

The More Things Change; The More They Stay the Same

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Last 24 Hours of Christ

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This morning, we have gathered on the day that change everything, in fact, today is the day that if Jesus Christ were not risen from the grave there would be no reason to sing the songs we've sung, there would be no reason to gather in the place where we've gathered and every hope that we have that rests on that empty tomb would be in vain. Today as we gather at this time, we recognize that in all four of the gospel accounts in your Bible there is not only a declaration of, there is an account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today, I want to encourage you to turn in your Bibles to the gospel of John, the last of the four gospels. We're going to read the account there of the tomb being discovered to be empty, but it's more than just the account of who was there and when and where, in fact, we're going to read the first 16 verses of the gospel of John 20 but I want you to go ahead and mentally put a note on verse 9. Verse 9 is really where we're going to spend the majority of our time today because one of the things that we've discovered is the old adage that the more that things change, the more they actually remain the same.

Now I want you to think about not only that first resurrection Sunday but even the ones that were celebrated in the years following. Can you imagine how drastically different the celebration would have been? Those early believers, those disciples, those who oftentimes gave their life for the faith, they could have only dreamed of a facility such as this, they could only imagine a choir and orchestra like we've had the privilege of singing along with today. They could not have imagined gathering in the number that we have gathered, in the manner and in the place therein. I think we would all agree that when it comes to celebrating Resurrection Sunday, at least as far as the environment is concerned, a whole lot has changed in a little over 2,000 years. But you know, there's one thing that has remained the same, humanity's condition, though the environment changes, rarely if ever changes, and today we're going to discover that our response to the empty tomb oftentimes mimics or emulates those of the first believers that first Resurrection Sunday.

In John 20, the Bible records that it was just about the break of dawn. We're going to be introduced to several very key figures and several very important statements but one thing is for sure: the tomb is empty and Jesus Christ has risen from the grave. Beginning in verse 1 of John 20 it says,

1 The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. 2 Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. 3 Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. 4 So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. 5 And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. 6 Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, 7 And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. 8 Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. 9 For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. 11 But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, 12 And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. 13 And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. 14 And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. 16 Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

Again, it's not only the story of today, it is the story of all stories. The fact that Jesus Christ is risen from the grave, that the tomb is empty is actually the event that changes everything else in God's creative order and yet today we celebrate much differently than even that first Resurrection Sunday but we're about to discover that things have changed but they really have remained the same.

There in verse 9 it says, "They knew not the scripture that Jesus would rise from the dead." Who are these proverbial "they"? I love when the Bible uses the word "they" because it's inclusive of all of us. In fact, in this particular story we're told of three individuals, we're told of Mary Magdalene, we're told of Simon Peter, and we're told of John the beloved disciple, the brother of James, the son of Zebedee. These three specific ones.

When you look at the other accounts, it describes the fact, particularly in Matthew, that there were other women that were there as well but in this account there are three but they represent all of humanity. This is important because when you think about just these three individuals, no one could appreciate the healing power of Jesus more than Mary

Magdalene. This was the lady whom the Bible says was possessed by seven devils. She was ostracized by her culture. She was sent to the outer limits, so to speak, and yet she would be the one who would anoint and recognize him just days prior to. Then we have Simon Peter, the one whom we'll speak of in just a moment that when the church began to become systematized and organized, he was that early voice, he was the one that back in Matthew 16 declared that, "You are the Christ," speaking to Jesus, "the Son of the living God." And even Jesus responded that flesh and blood had not revealed this to him but the Father alone. Then there's John, John whom we call the beloved. Why? Because every time we turn around, he's the one that's sitting right next to or laying right next to Jesus Christ himself.

Think about the representation there. You have one who's on the outskirts of culture. You have one that voiced truth in the midst of error. And then you have one who physically was closer to Jesus than anybody else. And yet they're not there. Has that ever struck you as odd, that on the day that Jesus Christ rose from the grave, they're not there? None of them. It doesn't matter who humanity is, where we've come from, none of us were there when the stone was rolled away and yet we know that we had empirical evidence that we should have been.

In fact, let's discuss the "when" for just a moment. I want you to notice back in verse 1 of this chapter it says, "The first day of the week." Now you and I know that, at least in our culture, Resurrection Sunday is celebrated on what we know as Sunday morning, the first day of the week, but one of the beautiful things about biblical chronology is it does not tell us the specific day. In fact, the Bible was very clear from the mouth of Jesus Christ himself what day they would discover the tomb to be empty. In the early part of his ministry, in fact, the very first public miracle, it's recorded in John 2. Jesus there proclaims himself as the Messiah to the masses and there at that great event during what we know as the same Passover season just three years prior, he gathers his disciples together and looking toward the Temple Mount he makes this incredible declaration, he says, "Tear down this temple and I will rebuild it in three days."

Now if you look at that passage in John 2, there's this interesting parenthesis that's there and it says, "For they knew not that he spoke of his body until after the resurrection." Then you fast forward a little bit into Matthew 12 and as often was, Jesus was surrounded by those who were very antithetical and contrary to whom he proclaimed to be. They had seen him perform miracles, they had heard his eloquent ability to orate in sermon form, and yet they just questioned is this really, this Jesus of Nazareth, is this really the one that Micah proclaimed? Is this really the one that Zechariah proclaimed? Is this really him? There that day in Matthew 12, they came to Jesus and they said, "Jesus, we want to know that you're really the guy so we would ask for a sign." Now this may not seem important to you except for the fact that he'd already done miracles and incredible wonders, basically here's what they're saying, "We want you to do something that only God can do." You may not remember what Jesus said. He alluded back not to Micah or to Zechariah, he actually alluded back to the prophet Jonah. He said, "Remember as Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights." Let me share with you what Jesus was

saying, "If you want to know emphatically that I am who the Bible said I would be, and I am who I proclaim to be, then when they put my lifeless body in the tomb, wait three days and three nights and meet me and I will rise from the dead."

Interesting. This was a pattern all throughout his ministry from the beginning unto the end. He always talked about these famous three days, that after three days he would "rise from the grave." Does it strike any of you odd that nobody's there? I mean, for three years this was the big day, this was the event that would change everything, and yet nobody's there. For those of you that are new to our community or maybe watching online, this may not have somewhat of the cultural understanding of our geographical area but in recent months I think the official title is declared that we've become an everything school, I think that's the word they're using, but we notice that games of great priority and prominence will be hosted just down the road, so what did the students do and some of you adults? They gathered their tents and they waited in the coldness of the night, some of them more than 24 hours, why? Because they were told at a certain time the doors will open and they wanted to make sure they didn't miss out because this would be an event they would not want to miss. This was a rival game. This was a basketball game and yet college students, they camped out some of them for days because they knew when it would start. Does it strike you odd that John the beloved, Simon Peter, Mary Magdalene and everybody else, what should they have done? They should have been waiting, ready and excited because Jesus told them, "Once I'm placed in the tomb, three days, three nights, I'm going to raise from the dead."

What was it that they missed? Notice what it says in verse 9, "For as yet they knew not the scripture." This same Jesus from his birth to his death had fulfilled at least 48 Old Testament prophecies, the fact that he would be born in Bethlehem, that he would reside in a place known as Nazareth and more recently the Bible declared over and over the manner in which he would give of his life. In fact, Psalm 22 talks about that he would be pierced in his hands and his feet. Isaiah 53 said he was pierced for our transgressions even to the details of his cloak or his garment being "gambled over" there on Mount Calvary.

But there was another scripture. I'm sure it's one that they would have been most familiar with because it's alluded to here. It's actually found back in Psalm 16:10. There in Psalm 16:10 the statement is made that his soul would not be left in hell nor should the Holy One see corruption. Now lest you think that's "cherry-picking" so to speak, let me call your attention to Acts 2. Think about this for a moment. Jesus Christ has risen from the grave, he's been seen of at least 500 folks. The Bible describes that he ascends up on high and the early church, which according to Acts 1 is about 120 individuals plus the women, they've gathered waiting what you and I know as Pentecost, that public formation of the body of Christ. There Simon Peter will get up and he will preach a sermon, a message. It's not very long, in fact, if you read it from beginning to end even in a very methodical manner, it's significantly less than 10 minutes, probably more like 5 or 6, but yet in that sermon he quotes Psalm 16:10 twice. You see, this was the prophecy that the Messiah not only would give of his life but he would raise from the dead. Think about the scene. It's Resurrection Sunday. The stone has been moved. Not one single person who witnessed

his ministry, listened to his messages, or was even a benefactor of his miracles, not one of them is awaiting his resurrection.

So let's talk about the "how" for just a moment. The "how." What did Jesus say over and over? That he would rise from the grave. In fact, if there is one thread of truth that you find from the beginning to the end of the gospel accounts, yes, Jesus performed miracles, yes, he spoke incredible words, but the theme you discover from John 2 all the way to the end is that he would give his life for humanity and that he would rise from the dead. Over and over Jesus emphatically told them that, "Though I give of my life, it shall be raised up again." In fact, even in those days prior to his crucifixion as things were getting tense and as the environment was becoming such, he reminded them that even though these things must happen and suffer it to be so, he said, "But I will rise from the dead." You see, it's at this point that the three characters mentioned here in John 20 as well as the rest of humanity should have been waiting "on go." They not only observed, they not only heard, they had the scriptures, they had the instruction, they had the timeframe, and they knew exactly how he was going to do it. I mean, they knew where he was buried. They knew that he would raise from the grave. They had everything they needed and yet somehow nobody's there.

Let me cut them just a little bit of slack for a moment. Let's talk about the "where." Now we talk about Resurrection Sunday and the empty tomb, we sing about it, we celebrate it rightfully so, but one thing you may not have noticed in the gospel accounts is that Jesus Christ never told them to go to the empty tomb. You say, "What do you mean? He said he would rise from the dead just as the scriptures foretold." No, no. In fact, in Mark 14:28, Jesus made this statement, he said, "But after I rise from the dead," listen to this, "meet me in Galilee." That's interesting that Jesus actually told them about the rendezvous point. He said, "After three days and three nights, go to Galilee and I will meet you there." If you want it more specifically in Matthew 28:16 after Jesus has risen from the dead, it says they went to Galilee, listen to this, "to the mountain that he told them to meet at."

So even if the characters mentioned in John 20, even if they had been paying attention, even if they had done as they needed to, they were in the wrong location. Galilee was about a day's journey north of what we know as the empty tomb. It was a journey that would not be easy but easily made. In fact, we know that Jesus' body was taken down before that famous Sabbath day, that first "day" would not have been a day to travel because of the Sabbath, but the next day would have been "fair game." And easily, no matter the size or one's family, they could have made it to Galilee. In other words, all of them, all of them had the ability, the resources, the knowledge and the information to be in Galilee just as Jesus told them.

And yet if you read the gospel of Matthew account, Mary did not come to celebrate an empty tomb, she came to finalize the burial of his body. Peter and John were nowhere to be found. In fact, you could give an account of those who watched at Mount Calvary, those from the Jewish background, those from the Roman background, those that are named and those that are unnamed, and yet we discover that when the tomb is revealed to

be empty, according to the Bible not one person is there, much less in Galilee, as was prophesied.

Which leads to the "why." You see, there's this real interesting account here in John 20 beginning in verse 4 that I want to call your attention to. Between verses 4 and 6, these two disciples do something a little bit odd. They actually run to the tomb. They don't take a leisurely walk. They don't stroll on down. In fact, the Bible says they ran. And just so you'll know, one of the reasons that when you either see a picture that has been drawn or a movie that has been made that we typically portray Peter as somewhat of a large portly fellow is because, well, he lost the race. John got there quicker. So obviously he must have been bigger, so to speak, but that's the reason that we do so. These two men when they hear the news that Jesus Christ has risen from the grave, they don't sit and ponder, they don't debate it, they don't discuss it, the Bible says they actually run.

Now why would that be the case? Because John and Peter and Mary and the others, things have changed over 2,000 years but they've remained the same. You may not know this or realize it but every one of us whether we're named in the Bible or if it's you and I, every single human being has four basic questions that we've got to answer. There's only four. The first question is this: where did we come from? The second question is: what's the problem? Third question is: how do we fix it? The fourth question is: where are we headed? That's really a summation of humanity right there and Peter and John and even Mary and hopefully you and I realize that the answer to that first question is a pretty simple one: we came from God. In fact, you go back to the book of Genesis and it talks about how humanity was created in his image. But then we also discover the problem. What did humanity do? There in the garden of Eden they thought themselves wiser than God, smarter than God, so they decided to do exactly as he instructed us not to do, they ate of the forbidden fruit and the problem was so bad because the chapter earlier God warned them, "In the day that you eat therein you shall die."

Now let me clarify something. Adam and Eve did not physically die that exact moment but according to the Bible they eventually did. Can I tell you what they did die? They died spiritually. No longer walking with the Lord in the cool of the garden. In fact, the Bible records that they hid themselves in shame. They started blaming each other, complaining and griping about the world they now resided in. You see, James or John and Peter, they believed that God started the whole story. They believed that our sin problem was the problem. It wasn't just Adam and Eve, it was them, it was you, it was I, it was all of us. But they had believed that Jesus was the answer. I mean, after all, these men left their jobs, they even departed for long journeys without their family, for three years of their life they hung on every word, they observed every miracle because this was the one who could finally solve the problem.

Then Mount Calvary came. Oh, it started really good, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they're doing." But it ended with, "It is finished and Father into your hands I commend my spirit." His lifeless body placed in a borrowed tomb. At that moment, these three that are mentioned in John as well as the rest of us, our last hope was finished. You see, here's the problem with that fourth question: where are we headed? You see, if no

one's available to fix the problem, then there's no way to experience what the Bible calls everlasting life, there's no way to walk in what the Bible describes as heaven. In fact, Peter and John realize that whatever little life they had on earth was left as good as it was ever going to be because there was no hope.

Maybe their story is your story. Maybe today is that day where you look at the world that's around you, the promises that have been made, the statements that have been declared and you say, "Do you know what? I know there's a problem out there," you may or may not have called it sin, that's what the Bible does, but maybe today you're that person who said, "Do you know what? I just, I don't see any hope. I don't see any promise. I don't see that there's any way this is going to get fixed." You know, things sure have changed but they've actually remained the same because if that's you this morning, you're in the exact same position of John and Peter. In fact, they got up that day, as they would any other day, trying to figure out how were they going to solve the sin problem. You see, they had tried offering sacrifices, they realized that was in vain. They had tried becoming better and they just couldn't keep it up. Most likely they had tried to stop some addictions or some repetitive behavior but they had failed. They were without hope not just for that day but for every day that would follow. And then somebody shared some news with them that the one who promised to fix it, the one who claimed he was the answer to all of humanity's problems, the one who they saw breathe his last breath had risen from the grave.

Now do you know why they ran? Because they realized for the first time forgiveness could actually happen, that heaven could actually be obtained, that hell could be avoided, and sin and death or could have victory over them. The reason they ran to the empty tomb is because finally the only one who said he could fix it was alive from the grave and the tomb was empty. They took off and they ran because they realized that he actually did what he claimed he was going to do. Now many of you may be in the same position today. In a moment, we're going to have a time of prayer together, afterwards we're going to stand and we're going to sing. I know we may be in a Baptist church but you might want to run this morning because when you realize that you have the opportunity to go from death to life, when you realize you have the opportunity to enter the place the Bible calls heaven verses the place the Bible calls hell, that is something worth running for. So whether you physically run or stroll down one of our aisles, today is an opportunity just like John and Peter, the tomb has been declared empty, Jesus has risen from the grave, and all of us, not just these three, have the opportunity to be saved, redeemed and have everlasting life. May we proverbially speaking run to the tomb as well.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe today in this place or even watching online, maybe you're that individual who today the Spirit of the Lord took the word of the Lord and finally one of the most famous events not just within the church but all of human history finally makes sense. You realize that the resurrection isn't just about the factuality of it, not just about the songs we sing, but it's about your sin problem that Jesus was able to solve because of it. The Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. I want to clarify the Bible doesn't say whoever joins a church, the Bible doesn't say whoever jumps through some hoops, and the Bible doesn't say whoever

starts this or stops that, it just says whoever believes on the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved.

If you're that person today who for the first time the empty tomb became real and became personal, you don't have to say a certain set of words, you don't have to do so out loud, you don't have to repeat exactly the phrases that I or somebody else might use, but maybe your heart's cry today, maybe your crying out would go a little something like this. "God, today I recognize that I've got a sin problem. God, I believe and I know it to be real, I've been places I should have never been, God, I know I've done things I should have never done, I've spoken words that should have never been spoken, God, I have thought thoughts that should have never crossed my mind, and your word says that the wages or the result of my sin is death but, God, your word also says but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Today, God, I believe, God, I believe that Jesus Christ is the answer to my sin problem. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to come and to be born on my behalf. And God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to live a sinless life resisting all temptation on my behalf. And God, I believe that there on a hill called Mount Calvary he paid the price and he took the pain and the punishment for my sin. And God, today as we have declared and we have sung and we have celebrated that the tomb was empty, God, I believe the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead actually makes it possible for my sin to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have the answers to all the issues that are happening in the world. God, I'll be honest with you, I don't have the answers to all the problems in my own life but there's one thing today that I emphatically believe and know is that I've got a sin problem, a rebellion against you problem that only Jesus and his resurrection can solve. So the best way I know how, God, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today particularly in person, maybe some of you watching online, where today is the day that you cried out to the Lord. In a moment I'm going to pray for us and we're going to stand and sing together. We want you to know we've got a team of folks set aside, we've got a room set aside, we would love the opportunity to hear your story, to celebrate with you, just to pray with you and pray for you. Today is the day we remember that Jesus Christ rose from the grave and today can be the day that we celebrate that you follow him.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, God, thank you that the tomb is still empty, that you're still in the forgiving business, you're still in the saving business, God, you're still in the redeeming business. And God, help us today to realize that it doesn't matter where we've been, what we've done, who we've been with or any of the details, that according to your word your arm of grace and mercy is stronger than any of it. God, today may we simply cry out to you the author and the finisher of our faith. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.