

Easter Sunday morning service

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[0 : 0 0] Let me add my word of welcome. It's lovely to see so many visitors. You're very, very welcome.

One of the things I love about the Bible is I've been studying the Bible, reading the Bible for the best part of 30 years. And one of the things about the Bible is there's always something more, there's something fresh.

And this week I discovered a verse. Let me read it to you. You'll see it on page 7 of the service sheet. It's a great little verse. I'd not spotted it first. It is the explanation of the resurrection. Unto you first, God having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you. I think that is, if you're to put a gun to my head and say give me one verse in the New Testament that explains the resurrection, I think that verse does it.

God having raised his son, his child Jesus from the dead, sent him to bless you. And so often as Easter time comes around, somebody turns the resurrection actually into a problem.

[1 : 1 1] It's often the annual event in churches. When Easter came, problems came. So some cleric or some bishop might question whether it was really a bodily resurrection or not.

And so there comes talks on the problem of the resurrection. But when you read the Bible, you find that the resurrection is not a problem.

It is a blessing. God having raised his son Jesus from the dead, sent him to bless you this morning. Not a problem, but a blessing.

And I think that's the emphasis of Matthew chapter 28. So if you would turn to Matthew chapter 28 in the Bible in front of you. Matthew chapter 28, which is on page 835. I want you to see, you probably know this already, that nowhere in the New Testament is Jesus' resurrection described. At the moment when his heart began to beat again, his eyes opened. We're not told about that. What we're told about is the effects. The effects of the resurrection that it has on people.

[2 : 2 8] The tomb is found to be empty. And the disciples, the followers of Jesus, meet him, the risen Lord. In this chapter, there's no doubt there's an element of Christian apologetic.

It gives you the evidence to support the claim of Jesus' resurrection. But the emphasis is not so much on factual proof for the non-Christian or for the skeptic.

But the emphasis is on the impact of this incredible event. This incredible truth on Jesus' bewildered and frightened followers.

How it turns their fear into joy. Their doubt into assurance. Four times in the passage, I don't know whether you can spot it.

Jesus says, or Matthew says, behold. I don't know about you, but I never use that word. I never use the word behold. I tell my children to stop.

[3 : 3 1] Look. Listen. I rarely say, in fact, I don't think I've ever said, behold. I don't know how any of us use it. But that's what the word means. It means, da-da.

It means stop. It means look. It means listen. It means this is important. Four times. And so why don't you behold this morning? Out of this passage, I've put three or four verses to give us a starting point.

First verse is in verse 6. Can you see it? Matthew 28, verse 6. It's very simple. It's very simple. It's very simple. He is not here. For he has risen.

As he said. That's our first Easter fact. It's the fact of the empty tomb. You don't need faith to see that.

A tomb is empty. All you need is a pair of eyes. That's not a problem, is it? And the tomb was empty. Next verse, verse 7. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, disciples and his followers, that he has risen from the dead.

[4 : 46] Risen from the dead. Death was not able to hold its prey. Jesus, the Lord of the empty tomb, is the conqueror of death.

An empty tomb. Secondly, a victorious Lord. A victorious Lord. And then in verse 8. Can you look there? They departed quickly from the tomb.

That's the women. They departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy. And they ran to tell his disciples. And behold, our word again, Jesus met them and said, greetings. Hi. And they came to him.

And took hold of his feet. And worshipped him. And then Jesus said to them, do not be afraid. And out of those verses, I just want to pick out some words.

Here it is. They departed quickly from the tomb with fear. Jesus met them and said, do not be afraid.

[5 : 47] They departed quickly from the tomb with fear. Jesus met them and said, do not be afraid. Can you just see from those verses that the resurrection is not a problem.

It is a blessing. The risen Lord comes to meet us with all the reassurance that we happen to need at that time. The empty tomb. The victorious Lord.

And then the saviour who comes to us. So first of all, I'm going to talk about those three things. First of all, the empty tomb. About 15 years ago, I took a funeral.

It was in South Ealing Cemetery. I don't know if you know that cemetery, if you don't know your way around. I had done very few funerals at that point. And I was unfamiliar with that cemetery.

There seemed to be little variation in the graves. It was unfamiliar. I didn't know it so well. And there was a new undertaker who I was helping out. And they seemed very, very nervous.

[6 : 49] I didn't know the family of the funeral that I was taking. I had never really met them before apart from once. And as we gathered round the grave, surrounded by not that many mourners and a very nervous undertaker, we were about to begin the service.

The bearers were about to lower the coffin into the grave when one of the family said, This is not our grave. This is not our grave. The poor undertaker looked absolutely horrified.

This is not our grave. The undertakers had pointed us four or five places along when it should have gone to the other. It was terribly embarrassing. Terribly, terribly embarrassing.

But the graves looked identical. And yet the family knew, this is not our grave. I read a book recently by a friend of mine, Jackie Gibson, called You Are Still a Mother.

She wrote it about her stillborn son. And I was reminded of my nephew, my brother's oldest child, who was stillborn. And so when I went back to Swansea last month, I asked my mother, Could we go to Samuel's grave?

[8 : 04] I'd not been in the cemetery for 30 years. And as we drove in, I knew exactly where the grave was. 30 years.

And yet I remembered. Because you don't forget a grave, do you? Of someone that is close to you, someone who is meaningful to you. You can remember where the grave is.

You can close your eyes and probably go there in your mind's eye now. And I think that is why Matthew is so insistent. That the women followed him from Galilee. Among them were Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James.

They saw where they buried him. Because Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there watching Jesus be buried on the Friday. And on Easter Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene and Mary, they went to see the tomb.

Do you see the continuity that Matthew is building into his story? They've been with Jesus all through his public ministry. They watched him die. They carefully watched where he was buried.

[9 : 09] And 36 hours later, they came back on Easter Sunday morning. It's one of those touches of reassurance that we have that what you're reading in the Gospels is a fact.

It is an unmistakable, unchallengeable fact. The women who had come, the women who had watched, the women came back. It's the same women. Back to where their dear, precious Jesus had been laid.

If you go to Luke's Gospel, it's even more particular. Luke says they saw the Sackbulker and how he was laid. Because they didn't know that this tomb hadn't been used before. For all they knew, it was a multi-occupancy tomb.

Therefore, it was important to these women not only to mark which tomb it was, but the place. How careful they were when they came face to face with an empty tomb.

Can you imagine Mary Magdalene getting it wrong? Even more difficult than that. Can you imagine the early church making up a story about an empty tomb if the tomb wasn't empty?

[10:22] Is that credible? It's not as if the women were expecting a resurrection. They came with spices to anoint a dead body.

Why? When the apostles were told that Jesus had risen from the dead, Luke says they thought it was nonsense. Literally, they thought it was humbug. That's the word.

They thought it was false talk. They were incapable of making up a story of the empty tomb, both on factual and moral grounds.

Imagine Peter preaching just a few days later. And he ventured to say to the people in front of him, he said, do you remember the Psalms? The Psalms are an Old Testament book.

You sing them. And one of the songs you sing is about David. And David says, my flesh will rest in hope. Because you will not leave my soul in the place of death.

[11:19] Nor will you let your Holy One see corruption. Now, said Peter, King David, who wrote that Psalm, he did see corruption. You know where his tomb is.

His body is corrupting there. You see, David cannot have been speaking about himself. Being a prophet, he foresaw, he looked forward to the Messiah.

That he would not be left in the place of the dead. That he himself would not see corruption. Peter is saying, go to the empty tomb yourself. Do you feel it?

In the very place where certainty had to be, they were doubly certain. Peter preached of a body that wasn't there.

And had not descended into corruption. Verse 6. Just notice what the angel doesn't say. Look at verse 6. Verse 6, he says, He's not here, for he is risen.

[12:29] As he said, come, see the place where he lay. The angel says, doesn't say, don't look in there. Take it by faith in me.

The angel doesn't say, don't ask any questions, just believe. No, the angel invites the woman to check out the facts with sense. Come, use your eyes and use your mind and see what I say is true. And if you're a skeptic, if you're here today and you're not a follower of the Lord Jesus, it's the same invitation today. Come and check out the facts.

Look at the evidence that there is for the Lord Jesus Christ and his resurrection from the dead. Use your mind. See if what you have sung and heard read from the Bible today is true.

The empty tomb, it's the first great Easter fact. And then there's the victorious Lord, secondly. The victorious Lord, he was dead. He has been raised from among the dead.

[13:40] He is the overcoming Lord. He is the Lord who left death behind. The Lord who put death into reverse.

Death is not like that for us. I remember I'm sitting down for tea when I was a little boy. And my dad took a phone call. And when my dad came to the table, I said to my mum, it's all over.

It's all over. And my mum understood those words. It was about the death of a family member. I didn't realise it at the time I needed it to have explained to me.

It's all over. It meant that she had died. It was irreversible. There was nothing more that could be done.

And death for us spells a line, doesn't it, across our lives. We can't go back. That's what's so painful for many of you this morning. The past is gone. It's all over.

[14:46] When King David, in the Old Testament, his little boy was very ill, chronically ill, as a baby. And David said, as long as the little boy is alive, there was hope.

And therefore, I prayed and I fasted, in case it might be that the Lord might have mercy and heal him. But the little boy died. And David says, now that he is dead, I will go to him, but he can't come to me.

It's all over. It's all over. There's no coming back. But not for Jesus. Not for Jesus.

We've been going through John's Gospel. And last week, we saw Jesus call Lazarus out of the grave. Lazarus came back to life again. Amazing story. Jesus came back to life again, though, forever.

And ever, and ever, and ever, Lazarus had to die again, poor bloke. Jesus says in the book of Revelation, I am the living one.

[15:49] I was dead, but now I am alive forevermore. He's the only one who can say that. And the reason why Easter brings us so much joy, is that the resurrection tells us that death does not have

the final word.

It is not all over. That there is someone who has gone through death. This morning, I went for a walk, and I went round Greenford Cemetery.

Can I really encourage you to do that on Easter Sunday? It's a great thing to do. To see the graves of people who many of us knew.

And we have buried them. And to remind ourselves that for those who have trusted in Christ, death is not the end. There is one who has come back from the dead.

There is hope in the face of death for those who have trusted Christ this morning. The empty tomb. The victorious Lord.

[16:58] And then there is the way that the story goes on. There is the saviour who comes to us. The saviour who comes to us. We are told, aren't we, that they ran away from the tomb. With fear.

They have come face to face with something awesome. Something unique. Something unparalleled. Something downright supernatural. They ran from the tomb with fear.

We can understand that. We might say, you look like you have seen a ghost. Ghosts don't have feet. Look at verse 9. They took hold of his feet. Ghosts don't have feet.

Think of Caspar the friendly ghost. They don't have feet. They grab hold of his feet. This is not their imagination.

They have met a man who they saw die two days ago. And they are terrified. Do you remember how our selected words from verses 8 and 9 went?

[17:59] They ran from the tomb with fear. But Jesus met them. They thought they were coming to a tomb to meet him.

They came to meet with a dead body. But they found that the situation was the other way around. There was a living saviour. Who had come to meet with them.

They ran from the tomb with fear. And Jesus met them. And Jesus said to them. Don't. Be afraid. The risen Jesus in all the accounts of the resurrection. In Matthew and Mark and Luke and John. Takes the initiative.

He is the one who comes to his people. To his followers. He appears to Mary. He draws alongside the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

[18:59] He meets the women. He appears to 500 people in his resurrection. The risen Jesus comes to meet us. The living risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Has his eye of love on his disciples. All the time. He knows your situation. He knows your need. He knows your fears.

He knows your worries. He knows your weakness. And because he is the living loving Lord. He comes to meet us.

And wherever there is the slightest need. There is the victorious Lord. Who is the saviour who comes to meet us. Close enough to touch. Do not be afraid.

God having raised his son from the dead. Sent him to bless you. I wonder if you know what the most common command in all the Bible is. The most common command in the Bible.

[20:04] Is not thou shalt not. And it is not do this. It is. Do not be afraid. It's given twice in Matthew 28.

It's given there in verse 5 and verse 10. Do not be afraid. We live don't we in a world. I'm wracked with fear.

Fear. Fear. Fear. Fear.! And he comes to you.

And he says trust me. Do not be afraid. Come this morning to him with all your fears. And all your doubts.

And all your burdens. And all your sins. And all your troubles. Some of you will know this call to worship. That's used in some churches.

[21:19] To those who are spiritually weary. And seek rest. To all who mourn. And long for comfort. To all who struggle. And desire hope. To all who sin.

And need a saviour. To all who are strangers. And long for fellowship. To all who hunger. And thirst after righteousness. And to ever will come. This church opens wide its doors.

And offers welcome. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The resurrection. Tells us that the death of Good Friday.

Wasn't the end. That on the cross. Jesus took. My sin. Our sin. And our rebellion. He took the curse.

For our wrongdoing. And it was laid on him. The price has been paid. The punishment has been born. For all who will trust him. And he was laid in the tomb.

[22 : 16] But death couldn't handle him. And the grave could not hold him. And he rises. In resurrection power. Never more to die. And he invites you.

And he comes to you. And he offers himself to you. And so there is an empty tomb. And there is a victorious Lord. And there is a saviour this morning.

Who offers himself to you. Says to you amidst all the difficulties of your life. And all your sorrows. And all your struggles. Do not. Be afraid. You do not have to live in fear.

You see the resurrection is not a problem is it? It is an enormous blessing. And so accept him. Receive him.

Fold at his feet. And worship him. Let's bow in prayer. Let's bow in prayer. Let's bow in prayer.