

Sermon- The Stone That Never Rolled Away

Scripture: Matt 28: 1-15

Sunday, April 4, 2021

In his lifetime Jesus did many miracles, but this one, rising from the dead is the greatest of them all. Why? Because when Jesus did other miracles like say the turning of water into wine, he caused the material in that location to behave differently from the normal laws of nature for that period of time. The Resurrection miracle is different, because in Col 1:18 Jesus is called the “first born from among the dead”. That means there will be a second born and a third born and so on from the dead as well. So when Jesus rose from the dead, something happened to change not just the laws of nature in his physical body but something happened to change the laws of nature in the whole universe. The Bible also tells us that one day, this universe as we know it will end and there will be a New Heaven and New Earth. When Christ rose from the dead my friends, we got our very first glimpse of what our bodies might be like in this New Heaven and New Earth. 2 Cor 5:4-5, says, **“*While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it’s not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life. ⁵ God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit.*”** So what Apostle Paul is saying is that those who are born again who have the Holy Spirit in them, have a deposit in their bodies which is the guarantee that one day we will have these new bodies. And what will these new bodies be like? To quote 2 Cor 5:1 it says, **“*For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands.*”** So the difference between the bodies we have now and the bodies we will get in the New Universe is the difference between living in a tent and living in a building. And when will this happen? In the blink of an eye,

a whole new heaven and new earth will burst into existence like water changes its state to ice or vapor. At that time, Christ will return to the New earth in a New universe and make everything new.

But today, we focus on the very first time and place that this transformation has happened. The day Christ rose from the dead. So let me take you back to Matt 28 to remind you of the details. After the Sabbath, at the dawn of the first day of the week, early on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb. What follows in verse 2 onwards is a little back story. There was a violent earthquake when an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, went to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. When this happened you will remember that the tomb was being guarded by a group of ruthless and heavily armed Roman soldiers. When the guards saw the angel, they were so afraid that they shook and froze like they were dead. As soon as they recover from their shock they run away as fast as they can and go straight to the priests to report what happened. And when they described the appearance of the angel, they described a person who looked like lightening with clothes as white as snow.

Moving back to the tomb, we are told that the angel remains there till the women appear. We presume the angel had a less intimidating form to the women. And when they appear, they are told that Jesus has risen and ask them to go and inform his other disciples. They do that and as they are on their way, Jesus Himself appears and greets them. At this, they fall at his feet and worship Him. Jesus tells them to not be afraid and to go and tell his brothers, the other disciples to proceed to Galilee and expect to meet Jesus there.

On the other hand, while the women and making their way then to meet the other disciples, the guards if you remember were running into the heart of the city, to the high priests in the temple. There as soon as they arrive, they describe every detail of what had just happened.

Now, what do the chief priests do at this point? They plot. They gather all the elders for a meeting. Then they come up with a plan. That plan includes giving these dazzled guards a fat bribe and asking them to lie to everyone that the disciples stole the body of Jesus overnight. And to cover for a fact that that lie would make them impossibly stupid to their superiors, they also promised the guards that they would make sure the governor would not give them any trouble.

These are the straight forward details of the events of Jesus' resurrection from Mathews Gospel. Jesus' resurrection was a universe transforming event. And yet you can see two very different reactions to the event. On the one hand, the woman fall down at Jesus feet and worshiped him. On the other extreme, you have the high priests who even after they were given the testimony of the guards were so focused on protecting their hold on the temple position and the income they got from it, that they continued to plot and scheme and responded to Christ's resurrection by coming up with one big fat lie.

I want to dwell on that high priest's response today and I will tell you why in a bit. Think about this situation. So the guards at Jesus' tomb have seen the most incredible mind bending thing ever and we know that because these are fearless, ruthless men who had seen it all and done it all and they come running into the temple like frightened school boys. They describe an angel from heaven, who looked like lightning, coming down from heaven, opening the sealed tomb of Jesus. This is Jesus who claimed to be the long awaited Messiah and Son of God. They are speaking to the experts in Scripture and the Rabbi's job was to teach people about God and His will. Yet they did not even pause to think that maybe they got it wrong with Jesus, this time.

This is honestly the scariest part of the story to me. These same priests who knowing the claim of Jesus that He would rise again on the third day, and arranged for the strongest guards ever, when these guards came to tell them what happened, all they would think about was to plot and scheme and spread lies. This is a frightening fact

because it tells you something frightening about human beings. It tells you that Jesus has the power to raise from the dead and change the properties of the universe itself, but the stone of the human heart is another matter.

Some people even seeing the power of God in dazzling manner, still have a heart of stone that remains closed no matter what is presented to them. We can look at this fact in two ways. One, God with all His resurrection power will not roll away the stone in the human heart that does not want to be rolled away. Looking at it from the human side, some hearts will not change no matter what is presented to them.

So what is the message for us from these events of the first Easter?

Well, the first thing is, there are two kinds of human hearts. One kind that will not change no matter what. The second kind is one that melts when they know that Christ died a cruel death substituting Himself in their place. This second kind are called God's chosen people. People who were chosen to be part of God's family as Ephesians 1 puts it before God even made the universe. Now if you are that person, even if you have resisted giving your life to the Lordship of Christ till now, now is a great opportunity to surrender your life to Christ. You don't want to miss this opportunity because you just don't know what might happen to your life. And I am not saying you should chose Jesus because by choosing him you are getting a ticket to heaven filled with cloud castles and harp music in the background. We don't know what heaven fully looks like because the Bible does not fully describe it to us. The Bible was never intended to be a brochure trying to sell you heaven 😊 The Bible is a love letter from God, trying to tell you that the God of the universe is reaching out to you to have a relationship with you. And when you have this relationship with him, Jesus and the Holy Spirit will walk you through the remainder of your life in this world. And guess what? When Jesus walks with you, you will have peace and joy. Your eyes will also be opened to the very purpose of your life and you will be able to bring glory to God by your actions. All that is what

you get in this life. Then after you die you will continue to live in eternity with God and it will be great. But remember eternity will only be great for you if you have lived this life to please the God of eternity. So when you hear this message, say yes to making the resurrected Jesus the Lord of your life, now.

But if you are someone who has walked with Jesus and you are sharing the Gospel with those in your life and you have people who will not believe and will not commit no matter what, just remember the high priests at the temple and even some of the guards. They were there. They were part of the story and still many of them did not believe it. So why be surprised if people don't believe when you or I tell the story? But, congratulations, you now know how God feels. But even when people do not respond to so incredible a message, we still keep doing what God does, which is keep looking for the lost sheep who will respond and love everyone whether they respond or don't.

And as you go through this process of sharing and being rejected and persisting and not giving up is a process will shape you as much as it shapes those who respond positively to the Gospel.

And sometimes in this process, it will really look like you are at a dead end. You may feel like the needle has not moved in the lives of anybody you are working with. You may feel like you are the most ineffective sharer of the Gospel out there. In other words, you may feel that you among dead people and that you are spiritually dead too.

But remember this. If you are following Christ and taking your guidance from His spirit, just make sure you persist even through that. Because in Jesus' world, death is not the end. In Jesus' world, life comes after death. James 1:12 puts it this way, ***"Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him."*** Remember, in this world you will go through a thousand deaths. Because Jesus persevered to the bitter end, He rose to new life, not just for Himself but for all who would follow him one day.

So if you have not given your life to Christ yet and are still trying to look for the evidence, this is a great time to investigate because the evidence is being discussed on every media channel you can find. And if you are a Christ follower and at a dead end, persist my friend. Because James says, those who persist in their faith till the end will receive the crown of life. Christ has risen, so that you may rise too. Let us pray.