

April 21, 2019 The Resurrection...It Is Complicated! John
20:1-9

“I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the 3rd day he rose again, ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.” That is what I believe concerning Jesus Christ.

I also admit the resurrection of Jesus Christ is complicated. What I mean by that is primarily this. We want to trust human logic and our own experience more than what God asks of us...which is that we believe. None of us has seen someone die, properly buried and entombed, and then physically alive again 3 days later. And so full of the pride of life we are tempted to say, and to think, and to let this shape our understanding...resurrection is not logical.

I have told you what I believe. I believe that the historic creeds of the Christian Church rightly represent the teaching of the Scriptures, and the experience shared by the early Church, its leaders and its people. That said, what I am going to share with you in the next few minutes is some material that has come to my hands, stuff gleaned from the first chapter of John Ortberg’s book, “Who Is This Man?” First of all who is John Ortberg and why should we care? He is the minister of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in California. One

of the members of John's church wrote the foreword. Her name is Condeleezza Rice, former United States Secretary of State.

Condeleezza Rice shares in that foreword that she has roots in the Presbyterian tradition. "She begins by writing, as the daughter and granddaughter of Presbyterian ministers I have been a follower of Jesus Christ since birth." I did not know that before I read her foreword. She goes on to say that what John Ortberg produced in "Who Is This Man?" is a testament to the impact of Jesus Christ on human history. Hear this! Not what the impact of the church has been, the impact of Jesus on human history.

I am quoting Ms. Rice. "The apostle Paul's summary statement of the faith was a thunderbolt in the ancient world: 'In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith...There is neither Gentile nor Jew, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' (Galatians 3:28)..." "With the coming of Christ it is now forever clear that every life is worthy before God. It is from this belief we conclude, "all men (and women) are created equal.....John Ortberg has demonstrated that nothing in our human existence has been quite the same since that fateful Sunday (Easter) so long ago....The real power of the book is in its exploration of the paradox of our faith: that acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ is not a pathway to an easy life but a call to do hard things if we are to live in the image of our Lord. "Love my enemies." "Give

my riches to the poor and take up the cross.” “Die so that I might live.”

So....what does John Ortberg bring into clear focus for us? Here is where it starts. “Normally when someone dies, their impact on the world immediately begins to recede....Jesus impact was greater a hundred years after HIS death, than during HIS life. It was greater still after 500 years; after a thousand years HIS legacy laid the foundation for much of Europe; after 2000 years He has more followers in more places than ever.” John Ortberg points out, that on the day when Alexander the Great, Caesar Augustus, Napoleon, Socrates, and Mohammed died their reputations were immense. When Jesus died, his tiny movement by comparison appeared to be at an end. The fact is, Jesus vision of life continues to haunt and challenge humanity. Jesus is history’s most familiar figure.

Here are a couple of crumbs of detail to remember. Great men have often tried to secure immortality by naming cities after themselves. Alexander named Alexandria. Caesar named Caesarea. When Jesus was alive in many ways he was homeless. He stayed with friends and friends of friends and often brought a crowd of friends with him. Ortberg points out he lives in the San Francisco Bay area of California. It has its name because a man named Francis once followed Jesus. The state capital is called Sacramento, because Jesus shared a meal with his disciples. The meal became known as a sacrament.

Which means? You cannot look at maps without being reminded of Jesus.

Powerful regimes of government have tried to establish their importance by dating the calendar around their existence. Roman emperors would date events according to the years of their reign. They marked past history from the founding of Rome itself. The French Revolution tried to enlighten everyone by marking the time as the Reign of Reason. The USSR dated time from the deposing of the Tsar. It formed an organization called The League of the Militant Godless. A magazine in 1929 portrayed on its cover 2 workers dumping Jesus out of a wheelbarrow. The League's leader Yemelian Yaroslavsky grew frustrated at the stubbornness of faith in Jesus. He said, "Christianity is like a nail. The harder you strike it, the deeper it goes." Here is the point: every time you and I look at a calendar we are reminded that the life of Jesus has somehow become the dividing line of history. He arose. He is risen.

The quickest and most basic mental health assessment involves asking three questions. Find out if they know who they are, where they are and what day it is. Ortberg makes this observation. He is John; named after Jesus closest friend. He lives in the Bay area named after Jesus friend named Francis. And he was born 1957 years after Jesus. He asks the question, How could orientation of depend so heavily on one life?

No one really knows what Jesus looked like. There were no cameras and Jesus did not sit for an official portrait. In spite of that Jesus and HIS followers became the most frequent subjects for art in the world. And here is the reality...Jesus image, settled on in Byzantine art somewhere in the neighbourhood of 400 A.D. has become the most recognizable image in human history.

Here are some of the changes that occurred in world history. Children once ruled by Roman Law to be more like plants than human, became recognized as people. It became illegal to kill unwanted babies by exposure in the time of Constantine. Jesus treatment of women has caused the church to consistently be attended by a majority of women. From HIS time to this one. Jesus never wrote a book, yet HIS call to love God with all one's mind gave rise to libraries, and guilds of learning. Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard and Yale are universities that trace their roots to followers of Jesus. Jesus is the man, who will not go away.

H. G. Wells marveled that after 2 millennia: "a historian like myself, who does not even call himself a Christian, finds the picture centering irresistibly around the life and character of this one most significant man." I am not alone when I look at things like the lift project and the piano here and I say, Jesus is alive. He is risen. Hallelujah.

Let us pray;

Lord on this special first day of the week, we celebrate the empty tomb and the witness of the women, and the eventual conviction of those we call the disciples. Continue to call us to the hard things we would rather not think about....lead us to love people we would rather avoid. Grant the conviction to care for the poor, and the muscle to carry the cross. Grant that we might die to building our reputations so that we might live led by YOUR Spirit. In Jesus name, we pray, to YOU the living God. Amen