"Jesus and the Sasquatch"

Acts 4:20

Of all the surprising things that happened on the first Easter, the thing that probably surprises me the most is that when the disciples first heard that Jesus had risen from the dead, they were skeptical. They didn’t believe it. The disciples, the people He’d spent time with and He told them He was going to rise from the dead, but I guess it sounded too good to be true. They just couldn’t quite believe it at first.

I want to show you a couple of Scriptures that demonstrate what I’m talking about. Both of these are in Luke 24. First of all Luke 24:11, “The women came back from the tomb with this report that Jesus was alive. He really was alive! But, the story sounded like nonsense to the men so they did not believe it.” “It sounded like nonsense.” The King James says, “These words sound like idle tales to them,” like tall tales, really. Remember Luke was a physician, and in writing this Gospel, the word he used for idle tales or nonsense was the word that describes a person who’s in a state of delirium, a person just rambling and raving -- delirious. It was a bunch of nonsense, as far as they could see. Well, that was earlier in the day on Easter, but late that evening, just about dark as they stood in the upper room, suddenly they noticed somebody else standing there, and this figure emerged from the shadows. Listen to how they responded this time when they actually saw the Lord. This is Luke 24:37, “The whole group was startled and frightened thinking they were seeing a ghost.” Do you get that? They didn’t think it was really Him. They thought it was a ghost, and to this day, there are plenty of people who look at the resurrection of Jesus, that whole story of how He came back to life, as just some sort of old ghost story. To them it’s like the legend of Bigfoot. They’re always looking for him but they never seem to find him. Do you know that?

I’ve got a couple of boys who are actually Bigfoot hunters. My son, Luke, here, 11 years old, and his friends often try to camp out on the one-acre patch of woods behind our house and they take their guns with them. Luke, show them a demonstration. They’ve got their BB guns rigged up with flashlights on them so they can shine in the dark. They’re not going to kill Bigfoot, but they can put the hurt on him. Watch where you’re pointing that now [speaking to Luke].
Caleb does the videoing. Just the other night, they were going to try and spend the night out in the woods. They got the tent set out. There were four of them. Parker Hayes was with them and one of the boys from the neighborhood. They lasted until about 9:30 before they came back in the house. But it was for good reason. I mean, they heard these strange sounds. They heard snapping twigs which are believed to be Bigfoot-induced, and therefore you can't blame them for coming into the house.

I got the idea after the second or third Bigfoot hunt that I ought to really pull one over on these boys, and I came up with this masterful plan. I rented a Bigfoot suit from AceCo in Muskogee. I was figuring “I can slip around the side of the house and let them shine that flashlight on this and let them see what happens.” But the more I thought about it I realized “That's too small, that's small time.” I mean, why would I want to waste something that good on three or four 11-year-old boys? I wanted to try it on some adults.

You see, we live at the foot of Braggs Mountain, just off Highway 10. It seems to me that if Bigfoot was going to be anywhere in these parts, Camp Gruber [a training camp for reserve troops] is probably where he would be. Don’t you agree? I mean, the government would probably be hiding him there, keeping him a secret. So I decided to create some real Bigfoot sightings by getting out there after dark, letting some people drive by and me just mysteriously disappear into the woods, and it'll be interesting to see if it’d make the paper. How would people respond? I really wanted to see.

So last Thursday night, I believe it was March 29, I got together a team to set up this whole Bigfoot scenario. I was there, of course, in my Bigfoot outfit. My kids wanted to see it so I told my friend, Arthur Hulbert, about it. He brought his girls. Then I got Von Castor, the storm chaser, to come. I mean, if you can chase a storm, you can chase Bigfoot. He came with his video cameras and set them up. I picked out this spot. As you’re going up the mountain, right around the curve, so that the people would come around the curve and the first thing that would happen is that their lights would flash on Bigfoot. Now I had Arthur stationed up on the hill with the kids in case there was any shooting or anything like that. Von Castor was camouflaged down in the bushes, filming. So what I would do is I would stand there in my Bigfoot costume and I would wait until we heard a car coming up the mountain, and I would get out in the middle of the road, like right on the yellow line, and the second that their lights hit me I would just start walking casually on across the road and down into the woods. I don’t know what I was expecting. I guess I thought some people would slam on their brakes. I intentionally did not do it if it was two cars coming along together, because there might be a pile-up or something. I didn’t know what they would do. I was actually disappointed with what they did. Because you know what happened? There must have been 12 to 15 cars pass, and every time, I did the
same thing. The lights would hit me, I would amble across the road into the bushes, but they just kept going. I guess seeing Bigfoot at Braggs Mountain is a common thing. It's no big deal.

We were just about to wrap things up and my boys on the upper hill were hollering, “Daddy, that’s enough. We need to go. We need to go. Nothing’s going to happen.” I said, “Let me just get one more, one more,” and I got that “one more.” The thing was this “one more” did stop and he did shine a light. He was packing a pistol -- and he was in this car with flashing blue and red lights. It was the Muskogee County Sheriff’s Department. So I was already in the woods. What did I do? Well, what would you expect Bigfoot to do? I stayed in the woods, and left Arthur and Von there. I knew they could deal with it, and they dealt with it very well. They talked with him, and they talked our way out of this. Finally I heard Von hollering, “Come on up, Lance. Come on up” -- and I came up.

Here’s what had happened. The first thing that the cop said was, “We got four calls on this,” and one of the ladies who had called was there with her husband on the scene. She looked at me and said, “You were freaking me out.” And she said, “Can I get my picture made with you?” So I made a picture for her. Fortunately it was a good-natured cop and he laughed it off and he let us go. But here’s the thing. We did get some video footage that I want to share with you because a lot of times when I tell you stories that sound crazy, people come up to me after and say, “You just made that up, didn’t you?”

Now, the question I’ve got to answer now is what can we learn from this? Lance, what lessons have you learned? Well, here’s the first thing I’ve learned. I learned that it is actually very, very difficult to pull off a hoax. I also learned that if something is not real and if the people involved know it’s a fake, they are going to tell the truth in a hurry whenever they get in trouble, which is actually what Von Castor did, because the first thing out of Von Castor’s mouth when that deputy shined the light in his face was, “It’s not me. It’s not me. It was Dr. Sawyer. He’s the pastor at First Baptist Church. We were just funning. We didn’t mean it. We didn’t mean anything by it. We’re just leaving. We’re just leaving.”

You see, when a story is something you just made up and you know that it’s not true, when you know it’s a hoax, you’re not willing to get arrested for it. You are not willing to get into any trouble over it. You’re going to tell the truth the minute the light shines on you and you realize you’re in a bind. That’s one of the reasons I believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It’s because of the way His disciples responded when the spotlight was on them, and when the authorities were threatening them with jail and death. You see, there was this remarkable transformation that took place in the lives of the disciples.
Let me explain what I mean. Before the crucifixion when the mob came out to arrest Him, do you know what the Bible says? Matthew 26:56. It says, “Every one of them fled.” They fled, just like our kids fled when the cops came, right up the mountain. The disciples fled like a bunch of kids. That was before the crucifixion. They had no guts whatsoever, just chicken liver, that was it. But after they’d seen Him, after Jesus rose, once they knew He was alive and they knew He was real, you could not shut them up. They were broadcasting the news everywhere even when it got them into trouble.

For example, Acts 4. It didn’t take long for this thing to get them into trouble. People did not want to believe it. The religious leaders did not want to believe it was true and they brought Peter and John in for questioning, telling them to stop telling this story -- stop telling it. “You’re filling Jerusalem with these rumors and it’s got to stop.” Listen to what Peter and John replied. They said, “We cannot stop telling about everything we’ve seen and heard. We cannot stop.” And do you know what? They did not stop. They all were willing to die for it. What I’m saying is, this was no ordinary ghost story. This was not like a Bigfoot sighting. This was something that was real, and everybody involved in it knew it was real and they went to their deaths swearing it was real.

Do you know how the apostles died? Let me give you a quick rundown. Peter, Phillip, Thaddeus, Bartholomew and Simon the zealot were all crucified because they refused to take back their story about Jesus being alive. James, when he was 94 years old, was thrown off the top of the temple and after he hit the ground, they clubbed him to death on the head and beat his brains out, 94-year-old James. Matthew, who wrote the Gospel, do you know how he died? He was chopped to death with an axe. John was thrown into a pot of boiling oil and yet managed to survive. Andrew, the brother of Peter, was whipped severely and he was crucified in a different way. He was stretched out in the form of an X and tied to a cross after being whipped, and it took two days for Andrew to die. Then there was Thomas. Remember doubting Thomas? The one who didn’t believe at first, the one who said, “I can’t believe this and I won’t believe it unless I have some clear evidence, unless I can touch Him.” Well, if you know your Scripture, you know that Jesus gave him that evidence, and Thomas, doubting Thomas, developed a faith in Jesus that was so real and was so strong that it took him all the way to India preaching, and when he wouldn’t stop preaching it, an idolatrous priest ran him through with a spear and they burned him in a hot oven. You see, these are not the kinds of things you do to keep a Bigfoot story going. These are not the kind of tales you keep telling once you realize it’s going to get you in big trouble.

Now I want to ask you, have you ever wondered how you would respond if you found yourself, as a Christian, in a situation like the disciples got into? How
would you respond if your faith got you in big trouble and you were either going to have to deny your faith or you’re going to jail, you’re going to be tortured, you may even be killed unless you deny Jesus? How do you think you would handle a situation like that? I’ve thought about it many times and I have to say, I’m not sure how I would handle that. But I do know this, I know it, I know it, whether or not I stuck with my Jesus would depend on one thing. It would depend on how real Jesus really is to me. It would depend on whether or not I’d really had an encounter with Him. It would depend on whether or not I really knew Him for myself.

You see, if Jesus is just some doctrine that we claim we believe in, if Christian is just the box you check when you’re filling out some form, then you wouldn’t stick with Jesus in a difficult time. I mean, it’s amazing how many people will forsake their faith or lose their faith the minute things get difficult for them. It all comes down to this. Is He real for you? If He’s real to you, if you really know Him and you know He’s alive, you’re going to be willing to make a sacrifice for Him. If you don’t have that kind of relationship with Him, you wouldn’t. If He’s real to you, you’re going to take Him so seriously that you’ll make financial sacrifices to support His work. You’ll make financial sacrifices to help people who are in need, because you’ll believe what He said. “When you do it to them, when you help them you’re doing it to me.” You’ll make those kinds of sacrifices. You’ll sacrifice your time. You’ll sacrifice a beautiful, 70-degree Sunday when you could have been fishing or playing golf. You’ll sacrifice that to come and worship Him. You’ll sacrifice that because you’ve committed yourself to worship. You’ve committed yourself to serving Him on a regular basis. But if He’s not real to you, you won’t do that. You won’t even make those little sacrifices. What I want to say very clearly is, if we’re not willing to make the little sacrifices, let’s not deceive ourselves. We would not make the ultimate sacrifice.

Now my goal here is not to make you feel guilty about your level of commitment, because if all I do is make you feel guilty, here’s what that’ll accomplish. That might get you to come to church for three or four Sundays in a row and sign up to volunteer for something, but it’ll wear off, the guilt will, and that’s when the commitment will go away. I’m not really interested in guilt. What I want you to see is that you can know Him in a very real way and once you get to know Him in a real way, then the commitment issues, they’ll all take care of themselves, and the better you know Him, the stronger your commitment will get. So what I’m asking you to do today is to seek after Him. You know, there are people who spend their lives and lots of money and tremendous amounts of time seeking Bigfoot. They buy expensive cameras and they spend hours in the woods in the middle of the night seeking for something they’re never going to find, but they’re more committed to finding Bigfoot than some of us are to finding Christ.
I know this, if you seek Him, you will find Him as I’ve found Him, and as many others have found Him, and you’ll discover for yourself He’s real and He’s alive. But you’ve got to do your own seeking. There’s a promise. Jesus said, “Seek and you shall find.” God gave a similar promise in Jeremiah 29:13. Listen to these words of the Lord. “If you look for Me wholeheartedly you will find Me.” If you look you’ll find Me. The Bible says, “Jesus is the rewarder of them who diligently seek Him.” That means if you seek after Him diligently with all your heart, you’re not going to come up empty. You’re not going to come up disappointed.

So today on this Easter Sunday, I’m challenging you to find out for yourself whether He’s real. If you’re one of those who’s not sure, then try Him. Seek Him. I already know what will happen if you seek Him with your whole heart. But in order to seek Him, you’re going to have to do things you’ve not been doing. You’re going to have to go through some things that are going to require some commitment. You’re going to have to do more than just show up at church twice a month. You’re going to have to seek Him every day. You’re going to have to spend time reading His Word. You’re going to have to spend time listening to others as they tell you about their experience with Him. You’re going to have to join together with other people who are also seeking Him. Seek Him that way and you shall find Him, and when you find Him, you will have found something that will change your life.

You know, one last thing. Suppose somebody did manage to find Bigfoot. Suppose he really was captured. Ultimately what difference would it really make? We’d have a new species of animal. It would have nothing to do with your life. Your life would go on as normal. But folks, if you seek and find Jesus Christ, your life will do a radical turnaround and you will suddenly begin seeing everything in a whole new way, because you’ll know He lives.