

April 28, 2019 Resurrection Revisited Luke 24:36-48

Last week, I shared with you a few crumbs from the book “Who Is This Man,” by John Ortberg, the Presbyterian minister of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in California. John Ortberg has pulled together a host of detail on how world history has been changed by the singular person of Jesus Christ and HIM risen from the dead on the 3rd day following His being crucified. What is extraordinary about that is that it is a subject I have never seen treated in a book before. I have seen reference to the affects of the church on history and cultures, some good, some bad because the church suffers from all of the limitations, short fallings and sins of the committed but all too human, people who make up the Church. Ortberg’s focus in on the effects Jesus has had on the world.

Historian O. M. Bakke wrote a book called “When Children Became People.” The subtitle of his study was The Birth Of Childhood In Early Christianity. Bakke noted that in ancient times, children were not named until they were more than 8 days old. The reason was that they might die, or be killed by exposure, especially if they were in any way deformed or considered to be the wrong gender. He concluded, that that custom changed because a group of people remembered that they were followers of a man who said, “Let the little children come to me.”

One of the great insights Ortberg’s book (and in case you are interested here is the full title) Who Is This Man:

The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus. One of the great insights Ortberg shares is that every person's influence, no matter how great they were perceived to be, begins to decline on the day that they died. In the singular case of Jesus the opposite occurred. A hundred years after he died and rose from the dead Jesus influence was greater than it was when HE was crucified. A thousand years later Jesus legacy laid the foundation for Europe. After 2000 years HE has more followers in more places than ever before. I will tell you a story before we are done this morning that will send chills down your spine. That is called a teaser.

It is not a very long walk from here to the cemetery. I get emotional about this little bit of information. Forgive me. You need to visit a cemetery while you are alive with this thought in mind. It is part of the thread of reality that Jesus changed and changes culture at the heart of things that matter. The ancient world did not have cemeteries. The practice of setting grounds aside for the burial of the dead in or on the outskirts of communities arose because Jesus followers did this. Remember the resurrection of Jesus when you go for a walk in the cemetery. That word comes from a Greek word (the international language of commerce in Jesus time was Greek, all the documents in the New Testament were written in Greek and not classical Greek, the Greek of the market place...where life is very real): the word cemetery comes from a Greek word meaning "sleeping place". Remember when you visit a cemetery that Jesus promised you will rise from death.

Examine a tombstone. It usually records the date of birth, the date of death, the length of time of that human life as measured from the lifetime on earth of Jesus. Notice that if a tombstone was unaffordable the grave is often marked by a cross, a reminder of how Jesus died. But HE is risen. HE does change things. He changes lives.

Novelist Mary Karr was a lifelong agnostic, daughter of a mother who married seven times, set Mary's toys on fire and tried to stab her to death. Karr wrote "The Liars Club." She was a committed alcoholic. Jesus was the last person she expected to come into her life. She said, "If you told me a year before that I would wind up whispering my sins in a confessional, or on my knees saying my prayers I would have laughed myself cock-eyed. More likely pass time? These are the words of Mary Karr, "Pole dancer, international spy, drug mule, assassin? Jesus changed Mary Karr's life and destiny.

The historian Jaroslav Pelikan said, "It is not merely in the name of a great teacher, or even the greatest teacher that ever lived, that Justinian built Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, or Johan Sebastian Bach composed the Mass in B Minor. Pelikan went on to say, "There are no cathedrals built in honour of Socrates." In the name of Jesus and to the name of Jesus that has been done over and over.

Among the early Church fathers was Gregory of Nyssa. He preached a famous sermon as part of an effort to raise money to provide care for lepers. Here is what he said:

“Lepers are made in the image of God in the same way you and I have been. Perhaps they preserve that image better than we do, so let us take care care of Christ while there is time. Let us minister to Christ’s needs. Let us give Christ nourishment. Let us clothe HIM. Let us gather Christ in. Let us honour HIM.

That was the beginning of hospitals. The Council of Nyssa (the same Council that affirmed the Nicene Creed) decreed that wherever a cathedral existed there must be a hospital, a place to care for the sick and the poor. That is why even today some hospitals are known by names like, St. Jude’s, The Good Samaritan, The Good Shepherd. The hospitals created by that Council of Nyssa were the world’s first voluntary, charitable institutions.

Another follower of the risen Christ, Henri Dunant, could not stand the sound of wounded soldiers crying out on the battlefield, so this Swiss philanthropist said he would devote the rest of his life to helping them in the name of Jesus. He started an organization in the 1860s. It became known as the Red Cross. Every time you see the Red Cross, Ortberg says, you are seeing the thumbprint of Jesus.

In the early church a slave might wander in and have one of the masters, a rich and powerful man, get down on his knees and take a basin of water and a towel to wash the feet of what the law of the time regarded as a non-person. The Didascalia Apostolorum, an early church order of ministry instructed bishops not to interrupt a service to greet a wealthy

person of high rank, who entered late. But if a poor man or woman entered, the bishop was to do whatever was needed to welcome them in...even if it meant the bishop wound up sitting on the floor.

The apostle Paul said, “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, for all are one in Christ Jesus.” Historian Thomas Cahill says that was the first egalitarian statement in human literature. Jesus Christ is risen, alive, and changes the world still.

A personal story. I was studying at Fuller in California doing my doctorate. I heard this story when it was breaking news. When the Bamboo Curtain fell over China in early 1950s Christian missionary work in China had been going on for over a hundred years. The result was that there 1,000,000 Christians identified in that country. The Communists expelled or killed missionaries and persecuted believers. We held our breath as we were beginning to be allowed to see what had happened in China as westerners were allowed to visit. In short order we discovered there were 50 million believers in Jesus in China. And the Communist government helped the cause, unwittingly by not permitting western missionaries to return.

One final comment from Ortberg’s book. There is an old story that Thomas Aquinas was being shown the glories of the Vatican by Pope Innocent the 1V. The pope said, referring to the story of a lame beggar in the Book of Acts, “The church no longer has to say, ‘silver and gold have I none.’” Thomas

Aquinas replied, “Yes, but no longer is the church able to say, ‘In the name of Jesus, rise up and walk.’” *Who Is This Man: The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus*. He is Lord. He is risen. He is with us.

Let us pray;

Lord we believe in YOU. Help our unbelief. Help us to see how you have changed our world and our culture, creating a more caring and humane world in spite of what the careless and the carefree might say. Open our eyes to your presence and power. Cause our hearts to burn with the fire of your Spirit, eager to help those who need help, eager to be servants of those whom you cause to cross to our paths and bless our lives with opportunity. Amen