

“The First Act of the New Creation” The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the Dead

Matthew 28: 1-10

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Text: Matthew 28:1-10 (NIV) ¹ 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."

Easter is the most joyful day of all so let me begin with a lighthearted story. A lot of years ago when I was a much younger Dad, I took two little boys as my helpers to build a baseball backstop out of old lumber. Our son Chris was about eight and our JJ was about five and there they watched as I prepared to cut some lumber. Skill saw in hand I leaned forward and said "OK you guys...hold your ears!" And I looked and there was Chris covering his ears like this [ears covered by hands] but JJ was holding his ears...like this [literally holding his ears pulling them outwards]! He heard what I said but he had no idea what I meant! What a cute memory!

That is exactly what happened again and again when Jesus spoke of his Crucifixion and the Resurrection to follow. They heard what he said but had no idea what he meant. The same as the women that morning at the tomb. Consider, we read:

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."

A few moments later we see that the women hurried off! I find it incredible that they said nothing to the angel. What does that tell us? I mean...think about it with me please. The only recorded reaction from these women was that they were afraid and yet filled with joy. But no verbal response. This message from the angel is obviously not what they were expecting. They went to the tomb with spices and ointments to make sure that the body of Jesus had been properly prepared for

burial. It seems that the last thing they were thinking was that Jesus would be alive! Resurrected? Not even in their thoughts! Interesting. Before we go further, let us pray.

The Laws of Probability deal with the likelihood of something happening or being true and valid. The larger the sample the more likely something can be considered true or false. For example, in a group this size it is highly probable that at least one person here has been to the State of Florida. That's easy. But even in a group this size, it is not very likely that anyone has, for example, been inside the Kremlin in Moscow. Fair to say? So, probability considers the likelihood of the event and size of the sample...among other things.

OK. Now, without even asking I can wager or guess that nearly every single adult in this sanctuary has been to a funeral home and stood politely near a casket with a deceased person's body in view. Right? But let me ask this question: has anyone here this morning ever gone to a funeral home and seen a dead person sit up in the casket and climb out and resume human physical life? No. In fact, no one has. Thus, probability thinking would say that if in a group this size no one has ever seen a dead person come back to life....dead people probably do not come back to life. They stay dead! Indeed, the world says, quite reasonably from experience, that "When you are dead, you stay dead!"

Now, when we study the Easter account of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we see the same reality. It is perfectly reasonable for everyone to find the Resurrection account to be...hard to believe. Unlikely. And we find it even strange that thru the ages so many people have believed it when the only people who saw evidence of it...have been dead for twenty centuries. So, let's be honest. I am absolutely certain that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead but my certainty will not persuade anyone else out there to believe it. And I understand that.

We open the New Testament and we find that the angel said: ⁶ **“He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.”** And we quietly say to ourselves “Really?” Even they did not know what to do with such news! Consider...how curious is this reality. The idea of resurrection was less foreign to them than it is to us. Why? Because some of the very people in this account had seen Jesus raise the dead. Some of them were there when he raised up Lazarus. Some were there when he raised the widow's son. But think about it....they had seen Jesus do those things and now Jesus himself was dead! So, from their responses absolutely none of them expected to see Jesus come back to life. The one man who could raise the dead was himself...dead!

They would have said “Dead people stay dead and only Jesus could raise dead people up...and now he himself is dead...so it's all over!” They were really like the Sadducees whom Jesus had rebuked because they did not believe in the power of God [Mark 12:24]. What is our point? The people in that age and in our age can be forgiven for not believing in resurrections because they just do not see them

happen. And this is of great importance: we can be sure that the disciples of Jesus were not expecting to see him alive again. We do not see even one of them say “Let’s go to the tomb and wait for his Resurrection!” Not one of them says to the angel “Well of course! I’ve been waiting for this! He said he would be resurrected!” No, we see even his most intimate friends saying “When you are dead...you are dead.” So...we should never say to our unbelieving neighbor “How can you not believe in the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead?” From his or her personal experience, he or she has no reason to believe it!

Man is so refractory to the idea of resurrection that he just *cannot* believe it. It seems too good to be true. That was true for the disciples also! Jesus told them several times that he would be put to death and then be raised up. We read:

Matthew 17:22-23 (NIV) ²² When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. ²³ They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.” And the disciples were filled with grief.”

Consider their response. They are filled with grief! They don’t even say “We’re grieving but...you’ll be raised to life? Really?” No. It’s as if they don’t even hear Jesus say that part. That’s why at the end of the Sabbath Day...the second day...we don’t find any of them saying “Hey...tomorrow is the third day! Jesus will be raised up! Let’s go sit by his grave!” No. They were thinking dead people...stay dead. So, if you are here this morning and you do not believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, I want to tell you that you are totally statistically normal! If you get nothing else out of your visit to Cornerstone today, you can take home this encouraging thought: you are normal! And as to his Resurrection, I did not believe it either for the first 29 years of my life! But now I do. And millions of other people do. Why? Let’s consider just two things today:

FIRST: IT IS IMPOSSIBLE IN OUR NATURAL THINKING TO BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST! HE MUST REVEAL HIMSELF TO US INDIVIDUALLY!

Consider the disciples. Again...they were not expecting a resurrection and they did not even believe it when they first heard about it! On the afternoon of the Resurrection, two of the disciples were walking a few miles outside of Jerusalem when Jesus joined them. But they did not recognize him. So, they told this “stranger” all about what had happened and they put it this way:

Luke 24:20-24 (NIV) ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of

angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

All they can say is "Some of our women amazed us!" They do not believe it! It takes a special act of Jesus revealing himself to undo their doubts! Jesus begins to teach them and later on he breaks bread with them and is suddenly gone. And the text says:

Luke 24:30-32 (NIV) ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

They go out boldly. He revealed himself to them and they believed in his Resurrection. But that reality raises a different point. Why? Why did he reveal himself to them and not to everyone on Planet Earth that day? In fact, why not reveal himself to everyone today? Think of how easy it would be for Christ to have come into the world in the twentieth century. The Crucifixion and the Resurrection could have been carried live on MSNBC! We could be watching the Resurrection on You-Tube videos! Everyone would see it!

There is a mystery here. Could it be that Jesus' Resurrection from the dead was *not* primarily to prove that he was the Messiah? Could it be that his first priority was *not* to show himself alive to the world...but to show himself faithful to those whom he had chosen? Could it be that his revealing himself to only a very few people was consistent with something Jesus had said to his disciples several times:

Luke 8:10 (NIV) ¹⁰ He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, 'though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.'"

Here is the point I am trying to make. If you believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...it is because God has gifted you with the ability to do so. It is because of God's special grace to His own. No one believes in the Resurrection based on someone else's testimony. Consider the case of Thomas...the man known to history as "Doubting Thomas" ...

John 20:19-21 (NIV) ¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples

were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Our friend Thomas was not there. But the other men told him about what had happened. How did Thomas respond? The same way we would respond! In effect, he said "I know you guys and I trust you...but I can't believe this unless I see it for myself!" Perfectly reasonable! That's how you respond and how I respond! *So, allow me to speak now directly to those of you who either do not believe Jesus was raised from the dead or....you think it might be true but you're not really sure...*

You may be thinking "This preacher.... Pastor Alberta...seems to be saying that I don't believe or I can't believe unless God chooses me to believe and...what if God does not care about my soul and He is leaving me out of belief?" But my question to you in this: you are here this morning are you not? You are among a couple of thousand people today who are certain of the Resurrection right? Is it not possible that this is your day for God to reveal to you that Jesus was who he said he is and that he was raised from the dead?

If you hear the testimonies of those who have experienced the Risen Christ, you might say "That sounds great but *I need to know it for myself!*" True! But if you seek him with all your heart and admit that you are a sinner in need of salvation...Jesus will reveal himself to you! Consider the rest of the Thomas story...how the Risen Christ responded to the words of Thomas:

John 20:24-29 (NIV) ²⁴ Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." ²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." ²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

That last part is tremendously important to us as Christians. Jesus knew and Jesus knows that it is a special blessing to believe in his Resurrection for us because we have not seen him. In a way, we are more blessed than the first disciples because God's Holy Spirit has given us proof in our hearts and minds that eclipses even visible proof. So, that is our first point:

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE IN OUR NATURAL THINKING TO BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST! HE MUST REVEAL HIMSELF TO US INDIVIDUALLY!

Let me be clear. Eternal life depends upon the following according to the Word of God:

Romans 10:9 (NIV) ⁹ That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

The Lordship of Christ and his Resurrection yield eternal life to the Christian. But there was more to his victory over death than our individual salvation. In my view...

SECOND: THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS FROM THE DEAD WAS THE FIRST ACT OF THE NEW CREATION!

What do we mean by that? These three days in a sense were the days on which the human race started over again. Consider this from Genesis Chapter One. The first man, Adam was made on the Sixth Day. We read:

Genesis 1:26-27 (NIV) ²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

The first Adam was made and brought to life on Friday the Sixth Day. The Second or Last Adam Jesus took the sins of the first Adam and his entire race upon himself...and was put to death on the Friday the Sixth Day. The perfect Passover Lamb. We read:

Luke 23:44-46 (NIV) ⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

On the Seventh Day in Genesis we see the pattern for rest. We read about the Sabbath:

Genesis 2:2 (NIV) By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.

On the Seventh Day of after the Crucifixion it was the Sabbath. Jesus body was left to rest in the tomb. We read these things about the body of Jesus:

Luke 23:53-56 (NIV) ⁵³ Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. ⁵⁴ It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. ⁵⁵ The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. ⁵⁶ Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

So, the first Adam was given life on the Sixth Day; the Last Adam was given death on the Sixth Day. The first Adam rested on the Seventh Day...the Sabbath. The last Adam rested on the Seventh Day, the Sabbath. But then when all was lost, God began the human race all over again on the First Day of the week. In Genesis One, we read:

Genesis 1:3-5 (NIV) ³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning--the first day.

Just as no one was there to see the great flash of light on the First Day of creation, no one was there to see the great flash of the light on the First Day of the new creation when Jesus was Resurrected! We read:

Luke 24:1-6 (NIV) ¹ On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. "Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen!

In the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, God started the world all over again. Easter was the first day of the new creation under the Lordship of Christ! A new Adam without sin and ready to reign over the creation itself! If you belong to Christ by faith in his Lordship and his death and his Resurrection, then you are a child of the new creation and you yourself are being made new! That is why the Apostle Paul said these words:

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV) ¹⁷ "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

Question: are you part of the new creation? Are you body and soul and spirit a child of God thru Jesus Christ? Have you received him as Lord and Savior? Have you gone beyond hearing the Gospel...to understanding what it means? It means Christ has Risen in glory and those who belong to him will one day be raised in glory too! Because He is Risen...He is Risen indeed!

Let us pray.

