

Holy Week 2017

*And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying,
“Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
(Matthew 27:46 ESV)*

But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as 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.” (Matthew 28:5–7 ESV)

When They Saw Him, They Worshipped Him

Easter Sunday

April 16th, 2017

Matthew 27:57-28:20

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Introduction:

Good morning. It is a good day to be in the House of the Lord – amen? Amen. As I mentioned on Friday this weekend brings us into the HOLY CENTRE of the Christian faith. The Christian faith is fundamentally historical – meaning that our beliefs are rooted in historical realities. It MATTERS whether these things happened or not. If Jesus did not die on a cross – ACTUALLY - then the Christian faith makes no sense at all. If Jesus did not RISE from the dead – ACTUALLY – then the Christian faith makes no sense at all. Our faith is ROOTED in HISTORICAL REALITIES. If they ever find a tomb with the body of Jesus inside – not just some guy named Jesus – but the actual Jesus of Nazareth – if they ever find that then we are above all people most to be pitied. But thanks be to God – they have never and they will never find that. And therefore, we have hope – because the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead CHANGES EVERYTHING.

So let’s take a few minutes and remember what happened and then reflect together upon what it means.

What Happened?

To remember what happened I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Matthew 27:57 and we will read all the way through to chapter 28:20. That's on page 835 in your pew Bibles. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. 58 He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. 59 And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. 61 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

62 The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate 63 and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' 64 Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." 65 Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can." 66 So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

1 Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 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. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 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." 8 So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

11 While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. 12 And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers 13 and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' 14 And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." 15 So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 27:57–28:20 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

According to the passage we have just read, these are the historical facts associated with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

- i. Jesus of Nazareth was buried in a rich man's tomb

Now, I don't intend to expand upon each of these facts in detail but I do want to say a few words about this first one. In Matthew 27:57 we are told that Joseph of Arimathea asked for and received permission to remove the body of Jesus from the cross in order to bury him in his own

private tomb. Now this is an important fact. Some of you may know that a few years ago a conspiracy filmmaker named Simcha Jacobovici released a documentary called “The Lost Tomb Of Jesus”. He suggested that he had found the family tomb of Jesus because he found a tomb containing ossuaries with the names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph inscribed upon them. He wrote a book to go along with the movie and he made himself a whole lot of money. However, finding a tomb in Israel that belonged to people named Jesus, Mary and Joseph is about as difficult as finding a tombstone in Orillia belonging to a Langman or a Shellswell. Those were very common names. Jewish historian Amos Kloner, Professor of Archaeology at Israel’s Bar-Ilan University commented on the film saying:

"I think it is very unserious work. I do scholarly work..., this film is all nonsense."¹

Unfortunately, nonsense does very well on the internet so you will still meet plenty of people who think that Jesus might not have risen from the dead. But anyone who reads their Bible should know that Simcha Jacobovici began his inquiry with a false assumption. He assumed that Jesus would have been buried with his family. But the Bible says that he was buried in a new tomb – an unused tomb – belonging to Joseph of Arimathea. This is not an incidental detail, it was actually prophesied in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 53 – the chapter containing the most explicit prophecy of the Suffering Servant in all the Bible – we are told this:

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. (Isaiah 53:9 ESV)

Jesus died as though a criminal but he was with a rich man in his death. That is a very particular prophecy and according to Matthew 27 it was fulfilled to the letter.

The second thing we would want to notice – and we’ll move much quicker now is that:

- ii. The tomb was secured by a stone, a seal, and a guard

Again, those are important details because the alternative to bodily resurrection is that the disciples stole the body and claimed that he rose from the dead. But the Bible makes it very clear

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lost_Tomb_of_Jesus

that the Jewish authorities placed a seal over the stone and set a guard around the tomb. Whatever escape there was from that grave, it came from the inside, not the outside.

Thirdly,

iii. On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, Jesus rose from the dead

Hallelujah! This fact is why Christians from the earliest days have gathered together on Sunday morning to worship the resurrected Christ – thanks be to God!

iv. Women were the first witnesses of the resurrection and the first people to see the resurrected Christ

That too is a remarkable detail! In Jewish law the testimony of women was generally inadmissible in court. Therefore, if you were making this up you would not have women as the first witnesses to his event. You would have Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus – both members of the Sanhedrin, both very respectable and eminently qualified. Instead, the Bible says, the first witness of the resurrection was a former prostitute named Mary Magdalene – that's not helpful – unless it actually happened. This certainly does read as if it is based on eye-witness accounts of actual historical events.

v. The Jews spread a rumour that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus

We read that in Matthew 28:13. That is the only plausible alternative to the Christian belief in the resurrection. Simcha Jacobovici's proposal is not a serious option. The Islamic belief that Jesus did not die on the cross but that a substitute disciple that looked like Jesus died on the cross is not a serious option. The mass hallucination hypothesis is not a serious option. Jesus appeared to too many different people at different times and in different locations for that to be taken seriously. The only remotely plausible alternative is the one that has been offered by Judaism since the 1st century. That the disciples – the same disciples who had run away in the garden and who had crumbled in fear before a servant girl in the High Priest's courtyard – had somehow become violently courageous men and had over powered a well armed guard, stole the body of Jesus Christ and faked his resurrection appearances. That is the only plausible alternative. But it has

one significant flaw. The undeniable fact that 10 of these men were tortured to death and not a single one of them ever recanted their belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus – I find that remarkably compelling.

vi. The disciples saw Jesus, worshipped him and were sent out to speak of what they had seen

Matthew 28:16-20. The fact that Jews worshipped a man proves that they believed that this man was also God. Something had happened that immediately changed the way they looked at Jesus. And they went out and they spoke boldly and they were tortured to death proclaiming that Jesus was the Son of God and he had risen, bodily from the dead.

Those are the facts associated with the Christian doctrine of the resurrection and they have never been seriously challenged or falsified. People have been converted by trying to falsify those facts – Lee Strobel comes to mind – but as of yet, no one has ever been able to falsify or seriously challenge the facts associated with the resurrection.

Those facts formed the basis of the earliest preaching of the Christian Apostles. The Apostle Paul said:

For I delivered to you **as of first importance** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Corinthians 15:3–8 ESV)

Jesus did not “rise in our hearts” spiritually speaking, he rose **BODILY FROM THE DEAD ON THE THIRD DAY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SCRIPTURES**. Thanks be to God – **CHRIST IS RISEN – HE IS RISEN INDEED** – will you say amen to that? Amen.

Now, what does it mean? Its great to be excited. Its great to believe. Its even better to understand. What does it **MEAN** that Jesus is risen from the dead?

What Does It Mean?

Well, first of all:

- i. It means that God exists and he is active in the world

If there is one thing that all people agree on it might be this: humans have not conquered death. Death is our universal enemy and there is no cure for death. Larry King is looking for the cure to death but thus far he has not found it. Death is stronger than man. And Jesus was really dead. He did not faint, he was not unconscious. He was dead. The Romans were good at killing people and Jesus was really dead. He was three days in the tomb – dead. And yet, he rose again.

What does that mean?

It means that he was more than a man. It means he was God and that is the first thing Matthew tells us the disciples understood AFTER the resurrection. He says:

And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. (Matthew 28:17 ESV)

They worshipped him! But some doubted. I love the honesty in Matthew's account. Again if you were writing a giant lie that you were hoping to pass off on a skeptical culture, I'm not sure you would include that detail, and yet the Gospel writers do. John goes into even more detail. He tells us who doubted and why.

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." 26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:24–28 ESV)

Some of the disciples doubted because they weren't THERE when Jesus first appeared to them, but when they saw Jesus and when they put their fingers in his hands and in his sides they believed and believing they worshipped him as Lord and God.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead proves that God exists and that he is active in the natural world. Both aspects of that are important. Some people believe that God exists but they don't

believe that he is active in creation. These people are called Deists. These people don't, as a rule, believe in miracles. They believe that the universe is like a clock and God is like a clockmaker and he doesn't get involved with his creation. Well, the resurrection of Jesus Christ says otherwise. It proves that God entered the clock and if he did that, then anything is possible.

ii. It means that the death of Jesus satisfied the wrath of God

According to the Bible, sin separates us from the presence of God – few things are clearer than that. When Adam and Eve sinned they were driven out from the presence of the Lord and a flaming sword was positioned barring their immediate return. Reading the Bible it is hard to miss the fact that sin separates us from God. But, before they were driven out God did something marvelous for Adam and Eve – do you remember? Genesis 3:21 says:

And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. (Genesis 3:21 ESV)

That was a very symbolic act. It meant that God still cared for them. He could not be with them while they were in their sin but he still loved them so he made them garments of skins. Where did he get those skins? He obviously killed an animal. Did you ever realize that the first physical death in the Bible came at the hands of God? God was communicating that sin leads to death. He was also prophesying that a sacrificial death would cover human sins. Most scholars believe that this was the birth of the sacrificial system – a system that the author of Hebrews refers to as a parable. In Hebrews 9:8-10 the Apostle refers to the entire Levitical system of sacrifices as “symbolic” – the actual Greek word is *parabole* from which we get our English word “parable”. PE Hughes explains it this way; he says that these animal sacrifices:

“constitute a parable, pointing through and beyond themselves to the promised reality of perfection that was to come... they stimulated a longing for the perfect sacrifice that God would provide for his people.”²

Jesus was that perfect sacrifice – but how can we know that God accepted this sacrifice as sufficient for our collective sin? How can we know that God was satisfied with the price that Jesus paid? The Apostle Paul says that we know that because God raised him from the dead. In Romans 4:24-25 he says:

² Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary On The Epistle To The Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 324.

It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and **raised for our justification**. (Romans 4:24–25 ESV)

According to the Apostle Paul the believer can know that has a right standing with God because Christ died AND rose from the dead. Matthew Henry explains it this way, commenting on this verse, he says:

When he was buried he lay a prisoner in execution for our debt, which as a surety he had undertaken to pay; on the third day an angel was sent to roll away the stone, and so to discharge the prisoner, which was the greatest assurance possible that divine justice was satisfied, the debt paid, or else he would never have released the prisoner: and therefore the apostle puts a special emphasis on Christ's resurrection³

Isn't that helpful? The empty tomb means that God has accepted the sacrifice of Christ as sufficient for the sins of his people. Therefore, it means that believers can go home.

iii. It means that you can go home

I mentioned that in Genesis 3 the man and the woman were driven out from the presence of the Lord because of their personal sin. They sinned and therefore they could no longer enjoy the Presence of the Lord. But in that parabolic act of clothing them in animal skins God promised that a covering would come that would wash away their sins and permit them to return home. The death of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection from the dead ENDED the exile of God's people. It paid for our sin, it removed our guilt and stain and it opened our way home into the very presence of God – that is what the Bible says! Again and again – that is what the Bible says.

The Apostle Paul says:

we also believe, and so we also speak, 14 knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. (2 Corinthians 4:13–14 ESV)

That is the hope that we have and that we speak about as believers in Jesus Christ! That as God raised Jesus so he will raise us and bring us – with others – into the presence of the Lord and there we will see his face and enjoy his favour FOREVER. That is our hope, Paul says.

Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible (Unabridged)*, Accordance electronic ed. (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2004), paragraph 39029.

That too is the great hope in the Revelation of John. In Revelation 22 at the very end of the Bible
The Apostle John says this:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:1-5
ESV)

Amen.

That's what Easter is about, my friends. Its about how the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ brings all God's people home. HOME. With God – and God's people - where we were meant to be – AS WE WERE MEANT TO BE – forever.

That's what this is about. That's what Easter MEANS and THANKS BE TO GOD - this is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray together.