

Easter Changes Everything: Matthew 28:1-28:8

Portions adapted from a sermon by Jim Kilson SermonCentral.Com

Tomb, You shall not hold Him longer,
Death is strong, but life is stronger
Stronger than the dark, the light;
Stronger than the wrong, the right;
Faith and hope triumphant say; Christ will rise on Easter Day.

While the patient earth lies waiting
Till the morning shall be breaking
Shuddering beneath the burden dread
Of her Master, cold and dead,
Hark! she hears the angels say; Christ will rise on Easter Day.

And when sunrise smites the mountains
Pouring light from heavenly fountains
Then the earth blooms out to greet
Once again the blessed feet;
And her countless voices say; Christ has risen on Easter Day.

(Author: Phillips Brooks)

A man went on vacation to the Holy Land with his wife and her mother. While in Israel, the mother-in-law died from a heart attack. The couple went to a local undertaker, who explained that they could either ship the body home which would cost more than \$6,000, or they could bury her right there in the Holy Land for only \$350. The man said, "*We'll ship her home*".

"Surprised, the undertaker responded, "Are you sure? That's an awfully big expense, and we can do a very nice burial right here." The man said, "*Look, 2000 years ago they buried a guy here and three days later He rose from the dead. I just can't take that chance.*"

This morning, circumstances perhaps more than ever before find us like those first disciples of Jesus who, following His death, locked themselves away in fear for their lives. Unlike them, we hide not so much from an angry mob, but from a silent and capricious killer passing quietly among us leaving some apparently untouched, others slightly or deeply ill and still others unexplainably dead. Fear once again walks the streets.

What then can we learn today from this annual celebration of Christ's return to life that will help us face our life tomorrow? The answer now is surprisingly the same as it was back then, even though it happened some 2,000 year ago; **Christ's resurrection from the dead changes everything.** So let us once again rehearse the story that changed peoples' lives those first Easter mornings so as to strengthen our own faith in

the God of miracle, the assurance of our salvation and our hope for a new life with Christ.

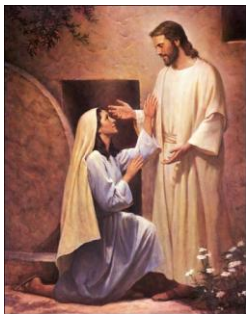
In our imagination let's travel back to that third day following the crucifixion of Christ Jesus. The God of all creation had been executed for the sins of all creation. His followers have scattered, locking themselves away behind closed doors, their faith shaken to the core. They knew from His own words that this was going to happen... but no one can ever properly prepare for an event of this magnitude.

But what a liberating surprise awaits them. As promised, Christ conquered the grave and as He rose to seek out and greet His disciples, not only were their lives changed forever, but also were lives in the rest of the world for the rest of all time, right down to yours and my life today.

As Paul wrote to doubting Corinthian Christians so many years ago, *If Christ did not rise from the dead then we [who call ourselves Christian] would be of all people most to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:19)*. But in fact Christ did rise from the dead and that changes EVERYTHING.

Today let us visit with three of Jesus' closest companions
Three of the very first people to have life dramatically change
When they once again come face to face with the risen Jesus.

The first of these is **Mary Magdalene**



She has received a lot of press in recent years. In 2000, Dan Brown wrote a book titled the Davinci Code, which was complete fiction though he presented it as fact. In 2006 it was turned into a block buster movie in which he claimed - contrary to every Biblical and church writing ever since - that Mary Magdalene even had a child by Jesus. Then in 2007 the Discovery Channel aired a spurious documentary suggesting that Mary Magdalene was buried in "The family tomb of Jesus," right beside the bones of Jesus. Which makes the story of her encounter with the risen Jesus mighty strange.

Mary did go looking for a dead body – a sack of bones if you would – but what she unexpectedly found was an empty tome – no bones about it. After which she met the very much alive Jesus! Her savior risen from the grave. This meeting with Mary and for us changed everything because Jesus' resurrection **VALIDATES OUR HOPE OF SALVATION**

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

Mary had already had one life changing experience with Jesus. Scripture tells us that at one time she was possessed by 7 demons (Luke 8:2). Can you imagine her hopelessness, compounded by fear ... convulsions, day and night at the hands of these demons.

One day however she met a man who changed her life, it was Jesus who cast out those demons and gave her back the life she had lost. From that time forward she followed him. Imagine her now, headed toward a tomb expecting to finish the preparations they had earlier begun on His dead body.

Walking along that dark morning, Mary thought of her own shattered dreams, her lost hopes. She like the others must have been ecstatic when Jesus came riding into Jerusalem, hearing the shouts of "Hosanna" filling the air.

Likewise she was probably filled with an equal amount of shock to discover that Jesus, this man who had saved her life had been arrested and put on trial for His own life.

Bitter must have been her tears at the foot of the cross watching the soldiers crucify Him... asking WHY!!! Her hope shattered, gone, in an instant – as Jesus bowed His head and died. The one who had saved her was now dead.

Gradually, the jeering crowds and the merely curious departed leaving only the soldiers forced to guard those dying prisoners and a small cluster of women, including Mary, who lingered nearby for the rest of the day until just before evening when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus the Pharisee took their master's dead body down from the cross and carried it to a nearby tomb.

Now three days after His death, her tears may have stopped but all she felt was emptiness and despair. She and the other Mary came looking for a dead friend, but on this morning, when God rolled away the stone for the two women, that changed everything.



They were not prepared for what would happen next.

- First there was a great tremor as an angel of the Lord, blindingly bright, came and rolled the stone away then casually sat on top of it waiting the two women's approach.
- The guards on duty were so afraid they passed out, became like dead men.
- Then the angel addressed the women, *Do not*

be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He has been raised, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay.

Ask yourself this question, **why did the angel roll away the stone?** Jesus was already gone, He didn't need help getting out.

The stone was rolled away, not so Jesus could get out but so that Mary could get in – which gave her a new found sense of her lasting salvation. The same Jesus who gave such assurance to Mary also validates our hope of salvation.

Christ by His actions saved Mary not once but twice - Physically & Spiritually. Seeing the empty tomb, validated both the salvation that she had already gained through Christ and the future salvation He had promised her would one day come. He can do the same for us as well today

Listen to Christ's earlier words to that other Mary who was also walking to the tomb that morning (Mary was a very common name – this one was the sister to Martha and Lazarus). Several days earlier standing in front of her brother's grave, Jesus had said to this Mary, *'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'* She said to him, *'Yes, Lord, I believe'* (John 11:25). Having then watched her own brother restored to life, I am guessing that this Mary more than the others was not too surprised to find an empty tomb.

That day, an angel had physically rolled a stone out of their way. These days God's Holy Spirit, sent to us by Jesus, comes to roll away the stones of fear, dread, uncertainty, from our lives (John 10:10) ***Jesus had said: I am come that they may have life and have it to the fullest!***

Let me ask you – how full is your life of joy and hope? It should be overflowing today! Because Jesus' resurrection validates yours and my hope of salvation – just as it did for both Marys that first Easter morning.

The next person we need to meet this morning is a man named **Thomas**, (one of the twelve Apostles). His meeting with the resurrected Jesus **VALIDATES OUR FAITH IN THE GOD OF MIRACLES**

I like Thomas – he's my kind of guy – I think history has given him a bum rap.

Thomas was a realist: *if I can see it and feel it, then its real.*

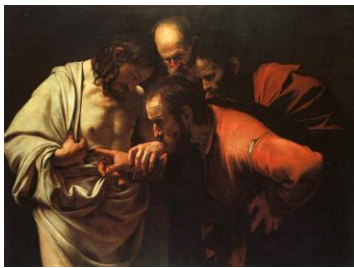
Sure – he saw Jesus do some amazing things when He was alive ... but how is a dead man going to bring himself back to life (even Houdini couldn't do that!).

Thomas would fit right in with the society that we live in today... I'll believe it if I can see it. He would probably be from Missouri – *the "Show Me" State*.

Chapter 20 of John's gospel records Jesus' first upper room meeting with the assembled disciples, for some reason Thomas wasn't there.

When he returns – after Jesus had left – they excitedly tell him that Jesus has risen, Jesus is alive again! But he refuses to believe it ("you just missed him!")

NO. Thomas wanted "proof", '*Unless I see the mark of the nails in His hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in His side, I will not believe.*' (John 20:25).



Thomas got his proof. A week later, Jesus returns to the disciples and this time Thomas is with them.

After quieting the other apostles – "*Peace be with you*" – Jesus turns to Thomas with this invitation, '*Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. **Do not doubt but believe.***' (John 20:27)

Thomas saw the truth for himself and his response, shows it (John 20:28)

Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'

Believing in Christ requires faith

Many people today are like Thomas, what they have not seen they refuse to believe. Just like those "supposed theologians" who narrated **The Family Tomb of Jesus.**

They open the program intentionally misquoting the Bible – that there was indeed a rumor circulating in Jerusalem that the disciples had stolen the Body (Matthew 28:11-15). Then they imply that the four Gospel authors and the other disciples were all liars – because they maintain that is what probably did happen! Strangely, for the rest of the program, they then refer back to these same disciples whom they had earlier insinuated were liars for corroboration of their "scientific findings."

You can't have it both ways people! Either these Apostles and the members of Jesus' family got together and concocted the biggest lie of all time – one for which they willingly died - for who knows what reasons – or that there could be no bones in the family tomb Jesus, because He is still using them.

Our Thomas – the realist of the bunch – met a very much alive Jesus who offered to show him His wounds as proof of who He was – and that He had truly come back from the dead.

When it comes to the resurrection of Jesus, as unbelievable as this seems, it stands out as an event that is more faith building, than faith shaking

When we examine the evidence, it is easier to believe that Jesus rose from the dead than believe He didn't. the Apostle Paul actually encouraged doubting Corinthian Christians to go to Jerusalem and interview over 500 witnesses who would gladly testify that they saw Jesus alive again – after they saw him die (1 Corinthians 15:16).

The fact that Jesus did rise from the dead, also builds our faith as well. Because faith is just as indispensable of an element in our Christian lives as it was for those first disciples. Scripture reminds us, *without faith it is impossible to please God* (Hebrews 11:6).

Jesus made seemingly unbelievable claims about His deity, His ability to forgive sins, and our hope for eternal life. **His resurrection validates each of these claims,**

Look at what Jesus next told Thomas, **'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe'** (John 20:29).

Surprise! At that time, Jesus was talking about us! We weren't there 2000 years ago, that doesn't mean that it didn't happen. We can't talk to 500 witnesses, but we can read the Biblical accounts, research 2,000 years of church history, and listen to the quiet voice of the Holy Spirit – deep within – reminding us that Christ has risen indeed!

There was another **Thomas**, who had very strong doubts about Jesus. Thomas Jefferson also considered himself a realist. He just could not accept the miraculous elements of Scripture. He respected Jesus as a good man, even a great moral teacher, but he refused to believe that Jesus had returned to life after His death.

Thomas Jefferson went on to personally edit his own version of the New Testament in which all the supernatural references were physically cut from the pages. This is how Jefferson's Gospel of Matthew closes:

So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. (Matthew 27:59 – 60)

How sad that so many still refuse to believe that Jesus rose from the grave.

Just as the resurrection of Jesus validated Mary's hope of salvation and Thomas' faith in the God of miracles, it validates ours as well. Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed, all died and were buried where they remain to this day. You can visit their graves if you wish ... "We serve a RISEN savior," not one whose bones they could not find in His supposed family tomb.

The third person we need to meet this morning is **Peter**, his experience with the risen Jesus shows us how the resurrection... **VALIDATES OUR HOPE FOR A NEW LIFE**

Several times after His resurrection, Jesus met with the Apostles continuing to prove that He was very much alive. But He kept coming and going, He wasn't always with them as He had been in the past. Which left Peter with plenty of time on his hands to think of what he had done – what he had sworn he would never do – the night Jesus was arrested!

I am sure that Peter was equally excited that Jesus had returned to life. But Peter knew – at least for him – that it was still finished! Sure all the other disciples except for John had run away and hid. But only he, when challenged had then sworn – three times – that he never knew this Jesus.

Well he was a fisherman by trade, so he might as well get back to the job he knew; Peter even got some of the other disciples to go fishing with him (John 21).

We read that they fished all night without catching anything, by morning they were getting mighty discouraged; unlucky as Apostles, now they are even unlucky as fishermen!

But just as morning breaks, there's this man standing on the shore, shouting out to them "*cast your nets on the other side of the boat.*" Well why not, nothing they were doing had worked; perhaps he could see something that they couldn't. So they cast their net on the other side and netted more fish than they could haul in.

Peter knew who it was, he had seen this trick before. He was so full of joy that he jumped out of the boat and swam to Jesus, leaving the others to drag the net to shore.



Just seeing Jesus had given Peter renewed hope for his life. His denials of Jesus were still probably fresh in his mind, but he had repented and come back to Jesus. If nothing else, he could at least be with his friend, still he figured he was no longer in the inner circle – and he had definitely lost his Apostleship!

But after this morning meal, on a private walk down the lakeshore with his resurrected savior, Jesus asks Peter three times: **Do you love me? If so go feed my sheep.** Three affirmations to offset his earlier three denials. This was what Peter needed to hear, to know that he was still part of the ministry with his savior and friend.

Like Peter, we all stumble and fail from time to time.
Like Peter, the Lord offers us grace, not punishment.

Like Peter, each of us find in Jesus' resurrection hope for a new life.

When we understand the extent of His grace and love and willingness to help us start over, it makes us want to serve God even more.

Peter went from being a bragging coward on the night of Jesus' arrest to preaching the first gospel sermon on the day of Pentecost. He ended his life leading the infant church, from the capital city of Rome, in changing the rest of human history.

Like Mary, Like Thomas, Like Peter

Because Jesus lives... We can have an assured hope of our salvation.
Because Jesus lives ... We can have faith in the God of miracles
Because Jesus lives... We can live a brand new life in Christ

These three people met the risen Lord and it changed everything.

We can see what the resurrection meant to each of them, the question is, **what does the resurrection of Jesus mean to you this morning?**

For some Christ's resurrection means everything, you've staked your life now and for all eternity on Jesus...don't give up.

for others the resurrection is still something to ponder, don't doubt, listen to the witnesses and listen to your heart ... believe!

Still sadly for some others the resurrection means absolutely nothing.
I hope that this is no one here today.

Let's pray about this.

Matthew 28:1-8

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He has been raised, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has been raised from the dead, and indeed He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." This is my message for you.' So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.