



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### **“The Pathway to Resurrection”**

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**Luke 23:52 – 24:12**

Easter rocks. But it's freaky. Because even though we get it, we don't really *get* it. It's not about butterflies, or eggs, or crocuses, or how we feel at funerals, though it impacts all of them. Easter is about Jesus rising from the dead. Alive again, alive forevermore. And today, we're celebrating the most important event in history. Some may say "It's Christmas," God being born into the world. But, that's not so big. After all, *I did that*. Chances are, you did too! ☺ No, *Easter* is the best day of the year. The resurrection is an amazing, amazing event. It is the centerpiece, the central tenet of the faith and foundation of all we believe.

Listen, if the main reason you're here is because someone promised you brunch, of course you're skeptical. Rising from the dead is just so stinking hard to believe. So, if you're just checking this out, here's what you have to understand: Christianity, unlike every other religion of the world, is *not* built on the teachings of a person. This may be new news, but the thing that holds Christianity together is not the *teachings* of Jesus. It's the resurrection of Jesus. If you were to pull the resurrection out of Christianity, it would completely deflate. It's *the* big event.

If all we had were the teachings of Jesus, or the claims of Jesus, I don't think we'd have ever heard about them after he died. He went around equating himself with God. He said stuff like "*I have come to judge the world*." (John 9:36). He taught "*Love your enemy*." He said "*Pray for those who persecute you*." What kind of message is *that*? I don't remember to pray for all the people I *love*, let alone those who *persecute* me. Then he said "*Forgive—every single time*." But Jesus, what if it goes on and on? And He said "*Any time someone asks anything of you, just give it to them*." You say, "Yeah, I'm going to follow *that*! I'm supposed to love my enemies, pray for people who persecute me, and give to anyone who asks? (Can I follow you? Sounds like a great life! I won't have anything!)" Jesus' claims were so marginal, so fringe, so strange. (And a number of them were said before by others).

And, unlike every other religious movement, when Jesus died, the guys that were closest to him, his followers didn't have a big meeting and say "Let's spread his message everywhere!" Before Mohammed died, there was a *lot* of momentum. He was a military leader and a political leader. All that momentum was carried by his followers into the next century. When *Jesus* died, there was *NO* momentum. When you read in the accounts, you see the movement was slowing down. People were leaving by the dozens. On the night of his arrest, do you remember what his brave followers did? By their own admission, they ran. They hid. Why'd they record that? Because it was true. When Jesus was arrested, *they* didn't try to keep it going. They didn't even wait for him to die!

*It wasn't his teachings. It wasn't his claims. It was the Resurrection* that took hold of those cowardly guys who hid during his trial. The Resurrection took them right back to the scene of the crime, into that same Jerusalem neighborhood. And *that* was their message. "We saw him die. We saw him buried. And 3 days later, we had a meal with him! He's alive. He's really alive!" That's it. It was the resurrection that catapulted Jesus out of the first century. Not what he taught. Not what he claimed.

If you're skeptical, you need to know this. The last thing you may have heard was from your freshman English class, and you just went on with life after that. The story of the Resurrection did *not* develop over a 100 years of time where folklore and legend made it bigger and bigger. The message of the Resurrection was

the primary point of the message. In the day it happened eyewitnesses were still running around. It would have been *THE* easiest event to discount because all you had to do was produce a body. The authorities all lived right there! But it just didn't happen, *because there was no body!* Something happened, and it changed the course of history.

It leads us to the weirdness of this first account. It's not teaching or doctrine. It's not some guy going up on a mountain coming back with "the truth from God." This is simply an eyewitness account. Look at Luke 23:52:

*Going to Pilate, Joseph of Arimathea asked for Jesus' body. 53 Then he took it down (off the cross), wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. 54 It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. 55 The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. 56 Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.*

*Luke 24:1 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. 5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 7 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'"*

The first Easter morning began with a bunch of women acting as funeral directors (about to go out of business). These terrified women, armed with the spices of the day, to the graveyard to prepare the body of Jesus. He was hurriedly buried in a borrowed grave. They'd have been there sooner, but Luke says they had to wait all day for Sabbath to end. Little did they know the extent of what can happen during Sabbath!

Today, a lot of people wonder "Why don't I experience this power of the resurrection in my daily life?" And I think one reason is because we forget what led up to it: SABBATH. **Unless you experience Sabbath, Easter will be long coming.** Sabbath has to happen first for Easter to happen. When you think about Sabbath, you have to go back to Genesis...this God who made black energy, dolphins, gravity, whales, weathered pine trees, bugs, lizards, and puppies, who blessed the children of the earth. God Himself stopped and rested. Jesus *had* to stay down on the Sabbath. On the Sabbath, you have to answer the question "Who's your daddy?" Making a living, doing stuff, we answer the question "Who's your daddy?"

A little boy in the South grew up hard, the son of an unwed mother. The people all over town, and kids especially would ask him "Who's your daddy?" The cruel question hurt him every time. One time, when he was 12 years old, the church he attended got a new preacher, and after the service, on the way out, the young boy got caught by the new preacher who asked, not knowing, "Son, who's your daddy?" The whole church got deathly quiet. And the new preacher sensed the situation, and said the following to that scared young boy: "Wait a minute! I see who you are. I see the family resemblance now. You're God's child! And with that he patted the boy's shoulder and said "Son, you've got a great inheritance. Go and claim it." And with that, Ben Hooper smiled for the first time in a long time and walked out the door a changed person. And eventually grew up to be the governor of Tennessee.

Do you ever let your daddy take care of you? You need Sabbath, time with God. Time to rest. And you could say Jesus, though dead, was just resting in the palm of his daddy's hand. It was Sabbath. And they had forgotten who His daddy was.

The pathway to the resurrection is through the Sabbath. While they were resting, God had begun the work of re-creating. This was not resuscitation, this was resurrection. We're not resuscitating the old way. We're creating a whole new way, so we can begin a whole new relationship again.

If you don't take your Sabbath, you dwell on Good Friday. Sabbath helps us shift focus from the Good Friday to Easter, and nothing is the same again. If you're living on *that* side of Sabbath, you see folks serving around here, and it looks like the stuff of losers: Their time isn't even their own! They're not living for *themselves*. They're paying all this attention to these other people: Going to Cass in Detroit, helping at Alpha

House, giving to Haiti, working in the nursery here, studying the Bible, and you think what a waste! But, if you live on *this* side of the resurrection, you'd see it's a whole new way of doing life! And *you* become a servant of God, ministering to God's children, making an eternal difference in the world. Sabbath means *I'm* out of the equation. I'm having Daddy time. And for some of you, this idea may be the best Easter present you've ever received.

The Resurrection of Jesus makes this day *the* event that validated all those crazy claims and crazy questions and crazy teaching. So, this week, *risk* following Jesus' teachings. Risk taking Sabbath, no matter how many people don't get it.

Starting this week, be confident. Risk Sabbath. Rest. And don't fill it with so much junk. Instead, trust. Believe. Rest, and be free. Forgive lavishly. Give extravagantly. Love whole-heartedly. Because we know what we know, we can be confident in life, and death. Jesus has overcome both life *and* death. Imagine our world if we lived out of this paradigm shift in such a way that people had no doubt that Jesus is alive and lives in each of us. Have you put your faith and trust and rest in Him?

If you're honest, your real issue with the Sabbath, like mine, is not too many activities. If you're honest, your real issue with Easter, like mine, is *not* too many questions. **Your real issue today is over the authority of Christ in your life.** Let me ask you: Jesus Christ is Lord, but is He *your* Lord, or is He not?

If he is, then He is the resurrected Lord of the Sabbath, and of *all* of life. Jesus is alive forevermore. He has the authority to shape life ...and to shape *you*. You keep the Sabbath. The rest is up to Him. Hallelujah and Amen!

## Study Guide for Luke 22—24 & John 1—2

**Monday: Read Luke 22. The Last Supper. Betrayal!** (1-6). Judas agrees to betray Jesus. Have you ever felt your way of life was threatened by Jesus, the way the authorities did? The Meal (7-38). What does it mean to apply Jesus' words about "service" (27) to your family life? Work or school relationships? Political views? Use of money? What do you think about during communion? The Long Night—In the Garden praying, the arrest, Peter disowning Jesus, Guards mocking, the trials. (39-71). Jesus admits openly that He is the Son of God (70). What do you mean when you pray "Your will be done?" When have you felt like Peter, denying Jesus? What rooster reminds you when you fail? What helps you work through the guilt?

**Tuesday: Read Luke 23. The End. Before Pilate & Herod** (1-25). Neither Pilate nor Herod will condemn Jesus. But the leaders demand crucifixion and Pilate bows to the pressure. Jesus doesn't defend Himself. What injustice makes your blood boil? When have you decided to get involved, or when not to? The Crucifixion (26-43). People mocked and sneered as Jesus hung between 2 thieves. What they didn't understand was only by refusing to save Himself can Jesus truly save others! When did the meaning of Christ's death begin to make sense to you? How do you explain the necessity to a non-Christian friend? What impresses you and moves you most about Jesus here? Luke alone reports that one of the thieves, with awkward faith, rebukes the other thief, and asks Jesus to remember him. Jesus' Death and Burial (44-56). In your life, whose death has affected you most (family, friend, national figure)? Notice that Jesus didn't go pleading for his life. He commits Himself to His Father and dies. Even the Roman centurion is heard in praise (47). Given the elements here, how would you describe what Jesus' death is all about? It's hard not to read ahead. Take time to recommit yourself in praise, confession, and thanksgiving to Christ.

**Wednesday: Read Luke 24. The Resurrection. The Discovery** (1-12). How did the meaning of the resurrection first "dawn" on you? What difference does it make to you? Spiritually, where are you focused these days: on Good Friday? Easter Sunday? Or in between? The Emmaus Road (13-35). The Blindness of the disciples is linked to the fact that the promised king would also be the suffering Savior (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). Where is your "Emmaus Road," the place where Jesus surprised you recently? How could you explain the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the relationship a person can have with Him? Try rehearsing. Other Appearances (24:36-53). The disciples touch Him, see Him in a body of flesh and bones, eat with Him. But most important to Luke, Jesus "opens their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." (45). How does the Old Testament impact your thinking? How would you live differently if

Jesus were just another martyr? In light of where you are in life today, where is the “mission field” Jesus has sent you? How do you respond: Let’s get going!? Or could I possibly do that?! Or He didn’t mean me? Or I’m scared but I’ll trust him? Why? What has been the high point of Luke for you?

*The good news is Luke’s not done. Luke wrote Part 2: The Book of Acts. But those who consolidated the texts inserted the final authentic account of Jesus’ life and ministry:*

### **The Gospel of John**

You will note the Gospel of John is different from the first 3. Matthew was written to a Jewish audience, Mark to a Roman one, Luke to a Greek one, and John, written much later, to a Christian audience. There are no parables, but many signs. John contains the “I am” statements of Jesus, a few long conversations, and an emphasis on a call to faith and the promise of eternal life. Some key theological emphases and pairings in John: the Deity of Jesus, Life/Death, Light/Darkness, Belief/Unbelief, Truth/Falsehood, Love/Hate, the need for personal response to Jesus.

**Thursday: Read John 1. The Word Becomes Flesh** (1-18). John doesn’t just go back to Bethlehem like Matthew and Luke. John goes back to Creation! In the past, Jesus revealed God in the Creation itself, in the gift of life, in light (a moral term of awareness as well as physical light). Of the titles given to Jesus so far (the Word, the Light, the Christ, the Lamb of God, the Son of God), which means to most to you?

**Testimony about Jesus: John the Baptist & Personal** (19-51). First John the Baptist, then the 5 first disciples. What was your motive for following Jesus originally? How much did you know about him at that time? Who was the John or Andrew in your life?

**Friday: Read John 2. Water to Wine** (1-11). What’s the funniest thing you witnessed at a wedding? Where is the “wine” (zest for life) in your life right now: full? ½ full? Empty? What is draining you? How could Jesus renew that for you? **Jesus Clears the Temple** (12-25). If you compare your spiritual life to the rooms of a house, which room do you think Jesus would clean up? Library & Computer Room (reading room)? Dining room (appetites & desires)? Workshop (gifts, skills, talents)? Rec Room (after work time)? Family room (relationships)? Closet (your hang ups)? Do you resist or welcome Jesus’ “clean up” operation in your life?