

There's an old minister I know (Evan Stenlake) – Some of you might remember him – he was in St George for a while... And every sermon I ever heard him preach, I think he summed it up in 3 words... Now, I've never been able to do that, Michael's more likely to have 36 points up on the screen...

But today, I've finally managed to achieve it – today, I have 3 words for you ...

I would have 4, but you already know the main point of today – Spoiler Alert! – It's Easter Sunday! – Jesus is raised from the dead!... And everyone said: Hallelujah!!!

So, I don't need to use the word “Resurrection” – you already know that...

So, the first word I have for you today, is “**Believe**”.

When it comes to Jesus Christ and when it comes to being a Christian, how much am I “required to believe”, and how much of the Christian faith, is “optional” (you can take it or leave it sorta stuff)????

Well, I'm going to be really blunt: That sort of question itself, is a question that comes from a state of “faithlessness”... Because, what lies behind that question is “I don't have too much trouble believing these things, but this other stuff??? Seriously??? You expect me to believe that stuff??? How can I believe what is unbelievable...” – in other words, “How could I believe something that takes “faith””...

The writer of Hebrews, in his magnificent Chapter 11 on “faith”, says:

Hebrews 11:1 (ESV) Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

And then in V⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Anyway, when it comes to “faith”, what most folk find hard to believe, are things like:

- the virgin birth;
- the creation of the universe in 6 days;
- miraculous healings;
- the flood that covered the whole earth;
- the feeding of 5000 with a little boy’s lunch

And of course we can’t forget this one today:

- the resurrection of Jesus.

But unbelief, at any one of those points, all boils down to not believing that God exists...

You see, if the god that I believe in, is unable to do any or all of those things, then the god I believe in, is not God... Are you with me???

God:

- is all powerful;
- is all knowing;

- can do anything
- is everywhere and sees everything;
- is Sovereign/King/Boss, - that means, “What God says, goes”;

And if the one, true, all-powerful God, is **unlimited** by physical human constraints,, – If we truly believe that, then we will have **zero** trouble believing that God can do, even the unbelievable...

Now, when Jesus appeared before the disciples (a few days **after** He'd been crucified), they had to have a bit of a reality check...

The man whom they had witnessed being tortured and executed – the One whose corpse they'd witnessed, being taken down from the cross, and some had seen the corpse being laid in a tomb... **That** man was now standing before them, alive...

Now, we don't know how many wounds they could see.... Could they see the scourge of the whip? We're not told... But we **do** know that they could see where the spikes had gone through His hands and His feet...

Of course, when they first saw Jesus, it didn't compute for them. They were startled/frightened – why? Because they thought He was a ghost – how could He be anything but a ghost???

They could see Him; They could hear Him,,,,, But Jesus had to calm them down **"Peace to you!"**, He said.

Jesus had to assure them that He was **not** an apparition/ghost/disembodied-spirit, come back to haunt them...

See my hands; See my feet – you can see that it's me. **Touch me, and see.** For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.

He asked: **"Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"**

You see, if God is God, no miracle is too great for our God. And they should have known this by now. They had seen the amazing miracles of Jesus (over and over again)... And if it is God's will, God can raise **anyone** from the dead – we know this... But the resurrection of Jesus is special. Jesus was the first to be raised to a permanent, eternal, resurrection body... But more than that – It was God's stamp of approval on Jesus.

And once they'd realised, that "it truly was Jesus", things changed. They were no longer startled and frightened – Luke uses the phrase, **"they still disbelieved for joy and were marvelling"**... Right, so it had shifted from "terror", to "Wow, I just can't believe it"....

And to shore up their belief a bit more, Jesus said, "Have you got some tucker"... I don't know if Jesus was hungry – I

suspect He was more, wanting to demonstrate that He truly was alive in a body, such that when He ate the broiled fish, it didn't just drop through onto the ground.

BTW, I don't know why our English translations all use the word "broiled" fish – the Greek word simply means "cooked" /roasted/maybe grilled... but cooked on a fire...

Jesus ate cooked fish.

His body was not an apparition – it was flesh and bones, and now it contained "cooked fish"...

Believe...

Now, what was Jesus really commanding His Disciples **to** believe???

To believe in the resurrection? (To believe that Jesus was raised from the dead?) Well, "Yes, of course."... But for them, their belief, was going to take a major reset...

To believe that God is God, and to believe that God is able to do anything He wants to, is one thing... To believe that God can raise Jesus from the dead: Sure....

But to know the implications this has for "faith", that's quite another matter...

And so, the second word I have for you today, is
“Understand”...

During His time of ministry, Jesus had taught His Disciples, about what was revealed in the Scriptures, about Him... But they never ‘got it’. And Jesus said: **“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”**

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures

To believe that God is God, **and** to believe that God is **not** just some kind of weak, impotent spirit that has no power and remains aloof and uninvolved in world, means to believe that God truly is a God of

- power;
- might;
- justice;
- who has a plan, and

His plan has been unfolding throughout history....

But, a plan for what?

A plan to make it possible for sinful humans to have eternal fellowship with a Holy God...

The Disciples were at the point where they had to understand how Jesus fitted into that plan... And more than fit into it – to understand Who He truly is...

What did they need to understand?

1. That Jesus is the Christ... He's the Messiah/chosen/anointed one of God...
2. That the Christ should suffer and die;
3. That the Christ would rise from the dead on the third day;
4. **that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations**

Now, when it comes to “faith”, do we truly understand what we believe???

Many people believe in God, but they don't believe in a God who has any power, and certainly not a God who is going to hold them accountable...

But then, others **do** believe in a God of power, but they don't understand how Jesus fits into that...

Jesus is the Christ. And it was prophesied in the Old Testament, that He would suffer and die:

If you want an example of this, read the Suffering Servant – you'll find it in Isaiah 53: And that is just **one** prophecy...: that The Christ would suffer and die, and rise from the dead...

But this has implications, doesn't it???

If Jesus died, so that our sins can be forgiven (so that we can fellowship with a Holy God), how do we attain this forgiveness? And, **this** is what is important to understand. **that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.**

Many people like to believe in something they call, "universalism"... : to believe that it doesn't matter which God you worship, as long as you're sincere about it, you'll get to heaven... That is a lie of the devil. *If you worship Buddha, you are worshipping a Demon. If you follow the teachings of Mohammad, you are following the teachings of a demon. If you want to make up your own milkshake of various religions that appeal to you, your level of self-deception is staggering...*

Forgiveness of sins, can only be found in Jesus Christ.... Even when it comes to Judaism, (Jesus is a Jew, right?), But even so, Judaism without Jesus, is empty. In Romans, Paul likens the "people of God" as being "the olive tree", and Israel who reject Jesus, are like the branches getting broken off, and the Gentiles who receive Jesus, are like branches getting grafted on...

There is only one way to be saved (for the Jew/Gentile), and that is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ....

Now, many people get quite upset at Christians for saying this. And they accuse us of being “exclusive” and arrogant, because we claim that Jesus is the only way to God (How dare you)... The thing is, it’s the truth. And their accusation is as ridiculous as saying, “You’re arrogant to say that breathing air is the only way to live...” What if I want to breathe Argon? or Chlorine???

But we need to understand what it means to become a Christian. There is no forgiveness without repentance. So, repentance is pretty important (don’t you think???). And the message of repentance, is **key** in the Gospel of Luke (The call to repentance, is all the way through it)... What is repentance??? In its simplest terms, it means to be heading in one direction, and to completely turn around, and go the other way....

Becoming a Christian isn’t just adding a bit of Jesus to your life. Becoming a Christian is something that is such a radical transformation, Jesus described it as “being born again”...

- We once used to live for ourselves
Now we live for Him;
- We once did what we liked
Now **Jesus** is Lord/boss, and we are His servants/slaves
(And happily so);
- We once used to follow the ways of the world
Now we are filled with the Spirit, and we walk in the ways of the Spirit
Completely changed....

And so, the third word I am going to give you today, is
“Witness”.

Disciples of Jesus, are witnesses **for** Jesus...

Do we truly believe, that being a Disciple of Jesus – being in relationship with Him and following Him, is the greatest thing ever? Do we believe that????

Do Christians love Jesus more than (is Amway still a thing???)

Are Christians as excited about Jesus:

- as the Amway rep is about their Amway products?
- as the Thermomix lady is about her Thermomix?

Do you understand what I’m saying?

Am I more likely to tell someone about:

- my hobby;
- my sport;
- my family;
- the farm;
- the weather;
- the latest varieties;
- my favourite breed;
- The footy game last week;

Am I more likely to tell a person about that sort of stuff? Or am I more excited to tell them about Jesus???

The third word is “**witness**”... And you might say to me, “But Michael, it’s tough telling people about Jesus – to tell a person, about their need for repentance for the forgiveness of sins – that’s offensive...”

Yeah. Do you know the Greek word for “witnesses”? μάρτυρες (martyres) – martyrs.... Why does our English word “martyr” mean “to suffer or die for your faith”? Because that’s the cost of being a witness...

Just as well it’s worth it, hey...

Now, if I had room for a 4th word here, I’d throw in the word “Power”... But we’re going to stick with “witness”...

48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

You are quite right. Being a witness for Jesus, is hard/costly. To proclaim **repentance for the forgiveness of sins** is not always, a welcome message... And if we try to do that in our **own** strength, it will seem extra hard, and we will fail. And so Jesus is telling His Disciples, to stay in Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high...

Does that whet your appetite? It’s meant to.

You know how some movies sort of finish, but then right at the end, there's another little scene that wets your appetite for the sequel...

Think of the Marvel movies (superhero) – You watch the movie, and then it scrolls through the credits... But then right at the end, you get a little snippet of something, that lets you know there's another instalment coming – there's another movie – you haven't got the full story yet...

That's what **this** is like. The Gospel of Luke, is a 2-part series – Luke has a sequel: It's called “The Acts of the Apostles”. They are both written by Luke, to “The most excellent Theophilus”...

And in Acts 2, is Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit comes, and the Disciples of Jesus become the Church of Jesus Christ, and are given Power – to use the phrase here: **clothed with power from on high.**

Jesus sent His Holy Spirit, so we **can** be witnesses. We are clothed with the power of God, And the chief purpose of the power of the Holy Spirit, is so that we can fearlessly proclaim Jesus Christ.

To proclaim:

- Who He is – that He is the Christ – the Son of God;
- that He suffered and died, to atone for our sins;
- that He rose from the dead,
- repentance for the forgiveness of sins...

That's what the power of the Holy Spirit is for.

I give thanks to God, for the generations (who have gone before us) – for those who have received the power of the Holy Spirit, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was proclaimed, and we got to hear it...

We Believe it;

We understand it;

Now it's our turn. Let **us** be witnesses – Let us be clothed with power from on high, to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus loved the world enough to die for it.

Let **us** love the world enough, to proclaim it.

Happy Easter everyone,