

The resurrection of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Well, today we celebrate that Jesus is alive. So Jesus died on a cross, but Christianity claims that Jesus was raised from death.

And we call this the resurrection. And without the resurrection, there'd be no point in this meeting here today, because the resurrection is absolutely central to the Christian message.

So what I'd like to do this morning is look at the Gospel of Matthew, one of the eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus. And we'll read the end of Matthew's Gospel in Matthew chapter 28 and see his report of the resurrection of Jesus.

So Matthew chapter 28. After the Sabbath at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.

[1 : 0 5] His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the woman, Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.

He is not here. He has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee.

There you will see him. Now I have told you. So the woman hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Suddenly Jesus met them. Greetings, he said. They came to him, clasped his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, Do not be afraid.

Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. There they will see me. While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.

[2 : 1 6] When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, You are to say, His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.

If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble. So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed.

And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day. Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

[3 : 18] And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. That's Matthew chapter 28. And this is his report of the resurrection of Jesus.

Okay, as we look at Matthew's report of the resurrection of Jesus, we're going to ask two questions this morning. First question, is it true? Second question, does it matter? And the answer, spoiler alert, is yes.

Yes, the resurrection is true. It's historically reliable. And secondly, yes, the resurrection does matter. It matters for everybody. So let's see why.

First question, the resurrection, is it true? Notice that Matthew doesn't try to prove the resurrection of Jesus. He simply reports what happened. But as he does so, he stacks up the evidence for us.

And actually, he gives us a compelling case for the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. So what I'd like to do is to look at eight lines of evidence that run through this text.

[4 : 20] Don't worry, I'll be quick. So first line of evidence is the supernatural events. The events of that first Easter morning were out of the ordinary.

There was a violent earthquake and a dazzling angel who rolled away the stone. And all of this freaked out the guards who collapsed in shock. But then we are talking about the greatest miracle in world history.

And so it's hardly surprising that Jesus' resurrection was accompanied by other supernatural events. It's the first line of evidence, the supernatural events. The second is the empty tomb.

So the woman went to the tomb early in the morning. They found the stone rolled back and the tomb was empty. The angel told them that Jesus had risen. And so the empty tomb points to the risen Jesus.

So supernatural events, the empty tomb, third, the fulfilled predictions. The angel in the passage said to the woman, he is not here. He has risen, just as he said.

[5 : 26] Now Jesus had already predicted that he'd be killed. But he also predicted that he'd be raised to life. And so the resurrection is the fulfillment of what Jesus had already said would happen to him.

Jesus was killed, just like he said. And he rose again, just like he said. It was all in his script. So the supernatural events, the empty tomb, the fulfilled predictions.

Fourthly, the woman eyewitnesses. You would have heard from the story that the woman were the first people to meet the resurrected Jesus. So why is this important?

Well, it's important because in those days, the testimony of a woman didn't count. In Jewish, Greek and Roman culture, women weren't even able to give evidence in court.

And yet for the resurrection, the initial eyewitnesses were women. So why does Matthew include them? Well, it's because they were there. In other words, if Matthew or the other gospel writers were making up the story of the resurrection, they never dream of using women as the first eyewitnesses.

[6 : 35] It just wouldn't make sense. It would be too problematic for the church. They'd have no reason to write down that women were the first witnesses, unless, of course, they were the first witnesses.

Can you see? The fact that women were eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus is strong evidence that says this is no fabricated account. So there's the supernatural events.

There's the empty tomb. There's the fulfilled predictions. There's the woman eyewitnesses. And fifth, there are the physical appearances of Jesus. So Matthew records Jesus appearing to two groups of people.

First, he appeared to the woman and they clung to his feet and worshipped him. And then Jesus appeared to his 11 disciples and they saw him with their own eyes.

And so the empty tomb is one thing, but it was accompanied by the physical body of Jesus. So Jesus wasn't some kind of disembodied spirit and nor were these people hallucinating.

[7 : 38] Furthermore, we know that Jesus appeared physically over the course of 40 days to crowds as large as 500 people at a time. So Jesus had a physical body that people could see and touch.

So we've got the supernatural events. We've got the empty tomb. We've got the fulfilled predictions. We've got the woman eyewitnesses. We've got the physical appearances. And sixth, we've got the need for an alternative explanation.

So the religious leaders had hatched a plan. Their conspiracy theory was that the disciples stole the body while the guards were sleeping. Now, it might sound like a good argument against the resurrection, but it's actually a brilliant argument for the resurrection because it proves that there was definitely an empty tomb.

And so the logic is simple. If there was no resurrection, why go to such great lengths to try and explain it away? So the supernatural events, the empty tomb, the fulfilled predictions, the woman eyewitnesses, the physical appearances, the need for an alternative explanation, and number seven, the transformed lives.

The disciples of Jesus were transformed by his resurrection. We read in the passage, when they saw him, they worshipped him. Do you remember how the disciples deserted Jesus before he died?

[9 : 05] Now they worship him. Why? It's because they'd met the risen Jesus. There was no way first century Jews would worship a human being as God unless they were convinced he was God.

And what convinced them was that Jesus had risen from the dead, and it transformed their lives. It changed them from being scared disciples to being bold witnesses.

And they were even prepared to die for proclaiming the death and resurrection of Jesus. Now, would they suffer and die for a lie? They wouldn't.

Nobody would. So we've got the supernatural events. We've got the empty tomb. We've got the fulfilled predictions. We've got the woman eyewitnesses. We've got the physical appearances.

We've got the need for an alternative explanation. We've got the transformed lives. And eighth, we've got the explosion of the church. So the resurrection of Jesus was the catalyst for the growth of the church.

[10 : 08] Jesus gave his disciples the great commission to go and make disciples of all nations. And that is exactly what they did. So in such a short space of time, this little group grew to become such a dominant force in the Roman Empire.

Christianity was a movement that literally turned the world upside down. A phenomenon that is unparalleled in history. And still today, the church continues to advance across the globe.

So why did Christianity emerge so rapidly, virtually overnight, and with such power that it has changed the world? The answer, the resurrection of Jesus.

The explosion of the church is inexplicable apart from this fact. So, eight lines of evidence. The supernatural events. The empty tomb.

The fulfilled predictions. The woman eyewitnesses. The physical appearances. The need for an alternative explanation. The transformed lives. The explosion of the church.

[11 : 15] Matthew has stacked up plenty compelling evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. And yet sometimes people think that it's up to Christian believers to prove the resurrection.

But I'd suggest that those who deny or doubt the resurrection have got a far harder job to do of trying to explain it away. Because if you don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus, then you've got to produce some more plausible explanation for how Christianity has changed our world and continues to transform people's lives.

And it's an explanation that's got to stand up to the biblical evidence and the circumstantial evidence the resurrection provides. And it's a hard case to make.

In fact, it's one that we're still waiting to hear. It's actually amazing how much that you've got to believe to stop yourself believing that Jesus rose from the dead.

Because the evidence is all pointing in that direction that Jesus Christ died and that Jesus Christ rose again. So, first question. Is the resurrection true?

[12 : 23] Yes, Jesus is alive. Second question. Does it matter? Does the resurrection matter? Well, if the resurrection of Jesus Christ is true, then it matters for everybody.

But some might still be asking, how can I be expected to believe in the resurrection today? I mean, it happened so long ago. Surely it was far easier for people back then to believe in the resurrection than it is for us now.

As if the people back then were far more gullible and far more accepting of this kind of thing. This is what C.S. Lewis, the author, has called chronological snobbery.

That is, the assumption that we modern people are far more sophisticated and far more intelligent than ancient people. But we know it simply isn't true. The resurrection of Jesus was just as inconceivable to them as it is to us.

Just listen to how some of them reacted. We read in the passage, Now, isn't that fascinating?

[13 : 31] Some who saw the risen Lord Jesus Christ still doubted. So what's that saying? Well, it's saying that you can have all the evidence stacked up. You can even have the resurrected Jesus right in front of you, but still not be convinced.

And so all the evidence in the world doesn't give certainty to some people. And so perhaps you're tuning in today, and you know that's you.

You continue to doubt all of this. Then if so, please see why the resurrection of Jesus matters. Jesus indicates why in his closing words in Matthew chapter 28.

Jesus said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. So if Jesus has got all authority, it means that Jesus is Lord over all.

Jesus is Lord. And that's the deal, whether we like it or not, and whether we believe it or not. Because if he has all authority, then it means that you and I, we're accountable to him.

[14 : 40] So we can't live life ignoring or rejecting him, because one day as Lord, he will return as our judge. And God has given us proof of this by raising Jesus from the dead.

And so the resurrection matters, because Jesus is Lord and judge. But just listen to what else Jesus says. He says at the very end, And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.

As Jesus commissions his disciples to go and make more disciples, he promises to be with them. Jesus was promising his very self, his presence with his people, which means Jesus will be with his people throughout their lives and even through their deaths.

This is a promise, not just for those who were there at the time, but it's a promise for all who follow Jesus, which means that we can know Jesus, not just know about Jesus as a historical figure, but know Jesus as a person and enjoy his presence with us.

In other words, the death and resurrection of Jesus give us a personal relationship with him that will never end, which means that we can have hope even in the face of death.

[16 : 08] And isn't that what we need in the current coronavirus crisis? That's why the resurrection matters for every one of us, because we'll all die. And yet there's no need to fear death, because death can't touch us.

Listen to what George Herbert, the poet, said. He said death used to be an executioner, but the gospel has made him just a gardener. Death used to be an executioner, but the gospel has made him just a gardener.

So when Jesus Christ smashed through death, he opened up the door of eternal life for us. So death might take us down, but through the resurrection of Jesus, it will raise us up.

So when the resurrection gives us hope to face our greatest enemy, which is death, then it gives us the resources to face everything that comes our way in life. And so the resurrection of Jesus isn't just an objective truth.

It's also a subjective reality, because it impacts how we live right now. And it equips us for death, because the risen Lord Jesus is with us right now and always.

[17 : 19] Jesus died for our sins, and he rose for our salvation. Jesus was prepared to give up his life for us at the cross so that we might receive his resurrection life.

And so the resurrection of Jesus matters because it doesn't just convince your mind, it also melts your heart. So as we close today, Jesus lived, Jesus died, Jesus rose again, Jesus is alive today, and one day Jesus will return.

And that's why we celebrate what God has done, what God is doing, and what God will do through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for us. Even what he's doing for the whole creation is impacted through the resurrection of Jesus.

So please, I would encourage you, no, in fact, I would even plead with you, respond to the living Lord Jesus Christ. Trust in him, because the resurrection is true, and it matters for us all.

Let me pray. Thank you, our great God, for sending your son into this world to be our saviour. We thank you that he is the risen Lord who was raised from death.

[18 : 39] He is alive now, and he promises to be with his people forever. Thank you for the hope that the resurrection gives for our lives at this time, but also through death and on into eternity.

Help us not to turn away from Jesus Christ, but to trust in him and to share in his resurrection. We give our thanks and praise in Jesus' name.

Amen.