



The Resurrection of Christ

Matthew 28:1-10

1. Look for Jesus (verses 1-7)
2. Believe He is Risen (verse 8)
3. Worship Him (verses 9-10)

About a month ago, I told you that I saw the film, "The Passion of the Christ" for the very first time. The movie has many strengths: First of all, it the movie is very faithful to the Biblical account of the last 12 hours of the life of Christ upon the earth. Much of the narrative is pure Scripture. That which isn't is often merely helpful for the story to be told. Second, the movie gives a good representation about what the physical sufferings of Christ were actually like. The death of Christ upon the cross was a brutal and painful death. The movie didn't candy coat anything about His sufferings. I recently heard one man say that the sufferings of Christ were so gruesome, that had we been at the foot of the cross at Calvary, we would have thrown up. This is actually a strength of the movie. The movie helps us to think long and hard on what Christ endured on our behalf.

However, the movie also has some weaknesses. Perhaps the most obvious is that it doesn't even attempt to explain why Jesus suffered so badly. It begins with Him praying in the garden, anticipating the suffering that He will experience. It shows Him being mercilessly beaten for no reason at all. Never does the movie seek to explain why. If you ever have the opportunity to speak with a non-believer about the movie, I encourage you to direct your conversation toward the goal of answering the "why" question. Tell him that Christ's death upon the cross was for sins. Tell him that he might know and experience the forgiveness of his sins by believing in the sufficient sacrifice of Christ upon the cross. "Whoever believes in Him will not perish, but will have everlasting life" (John 3:16) in which he might know, see, and experience God in all of His fullness! And in so far as the movie, "The Passion of the Christ" fails to explain the reason for Christ's death, it fails in proclaiming the gospel to the watching world. This is tragic in light of all the fanfare about the movie.

But, another deficiency in the movie was obvious for me as well. It came in the very last scene of the movie. The last scene was in the tomb. Jesus is shown to arise from where He was laid to rest and to walk away, up and out of the tomb. While I delight in the allusion to the resurrection, the deficiency is in this very fact. The movie only hinted at the resurrection. When you watch the movie, you aren't quite sure whether Jesus rose bodily or whether it was an artistic representation that ultimately, all was well with Jesus. And thus, the movie fails to finish the story.

For the message of the sufferings of Christ isn't so much that all is well with Jesus. The message of the sufferings of Christ is that all is made well for us who believe! Jesus has conquered death, so that "death no longer is master over Him" (Romans 6:9). And since death is no longer master of Him, it is no longer master over us! We can conquer death through Him. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we have victory over death "through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57).

I know how unfair it is to criticize a movie for what it doesn't say. However, the resurrection of Jesus Christ isn't a minor point to the story of Jesus. **The resurrection IS the story!** For, it was when Christ was raised from the dead that His message was verified! Paul writes that our faith stands or falls on the fact of the resurrection. Should the resurrection prove to be false, "our faith is worthless; we are still in our sins" (1 Cor. 15:17).

When the Bible speaks about the resurrection of Christ from the dead, it is always simple and straightforward. Never do you get the sense that Jesus was only a ghost or a phantom and an allusion. All of the gospel writers portray Jesus as risen from the dead and interacting with His disciples. After His resurrection, we find Jesus appearing to His disciples (John 20:19-23) and showing Himself to them, speaking with them (Matt. 28:10). He allowed His disciples to touch Him (John 20:27). He ate with them in their presence. Jesus was flesh and blood risen from the dead. He wasn't some ghostly appearance of a dream (John 21:12-15). He was real. He told them of what they future held for them (John 21:18-23). He taught them what they ought to do next (Matt. 28:18-20). When Jesus raised from the dead, people recognized Him. People spoke with Him. People saw that He was alive and well.

When the epistles interpret the life of Christ for us, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is no minor point. When the apostles began to preach to the Jewish people of the good news of the gospel, they often focused their attention upon the resurrection. They frequently said something like this: "You all know that Jesus was crucified unjustly. But, let me tell you that death could not contain Him. He has risen from the dead. We have seen Him and spoken to Him. He now sits at the right hand of God, the Father, in heaven. He is the Lord and the Christ. All of this took place just as the Scriptures put forth." This was the message of Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). This was the message of Peter some time later in the temple (Acts 3). This was the message of Paul when he preached in the synagogues (Acts 13). This was repeatedly mentioned in their writings.

When Paul summarized the core things you need to believe to be saved from your sins, the resurrection of Christ was at the center of it. "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved" (Romans 10:9). And so, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is no minor point to the story of Jesus or the message of the gospel. It sits at the very center of our faith. And that's where the movie, "The Passion of the Christ" fails. It didn't finish the story. It didn't tell how Jesus appeared to His

disciples. It leaves you hanging. It leaves you guessing about what happened to Jesus. One scene, with one conversation between Jesus and the disciples would help to sway the day.

This morning at Rock Valley Bible Church, we will finish the story. For the past two months at Rock Valley Bible Church, our times in the Scripture have been dark. We have focused our attention upon the cruel sufferings and death of Christ. Listen to the sermon titles of the last four sermons that I have preached: (1) The Sufferings of Christ (9/4/05). (2) The Crucifixion of Christ (9/11/05). (3) The Death of Christ (9/18/05). (4) The Burial of Christ (10/02/05). All of these topics were dark. But, today, we come to the light at the end of the tunnel. We encounter the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Death couldn't contain Him. Jesus didn't remain dead. Rather, Jesus was risen from the dead!

The result of the resurrection is that we look at the cross in an entirely different way as well. As the light of the resurrection shines back upon the cross, it gives us great hope in the cross. The events that ought to be tragic are transformed by the cross of Christ into our great joy! It's no wonder that the preaching of the cross is a stumbling block to those who don't believe in the resurrection. (1 Cor. 1:23). When you don't have the light shining, you will stumble in the dark. From time to time, we sing the song, "O Mighty Cross." The chorus goes ...

"His sacrifice on Calvary
Has made the mighty cross
a tree of life to me."

The cross is an instrument of death and torture! And yet, with the light of the resurrection shining on it, the cross becomes life and hope to us who believe! And so, even as we studied through the dark things of the sufferings and death of Christ, we knew of the light that shined upon them to make it shine brilliantly. Let's look at "The Resurrection of Christ."

Matthew 28:1-10

Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his garment as white as snow; and the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. And the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going before you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you." And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they shall see Me."

by way of outline, I have pulled out three lessons for us. The first is this:

1. Look for Jesus (verses 1-7)

In verse 1, we encounter two women, "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary" (verse 1). These were the same women that were with Jesus in His burial. I trust that you remember that when Jesus was buried, "Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave" (Matt. 27:61). Once they left the tomb, surely they had returned home before the beginning of the Passover celebration, which would begin at sun down. They spent the Passover at home, not daring to walk to the distance to the tomb during the Sabbath day. But, the moment the Sabbath was over, just "as it began to dawn, [they] came to look at the grave" (Matthew 28:1).

They came at their very first opportunity. They came, looking for Jesus. Their coming to the tomb was an act of devotion. They weren't simply coming to "look at the grave" as an observer. They were looking for the body of Jesus. Mark tells us that they brought spices and were coming to the grave to "anoint Him" (Mark 16:1). Although Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had initially anointed the body of Jesus, it needed more spices, which these women were bringing. They loved the Lord Jesus and were faithful to Him even after His death by doing one final kind deed for His body that would soon decay. And yet, we know that the Lord had promised not to "allow His Holy One to undergo decay" (Psalm 16:10).

And so, when these women came to the scene, they didn't find what they had expected to see. They were expecting to see a grave with a giant round stone covering the entrance to the tomb. According to Mark's account, the stone was the center of their discussion along the way. They were discussing with themselves how they were going to roll the stone out of the way (Mark 16:4). It was so "extremely large" (Mark 16:4) that they knew that they would need help. Perhaps they were hoping for the gardener of the cemetery to be around to come to their aid and help move the stone for them (John 20:15).

There were a few surprises in store for them. First of all, the stone that covered the entrance to the tomb was already "rolled away" from the tomb (Matt. 28:2). This stone was no longer covering the entrance to the tomb. Rather, it was away from the entrance and they could enter the tomb easily. But that wasn't the only surprise. Seated upon the large, round stone was an angel, whose "appearance was like lightning, and his garment as white as snow" (verse 3). According to verse 2, it was this angel who had moved the stone away. Perhaps he moved it using a "severe earthquake" that verse 2 mentions. Perhaps he simply used his strength to roll it away all by himself. From other accounts we have of angels, certainly this one had the strength to do such a thing.

At any rate, his appearance stunned the guards. Verse 4 tells us that "the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men." In other words, they were "scared stiff!" At first, their reaction was one of fear and trembling. But, quickly after this, these guards froze. They were in a state of shock! Perhaps they had fainted to the ground. Perhaps they simply didn't know how to respond to this angel. They were terrified. This is completely understandable. After all, they had never seen such an appearance of an angel before.

In a few weeks, there will be many people who will dress up in scary, Halloween costumes, dressing up as skeletons or ghosts or demons. None of their costumes will be nearly as frightful as this angel right here. His appearance wasn't dark. In fact, it was just the opposite. It was light. It was like lightning! The appearance of the angel was of a flashing brilliance of light, which could be detected even in the brightness of the morning. Imagine a Halloween costume that was began with a completely white garment, which was wrapped all around with Christmas lights, which would flash off and on like lightening. Now that would be a neat costume. However, the sorts of batteries needed to do such a thing might quickly run out. That's a bit what this angel looked like.

Understandably so, the women were likewise terrified, for the first words out the angel's mouth was, "Do not be afraid." (verse 5). This was far easier said than done. For one thing, you simply don't encounter angels every day. For another thing, the angel's appearance was enough to scar anyone away. But, the angel's words proved to be words of comfort, aimed at calming down these terrified women. He said (in verse 5), "I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified." In saying these words, the angel comforted the Marys. He communicated that he knew why they were there. I don't believe that this angel needed to be omniscient to know these things. This angel could also have observed what these women were carrying in their arms: perfume and spices. He knew that you only come to the cemetery with these things in your hands if you are coming to anoint a body. This angel knew about Who had been in the tomb. He knew that Jesus had been buried there. He knew that Jesus was no longer in the tomb.

The angel continued on (in verse 6), "He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said." How easily His words could have come with condemnation: "What are you holding in your hands? Are those spices for burial? Why are you bringing spices? Didn't Jesus tell you that He would rise from the dead? Didn't Jesus tell you over and over and over and over again? Your faith is so small. You will never please Him with such small faith at that. Why didn't you believe? Besides, this is the third day since He was crucified. He said that He would rise up 'on the third day' (Matt. 20:19). O foolish women." But, these words didn't come out like this. They were comforting words. They were words of encouragement and help, just like God's words often are.

The angel continued, "Come, see the place where He was lying" (verse 6). At this point, the angel probably stepped down from his stone and led the women into the tomb to show them exactly where Jesus had been laid to rest. The women had seen Jesus placed into the tomb (Matt. 27:61) and so they knew where His body was set. But, alas, it wasn't there! I suspect that they saw the same thing that Peter saw when he came running into the tomb. John records that Peter "beheld the linen wrappings lying there, and the facecloth, which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself" (John 20:6-7). The significance of these wrappings demonstrate that nobody came to take the body away. For should the disciples or some grave robber steal His body, he would have taken away the linen wrappings as well. But, Jesus made His bed before He got up.

Please notice that the only reason these women were privileged to see the empty tomb is because they went looking for Jesus. They were privileged to hear a messenger from heaven come and tell them where Jesus was. "And go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going before you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you" (verse 7). This angel told these women that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead and had gone on to Galilee. It's where they were to find Jesus. That's where they were supposed to go. In verse 16 we read that "the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee" where they met up with Jesus. These women went to the tomb, because they knew where His body was. Although they didn't find Jesus in the tomb, they were directed to where He would be.

The lesson that I'm pulling out of these verses is simple: Look for Jesus (verses 1-7). As they looked for Jesus, they found Him. The same is true for you as well. If you seek for Jesus, you will find Him. This is what He promised the people of Israel. It still is true for us today. "You will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul" (Deut. 4:29).

Two thousand years after the resurrection, you won't find Him by going to Jerusalem and looking in an empty tomb, hoping for an angel to direct your way to Him. No. Today, you will find Him in the pages of the Bible. The Bible will direct you to Christ. In fact, in you want to summarize the message of the Bible it is simply this: Jesus Christ crucified for sinners. When confronting the religious leaders of His day, Jesus rebuked them saying, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me" (John 5:39). Are you looking for Jesus? Search the Bible, because in it you will find Him.

The way to find Jesus today is through faith. We don't see Jesus today. We don't hear the voice of Jesus today. However, by faith, we can find Him, which leads nicely to our next point this morning. Not only should you Look for Jesus (verses 1-7), but you should also ...

2. Believe He is Risen (verse 8)

I get this from verse 8, which says, "And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples." These women believed in what the angel had told them and they responded with quick obedience. That's the response of faith. The angel had told them to "Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead" (verse 7). Indeed, this is what they did. They "departed quickly." There was no delay in their obedience. They knew that they had seen this angel. They had seen the empty tomb. They had some news to tell. And so, they responded quickly.

Their heart was entirely into it. They "ran to report it to His disciples" (verse 8). They didn't walk. They didn't go for a stroll. They ran. So, picture it in your mind, two Jewish women, who had girded up their tunics and were running along side the road. To catch the scene, perhaps you might imagine several middle-aged women today after church pulling up their dresses and running down the street to get a message out. I don't suspect that it was too lady-like in their culture for a woman to run down the road as they did. But, I don't think that they cared. They had some news to tell and they were going to run just as fast as they could to tell the disciples.

I suspect that as they were running, they were a bit winded and so found it difficult to talk with each other as they ran. Perhaps their minds were pondering the details of the past several days ...

"I remember Him telling us on several occasions of what was going to take place in Jerusalem (Matt. 20:18). He knew that

He was going to be betrayed into the hands of the chief priests and scribes (Matt. 20:18). He knew that He was going to be condemned to death (Matt. 20:18). He knew that He was going to be scourged (Matt. 20:19). He knew that He was going to be crucified upon a cross (Matt. 20:19). He knew that He would be raised on the third day (Matt. 20:19). We saw all of these things take place exactly as Jesus had told us. He was betrayed. He was condemned. He was scourged and crucified. And, could it be true? Did He really rise from the dead! Certainly, we found the tomb empty, though guarded by some soldiers. Certainly, we saw an angel who said so. And on top of that, today's the third day! Could it be true? Is He really risen? It must be true! Wait until Peter and John hear about this! I wonder what they will say?"

And as they thought these things, perhaps they were encouraged to run even faster to see the other disciples. We are told that their hearts were filled "with fear and great joy" (verse 8). I believe that they were fearful, because they didn't quite know what to expect. Discovering an empty tomb was news of great hope! I believe that they were joyful, because they knew that their hope wasn't lost. They had some good news to tell. They were going to tell the disciples that Jesus was risen from the dead!

Sadly, when you put all of the Biblical accounts together, these women didn't stand firm in their faith. They seemed to waffle a bit. Luke's gospel seems to indicate that they reported everything that they saw to the disciples. In Luke 24:9 we read that they "returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest." They reported to them about the empty tomb. They reported to them about the earthquake and the angelic appearance. They reported to them about the words that the angel spoke to them, that Jesus had risen from the dead (Luke 24:6-7). But Luke tells us that the eleven refused to believe. Rather, the words of these two women "appeared to them as non-sense" (Luke 24:11).

From John's gospel we get the feeling that the women didn't fully believe. We read in the beginning of John 20 that when Mary Magdalene "saw the stone already taken away from the tomb, ... she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.'" (John 20:1-2).

When you harmonize these accounts together, you can only put together a scenario that the women reported everything back to the disciples, but were soon persuaded away from their faith that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. Surely the other disciples were putting doubts into the minds of these women. "Are you sure? Did you see Jesus? Perhaps somebody came and took away the body!" Eventually, they backed down to talk about the raw facts of what they knew. They knew that the tomb was definitely empty. And then, they conceded that somebody must have moved the body of Jesus.

At any rate, their report caused Peter and John to run to the tomb to check it out for themselves. When they saw the empty tomb, they believed the report that the women brought. And yet, they hadn't fully grasped the full significance of everything that took place. John tells us that "as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead" (John 20:9).

As the picture emerges, you have these women believing that Jesus was raised from the dead. And yet, not being fully persuaded in their own minds. They were somewhat convinced. And yet, there was still some confusion and doubt in their mind. Does this sound at all similar to your experience of faith? I know that it does mine. There are times when my heart soars with faith in the risen Christ. At other times, my heart is filled with unbelief. I find that my heart can easily sway from belief to unbelief. Is it true? Can it be? And I find that in moments like these, the cure is to look for Christ, as these women did. I find the cure to be found in reading the Bible, praying and meditating upon the cross.

God calls us to "Believe He is Risen" (verse 8). One of the reasons why I love this application is because they were in the much of the same situation that we are in. As they reported these things back to the disciples, they hadn't seen the risen Christ yet! They had only seen the empty tomb. It's not until verse 9 that they finally see Jesus alive and well. And yet, they had the faith to run back to the disciples and tell them all that they had just witnessed! Likewise, we've never seen Jesus risen from the dead. We've only read about the accounts of the empty tomb. And yet, we are called to be like these women. We are called to believe the message of the angel, "He is not here, for He has risen, Just as He said" (verse 6).

And so, I ask you, "Do you believe?" Perhaps your faith is weak. Why then, you are just like these two women. There was a strong sense in which they believed. And yet, they had difficulty in fully grasping it in their minds.

I have always been blessed by the passage in which Thomas actually had an opportunity to take his finger and put it into the side of Jesus (John 20:27). When he did so, he said to Jesus, "My Lord and My God!" (John 20:28). The manner in which Jesus responds to Thomas comes as a great blessing. Jesus said, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 20:29). Jesus was talking about us who believe. We haven't seen, tasted, and touched first-hand. We have only heard the stories about Jesus. And yet, when we believe that Jesus is risen from the dead, we are blessed by God.

Let's look at our last point this morning, ...
3. Worship Him (verses 9-10)

Worship was the response of the women who initially saw Jesus raised from the dead. Look at verse 9, "And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him." Certainly, it must have been a shock for these women to see Jesus. They had begun to have thoughts that Jesus had risen from the dead. But, they didn't know exactly what that meant. For all they knew, Jesus had risen from the dead and returned to His heavenly Father, never to walk upon the earth again. For all they knew, Jesus was gone. And yet, here was Jesus, greeting them in flesh and blood.

I remember having a taste of what this reunion must have been like. About 15 years ago, I was in Los Angeles in Seminary. A friend of mine was driving his car out to Illinois and had asked me if I had wanted to drive back to Illinois with him. The plan would be that I would drive with him to Illinois and fly back home on a ticket that he would purchase for me. I never told my family what I was doing. For all they knew, I was out in California. I can remember the time very well. We arrived at my parent's home around 4pm on a Sunday afternoon. (I remember the

time, because I was thrilled to be home early enough to attend the Sunday evening church service with them and see many people at church as well). I just walked in the door and boldly shouted, "Hello! Anybody home?" It was a great time of surprise and rejoicing! At first, those in my family were a bit confused. But, as the reality sunk in, there were hugs and kisses all around, as they were eager to hear about the story of me driving across the country. I'm sure that Jesus had a bit of these same feelings.

My wife, Yvonne, is also planning to do this as well. Her sister in California is having a baby in early November. As soon as Yvonne finds out that she is going into labor, Yvonne is going to hop on the first plane that she can that is headed to California. She wants to visit her sister while she is still in the hospital. Yvonne has told me on several occasions of how excited she is to simply show up at the hospital. She can't wait to walk into her sister's hospital room and say, "Hi Janelle!"

When you piece together the gospel narratives, the best guess is that this meeting took place right there in the garden where the tomb was. Jesus was probably standing a bit of a distance away watching these women try to deal with the empty tomb. After a bit, Jesus walked up to them. John tells us that Mary "turned around, and beheld Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus" (John 20:14). Jesus said, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" (John 20:15). "Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, 'Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.'" (John 20:15). And then Jesus said to her, "Mary!" (John 20:16) at which point she "turned and said to Him in Hebrew, 'Rabboni!' (which means Teacher)" (John 20:16).

It's at this point that the Mary's "took hold of His feet and worshiped Him" (verse 9). The emotions at this point must have been absolutely overwhelming! There must have been tears of joy! There must have been a sense of the reality that everything that Jesus had taught them for the past several years was true. He was the Messiah. He was the Son of God. Death has been conquered!

At this moment, worship was the only appropriate response to the risen Lord! The idea that we get from verse 9 is that these women were prostrate on the ground, clinging to His feet, giving glory and honor to Him as the Lamb of God! When we read John's account, we know that this lingered for a bit, until Jesus finally said, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father" (John 20:17).

I don't think that either of these women were very much interested in ceasing to worship Him. They were overjoyed! It would have needed to be Jesus who stopped them. When Jesus was finally able to free Himself from these women, He gave them instructions of what to do next. He said, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they shall see Me" (verse 10). I doubt that these words were too pleasing for these women to hear. Now that Jesus had been risen from the dead, I'm sure that it was their desire to be with Him as much as possible! They wanted to continue to worship Him! Do you ever feel this way? When worshiping Jesus at church or at home, do you ever wish that it would never end? Such ought to be the heart of those redeemed by Christ.

The worship of Jesus marks all genuine believers in Christ. Paul said that "we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3). It's our application this morning: "Worship Him" (verses 9-10). The first response of these women ought to be the continual response of our hearts. The reality of the risen Lord ought to be constantly on our minds. As it is on our minds, we will respond in worship to Him.

The resurrection is the time/space proof that our faith is real ... and that we are justified before God (Rom. 4:25)! The resurrection assures us that our sins are really gone! The resurrection shows us that Christ is worthy of the worship that we give to Him. He is the highest of all beings. He is the Lord most high! Let's worship Him!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on October 16, 2005 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.
