ordinary people to Himself... people like you and me, people through the centuries. People calls us... Jesus calls us to a relationship with Him... to know Him in the power of the resurrection. And we can know Him personally because of the resurrection, because He lives! His Spirit lives in us! So the question of questions is this: Will you follow Christ... will you follow Christ? Have you answered the call to follow Christ?

Most of us have one of these, right? Cell phone? You carry them everywhere. You feel like if we leave them home, you know, that... that we can’t make it through the day. Some of you have yours out right now, looking at, you know, your email. [laughter] (I hope not.) But this phone has a feature that is really convenient. I have my contact list and when my people call me... my family, friends, staff and others who are in my contact list, guess what happens? Ah... the name shows up on this phone. Says Deb Graham calling- and I always answer when Deb Graham calls! [laughter] I can’t say the same for her, however. I think she screens my calls! Quite often! [laughter]

But it has another feature that is... that is really good and that is if there’s a number that shows up that you can’t identify or know... Like right now I’ve gotten about 97 phone calls from somebody in Shreveport, Louisiana who’s trying to sell me something. And it’s a recorded thing. Somebody, please, tell me how to rid of these calls from Shreveport, Louisiana. I would appreciate it! But all I initially if something’s coming in, I don’t recognize it, all I do is... and this is such a feeling of power. Boop! Now don’t judge me... you do the same thing, right? [laughter] Just boop! And you can knock down that call, you can block that call. Not receive the call.

Jesus is calling. He’s calling your number. He’s calling your name. You can screen the call, you can block the call or you can answer the Lord Jesus Christ, the risen Redeemer and Savior. And you can answer that call today. And here’s how you do it. A-B-C-D. Here’s how you answer the call:

Number one, A- Admit that you’ve sinned and broken God’s commandment. People say, “Well, I’m a good person.” Good people don’t go to heaven; saved people go to heaven! Nobody’s good enough to go to heaven. People say things like, “Well, I’ve always been a Christian.” No, you haven’t... no, you haven’t! That’s impossible. You may have grown up in a Christian family, you may have a Christian heritage, you may go to church, you may believe in God, you may even carry a Bible. That doesn’t make you a Christian! A Christian is someone first who admits that he or she has sinned and, therefore, we cannot save ourselves!

B- Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Not only intellectually... the fact of Christ, but the power of Christ! Believe in the person of Christ, that He died for you and rose again. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ! Believe! So simple that the smallest child or the oldest adult can believe.

And then C- Confess Christ. The Bible says [Romans 10:9], “*If we confess with our mouths the Lord Jesus Christ, and believe in our heart that God has raised Him from the dead, we will be saved.*” [Romans 10:13] “*Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord, will be saved!*” You can know! So many people... you ask them, “Are you saved? Do you know Jesus?” “Well, maybe, I hope so, I think so. I’m counting on it.” You can know by confessing Jesus because whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be... Not hope, think so, maybe so... will be saved!

And then D- Demonstrate your faith in Christ by following Him. If you're saved, you'll follow Christ. And that means that all the days of your life until He comes for you, and the risen Christ is coming again. He's returning and coming soon! And if you live for Him in the power of His Spirit, throughout the days of your life, when you die or when He comes for you at His Second Coming, He will take you into His presence and you'll be saved forever.

Admit that you have sinned, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, confess Him as your Lord and your Savior, and demonstrate that faith by following Him openly and publicly. Jesus said [Matthew 10:32], *“If you're not willing to confess Me before men, I'll not be willing to confess you before the Father in Heaven.”* Jesus said [Matthew 10:21], *“If you follow Me take up your cross and follow after Me.”*

And I want to give you an opportunity to take a stand for Christ today. To hear the call, because you're here not by chance or accident; you're here at the invitation of a friend, maybe you're with a family member. You decided to come to church on this Easter day. Regardless of the reason that you are here, the call of Jesus Christ is clear. “Follow Me!” Will you follow Him?