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MATTHEW 28:1-20

Today, as we look at the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, I know we won't see anything new, but I do pray that we will see something old in a fresh way. My prayer is that the story of our Lord's resurrection will never be old or stale or "ho-hum". My prayer is that you and I will never take it for granted...that it will ever be an incredibly wondrous event!

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is essential to our salvation. What is the Gospel? It's the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

And it's a wondrous event because it's what makes Christianity different from all the "religions" of this world. Christianity is a relationship...not a religion. Religion is man attempting to reach up to God...but Christianity is God reaching down to man.

Go to the tomb of Buddha or Mohammed or Confucius and all the rest of the leaders of the world's leaders, and you'll find their bodies in the graves...but go to the tomb of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you'll not find Him.

Luke said that Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father. He
could not do that if He were still in the grave!

Paul said, "Christ in you, the hope of glory."
Christ can't be in you if He is still in the grave!

Jesus said, "Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
He can't be with us if He is still in the grave!

Peter said that Jesus will judge the living and the dead.
He can't judge anyone if He is still in the grave!

Jude tells us that Jesus is able to keep us from stumbling, and to make us stand in the presence of His glory blameless and with great joy...
Jesus can't do that if He is still in the grave!

John tell us that Jesus is coming quickly...
Jesus can't do that if He is still in the grave!

Even Job said, "I know that My Redeemer liveth and at the last He will take
His stand on the earth..."

The resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. There would be no Christianity without the resurrection...without the empty tomb.

Let me say one more thing before we get into our Scriptures this morning. Don't ever believe that what you believe about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is unimportant. It is very important!

Paul said in Romans 10:9:

***"If you confess with our mouth Jesus as Lord,
and believe in our heart that God has raised
Him from the dead, you will be saved!"***

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Matthew invites us to visit the empty tomb today...

Verses 1-6...

Over and over Jesus told His disciples of His resurrection. He told them that as Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days, so shall the Son of Man be in the grave...but they didn't believe Him.

These women didn't believe the resurrection story either. Mark and Luke tell us that these women came to the grave that first Easter morning carrying spices and these spices were for the purpose of anointing the dead body of the Lord Jesus.

But when they got to the tomb Jesus was gone...By the way, this stone wasn't rolled away to let Jesus out. The stone was rolled away to let these women and the disciples in. If we had the time to go to the other gospels, we would see that Jesus had already left the tomb before the stone was rolled away. And how like our dear Heavenly Father to send an angel...(Luke and John tells us there were two angels)...to comfort these women!

Verses 7-8...

"Come and see" – followed by "Go and tell..." and they did!

Other gospels tell us that Peter and John came to view the empty tomb, but it was only after the women came and got them.

Think for a moment about who was at the grave that morning and who was not! Think who should have camped out there...watching and waiting for Jesus to come forth from the grave!

Think about it!

All His disciples should have been there! Where were they? They were hiding! They had forgotten all that Jesus had told them...Fear does that to us. In the midst of our fear, we forget the promises of God!

Every Jew from everywhere should have crowded into that cemetery to see what the women saw that morning. I mean, every Jew for hundreds of years had had to bring a lamb or a bull or a goat or a turtledove to offer as sacrifice for their sin...and now Jesus had made a "once for all" sacrifice. Never again would they have to cut the throat of an animal in order to have their sins rolled back for a year. Jesus had made the ultimate sacrifice and it would cover their sins forever!!

The roads leading to Jerusalem should have been packed with people...Jew and Gentile alike.

Caiaphas and Herod and Pilate should have been there to witness the resurrection of the innocent Man they had put to death. Caesar should have come from Rome!

The world should have been there! But...the world stayed away...

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and two grieving women, two angels from glory,
and two doubting disciples came...

And you know...**even that** was all part of God's sovereign plan! Jesus didn't have to have the **approval** and **applause** and **acclaim** of the world in order to triumph over hell, sin, and death, did He? Jesus needed only the approval of His Father in heaven!

Verses 9-10...

Liberals dismiss the resurrection by saying that if Jesus rose at all, He rose spiritually, not physically. But, **verse 9** tells us that the women took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. It would have been hard for these women to take hold of spiritual feet, wouldn't it?

Of course, there are many more instances from the Word of God that Jesus was raised bodily.

He was raised with a body **that wasn't limited to time and space.**

He was raised with a body **that could walk through doors and walls,** but it was a body that **could also be handled and touched and recognized.**

He was raised with a body **that could ascend into heaven!**

And He still has that body! When we get to heaven, we will be able to see the same Jesus these women saw! And guess what? We'll have that same kind of body, too!

Did you notice what Jesus said? "Don't fear. Go and tell. Come and see."

This is His message to us today...

He says, "Because you have seen Me, and know who I am, don't be afraid to tell others to come and see the risen Lord Jesus for themselves."

I pray that we will have the same sense of urgency to share the Lord Jesus Christ with those around us that these women had.

By the way, don't miss "My brethren..."

Just the night before, He had called His disciples His "friends". But His blood had made them His brethren... joint-heirs with Jesus!

And you want to know something that's exciting? The writer of **Hebrews** tells us that He isn't ashamed to call **you and me** His "brethren."

Verses 11-15...

Well, don't you just love it?

We see the soldiers and the Jewish leaders doing what the world has been doing for centuries...

...attempting to explain away the truth of the resurrection!

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Isn't it amazing when we see mere man trying to outwit the plans of our sovereign God?

Do you get the picture here? The soldiers had been commanded to guard the tomb of Jesus. Jesus was the only Person in history to be guarded to make sure He stayed in His tomb. And then when He didn't stay, and the guards found out He was gone and went and told the authorities, they were commanded and bribed to say He was stolen by His disciples in exchange for their lives.

Verse 15b...

The book of **Matthew** was written some 30 years after the crucifixion and resurrection...

After 30 years, they were still telling this concocted story!

After 30 years, they still had not found the body of Jesus!

The sad thing is that after 2000 years, there are still skeptics who explain away what they cannot understand, and they scoff at the truth of the resurrection even now.

Verses 16-29...

This passage of Scripture is commonly called **The Great Commission**.

If you were here Wednesday night, you heard this passage of Scripture as it relates to three fine young men who are about to graduate from seminary and go out to serve the Lord on the mission field.

But to whom did Jesus give the **first** Great Commission?

Did He give it to a special, newly graduated and dedicated group of seminary trained folks...with all kinds of **talent** and **degrees** and **education**?

No!! He gave His Great Commission to the same men who had not even believed Him when He told them He would rise from the dead. He gave it to the same bunch of men who had deserted Him at the Cross and at His burial and who weren't anxiously waiting for Him at the tomb.

Why didn't Jesus go out and get some "better" men? Why didn't Jesus just go out and get some **strong, decisive, well-educated** men to carry on His work?

Well, after the resurrection, these men became strong and decisive...and they spoke with such eloquence that they could hold their own before governors and kings.

See, Beloved, God uses the foolish things of this world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and God has chosen the base and the despised things and the things that are not in order to nullify the things that are...**WHY?** "...that no man should boast before God... 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord .'"

Jesus knew their **weaknesses**. Jesus knew their **inadequacies**. Jesus knew their **failures**. Jesus knew all that...but He also knew that when they went out, not in their own power and

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might, but guided by the dear Holy Spirit, they would turn the world upside down for the Kingdom of Christ.

And they did!! They were **bold and unafraid!**

They were **steadfast in their testimony!**

They feared God rather than man...in fact, **they feared no man!**
Not even governors...not even kings!

They **boldly** preached the Gospel!

They **boldly** planted churches!

They **boldly** wrote Scripture!

They **boldly** led people to Jesus!

They **boldly** disciplined believers!

And most were martyred for their boldness and faithfulness!!

**I believe we can answer the questions of all the skeptics with a question of our own...
"Would these men die for a lie?"**

Down through the ages, many folks have died for a lie that they mistakenly believed was the truth...

EX: Kamikaze pilots in WWII were dying for their emperor
Because they believed their emperor was a god...their
afterlife was assured!

Muslim terrorists believe the same thing. They believe
if they die a martyr, they go straight to heaven.

But would these disciples die preaching about a risen Savior whom they had never seen resurrected?

**I mean, if they had stolen the dead body of Jesus, would they be
willing to die proclaiming He was alive?**

When a sword is at your throat, or your head is about to be severed from your body...and you are told to deny the resurrection of Jesus or die, **what would cause you to choose death over life?**

None of these disciples ever backed down...WHY?

Because they not only **believed** He had risen from the
dead, they **knew** He had risen from the dead!

This group of men became the means by which Christianity spread! They and the Apostle Paul and others who were just as committed, laid the foundation of the church that Jesus is still building!!

And the same commission is given to us. We sometimes think that only preachers and missionaries and evangelists are to carry out this commission, but Jesus wants all His children to have a part in growing His kingdom.

Listen, Beloved, God could accomplish His work without us. But, He has chosen to allow us to have a part of bringing others to know His Son!

So, I want to ask you this morning...how faithfully are you doing that?

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How faithfully are you fulfilling the Great Commission?

Maybe I should back up and ask this question...

Are you saved? **And if you are...**

Have you been baptized since salvation? **And if you have...**

Are you learning the commandments of Jesus? **And if you are...**

Are you doing your part to begin this cycle all over again in someone else's life?

The catch phrase of the day is "I want to make a difference"...

Let me say this...the biggest difference anyone can ever make...the highest and most fulfilling thing that you will ever do is to lead someone to Jesus Christ and then teach and disciple that person.

And let me also say this...As crucial as are "going" and "baptizing" and "teaching"...none can be done without the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ...

"Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The writer of *Hebrews* tells us that Jesus died at Calvary "for the joy set before Him"...

"Thank You, Jesus, for dying on the Cross..."

Thank You for Your resurrection and for Your abiding presence!"

In closing, let me just paraphrase Dr. R. G. Lee to summarize the truth of this...

Accept the literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as fact...

and you will never doubt that He caused the earth

to emerge from nothing.

...that He preserved Noah and his family in the ark...

...that He overthrew the Tower of Babel...

...that He opened the Red Sea...

...that He held back the Jordan River...

...that He locks and unlocks the heavens...

...that He preserved life with His presence in the fiery furnace...

...that He shut the jaws of lions...

...that He fed the multitudes...

and stilled the waves...

and walked on the waters...

...and can read the thoughts of man...

Accept the literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and you will never doubt

...that He gave the blind their sight

...and the deaf their hearing

...and the mad their reason...

...that He healed the sick

...and raised the dead...

...that He lived before He was born

...that He lived after He was dead...

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that He always was...He is...and He always will be!

He is the eternal God, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End...

Best of all...He is the Resurrection and the Life, and because He lives, **we shall live, too!**

May we walk and witness and win folks to Jesus in His resurrection power!!