

Big Things From Small Beginnings

Small Events... Big Consequences...

On 28th June, 1914, on the streets of Sarajevo in Bosnia, a young man shot and killed the heir to the Austro-Hungarian empire. He had no idea that those two bullets would be the spark that ignited World War One. Within a month of the shooting, Austria was at war with Serbia. Within two months Austria, Germany and Turkey were at war with Belgium, France, Britain, Russia and more than 15 other nations. On a world scale, a shooting in Sarajevo was a small event. But it had big consequences. 35 million people died.

When Ernest Rutherford, a 40-year-old physicist from Nelson, was experimenting with splitting the atom, he could never have imagined that his experiments would lead to weaponry that had the potential to kill every human on the planet. In December 1955, Rosa Parks was sitting on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Because of the colour of her skin, the driver told her to give up her seat for a white man. She refused to move, and that refusal sparked a civil rights revolution. A small event with big consequences. Who could have guessed that a protest strike in a Polish shipyard led by an electrician named Lech Walesa, would have ultimately resulted in the collapse of the whole Soviet Union. A small event on a world scale, but with big consequences.

A Small Event In Jerusalem.

At the time Jesus was crucified, the Roman Empire covered all of North Africa, all of France, Spain and Portugal, half of Germany, Greece, Turkey, and the middle East around to Egypt. Palestine was a tiny territory on the edge of this vast Empire. So as far as the Roman Empire was concerned, the crucifixion of a Jewish carpenter in an obscure territory at the corner of the of the empire didn't even rate a mention. Crucifixions were commonplace. People were being crucified every day. No one had any idea that the death of Jesus on a Cross in Jerusalem would result in a movement that would change the world. No one had any idea that the handful of followers of Jesus would become 33 million Christians 350 years later. No one could have predicted that within 350 years of the death of Jesus, the Emperor of Rome would declare himself to be a Christian and that more than half the population of the western world would turn away from pagan religions to follow Jesus.

What A Difference A Resurrection Makes!

So what was it about the death of Jesus that caused his followers to take courage and spread this new faith throughout the world? It wasn't the crucifixion of Jesus. That was the point of despair for the followers of Jesus. All their hopes and dreams were dashed. On Good Friday, when Jesus was crucified, it looked like this new Kingdom that Jesus had spoken of was finished. It wasn't the crucifixion that transformed the disciples, but the resurrection. When Jesus came out of that tomb and met with his disciples, that made all the difference. It was the resurrection that changed his disciples forever. Here is John's account of one of the times Jesus appeared after he had risen from the dead.

“ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be

with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:19-31 NIV)

Good Friday...Death Wins.

Easter was a contest between life and death. Death is our big enemy. One of the most painful experiences we can go through in life is to lose someone we love. None of us escape this. Our parents die. Our brothers and sisters die. Our husbands die. Our wives die. Our children die. Our friends die. The more we love them, the more crushing it is for us. If that isn't painful enough for us, we then have to face death ourselves. It doesn't matter who we are, death comes to all of us. The good and the great. The rich and the powerful. The beautiful and the talented. Few people were as powerful as President John F Kennedy. But death came to him at 46 years of age. Winston Churchill saved a nation through his oratory and his determination, but he still died. Death wins, even with great men like Kennedy and Churchill. You may be a beautiful, fairytale Princess that the whole world loves, as Diana, Princess of Wales was. But death still wins. You can be a saintly nun that the whole world admires, as Mother Theresa was, but death still wins. Even great saints like Abraham and Moses and Jeremiah and Joshua - they all died.

On Good Friday, when death had Jesus pinned on a Cross, and he breathed his last breath, death was sure he had won. Death was so sure that he had the victory, that he threw a party that lasted all Friday night and all of Saturday and into the wee small hours of Sunday morning. For death, this was the greatest victory of all. To have taken the life of the Son of God was really something as far as death was concerned. All over Jerusalem, death was shouting "I've won!"

Easter Sunday... Death loses.

But early on Sunday morning, when death was celebrating his victory, God did something that death hadn't seen coming. Death was taken by surprise. God pulled the sting out of death and breathed life into a dead Jesus. The power of the Spirit of God was greater than death. God breathed the Spirit of life into his Son Jesus and raised him from death into life. Death never knew what hit him. Death no longer was in control. The Spirit of Life lifted Jesus out of that grave. Never again could death touch him. Jesus conquered death. When Jesus came out of that tomb alive on Easter Sunday morning, the power of death was broken forever.

If you travel in the more Catholic areas of Europe, you will see images of a dead Jesus on the Cross. You will see the crucifix in churches, on buildings and in shrines by the roadside. Travel in Italy and you will find the crucifix everywhere. When I see those images I want to shout and say "Jesus is no longer on the Cross. The cross is empty. He's alive!" The image of Christianity is not the image of a dead Jesus but of an empty Cross and an empty tomb. Jesus has conquered death. The Jesus I worship is alive. Death is defeated.

The Resurrection – A Matter Of Life.

Easter Sunday is hugely significant for every one of us. John's Gospel says that by believing in Jesus, we may have life in his name. The resurrection of Jesus opens up the possibility of life for every one of us. When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome he said ***“And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies, through his Spirit, who lives in you” (Romans 8:11)*** The same Spirit of God that gave life to Jesus and brought him out of the grave, can give life to us. The Spirit of God will come and live in us if we put our trust in Christ. If we put our faith in Christ, that same Spirit that raised Jesus

from the dead, will raise us up to a new life with him. For those who have faith in Jesus Christ, death has no power. Death is not the end. When we have the Spirit of God within us, we live forever with Christ.

Dwight Lyman Moody was a famous evangelist and publisher from Chicago. Sometimes up to 20,000 people would turn up to hear him preach. On one occasion he said this; "Some day you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody of East Northfield, is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now; I shall have gone up higher, that is all, out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal- a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint; a body fashioned like unto His glorious body. I was born of the flesh in 1837. I was born of the Spirit in 1856. That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit will live forever".

This resurrection life of Jesus is available to every one of us. Because Jesus rose from the dead, we will too. The resurrection life Jesus gives us is a life that can never die. Do you understand this? Do you believe it? Jesus said to Thomas ***"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."*** ***Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"*** ***Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*** (John 20:27-29 NIV)

I started today by talking about seemingly insignificant events that have changed our world forever. People who could never have imagined the consequences of the decisions they made and the things they did. Revolutions that began because of one decision. I tell you today that a decision to follow Jesus will start a revolution in your life that will make a difference for all eternity. It's the difference between life and death. Will you, like Thomas, put your hand in his hand and tell him that you believe?