

Purpose

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[0 : 00] Amen. Please do keep the page open as we consider Jesus and his appearances together. Our Father, we thank you for this precious record of that first resurrection day, and we ask now that as we consider it together, that by your Spirit you would bring to us the presence of the risen Christ, that we would know him among us, and we would hear his voice speaking down through the ages, that he is alive. This we ask in his name. Amen.

Where is it all going? And what is it all for? Is there a big purpose to life? These are questions human beings have asked for centuries. No doubt you have wondered yourself, what's the point? Or is it more like Richard Dawkins wrote famously that in a universe of electrons and selfish genes, blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice.

The universe that we observe, he says, has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.

Now, whether you agree with him or not, none of us live as if that were true, do we? None of us live like there's no point or purpose in life. We don't wake up and tell ourselves every day, we're just one of eight billion people here by complete accident in a world created by chance fluke, and that we have no significance besides surviving and one day dying. We tell ourselves, don't we, there's something bigger to get out of bed for. But what is the bigger thing? We live like we mean it, but what does it all mean? In the run-up to Easter, we've been following a series called Hope Explored. We saw that Jesus gives hope because he came to bring God's good and loving rule into our world. Last week, you saw Jesus brings peace because through his death on the cross, he reconciled a hostile humanity to God.

[2 : 40] We, his enemies who rejected God and his good and loving rule, Jesus came to die so that we could be friends with God and better still, God's family. And this morning, Easter morning, we're considering how Jesus gives purpose, a big purpose in life. Now, Luke, he wrote up this breathtaking account of the very first Easter Sunday, the very first Easter Sunday wants us to see that because Jesus has come back from the dead, everything that we've been taught to believe as Christians, or everything your Christian friend has shared with you, is true, that the resurrection changes everything forever. If Jesus is alive today, friends, then the whole story is not a fairy tale, but history. The book in your hands is not fiction, but fact. And the God who it reveals, and the things that he has done, and the future that he promises are real and true. Now, to help us see that, Luke invites us this morning to meet the back from the dead Jesus. And he wants us to meet the risen Lord Jesus in four places.

And they're the same places the very first people that very first day met him 2,000 years ago. So let's see, firstly, how we can meet the risen Jesus in his own words. On Friday, a group of women who had followed Jesus from the start watched as he died. They went and saw how he was buried. They saw the tomb, how his body was laid in it.

The next day was Saturday, their day of rest. So on the third day, the Sunday, those same women went back to the tomb, where Jesus' body was, except Jesus' body was not there. The stone that had been in front of the tomb was rolled away, and when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And they wondered about this. They were confused. They couldn't work out what was happening. In fact, we know from other gospel accounts, they were very distressed and anxious about this. They had come with spices to embalm Jesus' body, their last act of devotion to their Lord and Savior, but his body wasn't there.

But as they stand there, utterly bewildered, two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. Angels. Angels. Now, if that's a lot to take in, angels in an empty tomb, it helps that what they say is the most sensible thing that anyone could have said in this situation. Ready?

Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen. Now, in what way is that a sensible thing to say? That sounds pretty out of this world, doesn't it?

[6 : 00] Pretty out there. But look, why do they say it? Remember how he told you while he was still with you in Galilee. This is what he said. The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again. Jesus had said that not once, not twice, but three times since they had left home. And now they're standing in his tomb on the third day, expecting his body to be there? You, if I told you, I'm going away next week, and I told you again, I'm going to be away next week. And then I told you again, next week I'll be away. And then you went to my house, and you knocked on the door, and I didn't come to the door. What would you think had happened?

Maybe he's been kidnapped. Maybe he's too sick to come to the door. You'd have to be pretty slow, wouldn't you, not to put two and two together, and remember that I had told you that I was going away, and that that then is probably why I am not at home. Three times Jesus told his followers he must suffer, must be crucified, must die. And on the third day, he must rise again. But the women are wondering where on earth his body could be. Now, I imagine the angels were really kind. Imagine angels are pretty kind. You know, how can we put this nicely? You remember how he told you, yeah? While he was here, remember? That he would come back from the dead? And then they remembered his words.

Brilliant. So back they go to the other followers with the news, and they all said, of course, we couldn't sleep last night. We were so excited because, of course, Jesus said that today he would come back from the dead. Not quite, is it? Verse 11. But they did not believe the women because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Now, if it's possible for angels to be pulling their hair out, I imagine they would have been. There's a glimmer of hope, isn't there? Peter got up and ran to the tomb.

Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and then he went away singing and leaping for joy because he knew that Jesus was back from the dead. No. Wondering to himself what had happened. The angels have clearly given up and gone home by this point, haven't they? Brothers and sisters, how farcical is their reaction to the fact that there was no body in the tomb? The women eventually grasp, don't they, that this is exactly what Jesus had repeatedly told them would happen.

The men are still not sure what's going on. If you're not quite convinced of this this morning, if you have doubts in your heart, well, it certainly helps, doesn't it, that the people who were there at the time took a bit of time to get it. They were not quickly taken in by it, weren't they? They were harder to convince than they should have been. But when they finally put two and two together, it was because they remembered Jesus' words. What Jesus said is the best fit for what is going on. He said he would die and rise again, and he did die, and now his tomb is empty.

[9 : 44] Friends, if Jesus is back from the dead, well, what does that say about him? And what does that say about his words? If Jesus' words came true in this incredible way, then he is most trustworthy and reliable and true.

If he is back from the dead, then he is the person we should most want to meet in all the world. And so here is a great purpose in life on Resurrection Day to listen and learn from the one whose words are tried and tested and proven, to get to know this person who said he would come back from the dead and did come back from the dead, to believe what he said about his death and resurrection.

There are four Gospels in our Bibles that record the life of Jesus, and that is where we get to know him on his terms. Not a Jesus that somebody else has told you about, maybe when you were growing up, or maybe at church, or maybe me.

Not a Jesus that you imagine in your head or that you've seen on the TV, but Jesus in his own words, on his own terms.

[11 : 12] We can get to know him. If Jesus' words are true and came true on Resurrection morning, then nothing can ever be the same for us, can they?

He is alive, and that means we can know him truly and personally in his own words and life. And if you're not convinced by that, well, at least take some time to see.

You know, it's a huge claim, isn't it? It is worth investing a little bit of time to actually check that what he said is true and trustworthy, and there is no better place to start than to meet him in his own words.

So if you don't have a Bible this morning, just take one home with you. Go back to the beginning of Luke's Gospel. Start reading. I'm sure if someone brought you along, they'd be delighted to do that with you.

Or if you're here on your own, just ask. We'd love to read it along with you and answer any questions that you've got. But we don't only meet Jesus in his own words.

[12:15] Jesus says we also meet him in the words of the Scriptures. So that same day, it says Luke, two guys are walking down the road, and a stranger walks up beside them.

What are you talking about? He says, don't you know, they say? Haven't you heard what has happened? Well, what's happened? Well, haven't you heard about Jesus?

The one who we hoped, past tense, would be our Savior to redeem us. But he was crucified.

He died. It's the third day since that happened. And some of the women amazed us. They went to his tomb, and they didn't find his body. And some angels told them that he was alive.

And then some others went and found it just as the women had said, but they didn't see Jesus.

Now, see, these two, they are upset, aren't they? But it's as if for them the story is finished.

[13:19] They're on their way out of Jerusalem. They are certainly not expecting to turn the page and have the story carry on. So what a wonderful twist, then, that the Lord Jesus himself goes to them to get them back and send them home with new hope and new purpose.

And how does he do that? Well, he says, verse 25, how foolish you are, and how slow to believe what? The angel said, remember Jesus' words, but that's not what Jesus says, is it?

He says, how slow are you to believe all that the prophets have spoken? Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

Now, I wonder if I asked you, okay, to sum up the Bible in one sentence, I wonder what you'd say. What's the Bible all about? If you haven't spent much time, you haven't opened a Bible before, maybe you think, you know, it's just a load of random stories about people who lived a long time ago and some rules kind of on the side, or lots of rules and a few stories.

[14:44] Maybe if you know a little bit of Bible, you might think it's all about God's anger and judgment. It's full of hellfire and brimstone. Maybe if you're a Christian and you know your Bible and your Old Testament pretty well, you might be unsure whether you really could sum it up in one sentence.

You know so much, the law, history, and Psalms, the Proverbs and the prophets. It's, you know, how could we kind of capture all of that in one sentence?

You know, if only Jesus had given us a one-sentence summary of the scriptures, wouldn't that unlock the story for us? Wouldn't that be a key to unlock the purpose, the direction, the plan, the design?

Wouldn't that give us everything that we are looking for, or God's big picture for the life and the universe and everything in it? Well, friends, the back from the dead Jesus does give us a one-sentence summary of the Old Testament.

It's there in verses 46 and 47 of our passage. What does he say? The whole story has all been about. Then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures.

[16:00] He told them, this is what is written. Ready? The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

There's your one-sentence summary of the book in your hands. The scriptures, he said, that's what's written. That's the story God's been telling all the way along, a story about a chosen, anointed king who would suffer, die, and rise again, so that on the basis of what he's done, a message would be preached in all the world, turn and be forgiven.

That is what the Old Testament is all about. That is what the Bible is all about. Perhaps on the road, Jesus showed them how the story of Joseph was a shadow of what he had come to do, how Joseph was rejected by his brothers and left for dead before being raised up out of the pit and set in the highest place in the land so that people from all the countries around came to him and were saved from the famine and his brothers were forgiven.

Or maybe Jesus told them how the experience of King David in the Psalms was a shadow of his suffering and death and resurrection, how his hands and feet were pierced, how he thirsted, how his clothes were divided up, how he was dead and buried but his body did not see corruption, how

he was lifted up and exalted from the depths and set in a place of honor to rule over the nations. We could go on and on, couldn't we? Jesus says everything must be fulfilled, everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms.

[17 : 59] So that, friends, it's not only his own words that are proved to be true by the resurrection, but the whole story of the Bible is proved to be true by his resurrection.

And if you're not sure what difference that makes to you today, well, back to our question. Where is it all going? What is the point?

What's it all for? Our world tells us, doesn't it, that we are going nowhere and that the point, if there is one, is up to ye to discover. There's no bigger story that we're part of.

There's no design. There's no purpose. We make it up as we go along, and then we're gone, and it's somebody else's turn. But if Jesus walked out of that tomb alive again, then every word that is printed in the pages, in the book, in your hands, walked out with him.

The whole universe, the worldview, the life, the promises, the words of the Bible live because Jesus lives. Because in his suffering, death, and resurrection, he fulfilled everything that was written about him.

[19 : 15] So that when we come to Jesus, we become part of God's big rescue story. Our lives become part of something so much bigger and better, as big as the universe that God created in the beginning, as big as the eternity that the God of the Bible inhabits, as big as the world and the promise that God makes that he will make everything right and new and perfect in the end.

Friends, when Jesus rose from the dead, he confirmed that your life has a God-given purpose and significance and direction that is found in him only. Because his resurrection says, it's all true.

It's all true. Again, if you're not sure where to start with that, that's okay. We'd love to help you. If you're here, you're not sure about your Bible, please, please just ask.

We'd love to read it with you. Be on deep joy. But what you'll find as you begin to read the Bible, is that it gives us a far, far bigger purpose than anything that any human being has ever come up with. Because it introduces us to a God who is so, so much better than anything that we could ever conceive of existing. So please, come get to know him.

[20 : 41] Read his words. Read his word. Do it with someone here. Find your place in his brilliant story. Why? Because Jesus is alive. And it is all real and true.

None of us want to live a lie, do we? We all want to live a life that's true and real. Well, Jesus gives that to us. Briefly, because Luke touches on this too, here's the third place we meet the risen Jesus. In his own words in the scriptures, and in the Lord's Supper. Did you notice that? The stranger walking with the disciples on the road was, of course, Jesus.

But they only recognize him when he does this. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.

That's what he'd done only three nights before, wasn't it, at a different table, as he had taken bread and broken it and said, this is my body broken for you. And as he does that again, suddenly they see who they are sitting with.

[21 : 56] And so, brothers and sisters, the Lord's Supper, the broken bread, and the poured out wine, that is another place. We meet Jesus, isn't it? We touch, and we see, and we taste what he's done for us.

We come into his presence. We recognize him. We see who it is that we're sitting at the table with as we meet him personally there. So that as we hear and we receive by faith his words and the words of the scriptures, well, so we receive by faith the bread and the wine and enjoy being with him and meet him as he is.

It's so wonderful that he gives us that himself in such a tangible way. And if you're not a Christian or you are not yet public in your profession of faith, it's something that you should long for, to meet with Jesus personally at the table in this beautiful way he's given to us.

If you are a Christian, it's something to really look forward to whenever we do that, as we will next Sunday, to meet with him at the table in the broken bread and the wine.

And we can meet Jesus in these places because finally he is there for us to meet. Perhaps you've been thinking all this time, well, that's all great, okay?

[23 : 21] And if you want to think that you can meet Jesus kind of metaphorically in these ways, you're great for you, but he's not actually here, is he?

He's not there. He's not alive, really, is he? Well, yes, he is. You must say it helps in our uncertainty, our unbelief and doubt that his closest followers at the time struggled to take it in.

But Luke is unashamed to report that Jesus was resurrected body and soul. While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said, Peace be with you.

They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said, Why are you troubled? Why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself.

Touch me and see. Put your hands on my hands. See that it is me, that I am not a ghost, but I have flesh and bones and a body.

[24 : 22] And then he eats their food, and he speaks with them. Remember, these are the same people who wondered where his body had gone, and when someone said he was back from the dead, they said, Nonsense.

Even with Jesus right in front of them, they thought they were seeing some kind of disembodied spirit, but no, there was his body, not in a tomb, not in a ditch, not in a river, but living and breathing, moving, eating.

Friends, Jesus is there to be met. He is risen. And if you're still not convinced, well, here's the fourth and final place we meet him, in the witness of those who saw him alive.

You are witnesses of these things, says Jesus. You many of the guys in that very room who met Jesus after his resurrection gave their lives to telling others what they had seen and heard.

lots of them died horrific deaths because they did that. And if there was any doubt still in their minds that he wasn't back from the dead, or that his life was wasted, or that he wasn't really the one who they had been waiting for, why would they have done that?

[25 : 38] They did doubt, didn't they? They thought it was nonsense, but then he came and showed himself to them, and the world has never been the same. And today, 2,000 years later, billions of people around the world meet as we are this morning, as we do each Sunday, to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus because their witness has gone out through all the world, the testimony of what they saw and heard on that day.

And some of them wrote it down, as Luke did, so that we could be certain of the things that we have been told and taught about him. He is alive, friends, and he is there for us to meet today.

So will you meet him? Will you get to know him? Will you read his words? Will you read your Bible? Will you let his resurrection give your life ultimate direction and purpose and significance, a place in the great, big, true story of God and his rescue and our world and ourselves to live in?

Will you let his resurrection give your life an eternal story? We all live, don't we, as if there was something bigger and better to live for?

Jesus' resurrection says, here it is. This is what you've been looking for but didn't know where to find. Here is life's big purpose, to know him, to live with him, to trust him, to live under his good and loving rule, to be saved and forgiven by him, and to be given you an eternal life and a kingdom that will never end.

[27 : 30] So will you come and meet him this resurrection day and take hold of the great purpose of life yourself by taking hold of Jesus by faith?

Let's pray that for each other now. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you that in love you gave us your Son, and we thank you that in love he came.

We thank you that in love he laid down his life so that we could be saved and forgiven, and that in love and in great power he rose from the dead on the third day so that we could be right with you and have life with you forever.

Father, again we pray, take away every fear in our hearts and every shadow of doubt. Lord, let us meet Jesus and come to him today. Father, each one of us, we pray that we would have certainty concerning the things that we have been taught.

Lord, we pray for one another and that you would help us to strengthen one another's hearts by speaking the truth in love, reminding one another that Christ lives and that we live in the light of his resurrection.

[28 : 52] Bless us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.