

## **Introduction**

A couple years ago, Melissa and Ariail and I went into the Canadian Rockies. We stayed a couple nights in a campground near Banff. It would have been a gorgeous setting for camping except for the smoke. Huge numbers of acres in western Canada were burning. And the smoke from the fires allowed you see some shadows of the mountains but that was about all. A beautiful view was right there before the door of our camper. But we could not see it for the smoke. Sometimes familiarity functions like that smoke. There is no smoke there, but you are so used to something it might as well be. Nothing is more amazing or fundamental to the Christ-follower's hope than the resurrection of Christ, but familiarity may lead us to take its beauty and glory for granted. Strive with me not to not let that happen this morning.

[Read Text and Pray]

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of several aspects of the work of Jesus Christ without which we would have absolutely no hope. At the same time the reality of the resurrection cements our hope. It seals our hope. Because Christ is risen, we can truly command our souls with the psalmist to "Hope in God." Resurrection Sunday is the Sunday of hope. But it is also a Sunday of warning to the world. Resurrection Day is a worldwide holiday, and as such, witness is born to the world that must not be ignored. The main idea of Matthew's text before us this morning is that the resurrection of Christ fills his people with joy and his enemies with dread. We will unpack this main idea by looking at the Fact of Christ's resurrection, the Charge associated with Christ's resurrection, the Response to the Resurrected Christ, and the Dispute of Christ's resurrection.

### **I. The Fact of Christ's Resurrection (1-6)**

A. The two Mary's had been at this tomb on Friday evening. They had watched Joseph of Arimathea prepare Jesus's body and put it in the tomb, rolling the stone into place. Now they returned. According to Mark they came with several other women. They came bearing spices hoping to anoint Jesus's body. But they were soon to learn that the body of Jesus would not need to be anointed. He was no longer dead but alive.

B. An earthquake coincided with the arrival of an angel from heaven who rolled back the stone and sat upon it. He had a bright and white appearance as of lightening and snow. He radiated holiness as Moses had done when he spent time with God. There was to be no mistake; the angel was an agent of God, not Satan. When holiness is felt so is fear and awe. And the truth he was revealing was a fact ONLY the true and transcendent, holy God could accomplish.

C. Though soldiers were present, the angel directed his words to the women. He told the women not to be afraid. Clearly the awe of his appearance along with the earthquake had shaken them up a bit. But if there ever was a reason not to be afraid, it is for the very reason the angel is about to explain. He rolled away the stone that covered the opening to the tomb. It was not to let Jesus out but to put on display the fact that Jesus was no longer inside. He addressed the women with these words: "I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen as he said."

That is right. Jesus had said he was going to rise from the dead. We heard him tell it when he warned the wicked generation that the only sign he was giving to it was to be the sign of Jonah. As Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days, so it would be for him. He would be in the

heart of the earth for three days. From the time of Christ's transfiguration, he began again and again to tell his disciples that he would have to go to Jerusalem, suffer many things from the elders and chief priests, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. The resurrection of Jesus happened just as he said.

Every follower of Christ Jesus needs to bear in mind that Jesus is a Prophet. He is much more than a prophet, but he is in fact the prophet foretold in the OT. He came in part to preach the truths of God and to foretell the plan of God for his kingdom. One of his prophecies is that he would rise on the third day. Another is that he would send his Spirit to indwell his followers. That was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. And yet another prophecy is that he would go to prepare a place for his disciples and would return to take his people to himself. The fulfillment of his word about his resurrection assures us of his truthfulness and trustworthiness. We must not doubt what Jesus says. And there is great reassurance that he will keep his promises.

The sad part of this aspect of things is that the enemies had a better handle on what Jesus had said than Jesus's own followers. We simply must not allow that to be true in our day. We must know the word of the Lord and set our hope fully on what he has told us.

D. The angel said, "He is not here, he has risen as he said." Then "Come, see the place where he lay." Not only were they TOLD that Jesus had risen. They were also SHOWN that he was no longer there. The cloths were there but not the body. John's gospel tells us that the linen cloths were there and separately the face cloth was folded and in a place by itself. The women may not have witnessed the resurrection itself, but they saw the evidence that it had happened. Jesus left evidence that his body was not stolen. It had been raised. And the evidence could be seen.

Jesus still presents evidence that he has risen from the dead. It is living evidence in the lives of the ones who turn from sin and follow him. It is a bedrock truth that whoever is united with Christ Jesus through faith has been united with him in his death AND in his resurrection. Paul asks in Romans 6, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

The life of every person in Christ has been renewed by the power of Christ in his resurrection, and every single one of these lives is a living breathing piece of evidence that Jesus has risen from the grave. You and I who live for him, who have had our desires and longings changed by the resurrection power of God are and are meant to be living evidence that Jesus Christ is risen. It would be a fitting question here then to ask how well your life gives evidence of Christ's resurrection. Christ-followers, to what extent is your life showing the change brought about through the resurrection power of Jesus Christ?

## **II. The Charge Associated With Christ's Resurrection (7-8)**

The angel continued speaking to the women. He said to them, "Go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead." Let's mark the elements of the charge.

A. First, there is a message. The women were charged with a message. The message they were to communicate is that Jesus had risen. The angel had been given the task of bringing this same message to the women. Having done so, he says, "See, I have told you."

B. Second, there is a charge to "go." They were entrusted with a message and they were not to sit and wait for someone to come along to tell that message to. They were to go and find the ones that

the message was for. The angel had come from heaven to deliver the message to the women, and the women were to go in order to deliver the message as well.

C. Third, there is a charge to “tell.” This is what you do when you deliver a message. You have to tell it. You can’t hope just being in the presence of someone will communicate to them. This was good news. It was GREAT news! And they were to TELL IT even as the angel had told it to them.

D. Fourth, there is a charge to bring the message to Jesus’s disciples. The message of the resurrection is a message for the world. But first it is a message for Christ’s disciples! It was especially so on this occasion. And what grace it displays! The disciples of Jesus with one exception had abandoned the Lord. And they had disregarded his word. Their hopes were dashed. They were not looking for a resurrection. They were locked away in residences in Jerusalem cowering in fear. But in mercy, compassion, and grace, these women are now sent to those very disciples to bear the good news that Jesus had risen from the dead just as he had said.

You know this is the way it always is. Jesus taught that “no one can come to him unless the Father who sent me draw them.” The scriptures also bear witness that no one will stay unless the Father keeps those he brings. Time and time again disciples of Jesus exhibit that we are prone to wander, prone to faithlessness, prone to unbelief. But time and time again he comes with the message we need to hear and take to heart to keep on going. It’s the gospel message that Christ died for our sins was buried and has risen from the dead. He is alive. He is the resurrection and the life.

E. And we can observe one more element to the charge. It is to be carried out with URGENCY. “Go quickly and tell,” said the angel. This is a life-altering message. It completely changes what things look like. But also it was a message the disciples needed to hear. They were languishing in sorrow and grief, and no doubt they were feeling great guilt and were disillusioned with themselves. You know, the Lord could have instructed the women to keep this to themselves for a week or so, so as to let the despair in the hearts of the disciples grow even heavier—discipline them for their disbelief and abandonment. But no. That is not who he is. Go quickly and ASAP let them in on the joy and assurance and restoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But also time is short. At all times, this is a message that needs to go out quickly. A world is languishing. A world is groping in darkness and futility. This is the manner we disciples need to bear in mind for our times. Do not sit on this message. Do not hold back. Do not be slow. Go quickly and tell!

### **III. The Response to the Resurrected Christ (9-10)**

The women did just as directed by the angel. They departed quickly from the tomb. They were fearful and yet joyful. So their fear was not terror but amazement and awe. And behold—oh, yes, behold—in the midst of their obedience, Jesus met them. The risen Christ greeted them. What an amazing honor! You and I are longing to see him, and these ladies already got a glimpse. And what did they do with that glimpse? They worshiped him. And he did not stop them.

Think back to the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Satan’s third temptation consisted of showing Christ all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and saying to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” But Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan. For it is written, “You shall worship the LORD YOUR GOD and HIM ONLY shall you serve.”

Behold these women are worshiping Jesus. They are worshiping the Lord their God. The resurrection of Christ displays his deity and majesty and worthiness to be worshiped. It is as Revelation 5 depicts the overcoming lamb. He was slain, but he is alive. And he is worthy to be

worshiped. For he has ransomed people for God from every tribe, tongue, and nation. He has conquered. He is worthy that we fall before him in honor and amazement proclaiming his greatness. He is worthy that we submit ourselves to him without reserve. Is he worthy of all blessing and honor and glory? "He is!!"

Now I want to consider the question, why these women? Why were these women the first to learn of the resurrection and the first to see the risen Jesus and to worship him? On the basis of the text, we can assert that they were the first witnesses to the fact of the resurrection and to the resurrected Lord because they were there. They came to where it happened. They could not be kept away. They were where the action was. The women had remained at the cross. Now they had come to the grave as soon as they could after the Sabbath. Pastor John MacArthur points out that the experience of these women "is analogous to the reality that the closer a believer stays to the Lord and his work, the more he is going to witness and experience the Lord's power. Those who are there when the Lord's people gather for worship and prayer, who are there when His word is being taught, who are there when the lost are being won to Christ, who are there when others are being served in His name, who are regular in their times of private prayer—those are the ones who will most often experience firsthand the work of God" (Matthew 24-28; 311-312).

Many times we might find ourselves asking, "Why do I not see God working in amazing ways around me?" Maybe you should be asking whether you are constantly seeking him, consistently availing yourself of the means of grace, and intentionally engaging in the work of his kingdom.

#### **IV. The Dispute of Christ's Resurrection (11-15)**

While the women were going to tell the disciples, the soldiers were going to tell the chief priests what had happened at the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. While the women were experiencing joyful amazement, the soldiers were full of angst. When the earthquake occurred and the angel appeared, the guards trembled for fear and they became like dead men. And what we see is that their deadly fear turned into denying the facts and deceiving the folks. A number of the soldiers went to the chief priests and reported what happened. The chief priests assembled with the elders and took counsel. They determined to bribe the soldiers to deny the facts. They would tell the story that the disciples of Jesus stole his body while they were sleeping. And in this way they would deceive folks from knowing the truth. And the story went viral. Folks were deceived. The story was still being propagated when Matthew wrote his gospel.

I have two observations to point out here. First, the devil is going to do what the devil is going to do. And what the devil is surely going to do is lie. He is going to dispute the truth. Jesus said the devil "does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." And of the Jews who rejected him, Jesus said their father is the devil. They would not believe the truth but believed the lies of Satan.

At every turn, you can hear Satan's lies. For every truth of God, he has an alternate story. Or he propounds philosophies which denigrate the whole idea of truth. The devil is delighted with the way in which postmodern thought has taken on in our world. It used to be that people argued over what is true. In postmodernism they argue that everyone has their own truth. It is another of the devil's lies. And the sin darkened world loves it because it can appear to be wise even though it is incredibly foolish.

My second observation is that the devil's lies are believed even though they aren't very good. I mean consider the lie of these soldiers. The story they were paid to tell asserted that they went to

sleep on the job—something Roman soldiers would be absolutely determined NOT to do because their very lives would be at stake for falling asleep on the job. But more preposterous, the story was that they ALL went to sleep on the job, and all at the same time! And to top it off, they knew exactly what happened while they were sleeping! Plus this story flies in the face of the unbelief that actually characterized the disciples at this time. The lie that was told to deceive the folks has so many holes you can see right through it. It is the lie that actually proves rather than disproves the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But with many it does not matter. By nature folks do not want what is true. They want to believe a lie. Anything will do just as long as it allows them to continue on a path of disbelief.

The truth is uncomfortable because the truth is that humanity is a motley crew of wicked sinners wanting to believe they are wise and good. The truth exposes their guilt and foolishness. They do not want to see themselves as wicked, evil, sinful, deserving of eternal punishment. Their glory is their sin. They do not want to think they need a savior who had to die in the place of sinners and rise from the dead. They want to go their own way. But the truth is it is the way that leads away from God to eternal destruction. How strongly I can say these things does not really matter. What really matters is the work of the Spirit of God removing the veil of darkness from the hearts of the unbelieving. The silly lies people believe just put on display how determined their dark hearts are to reject the one true and LIVING God.

What can Christians do? While we cannot change hearts with sophisticated arguments and complex apologetics, what we can do and what we must do is simple. What God tells us to do is to preach Christ. Just preach him. Proclaim his glory. Proclaim his holiness. We not to carry out the directions the angel gave the women—go quickly and tell the message that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Proclaim his life; his death; his burial; and his resurrection; and his imminent return to judge the living and the dead. Call sinners to forsake the lies they love and repent of their sin and trust in Jesus. That's what we can do, and it is what we must do. And when we do that, sinners will be convicted and converted by God's grace.

## **Conclusion**

Resurrection Day is a glad day of hope and rejoicing for the people of God. Our savior died and was buried but he rose again. And if you are in Christ his death is yours and his life is yours as well. But not only that, if you are a believer in Christ, you are his family. I close this morning by pointing you to the words Jesus spoke to the sisters who came to the tomb that first resurrection morning. The angel had spoken of Jesus's followers as disciples, but Jesus spoke of them differently. He said, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my . . . BROTHERS to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." I am struck by the fact that Jesus called his followers not followers or disciples or even fiends. Instead he called them brothers.

John writes, "See what kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God, and so we are." That is the testimony of the risen Christ as well. The conquering Lord Jesus Christ calls us brothers. If you are in Christ by faith, then his resurrection is foundational to your hope, but it is also a witness to the wonderful truth that in him you are family. Are you in the family this morning? If not you can be if you will just turn from sin and trust in the risen Christ. He will save you and you will be adopted into the family of God.

## **Prayer**

**Benediction**

Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. A-men.