

NOTES FROM PASTOR TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON-

Easter Sunday 31st March 2024 am

TITLE: "The transforming power of Christ's resurrection."

TEXT: Matthew 27:50, 57 – 28:17

Scripture references from the ESV

Matthew 27:50, 57 – 28:17 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

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^l 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.

28 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^l 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.

- What difference does an account of events that took place 2000 years ago make to our lives in the 21st century, particularly when we are given two different versions? How will it help us when we go back to work or school, or we face hostility because of our faith, or when we struggle with illness?

We all face a danger in our conversations about Jesus. We are often very good at speaking about the historical Jesus and all he did when he was on earth. We may speak about the future Jesus, reminding ourselves that he is going to return in power and glory, when he brings human history to its eternal conclusion.

We often fail to consider that he is the Jesus who is present with us now.

The events of his historical life and his future return are both vital considerations but Jesus is more than that. The message of the angels (**28:5-7** above) assures us that our leader King Jesus is who he claimed to be.

He is the God of the universe who is present with us now

Consider the two contradictory witness statements as to why the tomb is empty:

1. **The witness of the guards.** The religious leaders, enemies of Jesus, were afraid that Jesus' claim that he would rise again might actually happen (**v62-3**). Ironically, the disciples were not expecting this to take place! The authorities knew that, if they could keep Jesus in the tomb for three days, then they would be able to show that he was a fraud and they were right to have him put to death. To prevent the disciples from stealing his body so that they could claim Jesus was alive, they asked Pilate to let them have Roman guards to make the tomb secure (**vv65-66**). With soldiers in place, the authorities could rest in the assurance that no one could get into the tomb or get out alive from it.

However, they had a problem when the tomb was found to be empty! The only way to cover this was to say that the disciples had stolen the body while the guards were asleep. (**28:11-13**)

2. The witness of the women. Their witness statement (**28:1-10**) told of how they watched Jesus die on the cross, then saw his body taken down and buried in the tomb just before the Sabbath started. The day after Sabbath, as they went to the tomb, there was a massive earthquake and they saw the soldiers lying as if dead. The stone had been rolled away and an angel sat on it. That angel told them that Jesus was alive and let them see the empty tomb. He then sent them to go and tell the disciples that Jesus was alive. In obedience, they went immediately, and on the way, they met Jesus. He spoke to them and they held his feet and worshipped him, and then he told them to go to the disciples and tell them to meet Jesus at Galilee.

We must ask ourselves the question:

Which witness statement are you going to believe?

Consider the following:

- Would soldiers, who are used to standing guard, fall asleep on duty and sleep through an earthquake?
- If they were asleep, how did they know the disciples had stolen Jesus' body?
- Would the terrified disciples have gone near the tomb, when it was guarded by Jesus' enemies?
- How would the disciples have been able to roll away the stone and remove Jesus' body without waking the soldiers?
- Is it likely that Matthew would have used the testimony of women to prove that Jesus was alive in a culture where the testimony of women wasn't counted in a court of law?
- Is it likely that Jesus' followers, who gave their lives to declare that Jesus was alive, would have died for what they knew to be a hoax?

When you take time to ask honest questions the only conclusion you can come to is that the soldiers were lying, but the women (and the disciples) were telling the truth. The chief priests had put steps in place to stop Jesus' disciples from stealing his body, but they could not stop God raising him to life. Ironically, by spreading the story that

the disciples had stolen the body, they helped spread the news that the tomb was empty.

Jesus did rise to life after he died
Our leader, King Jesus, the one we follow,
is the God of the universe who is present with us now.

This truth makes a difference to our fears, our obedience and our relationship to Jesus, as scripture shows.

- a) **The resurrection makes a difference in our fears.** The enemies of Jesus were overwhelmed with fear:
- The soldiers feared the angel, and they feared the religious leaders, going along with their lies.
 - The chief priests wanted the tomb made secure because they feared that Jesus might actually rise from the dead. He had, after all, raised Lazarus to life.
 - They feared that they were losing control of the situation and would be seen to be the fraudulent ones.

One of the biggest reasons that we fear is that we so often find ourselves in situations outside our control.

Despite their initial fear of the religious leaders, the disciples' reaction less than two months later was the opposite:

- They went to the place controlled by Jesus' enemies (the temple courts) and preached Christ's resurrection with boldness
- They went on to witness that Jesus is alive before the might of the Roman Empire even though it cost them their lives.

What brought about this change?

The disciples knew that Jesus was alive. They had seen Jesus alive after his death, and through the Holy Spirit, they were experiencing the presence of Christ with them. They had the assurance that the one they followed, and knew to be with them, was:

The sovereign King who is ultimately in control of their (and our) lives.

When we know that and believe it

our fears are transformed into courage

We do not need to fear the loss of control over all that is happening around us because Jesus is with us and he is the sovereign King who is ultimately in control of our lives. In reality, none of us are in control of life, nor do we have the power, wisdom or ability to manage every situation.

When we give up trying to control everything and admit our weakness, we experience the risen Christ assuring us that he is in control and he is working for our good in the midst of those situations.

When we experience the risen Christ, we do not need to fear the hostility of others because in those times:

- Jesus gives us the words to speak
- Jesus strengthens our hearts and assures us of his love
- Jesus stands with us to defend us and gives us assurance that he is more powerful than our enemies.

When we experience the risen Christ, we do not need to fear illness or death:

- Death does not have the final word over our lives
- Because Jesus is alive, we can be sure that we will be raised to life. Our bodies will be raised from the grave and transformed to be like his glorious body.

The news of the resurrection assures us that the risen Christ is present with us in everything that we face.

When we do experience fear, we can reach out to him and experience him meeting us in our fears.

By his Spirit, he brings the truth of his promises to our hearts and minds, assuring us that all will be well and that there is resurrection life to come for us.

b) The resurrection makes a difference in our obedience. The Roman soldiers obeyed man, and spread the lie that the disciples stole Jesus' body.

How different is the obedience of Jesus' followers. The women were quick to obey the command to tell the disciples that Jesus is alive (v8). Jesus also gave the disciples a command: **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in^[b] the name of the**

Father and of the Son and 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.**" You can read in the Acts of the Apostles how they obeyed Jesus' command, as a result of which we also, 2000 years later, have heard the truth that Jesus is alive.

Where did they find the strength to obey? Jesus told them (and is telling us) that he has all authority and he is with them. He is the one with authority to command and therefore must be obeyed.

- The women and the disciples did not have the right to say no and we do not have the right to say no

but that should not cause us to despair at our inability to do what is commanded because

Christ is the one who is ever present to enable us to obey all that he commands

- c) **The resurrection makes a difference in our relationship to Jesus.** What happens when we fail to trust Jesus and experience fear, or we fail to live in obedience to Jesus?

Although Jesus has been raised to life and has all authority and power, he is still meek and lowly toward those who are his disciples, describing us as **his brothers (v10)**. That is a remarkable gift of grace. Both the soldiers and the disciples have failed Jesus, but the difference is in what they do with their failure.

The soldiers failed to witness to the truth of the empty tomb. Instead they trusted in a human saviour to keep them out of trouble (**vv12-15**). Like so many today, they believed that the only judge who matters is their earthly master, and so they thought they were safe.

- They failed to see that there is a divine judge above every human judge and every human being must stand before him to give an account of their deeds.

What we all need is a mediator who can represent both God and man.

We need the one the soldiers lied about.

We need Jesus.

The women's response shows us that Jesus has a real human body (v9), but then they worshiped him despite the prohibition on worshiping another human being. Jesus did not rebuke them because, though he is man,

He is God

Jesus is the one who can mediate between God and man

Like so many people today, the soldiers did not go to Jesus because they trusted in other humans to intercede for them before their human judge, and the tragic result of that is that they are eternally lost. The disciples, however, obeyed the command of Jesus and went to Galilee to meet him. They embraced him as their saviour from sin and their mediator with God.

- Though they disowned Jesus, he did not disown them, but accepted them as brothers.
- Jesus could do this because he died and rose again for their justification and inclusion into God's family.

That is true for us, too. We fail Jesus when we do not trust him and when we do not submit to him, and we all fail in these ways, BUT

When we go to him in repentance and faith we are accepted as his brothers and sisters.

Because Jesus died and rose to life for our justification from all our sin, and for our inclusion into God's family:

**Jesus meets us in our fears and strengthens us to obey his commands
not just as some historical figure or future returning King but as
our ever present elder brother**

Like the women who were actively seeking Jesus (v5),

**we will experience Jesus' presence in our lives when we actively seek him each day,
listening to his word and trusting his promises,
obeying his commands and
worshipping him as the ever present risen Christ.**