

April 21, 2019

Holy Week 2019
Do You Believe?
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 cursing of Holy Monday, the teachings of Holy Tuesday, the betrayal of Holy Wednesday, the rejection of Maundy Thursday, the devastation of Good Friday and the final victory of Easter morning.

This is Easter morning, and on Easter morning we remember the single greatest event in the history of the world: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Consider this with me. 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 who is alive is Jesus. Let me make this point 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! Our scripture reading for today is Matthew 28:1-10. Let me call this message *Do You Believe?*

Matthew 28:1-10 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² 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. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ 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." ⁸ So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of 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."

John Ortberg (born 1957) is a Christian author, speaker and pastor of Menlo Church in Menlo, California. He once said, "*At the very heart of the Christian faith is the story of Jesus' death and resurrection.*" I can't disagree with that quote. Those are the basics.

If you believe that Jesus died and then returned from the dead, say, "**Amen!**" That takes us to this morning's Gospel reading.

We find ourselves in the twenty-eighth chapter of Matthew. Much has already happened. Jesus was executed Roman style on Friday. He was crucified between two common criminals. The picture was not pretty, but in a certain way Jesus was lucky. First, Jesus died quickly. Second, it was not uncommon for the crucified to be taken down and thrown into a pile of lifeless corpses; their bodies would be eaten by buzzards or wild dogs. Not so with Jesus. Arrangements were made by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus that Jesus' body would be taken down and placed in a new tomb. A large stone was rolled in front of the entrance to protect it from thieves. The Roman government was persuaded by Jesus' enemies to place guards in front of the tomb to eliminate any future problems. This was all done by dark on Friday, because the law prohibited any burials on the Sabbath. Once this was completed, Jesus' loved ones grieved because Jesus was dead! On Saturday, nothing happened because the law did not permit anyone to touch the dead on the Sabbath. There was just more grieving. That takes us to our reading for today.

According to our story, early Sunday morning, Jesus received his first visitors, two women with the same first name. There is Mary Magdalene and another Mary. They had no clue what was about to happen. The miraculous is woven into the story. Several miraculous things happened. The first is the great earthquake. Only Matthew mentions this earthquake, but this earthquake is worth mentioning because it reveals to us that God has done something truly special. The second miracle is that the giant stone has been rolled away. The third is the announcement of the resurrection. According to verse three, it is made by an angel, whose clothes were white as snow, symbolizing purity. The angel tells the women about the resurrection, but the women experience the resurrected Jesus for themselves in verse nine. In time, Jesus would appear to others. It is important that at some time in your life you have experienced the resurrected Jesus. If you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, say, "**Amen!**" Listen to what I am about to say.

Jesus was not the only one to be resurrected in the Bible. There are stories in both the Old and the New Testaments about others being resurrected. There are no fewer than eight, Lazarus being the most noteworthy. However, Jesus' resurrection is different. The others had human fathers. Jesus was the son of God. The baby in the manger at Christmas and the man on the cross on Good Friday are the same. Jesus was the incarnation of God, who not just became one of us, but died for us. He was the sacrificial lamb for your sins. How can you question God's love for you? Never forget it! Your salvation can't be earned. You are saved by grace.

Your belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not optional, it is indispensable. Many believe Romans 10:9 was the first creed in the history of the church. Do you remember that verse? It says, "*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in*

your heart God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." If that is true, then the opposite is also true. If you don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, then the fires of hell are waiting for you. The early church understood the significance of Jesus' resurrection. They worshipped on Sunday morning because every Sunday morning is a little Easter, or resurrection day. (It would be much easier if Jesus had been resurrected on a Thursday afternoon.) This is the question you must answer: Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Remember, your belief in the resurrection is not optional, it is indispensable. If you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, say, "**Amen!**" Consider these three things with me.

Past

Because you believe in the resurrection of Jesus, your mistakes are forgiven! Without the resurrection of Jesus there is no hope for the forgiveness of sins. How many people do you know who are constantly reviewing their past mistakes? The resurrection liberates you from your past. 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.*" On the moment Jesus walked out of that tomb you had the opportunity to forget your past mistakes and have a relationship with God. Because you believe in the resurrection of Jesus, your mistakes are forgiven. If you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, say, "**Amen!**"

Present

Because you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, your life has purpose! The resurrection demonstrates God's power and is the source of our own salvation. You are not saved by your good works. You are saved by grace. It is a gift, and with any gift you want to express appreciation. You express your appreciation to God by the life you live. The focal point is no longer yourself. It is others. Do you remember Philippians 3:13-14? It 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.*" What are you doing today to express your appreciation to God? Because you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, your life has purpose. If you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, say, "**Amen!**"

Future

Because you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, your future is bright! 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 away. 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.

Several years ago, I was visiting someone in the hospital. I had known this individual for almost twenty years. He was a person of integrity, and I respected him at every

level. It still pains me to say it. His future in this world was not bright. He was fighting the brave fight, but the disease was winning. When I walked into his room, I was pleased he was awake. He spent most of his time sleeping. He was weak, so I prayed with him before he dozed off again. After I said, "Amen!," he looked at me and said, "Russ, I have had enough. I am ready to go home." In other words, he was ready to die. I looked at him and responded, "I am sure you are." Without the resurrected Jesus, there is no journey home. Without the resurrected Jesus, there is no great reunion. Without the resurrected Jesus, there is no hope of heaven. Because you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, your future is bright! If you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, say, **"Amen!"** Who is the first person you are going to look for when you get to heaven?

It was on Monday afternoon when we received the sad news. The great Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris was on fire. If you can mourn for a building, I did. At first, we feared the entire structure would be destroyed. I was fortunate to have been there two times. Once with my parents as a teenager, and once with Kathryn on our anniversary. I am not the only one. They say on an average week, 12,000 tourists visit Notre Dame daily. During Holy Week, that number swelled to 30,000. Notre Dame is a piece of history. Construction began in 1163 and took two hundred years to complete. It has been the backdrop of French history for generations. I was moved by the emotions of the crowds who gathered to watch the blaze, some praying, some singing, some crying. I know those damaged sections will be rebuilt, but it will never be the same again. I mourned for the building and the history, but not the faith.

The Christian faith can't be contained to a building. The Christian faith lives in the hearts of men and women who believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That belief in the resurrection is not optional, it is indispensable. The resurrection of Jesus Christ changed everything. Do you remember the quote from John Ortberg? He once said, "*At the very heart of the Christian faith is the story of Jesus' death and resurrection.*" If you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, say, **"Amen!"**