

## ***The Resurrection and the Life***

Matthew 28:1-10

Easter, March 23, 2008

### **I.**

How many times have we heard the story of the empty tomb? And we truly know the tomb was empty. Even the Roman soldiers agreed the tomb was empty, and they were guarding it. But what really happened?

Suppose modern technology was on the scene, and a surveillance camera was in the tomb. We all know those cameras seem to be everywhere. What would that camera have shown?

Would it show Jesus opening his eyes, stretching a little, folding up his burial shroud and then walking out? Maybe there would be a blinding flash of light that would disable the camera. Perhaps Jesus' body would just disappear, here one minute and gone the next.

There's a story about a Sunday School teacher who asked her class this question. What happened on Easter? One little girl said "Easter is when the whole family gets together and eats turkey, and we remember the pilgrims.

"No," said the teacher, "That's not it." Another child raised his hand and said "Easter is when you decorate a tree and give gifts to everyone." The teacher was becoming frustrated.

Finally a third student said, "Easter is when Jesus died and was in a tomb for three days." The teacher thought someone finally understood. But the child continued, "and then everyone gathers at the tomb to see Jesus come out, and if he sees his shadow we have six more weeks of winter."

Well, there are some different ideas about Easter. Today I would like to talk about what we know, what we can figure out, what we accept on faith, and what it all means.

### **II.**

Let's start with what we know and can figure out. Some things in the Bible can be verified from other historical sources. We know that a man named Jesus lived about two thousand years ago, and that he made some pretty fantastic claims about himself. We know that he had disciples who followed him. We know that he was crucified and placed in a tomb. And we know that the tomb was empty three days later. We don't have to go the Bible to read those things.

In fact, very shortly after Jesus' death some early pagan writers ridiculed Jesus and the disciples, and they made fun of the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection. These were not people who were promoting Christianity and the resurrection. Instead, they were criticizing it.

But think what that means. This criticism acknowledged that the disciples existed, and it established at the time, while the disciples were still alive, that they believed Christ was raised from the dead.

And these disciples were eyewitnesses to all that happened. Their stories were not things that were handed down from their ancestors, but rather started with them. They were there at the time, they saw what happened, they wrote it down, and some of those writings exist today.

The way the disciples acted at the time also is instructive. During the two days after the crucifixion they were dejected and disillusioned. They felt all hope had been lost. Then, almost overnight, on the third day, their attitudes changed into joy, and hope, and optimism. What caused all that?

Well, as both the Bible and outside sources tell us, they began talking about the risen Christ, and they reported their own eyewitness experiences of being with the resurrected Jesus.

Now, some people might say that the disciples got together and made it all up so they could continue to work together. There are two reasons why I would not believe that.

First, whatever people might think about the early church, most authorities agree that its teachings were moral, ethical, and honorable. It would have been extremely out of character for the disciples to have just manufactured the idea of the resurrection.

In fact, the disciples didn't need the resurrection just to start a church. Treating Jesus as a human prophet would have been sufficient. The Jews started their religion centuries earlier with Abraham and Moses as central figures. And Islam would arise a few centuries later, again based on a human prophet. The idea of the resurrection was radical and revolutionary, and the disciples could have done without it if all they wanted to do was build a following based on Jesus' preaching and teaching.

Second, all of the disciples actually continued to work as missionaries after Jesus' death. Not one returned to his old job. And church traditions and early writings tell us that that every one of them except John eventually were martyred, were killed, for preaching and teaching about Jesus Christ and the resurrection.

I would suggest that while the disciples might have been willing to die for something they believed was true, they would not have been willing to die for something they knew was false because they just made it up.

The bottom line is that the disciples were there and saw what they saw, and believed what they saw, and were willing to die for that belief. And that belief was that Jesus Christ actually was resurrected from the dead.

### **III.**

But the resurrection has two parts. The first is what we know and can figure out, such as the things I just mentioned. The second part, however, is its mystery.

Because there were no cameras, we don't have photographic evidence. Network and cable news did not exist. There was no internet. All of those things that we rely on today for information were not in the picture. Many of us are not used to believing things that we cannot touch, hear, see or read.

I recall having a discussion with a person who did not believe in the resurrection because he said it could not be proven. There was no hard evidence of it. And then, not more than thirty seconds later, that same person said he believed there was life on other planets.

Explain that one to me. Maybe there is life on other planets. But I don't understand how the resurrection can be denied for lack of evidence, and at the same time the existence of extra-terrestrial life can just be assumed with even less evidence.

The point here is that we cannot always rely on science and logic and reason to explain everything. And we cannot assume that humanity is so highly advanced that nothing is beyond our understanding.

Therefore, if we accept that we have limitations, then we also have to acknowledge that some things are beyond our ability to analyze, and they remain mysteries that are understood by faith, or not at all.

#### **IV.**

This brings us to the most important part of Easter. Why are we here? We all have our own reasons. Some of us are thankful and want to praise God for the blessings we have received. Others might have gone through some difficulties and come for strength and support.

Perhaps some of you are here under a little duress. You're here because someone in your family or one of your friends prevailed upon you, and you rather would be somewhere else doing something else.

But the fact you're here also says something. Perhaps it says that deep down in your soul, after we put aside the jokes about church attendance, you really want to hear the story one more time. You really want to believe that this religion business is not just something people made up centuries ago.

And finally some of us are here because we always are here. This is our home. We want once again to experience God and his only Son, and the love he gives us and the salvation he offers.

On Good Friday I spoke of how Jesus took all of the sins of humanity for all time upon himself on the cross, and died with those sins on him rather than on us.

Today, we complete that picture when we celebrate Easter. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we believe that we will be raised in the same way and will have eternal life in heaven with God. This is set forth by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians. He said that if Christ was not resurrected, then we have no hope of resurrection. He made it clear that our hope of eternal life cannot stand if Jesus Christ was just laid in a grave and that's all there was to it.

#### **V.**

So, where does this all leave us as we sit here today? Obviously, I would like to suggest that the resurrection is true, that it happened, and that it's the basis for our eternal hope of being with God.

But even if we believe that the resurrection is our assurance of life in the hereafter, what do we do about the here and now? At the end of the day, a strong life-changing Christian belief is not based on arguments or logical presentations. It's based on a personal encounter with the risen Christ. It's based on a relationship with our Lord and Savior in our hearts.

I urge all of you to ask Jesus Christ to come into your life. Even if you have done it before, do it again. If Jesus already is in your life he always will be there, but he calls us to deepen that relationship. It is not a one time thing but a way of life. I have never heard anyone on their deathbed worry about having prayed too much. You can never talk to Jesus too much.

And if you do, he will come to you; not perhaps in the way you expect or ask, but he will come and you will know that he is there. And this all is possible because Christ has risen, and has taken his place at the right hand of the Father. *Amen.*