

Palm Sunday 2022

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, please, if you would turn with me to Matthew chapter 28, and we'll read the whole chapter.
- So Matthew chapter 28, and we'll read the whole chapter. I hear God's word.
- Now, after the Sabbath, towards the dawn of 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 woman, do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen.
- [1 : 2 0] And he said, come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead. And behold, he is going before you to Galilee.
- There you will see him. See, I have told you. So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples. Behold, Jesus met them and said greetings.
- And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee and there they will see me.
- 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 had taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, tell people his disciples came by night and stole him 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.
- [2 : 3 6] And this 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. And Jesus came and said to them, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
- Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.
- And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. Let's pray. Father God, we would ask this morning that you would enlighten our mind with a view of changing our heart, that Father God, that we still have trouble at times reading your word.
- Our heart is not always where it should be. And our mind is not always where it should be. So we would ask, Father God, this morning that you would enlighten our mind with a view of changing our heart, that we would be able to see and hear, or see by hearing your word, what you have for us this day.

[3 : 48] We thank you, Father God, that while this story, this account is familiar to us, what may not be familiar is what it means. And so, Father God, we don't just want to memorize the story.

We want to live in its truth. So help us to do so by the power of your Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. So following on from Friday evening, one of the points that I made, and it's an important point, especially when we come to take communion, is that there is a difference between memorization and not forgetting.

There's a difference between memory and what it means to remember, biblically understood. And so for those of you who read the Bible and hear the command of God to remember, knowing that it is a sin to forget, and you hear the command to remember, and you receive that command as, I must therefore memorize, I must memorize what I have been told, that would be a misapplication or a misunderstanding of what it actually means to remember biblically understood.

So to remember biblically understood does not mean to memorize. And therefore, as we come and we, no doubt, remember the story of Christ's death and his resurrection, what you remember may be a memory.

You may have memorized the story. And therefore, you are remembering your memory of learning the story once upon a time. But what does it actually mean to remember biblically understood and live in the light of that memory?

[5 : 47] Well, it means that the gospel, which is at the end of the resurrection here, shows us that God's word is useful.

It is useful. It is useful. So if I were to ask you the question this morning, do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, you would hopefully, unanimously say yes.

If I were then to ask you, do you know what the resurrection of Jesus Christ means, that would be a challenge, I think, for you all to be able to unanimously give the same answer.

In other words, now that you know that Christ is risen from the dead, how useful is that truth? How useful is that truth?

And the usefulness of the resurrection is seen in the command or the great commission to now go into all the world and make disciples.

[6 : 56] That's the usefulness of the resurrection. Therefore, the challenge here for us this morning is not just to believe that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, but to live in the light of the usefulness of that truth.

That this is a useful truth. All of God's word is useful. But the challenge here this morning is do you recognize the usefulness of what it means for Jesus to have risen from the dead?

Do you know what it means for Jesus Christ to be Lord over your employer? Do you know what it means for Jesus Christ to be Lord over your future? Over your family?

Over this church? Do you actually know what it means for all authority in heaven and on earth to be given to Christ Jesus? And then for Christ in light of that to give a single command here in Matthew 28.

So therefore go and tell everyone else to obey Christ Jesus. That's what it means. So the question of being here this morning and living in the light of the resurrection is the question of how useful that is to you.

[8 : 16] How useful is it for your life to know that Christ Jesus has risen from the dead? And therefore when these two women, these two Marys come to the tomb and they recognize that he is not there or they have been told Jesus is not here.

He has gone on to Galilee. Go and tell the disciples to meet him there. Just think of that news. That you're going to a grave and you're told that he is not there.

And that raises multiple questions, doesn't it, as to what did they believe before? I mean Jesus spoke on many times of his own resurrection.

And we looked at last week in Palm Sunday with a parable of the tenants in the vineyard that Jesus knew at the beginning of the week that at the end of the week they would kill him.

So Jesus is predicting his death. And then of course during the week he predicts his resurrection that the temple will be rebuilt.

[9 : 30] Not referring to the physical temple but referring to his own life. So what are people thinking to then go to a grave? And it would seem to me that it doesn't matter how much you hear something, even from the mouth of God himself, you still are tempted to go to the grave.

Is it because you doubt? Is it because you're curious? Is it skepticism? Is it because you just want to see with your own eyes?

Is it because you're not going to be able to find Jesus in the place where you think you would find him after death?

That's not where you're going to find him. You're looking in the wrong place for Jesus. He is not there. And therefore what Jesus is actually demonstrating to us is that he is the one who's put an end to the grave.

He has put an end to death. And for all those who belong to Christ Jesus, death is nothing but a comma. It's not a full stop.

[10 : 51] It's like a pause between this life and the life to come. It's like a pause between what you are now and what you will be in the new heavens and the new earth.

Don't forget about the new earth. Never going to tire of saying that. Because we want to speak of the new heavens, but we're told that there's going to be a new heavens and a new earth.

Because God created people to live where? Not in heaven, or else he wouldn't have created the world. He created people to live on earth. That's why he made the earth and made us in it. So in light of the resurrection, all things become new.

Now in Matthew 28, the one thing that the resurrection means, at least to Matthew, or what he wants to communicate to you, is that now you have something to speak about.

Because it could be tempting to some to say, we can't really be convinced with this message until we know the outcome of the message.

[11 : 55] So Jesus in Mark, for instance, turns up and the first thing that he says is, repent and believe for the kingdom of God has come. And of course, the hope and expectancy of what that looks like quickly disappears the moment Jesus Christ dies on the cross.

And you'll remember how Peter, at the end of John, which is a remarkable story really, that he goes back, he says, I'm going fishing, and the other said, we'll go with you.

So never underestimate the power of one person doubting and the effect that that has on other people.

And then what does Jesus have to do with Peter? Well, he has to call him all over again. The call of Peter happens twice over.

He calls Peter from being a fisherman to being a fisher of men. And then at the end of John, he has to call Peter out of his boat for a second time.

[13 : 03] And then he says, feed my sheep. So even Peter, first man to walk on water, the first one to call Jesus Christ, the Christ, the Messiah.

And the first one to say, after Jesus' death, I'm going fishing. To go back to his old way and pattern of life. So the point is here is, do you understand and appreciate the value of the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Not as a memory, but what it actually means now to live in light of the resurrection. And to Matthew, it means that you can go and tell without being ashamed that Jesus Christ, Lord of all, is risen from the dead.

There's absolutely no embarrassment whatsoever to believe that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. There's no embarrassment whatsoever to go and tell someone today of all days that you have gone to church.

Not to remind yourself that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, but because you are a product of his resurrection. That you're able to sit here and you're able to pray because that is the usefulness, that is the product, the outcome of Jesus Christ having risen from the dead.

[14 : 33] Which you are not to commit to memorization, but you are to remember practically. So on Friday night when we took Good Friday Communion, we understood that the memory aspect is do this in remembrance of me.

Not remember this in remembrance of me, but do this in remembrance of me. Jesus understands, of course, and we are to understand what it means to live in the light of the resurrection.

Memorization is something that may be useful for mathematics or history or a number of other things. It's not as useful as you might think for living the Christian life.

Doing the Christian life is how you remember and how you are not forgetting. So what does it mean then as we look through the text here to understand why the two women go to the grave?

Why would you go to a grave? Well, I would imagine that even if you did believe in the resurrection, you might, if you're especially similar to Thomas, that you might go simply to see for yourself.

[15 : 58] That you want the confirmation with your eyes rather than with your ears. Which is problematic, isn't it, for the Christian. The Christian who wants confirmation via the eyes gets themselves into all sorts of trouble with doubt than the Christian who is blessed knowing that confirmation comes via the ears.

So biblically speaking, especially when you read through the book of Hebrews, which I know that those in the Bible class have done under Daniel, and we've done that together, that the way you see as a Christian is by hearing God's word.

So God has created you to see by hearing. And hearing by his word. Now, those of you who may be inclined to watch sporting events, and, you know, football or rugby or whatever it may be, I can't say that I'm all that bothered myself.

But I understand the principle of knowing who won, but not having seen the game. And then sitting down watching the game, and still nervous as to what the outcome is going to be.

I don't actually understand why that happens. That if I had a favorite team, which, which, which, I don't. But imagine, imagine you did. And you knew that your team had won.

[17 : 34] But in the first half, they're down by two goals. Why on earth would you be nervous? Why would you be clenching? Why would you be afraid to move away and go and make a cup of tea and say, I know the outcome?

Why is it that your heart in the moment is still being taken in by the process rather than the outcome? So here you have heard that Jesus Christ has already said that he will rise from the dead.

And you go to the grave, even though you know the outcome. There's something about us that just cannot seem to get out of that fixture, as it were.

And I think it comes down to the fact that unless we can see and be convinced for ourselves, then we have that moment of, I can't rest until I know for myself.

So hearing the result seems to be quite different than seeing the result for yourself. That seems to be what happened.

[18 : 42] The challenge, however, is that is extremely problematic for everyone who didn't see the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it's the very thing that Thomas is challenged over by Jesus himself.

When Thomas said famously, I'm not going to believe until I can reach out and touch Jesus for myself, see the nail prints in his hands, put my hand in his side, that I'm not actually going to believe until I can do that, we understand the mercy given to Thomas by Jesus appearing.

Because imagine being that adamant and that stubborn to the word of God, because he's effectively not believing what Jesus has already told him.

That's the challenge. In other words, I know Jesus has told me, but I'm not going to believe that until I can confirm it with my own hand. That's effectively what Thomas is saying.

And so Jesus' words to Thomas is this, have you believed because you have seen me? There's the challenge. Then he goes on to say, blessed are those who have not seen yet have believed.

[20 : 07] Now it's really important that we understand what Jesus is saying here, because it's exactly what the women might have been experienced by going to the tomb and then being told he is not here.

Go and tell the disciples that he has gone to Galilee. And in the meantime, Jesus meets with them and they fall down at his feet and worship him. It's almost the same kind of pattern that is happening, but without the statement, I am not going to believe until I see for myself.

What Jesus is saying in John's account and what is happening here in this account is that confirmation should not come via the eyes. And confirmation should not come via the hand.

Confirmation to you should come via the word of God, period. That is how you can be assured. True sight, to put it this way, comes not through seeing with your eyes, but through hearing God's word.

Now it is important the fact that Jesus' resurrection body was seen by over 500 people, showing what had happened. Historically speaking, there is proof there to say the resurrection has happened.

[21 : 29] But let's just challenge Thomas, in the light of Matthew here, of what it means to see by hearing and to believe by hearing rather than seeing and touching with your own hands.

And what Jesus is actually saying to Thomas is this, that those who believe my word, for them it is the equivalent of you putting your hand, your finger, in the hole in Jesus' hand.

When Jesus says, blessed are those who believe and yet have never seen, he is saying, blessed are those who believe and yet have never seen. In other words, the confirmation that God gives to you as you believe his word is the equivalent in terms of standard, in terms of authenticity, to you actually taking your finger and putting it in the hole in Jesus' hand.

That is how convinced you will be if you believe the word of God. And so the reason we can sit here as Christians this morning and not doubt in the resurrection of Jesus Christ because we haven't seen it, is because we are fully convinced because the word of God brings that confirming blessing.

The word of God confirms to us in terms of blessing that it is true. That we can believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ to the same quality and authenticity that Thomas had, though having never seen.

[23 : 21] We are blessed. And that's the beauty of what Jesus is giving here to his disciples. But Jesus qualifies that in John by saying blessed are those in John 20, just before we have John saying the reason why he's written the gospel, to confirm to us who haven't seen Jesus that we are not shortchanged at the resurrection.

That we are not worse off because we have not seen Jesus in the flesh risen from the dead for ourselves. So never ever believe that disciples had it easier.

And the reason I say that because as you get to the Great Commission, what is the one thing that we read? In verse 17, it says that now the 11 disciples, verse 16, now the 11 disciples went to Galilee to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

And when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. doubted. And so what we're understanding here is that doubt really has almost nothing to do with being able to see and touch and that it comes down to how you are convinced as an individual.

And how you are convinced is the blessing of God. You believe in the resurrection not because you're smart. You believe in the resurrection not because you're clever than your next door neighbor who's unsaved.

[25 : 05] You believe in the resurrection because you have been blessed by God. You have been blessed by God to believe in the resurrection.

And so doubt in Scripture is always explained in this way. Either you don't believe what you see or you don't believe what you hear. which is verse 17 and other verses.

Either you don't believe what you see or you don't believe what you hear. And if we were to flip that on its head it would simply be saying why are you choosing to believe what you do?

Because doubt is simply an alternative belief. And now so what were they believing in verse 17? when they doubted Jesus?

I mean ask yourself that question. You come you are face to face with the resurrected Jesus. It says verse 17 some doubted but what did they believe instead? What were they believing instead of what they were seeing?

[26 : 15] Now before this happens we have the cover up or the attempted cover up to cover up the resurrection. and so the story is the guards were asleep and they stole the body.

The guards were asleep and they stole the body. I can remember that the story that every time I read this passage that the story that keeps coming back to me is at the Watt Club on a Tuesday evening years ago where it was during Easter and I told this story and I said to the children then what's the problem with the story?

What's the problem with that story? And one boy I forget his name but I can remember it being a boy and he was quite clear and he says well if they were asleep how do they know what happened? So if you've got a seven year old boy who can figure it out if you've got a seven year old boy who can figure out what the problem with the story is then everyone can figure out what the problem is.

If you were asleep how do you know what happened? Chocolate goes missing in your house in the middle of the night and then the next morning there is the Inquisition who ate the chocolate and so and so ate the chocolate how do you know?

If you were asleep perhaps you weren't asleep and you were the ones right? The story makes no sense but as I said again on Friday evening the truth is easy to remember.

[27 : 55] Lies get you into trouble. Lies fold down on themselves they collapse on themselves the moment you push them. So it doesn't really sound like a convincing story is it?

To say I know what happened at the resurrection of Jesus he didn't really rise we fell asleep the disciples came and stole the body and and that was it.

And even if they told that story how do they convince themselves with what really happened? The fact that they were stunned to the point of being dead like with the angels appearing.

Surely that would change a man. It would certainly change me. I remember the story of William Haslam where his parishioners thought that he was going to die.

William Haslam was a Church of England vicar who came to faith through his own preaching. I know it's frightening isn't it to think that that was the state of it but praise be to God the fact that the word of God brought him to faith through his own preaching.

[29 : 13] But prior to this he was so ill the parishioners were digging his grave. And he went outside his front door to get some fresh air and saw this happening and was changed forever.

You could you could you understand how to change a man. My congregation are digging their grave for me. Their own grave for me. And then several weeks later he's preaching God's word and a man at the back of the congregation said thanks be to God our parson which is what they were called back then has been converted.

He recognized that the power of God's word converted him in his in his own preaching through his own preaching. So for me I find it staggering that these guards are willing to accept money as a bribe to say go along with the story when they have been exposed at least to this supernatural power of angels making them dead like.

I'd love to be able to go and sit with them and say come on we know what really happened. What do you think it means? And of course we don't get to see that side of the story but you see there's huge problems there.

So what then of the Great Commission? Well all of this leads to Jesus appearing at Galilee with his disciples and telling them to go and preach the gospel.

[30 : 53] To go and tell the gospel. Here's the usefulness of the truth. In other words God's truth is useful.

It is not simply to be memorized. It has a purpose. It has a function. And the function here is that you go and speak it. You go and tell people guess what?

The world is changed forever the day Jesus Christ rose from the dead. and you may believe that you're living your life autonomously but you need to know that all authority in heaven on earth has been given to Christ not you.

And therefore there's no way of escape other than Christ. You see the problem you have. Therefore repent believe and follow Christ.

Because there is no alternative positively speaking. That's it. Do you understand that what the resurrection means is that everyone who doesn't follow Christ in the world is wrong?

[32 : 06] That everyone who doesn't follow Christ in the world may look as if they're living the life they want to live but it has an end that falls off a cliff. Do you understand that everyone who doesn't believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ has nothing in the future to look forward to?

Do you understand that for you to believe in the resurrection of Christ is for you to experience the greatest blessing of God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? And do you understand that the way that that blessing is communicated as we see here in the Great Commission is by you telling others exactly what you have been told at some point in your life.

God communicates his blessing to others through words and those words communicate the blessings of God of confirmation and assurance.

So as you go out into the world and you proclaim the gospel, people, you don't have to worry about whether or not you are convincing this person. You don't have to worry about whether or not you are being all that clear.

All you have to do is say what happened and why it happened. And as Jesus said in John, blessed are those who have never seen yet believe.

[33 : 37] Jesus Christ will give them the blessing they need in order to believe in what you are saying. Why do you think that for the last at least couple of years or even three years now I've been pushing knowing Christianity more and more and more and more?

And it is because, not because I don't think you as a congregation know the gospel, I'm convinced most of you know the gospel. And it's not because I don't believe that you haven't got it memorized.

I think I'm pretty convinced that most of you could call up the order of the gospel quite clearly. But can I be as convinced that you speak it to others?

And are you convinced yourself that you speak it to others? this is the challenge, right?

This is the challenge that we all face. It's not that you haven't got the gospel memorized, it's not that you don't know it, it's not that you're not honoring God by turning up today and singing and praising and worshiping and giving thanks to him.

[34 : 56] you. But the question is this message could be very much a dead message tomorrow morning if you don't use it. So understand in the light of Matthew 28, the verses from 16 through to 20, that what the resurrection of Jesus Christ actually leads to in Matthew is the Great Commission.

that the outcome of what the resurrection means is that you have something to tell people that they don't know and that can change their life both now and forevermore.

That's what you are and that's what you have to tell. So it is right to believe in the resurrection of Christ.

But it is wrong not to speak of it. The call of God is to go out into the world telling every man, woman, boy and girl, I'm tempted to say along with that phrase and everyone who works for Disney, because Disney as you know have got ridden the phrase men, women, boys and girls.

They want to be gender neutral. So Disney, repent and believe. in Jesus Christ, every man, woman, boy and girl. In other words, you need to be absolutely convinced that what Jesus told you is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, or you will be tempted to live according to the lies the world tells you.

[36 : 42] truth and the best thing, although the result here is that we're all products of this message. And if we don't go and speak, if we don't go and speak, then I guess we're more like the guards than the disciples, having experienced truly something supernatural, but then we have been bribed off by something else.

That's the challenge of not speaking. Amen. Amen. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, and may the love of God be with you all in Christ Jesus.

Amen. Amen.