

The Promise and Power of Jesus' Resurrection

Matthew 27:62-28:20

Have you ever thought about what it would be like if the Sun went dark?

Of course there is a fair bit more to consider than just the heat and light problem, but if we just consider that the rough time line would go something like this.

After eight minutes the earth would no longer receive any light from the Sun.

In one week the global temperature would be 0°F (-18°C).

Within weeks most of the plants on the earth would be dead.

By the end of a year the surface temperature of the earth would be around -100°F (-73°C).

That is pretty chilli and it just keeps getting worse from there.

When we consider even a few of the consequences of losing the Sun, it is pretty easy to come to the conclusion that barring a supernatural intervention life as we know it on this planet depends on the Sun to exist.

What the Sun is to life on earth, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is to the Christian faith.

I have heard more than a few pastors and theologians over the years deny Jesus' resurrection and yet still claim some connection to Christianity.

In every single one of those cases what they proposed for faith was far from Christian.

They will still use many fancy sounding words, but essentially their religion boils down to being nice people for no reason other than we think it is a good idea.

There is no difference whatsoever between a Christianity that denies the resurrection of Jesus and atheism.

I actually believe the atheist to be a more honest individual than the liberal who still calls himself a Christian.

[The Bible is extremely clear on this point. The whole of the Christian faith depends completely on the promise and power of Jesus' resurrection. Apart from the empty tomb of our Saviour the church cannot exist in any true sense. If Jesus is alive, everything in the Bible is absolutely true, and if not it is all a lie and a waste of time. As we continue to consider this morning the big picture of the cross and empty tomb of Jesus, we have come to the empty tomb. This morning we are looking at Matthew's account of this essential event in God's plan of redemption. Turn in your Bibles to **Matthew 27:62-28:20**. As in all the other gospels, we find here compelling reasons to believe in the reality of the resurrection and what it means in the big picture of our redemption. At the end of chapter 27 Matthew tells us about the enemies of Jesus and what they did to His tomb which shows us this important fact, that...]

Point #1 – Jesus’ tomb was secured and sealed. (27:62-66)

Those opposed to Jesus clearly knew of His claim to rise from the dead and took steps to prevent his followers from faking His resurrection.

If you read the gospels for yourself you will find that ‘the chief priests and Pharisees’ mentioned here in verse 62 had listened to Jesus teach on many occasions.

One of the things they heard Him teach about was His resurrection.

What they say to Pilate in verse 63 shows that they even understood the time frame Jesus had predicted.

They also reveal here what they think of Jesus. They call Him an ‘imposter’ and His teaching a ‘fraud’ in verse 64.

While they have completely rejected any possibility of Jesus really rising from the dead, it does occur to them that His followers may try and fake His return to life and that such a deception would be powerful among the people.

So they come to the governor and ask for permission and help to ensure that cannot happen.

Listen to Pilate’s response and the action they take in **verses 65-66.**

While the exact number of soldiers given here is left unsaid, it must have been enough for the chief priests and Pharisees to believe that the disciples would be no match for them.

The ropes and wax seal showed that they were satisfied with the way the tomb was and as long as it remained in that condition than any notion of a resurrection would be easy to prove wrong.

On Saturday, Jesus’ enemies were fully convinced that He was still dead, they knew His body was still in the tomb, and they took significant action to make sure things stayed exactly as they were.

These things also mean that Jesus’ burial place was a known location.

If His disciples started to claim that He was alive, they could simply refer people to the tomb, roll back the stone, and say, “Have a look, He is still there.”

Do you see what they did? They did all they could to ensure that a lie regarding Jesus being alive would be silly to believe.

[Anyone here this morning familiar with Judo? Judo is a form of martial arts where you try and use your opponents’ momentum against them to defeat them. Spiritually speaking God does that all the time and this is a great example of Jesus’ enemies doing things to defeat Him and He flips it around and uses it to His own advantage. With the tomb secured and sealed the idea of faking a resurrection has become next to impossible to believe. That leaves us to contend with what we see next in this passage. While the tomb was sealed we also find that on the third day...]

Point #2 – Jesus’ tomb was undeniably empty. (28:1-10)

Since the LORD’s burial place was known and secured the fact that His lifeless body was no longer present was impossible to dismiss.

All four gospels tell us that early on the first day of the week, some women who had followed Jesus made their way to His burial place with the intention of honouring Him by anointing His body with spices and perfumes.

They were expecting His body to still be lifeless and lying where it had been placed two days earlier.

They found this instead **Verses 2-4.**

A guard of several Roman soldiers were more than sufficient to keep a handful of disciples from stealing Jesus’ body, but they were quite powerless before an angel from heaven.

The power of the angel is displayed in the rolling back of this enormous stone and in addition to that his appearance alone was enough to make these soldiers freeze in fear.

If this had been mere disciples they would have taken up their swords, shields, and spears and made short work of them.

But in the midst of an angel they are left powerless.

Now look at what the angel says to the women.

(Verses 5-7).

I love what DA Carson writes about this verse, he says, “The stone was rolled back, the seal broken, and the soldiers made helpless, not to let the risen Messiah escape, but to let the first witnesses in.”

From the very moment that life returned to the body of Jesus, the fact of the empty tomb was made known.

On the dawn of this day, everything changed.

Death had reigned from Adam but now Jesus had left the grave behind.

The women were the first to go in and see that he was gone.

Verse 8 tells us that when they left the tomb to report the news to the disciples they did so with “fear and great joy”.

Seeing an angel and empty grave changed everything they were feeling.

Before they get to the disciples, Jesus meets them along the way according to verses 9-10, they touch Him and speak to Him.

They are the first to see that Jesus’ tomb is empty because He is alive.

[With the stone rolled away anyone and everyone could come and see that Jesus was gone. No one ever tries to deny Jesus’ resurrection by producing His body. If Jesus burial place was a

secret it would have been much easier to say it was all a hoax. The situation takes that option off the table, instead His enemies are left to explain the empty tomb because it is undeniable. The explanation they come up with teaches us an important lesson, it teaches us that...]

Point #3 – Denying Jesus’ resurrection requires believing a lie. (28:11-15)

When the only way to explain the empty tomb of Jesus is to accept the fact that He conquered the grave, the only escape for the hardened heart is to embrace deception.

Verse 11 tells us what happened with the guards.

Given that the penalty for failure for a Roman soldier was death, they immediately recognize they have a big problem on their hands.

It makes sense that they go first to the chief priests considering that Pilate had put them under their authority.

Notice what they tell the religious leaders. They told them ‘all that had taken place.’

An angel came, made us statues of fear, and rolled back the stone revealing an empty tomb.

It sounds incredible right? You may even say it sounds unbelievable, but it is very interesting here that there is no indication whatsoever that the chief priests believe they are lying.

You would think that if they believed the soldiers they would themselves at the very least start to question their course of action, but instead we read this in verses 12-15.

Is it any wonder the bible says “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils”?

They know full well this story is absolutely absurd.

The idea that the soldiers would fall asleep is unthinkable considering the penalty of death that would be given for doing such a thing.

Then there is the problem of rolling a stone weighing over a tonne without waking anybody up.

If they were asleep how do they know it was the disciples?

And those are just a few of the holes in the lie.

Anybody who takes the time to think the story through will realize that it can’t possibly be true.

Additionally, for the soldier’s story to be true the disciples would have to lie about seeing, touching, talking with, and eating with the risen LORD.

They would have to stick to that lie with receiving no worldly benefit, but instead have to suffer and in most cases give their lives for something they knew was a lie.

People will surely die for a lie that they believe to be true, but who suffers and dies for something they know is a lie?

Yet the apostles and the hundreds of others that Jesus appeared to never once over the course of several decades ever waiver from their testimony concerning the resurrection of Jesus.

Why then is the lie of the soldiers falling asleep able to persist as Matthew tells us here in verse 15?

Simply put, it is the hardness of the human heart.

Their problem is not the evidence, their problem is they don't want Jesus as LORD.

[How often that is true today? What people see in the microscope and the telescope declares the glory of our Creator and yet people believe the lie that it all came from a cosmic accident. There is simply no other way to explain the beginning, the expansion, and the persistence of the church than the resurrection of Jesus and yet people will believe the unbelievable instead. Why? If people are really honest with themselves they will see that it is because they don't want Jesus as their LORD. If that is you I want to plead with you to reconsider. Just ask yourself does your unbelief really make sense? What if Jesus really did die and what if an angel really did roll back the stone to reveal an empty tomb. What would that mean? Matthew answers that question for us as he brings his gospel to a close. He shows us that...]

Point #4 – Jesus' resurrection means He has the power to reign forever. (28:16-20)

Conquering the grave shows beyond question that Jesus is Who He claims to be, the LORD of all Who will sit upon His throne throughout eternity.

The bible tells us that after Jesus was raised from the dead he appeared to many people over the course of forty days.

In that time He gave 'many proofs' that He had taken up His life from the grave according to Acts 1:3.

Matthew focuses particularly on an encounter that takes place in Galilee during that time.

Verse 16-17 set the scene for us.

That is amazing. Most of them get it. Jesus conquering the grave means He is all that He claims to be and is worthy of our worship and adoration.

Some of them, however, still struggled with doubt even though they saw Him standing right in front of them.

I have to say, I am so thankful that God is patient with our doubts and fears.

As I said earlier, the Lord does not leave these eye witnesses in their doubt but instead He brings them along and they live out their days proclaiming that Jesus has conquered the grave.

That happens because of what Jesus says in verses 18-20.

Why are disciples still being made today? Why are people still getting baptized? Why are people still being taught God's word? Why are people still hearing God word and seeking to obey it?

Because Jesus has conquered the grave and that means He has complete authority in heaven and on earth.

Yes in His humanity He ascended into to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father, but in His divinity He is present with His people always and that promise will endure, he says, until the end of the age.

We know that is true because Jesus is alive.

[It is more possible for life on earth to endure without the Sun, then it is for the church to endure without a living Saviour Who reigns over everything.]

You see brothers and sisters the cross and empty tomb of Jesus is about much more than a three day series of events.

It stretches all the way back to before the beginning of time when God resolved to make right what went wrong with our first parents.

In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son into the world and where all others failed, He was faithful.

He faced every trial and temptation in perfect obedience.

In perfect obedience He offered Himself on our behalf.

He took the full wrath of God, paying the cost of our rebellion against the LORD, dying to set us free from the curse of death.

His resurrection shows that His death has conquered sin, and death, and hell.

He is reigning, He will return, and He will restore everything in the whole of creation.

This is the promise and power of Jesus' resurrection.

What will you do with that promise?

Reject it and believe a lie because you are too stubborn to submit to the King?

Or embrace it and know the joy and peace of a King Who lives and reigns forever for the highest good and eternal joy of all His people?

*Up from the grave He arose
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes
He arose a Victor from the dark domain
And He lives forever with His saints to reign
He arose!
He arose!
Hallelujah! Christ arose!*