

WITH A BANG

Somebody once said to me, “you should start your sermons out with a bang, so today I’ve decided to do just that. Are you ready? I don’t want to scare anyone, so please wake up any stray sleepers who might be lingering in our midst. Here goes. (BOOM)

Did you like that? Don’t worry, nothing’s broken. I’ve been field testing it all this week, and it hasn’t broken yet. Want to do it again? Would there be anyone willing to sit right here while I let this baby drop right on you? ...Nah. It would muffle the bang!

Now I would be lying if I didn’t say this was an attention-getting device. I mean look at you. You’re all paying attention. You’re all wondering where I’m going next. No indifference or apathy out there anymore, at least for the moment.

Today I want to talk about the bangs and booms: specifically two which I see surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus.

1) at his death. Matthew 28: " And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

And 2) at His resurrection.

Matthew 28: After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.

Did you notice these? I bet you didn’t. If I had asked you if there were earthquakes surrounding the death of Jesus, I’m reasonably certain that many of you wouldn’t have remembered. We’re so used to reading other texts about the resurrection that we almost gloss over these sections to get to the BIG story of Jesus victory. But look at the BOOMS. Earthquakes, rocks split, tombs opened, resurrections! So much so, that even those who were standing at the foot of the cross declared Jesus the Son of God.

What do you think these were all about? Wasn't the death and resurrection of Jesus Himself enough news for the people to notice and later to understand? Was it really necessary to have a laser light show too?

My answer to this question? Yes. Do you remember when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and the Pharisees told Jesus to silence the people and Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, if they keep quiet, the stones themselves will cry out." Well, think about it. The stones themselves are literally crying out. The earth itself, at God's behest, declares to all the world, in dramatic fashion, that it's time to wake up! Pay attention! Listen carefully! Don't let the message of the Son of God's death and resurrection pass you by, be forgotten, lie dormant. Don't let His incredible work of redeeming the world go unnoticed." BOOM. These two stories, His death and resurrection, are the two most important events in the history of the world and anyone who is sleeping or busy or distracted or preoccupied might never feel its impact.

Are you sleeping? I daresay that a lot of people are. They are too caught up in their busy lives to have time to dig too deeply into the bangs. They've got a career to build, children to raise, houses to buy, cars to drive -- they've invested themselves in this beautiful world and they are going to do their best to fill their lives with everything they can grab. Easter is Walgreens stuff: candy eggs, chocolate bunnies, jelly beans, a chance to visit with family. Easter is frilly dresses, blooming flowers, fancy hats, and warmer weather.

But the splash of the world is not the BOOM of God's power. Those who invest themselves there are missing something. They're really missing something.

Caiaphas. He was the High Priest of Israel. But when he saw Jesus uprooting his comfortable position, his favored status, his material blessings -- well, he just couldn't let that happen. And so, he found ways to excuse his conspiring role in cutting off God's Messiah from the world -- of crucifying the Lord of Life. The BOOMS came -- the rocks sang about Jesus. And Caiaphas missed them. He was too wrapped up in himself.

Similarly Pilate. He was not going to let some Hebrew prophet get in the way of his own rise to power. There were bigger fish to fry than this peace-lover. Caesar was the man to please -- and you don't do that by letting yourself get too caught up in the message of a man who makes

claims that He doesn't seem to back up. The BOOMS came -- the earth gave its own praise to Jesus, and Pilate missed them too.

Then there's Judas -- Judas, who saw a buck to be made off the back of his friend. Judas, whose greed and selfish desires had led him to compromise his integrity and who couldn't get past what the dollar could do for his ability to enjoy life. The BOOMS came, but Judas never even got to hear them because he yielded to the ultimate despair that unbelief brings. Judas missed them too.

And then there was Herod. Herod, when confronted by Jesus on the day of Jesus' death, is purely interested in Him for entertainment value. Can I get Him to perform a miracle -- to show me something I haven't seen before? Can I get, from Jesus, a smile for myself, a laugh, an ooh or aaah? And when Jesus refused to be a sideshow, Herod sent Him back to Pilate. The BOOMS came -- the earth sang, and Herod missed them too.

Lust, envy, pride. Anger, jealousy, laziness. Giving in to one's passions. Those things have a way of twisting us all out of shape -- taking our focus off things that are important and filling our attention with things that we deem urgent.

Brothers and sisters: (Push over the door again) On this day the BOOM shouts out. "Wake up. Wake up! There's something to see here! Jesus is Risen, and it means something." But many will still see Jesus as just another man. And, with some measure of indifference, they will ignore the BOOMS for some different activity or goal to engage them, a spectacle to entertain them, a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow to offer hope and promises and some measure of reward.

Will it be you? Are you going to wander from this building and fall back into the patterns of living for yourself, filling your time with the quest for material success, and forgetting about the booms?

Or will you wake up -- wake up and see the intrinsic worth of Him who loved us enough to become one of us -- to feel what we feel, to suffer what we suffer, to be guilty in our place, and to know the death that we deserved. But Him who was also powerful enough to blow the

stone away and walk forth from that tomb to offer His help and His future to those who believe on Him.

Peter was awakened by the BOOMS. He saw the utter folly of his denials and his fears and said, "Jesus is worthy of everything I have to give. I will not make the same mistake twice and deny Him who is worth everything. Instead, I am ready to give my life so that others might know His love." And Peter went on, tradition says, to surrender it all to a cross much like Jesus' so that the message of the Savior might be heard. He did it willingly, because He KNEW there was more to life than just this flesh and bones.

Thomas too. He heard the BOOMS. Caught up once, in his own images of safety and security, after the resurrection, "doubting Thomas" is not so much a doubter any more after Jesus presents His hands and feet to the disciple. Tradition says he took the Gospel message to India where he may have been pierced to death by spears. Thomas was convinced there was something more.

Pontius Pilate's wife may have been another who heard the BOOMS. Matthew's Gospel tells us that she had a dream concerning the innocence of Jesus and urged her husband not to allow His crucifixion. Tradition as early as the 3rd Century suggests that she did come to be a believer and is known as St. Claudia Procura. We don't know if this is true -- but if it is, I'm sure she was moved both by her dream and by the thunderous BOOMS that went off at Jesus' death and resurrection that Jesus was a force worth investing in.

What about you? Are you here today because Jesus' resurrection is more to you than just a tale, a myth, a legend? Are you here today because you believe that the Son of the Living God suffered the agony for you, endured the cross for you, rose from the dead for you, and lives forever as your eternal advocate with the Father. And, if so, are you ready to invite His rescue and deliverance of your soul to make a difference in the life you live tomorrow -- wherever He might lead you?

I want to ask one of our musicians to help me, this morning. I think you're tired of seeing me push this screen over again and again. But the truths that the resurrection are certainly worthy of some BOOM. So here we go.

1. (Trumpet please) Jesus is God. (say it with me) No man can raise Himself from the dead. No ordinary human can predict the nature of His suffering and also His full knowledge that He will walk forth from that tomb alive and well. The Jesus we serve is the Jesus who is Divine.

2. (Organ please) Jesus words and promises are true. (Say it with me: His words and promises are true.) Jesus has made an awful lot of promises to us. Things like “Lo I am with you always. Ask and it will be given you. The Holy Spirit will guide you. All things are possible. He will bear our burdens, calm our fears, strengthen us in weakness and urge us on to love and good deeds.

If Jesus confirmed Himself as the Son of God by rising from the dead, then we know all of His words can be trusted and believed.

3. (Trumpet please) There is Eternal Life for all who believe. (Say it with me: There is eternal life for all who believe.)

The day is coming, my friends, when Jesus will gather us all out of this world of darkness and offer to us our eternal mansion. And in that place there will be no mourning or suffering or sadness or tears. Instead, we will sit before the throne of God and celebrate His kingship forever and ever. It will be a place of great beauty, a place of lasting peace, a place of rest, celebration and joy as we gather together with the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, in our midst.

- Do it again:
- 1) Jesus is God
 - 2) His words and promises are true.
 - 3) We have a future in glory with Him.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen.

He is risen indeed.

Let the trumpet sound. Let the earth sing out. Let the mountains be shaken and the hills rejoice. But most especially, BOOM may it be in you and me as we wake up to the truth of His incredible love. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.