

Triumph Of The Crucified

Matthew 28:1-7

Pastor John Miller

I want you to follow with me beginning in Matthew 28:1. Matthew says, "In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. 2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. 3 His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow," describing the angel, "And for fear of him the keepers," or the Roman soldiers, "did shake, and became as dead men." They were paralyzed with fear. I want you to notice verses 5-7. "And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. 6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. 7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you."

You know, for many today Easter, like Christmas, has lost its real meaning. We have this idea that Easter is Easter baskets, Easter eggs, Easter hunts, Easter bunny, and we forget that Easter is about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I Googled Easter and found out that 67 percent of Americans view Easter as a religious holiday, and only 42 percent view it as a celebration of Jesus' resurrection. In the United States we spend \$2.1 billion annually on Easter candy. That's amazing! That is 120 million pounds of candy. That's not what Easter is about. We have 90 million chocolate bunnies produced at Easter and have kind of developed eating a chocolate Easter bunny down to a fine art. Sixty-seven percent of Americans say that of all your Easter candy the bunny should be eaten first, and you should begin with its ears. Five percent say, "No. You start eating the feet first." Only four percent said, "You start with the tail," that's getting creepy. I just smash the bunny and eat it anyway it comes, you know, it's all chocolate. Who cares what you start with.

I am not here today to preach a sermon about chocolate Easter bunnies. I'm here to preach about the resurrection of Jesus Christ! I believe, with all my heart, that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the only basis of hope in this hopeless world, that all of our hopes in life and beyond the grave in death lie in an empty tomb. Jesus is not here. He is risen as He said. Amen? What a glorious truth that is!

I want to look at Easter from Matthew's perspective. All of the gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—record the true story of Jesus' resurrection. They are an historical narrative. I think one of the greatest and most attested facts of history is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but I want to focus not on the first four verses, but on verses five down to seven, on the angel's Easter message. I'm going to actually steal an Easter sermon today. I'm going to steal it from the angel. I'm going to embellish it a little bit, but I'm going to use his points as my points. The first Easter sermon ever preached was preached not by a pastor but by an angel, not preached in a church but in a graveyard. In this message that this Easter angel gave, there are three

points: First, fear not, verse 5. Second, come see, verse 6; and third, go and tell—fear not, come see, and go and tell. That's the Easter sermon the angel preached.

First of all, look with me, fear not (in verse 5 and the first part of verse 6). It says, "And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that you seek Jesus, which was crucified," then notice verse 6, "He is not here: for he is risen, as he said." That's the most glorious message ever proclaimed! Don't be afraid. In the Greek the word "you" is emphatic, fear you not. My King James has "ye," but it's a you—fear you not. I would say the same to you this morning. Don't be afraid.

You know, we live in a world today where people are so afraid. With the recent terrorist attack in Europe, we had one in San Bernardino, and ISIS on the move, people are living in fear of terror. People are afraid of life. People want to know, "Can I make my mortgage payment? Will I lose my house? Will I get the job? Will I lose my job? Will I lose my health? Will my marriage be able to survive?" Some of you this morning are worried about the survival of your marriage and your family. Some of you are worried about your kids. Some of you are worried about other fears. We all are worried in life, and many times we worry about death. One of the greatest fears that every human being faces is death. Do you know the statistics on death are quite impressive. I Googled that too, by the way. Ten out of every ten people living will die. I thought, That's pretty cool. That's what the Bible says. The Bible says, "Who is he that lives and shall not die? Who is he that lives and can save his soul from the hand of the grave? "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this judgment." We're all going to die, and the Bible says, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." There's nothing more important for you to do than to realize, One day, I'm going to die.

I heard about a carving on a tombstone. Someone was walking through a cemetery and looked at the tombstone. It said, "Pause, my friend, as you go by; as you are now, so once was I. As I am now, soon you will be. Prepare, my friend, to follow me." Wow. Someone wrote a response to that epitaph on that tombstone. "To follow you is not my intent, until I know which way you went." The truth is, everyone living will die. Amen? We need to be ready to die—you're not ready to live until you're ready to die. We're fearful of what happens when we die and about life after death.

In this text the angel gives us two reasons why we do not need to fear. The first reason, verse 5, Jesus was crucified. Notice the angel says, "...for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified." Jesus died on the cross. Now, I want to take a minute and explain who Jesus was. Jesus Christ is the second Person of the Godhead. What do I mean by that? The Bible teaches there is one God—one God, but three Persons, not three gods. It's called the triunity of God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Jesus is God the Son, and He has been with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit from all eternity. He came from heaven and was born on Christmas through the womb of a virgin by the name of Mary. The Bible teaches that Christ is born of a virgin, without the agency of a man, thus He came without a sinful nature, but it teaches that Jesus is fully man and fully God. I want you to understand who Jesus was, the God-man, not two persons, one Person yet two natures—fully God, fully man.

That God-man voluntarily went to a cross and laid down His life for the sins of the world. Jesus, when He died, you won't understand unless you understand the word "substitution," took your place. He substituted Himself for you, and He took your sins on the cross. So, we don't need to be afraid, God has dealt with our sins. Where? At the Cross of Jesus Christ.

You know, it's a wonderful thing when you come to Christ and your sins are forgiven. I'll never forget that day I repented of my sins. I felt like a weight lifting off my shoulders, and I literally felt clean inside. All of the sins had been forgiven. That doesn't mean I've gone on to live a perfect life, but I know that my sins have been forgiven, that I'm free from that dominating power of sin, and that one day I'll be free from sin altogether. Because of Jesus' death on the cross, I do not need to be afraid of sins and its judgment.

There's a second reason why we need not fear (verse 6), because Jesus rose from the dead. Notice what the angel said, "He is not here: for he is risen, as he said." So, Jesus died for our sins, and He rose again for our justification. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation for all our hopes. It is the elimination of all of our fears. The song we sing, Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone. What a blessed thing that is, because Jesus lives all fear is gone! I can face tomorrow. But, you say, "Pastor John, what evidence is there that Jesus really rose from the dead?" Let me give you a few. This list could go on very long. That's one of those points for Easter where I have a hard time not going for a long time, okay? Some of you want to get out of here so you're praying for me, but I want you to listen very carefully.

The first reason we know Jesus rose from the dead, and it may sound simple but it's not simplistic, verse 6, "He is not here." Isn't that awesome? He is not here! What does that mean? It means the grave is empty! The grave is empty. Now, I know, I know, I know, and again, Lord, help me not to go too long. People say, "Well, thieves came and stole the body. That's what happened. The disciples stole the body." I don't have time to go into all the arguments against these theories of the stolen body—none of them hold water. Some say, "Well, the women got the wrong tomb. You know, they're bad on directions, so they didn't know where they were going." I'm kidding...kind of. "I think it's over here." "I think it's over..." they knew where Jesus was. If you buried someone on Friday, would you forget where you put them on Sunday? "I don't know where Uncle Harry is. Just throw the flowers, they'll land out there somewhere." No. You know exactly where they are buried, right? Wrong tomb theory is out. Stolen body theory is out.

There is another popular theory for the empty tomb called the swoon theory. Jesus didn't really die, He just passed out—loss of blood, exposure on the cross, laid in the tomb—but He revived and came to His disciples and they nursed Him back to health. Years ago a woman wrote the famous radio preacher, J. Vernon McGee, and said, "Our preacher said on Easter Sunday that Jesus swooned on the cross and that his disciples nursed Him back to health. What do you think?" I love Dr. McGee's reply. He said, "Dear Sister, beat your preacher with a leather whip 39 times, nail him to a cross, hang him in the sun for six hours, run a spear through his heart, embalm him, put him in an airless tomb and see what happens." I don't think Jesus just

swooned. The Bible is very, very clear. Jesus actually died. You don't have a resurrection unless you have a death. Because of His full humanity, Jesus tasted death for every man.

Another evidence of the resurrection, of course, is His post-resurrection appearances—Jesus was seen alive. For forty days, He appeared to His disciples. Even Thomas, who said, “I won't believe unless I touch Him.” He appeared in the room, and Thomas knelt before Him and said, “My Lord and my God!” He was convinced of the resurrection. The women and the disciples were changed from fear to faith. There was the great conversion of Saul of Tarsus who became Paul the apostle in Acts 9, and the first Jewish Christians gathered to worship on Sunday as opposed to Saturday. The first day of the week was Sunday, and they called it the Lord's day. What would cause these Jewish Christians to transfer their day of worship from Saturday to Sunday? Only one thing. That one thing is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday. That's why traditionally, true Christians will gather on Sunday to worship the Lord. Again, for us as Christians, every day is the Lord's day. Amen? Every day is resurrection day. We live, we walk, in the power of the resurrection. But Jesus was seen for forty days by His disciples. He changed lives; and, not to say, millions of lives have been changed over the last two thousand years by coming to know the living Savior.

How many of you today could testify that when you accepted Jesus Christ your life was changed. Amen? Your life was changed! And this is the way the Bible puts it. It says, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away,” praise God for that, “behold, all things are become new.” Jesus is still in the business of changing lives. Has your life been changed by the risen Savior, Jesus Christ? If not, I'm going to give you an opportunity this morning to put your faith in Jesus Christ. You can come to know the living, risen Savior.

The first thing the angel said was an assurance—don't be afraid, Jesus died and Jesus rose. The second word or point is an invitation. I want you to notice it, verse 6, “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” What would they see? They'd see that Jesus was gone, the grave cloths were still there in the shape of a body, but the invitation to “come, see” means to see with regard to understanding. I've always thought that's interesting. The angel actually said, “Come, see.” He's inviting them. They started into the tomb and, by the way, the stone was rolled away not so Jesus could get out but so that others could get in and see that Christ has risen. The angel is hanging out inside the tomb and says, “Come on in!” It's kind of like, “The water's fine. Come on in.” They go in with fear and trembling and there is this beautiful angel. Actually, the other gospels indicate there were at least two angels, one at the head and one at the foot where the body of Jesus lay, which is interesting because in the Old Testament you had the Ark of the Covenant in the holy place and on the mercy seat atop of that ark there were two angels at the two ends with their wings facing each other and touching. That mercy seat represents the cross of Jesus Christ where the blood was sprinkled, so His grave became the mercy seat. The veil of the temple was ripped in two, and the way of access to God has now been made open. One of the angels spoke to the women and said, “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”

What is the significance of that empty tomb? Let me give you some reasons it's significant. First, it means that Jesus Christ is God, you got that? It means that Jesus Christ is God, and all that Jesus said is true. In Romans 1:4 Paul says that the resurrection of Jesus Christ declares Him, "...to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." The resurrection sets Christ off. No other human being in the history of mankind has ever been risen from the dead. Let me be very specific. When Christ rose from the dead, He rose in an immortal body. He wasn't just revived and had to die again, like others recorded in the Bible. He rose in a glorified, immortal body—the body that would exist in heaven forever. When Jesus ascended back into heaven, that same body, glorified; when He is seated at the right hand of the Father, same body, exalted; and He ever lives to make intercession for us in heaven.

Jesus is declared to be the Son of God which means everything He said about Himself is true because He predicted He would raise from the dead—He did raise from the dead—everything He said about Himself is true. "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me," "I am the bread of life...who comes down from heaven, he that cometh to me shall never hunger," "I am the living water..whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst," "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." All that Jesus said about Himself is true, and the resurrection proves that.

There is a second indication or result of the resurrection; that is, His death on the cross was accepted by God the Father as a true atonement for sin. You say, "Well, what do you mean by that?" When Jesus hung on the cross and cried, "Tetelestai," in the English, "It is finished," or paid in full, and then He was buried three days later, God the Father said, "Amen!" to Christ's "It is finished!" and raised Him from the dead. So, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is this stamp of approval on the atoning work of Jesus by God the Father. What He did on the cross actually paid for your sins. You don't have to die. You don't have to be separated. You don't have to die in your sins—you can be forgiven and free!

Thirdly, the resurrection of Jesus Christ means that those who put their faith and trust and believe in Jesus will be forgiven and stand righteous before a holy God. Fourthly, it means that those who are joined to Jesus by faith will also be raised, like Jesus, from the dead and have life eternal in heaven. That's good news! Amen? We can go to heaven! Sometimes that thought just kind of strikes me occasionally and I'll think, I am going to heaven! I know I'm going to heaven! Some people think that's presumptuous and, "Who do you think you are that you get to go to heaven?" I get to go to heaven not because of me but because of Jesus. Amen? My hope is built on nothing less, Than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand.

What are you trusting in today? Are you trusting in Jesus Christ? Is your faith in Christ alone? The idea that we will go to heaven is a glorious prospect! Jesus said, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live...and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Paul said, "We are confident, I say, and willing rather

to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” Jesus said, John 14, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” He’s talking about heaven, people. Heaven is a place. Heaven is a real place. Heaven is a prepared place, and guess who is going to heaven? Those who have trusted Jesus Christ because He came to save. He died for our sins and rose again from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ also means that Jesus will stand one day as judge on those who have rejected Him. Paul, preaching in Acts 17 before the Athenians, the Epicureans, and the Stoicks on Mars’ hill said, “God, because of the resurrection, has appointed a day,” listen to this, “in the which those who have rejected Christ will be resurrected and stand before Christ as the judge.” He’s proven it by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Did you know that everyone will die and those who reject Jesus Christ will stand before Jesus Christ? It’s called the Great White Throne judgment. Jesus will sit upon this throne, and the books will be opened. If your name is not found in that book of life, you will be cast into a lake of fire. Jesus said it was a place of darkness, of weeping and gnashing of teeth, where the worm dieth not—yes, I’m referring to hell. If you reject Jesus Christ, you will go to hell. You say, “Well, how could a God of love send anyone to hell?” He doesn’t send anyone to hell. Jesus came to rescue us from hell. Jesus came to save us from hell. We’re already on our way to hell and except we repent, that’s our destiny. Unless we believe in God’s provision through Jesus, that’s where we’re going. God came to rescue us in the Person of Jesus Christ. God doesn’t send anyone to hell, you send yourself there by rejecting Him. Jesus, who rose from the dead, will be the judge of everyone someday, but for those who put their faith in Christ and trust in Him, they’re transferred from death to life and won’t stand before Him on that day.

There is one last point the angel makes, verse 7; that is, go and tell. “And go quickly, and tell his disciples,” what are they to tell the disciples? “...he is risen,” from the dead. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. He died for us, He rose for us, it’s what we call the gospel. The word “gospel” means good news. Here’s what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:3, “...Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” Paul said, “That is the gospel which we preach.” That’s the gospel which I’m preaching this morning. That, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him,” trusts in Him, puts their faith in Him, “should not perish, but have everlasting life.” You either perish or you have everlasting life, and that everlasting life begins the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. You can have it right now, this morning. It’s just a prayer away. You can say to Jesus, “Come into my heart; forgive my sins. I believe You died for me on the Cross. I believe You rose again for me, and I trust You.”

Now, listen very carefully. It’s not enough just to believe Jesus died and rose again. It’s not enough just to believe that—you must trust in that. It’s not enough to stand on a runway...did you see on the news last night about the pilot who was arrested on the runway, on the tarmac,

for being drunk before he took off on the plane? That's crazy! You're sitting on the plane getting ready to take off, looking out the window, and the pilot is getting arrested. He's like, (in a drunken voice) "It's okay, officer. (Hiccups) I can fly this sucker." It's like, "No, thank you, Dude!" Think of how much faith you put in airplanes and pilots! It's scary. The first time I ever flew, it freaked me out, the pilot walked by. I'm like, "Who's flying this thing?" He's walking around the plane. You know, whatever you put your faith in is what you get. You put your faith in a pilot, you get an intoxicated pilot. You put your faith in money, what do you get? What money can do. You put your faith in government, what do you get? Not a whole lot, right? You put your faith in science, what do you get? You put your faith in religion, what do you get? Not much. You put your faith in Jesus Christ, what do you get? You get what Jesus can do. He can save you from your sins! He can give you eternal life! He can take you to heaven when you die! Amen? Put your faith in Jesus Christ.

We go and we tell. I encourage you this Easter to spread the good news—Christ died for our sins, Christ was buried, and Christ arose from the dead. What does it mean? It means Jesus is the object of our faith. It means that Jesus is the source of our hope, and it means that Jesus—and I love this—is the proof of God's love! Did you know when Jesus died and rose again God was saying to you, "I love you." When Jesus gave Himself willingly on the cross for your sins He was saying, "I love you," and "I can forgive you," and "I can give you eternal life." The Bible says God showed us how much He loved us by sending His one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through Him. This is real love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the sacrifice to take away our sins.

You say, "Well, Pastor John, what do I need to do to be forgiven? What do I need to do to know that I have eternal life? What do I need to do today to be a Christian and to know that when I die I'm going to go to heaven? I'm going to quickly tell you three things, listen. First, you need to realize that you're a sinner—all have sinned and fallen short of God's standard of holiness. The Bible says, "There is none righteous, no, not one." You need to realize you're not good enough to get to heaven on your own merits.

Secondly, you need to repent of your sin. That means you change your mind. The word "repent," *metanoia* means to change your mind about the way you're living and as a result you change the direction of your life. Instead of following your sin and your selfishness and your rebellion and your anger, you turn and trust Jesus as your Savior—you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Are you willing today to admit you're a sinner? Are you willing today to repent of your sin, to turn to Jesus Christ?

Here's the third thing you need to do, and I'm going to give you this opportunity. You need to receive Jesus Christ. You can't get to heaven because your parents are saved or your wife is saved or your husband is saved. You can't get to heaven because you go to church on Easter Sunday. You go to heaven because you've taken the hand of Jesus Christ. That's what it means to receive Christ, to believe in Christ, "...as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

If you're here today and you've never trusted Jesus Christ...I'm not saying, it's not an issue of what you believe, I'm saying have you trusted Him? You can believe all the right things and never be saved. Have you committed your life to Jesus Christ? Have you trusted Him and Him alone? Let's bow our heads in a word of prayer.