

# Keynotes -Pastor Tim's am Sermon on Easter Sunday 4/03/2021

## Matthew 27:57- 28:20      “The Resurrection – fact or fiction?”

All scripture references come from the ESV.

**Matthew 27:57 – 28:20** <sup>57</sup> When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. <sup>58</sup> He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. <sup>59</sup> And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud <sup>60</sup> 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. <sup>61</sup> Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. <sup>62</sup> The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate <sup>63</sup> and said, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise.’ <sup>64</sup> 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.” <sup>65</sup> Pilate said to them, “You have a guard<sup>[i]</sup> of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.” <sup>66</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup> And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he<sup>[a]</sup> lay. <sup>7</sup> 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.” <sup>8</sup> So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup> And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.” <sup>11</sup> While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. <sup>12</sup> And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers <sup>13</sup> and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ <sup>14</sup> And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” <sup>15</sup> So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day. <sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to

Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in [\[b\]](#) the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

On Easter Sunday morning, we declared that **Jesus is alive**. What makes that claim staggering is that Jesus lived on the earth 2000 years ago, and we have documents that describe his death at the hands of the Romans. Despite that, Christians all over the world have declared afresh that three days after he had died, and his body was put in a tomb, he rose to life. The same body that died was resurrected as a real body that:

- Was made of flesh and bones like ours, could be physically touched and eat food
- Ascended back to heaven where Jesus sat down on the throne of God, and is ruling over the universe.

We don't claim that about anyone else who has died. Not only that, this claim is so central to the Christianity that

**if it isn't true then it would mean the end of Christianity.**

If Jesus wasn't raised to life after he died, then our Christian faith falls apart for there is no salvation for sin and no eternal life. The question to be answered is this: **Was Jesus raised to life after his death, and if so – then so what?**

No one denies that Jesus' body had gone from the tomb where it had been laid, leaving it empty. **Why had it gone?**

In Matthew's gospel there are two conflicting accounts concerning the missing body of Jesus.

**1. The account of the sceptics** - Matthew describes the sequence of events

- a) **Jesus died** – vv57-58 show us that Joseph asked for Jesus' **body**. In another of the gospel accounts, we read that Pilate asked for confirmation that Jesus had died before he was willing to release the body. Neither the Centurion nor Pilate would have said Jesus was dead when he was still alive.

- b) **Jesus is buried - vv58b-60** Joseph took the body down, wrapped it in a shroud and laid it in the tomb.
- c) **Jesus' enemies (the religious leaders) respond – vv62-65** They were so prejudiced against him that they didn't believe Jesus could possibly rise from the dead as he said he would. After all, if he did it would mean that he was who he claimed to be – the Son of God. This was unthinkable for them so, in their eyes, if his body disappeared it could only be because the disciples stole it to make it look as if Jesus has risen. Knowing Jesus was dead, they needed to ensure the disciples couldn't get to the body, so they set a guard. Ironically, this makes it impossible for them to be able to explain why the tomb was empty in human terms.
- d) **The body has gone and a cover up has to take place – Ch28:2-4, 11-15** The guards are paralysed with fear, but when they come to, they report what happened to the religious leaders. These sceptics had done all that they could to keep Jesus dead, and when their plan failed they covered up the truth with bribery and lies.

**Can we be sure that this was a lie and that the disciples didn't steal the body?**

## **2. The account of the eyewitnesses**

- a) **The two Marys Ch28:5-9** They came to the tomb expecting to see the body of Jesus but **the body is gone and the tomb is empty**. God knew that neither they nor the disciples would be able to work out why, so he sent one of his angels to tell them what had happened. The body isn't there because '**he has risen as he said**' (v6). The women are promised that if they go to Galilee, they will see Jesus.

**The Jesus they see is a real Jesus with a real body, that same Jesus who was buried but is now alive.**

**How can we be sure that they told the truth?** No one in this culture would use the testimony of a woman if they wanted to fabricate a lie. The testimony of women was inadmissible as evidence, so if you wanted to fabricate a lie you would get a man to do this. Yet Matthew is appealing to the eyewitness accounts of the two women as

evidence that Jesus is alive. He would only do that if it was true and they really did see Jesus.

**b) The disciples Ch28:16-17** Matthew was among those eleven disciples. He saw Jesus alive after his death and touched his real body. He saw him eat fish  
(<sup>41</sup> And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" <sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate before them. **Luke 24:41-43**).

**How can we be sure he is telling the truth?** There are four accounts of Jesus' life on earth from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Piecing together their accounts, it is clear that after Jesus was arrested the disciples fled. From fear of the religious leaders, they went into hiding, not even going to the cross to take down Jesus' body. They would not have gone near the tomb because they were too scared.

After they had seen Jesus, they had a new confidence. Forty days after these events, they were standing in the temple (which was controlled by the same religious leaders they had been afraid of) and were preaching that Jesus rose to life. The disciples continued to preach the resurrection despite persecution and even death because of it.

This change is inexplicable unless they what they were saying was true. No one would lay down their life for a lie.

**Who will we believe when it comes to this claim?**

- The sceptics who are shown to have fabricated a lie and used bribes to ensure their message was heard
- The eyewitnesses who were willing to die defending the message that Jesus was alive and they had seen him

The answer to this is important because there is a lot at stake.

**The person who is trusting in Jesus, that he died and was raised to life, has no need to fear death**

During the Covid lockdown, it has become clear that many people are afraid of dying. The reason many have locked

themselves away, avoided seeing people they love, worn face masks, washed hands, and craved the vaccine is because they don't want to get Covid and die. There is a universal fear of death for at least three reasons.

- 1) **Deep down, if we're honest, we fear that we will have to give an account of ourselves** to someone or something. Very few people genuinely believe there is nothing after death. Deep down, we all hope there is somewhere better, and that we will have done enough good deeds to be allowed in to it.

The resurrection of Jesus answers all those fears.

**We have someone who has defeated sin.** The Bible helps us understand our fear of death by showing that it is ultimately a fear of judgement. Death is in the world because humanity chose to rebel against God. The first command of God is to have no other gods before him – he is to be the first object of our affections. He isn't however – there are thousands of gods competing for our affection. Family friends, possessions, money, work and sports etc can all crowd God out of our lives so that we don't give him the honour he deserves, we don't obey him and we don't live for him. **The Bible calls this sin.**

- In cutting ourselves off from the life of God, the inevitable result is death, both physical and spiritual.

All that remains is to face the judgement of God. That would be eternally disastrous, but God has made provision to save us. He came himself in the person of his Son to satisfy his own justice so that he could forgive us and make us right with himself. Jesus came to redeem our ruined lives, to put right the wrong we had done.

The resurrection of Jesus is proof that God has accepted **his** sacrifice for **our** sin. **If Jesus hadn't done enough to satisfy the justice of God, he would have remained dead.**

Those who trust in Jesus don't need to fear death because the judgement for our sin has fallen on him.

**Sin is defeated by Jesus.**

2) **We fear death because it is unknown** and we don't know anyone who has died and come back to tell us what it is like. If we are trusting in Jesus, we have someone who has defeated death and come back to life. He doesn't just tell us what life after death will be like, but he has secured that life for us. Before Jesus died, there was no way out of the grave, but he has made a way out for those who trust in him.

Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we don't need to fear the unknown of death.

### **Death is defeated by Jesus**

3) **We fear death because it will rob us of everything we treasure in this life.** When we put our trust in Jesus, we discover a treasure that death can't take from us. Death is the doorway into the joyful eternal presence of Jesus. He rose to life and he is still alive. When we die, our bodies may be buried in a grave but our souls go immediately into his presence. We have the promise that one day Jesus will return to this earth, with the souls of those who have died, to reunite soul and body, resurrecting them to become like his glorious body so that we enjoy eternal life in bodies free from pain and death. Then we will enjoy Jesus forever.

**For the believer, there is no need to fear that death will take what is precious,  
because**

**He who is most precious to us – Jesus – is alive.**

We can have confidence in the account that Jesus is alive and because he lives, we also can live - without fear in life and without fear of death.

**Who will you believe – the sceptics who hated Jesus or the eyewitnesses who saw  
Jesus alive?**

**To believe the latter is to trust in Jesus, to have your sins forgiven and to have eternal  
life.**