

Easter Sunday PM

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 00] Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening, in Christ's name, Amen. Be seated, be seated. It's so lovely to see you all.

If you are new, my name is Aaron, and I'm one of the ministers on staff here. And what I'm going to do now is I'm going to preach a short sermon, which I'm just going to try and explain the passage that was just read.

And obviously, it's one of the most precious stories in Scripture. You know, the resurrection, of course, it's kind of like the cornerstone event of our faith.

And I don't want to kind of mess up the sermon by kind of making it very overcomplicated. So I just have two questions to ask of the story. Two questions to ask of the story.

First, what does the story tell us about people? And what does the story tell us about Jesus? What does it tell us about people? And what does it tell us about Jesus? That's great.

[1 : 02] That's easy, right? So let's crack on. Let's just answer one of these questions. First, let's start with Jesus. What does it tell us about Jesus? Well, the first obvious thing it tells us about Jesus is that he rose from the dead, which is just wild, isn't it?

Completely wild. Ernest Shackleton. Ernest Shackleton. Ernest Shackleton. Sir Ernest Shackleton was an explorer. And in 1914, he left London with a group.

And he wanted to try and cross the South Pole. And a month in, his boat, Endurance, Endurance, was trapped by this ice pack. Totally stuck.

Couldn't go anywhere. They were stuck there for 10 months. And then finally, the ice started to crush the boats. They all had to leave. So 29 guys got out. And they couldn't stick around there. So they started walking across the ice pack. Obviously, an absolutely brutal journey. They're living off, you know, like penguins. And the temperature would get down to minus 45.

[2 : 06] They reached the end of the ice pack and hit water again. And then they launched three small boats, which they dragged across the ice with them. And it sounds like a relief.

I don't think it was a relief because they're launching these little tiny boats into the coldest, wildest ocean in the world. And they row 100 miles to this large, uninhabited rock of an island in the middle of the ocean.

And they set up camp. And then Shackleton and five others set out for another island that they knew about, which was 800 miles away by boat. It took them 17 days to get there.

So just a small group, one boat. Horrible, terrifying journey. Constantly drenched by icy water. They're starving. So on this other island was a whaling station.

But where they landed on this next island was on the other side of the island. So they had to get to the whaling station, which was miles away. So Shackleton and two guys trekked across this island.

[3 : 11] The other guys couldn't make it. They were just exhausted. They had no map. They had no knowledge of the island. No one had ever crossed this island before. They marched for 36 hours.

They crossed glaciers, scaled mountains, and cliffs. But they got there. They got to the whaling station. And then they sent ships to pick up all the other men.

So that's the story. And it's an unbelievable story, isn't it? Like that is very hard to believe, isn't it? Very hard to believe.

Except we have to believe it. We have to believe it because Shackleton, all those years ago, was standing there at the whaling station.

And he was alive. After this impossible journey. There he was. And all the other men who they rescued, they all corroborated the same story.

[4 : 11] The story of Jesus rising from the dead. It's unbelievable. And yet, there he was.

Now people have doubted over the centuries that this really happened. But he really was there. Alive. Eating. Chatting. Meeting with people.

Jesus, he was standing there. He really did rise from the dead. He really did defeat death. And there were hundreds and hundreds of witnesses who attested to it.

So again, keeping it really simple. This is my first point. What does the Bible, what does the story tell us about Jesus? Jesus, he rose from the dead. And that's a fact we kind of have to deal with.

The second thing it tells us about Jesus is this. That this risen Jesus wants to be with us. What does Jesus tell the woman when he sees them?

[5 : 16] He says, hi. Hello. It's a really casual greeting. Hello. It's great to see you. And then he says, make sure you tell the others that I'm going to see them soon.

Just think about that. So Jesus, after going through death, the mocking, the beating, the crucifixion, the dying, the resurrection.

After going through that, the first thing he wants to do after the resurrection is what? He wants to see his friends. That's why he greets these women so wonderfully, so joyfully.

And then he says, make sure you tell the guys I'm going to go see them as well. So let's make sure we meet. Isn't that astonishing? And to further emphasize this idea, look down at verse 20 there.

What does Jesus say right at the end? Sort of closing line. He says, I am with you always to the end of the age. I'm going to be with you always. So just take that in for a moment.

[6 : 21] This is what God is like. He's a God that wants to be with you. And this really takes us back to the beginning of this gospel.

Like if you looked at Matthew chapter 1 verse 20, right at the start of the story of Jesus. Let me read a line to you. This is an angel speaking to Mary.

Behold, the virgins shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. So the whole gospel is bookended, like enveloped with his incredible thought.

Jesus wants to be with us. He wants to be in a relationship with you. Now I don't know, I know people here will be, you know, variously religious and not.

So I don't know what you think about God, what you think that God is like or what he's about. But let me tell you, this is telling us that the God of the Bible is relational. He wants to be with you.

[7 : 25] He wants to be in a relationship with you. Okay, we're still going. What else does this tell us about Jesus? The passage tells us about his authority. So I reckon, I reckon lots of people think Jesus is great.

Like he's great. He's a brilliant moral teacher. He says cool things. He's the guy that you quote when you want to talk about being humble because he's, you know, really likable.

And he's a good moral teacher like Gandhi or like Jane Goodall or Confucius. Or he's kind of in that orbit. People who said cool things and did cool stuff.

I think that's how many folks think about Jesus. But look at what Jesus says about himself. Because he kind of blows that out of the water. He says, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

That's really serious and really full on. That puts him outside of the crew of folks who were just merely famous.

[8 : 37] Who said some quotable things. So what does all that mean? All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. What does it mean? Well, we know that when Jesus walked the earth, he had authority.

But there were limitations on that. Self-imposed limitations. But Matthew 28 tells us that God now hands over the governance of the entire universe into his son's hands.

And notice that word all. All authority. That's universal, unconditional authority. Which means there is no individual, no people group, no organization which isn't under the authority of Jesus.

Whether they know it or not. So a subsistence farmer, a wealthy banker, an atheist, an agnostic, a communist, a capitalist. Whatever you believe, wherever you live, Jesus is the Lord over you.

Now what does it mean for us? What does it mean for our friends? It means a lot of things.

[9 : 42] Let me just point out one thing. It means Jesus can't be someone you're just fond of. You know, Jesus can't be like Gandhi.

He can't be somebody or like your favorite, whatever, wealth management guru. Or somebody that you sort of like you follow on Instagram or something who's great. Like really great. You're really fond of them.

He can't be over there just kind of on the sideline of your life. Periodically sneaking in some pretty good advice. He's not really on that level.

We can't say, well, Jesus said this, but Napoleon said that, and Freud said this, and it's all pretty cool, you know. He's not just another great communicator. Jesus is the Lord over all.

And ask yourself that question. Is that how you see him? Okay, here's what we're going to do now. Because I'm going to pivot. I'm going to pivot. I said at the start, two questions.

[10:44] I wanted to ask two questions of this short bit of the Bible here. The first was, what does it tell us about Jesus? We've looked at that. I hope that was helpful. The second question is this.

What does this passage tell us about us? What does it tell us about us? Like just regular folks like us? Well, let's look at the regular people in our passage.

And I think we'll start with the soldiers. Because they are very interesting. Given that Jesus rose from the dead, it's a really, I mean, obviously that's a huge deal. So it's quite interesting that quite a bit of the story is given to the soldier piece, right?

Like Jesus rose from the dead. And then they kind of like tell the sub story about these soldiers and their interactions and their conversations. So let's have a look at these folks because there's something in here for us.

Because I think the first thing you'd want to say is that if you're the soldiers, if you were the soldiers, after everything that had happened and you'd seen, like the terrifying angels, you'd think the soldiers would run back to the chief priests and say, like, I think we got it wrong.

[11:57] I think we may have slightly underestimated Jesus. I think maybe we should reconsider this whole thing, you know? But what actually happens is this. They take off and they tell the chief priests, the religious people, the chief priests chat amongst themselves, and they agree to what?

Cover the whole thing up. The religious leaders say to the guards, listen, man, you can't tell anyone what happened. So just tell them that you fell asleep and the disciples stole the body and will pay you lots of money.

And that's all terribly ironic, isn't it? Because the religious leaders were so worried about the disciples stealing the body, hence the guards and the big stone.

And now that's exactly what they want people to believe happened. You see the irony there? They try and cover up the resurrection by promoting the story they tried to prevent.

They were so worried about the resurrection, they want everyone to think the body was stolen. And it's such a silly lie to promote, because how would they know the body was stolen if they were asleep?

[13:05] That's laughable. But I think what's really, what's worse, I think it's just the defiance. Let me read verse 2 to you again.

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. And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

There was an earthquake, because an angel, bam, landed on the ground. And he rolled away the stone and sat on it like it was nothing. It's a great picture of who has the power in that situation.

Like who's got the power there? The guards with the swords, having a freak out, or the angel sitting on top of the stone. Yet despite all of that, their strategy was, cover it up.

The defiance is staggering, is it not? They were happy to just try and spend their way out of dealing with the truth about Jesus.

[14:14] So now let me just sort of apply this in a really pointy way. All this stuff in Matthew's gospel, it really happened, and we have to deal with that somehow. And if you're here, and you're thinking about faith, and you're thinking about Jesus, and you feel some resistance in your heart towards this, like a little bit of pushback, ask yourself, is my resistance to this message, is it reasonable?

Is it because I have genuine questions, and I'm looking for some good answers? Is that what my resistance is about? Or am I just being defiant like the soldiers?

Imagine missing out on a relationship with God, your creator, because of that. Wouldn't that be a tragedy? So my invitation to you is, if you're here, and you're kind of, you know, just kind of interested, but you've got a bit of a sense of pushback in your heart here, I would just say, examine the evidence with an open heart.

And, don't be afraid of the truth. Let's keep going. What else does the story tell us about us?

If we look at verse 18 here, and then Jesus came and he said to them, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me, go therefore and make disciples of all nations. So we've already talked about the authority Jesus has, but what's the first thing Jesus does with his authority?

[15:57] What's the first thing he does with it? Is he kind of gives it away to people. He sends people out. All authority has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.

The first thing he does is he transfers his mission to us, to his people. The first thing he does is he invites us into his work, into what God is doing, which is completely wild.

I mean, post-resurrection, Jesus had a lot of things he could have talked about. He could have talked a lot about what having all authority meant for him, but no, instead he talks about what it means for us, his people, for us readers.

Go make disciples. Help others become followers of Jesus. And you see that little word in there, go. I love that word, go, go, go, go, go. It's a challenging word. There's intent in that.

Go means inconvenience. It means giving real thought to, structuring your life around how you can do this, how you can be a disciple, how you can be a disciple that makes disciples. There's a lot more to say about that, but we're going to keep going here.

[16:56] One more thing before we finish. One more thing I want to say about what the passage says to us. Verse 16. Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

And when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Let's talk about the doubters. This is different to the defiance of the religious leaders.

Sometimes I think it's just, sometimes it takes folks just a while to get on board with Jesus.

They have honest doubts. They have honest questions. And in fact, I think it's probably true to say for most of us, that most of us live in this kind of space of fluctuating between trusting and questioning, believing and sometimes doubting.

I just want to say, don't beat yourself up too much. If that's you, because isn't it wonderfully encouraging that God, that these were the folks that God used.

[18:00] Raised from the dead, finds his disciples, the faithful and the doubters. And he scoops them all up and he says, you guys, you're my people.

You will be my ambassadors. In the world. In other places in the Bible, Jesus confronts people's doubts, but not always.

Here, it's like he just quietly ignores it. And says, I know it's okay. I find this so moving.

He's like, let's get on with it, shall we? So he doesn't carve out, he doesn't carve out the worshipers and says, okay, I'm talking to you guys. You doubt this. Off you go. I'm not interested in you. He just scoops them all up and he says, let's get on with it, shall we?

Let's get on with it. I think that's just beautiful. So if you have genuine questions about Jesus, and you're not a Christian maybe, but you're curious, I just, again, I want to encourage, go to Chris's group.

[19:04] It's absolutely brilliant. But I know doing something like that would require some courage, wouldn't it? I know, it would require courage. So why would you even bother doing something like that?

Why bother? Because an angel sat on a stone. Because Jesus really did appear. Because death really was defeated.

Because the king of the whole universe really, really wants to be with you. And give you a purpose in your life.

A purpose that is better than anything you can imagine. Isn't that wonderful? We're going to spend a few minutes praying now.

Thank you, Richard.