

Everything Has Changed

Matt 28:1-10

Call: 1 Pet 1:3 (ESV)

Scripture: Matt 28:1-10 (Acted out)

I. Introduction

He has risen! He has risen indeed. Good morning and Happy Easter! My name is Shawn Reese. I'm one of the pastors here.

Something happened on that first Easter that makes all the difference in the world. Something happened on that first Easter that brought a new reality into our world. Something happened on that first Easter that had never happened before, and now everything has changed. Dr. Paul Williams, professor emeritus of Indian and Tibetan philosophy at the university of Bristol and previously practicing Buddhist, surprised his family and friends when in 1999, he became a Christian. He describes his journey in his book called *The Unexpected Way*. In there, he says this, "If the God we meet in Jesus is real and if he was really risen on the 3rd day, then everything changes" (Williams, 19).

If Jesus was really risen on the 3rd day, as the kids just acted out from the Gospel of Matthew, then everything changes. However, if what Matthew claimed to have happened actually didn't happen, then nothing has changed. If what Matthew said happened didn't actually happen, then it is fake news, and we can all go home right now. Actually if it didn't happen, we would never have heard of Jesus of Nazareth again. Had it not happened, we would never have heard of any of his teaching. We would have never heard about the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. We would have never heard of the Sermon of the Mount. We would have never heard of Mary or Joseph or the child in a manger. Had it not happened, there would be no Christmas season. There would be no Gospel, and there would be no good resulting from the Gospel. There would be no hospitals. There would be no public schools. There would be no CityTeam or homeless shelters. We would not have the Rotating Safe Car Park. There would be no artwork from Rembrandt. There would be no music of Handel and Bach. There would be no great cathedrals. If Jesus were still in the grave today, there would be no Gospel and all the implications of the Gospel. This is why Paul in Corinthians will say, "*If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain*" (1 Cor 15:14).

But, the fact is that something happened that first Easter which changed the course of history. Something happened that first Easter, and now everything has changed. So, what happened?

II. Good Friday

Well, to understand that, we need to understand what happened the Friday before Easter Sunday.

The previous Friday afternoon, Jesus of Nazareth had been nailed hand and foot to a Roman cross. The Romans had devised this cruelest of punishments as a way to declare the great power of Rome over all people, and to declare the dire consequences for those who would not conform to the Roman way.

So, why was Jesus crucified?

According to Matthew's Gospel, Jesus had spent the last three years preaching, teaching and healing. He had brought love and life to countless people. Many people had discovered wholeness, peace and joy through him. Many people who were considered unlovable had discovered love through Jesus. In the hopeless culture of the first century, countless people had found hope in him.

Yet Jesus was crucified. So, if he was so good, why was he crucified? Well, there were various charges laid against him, but the most likely reason was that he had committed blasphemy. Jesus did in fact claim to be uniquely sent by God. But, even more than that, he claimed that God was his father and that he and his father were somehow one (Jn 10:30). Even more, he called himself "I am" (John 8:58), using the very words that God uses for himself. Now, if those statements are not true, then he has in fact committed blasphemy.

So, Jesus was crucified on Friday. That afternoon, after he had died, some men take the body down off the cross, pack the body with spices, wrap the body in linen cloths and lay the body in an unused tomb. The tomb is then sealed by rolling a great stone in front of it. Roman soldiers are posted outside of the tomb guarding it. And, many of the women who had traveled with Jesus over the past 3 years watch all of these events.

Jesus was dead and buried on Friday.

Saturday was the Sabbath, so Jesus' followers rested and grieved. And, the whole world waited and watched in silence.

And, that brings us to Sunday. So what happened on that first Easter morning?

III. Easter Morning

A. Introduction

Matthew tells us that two of the women who had watched over those events on Friday went to the tomb. Both are named Mary. The point is they knew exactly where to go. In other words, they didn't go to the wrong tomb.

As the women are making their way to the tomb, there's a great earthquake. And, Matthew says, "Behold!" This is a key word for Matthew, and a key word throughout this text, used four times. To Matthew, "behold" always means something incredibly surprising. It's as if he's saying, "I know this will surprise you, but take a look at this..." Look! Really see what is happening. It turns out that "seeing" is also a key word in our text, also used four times. So, in

these short 10 verses, we are being invited to “really look; to come and see the incredibly surprising events.” And, behold, at the end of verse 2, look and see what happens: an angel!

B. The Angel

This angel apparently uses the earthquake to move the stone, then sits radiantly upon the stone. Of course, the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb become terribly afraid, then they have a “manquake” (same word as earthquake). They tremble and fall to the ground like dead men.

You have to really *see* what is happening here. Roman soldiers at that time did not fall to the ground for anyone. God was shaking all the world’s foundations with the resurrection, including Rome’s. He was changing everything!

C. The Announcement

Verse 5: The angel then turns to the women and encourages them, *“Do not be afraid, for I know you’re seeking Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said”* (28:5-6).

Of the four Gospels, Matthew is most concerned with things happening *just as* they were promised. He has risen *“[just] as he said,”* the angel says. Throughout Matthew, Jesus had promised over and over again that he would be raised (12:40; 16:21; 17:9, 23; 20:19; 26:32). I count 6 times he predicted it. And, now, the angel says, look and see that it had happened! He had been raised. The promise-maker is the promise-keeper. Behold! Look! See this! The promise-maker is the promise-keeper.

The angel then invites the women to *“come and see.”* Come on in ladies and see that the grave is really empty. Check it out! Do your scientific research. Use your senses. Investigate this new reality. Really look and really see what has just happened. A new reality has come into the world! Everything has changed!

The angel then commissions the women, “You’ve come and seen. Now, go and tell the others! Quickly! Everything has changed – go tell it on the mountains!” *“How beautiful are the feet of those”* who go away to preach the good news that the tomb was empty (Romans 10:15)!

The women obey the angel and become the official heralds of the greatest good news of all time! I said it at Christmas, and I’ll say it here – this story is a wonderful reversal of values! Not only is a woman the leading human actor in the drama of Christmas, women are the leading human actors in the drama of that first Easter morning. You may know that women were so marginalized in the ancient world, their testimony wasn’t valid in a court of law. Yet for the story that changes everything for all time, women are the leading actors. As one writer says, “In a purely fictional narrative, one would have avoided making women the crown witnesses of the resurrection” (Beasley-Murray). This story is not fiction! This story really happened and *is* “the supreme intervention of God into human existence” (Bruner, 778). And, the women are the official heralds of that truth.

Matthew says they begin running away with fear and great joy. Quaking fear and awe-filled joy. Can they coexist? I think so. I think we *can* feel both at the same time, can't we? I think my wedding would be the best example – I had great joy, but I also had great fear too, my wife would actually say it was “panic”!

D. The Meeting With Jesus

Look and see what happens next, verse 9. The risen Jesus meets the women - and simply says, “Hello.” “Greetings” is how the ESV translates it.

E. The Women's Response

And see how the women respond. They fall down, take hold of Jesus' feet, and worship.

They grab his feet – yes, he has a physical body. He is no ghost. He is a real person with a real body. It's a transformed body, but it's a real, resurrected body! In other words, *see* what has happened here. This is no resuscitation. All of the raising stories in the Gospels were resuscitations. Jesus resuscitated Jairus' daughter. Jesus resuscitated the widow from Nain's son. Jesus resuscitated his good friend Lazarus. But Jairus' daughter, the widow from Nain's son and Lazarus would all die again. Jesus is resurrected into a transformed body, never to die again. Jesus is not rescued from death. He's not brought back from the grave to live the life he had before. Jesus goes all the way through the grave, letting death do everything it wants to do. Then he comes out the other side into a new kind of existence that no one had ever lived, and where he will never die again. Jesus is the first person to be resurrected. And, he's resurrected into a real, transformed body.

Yet, also, look and see that the women not only grab his physical feet, they also worship him. So, he is human, but he is also God! The women have moved from quaking fear to mega joy to authentic worship. This is the only appropriate response to the risen Jesus, to fall down at his feet and say, “my Lord and my God.”

F. The Commission

Jesus then closes the scene by echoing the commission already given by the angel. “*Don't be afraid,*” he says. You've come, and you've seen the good news. Don't be afraid to go and tell my brothers and sisters to meet me in Galilee. I have not forgotten about them. They still matter to me, and I still have plans for them. They will *see* me in Galilee.

IV. What Has Changed?

A. Introduction

Well, that's Matthew's version of that first Easter morning in only 10 verses. Ten short verses, but ten short verses that make all the difference in the world. Ten short verses that change everything in our world.

So, what has changed? What is it that has changed for all time? Well, how long do you have today? Since it's Easter, I guess we should not go too long. But, I invite you to look – to *come and see* just a few things that have changed as a result of that first Easter.

B. Death has been defeated

Because Jesus lives, death has met its match and has been defeated! For the first time in history, death did not have the last word. Because of Jesus' resurrection, the last word is now life! Death finally met someone it could not hold down. And, as a result, the reign of death has been broken. The reign of life has begun.

C. Fear Fades

Because he lives, we no longer need to fear death. In relationship with the risen Jesus, death does not have the last word over us. Death only has the second to last word. The last word is life, so we don't need to fear.

Most people will say that all fear is ultimately rooted in the fear of death. Clearly, the fear of, say, pandemics is rooted in the fear of death. But, so is the fear of being alone, the fear of financial ruin, the fear of failure, and on it goes. All rooted in the fear of death. Death is real and awful, but it is no longer final for those in relationship with Jesus. Because of the resurrection, death is no longer the monster it once was. And, once that fact gets a hold of us, it sets us free from the fear of death, and slowly unravels all those other fears. And, we're set free to really live.

D. We Can Trust Jesus

Because he lives, we can now trust everything about Jesus.

1. We can bank on Jesus' teaching. The resurrection is God's great stamp of approval on the Jesus' way of living in this world, and on his teaching for how to be truly human. The Sermon on the Mount is one example. The resurrection is God's great yes to the way of being meek and merciful and poor in spirit, the way of loving our enemies, praying for those who persecute us and the Golden Rule, and on it goes. This teaching tells us how to live and how to be truly human, and the resurrection confirms it.
2. We can also bank on Jesus' promises, on every promise he ever made! The resurrection says that Jesus is always telling us the truth, which means we can count on all his promises:
 - *"I will be with you always,"* he says (Matt 28:20).
 - *"I will rest you if you come to me,"* he says (Matt 11:29).
 - *"I will lift you up on the last day,"* he says (John 6:39).
 - *"I will go to prepare a place for you, and I will come back again to take you to be with me,"* he says (John 14:3).

And, the resurrection says we can bank on all of Jesus' promises coming true.

3. And, we can also bank on His audacious claims. The resurrection is the great yes to all Jesus says about himself. Jesus says,
 - *"I am the bread of life."* Easter says yes you are (John 6:35).
 - *"I am the light of the world."* Easter says yes you are (John 8:12).
 - *"I am the good shepherd."* Easter says yes you are (John 10:11).
 - *"I am the way, the truth and the life."* Easter says yes you are (John 14:6).

- “I am the great I AM.” Easter says yes you are (John 8:58).
All of them! We can bank on all of his claims because of Easter.

We can trust everything about Jesus, his teaching, his promises and his claims, because of the resurrection.

E. Good Friday is “Good”

Because he lives, we can take our stand on Jesus’ crucifixion. The resurrection of Jesus confirms that his crucifixion really did accomplish everything the New Testament says it did. The resurrection is the Father’s great yes to the cross.

- Yes, the cross really is the victory over sin and evil.
- Yes, the crucifixion does rescue us from all that enslaves us.
- Yes, the blood of Jesus does reconcile sinners to God.
- Yes, we are forgiven!
- Yes, we are redeemed!
- Yes, everything that needs to be done for unholy people to be in relationship with a holy God has been done!
- Yes, he paid it all!
- Yes, it is finished!
- Yes, the resurrection confirms that Good Friday is indeed good!

F. Jesus Is Working

Because he lives, he is at work in this world right now. Because he’s alive, he’s doing the very things he did before he was crucified.

- He’s bringing his kingdom of wholeness, peace and joy.
- He’s healing and renewing and reconciling.
- He’s shining his light and love into all the dark spaces.

He’s working in this world.

This of course means he’s also working in us. Because he’s alive, he can put his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, within you and within me. And, that means, on a personal level, that you and I can also be changed. Now, Jesus accepts us just as we are, but he loves us too much to leave us unchanged. Sometimes I think, we wonder if we can really be changed. But, look and see that we can be changed. We can’t change ourselves, but with the Spirit of the Living God in us, we can be changed. The Spirit empowers us to change by slowly “*causing us to walk*” in the Jesus way (Ezek 36:27). And, we can be “*confident that he who began a good work in us will carry it to completion*” (Phil 1:6).

So, even if we don’t see it and even if we don’t feel it, we know Jesus is working right now, in our world and in us. And, he will never leave us, which leads to my last point.

G. Jesus is With Us

Because he lives, we are never alone. He is with us. Jesus can work out that promise that he made to those first disciples at the end of Matthew, that he will be with us *always* to the very end of the age. Always, always, always present with us. We are never alone.

V. Conclusion

Isn't all of that good news?! And a lot of hope, isn't it? Living and unshakable hope! Before that first Easter morning, none of that was true. But, it all changed as a result of Jesus' resurrection. And, much, much more changed too, such as we now have Christmas and we now have hospitals and public schools and homeless shelters and CityTeam and RSCP and the artwork of Rembrandt and the music of Handel and Bach and the great cathedrals, and everything else. Everything has changed for all time. Amen.

<Testimony>

Benediction

Now that you've come and seen, don't be afraid!
Go and tell your neighbors and co-workers and colleagues and teammates and classmates that everything has changed
And, invite them to come and see that the grave is empty!
He is risen ... He has risen indeed!
The promise-maker really is the promise-keeper.
Go forward in that unshakable hope!
Amen.

Resources

Bruner, Dale, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13-28*
Johnson, Darrell, *APPL516: What is the Gospel? (Regent College Course)*
Johnson, Darrell, *APPL517: The Weekend That Changed The World (Regent College Course)*
Osborne, Grant, *Matthew (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)*
Williams, Paul, *The Unexpected Way*