

The One Fool-Proof Evidence

Matthew 28:1-15 (03/31/13)

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Most, if not all of you, believe in the literal, physical, bodily resurrection of Christ. So I don't want to carry ice cubes to Eskimos this morning. But I wonder, do we really grasp its significance? Do you realize what this says about every other world religion? It means Christianity is true and all the others are false. Neither Islam or Judaism, nor any other religion has a risen Savior. Do you know what Christ's resurrection says about the future? Jesus Christ is Lord of both the living and the dead.

Do you realize that the same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in every believer? Do you live on the fact that Christ's resurrection power is the source of all your growing and changing and victory over sin? All your growth in godliness, your bearing fruit for God, your sanctification, your putting off sin and putting on godliness, is driven and empowered by Christ's resurrection (Romans 6-8; Ephesians 1-2).

Do you realize that this message of Christ risen from the dead is what fired up and fueled all the preaching in the book of Acts? Basically, "You murdered Him, but God raised Him up, so repent and believe in Him!" Do you realize how the resurrection of Christ is God's declaration that His work on the cross has been accepted and that the war has been won?

Do you realize Christ has taken the sting out of death and for His people to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord? And do you see that Christ's resurrection is the reason we do not grieve as others do in the face of the death of our loved ones (1 Thessalonians 4:14)?

Christ is all we need. We are justified by faith in Him alone. He is the Lamb standing in heaven as if slain, alive forever to intercede and represent us at God's right hand. Do you fully realize that the resurrection is the one fool-proof evidence that our faith is not in vain, that Christianity is true, that we will not be disappointed, that faith in Christ's resurrection is required to be saved (Romans 10:9-10)?

This morning, let's go to Matthew 28 and follow the story. After Christ's death and burial, the Jewish leaders were concerned about the disciples stealing the body, "No way are we letting those deluded disciples get in there and steal the body of that blasphemer!" So Pilate gave permission for a stone with a seal and a guard to be in place. The stone may have weighed a ton, the seal was probably a cord stretched across the stone sealed at each end with wax, and, according to Barnes, up to sixty soldiers may have been appointed to guard the tomb, possibly divided into watches through the night. So we pick up the account in Matthew 28.

A WORLD-SHAKING EXPERIENCE – vv. 1-5

Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his garment as white as snow; and the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. And the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified."

Verse 1 - There are very few experiences that totally change everything. The next few moments will change the world, not only for these ladies but for all time. They came "to look at the grave." We know from other gospels they brought perfume and spices to anoint Jesus' body. They came in deepest grief, severe disappointment, and loyal love. They didn't come expecting anything but His cold, dead body.

Verses 2-3 – God had sent an angel clothed in lightning, electrifyingly brilliant, to greet these ladies. Yes, there were two angels, but Matthew focuses on this one. Let's look at the power of God here. A "mega" earthquake accompanied the angel who rolled the stone away before the ladies arrived and now he is sitting on the stone. He's not standing there; he's sitting there, on top of the stone. I just like that. When do you sit down? After the work is done! He could be thinking, "I have this huge privilege in all the great events, all the world shaking, the history changing moments, to sit here giving witness to the resurrection." There he is, sitting on this stone that he himself rolled away, not so Jesus could get out, but so we could look in. He's sitting there symbolizing, "We won! The Victor has emerged, the Warrior has conquered, hope has dawned bright for a dying humanity. The cosmic war is strategically won. Sin and death and the devil have been smashed. The future is secure."

Verse 4 – This lightning-clad heavenly messenger scares these guards witless! The same word for earthquake, *seismos*, is used of them. They experienced an earthquake in their inner being! And, boom, they fall over, unconscious. There were dead-like Roman guards lying all around. Like when they came to arrest Jesus in the garden. "Whom do you seek?" "Jesus." "I am." And boom, down they go! How easily God could crush His enemies. How patient He is with unbelievers. All three, the stone, the seal, and the guard, all three were demolished and totally powerless before the Lord. This scheme to keep Jesus' body in the grave was like trying to ward off that recent tsunami that swept over the east coast of Japan with a Lego barricade, or like trying to extinguish the sun with a water pistol. How futile are man's efforts to deny God and Christ, and the Word of God. God smashes right through it all.

Verse 5 – But now, these dear precious ladies, God bless them, these devotees of Jesus, are here, shaking with fear, astounded. These are life-changing, world-changing, history changing moments. They will never be the same. This God-sent glorious messenger embraces them with his words. One commentator says, "Let us learn that all God's angels are our lovers and helpers, if we love and seek Jesus." He assures them, "I know why you've come. You saw your Lord crucified. You love Him so much. You are seeking Him. But you are seeking Him as if He were still dead." Now listen up; better news no human ears have ever heard. Here is what sets Christianity apart from all other faiths and assures us that Christ is Who He said He is and did what he said He'd do.

A WORLD-CHANGING MESSAGE – vv. 6-7

"He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going before you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you."

Here is a five point message that takes ten seconds preach. I want to engraft these five points into our hearts this morning. Before we look at them, though, imagine if the atheist Richard Dawkins was right. In a debate he said, "We come down to the resurrection of Jesus. It's so petty. It's so trivial. It's so local. It's so earthbound." Imagine if the five points ran like this:

- #1 He's still here, ladies.
- #2 He's not risen.
- #3 He said He would, but it didn't happen.
- #4 Come and see. His body is still there.
- #5 Go tell His disciples He's dead, their hopes are smashed forever, the enterprise has failed.

It's almost unbearable to even say this, isn't it? If His body still was in that tomb, it would mean the permanent triumph of wrong over right, evil over good, death over life, and Satan's victory over God. But what does the angel say? Take this into your minds and hearts and savor every point.

#1 He's not here! Oh, let these words to reverberate around the world! Proclaim them near and far! How can it be that some schools right here in America aren't allowed to celebrate Easter

anymore? How can it be? Let's shout it out like the angel, "He's not here! Ladies, you came to look at the grave, to anoint His body, you expected Him to be here, but He's not here!"

#2 He is risen! "He was dead, you saw Him, but now He is risen. He's alive, breathing, walking, and warm. His mind is active. His hands and feet and side still carry the scars; you'll see them. This isn't a myth or legend or cover-up to make us all look good. No, God sent me; I'm sitting on this stone throne that used to cover that tomb right there to prove to you forever that He is risen. This is the one final fool-proof evidence that your faith is not in vain. He is risen."

#3 Just as He said. "He told you about this so many times during the last three years. I know, it's hard to believe. You were caught up in total amazement every step of the way and when He talked about His coming death you missed His next assurance that He would rise again." Jesus told his disciples "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" (Matthew 17:22-23). But they were deeply grieved. It's like they never heard those last nine words – "and He will be raised on the third day."

Just as He said. And you can write it down, for everything God says, He will do. He keeps His Word, always. He told Abraham his offspring will be in slavery 400 years and then be brought out. Sure enough, down into Egypt they went for 400 years and then God sent Moses and they follow him to freedom through the Red Sea. He promised them the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey, and every one of His promises came true. Some of you ladies are studying Joshua this spring. What an incredible words are in Joshua 21:45, "Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass."

Do you believe this Book? Listen, there is a Mind and a sovereign Hand behind all the 66 books of the Bible. God controls everything, from beginning to end. And this resurrection – Christ told His followers He'd die and then rise again. And He did! Just as He said He would. Whatever God says He's going to do, He does. You can believe Him. This world has a built in bias against believing God, but let's write it down, "God said it, that settles it, I believe it." He said He'd rise again, and He did. What else did He say? He said He will come again and receive us to Himself, and He will. He said every knee will bow before Him, and they will, every one. Every person you know. Every rock star we know – Hendrix, Clapton, Joplin; every world leader – Churchill, LBJ, Kennedy, Reagan, Clinton, and Obama; every human butcher and mass murderer – Herod, Hitler, Hussein; every financial wizard – Buffet, Gates, Trump; every atheist, false teacher, mocker, hypocrite; Mohammed himself, all on their knees before this risen, living Lord and Judge, "just as He said."

So these ladies came to anoint Jesus' body. Imagine standing with them and hearing, "He is risen, JUST AS HE SAID!" Wow!

Come and see. What an invitation. God invites all of us. Look around. Do you see His body, ladies? You were there when Joseph of Arimathea laid His dead, lifeless body in there. You were there and saw Nicodemus, that teacher of the Jews, with 100 pounds of spices to bury with Jesus – John 19:39. Look, is He there? What did they see? They saw the linen bandages lying here, and over there the face cloth all folded up neatly, majestically, everything in its place. But no body. The most wonderful nobody you'll ever see. Come, feast your eyes on it! Let it totally consume your heart. He walked out of that death tomb gloriously alive! He is not there. We serve a living, risen, true, unique Lord and Savior. To John in Revelation 1:18 Jesus assures: "I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore."

Go quickly and tell! "Tell His disciples He has risen from the dead." This is the message we have. He died, and He is risen. This is the final proof. The one fool-proof evidence. You can deny it, but you can shut your eyes and deny the sun is out there, too. You can deny it and go on living as if this life was all there is, that "you're born, you live, and you die, that's it." But you'll discover too late how wrong you were. This truth is the keystone of our faith. It is the one final piece that fueled the apostles in the book of Acts. "You killed Him, but God raised Him and now

you have one thing to do – repent and believe in Him.” Embrace Him by personal faith right now. He is alive and stands at the end of every man and woman’s journey. Every one of you will face Him one day.

JESUS’ FEET AND A HUGE FABRICATION – vv. 8-15

And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they shall see Me."

Verse 8 – Would you not be shaking? They ran, shivering with awed fear, but hearts fairly bursting with joy. This is our joy – joy unspeakable and full of glory. They had life-transforming, hope-giving news to report. So do you and I. We have the one message this world needs to hear, in spite of our secularism and relativism and chaos. People need to hear this today and we ought to be gripped with fear and great joy, overwhelmed by the reality of the fact that Jesus rose from the dead! There’s only one hope for this world – the risen, ruling, returning Christ!

Verse 9 is so, so good. They are running like sprinters heading straight for the city, and suddenly who meets them? And what does He say? “Good morning, ladies.” Just the typical greeting, *chairein*. Instantly they are on their faces, their hands reaching out, touching His feet. What an amazing detail – they took hold of His feet. Literal, physical, living, warm feet, feet with nail marks – undeniably Jesus’ feet.

What does He tell them in verse 10? “Go tell My brothers!” Not, go tell those cowards, those betrayers, those quarrelers. No, Jesus said, “Go tell My brothers.” These words indicate more. “They, like you ladies, are in My family, forever. Sure, they stumbled all over themselves and got it mixed up, but I love them. I loved them from the beginning and will love them to the uttermost, as well as all who receive Me as their Lord and Savior.” Then Jesus gives a command, “Go tell them to meet up with Me in Galilee! I’ve got an assignment for them.”

SO WHAT? THE LADIES AND THE LIE

The Ladies: What does this account tell you about the ladies? Men, where were you early that Sunday morning? Playing video games? Sleeping in? Were you cowering, hiding out, afraid of reprisals from the Jewish rulers? These women proved their loyalty and love for their Savior! And God has used ladies to this very day to be “up and at ‘em,” telling the good news. What a joy it is today to see all the ladies coming to the Thursday morning study in Joshua, or the Monday night study in Ephesians and Philippians. On that eventful morning, it was ladies who came early, even before the sun was up, and saw that lightning-clad divine messenger and heard those world shaking, world changing truths.

The lie in verses 11-15: So what happened to those guards God had punched right out, boom, down they went when that angel appeared? Some of them went and reported to the big shot religious leaders who had murdered Jesus three days ago. And here you have the biggest cover-up in history. What were the soldiers told to do? “Here’s the narrative you need to repeat whenever asked about it, whenever interviewed by the media. Here’s the story, here’s the fabricated line to save your necks and protect our reputation and power. Say his disciples came and stole the body while you slept and we’ll cover your tails for you.” So much for truth. The religious leaders of that day didn’t care about the truth. They cared only about their own reputation. And this lie has been perpetrated down to this very day.

They can say whatever they want about the resurrection, call it a myth, a fabrication, a nice ending to a religious fable. But listen again to that angel, “He is not here. He is risen, just as He said. Come and see. Go and tell.” May God fill us with the joy of this reality, not just for today but for the rest of our lives. And if you have never bowed your knee to Christ, do it now!