

April 16, 2017

Holy Week 2017
The Resurrection
Matthew 28:1-10

Opening words: There are 52 weeks every year. Each one is important and not a single week should be wasted. Have you ever stopped to consider how many weeks have occurred in the history of the world? However, there is one week that changed our world forever: Holy Week! On the Christian calendar, Holy Week is the last week of Lent, beginning on Palm Sunday and ending at dawn on Easter. It is the week the church remembers the final days of Jesus' earthly ministry. It recalls the expectations of Palm Sunday, the rejection of Maundy Thursday, the devastation of Good Friday and the final victory of Easter morning. It is a week that changed our world forever.

This is Easter and much has already happened. Last Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that noble beast. Jesus was surrounded by a crowd, yet he was alone. On Monday, Jesus went to the temple and challenged the authorities' priorities. In a rage, he turned the tables of the money changers over and reminded them that the temple was a place of prayer, not profit. On Tuesday, Jesus cursed the fig tree. It was the only thing he ever cursed. The lesson was clear. We must be productive and make disciples for Jesus Christ. On Wednesday, Jesus went to the outer court of the temple and taught about the Kingdom of God. Each lesson is timeless. On Thursday, Jesus called the twelve together and washed their feet. It was an illustration of humility - the same humility we are to display as we serve others. Later that evening, he took the disciples to the Upper Room and gave them a memorial that should never be forgotten. Then, the story turns truly ugly. He goes to the garden to pray and is arrested. Within hours, he faces two trials. The first trial was before his own countrymen, the Sanhedrin. The second was before the Roman authority, Pilate. He ordered Jesus to be executed, and Jesus died. On Saturday, nothing of note happened because Jesus was dead. That brings us to Sunday morning. You know what happened. It changed everything. Our Gospel reading for this morning is Matthew 28:1-10. Let me call this message *The Resurrection*.

Matthew 28:1-10 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² 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.³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ 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."

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in California once said, *"The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ came to do three things. He came to have my past forgiven, you get a purpose for living and a home in Heaven."* That quote is the perfect summary for my sermon today. If you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

We find ourselves today in the twenty-eighth chapter of Matthew. It is early on Sunday morning and Jesus receives his first visitors, two women with the same first name. There is Mary Magdalene and another Mary. In the story, they experience three incredible things. First, we are told they experience a great earthquake. Only Matthew mentions the earthquake, but this earthquake is worth mentioning because it reveals to us that God has done something truly special. Second, they see that the giant stone in front of Jesus's tomb has been rolled away. Third, they experience the announcement of Jesus's resurrection. According to verse three, it is made by an angel, whose clothes were white as snow, symbolizing purity. The angel tells the women of the resurrection, but the women experience the resurrected Jesus for themselves in verse nine. The resurrection of Jesus is the single most important event in the history of the world.

There is no escaping the resurrection's theological significance. Did you know all but four of the major world religions are based on mere philosophical propositions? Of the four that are based on personalities rather than philosophies, only Christianity claims an empty tomb for its founder. In 1900 B.C. Judaism's Father Abraham died. In 483 B.C. Buddhist writings say Buddha died. Islamic writings say on June 6, 632 A.D. Mohammed died. The only one that is alive is Jesus. Let me make this clearer. In 33 A.D. Jesus died but came back to life, appearing to over 500 people over a period of 40 days. The resurrection separates us from the rest the world! There is no escaping the theological significance of the resurrection. Yet today, I don't want to be theological. I want to be practical. Let me look at how the resurrection impacts your past, present and future. If you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

Past

In 1830, a man by the name of George Wilson was convicted of robbing the U.S. Mail and was sentenced to be hanged. President Andrew Jackson issued a pardon for Wilson, but Wilson refused to accept it. The matter went to Chief Justice Marshall, who concluded that Wilson would have to be executed. "A pardon is a slip of paper," wrote Marshall, "the value of which is determined by the acceptance of the person to be pardoned. If it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must be hanged." For some, the pardon comes too late. For others, the pardon is not accepted. Have you accepted your pardon? Listen to what I am about to say.

The resurrection of Jesus affects the way that we perceive our past. Without the resurrection of Jesus there is no hope for the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness is a complex thing. Some have never accepted the pardon because they don't see themselves as a sinner. Some have not accepted the pardon because they believe they are beyond help. Both parties are wrong. We are all sinners and none of us is beyond help. Never forget it. We are all sinners who are saved by grace and by grace alone. Ephesians 1:7 says it clearly, *"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the richness of God's grace."* At the moment Jesus walked out of that tomb, you had the opportunity to forget your past mistakes and have a relationship with God. This is the question you must answer for yourself: Have you accepted your pardon? If you have an answer to that question, say, **"Amen!"**

Present

Early Tuesday morning, Kathryn and I will head to Russia. I can give you a hundred reasons not to go, and only one reason to go: I am confident this is what God wants us to do. We will be gone for three weeks. We are going to help English students refine their skill. Knowing English is the key to escaping Eastern Europe. We don't have to go. We want to go. It is just one way we thank God for saving our souls. You are a person of integrity. What are you doing in your life to thank God for saving your soul?

The resurrection affects the way you live today. Without the resurrection, your life has no meaning or purpose. Your life is nothing more than a collection of random acts of kindness. How many people do you know who are disillusioned with their lives because they have discovered there must be more to life than shopping? There is more to life than just being entertained. Philippians 3:13-14 says, *"But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind me and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."* On the day that Jesus walked out of that tomb, you had the opportunity to understand there was more to life than this world has to offer. It is not all about you. It is all about God's place for you in the salvation of the world. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

Future

Over four years ago, I received a horrible phone call. It was from my sister, Janet, who lived in Colorado. With no emotion at all, she told me she had cancer of the lung lining. On that day, she told me it was stage four. She told me it was controllable, but not beatable. They were going to use experimental medicine. I heard through her brave words and knew the truth. She would be a Guinea pig and someday that disease would take her life. I was shocked by those words and tried to dismiss them. Over the next several years, I called her regularly. Any discussion was hard because her cough grew worse. In the last year, it was easier to text.

In December of last year, my brother-in-law, Chris called me. With emotional words, he said it was just a matter of time. He only requested my prayers. Some of you remember the story. With encouragement from my wife, my other sister, Susan and I flew to

Colorado Springs to visit our terminal sister. I will be honest with you. It was a hard trip, yet it was a good trip. She was a shell of her former self. We did what we could do in a couple of days, but what is there really to do? I helped take her to the doctor for the last time. We talked and spent sacred time together. I flew back to Ohio early on Saturday morning. When I said good-bye to my sister I knew it would be the last time we would be together in this world. I gave her one last hug and kiss. With tears in our eyes, she looked at me and said, "Russell, I am not afraid to die." That was the greatest gift she could have given me. Less than one week later, Chris called me again. Janet was gone.

I flew back to Colorado Springs, this time with my extended family. As a family, we grieved together and enjoyed one another's company. I officiated at my sister's funeral at her church. It was a Friday afternoon and a large crowd gathered. I was surprised at how many came. After the service, the church offered the attendees cookies and beverages. After the reception, everyone went back to my sister's home. I feel guilty saying this, but I had a good time at the open house. A few days later with everything complete, Kathryn and I headed back to the airport.

It was at the airport that it all hit me. My sister was gone. It hit me like a ton of bricks. Overwhelmed, I sat near the baggage claim at the Colorado Springs Airport and cried like a baby. My wife sat next to me and held me. I just couldn't believe my sister was gone. We had always been so healthy. There is no other way to say it. It was over! But I was wrong. It wasn't over. It wasn't over because of the resurrection of Jesus.

The resurrection affects the way you look at the future. Without the resurrection there is no hope of going to heaven. There would be no hope of a great reunion with loved ones who have passed over the years. John 3:16 says, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life."* On the day I die, don't cry for me. I am going to heaven, not because I am a good person. I am going to heaven because I worship and serve a perfect and resurrected Jesus. If you would like to spend eternity in heaven, say, **"Amen!"** Rick Warren was absolutely right! He said, *"The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ came to do three things. He came to have my past forgiven, you get a purpose for living and a home in Heaven."*

Will you pray with me?