

He is Not Here, He is Risen

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[0 : 00] Amen. As we go along with the message, I'll read a few more verses out of that chapter.

But before we do that, obviously and appropriately, our subject this morning is the resurrection. This is Resurrection Sunday, and so I can't think of a more appropriate sermon or subject in a sermon than the resurrection.

And we do, of course, bring together several other things when we celebrate the resurrection. In fact, if I were to name the top, say, let's just say the top three events in God's redemptive history, I think they would be, first of all, the virgin birth.

We'd have it begin there. Or the doctrine of the incarnation. Tremendous, crucially, to Christianity. And you can't leave that out. There are many today that would suggest that we do leave that out, but it's not important.

In fact, it's not even true. That we don't need Christianity. We don't rather need the virgin birth than have Christianity, but it's absolutely crucial. If you have no virgin birth, you have no sinless Savior.

[1 : 39] Therefore, guess what? You have no salvation. No salvation. So I would name the incarnation first. And then the crucifixion, of course.

I mean, everybody knows, and I think most would admit, that the crucifixion is absolutely crucial to Christianity. If you don't have a cross, then you have no sacrifice for sin.

You have no atonement for sin, and therefore you have no salvation. So you can come to the same end, don't you? If you leave that out of God's redemptive plan. And then third, of course, would be the resurrection.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it is absolutely crucial. Just like virgin birth, where some would say that's not all that important. You can believe it if you want to, but you don't have to have it.

There are those also who would say that the resurrection is unimportant. Really, rather, it's not that crucial. But listen, people, without the resurrection, you have no acceptable sacrifice for sin.

[2 : 45] What I mean is, the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead is proof positive that God the Father accepted His sacrifice, His blood sacrifice for our sin. And so it's proof of the acceptable sacrifice that Jesus offered upon the cross in His own blood.

And so if you don't have a resurrection, you don't have an acceptable sacrifice for our sin, and guess what? No salvation. No salvation. Now, you see, the resurrection is not just icing on the cake. It's not, you know, some doctrine of lesser importance. The resurrection is crucial. Without the resurrection, there is no cake.

Not just the icing. No cake. No salvation. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15 and verse 1, I declare to you the gospel that is the good news of Jesus Christ, which I preach to you, which also you receive, in which you stand, by which also you are saved.

That's a pretty powerful sign. Paul said that he preached the gospel. They received the gospel, accepted it.

[4 : 08] They trusted the gospel. That's what it means to stand in it. And they were saved by the gospel. And what is this gospel? Well, Paul goes on to tell us, 1 Corinthians 15, 3, Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

He was buried and was raised on the third day according to the scriptures. There's the gospel. That's it in a nutshell. Christ died for our sins.

He died at our place. He was buried. Now, why is that so important? No, because it proves that the sacrifice was real. It was real.

It was not just some symbolic gesture. Some symbolic thing or some figurative thing. It was a real sacrifice. Jesus died on that cross and was buried.

And he was raised on the third day. And folks, all of our preaching and all of our teaching, all of our ministry is designed to either lead people to that foundational redemptive truth so that they might believe it and trust it.

[5 : 18] Or on the other side of it is to build upon that foundational truth so that people might live according to the implications of that truth. Everything we believe and teach and live hinges on the gospel of Jesus Christ, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Everything, everything depends upon that truth. And so we must preach it always and live it. I heard a story about a man who was visiting a particular city on business.

And the story's a little bit old because he was looking through the yellow pages. You don't do that anymore, do you? Look on your smartphone. But he was looking in yellow pages for a restaurant. And he came upon this listing, the Church of God Grip.

Weird. The Church of God Grip. And so his curiosity got the best of him. He just had to know about this, find out about this, so he dialed the number. And when they answered on the other end, he said to them, he said, Honestly, I'm not interested in eating at your restaurant, but I am curious about how you got your name.

And so the guy on the other end, he said, You don't have to apologize. That's okay. A lot of people called to find out about our name. And he said, We used to be a church. The Church of God. And after every service on Sunday morning, we would have a chicken dinner.

[6 : 46] And he said, First, it was for our membership, and then we invited people from the community, and eventually charged a kind of small fee for the chicken dinner.

And it became so popular that more and more people were interested in our chicken dinner, and less and less interested in our church. So we just, and since the church service kind of hindered our preparing of the chicken, we just simply closed the church and opened up a restaurant, a chicken restaurant, and we kept the name Church of God Green.

That's a true story, by the way. Can you imagine? Now, listen, if we ever stop preaching the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, and by the way, that includes all of the scripture, if we ever stop teaching the gospel and preaching the gospel and proclaiming the gospel, we might as well just sell hamburger service.

Or we might just close the church down and open up a museum to a forgotten religion, a neglected religion. The gospel is absolutely crucial.

It's all about the gospel. And all of our teaching leads, again, leads to the lost, understand it and believe it and trust it, or it teaches believers how to live out its implications in this life, really for eternity.

[8 : 08] All right, so, you know, the gospel includes these things. It's crucial. The incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and I could add a couple of more that are very crucial, I think.

The ascension, that is Jesus ascending to the right hand of the throne of the Father. And then we could add the consummation. Call it the consummation, the second coming of Christ.

But our focus this morning, of course, is the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul, again, said in 1 Corinthians 15, 4, he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

The resurrection. And it is that third day that we want to think about this morning. And so you have your Bibles open, hopefully, to Matthew chapter 28. And I want you to listen as I read verses 1 through 8.

Now, after the Sabbath, that would be Saturday, of course, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.

[9 : 22] And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone from the door and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning and his clothing was white as snow.

And the guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. But the angel answered and said to the women, Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.

He is not here, for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead.

And indeed, he is going before you into Galilee. There you will see him. Behold, I have told you. So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to bring his disciples' word.

Now, we're going to stop right there, although we'll look at a few verses that come after this. But what an amazing story. And I want us, from this text that I read just a moment ago, I want us to see

three things about Matthew's account of the resurrection.

[10:36] Now, there are many more than just three here. But we're going to focus on three things, and these three things primarily have us looking at these guards and the event that took place there while they were guarding the tomb.

Three things. The first one is this. A frightening scene. First thing, a frightening scene. And it really was.

So sometime between when these women set out to go to the tomb, but quite a bit before they arrived, something happened.

Something incredible happened there at the garden tomb of Jesus Christ on that Sunday morning. And it was something that, by the way, the eyewitnesses to this event would never forget.

Never forget. Now, who were these eyewitnesses? Well, they were Roman guards. And really, that makes it kind of unique. Among all of the other eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, these guys were Roman guards.

[11:42] Now, why guard the tomb? I mean, why guard it? You know, there was nothing of any value inside that tomb.

This was not the tomb of some king, you know, and with him all of his treasures were buried. In fact, to the Romans, there was no one of any importance buried in that tomb.

Just a poor Jewish carpenter. That's all. And so why guard this tomb? Well, you probably know, but we have to go back a few verses to discover that.

In fact, we have to go back a chapter in the previous chapter, chapter 27 and verse 62. And so if you've got your Bible still open, just look at it. On the next day, which followed the day of preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember while he, Jesus, was still alive, how that deceiver said, After three days I will rise.

Therefore, command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away and say to the people, He has risen from the dead, so the last deception will be worse than the first.

[13:03] Pilate said to them, You have a guard. Literally, here's your guard. Go your way, make it as secure as you know how. So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.

All right, so that's why. That's why we have Roman guards here at the tomb. There are at least two of them, probably three or more of them. And they had been assigned by Pilate, Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, and they had been assigned to guard the tomb of Jesus Christ just in case there would be some potential grave robbers, you know, just like the Jewish leadership said.

Now, little did they know, by the way, that they were just simply unwilling pawns in the hand of a sovereign God. Because these guards assigned to the tomb of Jesus would then become living testimonies, credible testimonies of the reality of Jesus' resurrection.

In fact, they would become the only unbiased, unbiased witnesses, eyewitnesses to the resurrection. So there they were, early Sunday morning, guarding the tomb of Jesus.

It was probably still dark. And suddenly, you know, the earth beneath their feet began to shake, and the earth was shuddering and shaking, and they looked in amazement as the massive stone that had been rolled in front of the opening to the grave and had been sealed there, as it rolled away.

[14:45] It just simply rolled out of the way. And then a spirit, a ghost, a spook, they most likely thought, came and sat down, kind of streaking out of heaven, sat down on that stone right before their very eyes.

Verse 3 says, His appearance was like lightning. His clothing was white as snow. Now, can you imagine seeing this?

And how did these macho Roman guards react to this? Well, verse 4 says, They shook for fear of him and became like dead men.

That's how they reacted. The word translated shook is from the Greek word seismos, from which we get our word seismic, by the way.

And, in fact, the word appears twice in the text. Back there in verse 2, when it says there was a great earthquake, that's megaseismos.

[15:50] That means a mega-earthquake. And then, of course, here in verse 4, the guards shook with fear. It's the same word. And so what happened?

Well, these guards have their own little personal earthquake on the inside when they saw what they saw. These brave soldiers, these battle-hardened fighting men, these highly trained Roman warriors quaked with fear.

And so would you. And then what? Well, verse 4, they became like dead men. Paralyzed with fear. That's the idea. So paralyzed with fear. So completely traumatized by what they felt and what they saw that they fell down to the ground out cold.

Unconscious. You know, if they had remained conscious, what would they have seen? They would have seen the living Jesus.

[16:56] They would have seen the one that most likely they had witnessed crucified just three days before. They would have seen him alive. if they had stayed conscious.

You know, there are a lot of people today who are just like these Roman soldiers. They are kind of the true walking dead.

Walking around like dead people. Dead spiritually. Meaning dead in trespasses and sins. And it's only the gospel of Jesus Christ that has the power to wake them up.

And so that they might believe in Jesus. And so we must proclaim it. The gospel of Jesus Christ. So first of all, a frightening scene. Second, a falsified story.

A falsified story. Verse, or chapter 28 opens with Mary Magdalene. We know who she was. And the other Mary.

[18:00] This is what Matthew says. They came to the tomb. They were on their way to the tomb. Now according to Mark, in Mark's gospel, the other Mary is the mother of James. One of the apostles.

James the Less, he was known as. And also according to Mark's gospel, there was a third woman in the group, Salome, who was the wife of Zebedee, who was the father of two apostles, brothers, James and John.

With this group of women. And then Luke also tells us about a fourth woman that was named Joanna. Joanna. Joanna was with this group. Joanna was the wife of Herod Antipas Stuart.

And Joanna, apparently, according to scripture, was healed by Jesus and became a follower of Christ. And she, along with a lot of other women, followed and ministered to Jesus and to the apostles as they traveled around Galilee and Judea.

So, you have these women then, a fairly large group of women, there may have even been others, who are on their way to the tomb and their desire is to anoint the body of Jesus with spices.

[19:10] Alright, so, they did not see what the Roman guards saw. I know it's a little cryptic there, we're just kind of moving along in Matthew's description of this, and so you have to kind of read between the lines.

They didn't see what these guards saw. And, and apparently, these guards regained consciousness and left the area before the women arrived.

And then, after these women arrived, all they saw was the stone rolled away and the empty, or the opening to the tomb. That's all they saw. Now, where did these soldiers go?

Where did they go after they regained their consciousness? Well, you have to skip ahead a little bit in the story and discover that in verse 11. So, look at verse 11. Some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened.

That's what they did. Came and reported all the things that had happened. And really, this is amazing. When you think about it, don't just pass over this. They, these guards described, according to the Bible here, all of what they saw.

[20:21] All of it. The earthquake, the stone rolled away, the angel coming and sitting on the stone, all of it. Now, you have to understand here that these guys were Romans.

These guys were Gentiles, not Jews. These guys were pagans. They were not, they were not believers in Yahweh God and certainly not followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

They were pagans. And so, these soldiers had absolutely no reason whatsoever to lie about this, to make this story up. And if they had had a reason to lie about this, you know, possibly to protect their position or maybe their rank or maybe even their lives, who knows?

I mean, they were assigned to guard the tomb and they didn't do a very good job. They might have even lost their lives. And so, if they had had a reason like that to make up a story, I think they surely could have come up with something a little bit more believable.

Right? But they didn't, did they? And here's my point. You would think that this kind of unprejudiced testimony would have then opened the eyes of the Jewish leadership to their sin, to their grand mistake, that they had crucified their Messiah.

[21 : 44] and they would have then been in deep remorse over what they had done to Jesus. But is that what happened?

Well, no. Look at it. Verse 12. When they, the chief priests, had assembled with the elders, that's probably just a reference to the whole Sanhedrin coming together, and consulted together, so they're consulting together, they gave, this is the conclusion, this is the decision they made, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, tell them his disciples came at night and stole him away while we slept.

And if this comes to the governor's ears, that would be Pilate, we will appease him and make you secure. That is, we'll cover for you. So just go out and tell this lie. So they took the money, Roman soldiers took the money, the bribe, and did as they were instructed, and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

That is, this lie is commonly reported to this day, and it is to this day. Now, folks, listen. There could not have been a clearer indication of the wickedness of their hearts and the hypocrisy of their hearts.

I mean, based upon the clear credibility, the clear, unbiased report of these Roman guards, these Jews should, again, have been in deep remorse for what they did.

[23 : 21] But instead, what? They choose to lie. They choose to spread a lie and thus reveal their wickedness and their hypocrisy.

You know, it was just a few days before this when Jesus was being crucified and He's hanging there on the cross that the Bible says, Matthew says, in chapter 27 and verse 42, this is what these Jewish leaders said then.

They said, if He be the King of Israel, that is, if He really is the Messiah, then let Him come down from the cross and we will believe Him. That's what they said.

They didn't really mean it. They had no intention of believing in Jesus, none whatsoever. Listen, the resurrection was a far greater miracle and therefore proof of His Messiahship than just merely coming down from the cross.

But they did not believe. You know, Jesus had already unmasked their hypocrisy. In fact, He did this a number of times throughout His preaching ministry, revealing their hypocrisy not only to themselves if they were willing to receive it but also to the people.

[24 : 42] And in Luke chapter 16, in fact, we studied this a few weeks ago, you have the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, remember? And the rich man is in hell and he calls out to Father Abraham, you know, and he pleads with Father Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead so that the rich man's brothers who are still alive so that they would believe and therefore not come to this place of torment.

And so he pleads with Father Abraham to do that. And you remember, don't you? Abraham said to Him, if they will not hear Moses and the prophets, which means if they will not hear and believe the Word of God, the revelation of God, neither will they be persuaded even though one rises from the dead.

So true. These Roman guards had no reason to lie about what happened there at the tomb, no reason whatsoever, but the Jewish leadership would not believe indeed.

They could not. They could not. I want to show you something very disturbing in John's Gospel in John 12, 37. You can turn to it if you'd like, but let me just go ahead and read it.

John 12, 37. Listen to this. But although He, that's Jesus, although Jesus had done so many signs before them, talking about the miracles, miracles, they're signs.

[26 : 18] That's the Greek for miracles. Simeon. It's a sign. Jesus didn't do miracles just to wow people or to, you know, fulfill some other desire that people might have.

He did them as signs. Signs. Signs to prove, to validate His true identity. And so He says here, He did so many signs before them.

They did not believe in Him. They did not believe. That the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which He spoke.

Lord, who has believed our report and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore, now listen to this, they could not believe.

That's frightening. Could not. Why? Well, we read on. Because Isaiah said again, He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts.

[27 : 17] Who has? God has. Blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn so that I should heal them.

And then at the end of it says this, These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory. That is, Jesus' glory and spoke of Him. God gave him foresight to see the glory of Christ and He spoke of Him. See, listen, there are people today sitting in pews just like these on this Easter Sunday in churches all around this nation right now and they are unbelieving.

They are unrepentant, unsaved. But listen, they don't have intellectual problems. That's not the problem.

It's not some proof, some proof of the claims of Scripture that they are looking for or needing and must have before they believe. It's not that. God has provided everything in His Word that you need to be saved.

[28 : 37] It's all right here. Believe it. Believe it. But many today would rather believe a lie as was the case in Jesus' day.

They would rather believe in a lie than to submit to the truth. They are very much like the people Paul wrote about in 2 Thessalonians 2, verse 10.

Those who believe in unrighteous deception. Those are the words that Paul used. They believe in unrighteous deception.

Why? Because they did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved. Now, people who have heard the truth, they have access to the truth, and they've heard it over and over again, but they did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved.

And for this reason, Paul goes on to say, God, who? God will send them strong delusion that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

[29 : 55] That's a frightening passage of Scripture. Paul believes specifically, talking about a time in history in the future. And yet, the same kind of thing is happening in the hearts and minds of people today and their spirits.

Rejecting the truth and at some point, not only will they not believe, they cannot believe. And so the Jews bribed the guards into telling this lie, right?

Lie about the resurrection. It's that famous grave robber lie. And there are still people who believe that today. And there are some other lies that are being told today and some are believing in those lies about the resurrection.

There is the famous swoon lie. Have you heard this one? That Jesus really didn't die on that cross. He just passed out. And he was so weak that they couldn't detect a heartbeat and so assumed he was dead.

And they buried him, sealed the tomb, but then in a few days he was revived. You know, he came back to consciousness and he walked out of the tomb.

[31 : 01] Not sure how he got that big stone out of the way, but he came back to life and all of his disciples saw it. There's that lie. There are many teaching that lie today still in seminaries.

And then there's the mass hypnotism lie. That Jesus was, you know, he just had hypnotized all of his disciples into believing a certain thing and then they went on and preached as if it were true. There's even one off the wall thought that Jesus and the disciples, they really loved to eat mushrooms. Mushrooms that caused them to hallucinate.

I'm serious about this, by the way. I'm not making this up. You know, some drug-induced hallucination lie. It's just amazing.

People would rather believe a lie than to believe the truth. But now, here's the amazing part. God used at least one of these Roman guards to help further prove the resurrection.

[32 : 14] He did. Did you know that God, none of the gospel accounts, none of the four gospels give us any details, any detailed description about the actual resurrection, that is, you know, the life coming back into the body of Jesus and his body coming through the grave cloths and Jesus walking out of the tomb.

None of the gospels give us any of that. They don't describe any of that. Why is that? Well, because there were no eyewitnesses to that part of the resurrection. And the closest we get is Matthew's account here, when he tells us about the earthquake and tells us about the stone rolling away and

also about this angel, you know, kind of streaking out of heaven like lightning. Now, how did Matthew know about that? He wasn't there. Well, he's just simply relating these details from an eyewitness. And the only eyewitnesses were these guards and they had been bribed handsomely to lie about it.

But, one of them must have defected. One of them must have talked.

And so, a Roman guard, a pagan, told the story of what he saw. He had no reason to lie about it, no reason to fabricate this story about an earthquake and about an angel, less of course.

[33 : 44] the story was true. Amazing. So, first, a frightening scene. Second, a falsified story.

And then, finally, a fantastic, factual statement. Fantastic, factual statement.

Verse 5, But the angel answered and 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, just as he said. I asked this question at the beginning of the sermon.

If I were to name the top events of God's redemptive history, history, then what would they be? And I gave the top three.

[34 : 45] The incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. Three crucial events. And you can't take any one of them out.

If you do, it all falls apart. And did you know that we have in the Bible three fantastic factual statements about each of these events?

Actually, more than three, but three that are so profound. Let me give them to you. John chapter 1, verse 29. John the Baptist, you know, he's there at the Jordan baptizing, preaching repentance.

And Jesus of Nazareth is coming. You know the story. And John sees Jesus coming, and he says, Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

That is, first and foremost, a bold statement to the fact of the incarnation. The Lamb of God has come.

[36 : 02] And then Luke 23 and verse 34. Jesus hanging on the cross near to breathing his last breath of air.

And he says, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they're doing. that's a fantastic, factual statement.

And that's the crucifixion. Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. They need a savior because they can't help themselves.

And then in our passage for today, Matthew 28 6, he is not here. For he is risen just as he said. He lives. He lives. Salvation to impart. You ask me how I know he lives.

[37 : 20] Venus demout. them out.