

'Easter: how do you respond?'

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[0 : 00] Christ is risen. He's risen indeed. That ancient Easter greeting just shows the assurance that Christians have that Christ is risen, doesn't it?

! Someone announces that Christ is risen and the hearer affirms that they too know and have witnessed that Christ is risen indeed.

! It shows assured knowledge of the resurrection. Do you have that? Do you have assured knowledge that Jesus is risen indeed?

Well, the story that we read this morning from Matthew 28 gives us that assurance. Because from the story we read about claims that are just so out there that they just have to be true.

If anyone had made up this story, it's a lousy fiction that wouldn't have been believed by anyone. And yet, those very details are part of what today makes it credible.

[1 : 08] So let's walk through the passage from verse 1 to 8.

Now I've told you.

So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid, yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

This is a crazy story, isn't it?

Today, many might think that ancient people were not as intelligent as us. And so, of course, they would believe the resurrection of Jesus. They were gullible.

So they think. Today, we are smarter, we know science, so we don't believe in the resurrection.

Well, actually, if you were an ancient Jew living during the time of the apostles, and you read or heard the story of the resurrection, you would not have believed it either.

[3 : 00] Think about it. This is the beginning of the resurrection story. The resurrection is the core of the Christian faith. And yet, Matthew started the story with the testimony of women.

Now, you might find it offensive now, but back then, women were so marginalized that their testimony was considered to be unreliable in court.

So to start the resurrection story, the core doctrine of the Christian faith, with two women going to the tomb, seeing an angel, and no one else was there except for the guards who were frozen in fear, people would have been like, oh, come on, how can you believe that?

That's like today saying, my grandpa rose from the dead and my two-year-old saw it. No one would believe it. If the apostles had wanted to make up a story, a fiction, to convince people, they would have begun the testimony with Peter or John or someone else who's recognized in the public square.

In fact, the writers of the Gospels would have had every incentive to leave this detail about women out and just go straight to the male disciples. After all, Jesus did appear to the male disciples.

[4 : 30] And yet, they didn't. Because they were not trying to deceive people by making up a story. They were trying to tell us what truly happened.

And while we're talking about women witnesses, it's good, isn't it, to recognize that today, we are now recognizing women as equal. That's a good thing.

And I would argue that it's because of the resurrection. The resurrection lifted women up so that in Christ we are all equal. And then there's an angel in verse 2 who came to Jesus' tomb and rolled the heavy stone cover open, scaring the guards in verse 4.

It's a crazy story. But notice that the angel didn't roll the stone to free Jesus, but to reveal that Jesus' body wasn't there.

Somehow, Jesus' body had already gone out without having to roll the stone away. In verse 5, the angel said, Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.

[5 : 49] He truly was crucified. He truly was dead. But, verse 6, He is not here. He has risen, just as He said.

I love that line. He has risen, just as He said. It shows the power of Jesus. I've said this before. One of the reasons why I believe that Jesus is God is because He's the only God who has come down here to tell us that He's God, and He proved it to us by saying that He's going to die and rise again.

Something that no one has ever done and something that no one can do. And He did it, just as He said. But again, that would have been so hard to believe for the Jews.

Because the Jews believed in the resurrection of the dead on the last day, not in the middle of history. They didn't believe that anyone could have come back from the dead in the middle of history.

[6 : 53] It's outside of their worldview. It doesn't make sense. And even worse, that the resurrected body could have gone out of the tomb without having to roll the stone away.

What kind of body does that? The Jews would have been just as skeptical as people are today. Because even though their reasons for rejecting the resurrection might be different to us, to ours, Jesus' resurrection was equally as unbelievable for them as it is to people today. It could not fit in their worldview just as it cannot fit in ours. The resurrection is just unbelievable, period.

I bet it could not even fit in the disciples' worldview. They, too, were Jewish. And that's why in the other gospel stories, when the disciples saw Jesus, they did not recognize Him.

[7 : 56] Because they did not expect that Jesus could have risen from the dead, even though Jesus had told them multiple times, I'm going to die, and in three days I'm going to rise again.

But no one was there on the Sunday, counting Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Let's wait there and see. No one was there. And when Jesus did return, everyone was shocked.

They could not believe it. The resurrection was just unbelievable to them as it is to us now. Yet, the gospel writers included all these details about the women, about the angel, because they were not trying to deceive anyone.

They were telling the true story. This story would have been too bizarre for Jewish people to make up. So why did the early disciples believe it, then, if it didn't fit in their worldview?

Because they saw Jesus. In verse 8. So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid, yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

[9 : 18] Suddenly Jesus met them. Greetings, he said. They came to him, clasped his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, Do not be afraid.

Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. There they will see me. They saw Jesus. And later on, the rest of the disciples, too, saw Jesus.

And as Paul says, more than 500 people saw Jesus. When the women saw Jesus, they clasped his feet and worshipped him.

Again, if this was fiction to deceive people into worshipping Jesus, it would have been unconvincing to anyone. The Jews were very strict in their monotheism.

They didn't have space for other gods, let alone human worship. If the first disciples, who were Jewish, wanted to make up a story to deceive other Jews, they would not have invented a story of human worship.

[10 : 26] To say that the first witnesses were women and they witnessed an empty tomb, but the body inside had somehow walked out without having to roll the stone away, and finally they fell at Jesus' feet to worship him?

Oh, come on. That's not a story that would have deceived anyone in the ancient Jewish community. Unless it's true.

unless people did see Jesus. Unless others, too, saw Jesus. And Jesus changed all their lives.

Like today, millions have seen the risen Jesus, not bodily, perhaps, but spiritually, spiritually in their lives, in their experience through Jesus' Holy Spirit.

They can affirm, yes, I have seen how Jesus works in my life. I have changed from the way I was to how I am now. Not because of my own strength.

[11 : 38] It's impossible with my own strength. Jesus, it must be Jesus. And so, we still affirm the Easter greeting.

Jesus is risen. And others who have spiritually witnessed Jesus' resurrection also affirm, he is risen indeed. I have seen him in my life.

Friends, it's okay to be skeptical. But please don't assume that the early Christians were dumb and gullible for believing in the resurrection. Please don't assume that the Christians today are dumb and gullible for believing in the resurrection.

We believe not because we get easily deceived by the resurrection story. The resurrection story is unbelievable.

But because we evaluate the evidence of the resurrection logically and because we have encountered Jesus spiritually in the pages of Scripture, in our lives, and in his body, the church.

[12:48] And because we have encountered the one who has conquered death, we cannot help but worship him just like the women here.

That's our response to the resurrection. We worship. Now, that's one response to Jesus' resurrection. It's unbelievable, but we witness it, so we believe and we worship.

Now, here's another response to Jesus' resurrection in verse 11. While the women were on their way, some of the guards, probably the ones that had previously been frozen in fear, 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, and this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

[14:13] Here's a completely different response compared to the women. The chief priests heard about the resurrection. They did not run to the tomb to validate it like the disciples in the other gospels did.

Instead, they made up a story that would fit in everyone's worldview. That, of course, the disciples would steal the body of Jesus. That story would have been easily believable.

Until this day, a lot of my Muslim friends still believe this, that Jesus' disciples stole the body. So instead of going to the tomb and checking the evidence, instead of going to the disciples and verifying for themselves, the chief priests chose to explain the resurrection away and came up with a logical explanation for it to ironically deceive people.

But that seemingly logical explanation is actually not logical at all if you think about it. How would the disciples who were made up of fishermen and a tax collector defeat armed guards?

If the disciples stole the body while the guards were sleeping, how would the guards know that it was the disciples who stole the body? and more importantly, why would the disciples steal the body and lie for 40-odd years to the point of being persecuted and killed?

[15:52] If the disciples had the body, wouldn't they show it when they were about to be persecuted and suffered and died? The explanation just doesn't make sense.

And also pay attention to the end of verse 15. This story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day, meaning Matthew wrote the gospel when the rumor was still fresh.

It was still circulating. His readers, his original readers, were still hearing the rumor circulating. He didn't write the gospel hundreds of years after Jesus' resurrection.

People could ask around. They could ask the disciples. They could see the empty tomb. They could ask the women. It's a verifiable story, which adds to the argument that the gospel writers could not have made it up because it would have been easily verified.

But the chief priests did not try to verify the story. They chose to explain it away. Which one is your response?

[17:15] Be slightly afraid, slightly hesitant like the women, but still joyfully open to the news that someone has defeated death. And to worship Jesus when he finally reveals himself to you.

Or to be closed off like the chief priests and try to explain the resurrection away without investigating because it just doesn't fit your worldview.

Or perhaps you just don't want it to be true. Think about that. And as you think about that, the resurrection true.

Now let me briefly show you from the same text the implications of the resurrection. Because if the resurrection is true, it's not only a logical and historical event, it's also something that must change our lives.

Someone has risen from the dead. So let's go back to the same text and look at a few things. What does the resurrection bring? first, to encounter the resurrected Jesus is to see life beyond this material world.

[18 : 35] And that's why this story is so full of the supernatural. In verse 5, there's an angel whose appearance is like lightning. Everyone was afraid.

But more importantly, in verse 6, someone who had been dead came back to life. these are not things that happen in the natural world. That means there's more to life than just all this. To encounter the resurrection is to see that there's more to life than what we can see. To encounter the resurrection is to realize that physical death is not the end to life.

There's something else. happiness. And that challenges us. But it also brings so much freedom in our lives. Because if this material world is not all that there is, then our job is not everything.

Our money is not everything. Our success is not everything. And that is freeing. We don't need to live for work or for money or for success. We are not enslaved by anything in this world because there's something else and there's something bigger.

[19 : 48] in the movie Pursuit of Happiness, the character Chris Gardner is a husband and a father who struggles in life.

He's poor, he's in debt, his wife has to work double shifts and they struggle to reach happiness. That's the point of the whole movie.

him and his family trying to reach happiness. In one of the lines in the movie, he says this, maybe happiness is something that we can only pursue, but we can actually never have it, no matter what. So in the entire movie, Chris runs here and there, chases this person, that person, this job and that job to pursue happiness. But here's the thing, nothing in this life secures that fulfillment.

At the end of the film, when he finally lands his dream job, he says, this part of my life, this little part, is called happiness.

[21 : 04] happiness. And it shows him smiling, crying, and having tears of joy. It's a moving moment, but notice how he describes it.

It's a little part. In this material world, happiness exists, but only in little parts. We know that. But what if there's more to life than just all this, our money, our success, our career, our reputation? And that's what encountering the resurrection gives us, a view of the eternal.

This messy life where happiness is only a little part of it, is not all there is. in verse 8, after the two women heard about Jesus' resurrection, they became joyful and they hurried.

They tell others. In other gospels as well, every time the disciples heard about the resurrection, they ran. Why?

[22 : 12] Someone has risen from the dead. Because if the resurrection is true, then it's proven that there's something more to life than just all this, then there's hope.

There's hope for those who struggle in this life, like Chris Gardner in the movie. There's hope for those who are dissatisfied in life. There's something else coming.

There's hope for the dying. There's hope for people whose loved ones are dying. Because Jesus has defeated death and he has opened the way to eternal life where Revelation 21 says there will be no more mourning or crying or pain or death because Jesus has defeated it.

That is great news. As you think about your response to the resurrection, consider that. second, to encounter the resurrected Jesus is to encounter God himself.

That's why in verse 9, the women worshipped Jesus even though it was probably incomprehensible for them how a man could also be God.

[23 : 33] And Jesus accepted the worship because he knew that he is God. to encounter the resurrected Jesus is to encounter the God of life himself.

The one who cannot be defeated by death. And yet, who is this God? This is the God who had just died for them.

In verse 10, Jesus said, do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. this is the God who is powerful enough to defeat death, powerful enough to be feared, and yet, this is also the God who comforted them because he loved them enough to die for them.

What kind of God would do that? Our God, the God who loves us. Don't you want to encounter someone who is powerful enough to defeat your death and the death of the people around you? Don't you want to encounter someone who is powerful enough to see every little brokenness and evil and wickedness in your heart, to know you more than you know yourself, and yet, who loves

you so much that he's willing to take your death and defeat it in himself?

[24 : 58] That's the God that the women here saw. God and so they came to him, clasped his feet, held on tight, and worshipped him.

So what is your response to the resurrection? Are you going to suppress and explain it away like the chief priests? Or are you going to approach it with a bit of fear and a bit of joy like the women? And then believe and worship because you have witnessed the resurrection. And then you can enjoy life with a view that this is not all that there is.

And you can enjoy fellowship with the God who loves you so much that he died for you and he defeated death for you. And then like the women, you go and tell someone the good news. that Christ is risen, he is risen in thee. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for raising Jesus from death to life.

[26 : 20] And thank you that in his resurrection we have hope for eternal life. we have hope for something else, more beyond the life that we see now.

Help us, Lord, with the power of your spirit to live life in light of the resurrection. In the name of Jesus, the risen one, we pray. Amen.

Amen.