



Does God Still Move Stones Today?

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For those of you who are Computer savvy or Movie buffs, you will know that in some computer software (like Microsoft 97), some Video games (Call of Duty – black ops has 10) and even some movies (like Happy Gilmore or Indiana Jones movies) they have placed hidden little surprise pictures, hidden messages or in-jokes that if you look hard enough will pop up and surprise you. Do you know what they are called? They are called Easter Eggs. When they pop up there is more to them than you first expected to find. As we enter the count down toward Easter I want to spend the next 4 weeks talking about the Resurrection of Jesus. For while most biographies of great men end with their death, that is not true of Jesus. We believe that Jesus Christ lived, died on the cross, was buried, spent 3 days in the tomb and then Rose again. All by itself the fact that Jesus rose from the dead is the most amazing and astounding fact in history. Here is where it gets even more exciting, just like in the video Easter Eggs, as we look at the resurrection there is so much more there, than we may have thought we would find.

As we begin, I need to let you know that this morning will be a little different, so I want to let you know what will be happening. First, I will spend some time looking at how God still moves Stones today. Then I want to open the morning up to do something we never do in a Sunday morning service. I want to give you a chance to share some of the things God has been doing in your life. There will be mikes at the front and you will have a chance to share what God has been doing in your life. I have felt pulled by God to do this because as we heard Marilyn Stiles testimony last week, I believe God is at work in so many of our lives and I think we need to hear some of the things that He is doing among us this morning. Then in the time remaining we will be sharing communion around the Lord's Table this morning.

Let's begin with an Obituary; if his disciples had opened the Jewish Times and read this obituary they would have agreed that this was a good summation of Jesus' life. Then they would have wept because their friend, the one they thought was the Messiah, the one who would change their world was dead, so very dead. With him died so many of their hopes and dreams. Maybe this will help put it in perspective: On February 27, 1991, at the height of a Desert Storm, Ruth Dillow received a very sad message from the Pentagon. It stated that her son, Clayton Carpenter, Private 1st Class, had stepped on a mine in Kuwait & was dead. Ruth Dillow later wrote, "I cannot begin to describe my grief & shock. It was almost more than I could bear. For 3 days I wept. For 3 days I expressed anger & loss. For 3 days people tried to comfort me, to no avail because the loss was too great."

But 3 days after she received that message, the telephone rang. The voice on the other end said, "Mom, it's me, I'm alive." Ruth Dillow said, "I couldn't believe it at first, but then I recognized his voice, & he really was alive." The first message was all a mistake! She said, "I laughed, I cried, I felt like doing cartwheels, because my son

whom I had thought was dead, was really alive. I'm sure none of you can even begin to understand how I felt."

Perhaps not, but the disciples to a degree, would have understood how she felt because they had experienced similar emotions themselves. One day they watched their best friend & teacher being nailed to a cross. They witnessed His pain as He cried out, "I thirst!" & "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"

They listened as finally He bowed His head & said, "It is finished!" & "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." They watched as His body was taken from the cross and then buried. Friday and all day Saturday they mourned, until finally, *Matthew 28:1* says on "the first day of the week, early in the morning," some women made their way along the path that led to His tomb, wondering who would roll away the stone for them. During their journey there was a violent earthquake, probably shaking them to the ground, but they got up and kept on going (brave ladies).

As they arrived, they found that the stone had already been rolled away. There in front of them sat an angel who told them, "He is not here, he has risen just like he said'. Don't miss this, the angel is reminding them that this amazing feat of the resurrection happened just like Jesus had said". In those words is a simple concept, if Jesus' promise/prediction of coming back from the dead was 100% accurate, then those other promises He made concerning Heaven and Hell, being able to be filled with his spirit, healing of sicknesses and changing of people's lives are also 100% true. Then the angel adds, go quickly and tell his disciples He has risen from the dead and you will see him later in Galilee" Jesus is already planning his next meet and greet with his disciples. Later that day *John 20* says Jesus walked into an upper room where they were and said 'peace be with you' a few days later when some of the disciples like Thomas had gotten back into town he met them again, Jesus said to him 'put your finger here, see my hand. Reach out your hand and put it in into my side (icky) Stop doubting and believe". "He has risen!" Each time he appeared they must have stood there somehow trying to comprehend what they were seeing. That Jesus somehow rose from the dead and walked out of his tomb, but one thing they knew was that it changed everything. This profound encounter with Jesus wasn't limited to those in the upper room or those who later met him in Galilee *Matthew 28* but Timothy said II *Timothy 1:12* says 'I know whom I believe"

It wasn't just the wonder of the knowledge of the Theology or even the glory of the story that overwhelmed him (probably 25 - 30 years after Jesus' resurrection) it was that he had somehow had an encounter with the living Jesus in his life as well. Because Jesus moved the stone that first Easter morning a new and ongoing story began, people like Mary, the disciples and the folks in Galilee saw the resurrected Jesus and later men like Timothy and women like Lidia met Jesus, not by sight but in a real way none the less. So many of you in this room would add your name to that list of millions down through the ages and have had a profound meeting with Jesus as well. This is only possible because somehow in church alone as we read the Word, as we walk across a hillside and see the sunset, or lay there at night in the dark. He who

moved the stones personally keeps moving our hearts as well. For we know that He is risen, He is risen indeed.

Jesus Chased the Rock

You remember in *Matthew 16:18* Peter was given the nickname 'the rock' 'rocky' by Jesus. It was play on words, with Peter's name which meant 'the rock'. You also remember that Peter was the guy who promised that while everyone else may forsake Jesus He could be counted on. He was the one who, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when the soldiers came to take Jesus away was the one who drew his sword ready to take on the entire platoon to save Jesus. But only ends up cutting off the ear of a man which Jesus put back on. Then Peter ran for his life. Later as Peter came near where Jesus was being judged someone asked him if he was a Jesus Follower. Three times with increased volume, fervor and harsh language said 'I don't even know the guy' he then he ran away again.

Have you ever noticed when Mark tells about the angels encounter with the ladies at the tomb that he says the angels words were 'go tell his disciples and Peter he is going ahead to meet them at Galilee, there you will see him just as he told you' *Mark 16:6,7*. That means that at Peter's first encounter with Jesus in the upper room, as Thomas walked forward and touched Jesus hands and side, Peter was too embarrassed to come forward, so he stayed in the back corner of the room. But you know the story, Jesus wouldn't leave Peter alone, for Peter's next encounter with Jesus was when he took him on a short walk down the sea shore and 3 times asked him a simple question (3 times, the same number of Peter's denials) 'Peter do you love me? Peter, I am not talking about the kind of friendship that makes you show up in church once a month, I am talking about the kind of friendship that will grab your life and make you live with a new passion for and with me'?

One of the angels first words were personally directed toward Peter, letting him know of the possibility of a personal encounter with Jesus, whom he had just let down and pulled away from. Just as in the case of Jonah (which we looked at a few weeks ago), it would have been so easy to write Peter off. To let him live out the just deserts of his actions and stay far from God in the place he had chosen to be. That Jesus asked about him and then chased him down so he could not only restore him but give him a new encounter with the resurrected Jesus. That would bring him back into a place where he could experience the greatest adventures and spiritual experiences of his life. God sought him out so he could have a new and deeper experience with Jesus. And that was only possible because Jesus rose from the dead, loved him and could personally still meet him. As you read that story, you can't help but ask 'how could someone of such strong belief chicken out and back away from what he believed?' The answer is simple, most of us know because at times we have done that same thing. We have, either due to wanting to do some things we knew were not what God wanted us to do, was decide to step back from our faith. Or because we wanted to do things which we felt were more important, more 'fun' or have at times stepped back from church, push faith stuff to the side and live a life that is Christian when it is convenient and then

like Peter we go fishing at the lake rather than stay in Jerusalem where he know there had been Jesus sighting. The wonderful thing is that the risen lord still chases us down and asks us if we want to join him again on the journey of faith and deepen our walk as Christ followers.

Jesus still Moves Rocks today

I Corinthians 15:1-7 What he is saying is that Jesus, as in the case of Peter and the disciples, because he is alive today, keeps on meeting people. Often as is Peter's case chasing them down so they can begin their relationship with the resurrected Jesus again so they came walking to the fullness of the adventure that he wants for their lives. He adds that there are at least 500 plus the other 15 names listed here of people who have seen and experienced this resurrected Jesus in their lives (and at the time of writing this book 25 years after the resurrection many of them can still be reached). Do you know that if these 515 people listed here were given only 15 minutes each to give a testimony of when they 'saw' Jesus? That we would be here listening until some time Friday morning, 128 hours from now). And then if we took turns speaking of our own personal experience with him the service would be even longer. Last week we heard Todd Stiles read about Marilyn's experience during her sickness with the resurrected Jesus. Last week I meet 3 other men from our congregation who told me of how the resurrected Jesus is impacting their lives as well, because the Jesus, who moved the stone that first Easter, keeps on moving stones in our world today. That is why I want to open the mike for a few minutes to let you tell others about it and to let Jesus hear how glad you are that He rose from the dead and walks with you during your life. So let's take a few minutes and before we have communion to encourage each other and bless our Jesus for how He has been at work in our lives.

Jesus' last words were *Acts 1:8* the potential to walk in his power, in an ongoing relationship is just as real today as it was right after Jesus' resurrection. But the #1 thing that seems to stop so many of us is busyness, busyness due to the thing we want to do, and the things we keep placing in our lives. The problem is that most of us have too many irons in the fire. It struck me again last week that 'God can't fully fill us with his power and a deeper relationship with him if there is no room left in our lives for him to pour into'. We need to make room in our lives so he can fill us and meet us.