

# The Stone Rolled Away

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 21 February 2010

Preacher: Rev Sandy Sutherland

[ 0 : 01 ] Let us turn to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 28, and verse 2.

Matthew's Gospel, chapter 28, at verse 2, where we read, 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.

This last part of this verse, the stone was rolled away, and an angel sat upon it. Now, I want to firstly have a word of explanation to why I've chosen this text, and then a word of introduction, as we come to the first, then, of five short points.

A word of explanation, I think, is necessary, because you may be wondering, well, this sounds like a text that would be more suitable for a Thanksgiving service, or a text that would be suitable perhaps for tomorrow night, because it's speaking about the resurrection.

Whereas today, this morning, we're really looking to what we might call the action sermon, remembering the death of the Lord in particular. That's coming, then coming to the table, out of that word being proclaimed.

[ 1 : 30 ] The reason, however, that last week, I went to the study to see what texts I could use here for the services. And among others, there was this one here.

And while I was well aware of the fact that it would be more appropriate, perhaps for a Thanksgiving service, I had been speaking to both of your ministers, and I was made aware of the sadness in the congregation at this time.

Now, obviously, there's a sadness directly for the families involved themselves. That goes without saying. But there's a sadness in the congregation through the loss of loved ones and workers in the Lord.

And I felt that even as far as 11 o'clock last night, I was still in a dilemma as to whether to take this text or not. But my heart, my mind, and my spirit could not depart from it.

And so I want to deal with this text here and to preach it, not into a vacuum or out of a vacuum, but that through what Jesus Christ has done through his death, which we will celebrate to remember his death.

[ 2 : 39 ] But we remember that it's until he comes that there is this aspect of the resurrection and what we celebrate today in the supper. But this is where our hope is in all our sadnesses, whether it be through the death of folks in the church or other sadness and difficulties that we've got to deal in our pilgrimage in this world.

This is our hope that he is not here because he has risen. And so it's with that in mind that primarily I've chosen this text.

You can perhaps debate the worthiness of that or the appropriateness of that. Obviously, a text that's worthy for preaching on, obviously. But is it appropriate for today?

You can discuss that for yourselves at your fellowships. This is the text I believe that God has laid upon my heart. Now, a word of introduction. That's the explanation. A word of introduction. We see here the first day of the week.

Three days after men had done their worst to the Lord Jesus Christ, we have these women, as we've read, making their way to the tomb.

[ 3 : 50 ] And they have this desire to embalm the body of Jesus. And as they journeyed to the tomb, they had one main problem, which was the center of their discussions.

This large stone. Who will roll away the stone for us? In actual fact, it wasn't just that one problem, but there was another two problems associated with that.

There was these three problems in all that they had to overcome. We see, firstly, in verse 60 of chapter 27, the first problem that they had, the stone was huge.

That's the first problem, the main problem. But notice there's a second problem in verse 66. And I hadn't noticed this before, and maybe you hadn't noticed it as well, I'm not sure, but there was a seal on the stone.

I hadn't actually thought about that before. I just thought, well, a stone was placed against the tomb. But I hadn't quite, I've read it, I'm sure, but I hadn't quite noticed there was a seal that was placed on the tomb to make sure that nobody had tampered with this stone.

[ 5 : 00 ] So that was the second problem that they had. Where are they going to get permission to break this seal? And then third problem, thirdly, we see in verse 66 also, that, as we know, there was a guard.

There were the representatives of power guarding the tomb. And so it was a real problem. No wonder they were discussing this. Who will roll away the stone for us?

Who's going to deal with the guards? Who's going to deal with the seal? We're going to get permission for all of this. And we are faced with the same three problems in a manner of speaking. Who's going to roll away the stone of death for us? Secondly, there's a seal upon our tomb. The wages of sin is death.

Who's going to deal with that seal of God's law? Eat of this fruit and you will die. We're all dead and dying in Adam. Who's going to deal with that problem?

[ 6 : 01 ] And then thirdly, the powers that be. Who will remove the powers of hell so that I may escape the sepulchre of death and enter into glory?

And so there is in that sense that we're faced with this question too. Who will roll away the stone of death for me? Who will roll away the stone of death for us?

What is our hope in our sadness? And what is our hope as we face death as we all have to? We have to go the way of all flesh, as David put it.

Well, the world itself, of course, looks for an answer. It asks the question, is there life after death? The world asks that. And the world answers it as well.

It answers it in various ways. There's those, for example, who believe in reincarnation. You know, there's people in this world who have people sweeping the road in front of them in case they stand on their grandfather who's come back as a beetle.

[ 7 : 12 ] And they say, I'm gullible in believing the evidence that clearly is stated in the scriptures and in history that the tomb is empty. What does the word of God say?

It says it is given unto man once to die. And that's the final coffin, the final nail into the coffin of reincarnation. Once to die.

You can't come back with something else. But the world invents its own answers to its questions like, can dry bones live? Will we be united with loved ones again?

But these women, when they came to the tomb with this question, who'll roll away the stone? Is there life after death? They received the answer from God.

Not from the imaginations of men. They discovered that the stone was already rolled away.

[ 8 : 14 ] That the seal was broken. And the guards, the powers that be, were as dead men. Jesus Christ has risen.

But how was he risen? Well, this is what we celebrate, of course, today. his death. He has risen because of his death. Being a perfect death.

Because he had a perfect life. His active obedience. He was perfect. 100% he kept the law, which we cannot do. And he thereby had a perfect death and a perfect passive obedience unto God.

And God sent back his soul. The father was pleased with his son's finished work. Sent back his soul to take his body on the third day, which had seen no corruption.

And he bursts forth from the tomb and gives God's answer to the questions. Is there life after death? Will dry bones live? Will we see our loved ones again?

[ 9 : 19 ] And so, through his finished work, that which we celebrate today through the Lord's Supper, through his finished work of his life and of his death and of his resurrection, we have God's answer.

So that's a word of introduction. But let's come to the first of five brief points based on what we have here in our text. That the stone is rolled away and there's an angel sitting upon it.

And the first point that I want to say or speak under is this. The stone rolled away gives us a celebration. A celebration. Even in the midst of the sadness of death, we have a celebration.

Christ's broken and broken body and bloodless body. We saw yesterday in one of the services we saw that his back was that he was flogged, scourged, pharaohs, plowed into his back and his body was broken and that his hands and his feet pierced and of course at the end which proved his death and the spear went into his side out came blood and water.

Through his broken and bloodless body the body that had as his people's substitute kept the law of God perfectly and the body that had been his people's perfect sacrifice and substitute for their sin now lay in the tomb and the guards kept watch.

[10:52] and there's a sense in which I don't know if it's a type in the Old Testament I don't know that it is but my mind here in thinking about Jesus Jesus' body in the tomb asleep waiting for the return of his soul with the guards outside keeping guard of the tomb it causes my mind to go back to the Old Testament and to Samson now Samson of course was a sinner as we all are but he was in sin Jesus had no sin so obviously but the types of course don't fully fulfill themselves in the anti-type but nevertheless I can't help but think of Samson in Gaza asleep with the Philistines all around him waiting to capture him and to put him to death and what does Samson do with the great strength that God gave to him he burst forth from his sleep and he took hold of the gates and the bars of that city and he uprooted the whole lot and he carried it away to the top of a hill there's a picture there I think of Christ the great

Samson surrounded by these guards and in the sleep of death he awakens and he lays hold of the gates of death the bars of the grave and he rips them totally up and he takes them away and he leaves death conquered as Samson left Gaza open and conquered that Jesus Christ rose from the dead conquering death conquering sin conquering the devil and giving us the victory that he had won and we celebrate that victory we celebrate Jesus' victory and our victory in him in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and we do so because the Lord's Supper is not only a memorial that sets out the sufferings and the death of Jesus Christ but we do we do indeed remember the kind of death that he had but it's a memorial that also goes in another direction it's a memorial that sets forth a joyful celebration that Jesus has won that Jesus is the victor that he has conquered death the conqueror of death and the one who says do this until I come the angel here we see is sent forth the angel is sent by God he's sent forth from the the councils of God from the high courts of heaven he's sent down to earth to roll back this stone not of course to release Jesus but to show to us that Jesus is already released that to show to us that the tomb is empty and he comes forth with this heavenly verdict to state to the world that that he's not here for he has risen and we celebrate that we celebrate his death but we're celebrating perhaps perhaps surely above all in the sense of celebration that he has conquered a death that death couldn't hold him and so the word of hope or the word of comfort that we have for ourselves as a congregation and those especially who mourn in particular is the victory that he gives to us and those who fall asleep in him this death that couldn't hold him cannot hold those who fall asleep in

Jesus Christ so that's the first thing there's that sense of a celebration even in the midst of that which is not good secondly the stone rolled away is a trophy a trophy now I dare say that many of us would like to win a trophy I've tried many occasions to try and win a trophy I'm getting too old to do anything about that now but it would be nice to win a trophy I'm sure I'm sure many of you here have trophies some of the young folks here that won trophies at school perhaps or endeavouring to do so but everyone who is in Christ has a trophy given to them through what the Lord Jesus Christ has done and it's the most precious trophy of all the most precious stone of all the world clambers at clambers after and it's quite legitimate in some ways but in other ways not but they they seek the stones of this world the rubies and diamonds precious stones like that but the most precious stone of all is this one here this stone that is rolled away with an angel sitting upon it that's the greatest trophy of all and you know if I was a jeweller

I would design a necklace or something along that lines of an empty tomb made in silver or whatever with a stone beside it and an angel sitting upon it and with the inscription below it he's not here for he has risen and I can't get my head I can't understand why people wear crucifixes I can understand perhaps to a point someone sincerely wants to wear a cross I don't mean as a fashion accessory but I can understand someone maybe for religious convictions wants to wear a cross perhaps that's not the way I would go personally but maybe I understand that but I can't for the life of me understand anybody wearing a crucifix a crucifix I mean a cross with Christ still on it has nobody told them he's not on the cross anymore he's risen and this is the most precious trophy that we can have and he gives it to us because it's a substitution you see it's his victory but he gives it to

us there's a sense in which as if we have won it for ourselves now don't take any glory away from him but that's the kind of substitution it is we're going to share in his glory we're going to see him as he is and we're going to be like him the enemies of Christ were no doubt rejoicing as they saw Jesus' dead body being taken away here in verse 59 and been wrapped in linen and placed in a tomb but their joy was short lived Jesus had his heel bruised by the serpent but on the resurrection morning the saviour came forth from the tomb and crushed the head of the dragon winning salvation for body and soul for his people saving his people from hell taking care of the powers that be and dealing with the seal of God the wages of sin is death giving to us this glorious perfection to see him as he is and to be like him the wages of sin is death our crime has been paid can you say that Christ has paid the crime he's expiated your sins but he's done more than that because if that's all he's done we're only saved from hell and we're not going to heaven but it's not an expiation only it's a propitiation where Christ has turned away the wrath of God from us you see if I can just use a very brief illustration let's say that one of you invited me for a cup of tea tonight or tomorrow perhaps to your home never been in your home before maybe there's somebody in my congregation that you know and you want to invite me around for a cup of tea and you take me through to your best room and there goodness me you've got a

[19:29] Spanish galleon made out of matchsticks what you don't know is I've got a Spanish galleon at home made a matchstick it's taken me years to make I don't actually but it's only for the sake of the illustration but you've taken years to make this Spanish galleon and I in a fit of jealousy I don't know what came over me but I just stuck my fist straight through your Spanish galleon and we ended up arguing with one another threw a stone through your car window you would get the police and I would go to court and you know what I would either expiate myself by paying the crime or going to jail for six months but you know what you would never ever invite me round for a cup of tea again because you're offended and Christ has paid the crime he has gone to hell in my place he's taken that punishment he's paid he's expiated my crime he's paid the ransom fee but what about

God who's offended at my sins is he going to invite me in yes because Christ has removed the offense as well isn't that wonderful reconciled to God and he gives us this trophy for our hearts this stone rolled away with an angel sitting upon it for all for all who love him in that sense in which our names are on the trophy and we are the winners joint ears with Christ then thirdly the stone rolled away is a foundational stone it's a foundational stone of Christianity it's a key stone of Christianity if there's no resurrection no point in us being here at all I'll just go home to the croft no point in us being at the Lord's table if there's no resurrection from the dead faith would be a fable we would still be in our sins and all who have died in Christ would have perished but our faith is not in vain we are not here today as no hopers a man in

Rogart was converted he was always spending his time in the pub as an unbeliever he's a poor man in a sense but he became rich in Christ he was converted but his old friends from the pub they would be saying to him oh come on back to the pub Eric and he would stop and he would think about it for a minute ah no he said you're no hopers I'm going to stick with the winners he's still sticking with the winners in the wisdom of God he has given us the proof 500 people saw Jesus risen from the dead this is a foundational stone to be true we don't need any other text than this one to tell us if we believe in the Bible that's the infallible word of God that this is the truth that we have a resurrection but God in his wisdom has given ample proofs

Jesus Christ risen from the dead appearing and to many and that there's many a learned man has gone out to try and disprove the resurrection only to discover that it is that which will stand up in a court of law as one professor in Harvard University has put it but of course we want to have a resurrection in our hearts and to know indeed that it is indeed the truth and surely we all those who are going to the table today are at the table that this is what we must believe we don't perhaps verbalize that that this is what is necessary for coming to the table to believe in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ but this is the stone this is the dividing doctrine that we do indeed believe in and that we must as Christians believe in the resurrection from the dead indeed I heard one of your own ministers say that very thing from this pulpit the late Murdo Alec when he was preaching through the book of

Daniel I followed that series all the way through more or less now you're wondering how could that be considering what I said yesterday I'd never been here in the church here before and didn't even know when I was here the first time there was a church here at all well it's because Alan and Grace used to take tapes over to Mull to Grace's mother and her mother would give the tapes to me and I

would play them in the car between Tobermory and Locked On at 28 miles just the right time for listening to a sermon and I remember Alec Murdo saying you you can't be a Christian if you don't believe in the resurrection is that not true we're all believing in the resurrection we're coming to the table we don't verbalize it as such but this is the the foundation of our of our faith he's not here he has risen what a blessing that is to you and to me but especially to those here in sadness at this time and that's for all of you different levels perhaps and so if you believe that the stone has been rolled away to reveal an empty tomb not to let

[ 25 : 07 ] Jesus out as who said but to show to the world that here is the only hope that lies beyond the grave then if you're believing in that then you're building upon this sure and solid foundation he's not here he has risen then fourthly the stone rolled away is a sign of peace I want you to meditate on this if you can just for a moment a sign of peace I want you to imagine the scene there's been a great storm there's been a day of darkness it was midnight at midday three days earlier Christ had been flogged humiliated great act of humiliations that he went through and he was crucified the earth shook there's been a great storm but now it's the peace and the calm of the first Sunday or Sabbath morning of the

New Testament and we have this angel sitting on a stone saying he's not here he has risen what a great message of tranquility and peace that that gives I hope to your soul and to my to my soul as we we think of that because there's been there's the blackness of the crucifixion and of the death of Jesus Christ and in the background but surely this picture that we have in our text and its context symbolizes the work of the incarnate God is complete it is finished and the father is pleased with it the empty tomb gives the believer peace knowing that his or her redeemer lives that all other tombs are of religious leaders are full but the tomb of our religious in brackets or in inverted commas his tomb is empty even the tomb of new ageism is full you say but wait a minute new ageism new ageism doesn't have a leader no it doesn't but it does have a tomb and it's a tomb that's full of rubbish it's a tomb that's full of emptiness there's no foundational stone it's full of emptiness no you would say what over the tomb here the

Christian tomb is empty no it's not the Christian tomb isn't empty oh Jesus isn't there but it's not empty no the linen clothes are lying there on the handkerchief how did they get there remember that it wasn't empty there was something left in it and one of the reasons that we have the peace that passes all understanding and in our sadness is this empty tomb everyone wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die therefore the empty tomb alleviates our fear of death and it gives us peace as we have to face death we want to live forever and so the believers shall you know when I go home to funerals at home or go and visit the cemetery at home where my own parents are and my brother

I imagine there's a sign on the gates of the cemetery as I go through them and the sign says an enemy has done this but then I remember what a friend has done I remember what Jesus my friend has done he's given me an empty tomb that gives me this great hope now I wonder have you bought your plot yet the place where you're going to be buried have you bought it yet I bought mine and my wife's together there in the cemetery in Brora bought it a few years ago you know what I do now and again I go to the place where I'm going to be buried should the Lord tarry and I see my own resurrection and I'm not daydreaming because faith is the substance of things hoped for we're told we're going to have a resurrection I'm not daydreaming I can go to that very place where my bodily remains are going to be placed and I can have a vision of my own resurrection

I look around me and I read the gravestones that are already there and see who I'm going to rise with all the people of God but in the immediate sense anyway and so we have this sign of peace but then fifthly and lastly we have the stone rolled away which is a separation stone it separates it's still separating today those who believe in the resurrection today here in this church and those who perhaps don't there's a separation there but we see here in the context on one side of the stone so to speak we have the frightened guards who were like dead men in verse 4 chapter 28 and on the other side in verse 5 we have the women who sought Jesus there's a separation there of a sense and so there's a sense in which the stone became a boundary it became a boundary between the living and the dead spiritually speaking and the doctrine of the resurrection is itself a separator and in eternal terms the resurrection spells disaster for all those who are not trusting in Jesus

[ 31 : 12 ] Christ finished work certainly while it is true that all will rise in the general resurrection from the dead the truth of the scriptures is in John chapter 5 verse 28 and 29 that there will those who will rise unto glory and there will be those who will rise unto eternal damnation the resurrection

separates the stone i.e.

the resurrection was a stumbling block to the to the philosophers of Paul's day remember in Mars Hill when he spoke to them people were listening and then he spoke about the resurrection and it separated immediately yet those who started to laugh some would say oh well we'll hear you again another day on this and there's others that believed it separated and it still separates today because the Lord's supper is a testimony as well as a memorial it's a testimony to where our faith lies or where our faith doesn't lie no faith at all we perhaps have said don't verbalize the need to believe in the resurrection in order to sit at the Lord's table but if we are truly professing the name of Jesus then we believe and do testify where our hope lies I suppose we could say here that these women maybe this gives hope for people here today who are not going to the table but we could say if these women that they didn't initially believe in the resurrection they were going to anoint the dead body of

Jesus so in that sense they didn't believe in the resurrection but the blessing to all those who are not yet sure about the resurrection who are not yet sure about going to the Lord's table is this wonderful verse verse 5 do not be afraid for I know that you seek Jesus that's a wonderful verse all who seek Jesus will find him but the warning is they won't find him in the tomb why not for he is risen not here for he is risen in seeking Jesus the women discover the truth of that which the world asks questions about is their hope is their life after death and the world searches and gives its own answers through false hopes false religion but here we have the truth that there is what these women discovered there is life after death not just for the soul but for the body also and there's that sense in which certainly shouldn't have come as any surprise because the

Old Testament abounds in texts and types of the resurrection that was to come we have at the very beginning of redemptive history we've got Enoch if you read through chapter 5 of Genesis it's like walking through a cemetery tells you this man died and he was buried this man died and he was buried this man died and he was buried too and then there was Enoch where is he he can't be found there's that sense in which he's not here he has risen right at the outset there was it wasn't just for the soul but for the body we have Job who saw his redeemer I know that my redeemer lives and I shall see him with my own eyes there was the sign of Jonah and the action typology yes of Jonah being cast into death and then having a resurrection onto dry land there is that and Jesus speaking about the sign of Jonah with that psalm that we sung not leaving your holy one to see decay we have these pictures in the old testament of Elisha being caught up all about the hope of the resurrection but here it is fulfilled he's not here for he has risen and so we find that this is the answer that we need to believe in him who said

I am the resurrection and the life whoever comes to me never be cast out or who believes in me even although he or she should die yet shall he live I am the way the truth and the life no man cometh to the father but through me but it's through his tomb the head the church has come forth from the tomb and therefore ipso facto the body must follow him do then say this in just in closing to those who are at the table or coming to the table along to others for that matter but don't seek after the bread and the wine don't be here today seeking after the bread and the wine but be seeking after the Christ of the bread and the wine to be getting Christ to be feeding upon him and to give testimony by being at the table or coming to the supper of your trust in Christ and to celebrate in the Lord's supper the death of Christ yes but also this aspect of it until I come the celebratory side of the

[ 36 : 44 ] Lord's supper that we celebrate the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ and that by feeding upon him that we might be strengthened through word and sacrament to be his witnesses in this world to this great truth that he is risen and that there is hope well we'll leave that there and we'll at the table address continue with our thought of what Jesus has done for us now let's sing before we say something about fencing the table by coming to Psalm 67 in the Scottish Psalter Psalm 67 page 300 Psalm 67 the tune is Selma

I often think of this psalm as I'm sure you do yourselves as a prayer in song Lord bless and pity us shine on us with thy face that the earth thy way and nations all may know thy saving grace Psalm 67 the whole of this psalm Lord bless and pity us shine on us with thy face Father Father thy way and nations all may know thy saving grace let people praise thee

Lord let people all praise praise O let the nations be done in songs their voices raise I'll just keep people judged on earth through nations all let people praise thee Lord let them praise people great and small the earth our fruit shall yield our

God shall all shall Him■ cumpl Fauci