

I Believe

The Resurrection

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-15

Speaker: Joel Greenwood

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It's not like I intended for it to end up like this. I mean, what eight-year-old says, "Ooh, I want to end up on death row someday." And yet, eight is when it started. The passion for the underdog, the hatred for oppression. I mean standing in the field between the little guys and the bullies. That's a good thing, right? And yet, as I grew, so grew the hatred.

That field turned into a battleground, a battleground between my people and tyranny. Standing on the front lines was the man I'd become. Let's just say things got a little messy. Morals were compromised. People were hurt. Families. Families were broken. You know When I was eight, my mother was proud of me for defending the defenseless.

But somewhere along that road, that pride dissipated. She said, "Stop fighting the system and settle down. Find love," she said. "Find love." Yeah, that's code four. Maybe a wife will know what to do with them because I don't. She was worried. I get that now. I said she was weak and I couldn't tolerate weakness. So I couldn't tolerate her.

I walked away from my own mother. You know when you believe in something, you really believe passion will lead you down a road you never thought you'd go. It'll make you do things you never thought you'd do until you're in too deep and then it's impossible to, well, it doesn't matter anymore. This is who I am now.

A cheater, a thief, a murderer. Rabbits. Let's go. What? Do you want me to hop to my crucifixion? You'd like that, wouldn't you? Yes, I would. So this is it. No justice, no appeal, no new trial, just a swift execution, and nobody has to think about me anymore. This is what your honorable government does to those who dissent.

Those who try to right the wrongs. Rome's corruption will catch up with one of these days. You can count on that. Oh, get out of here, Barabbas. Get out of here. What do you mean? Isn't it time for your so-called justice? Yeah, but not for you. It's your lucky day. Luck? You call this luck? Listen to the crowd. They're not calling for you. They want Jesus. And Jesus seems willing to go. I don't understand. What's to understand?

Jesus is taking your punishment. He dies, you don't. Wait, does this Jesus know who I am? Does he know what I've done? Barabbas, listen. I try to get it this time. It doesn't matter what you think. It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter what you've done. Jesus is taking your place and you get a fresh start, even though you don't deserve it. Now get out of here. You're free.

So he took my place and I'm free. I'm free.

Every Easter, Christians around the world make the astounding claim that on the third day, Jesus rose again from the dead. This resurrection of Jesus is the center of the Christian faith. It's so important that without it, there is no Christian faith at all.

You see, it's essential to Christianity that Jesus rose from the dead for various reasons. One, it fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. The prophets of the Old Testament said that the Messiah would raise from the dead. Second, Jesus told His disciples that it was going to happen. So if He didn't raise from the dead, that just makes Him a liar. Third, our relationship with Jesus is not based on what we do, but it's based on what He did.

And if Jesus did not rise from the dead, that would be the end of the story and the end of our relationship. Finally, if Jesus didn't raise from the dead, there would be no hope. He would not have defeated death and sin. You see, it's only because of the resurrection that you and I have hope in a victory over sin and death. So the big question today then is, did Jesus actually come back to life after being dead?

If the answer is yes, then there's a pretty good chance that Jesus is who He said He is, and He deserves our praise. If the answer is no, then none of this matters, and you and I are just wasting our time. We're wasting our breath. We're wasting our energy. And so the question is, can the resurrection be proven or is it simply a matter of faith?

First, you should know that science cannot prove or disprove the resurrection of Jesus because we no longer have empirical access to the body of Jesus or any other relative physical evidence. So if you were here hoping that I was going to give a scientific proof to the resurrection, that's not possible. Science remains agnostic about such events because they can't be repeated or copied.

The resurrection was a one-time event phenomenon that does not conform to the regularity or repeatable pattern of most events that are studied in science. And so instead, the evidence that I offer to you today for the resurrection comes mainly from the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, as well as Paul's letters in the New Testament. This is the same type of evidence because some of you say, "Well, that's great.

I don't trust Scripture. I don't trust the Bible. We just have written evidence." This is the same type of evidence that we use to understand all of history, even outside of the Bible, is written evidence from eyewitnesses. In fact, there is so much evidence about the life of Jesus that even the popular agnostic, somebody that does not believe in God, Bart Ehrman writes this, "It is hard today to understand just how offensive the idea of a crucified Messiah would have been to most first-century Jews.

Since no one would have made up the idea of a crucified Messiah, Jesus must have really existed. He must have really raised messianic expectations, and he must really have been crucified." Here is a person that's agnostic saying all of these things must be true. This man named Jesus existed. He must have claimed to be the Messiah, and he must have been crucified.

And again, renowned atheist now turned deist philosopher Antony Flew says this: "The evidence for the resurrection is better than proclaimed miracles in any other religion. It's outstandingly different in quality and quantity." These are people that do not believe in God that are making these statements.

So I want to take some time today to look at a little bit of the evidence, understanding that the gap between the events of Jesus and they're being written, so the gap, the amount of years between when the events happened and when Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote about them is far less than for an old soldier today reporting about his Second World War experiences. Think about that. We often say, "Well, the time gap was so long, and they had all of this time to put in whatever they wanted to put in.

And can I also point out before we look at the text this morning that these authors, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul were not evil people who simply wanted to deceive everyone. Instead, all of these individuals risked life and limb for what they saw and believed. It was not merely written from what somebody told them. This is firsthand experience.

And then I want to close our time today, sharing with you why this is important because I don't stand up here just to prove to you why I believe what I believe. I want to share with you how it has changed me and how it

can change you. It's incredible. We are all Barabbas as we witnessed in the skit. All of us are guilty of sin. We're all guilty of doing things that are wrong. Every single one of us could stand up here and share all of the mistakes that we have made in our life.

But every one of us like Barabbas could be set free because Jesus paid our debt. And if we will confess our sins and believe in Him, Scripture says, "We will be saved." That's the good news of Easter Sunday. Let me pray, and then we will look at Matthew's account. Heavenly Father, we gather before you today, offering our praise and our worship of you because you are worthy.

You have saved us from death and sin and the grave, and you have offered us new life. That if we simply would confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that you raised Him from the dead, what we celebrate today, Scripture says we will be saved. Not because of our own effort, not because of our goodness, not because we attend church on Easter and Christmas.

Father, if we will confess, you will save us. So speak your truth to us today. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. As I mentioned, we have accounts of the crucifixion and the resurrection all four times in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but I want to look at Matthew chapter 28, verses 1 through 15. I encourage you, you can look at all of these accounts this afternoon, maybe as you go home, but I want to look at Matthew's specific account, Matthew 28, starting in verse 1.

Matthew says, "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. 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 women, '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 women hurried away from the tomb, afraid, yet filled with joy, and they 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 they reported to the priests everything that had happened.

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.

This is the first piece of evidence that we have as we look at Scripture, knowing that there are four ancient biographies of Jesus and they're all in agreement of what happened during that time. They were all written from eyewitness experience, firsthand experience. They were written and circulated, meaning that these stories that they were sharing were being circulated among other eyewitnesses that were still alive.

And they all agree that Jesus rose from the dead. The interesting thing about these stories circulating at that time period is that anybody in Jerusalem could have gone to the tomb to visit and verify that it was empty, yet there is not one account outside of Matthew sharing this here claiming that the disciples were somehow caught in a lie, that they had made this whole thing up.

So we have these four biographies of Jesus, ancient texts that are in agreement that Jesus was raised from the dead. The second proof that we have is that pagan and Jewish writers, pagan meaning non-Christian writers,

people that don't believe in Jesus as the Christ, as well as Jewish people who don't believe Jesus as the Messiah. They report that Christians believed that Jesus rose from the dead. Now notice they're not saying they believed that, but the Christians.

They were people that believed that Jesus rose from the dead. In other words, this was not done in secret. The disciples did not wait until it was too late to verify the validity of their claim. Many years later, the story wasn't added to the text that we have today, that somehow this happened. It wasn't a new part of the story. This singular event based on eyewitness account is the birth of Christianity.

This very event, the resurrection of Jesus is the birth of Christianity. Third, many of the principal eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus died because of their claim that Jesus was resurrected. We all know that people will die for a cause. There are stories all throughout history of people dying for a cause, but these people died for a set of facts.

They died because they knew it was true, and they refused to change their minds. These men and women had opportunities before their life was taken to claim it was false. It's a lie. We made it all up, but not a single person did. You see, while some people will die for false beliefs, no one will die for beliefs they know are false.

People will die for false beliefs, things they believe to be true but actually aren't true. But nobody dies for something they know to be false. Fourth, historical evidence this is even beyond Scripture, beyond the text, shows that the grave was empty. The grave clothes were folded and left neatly behind. The stone enclosing the tomb was rolled away. The body of Jesus was never found.

The grave was, in fact, guarded by Roman soldiers, and no one claimed to have stolen the body. The tomb was indeed empty. This was not argued not even by the Romans or the high Jewish officials. So instead, they had to make the claim, according to Matthew, that Jesus' followers must have stolen the body.

The grave had to be empty because these leaders would have wanted anything but the grave to be empty. If they could have presented the body of Jesus, they could have ended the whole thing, but they had no choice. And so they made up the lie. The disciples must have stolen the body. And so you say, "Okay, well, maybe they did. Now we go back to previous proofs. Every single one of them died believing that Jesus was resurrected. How many people would be willing to die for that lie?"

We move on. There are, not counting Paul, 11 recorded times that Jesus appeared to people proving that He was resurrected. As we look at Scripture, He appeared to men, He appeared to women, He appeared to individuals, He appeared to groups, and at least one time, Jesus in His resurrected form also appeared to a crowd of people. He appeared to people inside, outside, in different locations, and at different times of the day.

When Jesus appeared, He was physically touched, He was audibly heard, He was visually seen, and we even have testimony that He ate food in His resurrected body. And not one of these witnesses that share their faith in a resurrected Jesus believed that Jesus was going to rise from the dead until He actually rose from the dead. Not one person made that claim pre-seeing the resurrected Jesus.

Sixth, in the very place where Jesus died and was buried, there was an explosion of growth in the Christian movement that was centered on the resurrection. In the very place where history would confirm there was a man named Jesus who lived, he was crucified by the Romans, and a group of people claimed the resurrection is the exact place, the birthplace of Christianity, which was centered on the claim that the grave was empty and that Jesus had truly risen.

History also would show that this movement began just mere weeks after his death. And this explosion of growth in Christianity happened in the face of persecution. It happened in the face of hostility and opposition from civil and religious leaders. This was not something that people would just jump on the bandwagon and

say, "Oh, that sounds fun. Let's believe this." No, they were being persecuted. They were being killed for this belief. And yet, it exploded.

What would cause that explosion and growth? What would cause people to be willing to give up their lives to believe something is so true unless they actually saw the resurrected Jesus? Seventh, the death and resurrection of Jesus wasn't just a random event. Jesus predicted that he would die by crucifixion. He couldn't control this. He couldn't force the Romans to do this.

He couldn't force the Jewish people to turn them over to the Romans so that they could crucify Him. This death and resurrection Jesus claimed would vindicate who He was. He made the claim this would fulfill the prophecies that were written centuries earlier. Jesus made this claim that many of the disciples didn't even understand until later when they recognized what Jesus was talking about. And then finally, we have the conversion of Paul to Saul.

Paul's testimony can be regarded as that of a hostile witness, someone who had zero incentive to accept the Christian testimony about the resurrection unless he actually himself had an experience that could undoubtedly be interpreted as confirmation that Jesus was alive. And so we read about Saul's yeah, not Paul to Saul.

I just saw that. Saul to Paul. We'll change that for next service. We all have read and seen Saul's road to Damascus, and he has this experience with the risen Christ, and it totally transforms his life. And so as we look at this evidence, I ask the question, if Jesus actually conquered death, then this really does change everything. The resurrection changes everything. At least it does for me. It validates everything that he said.

If someone can predict their death and their resurrection and actually pull it off, I am going to listen to whatever that person says, right? I don't know anybody else that has done that. I'm going to read Scripture as truth because Jesus read Scripture as truth. He often would refer to the Old Testament in His teaching. It means I'm going to submit to Him. It means that I am going to have hope in life everlasting.

It means that I can handle the ups and the downs of life because I trust that those things will fade. It means that I'm going to live for Him because He died for me. It means that my worship is going to be real because He deserves my praise. If Jesus has been resurrected, it means that I'm going to do my best to love others because that is what He called me to do. This makes Christianity true.

If He was resurrected from the dead, it makes Christianity true and every other religion false. It means that I don't have to live in a world of relative truth. It's not a matter of you believe what you believe and I'll believe what I believe and we can both be right. That cannot be true. Scripture says that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. And no one comes to the Father except through Him.

That means if the resurrection is true, that I'm going to share the good news of Jesus with anyone who will listen. It means that my goals in life have changed. It means that my concern and my focus of what I am going to do are not on the here and now, but my focus instead shifts to eternity. If the resurrection is true, it changes everything.

Let me read this to you. The death and resurrection of Jesus takes place in the context of an overarching story that has deep and powerful insights into the human condition. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection took place in the context of a body of writings that have proved for millennia to be wise and insightful about the human condition.

These writings have been the basis for the development of science, human rights, and good government. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus took place in the context of a worldview that is unsurpassed in its breadth, depth, coherence, consistency, and emotional and rational power. Think about that.

The story of Jesus' resurrection cannot be separated from all of the other truth that we have. As we look at Scripture, it is amazing. If you think about this book that we have, Our Canon, the Bible that many of you have on your phones in physical form in front of you, that for millennia, that book has been used to radically transform lives and hearts.

The band is going to come up and play in a closing song this morning. And Jesus says to us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." You see, God still calls to us today.

His desire is to have a relationship with us, and it's never too late on this side of eternity. Again, I'm reminded of the thief on the cross that was next to Jesus, who even in those final moments of his life would surrender to Him, would believe that He was the Messiah. He was the Christ.

As we close this morning, the worship team is going to lead us in the song, "Oh, come to the altar." And often, this song has been used to think about the altars that are upfront in the church. But as the song was written, "Oh, come to the altar," thinking about this sacrifice of praise that we offer to Him, that when we do come to the altar, we are offering ourselves to God as a living sacrifice, saying, "I believe that you are the Lord.

I will confess my sins. I know I'm not perfect. I know I have not done everything right." And so in order to justify a just God, we need to be made pure. And the only way that that can happen is through Jesus. And so he came and sacrificed Himself on the cross, taking our place. It should have been me on that middle cross, paying the price for my sins.

But Jesus came to carry that debt so that I could be made free. And that same thing is offered to every one of you. That if you would confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. What an amazing truth. What an awesome God we serve.

The altars are open if you want to come and do business with God. Maybe you just want to thank Him for the salvation and the life that He's offered you. Maybe you need prayer as you're going through a difficult season right now. There will be people up on both sides. If you want prayer, you can just go and talk with them. They'd love to pray with you. If you just want to do your business with God, nobody will bother you if you come to the altars unless you ask somebody to pray with you. You can do your business with God. Let me close in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we gather today to celebrate and to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus. We put our faith and our hope in this one event. For without it, Paul says that we are to be the most pitied of all men because if it's not true, we are all wasting our time and our energy. But if it is true, it changes everything.

So Father, if there are those here today that have wrestled with this, wondered what this means for their life, what should they do if they do believe in the resurrection? My prayer is that they would proclaim it as true today. They would surrender themselves to you and offer the praise and the worship that you deserve because you are good. It's in Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.