

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

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[0 : 0 0] I want us to turn together this morning to the chapter that we read, Matthew chapter 28. We'll read from the beginning once again, page 1006, Matthew 28, reading from the beginning.

Now, after the Sabbath, towards the dawn on 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. 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. Behold, he is going before you to Galilee.

[1 : 0 4] There you will see him. I want us to very simply this morning think about five messages.

We could call them statements that there are in this passage. Five messages. All of which add something to our understanding, I hope, of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And all of which, I hope, challenge us as to where we stand with relation to Jesus. Because I don't think we can talk all we want about how Jesus rose from the dead.

We can even celebrate today and this weekend as the time where we believe that Jesus rose from the dead. But unless we come to discover for ourselves what it means to us, and unless we listen to the Lord speaking to us and changing our hearts and our lives, then all it will be is a historical fact to us that will make no difference.

And I hope today that would be the case. I hope today that as we come, as followers of Jesus already, that it will thrill our hearts to rediscover what the message of the resurrection really is.

[2 : 2 7] But I hope also that if there is anyone here today who hasn't yet come to know Jesus for the first time, that the message of the resurrection will sound clearly and powerfully in your heart.

That you will listen, perhaps even for the first time, to the Lord speaking to us, God himself speaking to us, because that's how he does speak to us, in the pages of the Bible that tells us of his son Jesus Christ.

But the way the Bible tells us of Jesus is not just to give the bare facts, it gives us the details. And I want us to notice that even in the detail of Matthew 27 and 28, there is much that stimulates our thinking and that adds to our understanding and that challenges us as to where we are.

So I want us to think this morning of five messages, five messages in the passage that we have just read. I want us to think, first of all, of the message of Pilate.

The message that Pilate gave. Or I should say, perhaps, the order that Pilate gave. That's why I decided not to start the reading of chapter 28.

- [3 : 39] In order to do so, in order to really understand what's going on, you have to go back into the previous chapter and to discover what went on with Pilate and with the chief priests and with the soldiers.
- And, of course, this is the day that Jesus died. He was crucified at Calvary and took his body. We read here that a man called Joseph of Arimathea, and he took his body from the cross and he had arranged to have a burial place.
- Normally, the bodies were put into a mass grave, the bodies of criminals. But in this case, Joseph had arranged a special place to place the body of Jesus.
- And he took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And, you know, on that day, there was great rejoicing amongst some.
- There were people who had made it their business for three whole years to get rid of Jesus, and now the time had come. They were jumping up and down in great gladness because they thought that now was the time had come.
- [4 : 44] And then the other side of the coin, of course, was as they were celebrating the death of Jesus, the disciples were full of despondency. So there's a great contrast here in those chapters.
- The contrast between those for whom Jesus' death was a time of gladness and dawn, those who hated Jesus. And believe me, they really did hate Jesus. You know, that's one of the most astonishing things about the life of Jesus.
- How? If you look at him, if you read through his life, he did nothing but good and kindness for people. And yet, the more he acted and the more he spoke, the more he displayed his great, enormous power, then there were some people who were all the more determined to be done with him.
- Until that day, he stood in front of Pilate and he said, we will not have crucified him. They were so incensed at this man. It really is quite astonishing, the anger that there was in the crowd.
- But the other contrast that you can't help but noticing is the contrast between Pilate's intentions in making the grave as secure as he possibly could with all his power and his authority and the way in which God completely turns that upside down by overcoming.
- [6 : 06] It doesn't matter how much power and authority Pilate has. When God steps in, there is no power that can overcome God's power.
- And that in itself is a message to each one of us. God speaks to us in the Bible because he has a message for us that Jesus came into the world to die for our sins.
- And yet, is it not true? There's something within us that wants to get away from that. We want to do everything in our power to hide from it, to rebel against it, to stand against it, and to whatever we can do, we want to run from God.
- And yet, God will always have the last say, just as he had here. So the message of Pilate is one which will not make. All he could do was to say, go and make it as secure as you can.
- Of course, as soon as he opened his mouth, the soldiers would come. They would take the great stone. I'm not sure how much effort it would have taken to move that massive stone.
- [7 : 08] I would imagine it would have taken considerable effort to move a stone the size of the one that would be required to cover the mouth of a tomb. If any of you have visited, and I'm sure we all have visited, the stones at Calanet, you'll know that these enormous great stones, the first question you always ask yourself is, how in the world were these people able to move these massive stones and put them into place without the cranes and the technology that we have?

Well, it's the same here. You can say what you like about, oh, well, it was round. But that didn't make it easy for them to move this massive great stone. And look at the effort that Pilate goes to to make sure that nothing happens.

You see, despite the joy and the celebration on behalf of those who were celebrating the death of Jesus, those who hated him, there was still this wee miggling discomfort.

You get the feeling, don't you? They come to it. They're not happy, these people. They're still not happy. They watch him dying on the cross. They watch his body get taken down by the cross and no doubt making sure that he's dead.

He couldn't possibly have survived the awfulness of crucifixion. And yet, they're still not happy. Even when they see his body being wrapped in linen and placed in a tomb, they still think there's this unease.

[8 : 37] And I believe that was because deep down they knew perfectly well who Jesus was. And if today you know who Jesus is, then stop rebelling.

And come and ask him to change your life. Ask him to turn your life around. Instead of working and living against Jesus, then ask him to turn you around and to show you the joy of what it is to be a follower of Jesus.

We can only have that as we surrender and as we submit to him. It's a bit like the Philippian jailer in Acts chapter 16 when Paul and Silas were in prison in Philippi.

And the Philippian jailer, he put them into the innermost part of the prison. No doubt there were two or three different massive doors and he made sure that they were all locked. He had the key. He had the authority.

And he could sleep. He could fall asleep knowing that they were safe. Nothing was going to happen. Well, that's what he thought. What he didn't bargain for was the fact that God had the power to move heaven and earth in order to open the doors in order for Paul and Silas to escape.

[9 : 44] And that's literally what happened. The earth shook. See, we make these assumptions, don't we? We live on certain assumptions that things won't happen. And yet, when they do happen, that's the time when God really speaks to us and shows us that our lives, we're just a hairspray away from death at any given moment.

So Pilate used all the authority that he had to make sure that the grave was secure, to make sure that, but that's all he could do. Nothing more he could do than that.

And whilst we are able to have authority and power in this world, our power is always limited. So that's the message of Pilate then. Go, make it as secure as you can.

Power and yet limited power. The power was overcome and overturned by God himself. The second message is the message of the stone.

The message of the stone. The stone, of course, said nothing. The stone was inanimate. It couldn't say anything. It wasn't a living thing at all.

[10 : 50] And yet, it was highly symbolic, wasn't it? You couldn't look at that stone without knowing why it was there. And it was almost as if it spoke to everyone who passed by.

The stone was there. Let's go back once again to the one who put it there, Pilate. The Bible tells us that it was Pilate that was responsible for putting Jesus to death.

On the first place, he, it was him that gave the order to have Jesus crucified. But the Bible also goes on to tell us that he did so as he was motivated by a much greater power, the power of the devil.

The Bible called Pilate the ruler of this world, the rulers of this world. And the devil operates very often by using human agency.

So, if you looked at that stone, it would be saying to you, as if it was saying to you, I am here because I have the power over death and the grave.

[11 : 57] It was the devil who was responsible for bringing death and the grave into the world in the first place through sin, Romans chapter 5. That's how sin and how human badness came into the world and all the awful consequences of that sin.

And that stone seems to me to be symbolic of. And it seems to say to all who pass by, everything in this tomb is mine.

And you needn't bother even trying to roll me away because it won't do any good. You see, on the first day of the week, the disciples did want to come and visit the body of Jesus. But they knew perfectly well that all they could do was to anoint the body of Jesus.

There was nothing that they could do to bring Jesus back to life again. And the same was true for death in general. The awfulness of death is that it cannot be reversed. It was introduced into the world by sin and Satan.

And the Bible tells us that he has the power. And that is until God himself steps in. Between chapter 27 and 28, God intervenes.

[13 : 09] And where we cannot do a single thing to break the power of death and the grave, God steps in victorious. the stone says, this is what I can do to the human race.

God says, this is what I can do. And he rolled the stone away. But first of all, and there are many people, I wonder how many of the younger people, I'm sure the older people know this already, at least I hope they do.

But just for the sake of the younger people, some people think that the stone was rolled away in order to let Jesus out. Well, it wasn't.

It wasn't. Jesus had already come out of the grave by the time the stone was rolled away. What happened was that God came to the body of Jesus and breathed life into the body of Jesus.

See, only God can do that. Only God has the power and the authority to bring a dead person back to life again.

[14 : 19] So if Jesus came back from the dead, it had to be God who raised him. Only God can. No one else has the power and the authority to make a dead person rise again from the dead.

So this was God. God entering into that cold, lonely, dark tomb and breathing life back into the body of Jesus so that he rose once again.

And then he left the tomb. Presumably he went out through the stone. But it was only afterwards that there was this earthquake in chapter 28 and the stone was rolled away so that the disciples when they arrived at the tomb were able to see that the tomb was empty.

That's the message of the resurrection this morning. God rolled back the curtain as it were to display his power and his final authority to make the statement that whilst the stone up until this moment said this is man God is now saying no it isn't because I have now the authority and the power over death itself.

Have you ever noticed what happens once the stone is rolled away? What's the next thing that happens? The angel sits on it.

[15 : 50] I have to confess it's only recently I ever noticed that we few words few words that he sat on the stone. Now I don't believe that's incidental at all.

I believe that's highly significant because in the Bible when you sat it was a sign that something was finished. It was a sign that God has triumphed and when a king for example when he would go into battle when the battle was over the winner the one who was victorious would sit as a sign on his throne he would sit as a sign of him having been victorious but when a king was crowned the first thing that would happen was that the king would sit not just as a resting place but as a sign to everyone of his victory and his position and his authority over him.

Here is what God is doing. The stone is an instrument of Satan that says here is my power over this world but the angel is an instrument of God a messenger for God and he says this is what I can do here is my power over the world and sit triumphantly over the stone.

It's also interesting isn't it again looking at the contrast between what Pilate thought he was able to do and what God actually did that the soldiers they were so alive weren't they he had put everything in place he had made everything secure he was the one who was alive Pilate the soldiers were the ones who were alive and Jesus was the one who was dead that's the contrast that by the time Matthew 28 comes and the first day of the week Jesus has left the tomb and what's happened to the soldiers they are like dead men see the contrast they are like dead men they weren't dead but they were so afraid that all the life all the boldness and the confidence had been sacked out of them and all they could do was lie on the ground motionless that's what God can do and that's God's authority and his power and his mind so how we're seeing that even in these little details

God is speaking to us and even through the incidental details that take place but then thirdly I want us to notice a third message and the message is the message of the testament first of all the message of Pilate the message of the stone I want us to just spend a little time on the message of the testament now what do I mean by that well the old testament and the new testament because this is what was happening when you read your bible the old testament is the story of the history of God's people up until the point of Jesus and his death and resurrection but afterwards there is the new testament that explains that tells us about how Jesus came into the world and how he died at calvary rose again ascended to the father and the story of the ongoing church the church as it made its way preaching the message of the gospel into all the world past now we're leaving the old testament behind us I am not saying the old testament has nothing to say to us of course it does it's all

[19 : 11] God's word that's why we have the two testaments in the bible old testament and new testament and it's very dangerous for us to just neglect the old testament it's all God's word and yet it would be foolish for us not to see the transition between the old testament and then after the sabbath and the focus particularly is on what the old testament people called the sabbath after the sabbath toward the dawn of the first day of the week you know what the sabbath was of course it was one of the ten commandments it was the it was the fourth commandment in which God said remember the sabbath day to keep it holy for in six days God created the seventh day but the seventh day is holy to the Lord and all goes back to the genesis chapter 1 when God created the world in six days and he rested on the seventh day to as a mark of his completion of his work of creation so when he finished his work of creation he rested the Bible also goes on to tell us not only did he rest but he was refreshed genesis exodus chapter 31 and verse 14 it tells us that when he saw the work that he had done he delighted in it he joined when he saw the work that he had done it was a mark of his having completed this work of creation and so the people of God in like manner they were to finish their week and they were to rest and be thankful and worship

God and recognize what God had done through them and they had to make this a day of worship and it was a good thing it was something that it was something that that was for their well-being the Sabbath was made for man Jesus said we need to have that one day of in seven of rest God says we do we need it if it wasn't for that we would be doing as much as we can ruining our bodies and ruining our lives just because of our own frantic feverish effort to make the most of life well God knows how to give us the best in life and he tells us that one day in seven but here's what's happening whereas the Old Testament believers they look back God said remember the Sabbath day there was also an element in which they were to look forward to when God would complete another work and that's exactly what's happening here is God completing his work of salvation of redemption here is

God stating to the world that it is finished what's finished that's what Jesus said on the cross it is finished what is it what is finished the work of our salvation and because Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice for our sin instead of us because he was willing to go to that place of suffering and the wrath of God we have been set free by trusting him and our lives have been changed and if we come and trust him today we can discover what God can do for us in the Lord Jesus task this was the moment in which God was completing that work by raising his son from the dead triumphant over the dead and in which he says to us that we can be saved and washed and cleansed by trusting in him what's the fourth message is the earth's message the message of the earth what happened in chapter 28 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 now there had been an earthquake before in chapter 27 that gives the account of

Jesus' death on the cross one of the details is an earthquake the ground shook verse 51 in chapter 27 it reads behold the curtain of the temple is torn in two and the earth shook but look at what happened and the rocks were split look at what happens then the tombs also were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many now there's a mystery isn't it who were those people how long was it since they had died how long had they been in their graves before they were raised to life once again this passage tells us that they were raised to life once again and they actually came into Jerusalem at the time of his resurrection they were seen presumably they spoke perhaps

I don't know we don't know very much about it apart from the fact that they were raised to life you don't know how many there were you don't know who they were we know that they were believers saints that's what a saint is a believer a person who follows Jesus Christ but we don't know much more about them than that but what we can say is this we can deduce from this passage that here was God giving a foretaste of what will happen all over the world one day when everyone will rise from the dead even those who have been buried at sea even those whose bodies have been destroyed by explosion or by fire even those who have lived thousands of years ago and whose bodies have long since disintegrated nothing left of them will all come back to life God is able to do it nothing is impossible with God if the

[25 : 32] Lord is able to put together a universe by the word of his power he's able to bring back those who have died thousands of years ago whatever's happened to their bodies the Bible tells us particularly you can go and read this later on John chapter 5 tells us that there will be two kinds of resurrection there will be the resurrection of those who follow Jesus they will go forever to be with the Lord but there will also be a resurrection of those who have not followed Jesus they will not be with the Lord and there will be no second opportunity pray that the Lord will make sure every one of us here are amongst those who rise in Jesus Christ the only way we can make sure that will happen is by living and dying in Jesus today if you hear my voice Jesus said do not harden your hearts but then lastly and with this we close there was the message the fifth message was the angel verse 3 his appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow for fear of him the guards trembled they came like dead men but the angel said to the woman do not be afraid for I know that you seek

Jesus who was crucified he's not here he has risen come and see the place where he lay and that message that invitation is still given to you today the angel's invitation is timeless come and see the place where he lay if you were ever to go on a trip to Israel and Jerusalem I'm sure there wouldn't be any one of us who wouldn't want to go to this very place and you would today find that place as empty as it was 2000 years ago in fact I believe I've never been there myself but I believe there's I think I notice in the door that says just this come and see the place where he lay he is not here but he has risen have you discovered that yourself this morning have you discovered the significance of that it's incredible when you really think about it it's the most significant it's the pivot point of the gospel if Jesus has really truly historically bodily risen from the dead it must have been

God that raised him and if God raised him he must have raised him for a reason and he would not raise someone who had spent his whole life telling lies about himself it must have been God's mark God's seal God's confirmation on everything that Jesus was and said in this world in other words when he said I am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the father but by me he was telling the truth and God stopped his seal of approval on that by raising him from the dead in other words when we watch him giving his life on the cross and saying father forgive them for they know not what they do then God stopped his seal of approval and forgave them and he will forgive us also why because Jesus promises that those who trust in him will be forgiven and cleansed and washed the resurrection is of foundational importance that's why when the disciples went and preached in Jerusalem that's where they started the risen

Jesus have you really given it thought or have you just kind of passed it over as something that Christians do but it's daft if it didn't happen it's meaningless if it didn't happen if it didn't happen we might as well go and roll chocolate eggs down the nearest hill we're wasting your time here today if it didn't happen but if it did happen I believe with all my heart it's not without evidence it could go on all morning talking about the real tangible evidence that there is that Jesus rose from the dead and he met with his disciples and over 500 different people saw to me that's the key that's why I'm a Christian are you a Christian this morning have you ever realized the significance the marvelous significance of what

Jesus rising from the dead means I hope that you have and if you haven't I hope perhaps that something will be sparked even right now in which you'll go home and you will start thinking about the pain for the very first time God and Jesus has a great message and a great life to give to those who ask and those who trust in him those who come to him surrender to his greatness and to his power let's pray together and Father in heaven we give thanks today for a reminder that your word gives us of the reality that lies at the root of the Christian faith we ask that today that you will speak to each one of us and draw us to that living relationship in which we discover

[31 : 15] Jesus as the risen savior the Jesus who is alive who was dead and today is alive and one day will come again and will raise all of us from the dead we pray for that hope and for that expectation that death is not the end just as it wasn't the end for him it will not be the end for us we ask Lord that you will give us once again give us that comfort of knowing that our loved ones who have died in the Lord are with the Lord and one day will be raised to be with the Lord forever and we pray that you will give us that same assurance ourselves by faith in Jesus in his name amen for hope forgive you thank you you heir be brave