

EASTER DAY - Come and See

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[0 : 00] They weren't expecting to find a resurrection. And even the guards weren't expecting a resurrection. The guards were there precisely to stop the resurrection and to stop rumours of it spreading.

And yet they didn't expect it either. For dead people don't rise. Well, the worries that the women had about moving the stone were quickly allayed when they got there.

And suddenly there was a great earthquake for an angel of the Lord descending from heaven. Came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. The earthquake might have been an aftershock from the earthquake at the point when Jesus died on the cross on the first Good Friday and the tombs were open.

On that day the tombs were open and dead people rose. But here at this earthquake, the angel moving the stone, no dead person rose. The angels were dazzling in their appearance.

The guards were terror struck and fell down to the side. And the angel speaks. The angel speaks to the women, not the guards. And the first words are, do not fear.

[1 : 12] For many people they think the Bible is a lot of prohibitive laws from God. That God doesn't want us to enjoy ourselves and says, don't do this and don't do that and don't do this.

But the most common command in the Bible, 365 times, one for every day of the year, is do not fear. When the angel appeared to Joseph at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel to announce the birth of Jesus and what to call him, the angel said, do not fear.

And now at the end of the Gospel, the same thing. Another angel appears and says the same words, do not fear. The passage is full of fear.

The guards were afraid and terror struck. The women were afraid because of the earthquake and the appearance of the angel. And yet here and later on in the same passage, the same words, do not fear.

The angel says to the women, I know that you're looking for Jesus who was crucified. And that is what they're looking for.

[2 : 20] They're looking for a crucified corpse. And that's in effect what the angel says. You've come to find a body. I know that. That's why you've come.

Not you've come to find a resurrection. Not that you've come to find an empty tomb. But you've come to find a crucified body. But there's no body here.

He's not here, the angel says. For he's been raised. Not he raised himself, but he's been raised. It's God the Father's work to raise Jesus from the dead. Come and see, the angel says, the place where he lay.

For that's why the angel rolled the stone away from the tomb, not to let Jesus out, but to let the women in to see that the tomb was empty. Jesus didn't need the stone to be moved in order to rise from the dead.

But of course it's too late for the women to see the resurrection. It's already happened. The tomb is empty. And in fact, nobody sees Jesus rise.

[3 : 23] The women don't. They get there and the tomb's empty. The guards don't, and yet it happened right under their noses. They think that they're guarding a tomb where there's a crucified corpse inside. But they're actually guarding an empty tomb.

Foolish people. Right under their noses, and yet they don't realise that Jesus is risen from the dead. They're there to try and stop it. But of course the power of resurrection is greater than that.

Neither they nor the women expected an empty tomb, and yet it was empty. And the angel invited them in to see. Similarly, I guess our world doesn't expect resurrection either.

Our world tries to dismiss it, to put it to one side. The so-called triumph of reason of the last 200 years, the period of the Enlightenment, dismisses the resurrection as a myth.

It can't happen. It's not according to the laws of nature. But of course that ignores the God who made nature, and their laws. Science and rational reason of the last 200 years eliminates God from the equation.

[4 : 35] God is restricted, the miracles are denied, and the resurrection is regarded as a myth. I guess pseudo-Christian thinking thinks that somehow the spirit of Jesus lives on in those who follow him, or in other people.

But that's at best pseudo-Christian. For at the heart of it is that Jesus rose. The tomb was empty. The body was gone.

And the resurrection of Jesus mocks the arrogance of our scientific, rational world. For he rose from the dead. And it's weighty evidence indeed that supports it.

The tomb was guarded by the enemies of Jesus in order to prevent the resurrection, and yet it happened. There's no mistake over the tomb because the women who come to the tomb have seen him being buried in that same tomb.

They know where to go. When Jesus appears to them later in this passage, they touch him. They fall at his feet and touch his feet, hold on to them and kiss them. Not a ghost, not an apparition, not an hallucination.

[5 : 48] It's a real body. It's a real resurrection. And indeed, they weren't the only ones to whom Jesus appeared. Later to his disciples that night, to a couple of disciples on the road to Emmaus the same night, to 500 people at one time.

And indeed, not just to those who were supporters, but even to an enemy, a man called Saul, who when he saw the risen Lord Jesus, became a Christian and one of the great apostles.

If this were a made-up story, then it doesn't hold because in ancient times in Jesus' day, women's evidence was disregarded and not allowed in court.

The first witnesses are women. If you were making up a story to try and demonstrate a mythical resurrection, you'd have men there first. But no, the women were the first ones.

That's true. Wouldn't have held up in court, but it's not a make-believe story. Jesus' resurrection fulfils many predictions as well.

[6 : 51] Several times, in public and in private, in the Gospels, Jesus predicts that he'll rise from the dead. You're either a fool if you do that, or indeed, the Son of God.

It's easy to predict a death, as Jesus also did many times. Several points, that seems inevitable, but to predict a resurrection and then it occurs.

The disciples' lives are changed by the resurrection of Jesus. Why, just before he died, Peter couldn't even bring himself to admit that he knew Jesus, let alone that he was a follower of him. But come the resurrection, Peter's a changed man. He stands up and preaches boldly on the day of Pentecost, just weeks later, proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

And so bold was he now because of the resurrection of Jesus that he went to prison for preaching that and as tradition has it, in the end, he died for it. St. Paul, the same. Thrown into prison, beaten, tortured, kicked out of towns, all because, as he says, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

[7 : 58] If it were a myth, if it were a made up story, if the disciples had concocted something and hidden the body, they wouldn't die for it. But they did die for it. Stephen, Peter, James, Paul and many, many others because they knew it was true.

They knew that it wasn't a dream or an apparition or a ghost but the real thing. Jesus ate with them, talked with them, touched them, held their hands and they held his.

And they died because they believed in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Weighty evidence indeed. People whose lives are radically changed from being timid, bashful, ashamed of even knowing Jesus to being prepared to die because he rose from the dead.

Some people try and dismiss it because they say these gospel stories, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, they're written so far after at the event, they can't be true. But what a lot of nonsense.

They're written within a generation by people who either knew Jesus or knew somebody who did know him. Indeed, the letters of the New Testament, all of which support the fact that Jesus is risen from the dead, they were written even earlier than the gospels.

[9 : 14] The first letter of Paul was written within 15 or 16 years of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. That's not very long. Think back to 1981. It seems like yesterday, doesn't it?

That's how long from the first letter looking back to the resurrection of Jesus. And that's also to not make mention of the fact that in ancient cultures people passed on things by word of mouth much more accurately than we ever do.

There is no other ancient event that has the weight of evidence as the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There is better, more accurate evidence for the resurrection of Christ than there is for Julius Caesar conquering Britain, for Alexander the Great or any other ancient event or person in history.

The accounts that we have of all those ancient events are hundreds and hundreds of years later than the events themselves. But as far as the death and resurrection of Jesus goes, the gospels were written within a generation and the actual manuscript evidence that we have today begins in about 120 AD which is hundreds of years earlier than for any other ancient event.

[10 : 27] And there are thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands of bits of documents from the New Testament which show how old it is and how reliable it is.

When the Christian faith began and caused a stir because of the resurrection, neither the Jews nor the Romans could find the body because it wasn't there.

It was risen and they couldn't deny it. The Christian faith stands or falls on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And if by chance somebody could actually prove to me today that he was never risen, I would take off these robes and my collar, I would walk out of this building and I would never, ever return to a Christian church because it's nonsense if he didn't rise.

Everything that we do and have done for 2,000 years is an absolute waste of time if Jesus did not rise from the dead. 2,000 years of great tradition, architectural beauty, choral glory, the great preachers of the last 2,000 years, all the issues of morality and philanthropy done by Christian people, third world aid, the world missions, everything.

[11 : 45] Absolute nonsense if Jesus did not rise from the dead. and we are wasting our time here. We might as well be asleep or getting ready to go to the football.

And yet in every age people try to disprove it, try to mock it as though it never happened. Say that, oh, he didn't really die or that the disciples pinched the body or the Romans or the Jews pinched the body or they make up some other fanciful speculative theory about why it didn't happen.

These are not people who are trying to find objective truth. The reason people try and disprove the resurrection is because they try and avoid the demands and implications of it for their own lives.

So that's why they come up with fanciful theories. It's not the pursuit of objective truth and history but rather it's to escape the demands of a real and living God.

For the resurrection of Jesus does make demands on us, serious demands demands and if we believe it we must accept them and face the consequences. For the resurrection of Jesus demands worship.

[12 : 58] As these women left the tomb to go to Jerusalem to tell the disciples that the tomb was empty, they were confronted there with Jesus and they fell at his feet, they touched his feet and they worshipped him.

An extraordinary act by Jewish women. For Jews abhorred any physical form of God or any challenge to the uniqueness of God.

A very rigorously monotheistic religion and a religion that forbade the human form or animal form of anything that would be worshipped and here were Jewish women worshipping a man.

Absolutely extraordinary. It shatters all the understanding of the Old Testament faith unless of course it's true. Jesus is God and worthy of worship and not just once or twice a year paying lip service as though that's what worship of the risen Lord Jesus is all about but rather living lives that worship him regularly as part of the fellowship of his people and in the things that we do between Monday and Saturday as well as Sunday.

The resurrection of Jesus also demands obedience to him. Jesus told the women to go and tell the disciples and that's exactly what they do and every other place the same sort of thing.

[14 : 16] The risen Lord Jesus commands obedience from his followers. That's why people are keen to disprove it today. They don't want to obey Jesus they want to do what they want.

People want to follow their own desires and live lives for themselves where they are the kings and queens of their lives. But no if Jesus is God and the resurrection is true he demands obedience from us and if we fail to give him that then in effect we deny his resurrection at all.

And thirdly the resurrection demands mission as well because what the angel and Jesus said to these women were go and tell and if you read on the second half of this chapter and as we'll hear tonight not only go and tell the disciples but go and tell the world because the resurrection of Jesus demands that everybody hear because the death and resurrection of Jesus is for all people and this is an obligation on every single Christian.

It's not the missionary's job or the minister's job or the leaders of the church's job to tell other people it's all of our job every single one of us if we believe in the resurrection that it is our job to tell others our husbands our wives our parents our children our godchildren our nephews our aunts and uncles the people we share houses with the people we work with the people we're in probes with or go walking with or play cards with or tennis with or go shopping with or have fun with it's our job our obligation because the resurrection demands us to tell other people that Jesus is risen.

The passage about the resurrection begins by saying on the first day of the week we might expect it to say on the third day because so much of prediction and expectation was that on the third day Jesus would rise but no it begins on the first day of the week begins where the Bible began the very first day of the very first week when God began the work of creation but this is saying something different this is the beginning of a new era of creation indeed a new act of creation for the resurrection issues in the new age people search in all the wrong places for the new age crystals and tarot and yogic flying or the pursuit of science and reason and technology as though that's going to usher in a new age but of course it doesn't it's a moral failure people look for political leaders and gurus sadly so often as we've seen in the news in the last few days in order to bring about a new age but the answer is here

[17:03] Jesus is risen that's the beginning of the new age the new creation the new week that's still running and so Easter is an invitation as well so let's make a new start to be part of that new age and that new creation to start afresh with God and with Jesus to start afresh in worship in obedience and in mission because he is risen he's not here as the angel said to the women the tomb is empty won't you come and see and the implications for that are really life shattering but the invitation is fantastic as well for it's only in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ that we indeed find new life Jesus is risen he is risen indeed hallelujah