

The First Day of the Week

Matthew 28:1-10

No resurrection, no gospel. For the resurrection is the gospel. As Paul writes,

1Cor. 15:1 “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,”

I am quite certain that you believe those words, so I want to use them to encourage you today. I want to encourage you with a straight-forward proclamation of this most important doctrine of our Christian faith. The doctrine of the resurrection. Let me read a definition of that doctrine as it is found in our Westminster Confession of Faith,

WCF 8:4 “This office [of a mediator] the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake; which that He might discharge, He was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfil it; endured most grievous torments immediately in His soul, and most painful sufferings in His body; was crucified, and died, was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption. On the third day He arose from the dead, with the same body in which He suffered, with which also he ascended into heaven, and there sits at the right hand of His Father, making intercession, and shall return, to judge men and angels, at the end of the world.”

Or, in the simpler words of the Apostles’ Creed, “He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.”

Now, to believe that, you have to believe in supernatural power. You have to believe that God’s power goes beyond the power of man, beyond the powers of nature. For there is no natural power capable of raising a man from the dead. But the cardinal doctrine of our faith is that,

I. BY SUPERNATURAL POWER, JESUS WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD.

The discovery of that resurrection was made early on Sunday morning, the day after the Jewish sabbath. It was the first day of the week.

v.1

And what they found is unmistakable. They found an empty tomb.

v.6

Now, I don’t often want to sound this judgmental, but if you don’t believe that, you aren’t a Christian. If you don’t believe that, you won’t go to heaven. All religions are not the same. All religions don’t lead to the same place. For there is only one true religion, Christianity, and ultimately only one false religion, a religion of works salvation which goes under the names of every other religion which man has invented.

Before we study this most crucial doctrine of that one true religion, let me remind you just how practical the doctrine of the resurrection really is. Let me read the final verse of 1 Cor.15, that great chapter explaining the resurrection. Here is Paul’s own application of the doctrine of the resurrection,

1Cor. 15:58 “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast,

immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

Keep that application in mind as we study the supernatural power of the resurrection today, and notice first of all that,

A. The supernatural power of the resurrection was unexpected.

This really is quite surprising, for it was clearly predicted. But the immediate followers of Jesus weren’t expecting it.

v.1

Now, we will praise these women for their faithfulness in a few moments. They were godly faithful women, whose faithfulness was far superior at this moment than even that of the disciples, for it was the women who had stayed at Jesus’ side throughout the ordeal of his crucifixion. The disciples had fled. We read in,

Matt. 27:5 “And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, 56 among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.”

Further, we read that,

Luke 23:54 “That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near. 55 And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. 56 Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment. 24:1 Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared.”

So what were they coming to do? Not to witness the resurrection, but to anoint Jesus’ body! His dead body. They

came to anoint his corpse!

Mark 16:1 “Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him.”

That anointing, in Hebrew custom, was for comfort in mourning the dead in the hopes of the resurrection. The bodies of those who had died were treated well and cared for well, in the expectation of the resurrection. So there was, no doubt, that hope. But the bodily resurrection on the third day was not what they expected! They did not expect nor anticipate that the tomb would be empty that Sunday morning.

They should have. As we read in,

Matt. 16:21 “From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.”

Or, John 2:19 Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. 20 Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.”

Even after three years of public teaching, the supernatural power of the resurrection was unexpected. Yet that power was unmistakable, for,

B. The supernatural power of the resurrection was announced with an earthquake.

v.2

Now, an earthquake had also announced Jesus' actual death.

Matt. 27:51 "Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split"

So it will be that earthquakes would announce God's judgment upon the nation of Israel and will also announce Jesus' second coming in triumph. The point is, when God acts in history, he makes himself known. And at this moment, it is even appropriate to think of the whole earth shaking in connection with the triumph of Jesus upon the cross. No doubt that the time of the earthquake was the precise time of the actual resurrection. Such supernatural power.

Can you image announcing your presence with an earthquake? But even that didn't end God's revelation of his supernatural power. We see an angel.

C. The supernatural power of the resurrection was revealed by the appearance of an angel.

v.2-4

Don't be confused when Luke mentions two angels and John mentions none. Obviously, there were two, or at least two, for Luke is not in error. Matthew sees fit only to mention one, perhaps the spokesman of the two.

More importantly, notice how glorious they appear. They appear after the earthquake, for verse 2 should read literally, "there had been a violent earthquake." The angel came and rolled back the stone, but the tomb had already been emptied! The angel came after the earthquake, after the resurrection! The angel rolled back the stone so that the women could see in, not so Jesus could get out! With the sound of the earthquake, having

been raised from the dead, the grave could not keep him. That particular cave couldn't keep him either! The angel moved back the stone on an empty grave.

And in a symbolic gesture representing the power of Christ's triumph over the grave, the angel was sitting upon that stone. Death was conquered. And that angel, in appearance, revealed God's glory and power.

v.3

His appearance wasn't without the proper effect on the women and the guards who were there.

v.4

What a pitiful display of power by those guards! They had been so arrogant and confident when they were given their instructions. From a human perspective, we can imagine that they were up to the task.

Matt. 27:62 "On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, 63 saying, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, After three days I will rise.' 64 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." 65 Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how." 66 So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard."

From the standpoint of human power, that grave was secure. But from the standpoint of supernatural power, those guards were helpless. With the earthquake, and with the appearance of the angelic glory, they shook like the earth and became like dead

men. They were, no doubt, rendered unconscious.

And when they came to, they came up with a ridiculous lie to explain what had happened,

v.11-15

God's supernatural power was infinitely overwhelming. By that power, Jesus was raised from the dead. So now we serve a risen savior. And we do it on the first day of the week, which is now, by authority of biblical example, the sabbath day set aside by God to be holy. Each and every Sunday, therefore, is to be a celebration of the resurrection. Each Sunday is to be a celebration of what we celebrate this Easter Sunday. By God's supernatural power, Jesus was raised from the dead.

Then, in Matthew's gospel, we have an explanation given to these godly women. It's an explanation given by the angel.

II. BY SUPERNATURAL POWER, THE ANGELS EXPLAINED THE RESURRECTION TO A SMALL GROUP OF WOMEN.

v.5-7

Again, despite the fact that the women should have been expecting the resurrection that Sunday, at least they were there. There was a slight rebuke given to them, recorded only by Luke,

Luke 24:5 "Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, 7 saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.' " 8 And they remembered His words."

Yet they were sincerely looking for Jesus, looking to serve him

even in his death. And the overall message which they received was gentle and very honorable. It was, first of all,

A. A message of encouragement.

v.5 "Do not be afraid."

Of course they were afraid! They were afraid just being there. They were afraid of the Roman guards. They were afraid because of the earthquake. And likely, the appearance of the angels would also have caused them fear. So, the encouragement is so very appropriate, so very personal. "Don't be afraid."

Then they received,

B. A message of commendation.

v.5

Their understanding may have been defective, but their efforts were praiseworthy. They were, honestly and sincerely, looking for Jesus. They were commended for their loving service. They were attempting to do a good thing! Therefore, even with that slight rebuke recorded by Luke, the angels give the women a full explanation,

C. A message of declaration.

These women were the first to receive the infallible, inspired revelation from God of the resurrection.

v.6

Remember that God's first revelation of Christ's birth came to a similar group, a small devout group of Shepherds, keeping watch over their flocks at night. Surely God is demonstrating the truth of 1 Corinthians 1, that "God chose the foolish things of the

world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things —and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.”

It was a glorious declaration! Jesus had risen from the dead, just as he said! And with that declaration, there came,

D. A message of invitation.

v.6b “Come and see the place where the Lord lay.”

Surely that was a sacred place, a holy place. The place where he lay. Be sure to realize the past tense there. “The place where he had been lying.” He was no longer there, but the women would see where he had been.

According to Mark’s gospel, the women had already entered the tomb by this time, so that the invitation was to see the exact spot where Jesus had been, and to see the strips of linen and the burial cloth lying. Clearly, no disciple had removed the body, nor has an enemy pillaged the tomb. There is only one explanation. The resurrection.

Thus the angels invitation to “come and see.” The message to the women continues, with,

E. A message of direction.

v.7a

It wasn’t enough just to see and to stare. It wasn’t enough just to marvel at the power. There must be proclamation! Now that the resurrection is a fact of history, it must be proclaimed widely. Starting with the disciples.

Again, what great honor is given to these women. Jesus’ own

disciples would hear of his resurrection from them, not from the Lord directly. These women would be his messengers.

And they were directed to go quickly. They obeyed. With simple, unhesitating faith.

v.8

Luke 24:9 “Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.”

Imagine yourself in their place. Imagine the unbelievable message you have heard. You can well imagine how fear and joy would be combined together. They obeyed without hesitation. What a marvelous example for us.

And they obeyed with great anticipation, for the words from the angel were, lastly,

F. A message of anticipation.

They could anticipate that Jesus himself would appear to them, the final and unquestionable proof of his resurrection.

v.7b

They would see Jesus in Galilee. Jesus had already predicted that, speaking to his disciples after the prayer in Gethsemane,

Matt. 26:31 Then Jesus said to them, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ 32 But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.””

Galilee was the region where their homes were, and where the Lord had originally called them to himself. It was the place where his ministry began. And he did meet with his disciples there, as see in,

What great anticipation. What great excitement. What great expectation. And their hopes were fulfilled. Jesus would appear. Those appearances provided the necessary proof that the resurrection was real. They are included in the very declaration of the doctrine of the resurrection recorded in,

1Cor. 15:3 “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.”

We read of just how important those appearances when we read of Jesus and his disciples in,

Acts 1:3 “...to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”

III. BY SUPERNATURAL POWER, JESUS APPEARED IN HIS RESURRECTION BODY.

“Many infallible proofs.” Yet the first of those convincing proofs was to the women!

v.8-9a

A. Jesus met personally with the faithful women.

Not just a revelation from an angel, but a personal appearance. Don't miss the point that Jesus appeared to them as they were obeying his commands! Jesus appeared to them as

they were doing precisely what the angel had told them to do! They were hurrying back to tell the disciples. Jesus came to them. And be assured, this was no accident!

Their response was an instinctive reaction. They clasped his feet and worshipped him.

v.9

They held his feet, demonstrating both their great humility and their deep reverence, their eagerness for service.

We read of this encounter in the other gospels, too, accounts which offer even greater praise for these women and greater rebuke for the initial unbelief of the disciples!

Mark 16:9 “Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. 10 She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. 11 And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe.”

Luke 24:9 “Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles. 11 And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them.”

And most personal of all the accounts, we read in,

John 20:14 “Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me

where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” 16 Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him, “Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’ ” 18 Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her.”

Jesus accepted the worship of this godly woman, but he wouldn't let her cling to his body, for he had not yet ascended. That ascension was certain. His physical presence and various appearances during those 40 days were not to renew physical fellowship, but to prove the historical reality of his resurrection.

So he proves himself first to those most quick to grant him the worship he deserves. The women. Then,

B. Jesus promised to meet personally with his disciples.
v.10

Notice that he calls them brothers, quite a gracious description considering how faithless they have been. Brothers, those whom I acknowledge as members of my own family, those who share the inheritance with me, those whom I love.

As I've already stated, Jesus kept his promise. At various times over a period of 40 days, he appeared to his followers. I'll not take the time to read all of those appearances, but let me assure you, even as I encourage you to read them from the gospels of Mark, Luke and John, let me assure you, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was proven by hundreds and hundreds of eyewitnesses. The resurrection was an actual event. It stands as an actual event in history, in actual time and space.

Jesus was really and truly raised from the dead.

And so, after those 40 days, after all the appearances were completed, Jesus ascended in bodily form up to the right hand of the throne in heaven. And having physically left this world behind, leaving behind his disciples and his church, he would pour out the holy spirit upon his people just ten days later, on the day of Pentecost. And with that Holy Spirit, the church was equipped for its ultimate task--the task of being witnesses for Jesus in every nation of the world.

And so we read in,

Acts 1:8 “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

It is that power of the resurrection that is now with us! The supernatural power of God which raised Jesus from the dead is poured out upon us. And so I'll end with the great prayer from Ephesians 1,

Eph. 1:15 “Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers...18 that you may know...19 what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power 20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.”

May you know that power, the power to raise Jesus from the dead, in your own life. And may we as a church know that same power as we seek to bear witness and testimony of the gospel to this world in which we live.