

New Hope Sermon Why I Believe in The Resurrection of Jesus

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-15

We start today with Matthew's account of the Resurrection:

28 Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb.

2 Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. 3 His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. 4 The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint.

5 Then the angel spoke to the women. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying. 7 And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Remember what I have told you."

8 The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel's message. 9 And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to him, grasped his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid! Go tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there."

11 As the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and told the leading priests what had happened. 12 A meeting with the elders was called, and they decided to give the soldiers a large bribe.

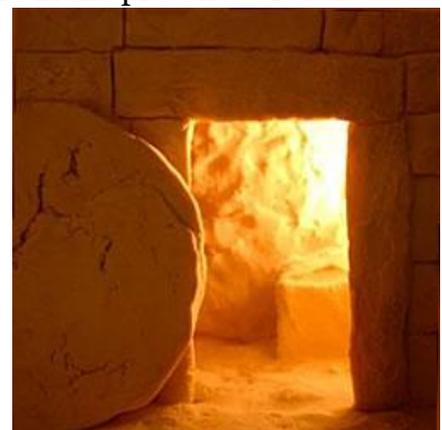
13 They told the soldiers, "You must say, 'Jesus' disciples came during the night while we were sleeping, and they stole his body.' 14 If the governor hears about it, we'll stand up for you so you won't get in trouble." 15 So the guards accepted the bribe and said what they were told to say. Their story spread widely among the Jews, and they still tell it today." Mt. 28:1-15

Introduction:

I wanted to use this version of the resurrection today because the resurrection is still not believed by billions of people. There are a number of reasons they choose not to believe. We talked about some of them last week as we explored Pilate's question 'What is Truth?' People dismiss God and miracles because they don't fit into a scientific, naturalistic worldview. Or they suppress the truth and worship themselves, or Satan has blinded their minds to *the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* (2 Cor 4:4) That was true of the chief priests who were willing to bribe the soldiers and lie to save face and their esteemed role as leaders among the Jews.

Actually, their concocted lie does not hold up under close scrutiny for several reasons. First, the tomb was sealed. It would have been extremely difficult to break that seal and enter. Second, it was heavily guarded by the soldiers and if the disciples had tried to break the seal and enter, even if the soldiers were sleeping, they would have awoken and the disciples would have to fight and overpower all of them. The disciples were not trained soldiers. The soldiers were. Third, the lie that the soldiers were sleeping was actually a death sentence on them for neglect of duty – that's why the priests said, 'we will cover for you' – literally, "we will satisfy him (the governor) and keep you out of trouble" (Mt. 28: 14). And lastly, the soldiers knew the chief priests' story was false. They had been guarding the tomb, quite awake mind you, when the violent earthquake came. That was shocking enough, but then they *saw the angel of the Lord who came, rolled back the stone and sat on it. They saw his appearance was like lightning and his clothes were white as snow.* They knew they were in the presence of God and the supernatural. In fact, Matthew adds, "*they were so afraid of the angel that they shook and became like dead men – they fainted right away.* Mt. 28:2-4

Even the women were terrified but the angel of the Lord told them – twice – do not be afraid. *I know 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.*" Since women's witness was generally not accepted as true in that day, Jesus Himself met these women on *their way and they fell at his feet*



and worshipped him and Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, there they will see me.' Mt. 28:9-10. As they went "with joy and trembling", some soldiers went to the high priest and the lie began.

The Pharisees' story rings true, although the lie doesn't. Money talks, doesn't it, beloved? And over the centuries the power of money, combined with special political interests, has corrupted justice and blocked truth to this day.

There are two questions I want to raise as we consider the resurrection today. The first is: **Did Jesus actually rise from the dead?** Master scholar/teacher John Stott helps us clarify the issues involved. *He said "I think it's important for us to be quite clear on what we're talking about. We're not talking about Jesus' survival, as a result of which we can say, "Well, he's alive," or, "He is living." No—we can say that about anybody who has died. When President Makarios of Cyprus died some years ago, his followers spray-painted the buildings in Cyprus with the words, MAKARIOS LIVES ! He hadn't risen from the dead, but his influence was still living. In Latin America, there are many students who have such confidence in Che Guevara as one of their leaders that they often sing and chant, "Che lives." Or, if I may mention D. L. Moody, he once said in New York in 1899, "Some day you'll read in the papers that Moody is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. At that moment I shall be more alive than I am today." But Moody was not talking about having been resurrected. He simply meant he would survive death. So the Resurrection is not just the survival of Jesus.*

Next, the resurrection of Jesus is not just his resuscitation. It doesn't mean that, having died, he was brought back again to this life, only to die again. C. S. Lewis expressed his great sympathy for Lazarus, who was resuscitated by Jesus, brought back to this life. C. S. Lewis said it was very hard on Lazarus, because he had to do his dying all over again. But Jesus didn't. We are talking not about his survival, nor about his resuscitation, but about his resurrection. God performed a dramatic act by which he arrested the process of decay, decomposition, and corruption; rescued Jesus out of the realm of death; and transformed his body into a new vehicle for his personality, so that he had a new power and was now immortal, never to die again. That is something new that never had happened before and has never yet happened since. (posted on Peaching Today 3/19/18 from John Stott's sermon 20 years ago: "[The Up-to-the-Minute Relevance of the Resurrection.](#)")

The Bible says that Jesus did rise from the dead. It's the cornerstone of our faith. It's been attested to throughout history, in fact, the gospels and Paul are clear about all those who met the risen Jesus after He actually rose.

Paul speaks of this to the Corinthians: What I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scripture and that he appeared to Peter and then to the Twelve. After that he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time." I Cor. 15:3-6

That same personal experience with the risen Christ is also the basis on which the Apostle John wrote: *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us." (I Jn. 1:1-2)* John is, of course, referring to Jesus Christ, whom he calls the Word at the very beginning of his gospel: *"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jn.1:1, 14*

Did Jesus actually rise from the dead? The witnesses at the tomb in history say, "Yes!"

That leads us to the second question: **Why do you believe in the resurrection?** As I posed this question to about 75 people from various cultures and places in the world, some noted the reliability of the Bible. Others spoke from personal experience, as did the Gospel writers and Paul.

The first responses were Jean (in the U.S.), Evan (from Indonesia), and Cathy Shi (from China). They all said, "Because the Bible says so." Jean continued "The accounts of the resurrection in the Bible all vary a bit which I think makes it all the more authentic...four different people's version). The disciples witnessed His resurrected body which could eat and go through walls. The disciples, who were men of integrity, were willing to give up their livelihoods, suffer persecution and even die for their faith. Without the resurrection, what good is our faith?...It is God's grace given to us so that we might know that we, too, will be raised to life. Didn't 500 people witness him in his resurrection state? (somewhere in Corinthians)?

Abigail, another Caucasian wrote: "I believe in the Resurrection for a few reasons--off the top of my head--

1. For the historical and biblical critical reasons N.T. Wright lays out regarding the reliability of Apostolic witness, and the strangeness of applying a hermeneutic of suspicion to a text that is otherwise in the historical genre.
2. I grew up coming to love Jesus as a living person. How can you love someone who isn't alive? And also, once you've committed your life to someone, it stops being about evidence and becomes about commitment.
3. The Resurrection is the very center of world history, and the very central miracle that sets the rules for redemption. If Jesus is resurrected from the dead, and we follow him in resurrection, it means that no evil has the final victory. All things that are lost or corrupted in this world can be flipped on their heads and, more than saved, made *even more beautiful*.
4. And I suppose one "accidental" reason I believe in the Resurrection because I've seen enough goodness in the world and my heart has been captivated by enough beauty that I *have* to believe pain (of which I've also experienced plenty) is worth it. And not for some Stoic or Karmic reason, either. It has to be genuinely redeemed and refined. The only story that makes that possible is the story of which the Resurrection is the centerpiece--the "eucatastrophe." The universe is governed by a truly *good* God. Goodness is truly more fundamental than evil. The Resurrection is the central moment when this truth is vindicated. In C.S.Lewis's words, I believe in the "deeper magic." Abigail Wooley (U.S.)

Alex in Hong Kong says: "My experience of Christ =More and more walking with God, I've seen how God leads me. I believe the resurrection is true. It's foundational to our faith, and I'm grateful to have this grace coming from God."

Amy Coles Nelson, an African American, said: "There is a gospel choir song we used to sing at Wheaton called "[He's Alive \(and I know it\)](#)" where in the bridge it says "He's alive, He's in my hand and my feet, He's alive, I can feel Him all over me". I too can feel God alive and at work in my heart and have seen my life and the lives of other people around me changed through His resurrection power (outside of their own capacity). So He lives and works IN and through His church body."

Vinod from India said: "Because it is the only proof we have of life beyond the grave. Christ's resurrection helps me hold a visual image of my own resurrection in the future. It helps me grasp eternity a little bit better."

Nancy Nasrallah, a Caucasian who married a Lebanese man said: " I came to believe in a Damascus Road kind of experience. I felt Jesus' presence one evening and immediately realized Who He was and What He did. I saw myself in the pit of my sins and realized that I couldn't get out without Him.

A very visual experience. My immediate response to your question was a song, followed by another song: 1) "If Heaven never were promised to me, neither God's promise to live eternally, it's been worth just having the Lord in my life, living in a world of darkness, You came and brought me the light." (Andrea Crouch) and 2). "On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking stand." (Edward Mote) Indeed!

Siew King, a pastor/teacher in Malaysia, said: "I would like to quote Paul's words in 1 Cor. 15:14-20 *"If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."*

"God's words, history of more than 2000 years, & many authentic proofs and testimonies have declared the truth of Christ's resurrection; and the least is my own experience of Jesus' love & work in my life. Thus, there is no reason for me not to believe."

Gail, a Caucasian said: The key for me is belief by the Spirit's enlightening to show me Jesus is the risen Lord who sat down at Father's right hand in heaven waiting to return. Phil.2

Reuben wrote from Nigeria: "I believe the resurrection of Jesus because I believe God has truly spoken through the scriptures."

Rayna Boone, an African American, said: "I believe because the Bible tells me so. I believe that the Bible is the infallible word of God. Also my personal encounters with God reinforces, confirms what the Bible says."

Stephanie Kraft, a missionary serving in global research around the world said: "Dear Friends, I believe in the resurrection because someone that I loved and trusted very much, my Mom, told me it was true. I've believed her, and Him, from the start."

Eileen Ng from Singapore said: "I believe that Jesus was raised from the dead because God showed himself to me in my life. He is real."

Similarly, Kiko Wilson from Japan (Megumi's sister) wrote: "I believe it's true because I've experienced his Holy Spirit's power and I just have assurance and conviction from that - also from seeing how absolutely true his word is, I trust that what God says about resurrection in the Bible is true as well.

Carol Dobson from Minnesota said, "I sense and know the Holy Spirit working in and through me as I continue to rely on God as much as possible. Jesus said the HS would be with us, and it's humbling to know God's love for us is so great that he would gift us this way!"

Brenda Russel from America writes: I'm a believer in the resurrection because of an event in the Bible and my personal life. As a child, I came to Christ after reading and studying Saul's transformation in Acts. It was clear to me after the vindictive stoning of Stephen and completely vile manner of Saul that God could and would forgive anything. Paul's could only have become Christian if Christ had been raised from the dead. The second was the deaths of my parents less than 3 years apart when I was in my 20s. I was convinced that my upbringing was Bible based and that everything I had been told and read was true. So, I would see my parents again and heaven was as real a place as the skin on the back of my hand. If Christ had not been resurrected, then it would have been the biggest fraud the world ever perpetrated from generation to generation, from language to language that has ever seen.

People aren't that smart. Christ is real and His presence is spoken aloud everyday. He's very much alive!"

Amy Killian, a Caucasian, writes: "God's power to triumph is displayed consistently throughout biblical history (an encouraging thought!) and in a way, the resurrection should have come as no surprise. Just about everyone, however, was surprised, and that in itself speaks to its reality. The testimony of all those surprised people (particularly for me the road to Emmaus account), the testimony of scripture both before and after, and the testimony and empowered lives of many saints, especially those who have touched my life closely (echoing Stephanie's comments) all provide the foundation for my belief in the resurrection."

And so the testimonies continue.

Does anyone else in the service here today want to add their testimony? Why do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? (More testimonies from church members)

With our effort to try to see aspects of the gospel from an Asian perspective this spring, I want to conclude with the testimony of Li Cheng, a noted Chinese scientist. We described some of his journey last week in the sermon "What is Truth?" Here's more of his struggle:

"Most Chinese, especially the educated, use their personal achievements in society to measure their value. They emphasize good virtues, good publications, the good fame. Their lives are wasted, they believe, if they are not able to leave something for society after they die. However, very few people in history are qualified to claim that they accomplished these achievements. ...

From a postdoctoral position to a professorship, I reached several stages of objectives and I also obtained the five things most desired by highly educated people: the mortarboard, automobiles, a wife, a house, and children. Even though I possessed all these, however, I did not feel relaxed and content. I still felt indescribable pressures coming from all directions. Before I believed in Jesus, I had emptiness and frustrations deep in my heart that I could hardly describe." (Li Cheng, *Song of a Wanderer*, pp. 357, 357.)

But when Cheng read American cardiologist Maurice Rawlings' book *Beyond Death's Door*, it convinced him that there was a spiritual world beyond death and a Creator God whom people would meet. A friend called and told him that when her father was dying in China and she couldn't go see him, she asked God to see him one last time. One night, just before he died, she saw her father in her dream. When she described to her mother what her father's countenance looked like in her dream and what he was wearing, her mother said her dream was just like the actual event. That convinced Cheng that God was real. From there he read in the Bible all the accounts of Jesus' life and death, and the number of renowned scientists who have believed in Christ. He realized that "following the thoughts of God " is probably the secret to success for many of the giants of scientific research." (Cheng, p. 395). He came to believe that Christ's resurrection was true and trusted in Christ for his own life.

Then he began to experience the miracle of new life and transformation by the Spirit. He says: "Now I know the true meaning of life; I am as small as a grain of sand; however, in the eyes of God I am important. He paid a great price to purchase me. He personally chose me to be His child. United with God and the Creator of the universe, I have received life for eternity. The fulfillment I have inside me is difficult to describe in words. The sense of emptiness and unrest is gone. There is now an everlasting hope and I fear no more. I even dare to face death now...I do not have to worry about tomorrow when a true and living God is with me. Peace and joy reign in my heart....In the past I struggled with the bondage of worldly lusts, suffering and the burden of worry and anguish. Today, I have faith in the one true God and have begun the eternal journey. Under the wisdom and illumination of the Holy Spirit, I am gradually growing...(Cheng, pp.392-399). I first approached God from reason and science. After trusting God, He allowed me to experience Him personally. I started to taste God's love, majesty, power and faithfulness, and to feel the peace, assurance, joy and

sweetness of the Lord. In my heart He is no longer just the God of reason but a God who is intimately involved in my daily life.” (Cheng, p. 422). That personal testimony is the basis of his book *Song of a Wanderer*. It is a must read for any intellectual scientist, particularly for other Chinese intellectuals raised in the atheistic, scientific worldview of China.

“Jesus is alive; I have seen him with my own eyes. He said, ‘Hello, Mary’, and I said ‘Hello Jesus.’ He was there and I was there. We laughed and cried.” That was Mary’s testimony in the play *Early One morning* that Mary and Luke and Salome performed last week. And it has still been the experience of believers over the centuries ever since.

This was the same story of the blind man in John 9. He had been born blind, yet because Jesus healed him on the Sabbath, the religious leaders couldn’t fathom it. They began to question him, trying to discredit Jesus and the miracle. The man wasn’t trained to debate them but he wasn’t intimidated by them either. When they accused Jesus of being in a sinner because he had healed on the Sabbath (John 9:13), the man replied, “Whether he’s a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” (John 9:25). And that line of witness continues to be irrefutable evidence of Christ’s claims and his resurrection ever since Jesus came, died, rose, and ascended.

Beloved, there is amazing scientific evidence for Christ’ resurrection. There are Biblical prophecies that were fulfilled to the letter in his death and resurrection; there is the testimony of over 500 people who actually saw Jesus in his post-resurrection appearances and there are the transformed lives of the multiple millions who have believed in Him since then – down through the centuries – including me.

I believe in the resurrection of Jesus because of all these external evidences, the fulfilled Biblical prophecies and the transformation of Christian believers through the centuries. But also because He has transformed my life. I know what it is like to go from fear to faith, from doubt to trust, from darkness to light, from insignificance to an amazing life purpose, from being trapped in my own limitations and failures to being freed from all that had and could enchain me because Jesus has defeated Satan and given us His life, His victory, His peace, His power, purpose and His hope. That is the key to the resurrection – it provides the source of our life in God, our power and strength (His resurrection strength), our victory over Satan in every way that Satan tries to undo us and destroy the works of God, the peace and assurance of His presence and the hope of being with Him forever.

He lives, beloved, He lives. So let’s repeat the acclaim at the beginning of the service:

Leader: Christ is risen!

People: He is risen indeed!

Let’s say it again:

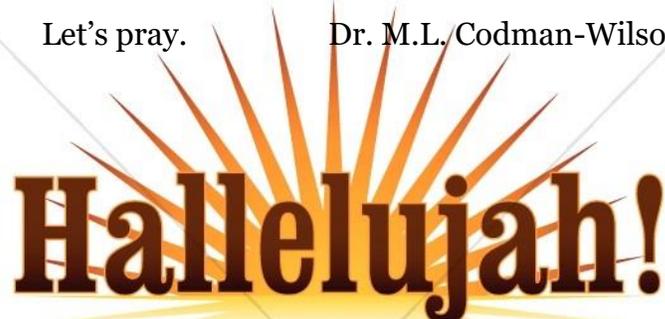
Leader: Christ is risen!

People: He is risen indeed!

Two of the songs that describe this personal encounter for me are what we will sing now: *I Come to the Garden Alone* and *Because He Lives*. Let’s stand and sing those songs of faith and celebration with joy.

Let’s pray.

Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson Easter 2018 – 4/1/18



Hallelujah!