

Easter Sunday morning service

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[0 : 00] Christ is risen. Christ is risen. Does it matter?

Did it happen? Did it happen? Did it happen?

Does it matter? The first is the reality of the resurrection. If you want a Bible, turn to Matthew chapter 28. Matthew chapter 28. And let's see in verses 1 to 10, resurrection reality.

First thing is this. It's seen in all the Gospels. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is completely unexpected. Verse 1 of chapter 28.

Now, after the Sabbath, toward the end, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. We know that from the other Gospels, they didn't just go to visit a grave on that Sunday morning.

[1 : 16] They didn't go just to look at a tomb. They went in the hope that they would be able to further anoint Jesus' body for burial.

Jesus died two days before on the Friday, just before sundown, just before the beginning of the Sabbath day. And so part of the women and the disciples' commitment not to do any work on the Sabbath, they'd hastily anointed Jesus' body.

They'd done it quickly for burial before the Sabbath began. They did what they could on the Friday with the time allowed. But there was still more to do. And so Sunday morning, they go to the tomb because they properly want to anoint and prepare Jesus' body for burial.

You see it in Mark 16, you see it in Luke 23, 24, you see it in John 19 and 20, the women came to honour Jesus in his death.

They came to the tomb fully expecting to find a dead body that needed attention. The women had no romantic expectations of new hope in the face of death.

[2 : 31] Their highest hope that morning was not that death's sting would be removed, but the stink of death would be removed. It's a really important detail for us to understand.

They were not expecting the resurrection. They knew as well as you know and I know that dead bodies do not come back to life.

Which brings them to verses 2 to 7. The women in their expectation of going to the tomb suddenly encounter something unabashedly, unashamedly supernatural.

And the women did not encounter some new emotional resolve within themselves to press on in troubled times.

They encounter a miraculous power coming down to them from heaven. Look at verse 2. There was a great earthquake. Of course earthquakes happen in the natural world.

[3 : 33] But we're told this one took place for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and rolled back the stone and sat upon it. And the appearance of this angel was like lightning and its clothing as white as snow.

It's a remarkable display of heavenly power. It's not just something that the women experience in their inner being, in their inner self, but with a public visible display.

And we know this, don't we? That it was public and it was visible because the guards who are there saw and heard the scene. These battle-hardened men were told they are utterly terrified by the angel.

They trembled with fear and became like dead men. They have their own literal earthquake. And then the angel makes this unmistakable announcement to the woman.

He says, they are not to be afraid. Can you believe it? Do not be afraid. Because the Jesus you are seeking who was crucified.

[4 : 45] That's alive. It's in contrast to the soldiers who've got every right to be afraid. Then the angel speaks the most amazing words, isn't it? Some of the most amazing words that have been

spoken at any time in any place.

The angel says, he is not here for he has risen. And they say, come and see the place where he lay. The angel gives the women not only resurrection evidence, but he gives them instruction. He says, go find his disciples and share the news. Tell them that Jesus will meet them in Galilee. Despite the angel's admonition not to fear, this supernatural angelic encounter was so unexpected, so amazing, so overwhelming, so world shaking, that the women still depart in understandable fear. But can you see that their fear is now joined to great joy? This display of supernatural power, this angelic announcement, is not just a new feeling.

It's not just a new sentiment. It's not just a new outlook on life. It is nothing less than a supernatural declaration that there is now new life from the dead.

[6 : 17] Because Jesus has risen from the dead. There wasn't just earthquakes and light words about a resurrection, but a real resurrection.

The angel is supernaturally testifying to a real, substantive, actual, literal, body resurrection. That's what we see in verses 8 to 10. It's unmistakably real. The real resurrected Jesus. As the women were on their way, and we read that Jesus met them.

So that they saw him with their own eyes. He says to them, greetings, literally, hi. They hear him with their own ears.

It's no mere vision. It is no dream. It's not a powerful thought in their heart and their mind. They come upon him.

[7 : 22] They fall to the floor and they take hold of his feet. They touch him with their own hands. It was a resurrection reality.

So powerful. So clear. So miraculous. So unexpected. So tangibly concrete. And they are overwhelmed. And Jesus, once again, admonishes the women.

Do not be afraid. And what we see in these verses, in the clear testimony of this passage, the universal witness of the New Testament is that Jesus really and truly rose from the dead.

A literal, physical resurrection of his body. The disciples touched his pierced hands. John chapter 21.

They sat and ate with him. Their fundamental testimony, from the beginning to the end, is that we saw him with our eyes.

[8 : 26] We heard him with our ears. We touched him with our hands. 1 John 1. The resurrected Jesus was not just an idea, not a vision, not a hope.

He was the God-man. Resurrected from the dead in his flesh. I was with somebody this week who recently lost their husband.

And they had said, in the last few months, they've begun to dream. And they dream of their husband. They wake up in the middle of the night and they've heard his voice. And they've felt that expression.

And when they wake up, they're discombobulated in reality. They ask themselves, is this, is he really dead? Or is he really alive? It takes them a moment to come to reality.

But this isn't like that. Can you see that? Matthew is at pains to point this out to you. They saw Jesus with their eyes. They heard him with their ears.

[9 : 28] They touched him with their hands. This is the God-man resurrected from the dead in his flesh. No other explanation will do. No other account will do.

Jesus either literally, physically rose from the dead in his physical flesh. Or there is no Christian gospel and we are wasting our time.

Part of the reason for that is because sin, our rebellion against God, our refusal to live with God being in charge, our sin is real and actual.

And death is real and actual. I've been present with a number of people. As they've breathed their last.

I've stood at the graveside and buried people in the ground. And I can tell you that death was not a metaphor. I can tell you that death is not a symbol.

[10 : 35] Death is not a negative feeling. No, sin and death are cold, hard realities. A reality that cannot be wished away.

A reality that cannot be explained away. A reality that cannot be hoped away. And so in the face of the cold, hard reality of death, the only thing that you can ask and I can ask is, can this be defeated?

Can this be dealt with? Can death be conquered? Can it be overcome? Is there an answer? And the answer is this. Well, not by any power that you have or I have.

But the Christian gospel declares to you, yes, it can be. And yes, it has been. And that is because Jesus faced the cold, hard reality of death in all its fullness.

And we're told that he bore, he took our sin and our rebellion in his body on the tree. And he died the death that we all deserved to die. And it was a real death.

[11:42] And they laid him cold in the ground. And Jesus lies in that tomb. And if Jesus had remained in the grave, there would be no hope this morning for you and me.

Because death would win. And its cold, hard reality would weigh on us forever. And the Apostle Paul knows this. He says, if Jesus has not physically, really physically, literally, risen from the dead, our faith is in vain.

And we are to be pitied above all men. If there's not a literal resurrection. If that's the case, you cannot redeem the gospel story.

You just bury it as lies. But if Jesus really rose from the dead, if he really rose from the grave, then the gospel, the good news story, can redeem you from death itself.

Can give you hope in the face of death. It's a bit like Jenga. You know the game of Jenga? You know Jenga, children? Have you played Jenga?

[12:51] Jenga, you take off, don't you, the little bricks, don't you? And so you have a tower of bricks. And you gradually pull. And then there is one brick, isn't there?

And there's one brick. And you know that if you pull that brick out, what happens? Everything falls. Everything goes. And Paul says, the resurrection, it's that brick.

You pull that brick and everything goes. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, we're wasting our time this morning.

People should feel sorry for us. But Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. The New Testament makes it really clear that the witness of those first eyewitnesses is that the resurrection is unexpected, totally.

It is real, yes. It is unabashedly, supernaturally. Supernatural. And it is miraculous. That brings us to the second R. We see the resurrection reality.

[13:53] And then we see the resurrection rejected. Rejected. We begin to see that in verse 11.

Can you look there? Matthew 28. Some of the guard that saw the resurrection go into the city.

And they tell the chief priests, they tell the religious leaders what has taken place. And we see here that even though the guards became like dead men in their fear, they're still able to take in the scene.

And they give a report of it. They tell the chief priests all that has taken place. And this report is not easily dismissed. In fact, there's a meeting called, of all the leaders, the elders and the chief priests, take counsel.

It requires, doesn't it, this report of the resurrection, a planned and coordinated response. But what we see right away is that the planned response acknowledges that the story happened.

Can you see that? It acknowledges that the resurrection happened. The resurrection happened. But there's no true belief. Despite the miraculous account of the guards, there's no sense that this account changes anything in the hearts and minds of the elders.

[15:12] It didn't change their view of Jesus. It didn't change their view of the truth. It didn't change their view of reality. No, it's clear, isn't it, that they heard the supernatural account.

They believed it. They didn't dismiss it out of hand. They didn't say, oh, you're making it up. No, they create a conspiracy in which they pay the men to lie to counter the reality.

It seems, doesn't it, that their only thought is how can we protect the status quo? How do we keep things the same? How do we retain our control and our influence and our power?

And so in their unbelief, they turn to conspiracy in a paid effort to spread untruth. They do not believe. And they would not believe.

So they lie and they conspire to cover up the truth. And they not only pay the soldiers to lie, but they use whatever power they have to ensure that the soldiers will not get into trouble.

[16:17] And that they would be enabled to continue to spread their lies about the Lord Jesus. And Matthew adds this little detail, doesn't he? He says, this conspiracy, this story has been spread to the present day.

Matthew is speaking of his own day when he wrote the gospel. It's a period kind of a few decades after the event in question. But we know, don't we, that the lie extended beyond Matthew's day. The early church father, Justin Martyr, speaks in his lifetime that this story is continuing to circulate. At least a hundred years after Matthew's writing.

And this lie had staying power. And of course, it's not the only lie, is it, that circulated against the testimony of Jesus' resurrection. Unbelief has produced many different resurrection rejections throughout the centuries.

Muslims say, Jesus didn't die. He kind of did a swap-a-roo with Judas. Or he only swooned on the cross.

[17 : 25] And then he revived in the refreshing tomb. Scientific arguments make rejecting the resurrection a materialistic and scientific impossibility, they say.

Attacks have been made, haven't they, on the unreliability of the New Testament witnesses. We could go on and on and on. Unbelief, lies and conspiracy against resurrection have been promoted in various ways even to today.

And yet what we've seen, and what we still continue to see, is that throughout the ages, the message of the real resurrection of Jesus, that Jesus physically, literally rose from the grave, continues to go forth in truth and in power.

The first-hand report of those who saw and heard and touched and ate with the resurrected Christ. The reports from the women and Peter and John and the twelve and the other disciples and as many as 500 people whom Jesus appeared to at once.

And those reports have continued to bless countless billions, believing that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is real.

[18 : 45] And so today I want to encourage you not to be dismayed and not to be thrown off course and not to be shocked as people deny the resurrection in our day. Because resurrection denial has been happening from that very day and will happen into the future until Jesus returns, but we press on in faith.

And that brings us to our final point. If Christ's resurrection is real, and it is, well, does it really matter? What difference does it make?

And Matthew 28 gives us a profound number of resurrection ramifications. Now I don't think I've ever used the word ramifications, but alliteration was too good to miss on Easter Sunday, alright? I think implications, alright? So the reality of the resurrection, resurrection rejected, and resurrection ramifications, alright? And here's the first one in the chapter.

And the most important, that if Jesus Christ is risen, and he is worthy of our worship. And do you see that from the women in verse 9?

[20 : 01] And behold, Jesus met them and said hi, and they came up and took a hold of his feet and worshipped him. And verse 17, can you see what it says?

And when they saw him, they worshipped him. And of course we have to add, don't we, that some of them doubted. I think that kind of lends authenticity to this account.

I would argue that their doubt is an even more compelling reason why you should believe. Because you see here in verse 17, that for some of the disciples, the resurrection was so unexpected, so remarkable, so obviously supernatural, that even when they saw Jesus standing before them, their first instinct was to doubt their eyes.

To come up with some other possible explanation. It reminds you, doesn't it? It reminds me that these men are not naive. They are not easily duped. They are not gullible men.

They are solid men grounded in the real world. So much so that it's hard to swallow, but in the end we see that they were totally and utterly convinced.

[21 : 14] Acts 1 tells us that Jesus presented them with many convincing proofs of his resurrection. And over a period of 40 days, so that in the end they had no doubt that his resurrection was real.

And they knew that if Jesus really was risen from the dead, he was worthy of their worship. Thomas captures that apostolic sentiment when he speaks with Jesus in John chapter 20.

And he sees the nail-pierced hands of the Lord Jesus. And maybe he puts his hand on those hands. And he says to Jesus, my Lord and my God.

You see, I tell you this morning, if Jesus really is truly risen from the dead, then it's all true. His prophecies about his death and his resurrection, they are true.

His moral teachings are true. His teachings concerning himself are true. And if he's risen from the dead, he really is the Lord of the Sabbath.

[22 : 19] He really is the bridegroom of the church. He really is the great I am. He really is the heavenly son of man. He really is Lord and God. And if Jesus is not really risen from the dead, then nothing he said matters.

But if Jesus is risen from the dead, then everything he said matters. And nothing matters more than Jesus himself. And in keeping with this, then Jesus declares that another great resurrection ramification is that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him.

It's the picture of the great Old Testament vision of Daniel chapter 7, where we behold one like the son of man coming to the ancient of days, where he's given a kingdom and dominion and glory and all the peoples and all the nations of the earth will serve him.

And his dominion, we're told, is an everlasting dominion, which will not pass away. And his kingdom will never be destroyed. And if Jesus is really risen from the dead, he is worthy of your worship.

He is king of kings and lord of lords. And he is not just an interesting teacher. He is not someone that you can treat with contempt. He is not someone that you can muck about with.

[23 : 32] He's not just a helpful moral instructor. He is not just an example of sacrificial love and someone who may be able to bring you no hope. If Jesus is risen indeed, he is God and king.

And he is the sovereign lord of heaven and earth. And he rightly rules over you and me. And that is the great claim of the Bible. That Jesus died for our sins.

And that he faced the fullness of death's sting and the pain of that. And on our behalf, he died and he was buried. And he really died. But he is risen from the dead on the third day.

And he appeared to many. And he's really, truly alive. He's risen indeed. And as the risen one, he is to be worshipped as God and king.

And he has sovereign authority over your life. I love the way that Abraham Kuyper put it famously. He said, there is not one square inch in all of the creation order over which Jesus Christ does not rightly declare, this is mine.

[24 : 53] And we see it here in this passage, don't we, right at the end, all authority, verse 18, has been given to him in his risen glory. And so he seeks disciples of all nations.

Disciples means followers, followers who will observe all that he's commanded. You can't, you can't, you can't pick in twos and pick a mix on Jesus' teaching. And he promises you this, that as you follow him, he will be with you to the end of the age.

And if Jesus is risen from the dead, he is not just to be acknowledged on Easter Sunday morning in a moment of kind of passing seasonal sentiment, he is to be worshipped always.

In all of life. In all of, in all times. In all places, among all people. And what is glorious is Jesus doesn't just give a command, these are the things you should do, but he gives you a promise and he says, I will give you my living presence.

He promises to be with his people as the living Lord and sovereign King. To be with us through the promised presence of his spirit until that day when he returns in glory.

[26 : 11] And we will see him face to face. And it would be wrong, wouldn't it, for us not to see that Jesus is not only calling us to worship him ourselves and to live a life of obedience, but he's calling us to invite others into that worship.

He calls you to worship. The resurrection road that he sets before us is that as we live under the reign of the resurrected Christ, we are to seek to bring others into the glory of his reign.

It says that we're to seek to make disciples through the teaching of his word to tell people that they need to repent of their sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ crucified and risen and in order that together as God's people we might walk in his commands.

And so we long to see men and women and children baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit for he is risen. For if Christ is risen we will then have victory over death as the people of God through faith in him and if Christ is risen we have purpose in life because King Jesus not only saves from eternal death but he gives us eternal life and he gives us eternal life to live right now a life of worship and obedience a life of purpose as we engage with others a life of witness as we call on the nations to a life of blessed obedience to his word in the church trusting in Jesus as saviour and king the resurrection of Jesus Christ is real and his resurrection orders and defines reality and this resurrection of the Lord Jesus should define and order every part of our lives and so my prayer for us is that this

Easter day that we will lay hold of the reality of Christ's resurrection and that by faith in him we would find faith to stand amongst all manner of resurrection rejections in our world and we would live out in increasing ways the full ramifications of Christ's resurrection that we would live lives of worship and of obedience and of mission to our neighbours and to the ends of the earth that is our joy we who believe this is our gift from God our king this is our calling for Christ is risen he is risen indeed hallelujah let's pray thank you Thank you.