

Too Good (or bad) to be true

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everyone. Today's Bible reading is from Matthew chapter 27, starting at verse 55. And while you're looking for that passage, I just say it's great to see you all after a year in Sydney.

And this passage, my housemaid in Sydney had to preach on the burial of Jesus from Matthew 27. We spent a long time talking about why is it important that we have this record of Jesus being buried, and what does it mean for us today. But yes, our reading is from Matthew chapter 27, verse 55.

There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him, and Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock.

[1 : 2 5] And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

The next day, that is, after the day of preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, Sir, we remember how that imposter said while he was still alive, After three days I will rise.

Therefore, order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away, and tell the people, He has risen from the dead, and the last fraud will be worse than the first.

Pilate said to them, You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can. So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

Now, after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.

[2 : 4 6] His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him, the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, Do not be afraid.

For I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

Then, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead. And behold, he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him.

See, I have told you. So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, Greetings.

And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, Don't be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.

- [3 : 55] While they were going, behold, some of the guards that went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, Tell people. His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep. And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble. So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day. Good morning. My name is Bo. I'm one of the elders of the church. We are going through the book of Matthew and this is the second last of the sermons. And next week, Calvin will give us the last sermon. Let us pray first before we start. Almighty God, we come before you asking that you might have mercy on us that we will see your glory this morning as we sing, as we listen to your word, as we take part in the Lord's Supper.
- [5 : 22] Lord. Thank you, Lord. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Welcome back to John and Catherine. Good to see you, guys. Well, in two days' time, something is going to happen in Australia for the first time. According to the government, the world's first policy. if you know why it is, it is the banning of the under-16s on social media. So all the social media companies will need to make sure that they will take reasonable steps to exclude all the children who are under-16s to be part of their platform. I mean, it's not all, but all the most common or popular ones, the 10 companies. The government realized that this social media is taking up a lot of time from the children. So they were hoping that the children would use their time to learn a musical instrument or help out to do house chores or do something that is useful.
- [6 : 41] Now, for some parents, this is a news that is too good to be true because to ban anything online is very difficult. I mean, looking at China, even they are so strict on banning Facebook from everyone, but there are so many people in China that are on Facebook as well. I think the Malaysia government did plan to ban Facebook as well a few years ago, but it wasn't successful. We are only hearing children under 16 change their platform to the lesser-known companies. So we are not sure how this would work. But for some parents, it could be too bad to be true as well because in particular it's school holiday time and if the parents are not used to entertain their children or help them to use their time, what are they going to do if their children are not on Facebook or YouTube or anything like that? And so we don't know how this would turn out. Only time will tell. As we consider that we, in the Bible today, there's a news that is far more important than the social media ban that is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- [8 : 10] This is also the first time ever happened in the world. I say the first time, I mean, we know that there were people who were raised from dead before Jesus' time, like Lazarus, but there's a very big difference. Those before Jesus' time, they were raised to the same physical body and they will die again. But the resurrection of Jesus is different. He's rising to an imperishable body which will never die again. That is the first time. Even though it's 2,000 years ago, until today, I mean, there are still many people who do not believe that this is true, or do not even know about it, not to say to believe.

So today, we will consider from the words to see what were the reactions or perceptions of people during Jesus' time after his resurrection and why was that good news to some and bad news to some and what is that to us.

So that's what we are going to consider. So I will mention five groups of people from our reading. So the first group from 27-55 are the women.

[9 : 34] The book of Matthew only mentions two Marys, but if you look at Luke and other Gospels, there are more than two of them, but just women as a whole.

And these women, they were sad. I mean, they lost they really loved Jesus and they lost a dear friend and master.

And these two women, they were preparing spices to preserve the body. And they did not actually believe in the resurrection, even though they would have heard Jesus telling them about the resurrection.

resurrection. In the Gospel of John, in chapter 20, verse 2, when they saw the tomb was empty when they went there, and they saw the angel, they actually married, they saw Jesus, and they thought that there was a gardener, and she was crying, asking where they have moved the body of Jesus.

So they were not, they didn't think about the resurrection or when this happened, the tomb was empty, somebody had stolen the body, moved the body, and so they remained uncertain until Jesus appeared to them, then they were convinced about the resurrection.

[11 : 03] So that is the women. And then the second group of people is the Joseph Arimathea, in chapter 27, 57, and in John 19, 39, we are told about Nicodemus as well.

So at least there are two of them, the two secret followers of Jesus. They were officials, Pharisees, or council members. They did not identify with Jesus when Jesus was alive because they wanted to keep their position in the leadership.

But after the death of Jesus, somehow they were moved to stand up, to identify with Jesus. I think they were unhappy with, or at least indignant, with the decision that the leadership made to murder Jesus or to punish Jesus.

they did not believe in the resurrection either. They prepared Jesus' body, they buried him, and just now Joe was mentioning why the Bible mentioned about the burial.

Is that so important? So that again tells us that Jesus did die, and Jesus has left the world, not become part of the world. burial, also reminds us that for those of us who are in Christ, we have been buried with him, we are no longer part of the world system.

[12 : 39] So these are the officials, and the third group of people are the disciples. Matthew 28-7 only mentions about the disciples in passing, but if you go to Luke 24-11, there's more detail, story about the disciples.

The disciples were despondent, they were in despair. Imagine you follow Jesus for three years, you've been perfectly identified with Jesus, and now Jesus has been killed, humiliated.

How do you feel your leader has been done with? So they will be afraid of the leadership, if they wouldn't dare to go to the temple, because the chief priests and the Pharisees would be hostile to them.

And they would not be able to, I mean, they won't be able to face their friends, even their peers, because their peers would laugh at them, ridicule them for following Jesus for three years and coming up to nothing.

and they couldn't face their families either. I mean, they left their family tray and did nothing to help with the family, and now come up to be nothing after these three years.

[14 : 09] And so for the disciples, their future was grim, and they did not believe in the resurrection either. even when the women came and told them about the resurrection in Luke 24, verse 11, it says that the words of the women seemed to them an idle talk, and they did not believe them.

So what the women, why didn't Jesus appear to the disciples sooner? He said Jesus appeared to the women, and then asked the women to tell the disciples.

Jesus could have just appeared to the disciples and tell them, I'm alive. I suppose what Jesus wanted the disciples to learn is to trust his word.

Jesus already told the disciples multiple times that he will become alive again. And now they didn't believe, and now the women tell them they saw Jesus, and still they could not believe.

So it's very hard for them to believe the fact that Jesus came back to life again.

[15 : 32] The fourth group of people are the chief priests and the Pharisees. Paradoxically, this group of people, even though they killed Jesus, they seem to believe what Jesus said more than the disciples.

They didn't want the resurrection to come true. They heard about the prophecy. They told Pilate that the God is to prevent the disciples from stealing the body.

people. If you think deeper, the disciples were so afraid that when Jesus was arrested, they were all scattered.

Peter denied Jesus three times. Would they have the courage to come to steal the body? To the leadership, they didn't actually think the disciples could do anything.

To them, they were basically nothing before Jesus. And even if they did steal the body, would they then have the courage to preach the gospel?

[16 : 42] And even though they were persecuted, they were still preaching the gospel. And so it's very unlikely that this is a reason for them to guard the tomb.

It's more likely that they really didn't want the resurrection to happen. And lastly are the soldiers. So the soldiers were the people who were closest to the resurrection.

They almost witnessed it. I mean, they would have seen the bright figure, the angel, and then they became unconscious after that.

So they would have experienced something supernatural. But then when the body went missing, what they were thinking about would be their own life.

Because when you're guarding someone as a soldier and the prisoner or this body got missing, you'll be in big trouble.

[17 : 53] And so they were fearful of their life. the chief priest convinced them just to say that the body was stolen while they were asleep.

Think about this explanation. I mean, first of all, if you are asleep, how would you know what happened to the body? The disciples stole it. So it's not logical to start with.

And even if they do think the disciples stole the body, why didn't they go after the disciples and look for the body?

Nothing was done, they just have an excuse. So the soldiers, so long as they don't get into trouble, because the leadership said that they would talk to the governor and excuse them and give them a sum of money, and so long they don't get into trouble, they don't actually care, whether the resurrection was true or not.

So we could see that the first three people, the women, the disciples, and the secret followers of Jesus, they thought that the resurrection was too good to be true.

[19 : 14] The chief priests and the Pharisees, the religious leaders, thought that the resurrection was too bad to be true, and the soldiers didn't actually care whether it's true or not, so long as they don't get into trouble.

So why did the first three people think that it was too good to be true? Because, I mean, it never happened. Everybody died, and nobody came back to life.

In general, however, they did witness Jesus raising Lazarus, and that should be enough to them that it's possible to come back alive again.

But it's so hard for us to believe and for them to believe as well. The other thing would be they were so down, I mean, they were expecting Jesus to bring in a new world, a new kingdom, a new life, but everything dashed to nothing when Jesus was killed.

And to them, so they were down, they were so depressed that they just couldn't take in anymore. They don't want to lose hope again, because they were quite hopeful during Jesus' time.

[20 : 39] And now somebody tells them Jesus has come to a life, they don't want to grasp onto it, because they think if they believe and then it's not true, then they will be so disappointed again.

And so it's too good to be true to them. If Jesus did come back to their lives, so what they were expecting would still be on track, that Jesus would still be their leader, their master, and bring them to a new world.

And it's what they expect. but actually what they were expecting is far less than what God was giving them in the resurrection.

And sometimes we look at Jesus and only expect Jesus to do things for us, our ambition, our plan, our physical health, but the resurrection means a lot more.

The disciples will have to learn eventually. The resurrection of Jesus means that that is a starting of a new creation. Basically, everything has been renewed.

[21 : 52] Death no longer have the final set, and death is no longer a threat to us or to them. Everything is no longer under the curse of God.

And so it's a big deal, the resurrection. If they think that it's too good to be true, the goodness that they think of is actually not the goodness that God intended them to believe.

It's to have a new life in Christ and to have the hope of resurrection, to have a hope of a new body, imperishable body.

All this, I think, is too much for them to take in at that time. and this is something that we benefited from them, from their experience and from their writing, and we can have this hope because of the resurrection.

And so for us, I hope it's not too good to be true, but this is the truth, and to know that we have this hope in Christ.

[23 : 04] And why is that too bad to be true to the religious leaders? Because if Jesus became alive again, that means they were wrong in the judgment of Jesus.

They didn't want to be wrong. They wanted to keep their reputation. And they couldn't afford to have Jesus rise again.

that will show how foolish they are, or how ignorant they are, or how corrupt they were.

So, ignorant, because the Pharisees and the priests, they didn't actually know the scripture, because it's all written in the Old Testament.

Foolish, because they did not actually find out from Jesus, what he was teaching, what he was trying to do, and they just simply have prejudice against Jesus and kill him.

[24 : 18] And being corrupt is that the court that they formed to judge Jesus was not proper.

They basically make up accusations and just ask the governor to grant the permission to execute Jesus. And so, he exposed them, and they didn't want to be exposed.

But, if they were to accept that Jesus became alive again, and admit that they were wrong, they would have found a new life in Christ as well.

But they would rather hold on to their old life than having the new life. It's like somebody gives us a check for a million dollars, but we don't believe in that person, so we just throw away the check.

God is giving the religious leaders a hope that they could never achieve on their own, but they throw them away.

[25 : 28] And I hope that today we can, if we are not accepting that we can think about this, and is it sometimes, it's always maybe good for us to admit that we were wrong, and the way we live is not according to God's way, and we offended God, and Christ has risen again, and we can come before him, and follow him, and have a new life in Christ.

So if we like the Pharisees and the chief priest, then we will keep living in the way that we think is right, but eventually we will come to destruction.

resurrection. Well, there's the third group of people, the soldiers, they just didn't think that they just, it's indifference to the news of resurrection.

Maybe some of us are like this, it doesn't concern me, so long as I have a good life, it doesn't matter if Jesus comes alive again or not.

But God did not actually live us like that anything, it doesn't give us a choice to be sitting on the fence or do nothing about this.

[27 : 02] Because in Acts chapter 17 verses 30 and 31, it says that the times of ignorance got overlooked. The times of people not knowing what God was about, not knowing that they have offended God, so the times of ignorance got overlooked.

But now he commands all people everywhere to repent. So he's saying that God has not given us any choice.

He commands either we follow or we disobey. He commands all people everywhere to repent. Why? Because he has fixed the day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed.

And what man? For this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. So it's quite clear that we can't just ignore this fact that Jesus has risen from the dead because God has commanded us to repent.

Otherwise we will just face the judgment. So Jesus is worthy to judge humanity because he's the first to raise and the first of the new humanity.

[28 : 34] Sometimes we might be like the secret followers of Jesus, Joseph or Nicodemus. We dare not show, reveal our faith in the Lord for fear of our peace, fear of people looking down on us.

If we are like that, we should consider, I mean, from the time of apostles until now, over the last 2,000 years, there are so many Christians who rather suffer and die than to deny the Lord Jesus Christ.

Why did they do that? Because of the resurrection. Because they have a better life to look forward to. Because they have this hope. And so even suffering and death cannot stop them from declaring their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I hope that we can, if we have been fearful of identifying ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, we can take heart from these people who have went before us and to know that there's something better, something more glorious to live for.

I don't know whether the social media ban would work, but I do know that if we don't have something bigger to live for, why would rules and regulations not be able to change our heart or change our behavior if we, especially if parents they only live for to satisfy their own flesh, then how do they help their children to use their time properly?

[30 : 36] It's only if we live for something that is bigger than us and greater than us, we have a hope that is beyond this world, then we can start living a life that is fruitful and meaningful and joyful.

I hope that this resurrection will give us this hope that we know life that we live now is just temporary and any suffering, any discomfort is all temporary and it's not worth comparing to the glory that is to come.

So today being the first day of the month, we are going to have the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper reminds us not only the death of Jesus, it also reminds us of the resurrection because Jesus said he will not partake this bread and the cup again until the coming of the kingdom of God.

And it means that Jesus is saying that he will rise again, he will share this bread and cup with his people again. And so when we take this, we will be reminded of his resurrection.

I hope that we are not like the disciples. When the women told them about the resurrection, they should be reminded of what Jesus already told them, but they did not believe.

[32 : 12] the Lord's Supper is reminding us of what Jesus promised, that we can all have new life in him, and that this new life is real.

It's not too good to be true. It is a truth. So every time we have the Lord's Supper, it reminds us of this truth and gives us encouragement and hope, so that even when we are going through difficulties in life, suffering of physical illness, or financial hardship, or anything else, if we get reminded, then all these things are small things compared to the hope that we have in Christ.

Shall we pray?