

He's Alive!

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[0 : 00] Last Sunday we walked together through Matthew's account of what happened leading up to the cross. We followed the unfolding plot against Jesus as the chief priests and the chief priests and the chief priests.

! We saw Judas quietly slip away to strike a deal, agreeing to betray his friend.

We sat at the table with Jesus and his disciples where he broke bread and spoke of what his death would accomplish. We entered the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed in deep anguish, surrendering to his Father's will.

There we witnessed the disciples' bold promises of loyalty, promises that would soon falter. And under the cover of darkness, Judas returned with an armed crowd and Jesus was taken captive. We heard last Sunday about how through the night Jesus was dragged from place to place as religious leaders sought false testimony to condemn him. And when asked directly, Jesus made the good confession that he was the Messiah.

[1 : 18] Words they called blasphemy. At daybreak, they led him before Pilate. And even though Pilate declared Jesus innocent, he bowed to the pressure of the crowd and handed Jesus over to be executed.

We read of the flogging and the mocking, the procession out to Golgotha, the crucifixion, the taunts and the jeers of the bystanders.

And we heard Jesus' loud cry, my God, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And with another loud cry, Jesus breathed his last and gave up his spirit.

We heard about Joseph of Arimathea and how he got permission to bury Jesus' body in his own tomb. And a large stone was rolled into place over the entrance and a guard set by the rulers to keep watch.

It was a horrible and tragic day. But as we just heard sung, all was not lost. There was a great and mighty purpose of God in the death of Jesus.

[2 : 41] Forgiveness for humanity was bought with Jesus' blood. And this forgiveness was offered freely to all, to you and to me.

And it's all because of the great mercy and love of God toward us. Just as it says in Ephesians chapter 1, In him, in Jesus Christ, we have redemption.

Through his blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace, which he lavished on us.

And I hope we don't miss that word grace. It means that this forgiveness is a gift that's given by God because of his kindness and goodness, his generosity.

It's not something that we need to earn from God. But each of us can have a restored relationship with him, despite what we have done, because of what Jesus did at the cross.

[3 : 51] And all we need to do to receive this gift is to repent, to turn to God, to acknowledge the wrongs we've done and believe.

It was a horrible and tragic day, but all was not lost. It was a day of costly sacrifice that became for us the day of our deliverance and salvation.

And what I love about this true story is that it didn't end with death and tragedy. Reading from Matthew chapter 28 verse 1.

So Matthew tells us that some time passed while Jesus' body lay lifeless in the tomb.

There was the Sabbath day, which was the seventh day of the week on which no one worked. And then following that was the first day of the week. Matthew tells us that two of the Marys who had been close followers of Jesus went to look at the tomb.

[4 : 58] 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.

Can you imagine this? You're on your way to the tomb and the ground begins to tremble violently. Matthew tells us that the cause of the quake was the angel.

He says there was a violent earthquake for or because an angel of the Lord came down from heaven. Imagine him streaking down like a bolt of lightning.

By how it's described, it would seem that almost the impact of his arrival just sent a shockwave through the ground. And what did this angel look like?

Matthew says that his appearance was like lightning and his clothes were white as snow. Think back to the last time you saw a flash of lightning.

[6 : 05] It's amazing just how bright it is. And so we imagine this angelic being so bright that you can barely stand to look at him. Matthew says he went to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.

The whole point of the large stone was to seal the opening to the tomb and to keep people out. And so there's little doubt that this would have been a very large and heavy stone.

We don't know exactly what it looked like or how big it was or how heavy. But likely it couldn't be budged by just one person or a few people. And so the strength of this angel of God is seen in his ability to single-handedly push it back from the entrance to the tomb.

The appearance of this angel and the demonstration of his power was enough to make grown men shrivel in the fetal position on the ground.

Verse 4. These are soldiers. These are men picked for the job because of their ability to intimidate.

[7 : 26] Their ability to subdue others. And yet their knees were knocking in terror till they fell limp on the ground.

The angel said to the women, Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here.

He has risen, just as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. So the angel speaks to the women and he knows why they are there.

He knows they're looking for the body of Jesus. Another gospel account tells us that they had come to put spices on his body. And they had been even wondering, How are we going to get the stone rolled away?

The angel says, You won't find him here. He's risen. Just as he said. I imagine the thoughts of the women were racing in these moments as their hearts pounded within them.

[8 : 33] What do you mean he's risen? What do you mean just as he said? When did Jesus said that he would rise?

Well, the chief priests and the Pharisees hadn't forgotten about what Jesus had said. That's the whole reason that they asked Pilate for the detachment of guards. To watch over the entrance to the tomb.

Look back to chapter 27, verse 62 for a moment. This was them talking to Pilate. They went to Pilate and said, Sir, we remember that while he was still alive, that deceiver said, After three days, I will rise again.

So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he's been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.

So the Pharisees and the religious leaders, the chief priests, they remembered what Jesus had said about rising from the dead. When had Jesus said that?

[9 : 43] That he would rise from the dead? Well, if we flip back a little longer, a little further, Matthew chapter 16, verse 21, already back then, it says, From that time on, Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

The sense we get from this is that Jesus has already been saying it, and not just once, but many times to his disciples, preparing them for this moment. He is not here.

He has risen, just as he said. The angel points them to the place where Jesus' body had been laid inside the tomb.

Like, see for yourself. He's not here. Go quickly and tell his disciples, He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee.

There you will see him. Now, I have told you. I love this. The angel tells the women to go tell Jesus' disciples and gives them the exact words to say to them.

[11:09] Go and tell them that Jesus has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. So if there's any doubt in their minds as to what he has risen meant, this should clear it up for sure.

Yes, he has risen from the dead. As in resurrection. As in alive again. And he's going ahead of you into Galilee.

This is the language of travel that describes a living person intentionally going from one place to another. Like, yes, he's alive. And there's a promise to go with it.

There you will see him. There you will see him. You will lay your own eyes on him alive when you get there. Well, how did the women respond?

Verse 8. So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid, yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Have you ever felt so deeply excited about something that it's like you almost have the jitters?

[12:17] And that adrenaline's just coursing through your veins and you can't sit down. And everything that you do, you kind of do it with a bit of a hip, a hip, a hop, a skip, and a jump.

Maybe it's the news that a loved one's baby has just been born. Or of a long-awaited appointment. Or a job offer. Or news of a dear friend who's going to stop in and see you.

That you weren't expecting. And we get totally pumped. I imagine that that's just a little of what these women felt. Scared silly by this angelic encounter.

The adrenaline coursing through their veins. And yet utterly ecstatic at the words of the angel that Jesus, the one they saw killed, was alive again.

They hurried away from the tomb and ran to tell his disciples. Afraid, yet filled with joy. And then all of a sudden, something stopped them in their tracks.

[13:21] Or rather, someone. Verse 9. Suddenly, Jesus met them. Greetings, he said. They came to him.

Clasped his feet. And worshipped him. This is wonderful. It doesn't say exactly where this was or how this happened.

Just that suddenly, Jesus met them. I don't know. Did he see and hear them running up behind him on the path and then just turn around? Or did he miraculously appear right in front of them?

Causing them to just kind of screech to a halt? It doesn't say, but there he was, somewhere between the tomb and Jerusalem where they were headed. And the women recognized him.

They knew it was him. Matthew says they clasped his feet. It's a very forceful word. Meaning they grabbed a hold of his feet tightly. And they worshipped him.

[14:23] Says Matthew. They were bowed down on the ground before him. As before a great king. Can you imagine what they would have been feeling in that moment at the feet of Jesus?

They'd watched this man suffer unimaginably. They watched him die horrifically. And now three days later, here he is in front of them, alive.

It's true. You are the Messiah. You are the son of the living God. Jesus then tells them to go into the city and tell the men, Jesus' disciples, the plan is to have them all head back to the northern region of Galilee where Jesus will meet with them again.

This is Matthew's account of what happened that morning when God brought Jesus back to life. And it's a precious story. One of the things that caught my attention this week as I was meditating on this is how different Matthew's account is from Luke's.

Luke tells us about a whole bunch more that happened that day. Luke tells us about how Jesus appeared to Peter after this and then to two men walking on the road to Emmaus and then about how Jesus later that evening appeared to the disciples themselves in Jerusalem behind closed doors.

[16:00] And then only after that would they all make their way out to Galilee. But I got thinking about this. Why did Matthew leave all that out? What's Matthew's focus here?

What does Matthew want to emphasize in the way that he tells it? Well, Matthew has more to say about what happened that day. But it's not about the other appearances of Jesus to people.

Rather, it's about the soldiers who were at the tomb. Let's read in verse 11. While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.

When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, you are to say, his disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.

If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble. So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed.

[17:17] And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day. So what's Matthew's emphasis? Matthew seems eager to highlight this side thing that proves the credibility of this whole account.

And it makes sense. I mean, after all, what has Matthew just told us? He just finished telling us about an angelic encounter. He just finished telling us about the resurrection of a person from the dead, somebody that everybody had seen publicly killed.

He just told us about how these women had an encounter with this resurrected man. And ordinarily, this is the stuff of fantasy and fairy tales. This is the sort of nonsense that maybe we might expect from those who are rocked with grief or who are emotionally shattered.

It's almost like Matthew anticipates the criticism of the skeptic who asks, can we really trust the word of the women? Like an angel? Risen from the dead?

And so what does Matthew tell us? If you can't take the women's word for it, take the soldiers' word for it. They went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.

[18:43] The sense we get is that they didn't leave out the surprising details. The stuff about the angel and what the angel had said about how Jesus had risen from the dead.

That report triggered a meeting of the elders with the chief priests. And notice Matthew's description of what they did at that meeting.

They devised a plan. They consulted together. And the result of that meeting was a large sum of money being given to the soldiers.

They agreed to pay the soldiers not to tell anyone what had really happened at the tomb. Instead, to tell people that his disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep. not only that, but the leaders of the Jews realized that at some point Pilate's going to hear about this. And in these days, what happened to soldiers who had been posted guard but failed their assignment?

[19:59] They were routinely executed. And so what did the leaders of the Jews promise to do? They promised to persuade Pilate to turn a blind eye and refrain from punishing them.

What we may not realize is that this is amazing evidence that Jesus' resurrection did in fact take place just as the women described. First, there's the obvious ongoing problem of the empty tomb and the missing body of Jesus.

The easiest way for the Jewish leaders to disprove it all would have been to simply produce Jesus' body and show it to the people. Obviously, they couldn't do that.

In fact, they'd taken extra precautions. They'd even anticipated, at least according to what they thought, that some of Jesus' disciples might try to steal Jesus' body in order to proclaim him risen from the dead.

That's why they'd ask Pilate for the soldiers. So where is the body of Jesus? How can it be missing if it was so well-guarded by Roman soldiers?

[21:10] We fell asleep. You fell asleep? While you were on duty? All of you?

At the same time? And then there was the problem of the large stone. Would have been too big for just one or two guys to move it by themselves.

Not to mention the noise that it would have made. So you're telling me that a group of four to six guys managed to sneak past a small company of Roman soldiers while they were sleeping and roll this large stone away from the door in silence, grabbed Jesus' body and then tiptoe out the door past all of you and you didn't even hear a sound?

We could even add to this the other strange evidence given by one of the other gospel accounts that the cloth that Jesus' body was wrapped in was left behind and the face cloth, the head cloth that covered his head was folded.

Like, if you were stealing the body and the Roman guards were sleeping outside, why would you take the time? Why would you take the risk to unwrap the body and leave the cloth there?

[22 : 30] To fold up the head cloth in the middle of this supposed heist? And then if you did fall asleep on the job as a guarding soldier, how come you're still alive?

Was there no consequence for you failing to do your job? Pilate should have had your head in the morning? You weren't disciplined in any way? There's some major things that simply don't add up and it's evidence that the women were telling the truth.

The soldiers were witnesses too. They knew that there had been no theft of the body. They knew that something spectacular had taken place.

They saw the angel and they cowered before him and then they reported everything that had happened to the chief priests. We might wonder how did Matthew come to have this seemingly inside information?

He doesn't cite a source here. How did he know about this report of the soldiers to the high priest and the bribe money that was given to them? How did he discover the plan to smooth things over with Pilate for the soldiers who had seemingly failed to do their job?

[23 : 54] Well, there was at least one member of the Jewish ruling council if not two to whom Matthew could go for that inside information like this. In fact, it was the very man who had buried Jesus in his own tomb, Joseph of Arimathea.

Who was Joseph? Luke tells us some very helpful information. He was a member of the council, a good and upright man who had not consented to their decision and action.

He came from the town of Judea and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God, the Judean town of Arimathea.

Then we compare that to John's account, the apostle John's account, and we read something interesting there as well. John 19, verse 38. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders.

With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. We read in John 3 that Nicodemus was also a member of the council.

[25 : 06] So very likely, Joseph or Nicodemus, or both, would have been at this meeting since they were members of the council.

Maybe the council didn't fully know whether they were followers of Jesus or not at this point. When we compare Matthew's account with Luke's and John's, there's even more credibility to be found in the testimony of these women.

It clearly wasn't a plot of the disciples because the disciples were surprised. They were as skeptical as anyone at first. They didn't even believe the women.

That's why they ran to the tomb. We've got to see this. It says in Luke, I believe, that they didn't believe the women because their words seemed to them like nonsense. It wasn't until later that afternoon and evening when Jesus began to appear first to Peter and then the rest of them that they believed Jesus had come back to life from the dead.

So the truth is that even though it sounds too good to be true, it's true. It is what happened. Jesus really did rise from the dead just as he said.

[26 : 27] Everything was pointing to this. Consider the many miracles of Jesus, the healings, the casting out of demons, the walking on water, the feeding of the 5,000, the supernatural knowledge that Jesus had of people, and the list could go on.

Is it any surprise that God decided to do the ultimate sign, the ultimate miracle at the end of it all, to prove once and for all that Jesus is the one by raising him from the dead?

God is the one by God. That's exactly what happened almost 2,000 years ago on the first day of the week. And as we look back on that, it's hard even to capture the full significance of this reality.

It factors into so much. We could celebrate just the ultimate power of God, which he displayed by raising Jesus from the dead.

We could reflect on what it means that God is the author of life itself and even the restorer of life to those who have died.

[27 : 38] We could think about how this resurrection is like the ultimate vindication of Jesus, the ultimate triumph over all his enemies, and not just the human ones, but even the devil who tempted him in the wilderness.

happiness. We could celebrate that Jesus' resurrection is the ultimate proof that he is the king, he is the Messiah that God has chosen for us.

All of these things are true, all of these things are wonderful. They're all good things to meditate on and rejoice in today, reasons to worship Jesus.

But one thing that I'm drawn to again and again, year after year, is this very simple connection.

What did Jesus promise to those who believe in him?

Eternal life. He promised to raise them from the dead. He promised them life forever in the coming kingdom of God.

[28 : 49] The gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are full of these many promises. Can Jesus make good on these promises?

Can he give us eternal life? Can he really raise us from the dead after we die?

Will he really be the king of that great kingdom of God of which he spoke? Will he be on the throne?

Well, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is proof that God can give these things to us.

He does indeed have the power to give life, to restore life where it was lost. The resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee that all the good promises of God to us will be kept for those who believe in his name.

And that is something that makes me rejoice year after year. Listen to these precious words of Jesus to Martha just four days after the death of her brother and not long before Jesus himself died on the cross.

[30 : 12] from John chapter 11. Lord, Martha said to Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask. Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again. Martha answered, I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die.

And whoever lives believing in me will never die. do you believe that? After what we heard from Matthew this morning about what happened at the tomb, do you believe this?

Do you believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life? Do you believe that he can and will raise you from the dead someday?

[31 : 32] when he returns? This is the good news that Christ's resurrection declares. Along with the redemption that we talked about earlier, the forgiveness of sins, it declares the gracious gift of eternal life for all of us who believe in him.

Life forever with God, with Jesus, in his kingdom. And there's nothing better than that. I want to invite you to stand.

We're going to continue to celebrate and rejoice together with a couple more songs here. voy voy voy!

voy! voy!