

The Passion of Jesus

Jesus' Resurrection

Matthew 28:1-10

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Scripture

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem took place on Palm Sunday. He went to the temple and chased away the money changers. He returned that evening to Bethany, where he stayed throughout the week. Each of next few days, Jesus returned to Jerusalem. He was confronted by religious leaders. And he taught his disciples. On Thursday evening, he celebrated the final Passover and instituted the Lord's Supper. Later that evening he was betrayed by Judas. On Friday, Jesus was crucified and died. He was buried in the tomb of a disciple named Joseph of Arimathea. And there he lay.

That set the stage for the most important event in history. Let's read about Jesus' resurrection in Matthew 28:1-10:

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

“Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.” (Matthew 28:1-10)

Introduction

Ken Davis writes about a woman who looked out of her window and saw her German shepherd shaking the life out of her neighbor’s rabbit. Her family did not get along well with these neighbors, so this was shaping up to be a disaster.

She grabbed a broom and swatted her dog until it dropped the now extremely dead rabbit out of its mouth. She panicked. She did not know what else to do. She took the rabbit inside, gave it a bath, blow dried it to its original fluffiness, combed it until that rabbit was looking good, snuck into her neighbor’s yard, and propped the rabbit back up in its cage.

An hour later she heard screams coming from next door. She went out and asked her neighbor, “What’s going on?”

“Our rabbit! Our rabbit!” her neighbor cried. “He died two weeks ago. We buried him, and now he’s back!”¹

People in the ancient world knew that dead rabbits don’t come back again. They stay dead.

In the decades prior to Jesus, there were many claiming to be God’s Messiah. In every case, the would-be Messiah got crucified by Rome, just as Jesus eventually did. Nowhere do we ever read of the slightest mention by his disappointed followers claiming that their hero had been raised from the dead. They knew better. They knew that dead people stay dead.

However, that changed with Jesus. Three days after Jesus’ death by crucifixion, he was raised back to life again.

¹ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2013/february/3022513.html>.

The resurrection of Jesus is the most staggering, life-changing event in all world history.

Lesson

Jesus' resurrection in Matthew 28:1-10 teaches us what his resurrection accomplished for sinners.

Let's use the following outline:

1. What Happened at Jesus' Resurrection? (28:1-10)
2. What Does Jesus' Resurrection Mean for Us?

I. What Happened at Jesus' Resurrection? (27:32-56)

First, what happened at Jesus' resurrection?

Jesus was crucified on what we call Good Friday. He hung on the cross from 9 a.m. until 3:00 p.m., when he died. When it was clear that Jesus was dead, Joseph of Arimathea, who had become a disciple of Jesus, went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. Then he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Meanwhile, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb, watching what Joseph was doing.

The next day, the religious leaders went to Pilate and asked that a guard be placed at the tomb because they recalled that Jesus had said that he would be raised back to life after three days. Pilate ordered a guard of soldiers to protect the tomb. So the religious leaders went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard (Matthew 27:57-66).

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, that is, on Sunday, Mary Magdalene and

the other Mary went to see the tomb (28:1). A few days earlier, they watched Joseph bury the body of Jesus in his tomb. Some skeptics say that the women went to the wrong tomb. However, that is not the case as Matthew makes a point of letting us know that they had seen exactly where the body of Jesus had been laid.

Matthew goes on to record in verse 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.”** Apparently, the women felt the earthquake and saw the angel. Earlier on Friday evening, they had seen Joseph roll a stone in front of the tomb. We often picture such a large stone that it seems like it would need a large, construction excavator to remove the stone. But, it was likely small enough that a man could push it by his own strength. So, on Friday, Joseph rolled the stone in front of the tomb to close it. On Saturday, Pilate had the stone around the tomb sealed shut and set a guard in front of the tomb. Then on Sunday morning, the earth quaked, which broke the seal, and the angel then rolled the stone away from the tomb and sat on it.

Matthew tells us in verses 3-4 that the angel’s **“appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.”** Scholars tell us that this was most likely a guard consisting of sixteen battle-hardened soldiers. Four of them stood guard for a few hours, while the others rested. They must all have been close enough to see the angel. They were terrified by what they saw. They became limp and dropped to the ground like dead men and watched what happened next.

Matthew goes on to tell us that after the women left the area, they guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. The religious leaders conferred together

and gave the guards money with the following instruction, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep’ ” (28:12-13). That was of course a completely fabricated lie. The soldiers jumped at the offer because they faced execution for losing the body of Jesus. In fact, the religious leaders assured the soldiers by saying, “And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” So the soldiers took the money and did as they were directed. Matthew tells us that this story has been spread among the Jews to this day (28:14-15). But the disciples did not come and steal the body away while the soldiers were asleep.

Matthew tells us that **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”** (28:5-6). Mark tells us that the women went into the tomb. It was just as the angel said: Jesus was not there! The angel went on to say to the women, **“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”** (28:7). Presumably, the angel meant the remaining eleven disciples of Jesus. (Remember, Judas had committed suicide.) The angel wanted the disciples to return to Galilee from where they had just come the previous week. Galilee was an important region for much of Jesus’ ministry.

Well, the women did not need to be told twice. Matthew tells us in verse 8, **“So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.”** They had gone to the tomb to put spices on the body. This was typically done to bodies a few days after burial. They went there filled with grief because their beloved leader had been put to death in such a gruesome fashion, having experienced forty

lashes and a crucifixion. They never expected to find an angel at the tomb. They never expected to see the body of Jesus missing. So, yes, their grief was turned to fear. And yet they were also filled with great joy.

As they were running to tell the disciples, **behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!”** (28:9a). Any question as to the whereabouts of Jesus was answered in that instance. There he was – right in front of them! Matthew tells us that **“they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him”** (28:9b). The women did not see a vision. This was no hallucination. They fell at his feet and grabbed hold of him. Jesus was there in his glorious, resurrected body, and they were able to see him and touch him. Moreover, they worshiped him. Jesus accepted their acknowledgement of his deity.

Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me” (28:10). Jesus wanted the women to be sure to let his brothers – James and Joseph and Simon and Judas (*cf.* Matthew 13:55) – know that he was alive. They were to join the disciples and go to Galilee, where they also would see him again.

We know from the other Gospel accounts that Jesus showed himself alive to the other disciples later that same day (*cf.* Luke 24:13-49; John 20:19-29). In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes that Jesus was “buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [that is, Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me” (1 Corinthians 15:4-8).

That is what happened at Jesus' resurrection.

II. What Does Jesus' Resurrection Mean for Us?

Second, what does Jesus' resurrection mean for us?

I would like to highlight just two truths about what Jesus' resurrection means for us.

A. Jesus Was Raised for Our Justification

First, Jesus was raised for our justification.

The Bible teaches us that God created Adam and put him in a perfect and beautiful garden to take care of it. God said that it was not good that Adam should be alone. So he made a helper fit from him, whom Adam called Eve. Adam and Eve enjoyed a wonderful, harmonious, and joyful relationship with their Creator, God. At that time, the couple were naked and were not ashamed. God said that they could eat of every tree in the garden except the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for if they ate of it, they would surely die.

But then one day Adam and Eve sinned when they listened to the serpent and ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They now felt shame and tried to cover their nakedness. Their relationship with God was broken by their sin and they were banished from the presence of God. But before he dismissed them, God provided them with garments of skin and clothed them. That is, a substitute died in their place. God killed an animal and clothed them with its skin. God also promised Adam that he would provide an offspring from Eve who would crush the serpent.

One consequence of Adam's sin was that all of his descendants were now tainted by sin. Every descendant of Adam was born with a sin nature. There was one exception, and that

exception was Jesus. He was supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit, and so he did not inherit Adam's sin nature. Jesus was the offspring of the woman who would crush the serpent.

Jesus crushed the serpent by dying as the substitute for sinners. His blood was shed on the cross to pay for sinners throughout all history. In the Old Testament, the people looked forward to the death of Jesus, whereas since his death, all of us look back to his death as the substitution for our sin.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans that Jesus "was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25). That is, Jesus went to the cross and paid for our sins when he died as our substitute. God accepted Jesus' sacrifice as an acceptable payment for sin because on the third day, he raised Jesus back to life again.

The word "justification" is a word that comes from the Roman legal system. It means "to be declared not guilty." A person is charged with some wrongdoing, say, theft, and so he goes on trial. At the conclusion of the trial, the judge determines that the evidence does not support the charge. So, he declares the person "justified." That is, there is no legal basis for finding the person guilty of the crime with which he is charged. That is not to say that the person is innocent. It simply means that the law declares the person "not guilty."

God declares sinners "justified" or "not guilty" because Jesus has paid the penalty for our sin by his death on the cross. Moreover, he credits Jesus' perfect obedience to sinners when they put their faith in him.

When God raised Jesus on the third day, he was accepting Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice on our behalf. That is why Paul could say that Jesus was "raised for our justification."

So, Jesus was raised for our justification.

B. *If Jesus Was Not Raised, Our Faith Is in Vain*

And second, if Jesus was not raised, our faith is in vain.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:14b, “And if Christ has not been raised, then...your faith is in vain.” The Greek word for “vain” (*kenos*) means “vacuous and devoid of any advantage or benefit.” Paul said essentially the same thing in verse 17a: “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile...” The Greek word for “futile” (*mataios*) means “useless or empty.”

Paul’s point is that believing that Jesus was raised from the dead – if in fact he was *not* raised from the dead – would be vacuous, devoid of any advantage or benefit, useless, or empty. It would be utterly worthless believing in Jesus if he was not raised back to life.

I became a Christian when I was nineteen years old. God started working in my life in a very pointed way about six months earlier. My brother and best friend often talked to me about Jesus and the gospel. One reason I took so long to come to faith is because I wanted to know for sure that Jesus really was alive. I did not want to put my faith in Jesus only to find out later that he was not who he claimed to be and that he was not raised from the dead.

Forty-five years ago, on Easter Sunday in 1976, I put my faith in Jesus Christ. I believed that he really did rise again from the dead. And in all my studies since then my conviction has only grown stronger and stronger that Jesus is as alive today as you and I are alive!

If Jesus was not raised back to life again, our faith is in vain. But, thank God, he was raised to life on the third day after his death.

Conclusion

Retired pastor Tim Keller tells the following story:

When my wife was growing up, every summer her family spent two weeks at a small compound of cottages on the shores of Lake Erie. Now the cottages are all gone – in fact that part of the beach is gone. Whenever she visits that childhood vacation spot, she weeps because she knows the beach is irretrievable. That sense of irretrievability is like a death. And the older we all get, the more we realize that certain losses are irretrievable; they're gone, and that sucks the joy out of our lives.

But here's where Jesus' resurrection offers something unique. Even religions that promise a kind of spiritual future or spiritual bliss, only offer consolation for what you've lost. But the resurrection of Jesus even promises the restoration of what you've lost. You don't just get your body back; you get the body you always wanted but you never had. You don't just get your life back; you get the life that you always wanted that you never had.

Jesus is walking proof that you will miss nothing. Nothing! It's all coming in the future. It's going to be unimaginably wonderful. There is no religion, no philosophy, and no human being who can offer this kind of future. Our hope for the future is based on the historical fact of Jesus' resurrection.²

Do you want to be done with sin? Do you want a future that is unimaginably glorious? Then do what I did forty-five years ago. Repent of your sin. And believe that Jesus was raised for your justification. And do it today. Amen.

² See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2014/march/6031714.html>.

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is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
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