

April 12, 2020

It's as He Said

Matthew 28:1-10

God's word is true. He who promised to resurrect the Savior, has promised to give us eternal life with Him.

Come, see the place where he lay.
He is not here,
for he has risen, just as He said!

The message I am about to deliver this morning marks the 21st Easter sermon I have preached at Calvary Bible Church. Of those 21 sermons I think I could argue convincingly that a message on resurrection preached right now – in the spring of 2020 – is more relevant to the obvious need of the whole world than it has ever been in our lifetime.

On this particular Easter Sunday the Coronavirus (COVID-19) has infected more than 184 countries,¹ has sickened nearly 1.5 million people, and has taken the lives of some 90,000 individuals worldwide. Moreover, we all understand that, despite the best efforts of history's greatest medical minds and the most advanced technology humans have ever had at their disposal, there's still more to come: More sickness, more fear, more uncertainty, and more death. If there were ever a time when preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ was desperately needed in this world, it is now.

One of the most difficult consequences of living under the cloud of a global pandemic is the ubiquitous, fearful uncertainty that hovers over us every day. As in the days of Israel's captivity in Egypt, death has come to call and it is taking from us many beloved associates, friends, and even family. In this kind of atmosphere many are asking: If there is a God, why he permitting such much death? But I want to suggest to you that that's the wrong question. Instead of asking Why is God allowing death, we should be asking: What provision has God made for death.

The reality is that every one of us is mortal. That means it's not a matter of IF you are going to die but merely when and how? And while there is no way of knowing for certain when and how you are going to die, we do know with absolute certainty what provision God has made for death. You see, God has actually provided a spiritual vaccine; an antidote for death made from the precious blood of His eternal Son, Jesus Christ.

¹ News/Health website, (visited on 4/08/2020), *Coronavirus: Which countries have confirmed cases?*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/countries-confirmed-cases-coronavirus-200125070959786.html>

The question for us this morning is: Why should anyone entrust to Jesus Christ all their hope of eternal life. What evidence is there that His word is reliable, and his promises true. I want to suggest this morning that you can entrust your hope of eternal life to Jesus because God's word is true. How do we know his word is true? We know his word is true because he has a long history of keeping His promises. I suspect we could spend a year of Sundays recounting the fulfilled promises of God, but for our purposes this morning, I want to point to just two. First, God promised that the long-awaited Christ would come NOT as a Royal Sovereign but as a suffering Servant. Second, God promised that while the Savior's suffering would result in death, God would raise Him to life on the third day. Furthermore, I will argue that since God delivered on his promises to both send the Suffering Savior and raise him from the dead, we can trust his promise that He will also return to usher us into His eternal home where there will be no more crying or tears, no sickness or disease, and no death.

If you have a bible with you this morning, I invite you to turn with me to Matthew 28.

By the time Matthew records these events, Jesus has already faced the cruel tortures that led up to his crucifixion. Already exhausted from the previous sleepless night, He was led through the proceedings of a kangaroo court where He was falsely accused of capital crimes. From there He is taken before Pontius Pilot where He was sentenced to death. The soldiers had beaten Him mercilessly, they had mocked Him, pulled out His beard and smashed a crown of thorns upon His head.

Through the crowded streets of Jerusalem, then, He was forced to carry His own cross until his strength failed him. Finally, they stripped him naked, threw him to the ground and nailed him by the feet and hands to two wooden posts upon which they hoped He would hang between life and death for up to three days.

The abuses and torture heaped upon Him were agony beyond our ability to fathom, and yet they were nothing compared to the ultimate suffering He would experience under the wrath of Almighty God for sins he had not committed.

It was Friday. Sundown would usher in the beginning of the high Sabbath, for this week also marked the annual celebration of the sacred Passover feast. In order to dispatch their victims before the Sabbath, the chief priests had asked the Romans to accelerate their deaths by perform what was called crucifraction – the breaking of both legs below the knees. John tells us that is exactly what they did to the two thieves hanging on either side of Jesus. But when they came to Him, they discovered he was already dead. And so, rather than breaking his legs, they pierced His side with a sword and punctured the chamber of His heart.

Before sundown, then, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus asked permission to remove Jesus' body so they could give Him a proper burial. They wrapped Jesus in fine linen strips between which they speared over a hundred pounds of costly perfume. Then, having a huge stone rolled in front of the tomb, they sealed it closed without the slightest inkling that they would ever see Jesus again.

This brings us to that part of the narrative upon which I wish to focus for the rest of our time together.

Read 28:1-10

We are all familiar with this story and there is enough in this text alone that we could glory in through a whole series of messages. But this morning I would like us to invest the time remaining in considering verse six.

The Sabbath was now over and a group of women (two of whom were Mary Magdalene and another Mary) had set out early in the morning to anoint Jesus' body. It was the custom of the day to take the body of one who was particularly honorable in the community and literally encase it in thick, pasty perfume so as to cover the stench of death. Joseph and Nicodemus had already done a thorough job of it on the night Jesus died. But these women loved Jesus so much that they determined to add their own perfume to Jesus' body, at no small expense to themselves.

As they walked to the site of the tomb, they discussed among themselves who they might find to roll the huge stone out of the way so they might get in. Again, they had absolutely no idea – it had never even crossed their minds – that Jesus' body might not be there when they arrived.

So, it was to their utter shock and amazement when they found a mighty angel of the Lord sitting on the stone, now some distance away from the front of an empty tomb. Terrifying as the sight must have been, the angel says to these women, "Do not be afraid: for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said."

"Just as He said." Now these are amazing words. In fact, these are the words that separate Jesus from the innumerable throng of false, misguided and illegitimate religious leaders of world history. Of all the many thousands who have claimed to be worthy of our trust, only He provided ultimate proof that His promises are trustworthy and that our lives are safe when they are in His care.

Whenever I am questioned about why I have placed my confidence in Jesus over all the other religious alternatives available today, one answer springs to my mind: "Jesus is the only one in History about whom promises were made and by whom

every one was kept. For example, through His prophets God promised that He would be the Suffering Savior.

I. God Promised a Suffering Servant:

1. Nobody ever prophesied about the life of Buddha. No prophet ever dared to record specific details about the birth, life or death of Mohammed. There are no ancient Scriptures predicting any verifiable details about the life and ministry of the Dalai Lama.

2. But of Jesus it was written that He would be born in Bethlehem, born of a virgin, of the tribe of Judah, of the lineage of David, that He would have the power to heal the sick and raise the dead, and finally he would be killed. In fact, he would not only be killed, but His execution would occur according to a very specific plan.

3. The prophet Isaiah, some 500 years before Jesus' birth, wrote of His death (Isa. 53:4-6)

Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth."

4. Isaiah went so far as to predict that He would die in the presence of wicked men (the two thieves) but that at least one wealthy man would attend Him upon His death (v. 9). Isaiah writes, "His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth."

5. Again, describing the scene of Jesus' crucifixion, Matthew writes: "And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots. And sitting down, they began to keep watch over Him there."

6. And yet, two hundred years before Isaiah (that 900 hundred years before Jesus arrives), king David made clear and specific mention of what would happen to Jesus clothing when they killed Him. He wrote of Christ in the first person: "They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

7. Do you see, beloved?, everything happened just as God has promised. It all occurred Just as He Said! Jesus' life and death went exactly according to God's plan so that there would be no excuse for failing to believe His word. For only the true God Himself could tell the end from the beginning and do it in such spectacular detail! He promised that His Christ, His Messiah, His Redeemer would come NOT as a Royal Sovereign, but as a suffering servant.

8. But, not only did God promise that His Christ would be the suffering Savior, Jesus Himself promised He would be the Resurrected Lord.

II. God Promised a Resurrected King:

1. As you read the gospel accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus, it becomes abundantly clear that He knew exactly what lay ahead.

2. One day some of the scribes and Pharisees came to Jesus and demanded of Him (Matt. 12) "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." In other words, they wanted some kind of magical, miraculous proof that he was Christ – the Promised King of Israel; the Son of God. But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE Great Fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Now, you don't have to know Greek to understand what Jesus was predicting here.

3. After that great occasion when Peter made His public confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God..." Jesus told the disciples NOT to tell anyone that He was the Christ. And from that moment on (Matthew writes) "Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day." In fact, so explicit were Jesus' words, that Peter rebuked the Lord. To which Jesus responds, "Get thee behind me, Satan. You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

4. In the very next chapter, Jesus reveals His glory to Peter, James and John on the mount of transfiguration. But on the way down the mountain, Matthew records, "Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead."

5. Later on, as Jesus and His disciples were gathering together in Galilee, He told them very explicitly: "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day."

6. Then, in chapter 20 of Matthew we read (v. 17-19), "As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them,

Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up."

7. Again on the night that Jesus was arrested (Mat. 26:31-34) "Then Jesus said to them,

You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.' "But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." But Peter said to Him, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away." Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times" (which he did).

8. So explicit was Jesus about the promise of His resurrection, and so often did He repeat His prophesy that it would happen, that even his enemies knew about it. So that after they executed Him, they went back to Pilate to ask for a guard at His tomb, saying (Mat. 27:63-66):

"Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.' "Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone."

By the way, that guard was made up of many soldiers, and they were the ones who immediately after the resurrection are found lying on the ground like dead men, shaking in fear.

9. You see, the enemies of Lord didn't realize it at the time, but when they asked for a guard of Roman Soldiers to secure the tomb of Jesus, they were being sovereignly used of God to make absolutely sure that no one could charge that Jesus had exited the grave by any means short of a miracle. And even though they would turn around and spread the rumor that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body, they knew that they themselves had made that absolutely impossible.

10. The fact is, when the women arrived at the tomb early on the first day of the week Jesus was not there. He had risen from the dead, "Just as He said."

11. Oh, beloved, this is such an important truth to allow the Holy Spirit to burn into our hearts; that the word of God is absolutely trustworthy in its every detail. He who promised to resurrect the Savior, has promised to give eternal life to EVERYONE who repents and believes.

- A. Do you know what the church needs on Easter Sunday 2020? We need the conviction of Abraham who "with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:21)
- B. As the author of Hebrews wrote, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10:23).

12. The resurrection is the centerpiece of everything we believe.

- No resurrection – no Christianity!
- No resurrection – no peace with God!
- No resurrection – no eternal life!

The believer's entrance into heaven is secured by no less than the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But let me ask you a question. Before we reach those pearly gates, before we ever stand before the judgment seat of the God, what is there to give us confident assurance that it is safe to live the risk-taking, Christ-exalting, lifestyle that God calls us to live? Simply this, that God has demonstrated over and over again that all that He promises, He will certainly perform. **The resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate evidence of God's infinite trustworthiness.**

13. Do you understand what a rock this must have been under the disciple's feet?

- A. How were they able to stand boldly in opposition to the local authorities for the sake of the gospel?
- B. How were they able to face the threat of death for the sake of the truth?

- C. Upon what confidence did they set out from their homes to the ends of the earth taking nothing along to sustain them?
- D. Was it not that they had somehow learned to put their absolute confidence in the God who had been unwaveringly faithful?

14. And what about us?

- A. Where will we find the courage to live holy lives in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation?
- B. From what will we derive confidence to share the gospel of Christ with our family, neighbors and co-workers who are skeptical at best?
- C. What is it that will convince some of you to give up on the traditional American dream for the sake of a higher call to take the good news to nations and people who have yet to hear?
- D. Will it not be an unshakable confidence that He who called you is faithful?
Whatever

He has promises He will perform.

15. He is not only risen! He is risen Just as He said!

16. Now before we close, I need to point out one more promise. First there was the promise of the suffering Servant. Then there was the promise of the Resurrected King. And since those promises were fulfilled in every conceivable detail, we can have absolute confidence in God's promise of the Returning Lord.

III. God Promises a Returning Lord:

1. You see, all of God's past promises fulfilled now serve simply to add immeasurable weight to one awesome promise for the future. Namely, that Jesus Christ will one day return.

2. When the disciples stood there watching Jesus ascend into the clouds some 40 days after His resurrection, the angels appeared to them saying,

Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

3. Is that promise worthy of your trust? It is just as trustworthy as every other promise Jesus ever made and fulfilled before He left.

4. As reliable as was his promise of resurrection so reliable is his promise to return. And on that day every wrong will be made right. Every sickness will be healed, and every death will be replaced with Resurrection.

5. From the apostle Paul we read (1 Cor. 15),

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.

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

6. So you see, beloved, what our world needs more than anything during the 2020 Global Pandemic is faith in the promises of our Resurrected and Returning Lord.

7. You know, over the past 15 years several trustworthy men repeatedly warned the world and it is just a matter of time before we face the ravages of a global pandemic. No one believed them, but Oh how we wish we had heeded the warning. Even so, the Lord Himself has repeatedly warned us that there is coming a day when we will all stand before God to give an account. Will you be able to say to Him that day “All my hope was in Christ?” If not, I plead with you to hear and heed this promise.

8. Jesus bore all your sins in His body on the cross. His shed blood was to pay for all your sins. He has promised to cancel the debt of all who repent and believe. If you come to Him, he will most gladly receive you and grant to you eternal life by the power that raised Him from the dead. The choice is yours.

9. You have now heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. Do not harden your heart. God’s provision for death is Jesus Christ, won’t you receive him now?

God's word is true. He who promised to resurrect the Savior, has promised to give us eternal life with Him.