

The Grave

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[0 : 00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, you can check us out at FCCGreensburg.com or the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, we're so thankful on this Easter day that you are tuned in to God's Word as we are celebrating our risen Savior. And I want to tell you a story about a couple that got the opportunity to travel to the Holy Lands.

And they were so excited to finally see where Jesus walked, to have kind of that visual of the Bible stories they'd heard all their life. But there was one thing that the husband was not looking forward to.

His mother-in-law was going with him. And to say it nicely, he didn't exactly hit the jackpot on the mother-in-law lottery. Apparently, she was a real grump. She loved to let him know all his shortcomings.

And so they get over there, and he's just trying to take it all in, listen, enjoy the sights. His mother-in-law is actually being really nice. They're having a great week.

[1 : 05] But sadly, at the end of the week, she got sick and passed away all very quickly. Well, still in shock. They're just not sure how to proceed this far from home.

So they were encouraged to meet with a funeral director, and he said that he could arrange for her to be shipped back for \$5,000, or for \$500, they could bury her right there in the Holy Lands.

So the man thought about it real hard, talked it over with his wife, and then he said, Okay, I think we'll just have her shipped back home. And that's when the funeral director looked at him and said, Why? Why would you spend \$5,000 to ship her home when it would be wonderful for her to be buried in these biblical lands for only \$500?

And that's when he said, Well, sir, around 2,000 years ago, a man was buried here. And then three days later, he rose from the dead. And honestly, I just can't take that chance with my mother-in-law. Hey, we're so thankful that you've tuned in today. And we just want you to know that we pray that God is just using these messages in your life.

[2 : 16] But hey, we'd love to also have you join us in person, as this is a great church family that is united in our mission to love God, love people, and make disciples.

I also want to welcome you back to the seventh and final week of our series in Matthew called Greater Than. We've been walking through passages in this gospel talking about our Savior who is greater than anything life can throw your way.

We've talked about the fact that he's greater than temptation. He's greater than our past, greater than sickness. We spoke about Jesus being greater than our limitations, our fears, even our man-made religions.

And listen, I think today it's very fitting to end this series with Jesus being greater than the grave. Because let's just be honest, most people are afraid to die.

And everybody seems to have their own opinion about what happens after death. And yet the only answer that matters is what God's Word teaches. That based on how you sincerely respond to his invitation, you will spend eternity in one of two places.

[3 : 28] In heaven or in hell. And yet the greatest news is that God loved you so much that Jesus came to this earth, lived a perfect sinless life, performed signs, miracles, and wonders, was mistreated and flogged, and even crucified for your sins and mine.

And then on that Sunday morning, up from the grave he arose. And today, if you'd like to turn with us to Matthew chapter 28, we're going to look at Matthew's simple account of the resurrection of the Messiah.

Now, I will say this. While Matthew only shares a few details of the day, the other Gospels fill in a little bit more of the story. Now, you can put them all together. You can kind of read all four of them and put all the pieces together and have a fuller account of how things went down on that resurrection Sunday.

And I may share a few things with you as we kind of walk through from the other Gospels. But for the most part, we're just going to travel this simple road with Matthew today as we discover that Jesus is, in fact, the Messiah.

He is the crowning proof of Christianity that everything rises and falls on. That happened as Jesus conquered the grave, and he is alive at the right hand of the Father, and he offers us life today in his name.

[4 : 57] So let this be more than just a family tradition of getting all dressed up and sitting together in a pew, although that's special, and trust me, I'm wearing what my wife has set out on Easter, okay?

But let this be more than that. Let this be more than just a day where your family get-togethers, have the great lunch and an Easter egg hunt. Let this day in history, the most important day, define your every day as you live and you walk in the power of your risen Savior.

So, you should be with me here in Matthew chapter 28, and let's read these first seven verses here. And I'm just going to kind of take some time as we walk through this and just kind of stop and explain a few things just so that we get the big picture, okay?

Verse 1, Matthew 28. Now, when we read some of the other accounts in the other three Gospels, we see that this is a little more complicated than Matthew makes it seem.

In fact, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, they may have both went that morning, but they didn't even go together. And there would have been some other ladies with the other Mary when she went as well.

[6 : 23] And we're about ready to see that account. Verse 2, 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.

His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were as white as snow. So what we're seeing is the glory of God accompanying this messenger of God.

And here's what it says in verse 4. And I want you to get this picture. These are elite soldiers. They're like our Navy SEALs, okay? Verse 4, The guards were so afraid of him, the angel that is, that they shook and became like dead men.

I mean, they were like unconscious because of their fear. The angel said to the woman, So now we're jumping ahead to the women coming to the tomb.

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 is risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.

[7 : 27] Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead and he's going on ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him. Now I have told you.

So guys, what a cool story. And today I want to share just some powerful truths that really just jumped off the page of God's Word as I was reading this.

So grab your outlines and your bulletin if you're a note taker. Or if you have the YouVersion Bible app on your phone, you can go ahead and go to the menu of that.

Go to events. And then you go to First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana. Then you'll see our outline that way. But the first thing I want you to see today, because Jesus is greater than the grave, I will walk in joy.

I will walk in his joy. Now, I know it's Easter, but let's also be real. Life is hard. Things are thrown at us that we don't always expect.

[8 : 30] People do things to us that we never dream would be the case. Sickness happens. Things break and cost a lot of money to fix. People let us down. Listen, we even do some boneheaded things ourselves and let others down.

And yet, because Jesus is risen, those circumstances don't have to define me and they don't have to determine my joy. So as you're probably very aware, Easter time at a church is usually pretty intense.

And while this is always a full-time job and more, those weeks leading up to Easter are all in, okay? A lot of hours. Extra services to prepare for and lead.

Added meals to plan. Extra people to accommodate. And yet, we love it. But this year was even harder because my family went down with the flu just a couple weeks ago.

And we all got it. And there was probably a four- to five-day stretch where we really didn't go anywhere. We were all coughing our heads off, burning through Kleenexes, feeling puny, taking naps, praying that this too shall pass.

[9 : 38] And yet, do you know what I noticed as I was stressing out about how I was gonna get all my Easter responsibilities done? Well, first, I was reminded that God has always taken care of me every single time.

His daily grace has always been more than enough. But second, I noticed a difference in my kids. While none of us felt great, they started to really cling to me.

See, my wife is an amazing mom who stays home with our kids. She's even their teacher as we homeschool. So they rely on Bethany for everything.

And they usually cling to her more because I'm gone quite a bit. Now, I try not to overdo it. I try to balance things well. But the reality is I'm gone a lot.

But what I noticed is that God used the flu to probably give us some much-needed rest, but also to let me spend some more time with my kids because they're not used to seeing me all day, every day, for several days.

[10 : 41] And then, when it was time for me to go back to work, my three-year-old Lila was clinging to me, saying, stay home, Daddy, stay home. And it felt good.

And I found joy even in that rotten old flu. Now, look at the next verse in Matthew 28. As the angel has just commanded these women to go tell the disciples that the grave is empty and Jesus is risen.

Here's what verse 8 says. So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid. Now, let me stop there for a second. You would have been afraid, too, if you'd have just saw an angel.

And even though he was on your team, on your side, I mean, just imagine seeing an angel, the glory of God all around him, and just how that would have got your heart probably pumping out of your chest, okay?

So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid. Watch this, though. Watch where that fear goes. Yet filled with joy, and they ran to tell his disciples.

[11 : 48] So why are they filled with joy? Because Jesus has risen. And when Jesus is alive in your life, it changes everything.

And your circumstances don't have to dictate your joy. See, it doesn't matter how nice your house is. It doesn't matter if you drive a Tesla or a 1985 Civic.

It doesn't matter whether your title at work is fancy or not, or how much money you make. It doesn't matter if you're single or married. It doesn't matter if you've walked through some things.

And it doesn't matter if society around you treats you good because you follow Jesus, or maybe they treat you poorly. For these women and these disciples, they would suffer greatly because of their faith.

And yet, do you know what secular history records? That people were so attracted to followers of Jesus. That's why Christianity grew like wildfire to where it is today, because people were so attracted because followers of Jesus were incredibly loving to others, and they had a joy even in the midst of persecution.

[13 : 01] See, the famous preacher, Charles Spurgeon, put it like this. He said, There is a marvelous medicinal power in joy. Most medicines are distasteful.

But this, which is the best medicine of all, is sweet to the taste and comforting to the heart. This blessed joy is very contagious. He says, One Dolores spirit brings a kind of plague into the house.

One person who is wretched seems to stop all the birds from singing wherever he goes. But then he says, But the grace of joy is contagious. Holy joy will oil the wills of your life's machinery.

Holy joy will strengthen you for your daily labor. See, Jesus is risen. And because of this amazing truth, we walk in joy.

Here's the second thing I want you to see today. Because he is greater than the grave, I cling in worship. I cling to him in worship.

[14 : 05] Now, let's pick back up here in Matthew 28, verse 9. As they are starting on their way to tell the disciples that the tomb is empty, and they get an even better surprise.

God's word says this, Suddenly Jesus met them. Talking about these women. Greetings, he said. They came to him, clasped his feet, and worshipped him.

So what a cool picture of worship if you think about what was going on through their minds. Just the hours leading up to this. Okay? Even though Jesus told them that he would rise again in three days. None of them seemed to get that message. It just did not seem to click for them. Probably wouldn't have for us either. And so as Jesus breathed his last breath on the cross, as he was placed in the tomb, as that large stone was rolled and placed, most likely by several strong men and some kind of mechanism, I'm sure everything all of a sudden felt very final.

I'm sure the hope they once felt in Christ was stolen away. I'm sure they mourned and wondered if he really was who he said he was. I'm sure they also weren't sure how to move forward since all those associated with Jesus may be targeted by religious leaders.

[15 : 30] There was so much grief, confusion, frustration, and hopelessness. And now, with the angel saying that Jesus was risen, with them seeing the empty tomb for themselves, there was a glimmer of hope.

Can this really be? Is this true? And then he appears before these ladies and they see him for themselves. You know, this year will mark 17 years of marriage for Bethany and I.

And God bless her for putting up with me with the grace that she continually shows. But I remember leading up to our wedding, I heard how pretty the wedding dress looked on her.

And I believed it. But nothing compared to when the church doors of the sanctuary swung open and I saw my beautiful bride for myself.

And then I couldn't contain the tears. They just started flowing. And I don't think they stopped through the whole service. But what a special moment that was to see her in that dress for myself and not just take someone's word for it.

[16 : 40] And I imagine while they surely believed this angel, of course they did. There's nothing like seeing something with your own eyes because they had seen the life disappear from Jesus' body on the cross.

And now here Jesus was before them and he's alive. And they fell to his feet in worship. Maybe earlier when we were talking about joy, maybe you were thinking to yourself, well, Ray, that sounds really great, but how do I get this joy?

Can I really have it? And the answer is simple. But the process takes faith. First, you gotta know the author of joy as your Lord and Savior.

And then every day you proceed to cling to Jesus in worship. And while I believe wholeheartedly that what we do here on a Sunday morning is so important for a believer to grow in their faith, and I wanna invite you to come and to join us sometime if you haven't.

But I'm also the first one to say that worship is so much bigger than just the songs you sing, the prayers you pray, the bread and juice you partake of, or even listening to the preacher teach God's word.

[17 : 55] Worship is so much bigger than a worship service. Worship is everything you are. And Romans 12.1 makes this so clear when it says, therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy.

So he's saying, because God has been so gracious to you by the cross, he says, I urge you to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your true and proper worship. Now I realize that each of us are still gonna be flawed as followers of Jesus. And yet, we aren't called to justify what we do.

We aren't called to make excuses for our sin. We're called to surrender that filth, to lay it down at the cross as we daily seek to look more like Jesus.

So there's not supposed to be a Sunday version of you, then a cutthroat Tuesday business version of you, and then a buck wild Friday version, followed again by holy me on Sunday.

[18 : 59] When I cling to Jesus in worship, I'm making that bold declaration that I will worship him 24-7, 366 on this leap year.

He is the treasure that I seek. And because he is greater than the grave, I will walk in joy, and I will cling to him in worship.

And then last, because he's greater than the grave, I look forward in hope. Now, have you ever noticed that some former presidents don't quite get talked about as much as others?

And one of them would be our sixth president, whose dad was also president before him, John Quincy Adams. But I love the story from when he was 80 years old.

A friend asked him, well, how's John Quincy Adams today? And here's what he said. John Quincy Adams is very well, thank you, but the house he lives in is sadly dilapidated.

[19 : 58] It's tottering on its foundations, the walls are badly shattered, and the roof is worn. The building trembles with every wind, and I think John Quincy Adams will have to move out of it before long.

But he himself is very well. And I think we could probably, he could probably make that statement because he was a follower of Jesus. Now, look at our last verse here in Matthew 28, verse 10. Then Jesus said to them, do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.

Now, don't miss the power in that simple phrase. Like we said a couple weeks back, 70 times in the Bible we see this phrase, do not be afraid.

Why do you think we see it so much? Because life can give us plenty to be afraid about. Adulting is hard. It can suck the joy and the worship right out of us if we try to do this thing called life in our own strength.

[21 : 04] And yet, Jesus speaks those powerful and comforting words right into their fears. Do not be afraid. What's another way of saying this? There's hope.

There's hope. You know, one statement I make at every funeral that I preach at is simply this. And by the way, I believe this with my whole heart, but I always say, hope is the very thing that every one of us search for, whether we realize it or not, or whether we search in the right place or not. And then, while he doesn't give them the full picture in this moment, he does point them to a future date where they will see him again. And we know that before Jesus ascended back up into heaven, he gave them a commission to be his hands and his feet in this world.

He gives them assurance that the Holy Spirit will come upon them to guide them. But for us sitting here, 2,000 years later in history, we've got the perfect word of God complete at our fingertips to guide every part of our faith.

As born-again believers baptized into Jesus, we have God, the Holy Spirit, living inside of us as that seal, showing that we are sealed for eternity, guiding us while we're on this earth.

[22 : 20] And while that's amazing, I can tell you the best is yet to come. Here's how 1 Peter 1, 3 and 4 puts it. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into, listen to this, an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you. Because Jesus is greater than the grave, we have hope. A hope that guides us on this earth as we live for the Lord.

A hope that guides our tomorrows as we know that as children of God, we are safe in his hands, and even a hope that goes beyond this life into eternity where we will be with Jesus in the perfection of heaven.

Guys, I love the story about a grandpa and his granddaughter who were out for a walk on a beautiful spring night. Temperature was perfect. The moon was shining bright.

[23 : 30] The stars were glowing in the sky, and both were just taking it all in. And the grandpa was kind of teaching his granddaughter some of the different constellations.

He said, well, if you look over here, you see the Big Dipper. And he had her kind of put her hand up towards the sky and kind of trace those stars. And he said, over here is Orion's belt.

And that's when his granddaughter spoke up. And she said, Grandpa, if the bottom side of heaven is this beautiful, then just think how amazing the top side must be. I love it.

See, Jesus is greater than the grave. Say that with me. Ready? Jesus is greater than the grave. And because he has conquered death, because he is risen, we will conquer death too if we are a child of God.

So, let's walk in that resurrection joy, that resurrection worship, and that resurrection hope. Pray with me. Heavenly Father, we just thank you for your words of hope and life that you have spoken over us today.

[24 : 46] Father, I just pray that if there's anyone listening to my voice right now who doesn't know your forgiveness, your salvation, that today may be the sweetest day of their life as they surrender everything to your Lordship, Jesus.

You don't want just a religious experience from us. You don't want just a Sunday morning from us. You want every part of our heart. And what a wonderful day it would be as we give these hearts to you one more time on this Easter Sunday.

So, Father, I just pray that as we have studied your word that you will stir these hearts and you will make us more and more into the image of Jesus. We pray all this in his holy name.

Amen and amen. Hey, I want to read you a quote by D.L. Moody, a man who knew the word of God well and once put it like this.

He said, none will walk the celestial pavement of heaven but those who've been washed in the blood. See, that's what God's word teaches. That's the reason Jesus came to this earth.

[25 : 59] You and I have sinned. That sin has separated us from a perfect heavenly father who cannot stand before our sin and we are separated for all eternity and that's why Jesus came.

That's why he lived a perfect sinless life. That's why he taught us all about the kingdom of God. That's why he endured such awful treatment at the hands of the religious leaders.

Was flogged, was spit on, had a crown of thorns shoved in his skull, was forced to carry his cross and then was nailed to that very cross.

But here's the good news. Three days later, the grave could hold him no longer and he gave his life on that cross to set us free and he rose from that grave to conquer death and offer us life on this earth and life eternal.

And so if you are listening today and maybe you got some questions about your faith, maybe you're ready to talk about coming all in with Jesus. We would love here at First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana.

[27 : 10] My name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor. We would love to come alongside you just like others have done for us. So reach out. Here's a couple ways you can do that. 812-663-8488.

812-663-8488. My name is Ray. Ask for me or you can email me at ray at fccgreensburg.com. Hey, God bless you and I pray that you have a great week.