He Has Risen

Matthew 28:1-20

Key Verse: 28:6 “He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.”

Happy Easter! Easter is a Christian festival to commemorate the resurrection of Christ Jesus. From God’s redemptive perspective Easter is more meaningful than Christmas. Dr. John MacArthur said that the resurrection of Jesus is the crowning event in God’s redemptive history. Resurrection is the cornerstone of Christianity and the foundation of the gospel. Easter is not related to bunnies or chicken. Today’s message covers two main topics: Jesus’ glorious resurrection and his great commission. The Apostle Paul explained the resurrection of Christ theologically and logically in the book of Romans and 1 Corinthians 15. Matthew, one of the Twelve, described the resurrection of Jesus fact by fact as an eyewitness. We’ll study how Jesus was raised from the dead, who were there, and how the message of Jesus’ resurrection changed people and influenced the world.

First, Jesus has risen. (1-10) Jesus was suffered, crucified, and buried on Friday. The dead body of Jesus was put into the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, who was a member of Jewish ruling counsel and a hidden disciple of Jesus. The chief priests and the Pharisees became anxious even though Jesus was buried in the tomb because they remembered Jesus’ word, “After three days I will rise again.” (27:63) So they went to Pilate the governor and asked him to seal the stone and post the guard in front of the tomb. The governor allowed them to do so. So, the tomb of Jesus was completely sealed by a huge stone and guarded by the religious police. No one could go in and come out.

***After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb***. (1) Here the first day of the week is Sunday, the third day of Jesus’ death and burial. It was still dark. Two Marys were on the way to Jesus’ tomb. According to Mark’s gospel they went to the tomb in order to anoint Jesus’ body with spices. (Mk 16:1) This was the Jewish custom. The women showed their unchanging love for Jesus by bringing their perfume. They loved Jesus, still they were sorrowful. Their life without Jesus was sorrowful and meaningless. Our life without Jesus is also sorrowful and meaningless. With deep sorrow and frustration, the women were on the way to the tomb.

What happened when they arrived at the tomb? Look at verses 2-4. ***“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 lightening, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.”***  Something very unexpected and frightening happened before their eyes. After a strong earthquake, the angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled back the stone, and opened the tomb. The angel of the Lord opened the tomb. To the women the heavy tomb stone and the guard were the obstacles for them to come to Jesus. But the angel removed the stone and disarmed the guard. Nothing was impossible with God. There is no obstacle or stone which cannot be removed or taken away by God. Don’t cry before obstacles. Come to Jesus by faith and the door will be opened! Amen! The appearance of the angel was absolutely amazing. It was like lightening, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid and they didn’t move like dead men. They were powerless before the holy presence of God and the power of God.

Look at verses 5,6. “***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***…” The angel’s message was short, but powerful. The women did not need to be afraid because Jesus was risen. He was not there anymore. He was not the one who should lie down into the tomb because he had to be risen as he had said! In fact, Jesus often predicted his death and resurrection while staying with his disciples. In Matthew 16:21 Jesus explained to his disciples at the region of Caesarea Philippi that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Jesus predicted his death and resurrection a second time while they were in Galilee. (Mt 17:22,23) Jesus predicted the same message a third time while they were on the way to Jerusalem (Mt 20:18) Jesus’ resurrection was not a sudden or unexpected happening, but it was the fulfillment of Jesus’ words and God’s set purpose.

While the women were still hesitating or wondering, the angel asked them to come and see the place where Jesus was laid. His body was gone! It was an empty tomb. There was no more Jesus in the tomb because he had risen! He did not need a tomb. A tomb is for only those who are to be buried and return to the earth such as Buddha, Mohammad, and Socrates. But Jesus did not need a tomb because he had to return to God the Father in heaven, not to be buried on the earth. Jesus has no tomb. Before he went to the Father, he had to meet his disciples in Galilee. Jesus prepared a great commission for his disciples.

People who have no resurrection faith stay in the dark tomb and cry in sorrow endlessly. Even though Jesus was risen, they are still looking for the dead body of Jesus. Fear, doubt, sorrow, and confusion occupy their hearts and make them spiritually blind. They must listen to the angel’s message and come out of the tomb. “He is not here. He has risen!” Before I listened to this resurrection message, my life was full of darkness. I was staying in the dark tomb and crying in sorrow before the power of death. Death seemed to take away everything from me, and all my effort on this earth seemed to be meaningless. But the moment when I believed that Jesus died for my sins and rose again from the dead, my life was changed. I was not sorrowful anymore. I didn’t need to stay in the dark tomb any longer. This was because I had resurrection faith. Death is not the end of everything. After death there is a glorious resurrection and eternal life in the kingdom of God. This was my living hope and it became a great light for my life. There is no failure or despair in the Risen Jesus. This is because Jesus died for our sins and conquered death. Amen!

I like to introduce to you Dr. David Jeremiah’s recent sermon about the impacts of resurrection faith. 1) Because of the resurrection of Christ our failure is not fatal. In the Risen Jesus there is no failure or despair because in all things Jesus will work for the good of those who love him. 2) Because of the resurrection of Christ our faith is not futile. Our Christian life often seemed to be wasting time and look unrealistic. But in the end, in God’s appointed time, we will bear fruits, the fruit of resurrection and the fruit of eternal life. 3) Because of the resurrection of Christ our death is not final. When we finish this life on this earth, we will all be changed into a new body, a resurrection body, and we will inherit the kingdom of God. Those who are born twice die once. But those who are born once die twice.

The angel’s message for the women continued, “***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***.” (7) The angel did not want the women to remain in sentiment and in awe. He gave them a mission, the mission of witnessing the resurrection of Christ Jesus. From human point of view these women were the despised and lowly-class women. But from God’s point of view they were the first witnesses of the Risen Christ in human history. In the Bible history God chose the lowly things and the despised things of the world in order to fulfill his purpose. He chose the weak in order to reveal his glory and power and to shame the strong. (1 Co 1:27-28) God called Gideon, a fearful farmer, and made him a great warrior who rescued his people from his enemies. God chose the shepherd boy David and made him a king of Israel. Jesus chose the unschooled and unlearned Galilee young people and made them shepherds for the whole world. God makes what is impossible with men possible. Therefore, in doing the work of God human condition or situation does not matter. What really does matter is whether we have resurrection faith or not. Those who have resurrection faith overcome human limitation. Those who have resurrection faith change their fate. Those who have resurrection faith conquer the world.

How was the women’s response to the angel’s message? Look at verses 8. “***So the women hurriedly away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.***” They obeyed the angel’s message immediately. With mixed feelings, fear and joy, they ran to Jesus’ disciples. What happened to them on their way? The Risen Jesus appeared to them. Look a verses 9,10. “***Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.***” The women didn’t see the Risen Jesus with their own eyes, but they believed in the angel’s message and obeyed. When they believed the angel’s message and obeyed, they met the Risen Jesus face to face. Someone may ask, “I will believe in Jesus if I see him face to face.” But he will not believe in Jesus even though Jesus appears to him. The righteous will live by faith, not by sight. When we believe in Jesus even though we don’t see him, we will meet Jesus. Among the Twelve Thomas was a doubtful skeptic. He did not believe when the other disciples said that they had seen the Risen Jesus. Thomas said, “*Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe*.” (Jn 20:25) A week later the Risen Jesus visited this doubtful Thomas and said, “*Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe*.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Then Jesus told him, ***“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed***.” (Jn 20:29) The women didn’t see the Risen Jesus, but believed the angel’s message. Then, they could meet Jesus face to face. Jesus never despises those who earnestly seek him. In his time, he will meet you face to face. Jesus healed the women’s fear and sorrow and he encouraged them to tell the good news of his resurrection to his disciples.

Second, the guards’ report (11-15) Look at verses 11-15. “***While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief 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.***” Here the guards were the temple guards, not the Roman soldiers. They had reported everything that they had seen and heard to the religious leaders. At that time when guards lost a prisoner, they received capital punishments. But they told the truth to the religious leaders. The religious leaders should have listened to their report very seriously and repented and believed in Jesus Christ. But they tried to cover up Jesus’ resurrection with money and with their political skill. They might close the guards’ mouth, blind the eyes of the governor, and cover up the truth of God with money. But no matter how they tried to stop the truth of God, the truth of God will march on. No matter how they tried to block the tomb by the stone and soldiers, God will open the door. Amen! The Apostle Paul sang a song of victory over death in this way, “*Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”... “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*.” (1 Co 15:54-57) Amen!

Third, go and make disciples of all nations. (16-20) Jesus’ disciples remembered what Jesus had said before he was arrested. “*But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”* (Mt 26:32) The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. They saw him and worshiped him. But some doubted. They doubted because they did not recognize the resurrected Jesus. His appearance was glorious with new resurrection body. There was no more pain or sorrow or agony in him. There was no darkness or weakness in him at all. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul compared our present physical body to a perishable seed, and the future resurrection body to a glorious and imperishable plant. He described the splendor of the resurrection body in this way. “The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body…” (1 Co 15:42-44) The Risen Jesus appeared to his disciples with new body, glorious resurrection body.

The Risen Jesus came to his disciples and gave them a mission. We call this the Great Commission. Look at verses 18-20. “***Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.***” “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” means that Jesus has authority over all nature and all human histories as the Creator God. As Jesus said that even a small bird will not fall down without God’s permission (Mt 10:29). Jesus has all authority over world history and human destiny. Therefore, with absolute faith in Jesus’ authority and sovereignty, the disciples must go and make disciples of all nations. Making disciples of all nations is the same command as being fruitful, increasing in number, and ruling over the all creatures on this earth. It means restoring the creation order, which is God-man-the world. It is also bringing the kingdom of God to this world. Let God rules the world and let people become his children! How could this be possible? Jesus said, “*baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*…” It is possible when we teach Jesus’ words and baptize them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. It is possible when Jesus is with us. Jesus promised to be with his disciples and with us always to the very end of the age. Jesus promised to be with us through the Holy Spirit. Jesus who had been in 2,000 years ago in Galilee cannot be with us physically. But Jesus sent the Holy Spirit in his place so that he could be with us always. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of truth.

This great commission is world mission command. Jesus gave this command to his disciples as his living will. This is also the will of God. May God bless you when you have resurrection faith based on today’s passage. Amen.! Happy Easter!