

Easter Sunday - The Coming of the King

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Preacher: Matt Coburn

[0 : 00] It must have been. It must have been a slow, mournful walk for the women that first Easter morning.

! Jesus, the one they had loved and followed, had died. They saw Him on the cross bearing the agony of crucifixion.

They heard Him cry out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? They heard Him cry, It is finished, as He breathed His last breath.

They watched the Roman guard pierce Him with a spear to make sure that He was dead. And they watched Joseph of Arimathea as He took the body down from the cross, wrapped it in cloths, and laid it in His own tomb.

You could only imagine their thoughts as they walked. How could He be dead? Where do we go now?

[1 : 08] We had set all our hope on Him, and now He is gone, and we're alone. They had left all to follow Him.

And they had gone one last time to honor Him. It was early morning, the day after the Sabbath, when they set out for the tomb, they carried spices. They had selected to embalm the body for burial. But what they found, what they found was not what they had expected.

It was, in fact, beyond their greatest hopes and dreams. As Stephanie read earlier, they found a stone rolled away. They found an empty tomb.

And they heard the angel's words, I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He is risen.

Just as He said, come and see the place where He lay. And friends, this is the wonder and the awe and the amazing message of Easter.

[2 : 18] And so, we turn to God's Word this morning to see what we can learn concerning Jesus' resurrection. We're going to look at Matthew 28, the whole chapter. That's page 784 in your pew Bibles, if you want to read along.

Stephanie's read the first half already. I'm going to read the second half, and then we'll look at it as a whole chapter together. So, if you want to follow along with me, I will start in verse 11 of Matthew 28. Let's read God's Word.

While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, Tell people, His disciples came by night and stole them away while we were asleep.

And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble. So, they took the money and did as they were directed. And the story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

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.

[3 : 37] And Jesus came and said to them, Let's pray and ask for God's help as we understand His Word this morning.

Lord Jesus, we do ask for your help this morning. We praise you that we celebrate this morning, Lord, the wonderful truth of you, a risen Savior.

Lord, we ask that by your Holy Spirit, we might understand your Word this morning more clearly.

Lord, that in our heads we would know it, that in our hearts we would receive it and treasure it.

And Lord, that it would move our wills. Lord, to worship you as the disciples did this morning. Lord, we pray for your help to understand your Word. I pray for your help that I might speak as I ought,

and that we together might sit under your Word. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Friends, we're going to look this morning at three things about the resurrection of Jesus. First, we're going to look at the reality of Jesus' resurrection. Secondly, we're going to look at the responses to Jesus' resurrection.

[5 : 15] And thirdly, we're going to look at the reign of the resurrected Jesus. So, the reality, the responses, and the reign of Jesus. Let's look at these in order.

First of all, part of what Matthew is telling us here is that Jesus' resurrection really, truly happened. First of all, Jesus' resurrection was a physical resurrection. Look at the accounts with me. Look at verse 6.

The angel says, come and look inside the tomb. See where He lay. Luke in chapter 24 of his gospel says that the women looked but did not find the body of Jesus.

It was not there anymore. His body was gone. And when you think about what the verses I read in verses 11 and following about the guards, they knew as well.

The body was not there. They went to report something because they knew something had happened. The body was no longer there. And maybe most strikingly, in verse 9, you see that when Jesus Himself appears to the women, they bowed down and they seized His feet. They touched Him. This is no zombie. This is no spirit. This is no vision.

[6 : 38] They physically touched Him. Jesus was fully resurrected. His body was alive again.

Not only was His resurrection physical, but it was testified to by multiple witnesses. You see this in there. Verse 9, the women bear witness. They run to the disciples to tell others what they had seen. Now, today, we might not be struck by this, but by the first-century standards, this was a striking reality. Because a woman would not be allowed to testify legally in a courtroom in that culture. They did not have that standing. And yet, the very earliest accounts all include the fact that women were the ones who bear testimony to this.

Here's just a thought experiment. If you were writing a story to try to convince people in the first century that Jesus had risen from the dead, would you choose that women would be their witnesses if those witnesses would be discredited by the culture?

[7 : 49] That means that there's a ring of authenticity. No one would make this up. It had to have actually happened that women bore witness. If it were a fabricated story, it would have been a pretty poor one for its purpose.

But not only that, the disciples witnessed Him. This is what we see in verses 16 and following, that Jesus called the disciples to meet Him. And as they came, and probably not just the eleven, although the eleven are clearly mentioned, but probably others in their group of those who follow Jesus, they saw Him and they heard His voice. And we know from other parts of Scripture, like 1 Corinthians 15, that He appeared not only to the apostles or to the disciples, but then also to many people in crowds, to 500 and more. And then thirdly, again, verse 11, the story of the guards. If the guards had a problem. If the guards had a problem. What do we say? But if the body was actually still there, the guards would have said, no, no, He didn't die, or He didn't rise from the dead. Look, here's His body. It'd be very simple.

They too, even in their deceptive witness, they bear witness to the fact that the body was no longer there. That Jesus had somehow left the tomb while they were there. Remember this sequence.

The stone rolling away and the guards being struck dumb happens after Jesus is gone. The stone wasn't moved so that Jesus could get out. The stone was moved so that the women could go in.

[9 : 37] So not only is Jesus' resurrection real because it was physical, not only do we think it's real because it was testified to by multiple witnesses, Jesus' resurrection is also real because He said He would do this five times in the Gospel of Matthew.

In verse... chapter 16, in chapter 17, twice, and then in chapter 20, you see Jesus Himself saying, after I die, when I rise, Jesus said, this is going to happen. And in fact, His own enemies remembered this.

In verse... in chapter 27, right before this chapter 28. Chapter 27, verse 63. Jesus' opponents went to the Roman authorities and said this, Sir, we remember how that imposter said while He was still alive, after three days I will rise.

Therefore, order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples go and steal Him away and tell the people, He is risen from the dead, and the last fraud will be worse than the first.

So, His prediction that He would do this was a well-known fact. It didn't mean people believed it would actually happen. But these... these opponents of Jesus were so concerned that they said, we want to make doubly sure that there's no shenanigans in this.

[11:11] They had every reason to guard the tomb well. They had every reason to prevent the very story that is told in Matthew 28.

And in the end, only a lie and a cover-up could deny what had actually happened. Now, some of you may be sitting here this morning and thinking, really?

Did Jesus really rise from the dead? It's difficult to accept, isn't it? We live in a world where we have underlying assumptions of naturalism. The world is a closed system, and what happens in this world has cause and effect, and we know what happens.

Resurrection is impossible because of that. When the body dies, it can't be resurrected back to life. It violates all of those assumptions.

But we have to recognize this objection has been true for centuries, long before naturalism was a philosophy. It's often been questioned, did Jesus really die from the dead?

[12:23] People have come up with all sorts of creative responses. Maybe something else happened. They posit, maybe He wasn't really dead. That Jesus did not die, but He just passed out.

And then He woke up again and left a tomb that was sealed. Or, some people think maybe all of these witnesses experienced mass hallucination.

That every account of Jesus appearing to people was a true account of what people thought they saw, but they just imagined this over and over and over again.

There's one that I didn't even know existed until I was studying it for this week, and that is that Jesus had a twin, and that nobody knew anything about Him, but He suddenly shows up when Jesus is dead in the grave and continues His ministry.

But, friends, we need to recognize that each of these assume that the biblical narrative has no historical value, and that there's no truth in it, that the whole thing is just a myth, right?

[13:43] And interestingly, when you look through scholars, and not just scholars who believe that Jesus rose from the dead, but many scholars who don't believe, but who study the Scriptures, they say it is very clear that the tomb was empty and that this was a credible report.

Most easily seen because if the tomb wasn't empty, it just could have been disproved.

The disciples were proclaiming this in Jerusalem within a month and a half of Jesus' death. It wouldn't have been hard for someone to go back to the tomb and say, actually, here's His body. But it wasn't true. Now, of course, the final objection is the one that Matthew himself takes up in 11 through 15, that the disciples came in and somehow stole the body.

Lots of people assume that Matthew wrote this because even in the first century, this story was being circulated among the Jews as he reported. We know in the second century that Justin Martyr wrote about this as being one of the claims against Christianity, Christianity and Jesus.

[15:01] So, we know that this was a very early objection to Jesus' resurrection. And interestingly, Matthew decides to include it in his story of Jesus rising from the dead.

He said, you know where that story came from? I'll tell you where it came from. These soldiers saw that the body was not there. They had no explanation for it. So, they went and they told their superior officers, uh, we've got a problem.

The body is not there. And we don't know how it got out because we were there. They didn't fall asleep, by the way. They wouldn't have because of the importance of their role and the fact that the stone was sealed.

So, they were just reporting, this is what we know. And their leader said, we cannot allow that report to go out.

So, we're going to create a different story, an alternate narrative for you. We're going to say, the disciples came and stole it. And we were terrible guards and we were asleep. But we're going to pay you enough money that you're not going to feel bad about looking like a schmo for being a bad guard.

[16:10] And if the governor finds out and he comes after you because you didn't guard it well, we'll pay him off too to make sure that everyone knows. Everyone's okay with this lie.

So, Matthew gives this report. But friends, we have to just stop and think about how believable is this lie unless you were already predisposed and wanting to believe it already.

Because again, how... If the disciples stole the body... Well, here's... Let's think about... If this body was gone, what would... Who would have stolen it?

The authorities didn't want to steal it. They wanted it to stay there. His opponents wanted it to stay there so they could see it. The only people that would have stolen his body would have been the disciples, right?

And this is where Chuck Colson comes in. You guys may not know who this is anymore. Some of the older folks in this will know this name. Chuck Colson was one of the men who worked for Richard Nixon in the 1970s during the Watergate scandal.

[17:20] When the White House covered up illegal activity that the White House directed in order to manipulate an election. I think that's what it's about. Anyway, so Chuck Colson was one of the guys who was enforcing the cover-up and the lies that were coming out from the White House in order to prevent the truth from coming out.

He says there were twelve of us, twelve men who knew that it was a lie, the story that was being told. Twelve men who had all the political power in the world to enforce it and every reason in the world to maintain this lie.

But when the pressure came, they couldn't do it. Within weeks, one of those twelve men, John Dean, first told the president, then told the world that it was a lie.

And he concludes his story with this. The fact is that people will give their lives for what they believe is true, but they will never give their lives for what they know is a lie.

The Watergate cover-up proves that twelve powerful men in modern America couldn't keep a lie. And that twelve powerless men, two thousand years ago, couldn't have been telling anything but the truth.

[18:51] For the disciples lived for ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years after this event.

And if they knew it was a lie, would they really have suffered the way they did? Would they really have gone to their deaths for this untruth?

The likely, the most plausible answer from the evidence is actually that Jesus really did rise from the dead.

Now, Matthew's account is not merely about the fact and the reality of his resurrection. For he wants us to also see the responses to Jesus' resurrection.

So let's look at those for a minute. When the women arrived, they see the open tomb, they hear the angel's words, and you see in verse 8, so they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy.

[19:59] Why fear and great joy? It was not fear that the angel would hurt them. It was not fear of being wrong.

No, I think it was a fear that maybe, and this is true of the biblical word of fear, it often has a sense of awe in it.

They knew that they had been a witness to something amazing, something greater than they could wrap their heads around, and they knew that they could wrap their heads around the world. They knew that God was powerfully at work.

And so they had this fearful awe that they were a part of this grander story. But more so than that, it was joy.

Because, friends, this is the wonderful thing about Easter. These women experienced it, and we experience it today. Jesus is not a dead savior, but he is a living savior.

[21:09] And those first followers who had put all their hopes, all their dreams, they had given their lives to follow him. He was renewed in his resurrection, and he gave them then the fulfillment of those hopes and dreams.

For a moment, when he died, they thought they had lost it. But with the resurrection, they knew that they had it forever. And this is the significance of Jesus' resurrection, is that Jesus ever lives to be the savior of his people.

That all that he did during his earthly ministry during those three years, then becomes a part of the plan for an eternal kingdom that he's building.

And it was really true. You know how, when something really unexpected and wonderful happens in your life?

Like when your team pulls off an unexpected, the steal, Havlicek steals the ball and scores the... You guys are way too young for most of that.

[22 : 25] Anyway, your team steals the ball and wins the game in the last second. Or when you see this, I mean it's throughout all the great stories of our modern cinema, right?

When all of the Avengers show up to help Captain America fight the final battle against Thanos and win, right?

Or when in the return of the king, the riders of Rohan appear at dawn and save Minas Tirith. Or when the photon torpedoes go down the exhaust shaft and blow up the Death Star and victory is achieved and evil is defeated and the good guys have won.

You want to jump for joy, cheer out loud, stand up and clap in the middle of a movie theater.

Friends, this is what the women, as they went, experienced with fear, awe and joy.

Because their Savior was risen. This is a better news than any of those stories. This is the best eternal story ever.

[23 : 39] The great victory of a greater Savior for us. And this is why we see in verse... Both verse 9 and in verse 17.

First the women and then the disciples. Do you see how they responded to the resurrected Jesus when they saw Him? They worshiped Him.

They bowed down. They recognized... Now look, these people had been with Jesus day after day after day. They didn't spend all of those days on their knees before Him, worshiping Him.

But when they see Him as the resurrected Savior, their first response is to bow down and to worship Him.

We worship kings. We worship deity. And that's the point. Because when Jesus rose from the dead, He showed Himself to be who He really is.

[24 : 43] If Jesus had just stayed dead, He would have been what? A great teacher, maybe? A religious leader of a movement that made a difference for a little while?

The resurrected Jesus is unique in history. He vindicated His claim to be God's Son. And He established His claim to be the beginning of a new kingdom that God was making in the world. A kingdom where victory over sin and death was accomplished by His death and resurrection. Now, Matthew is also helpful here because though there is this call for us to have this joy and worship in response to the resurrected King, we see, Matthew points out, that not everybody does that, do they?

Right? It says that some of the followers of Jesus doubted. Now, we might think of that doubt as like deep intellectual wondering about whether this is, you know, physically possible that Jesus would be raised from the dead.

I think that's probably not the best understanding of the doubt here that we see in verse 17. It's more likely to be, but some hesitated. It's almost as if they couldn't believe their eyes.

[26 : 05] They saw it and, you know, I remember a long time ago when we were, when I was in college, my brothers and I conspired to get back to see my parents for their 25th anniversary.

And we were not, we were not any of us living at home at the time. We had one brother in DC, two of us were at college, and one had graduated and was working.

And he flew home just to be the plant man. But the rest of us, we gathered ourselves together and arrived on my parents' doorstep to take them out to dinner for their 25th anniversary.

And my mom was like, I can't believe my eyes. What are you doing here? Right? And I think that this is the kind of hesitation.

Like, are you really here? Are you really here? Are you really here? This is the kind of hesitation that describes some of Jesus' followers. It wasn't that they didn't believe.

[27 : 11] It was that they were not sure they could believe what they were seeing. But then, of course, there were others who did reject him. Those who had rejected him during his life rejected him in their resurrection as well.

The chief priests and the scribes, they made up a lie to try to discount. Discount what they had seen. Friends, of course, this brings a question to us as well.

What about us? What will we do with this Jesus? Maybe you're here today and you've believed in Jesus for a long time. My hope is that as we see this account again, that you will be renewed in awe and joy and worship that Jesus really is here.

Maybe you're here and you're wondering, could this really be true? You're wondering if this actually happened. You're wondering, what are you to think of Jesus?

I'm going to read some words from C.S. Lewis, who was a professor at Cambridge in the 20th century who came to faith in the middle of his life. This is a slightly long quote, but I think it's worth capturing his thought here.

[28 : 28] He says this, I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him. That is, I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.

That is the one thing we must not say. A man who is merely a man and said the things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

He would either be a lunatic on the level of a man who says he is a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make a choice. Either the man was and is the Son of God, or else a madman, or something worse.

You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher.

He has not left that open to us. And he concludes by saying, now, it seems to me obvious that he was neither a lunatic nor a fiend, and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that he was and is God.

[29 : 48] So, what will you do with this Jesus? It's interesting because of the way Matthew constructs his account.

He then transitions from the reality of Jesus and the response to Jesus to Jesus' final words, where Jesus himself has that one final thing to say to all of us about who he is.

These final words, I could spend a whole sermon preaching lots of different things about this, but what I want to focus on is Jesus' own self-understanding as he proclaims these things.

Because what he says is a capstone to this whole chapter and what it's trying to say to us. What he's trying to say is that the resurrected Jesus came to reign as the king.

He understands himself this way. He begins in verse 19, or in verse 18, his words by saying, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

[30 : 53] This is why C.S. Lewis says you can't just call him a good moral teacher. That's an incredible claim. Because he's claiming to be God himself, the ruler over all things in heaven and on earth.

It picks up a theme that if you read the whole Gospel of Matthew, and if you haven't done that, I encourage you to do that after this service today. The whole, where Matthew is saying, Jesus really is a king.

Do you remember the story at Christmas we tell about the Magi and how they come and bow down before Jesus? This is the king, right? Do you remember that his ministry began with the words, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Repent and believe. Do you remember that on Palm Sunday when he entered into Jerusalem, the crowds worshipped him. And his opponents questioned, Jesus, how can you receive this worship? And he says, I tell you, if the people were silent, the stones would cry out, because I am worth this worship. Jesus claimed to be king all through the whole Gospel.

[32 : 04] But we see this now at the end. He says, all authority in heaven and earth. In my resurrection, I now have all authority as the king. By my death, I have conquered the last enemies of sin and death.

By my resurrection, I bring a new kingdom of righteousness and love and life. And this kingdom that I bring is universal.

Did you see in verses 18 through 20, the alls? All authority is given to him. Therefore, go to all peoples, all nations. I am the king of the whole world.

And I want you to teach them all that I have commanded you, because I alone have the words of life. I alone have this authority. And I will be with you at all times.

That's literally the translation of always. At all times until the end of the age. Jesus is claiming a global and eternal kingship and establishing a global and eternal kingdom.

[33 : 09] And do you see how his kingdom reflects the character of this resurrected king? Because, friends, we might think, I don't want to be a part of his kingdom.

I don't know if I want to do this. But look at Jesus and how he did this. Has there ever been a king like him who left heaven to come to earth to rescue us from our sin?

Who identified with his people by living among us? Who was hungry, tired, foot sore, just as we are? And he laid down his life for us, dying on the cross for us, in our place, for our sin.

So that by bearing God's judgment that should have been ours, we might be forgiven of sin and brought into the family of God and the kingdom of Jesus.

This is his kingdom established not by power, but by sacrifice. He comes to win the hearts, not to beat down his foes.

[34 : 21] He comes not to enslave, but to bring a joyful obedience. He comes not to destroy, but to invite those to share in his resurrection life.

His kingdom comes finally through people.

He told his disciples, go. Go and tell others about me. Go and let others know who I am and what I have done.

And this, of course, is what the church is and what the church is for, to proclaim Jesus Christ and to worship him until he returns. If you wondered why Christians are always talking about Jesus, it's because he's the best thing we've ever found and because he's risen from the dead.

He alone can be our Savior and the King who's establishing a kingdom that our hearts long for. And so we talk about him because we want others to know what a great thing we have found.

[35 : 39] The resurrection of Jesus Christ establishes all these things and secures for us a hope that can never be shaken. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.

Let's pray. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord, for this word. Jesus, we worship you as a risen Savior.

Your bones are not in the grave, but you are seated at God's right hand. And you are with us, your people, until the end of the age when you return and establish your kingdom fully by making all things new.

Jesus, what a great Savior, what a great King, what a life-giving Savior you are. Today, Lord, may we turn our hearts to you in worship.

We pray these things in your name, amen. We pray these things in your name, amen. We pray these things in your name, amen.

[36 : 43] We pray these things in your name, amen. We pray these things in your name, amen. We pray these things in your name, amen.

We pray these things in your name, amen.