

# The Resurrection of Jesus

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, this Easter, I don't know if you've noticed, but it's certainly something I've noticed that more than ever before, everybody seems to have an Easter message that goes out.

So unsurprisingly, church leaders, ecclesiastical leaders will have an Easter message that they deliver on behalf of their denomination or their church network speaking about Easter. The Prime Minister this week also, Keir Starmer, delivered his Easter message. Also the King, King Charles, delivered his Easter message. And when you listen to these different Easter messages from these folks I've mentioned and from others, then there can be a difference in terms of the clarity of the message of Easter that they announce or proclaim or relay to us.

And essentially, the message of Easter, it seems when some people speak of Easter, they're not quite sure what Easter is all about, whether Jesus actually did die and certainly whether he did rise from the dead.

And yet when you come to a passage like Matthew chapter 28, Matthew simply records for us the resurrection of Jesus. And as he does so, he essentially is pointing us to Christ as the one that we need to know and to believe in.

[ 1 : 21 ] And the fact is, without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there would be no point of us meeting here today. But we're here today because we are celebrating the resurrection of Jesus.

If he didn't rise from death, it would be a complete and utter waste of time. I mean, it's a nice afternoon. Why come to church if Jesus didn't rise from death?

There would be no Easter if there was no resurrection. But because the resurrection happened, it is central to the Christian faith. It makes Christianity make sense.

And so we're going to think about two things this afternoon. First of all, the reality of the resurrection and then the challenge of the resurrection. The reality of the resurrection, it is historically reliable. We'll see that from Matthew chapter 28. And then also the challenge of the resurrection. It is existentially satisfying. It does change our lives and meet our deepest needs and the deepest longings of our hearts.

[ 2 : 23 ] And so we're going to think about these two points this afternoon. So first of all, the reality of the resurrection. Now, we just read from the Gospel of Matthew. And Matthew gives one of the eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus.

And so we're going to look at what Matthew says in his account about the resurrection of Jesus. And what I find fascinating when I read Matthew's account is that Matthew here doesn't try to prove the resurrection.

We've just had it read to us. And when you read it, as we just have, then Matthew simply reports what happened in a matter-of-fact way. But as he does so, he gives a compelling case for the reality of the resurrection of Jesus.

And so I'd like us simply to run through his account quickly. Because the details actually stack up as evidence for the resurrection to convince us that it happened.

And so the first of these details, there are nine. So this is not a long sermon. These are short run-through details. So number one, the time and the place. Okay, verse one. What does it say?

[ 3 : 33 ] After the Sabbath at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. So when did the resurrection happen? Matthew tells us it was on the first day of the week after the Sabbath at dawn.

Okay, that is when it happened. Where did it happen? He tells us it happened at the tomb, the place where the dead Jesus was buried. And so Matthew's careful to place the resurrection in time and in history and in a specific location for us.

So here's when it took place and here's where it took place. Okay, second point. Told you they weren't wrong. The woman eyewitnesses. You'll notice all through the reading of Matthew 28, the women are there and they see everything that goes on.

Now they were the first witnesses to the resurrection. And they're named here, verse one, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. That's Mary, the mother of James and Joseph.

Now why is this significant? Well, it's significant because in those days, a woman's testimony did not count. It would not stand up alone in court.

[ 4 : 46 ] In Jewish, Greek, Roman culture, women weren't even allowed to be in court to give or say, give their testimony or say anything. And yet for the resurrection of Jesus, they are the initial eyewitnesses.

The first eyewitnesses to speak about the resurrection are women. And so just think about this. If you were making this stuff up, you would never dream of using women as the first witnesses.

It wouldn't make sense. And so Matthew and the other gospel writers would have no reason to write down that women were the first witnesses. Unless, of course, they were the first witnesses.

And so Matthew includes them, even though their testimony didn't count for much, simply because they were there. So can you see the fact that these women were witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus is strong evidence to say that this is no fabricated account here.

The very fact that they're named in what is a public document means that you could go and ask them. Their names are there so you could go and fact check with Mary and the other Mary and say to them, see what Matthew is saying.

[ 6 : 00 ] Did it really happen? Did these events take place just as he says that they did? Okay, thirdly, the supernatural events. The events of that first Easter morning were extraordinary.

There was a violent earthquake. There was a dazzling angel who rolled away the stone of the tomb. And all of this freaked out the guards who were there and they collapsed in shock.

And then the angel spoke to the women. But it's hardly surprising, is it, to find that when Jesus rose from the death, his resurrection is accompanied with all of these supernatural occurrences.

Okay, fourth, the empty tomb. Verse six, he is not here. He has risen just as he said.

You see, when the women went to the tomb, they made a shocking discovery. The tomb was empty because Jesus wasn't there. He had risen from death. And so the empty tomb is significant because it points us to the risen Jesus.

[ 7 : 08 ] Number five, the fulfilled predictions. Notice what the angel said to the woman. He is not here. He has risen just as he said.

Now, when Jesus had been teaching his disciples, he predicted that he would be killed. But he also predicted that he would be raised to life on the third day.

And this was the third day that Matthew is talking about. And so the resurrection is the fulfillment of what Jesus said would happen. So Jesus was killed just like he predicted he would be.

And Jesus was raised again just like he predicted he would be. So it was all in his script. He knew exactly what was happening.

Number six, the physical appearances. You'll notice here, Matthew records Jesus appearing to two groups of people. First of all, he appeared to the women.

[ 8 : 07 ] And what did they do? They clung to his feet in worship. And then Jesus spoke to them. Now, that could only happen if Jesus was physically present in bodily form with these women.

And then Jesus appeared to his 11 disciples, verse 16 to 20. So they saw him with their own eyes. And Jesus spoke to them too.

And so they could hear his voice. And so the empty tomb is one compelling piece of evidence. But it was accompanied by the resurrected body of Jesus. And it wasn't some kind of disembodied spirit. It was a real physical body. Jesus was alive and well. You could see him. You could touch him. You could speak to him and hear him speak.

Now, number seven, there was a need here for an alternative explanation. And this is in verse 11 to 15. So in the reading, the religious leaders had hatched a plan, a conspiracy theory.

[ 9 : 11 ] And it was that the disciples stole the body when the guards were sleeping. And so they paid the guards to give this alternative explanation to the claim that Jesus rose from death.

Now, it might sound like a good argument against the resurrection. But it's actually a brilliant argument for it. Because it proves the tomb was empty, for one thing. And logic implies that if there really was no resurrection, then why go to such great lengths to make up a story to try and explain it

away?

And then number eight, the transformed lives. This is verse 17. The disciples' lives were transformed by Jesus' resurrection. And so we read, when they saw him, they worshipped him. Now, do you remember how the disciples deserted Jesus just before he died? And now they worship him. Why the change? Well, because they had encountered the risen Lord Jesus. Now, for first century Jews, they would never worship a human being as God, unless, of course, they were convinced that he was actually God.

[10:24] And what convinced them was the resurrection. So it transformed their lives from being scared disciples to being bold witnesses.

Now, later, these men were prepared to die for proclaiming the risen Christ. Now, would they suffer for a lie and die for a lie? Of course they wouldn't.

Nobody would. And so the resurrection transformed their lives. Number nine, the growth of early Christianity. This is verse 19 and 20. The resurrection of Jesus was the catalyst for the explosion of Christianity all over the world to reach where we are today.

Now, Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commission at the end of this passage to go and make disciples of all nations. And that is exactly what happened. And this little group of once disheartened disciples soon became a dominant force in the Roman Empire.

So Christianity became this movement that turned the world upside down. Rodney Stark, a social historian, professor of social sciences, says that the growth of the Christian church in the first three centuries is one of the most remarkable phenomena in human history.

[11:47] And so why did Christianity emerge so rapidly, virtually overnight, with such power that it revolutionized the world? How could that happen?

Answer, the resurrection of Jesus. The explosive growth of the Christian church is inexplicable, apart from this fact. And so can you see what Matthew has done here?

He has stacked up compelling evidence to prove how the resurrection of Jesus is historically reliable. So there's the time and place.

There's the woman eyewitnesses. There's the supernatural events. There's the empty tomb. There's the fulfilled predictions. There's the physical appearances. There's the need for an alternative explanation.

There's the transformed lives. There's the early growth of the church. And that is the reality of the resurrection. Which takes us to our second point, which is the challenge of the resurrection.

[12:46] And here's the thing. The resurrection challenges your mind. It challenges your heart. It challenges your life. And it challenges your destiny. So first of all, the resurrection challenges your mind.

Matthew's just shown us how the resurrection is intellectually credible. And so if you are here today and you deny or perhaps you doubt the resurrection, then the onus is on you to give a more plausible explanation.

An explanation that deals with the biblical evidence, the historical evidence, the circumstantial evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Because it's actually amazing how much you've got to believe to stop believing the resurrection.

And some may argue that, well, it was far easier for people back then to believe than for us modern, sophisticated people today to believe.

But that simply isn't true. The resurrection of Jesus was just as inconceivable to people back then as it is to people today. I wonder if you noticed that despite the evidence in the reading, verse 17, some doubted.

[13:59] Some worshipped. We read they worshipped, but some doubted. Now, isn't that fascinating? You can have all the evidence stacked up. You can even have the resurrected Jesus Christ right in front of you and speaking to you, but still doubt.

And so the resurrection challenges your mind. And that's why if you are genuinely open-minded, the evidence of the resurrection will lead you to the obvious conclusion.

And that is that Jesus rose from death. Secondly, the resurrection challenges your heart. The resurrection not only satisfies the reasoning of your mind, but it also meets the deepest longings of your heart.

Remember the response of the woman, verse 8 and 9, and then the disciples in verse 17 to Jesus. The women were still afraid, yet filled with joy. And when they met the risen Jesus, they bowed at

his feet and worshipped him.

And when the men saw him, well, they worshipped him too. The resurrection of Jesus challenged their hearts because they saw Jesus die. But the very fact that Jesus is now alive again proves that he was and is the Son of God.

[ 15 : 20 ] Meaning that he deserves and he is worthy of our worship. And so you can't just ignore Jesus as if he doesn't matter. Because if Jesus came to die for our sins on a cross and then rose again, the only right response to him is to bow down and to worship him.

The resurrection challenges your mind. It challenges your heart. And this is connected to the third one. The resurrection challenges your life. Jesus said, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Do you know what the resurrection tells us? Tells us that Jesus is Lord. And that's the deal.

Whether we like it or not. Whether we believe it or not.

The fact that Jesus says all authority is mine in heaven and on earth means that Jesus must be listened to. He is not only Lord, but Jesus is also judge.

One day when he will return, he will judge the world. And later on in the New Testament, we read that God has given proof of this to everyone by raising Jesus from the dead.

[ 16 : 34 ] And so the resurrection challenges your life because Jesus is Lord and Jesus is judge. But then listen to Jesus' final words at the end of our reading.

He said, and surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. Jesus promises to be with his people right till the very end.

And so when you believe in him, he'll be with you throughout your life. But he'll also see you through your death. Which means, finally, the resurrection challenges your destiny.

Because the resurrection of Jesus shouts out, death has been defeated. I wonder if you've noticed this interesting statistic. It is that the death rate is holding pretty steady at 100%.

One in one die. And so that's what we are all facing. And yet the resurrection of Jesus promises life after death.

[ 17 : 42 ] There is hope in the face of death. Because when Jesus Christ died and then rose again, he opened up the door to eternal life for us.

George Herbert, the poet, said, Death used to be an executioner. But the gospel has made him just a gardener. And so death, yes, it might take us down.

But the resurrection of Jesus raises us up. But Jesus, there is hope when you die. When I die. And so our response to Jesus actually has consequences for our destiny.

As to where and how we will spend it. And so can you see, just as we wrap things up, how the reality of the resurrection challenges everything.

Everything about us. Mind, heart, life, destiny. The earthquake that shook the earth on that first Easter Sunday morning continues to reverberate throughout history.

[ 18 : 48 ] Because the resurrection of Jesus has massive implications for us all. Because it is historically reliable, it is also existentially satisfying.

Because the resurrection will convince your mind. It will warm your heart. It will transform your life. And it will direct your destiny.

And that's why we're here today. It is to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That Jesus lived. That Jesus died. That Jesus rose again. That Jesus is alive today.

And one day, Jesus Christ will return. And so believing in Jesus Christ will change your life forever. And so can I encourage you this afternoon. Even plead with you to respond to the resurrection of Jesus.

[ 19 : 45 ] By believing in him. Believing in Jesus. Changes your mind. Changes your heart. Changes your life. Changes your destiny.

Changes your life. Whatever you've come from. Whatever you've done in the past. Jesus offers a new start. New resurrection life.

For all those who believe in him. That's why he came. And he offers it to us. He offers it to you today. If you have never received it.

That is why Easter truly is good news. Good news for every single one of us. So let's pray together.