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He's Alive!

April 9, 2023

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TEXT: Matthew 28:1-10 (ESV)

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

I have been blessed with five delightful grandchildren who oftentimes will surprise me with some of the things they say to me. One of them, four-year-old Johnny, got interested in the US presidents and great classical composers of the past. So interested in fact, he memorized them. He could list them off like nobody's business. One day when he started going down his list of famous figures with me, he stopped after the first one and with a serious look on his face, he said to me, "You know what, Papa? He's dead." And then he went on to say the same thing again and again as he worked his way through his list. Now, someday, when Johnny's 18, he'll probably head off to a university and take a course in world history and read about the great religions of the world and their founders. He'll read about Confucius and that he's dead. And then there's Muhammad. He's dead as well. And Moses? He's dead. Then there's Buddha, and he's dead as well. But when he gets to Jesus of the Christian faith, here's what he will find. Yes, like others, Jesus died. But it is reported that he rose again and he's alive.

That's the ultimate truth the Marys in our story for today discovered. They had watched Jesus die on a cross. They saw his dead body placed in a tomb which was sealed by a large stone. They didn't go to the cemetery to meet with him. After all, dead is dead, right? But when they arrived at the tomb, they got the shock of their lives. Jesus is alive. They became the first eyewitnesses of his resurrection. The testimony of these women could be summed up like this: "We went. We saw. We heard. We touched. We worshiped. We received. Conclusion: Jesus, who was dead, is now alive. He is risen. He is risen, indeed."

First, they went to the cemetery to pay their last respects to Jesus, their friend. When they arrived at the tomb of Jesus, they encountered a dazzling angel sitting on the huge stone which had covered the entrance to the tomb. And the angel announced startling news. "Don't be afraid. I know you're looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. He is risen, as he said." And then the angel showed them the empty tomb. So, they headed back to town to tell the disciples this amazing news and the message that Jesus would meet them in Galilee.

But the story doesn't end there, does it? On the way they encountered the risen Christ. They saw him. They actually saw him with their own eyes. They also heard Jesus. They recognized his voice as he greeted them and gave them instructions. And on top of all of that, they actually touched him as well. We're told that the women fell to the ground before him and they touched his feet, affirming that this was no ghost or hallucination on their part, but Jesus physically resurrected from the dead standing before them. They were in such awe they worshiped him. And Jesus accepted their worship as they identified him as their Lord. They now saw him for who he really was, the exalted Son of God, divine and worthy of worship. And get this. Jesus didn't stop them, did he? He didn't try to correct them. He who once said to the devil during his own temptation in the wilderness, "You shall worship the Lord your God only," was now accepting their worship and their affirmation of who He was, thus acknowledging his risen presence and affirming his deity.

And then they received a commission from him to go tell the disciples about this and repeat the promise that the angel had given them. He said, "Tell my brothers to go to Galilee and there they will see me." And the women did just that, convinced that the crucified Jesus was alive. Everything had changed for them now. They ran to town.

They told the disciples about their encounter with the risen Jesus. And even though their story was met with skepticism by those disciples, as we read in Luke's Gospel, we know that their unbelievable story eventually did convince the disciples. They stuck to it because as just a few verses later in Matthew's gospel, we read these words: "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him, they worshiped him. But some doubted." But here he was again alive. And they all concluded the women and the disciples, Jesus is risen. He is risen, indeed.

He lives. This statement is the very center of the Christian faith. It's the cornerstone upon which everything else is built. You see, by resurrecting Jesus from the dead, God has actually vindicated him before us. The resurrection tells us that Jesus really is the savior of the world who saves sinners and that he is Lord. The resurrection is God's endorsement of everything Jesus said about Himself and God and humanity and living in God's kingdom and dying and the future. It's also God's loud "Yes" to the atoning sacrifice for sin that Jesus made through His death on the cross in order to save us. On Easter, God was declaring to His world, Jesus is the Savior who takes away your sin. He is the way, the truth, and the life that I have provided for you to come into a restored, saving eternal relationship with me. I find an illustration from Pastor Tim Keller to be helpful here. He writes,

Think of Christ's resurrection as a store receipt. If you're in a department store and you buy some clothes, you should always ask for the receipt. Why? Well, because if you're still walking around the store, a plainclothes security person could stop and ask you, "Excuse me. Can I look in your bag?" And if you don't have a receipt, you could get in trouble. So, if somebody stops you, you want to be able to hold up your receipt and say, "Oh, plainclothes security person trouble me not, because this proves that this has been paid for and I don't have to pay it again." The resurrection is a giant receipt stamped across history for all people to see. A receipt that allows you to know that your future is certain if you believe in Jesus Christ, because your sins have been paid for and you have eternal life with God.

The fact that Jesus is alive then begs the question: What difference does that make for me today? Well, it means you can have a life filled with hope. I'm not talking of hope as some sort of wishful thinking, like I hope the Minnesota Twins will win the World Series. I'm talking about a deep-seated confidence and certainty as you look into the

future, as you face each day. Hope is so important to us as human beings, you know. Someone once said, "Where there is no hope for the future, there is no power for the present." And I believe that from experience. Well, the risen Christ means hope for believers as we consider the future of this world for instance. The world may be dark and threatening some days, as you hear of senseless school shootings and man's inhumanity to man. It may look hopelessly out of control and like evil is going to win the battle. But the believer in the risen Jesus knows that just isn't true. She knows the end of the story because Jesus is risen, because He lives. We know all authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to him and he reigns over the world as Lord. And he's coming again in power and majesty to take his own to himself. Easter reminds us that a great and glorious day is on the way. A day when God will wipe away our tears and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore. For the former things will pass away. There will be a new Heaven and a new Earth. And everything will be perfect forever.

And the believer knows, as we wait for that day, no matter what we face with each new day now, the risen Jesus Christ is with him or her – available to personally know and call upon for help. He's with us to the end through the Holy Spirit. No single day or moment we face needs to be faced alone. Ever thought about all those appearances Jesus made to the disciples after his resurrection? Popping up here and there and then suddenly gone, and all of a sudden they're beginning to look around every corner, expecting to see him. Now, what was Jesus doing? He was convincing them that they would never be alone, that he was always with them, even when they could not see him. So, when we find ourselves confronted with evil and darkness in the present and troubles and it looks like it's all winning out, we can keep in mind the ultimate battle has been fought and Jesus won through the resurrection. And we're just living in the midst of the mop up operations. And he is with us. He is ultimately in charge of the world and all who belong to him will share in his victory. That is our living hope because of Christ's resurrection. He's alive, and we are not abandoned and lost. He holds us in the palm of his hand, and nothing will snatch us from that nail-pierced hand. We can rest on that. That is our hope, believing in Christ.

On an even more personal and serious level, His resurrection offers hope as we consider dying. You know, every one of us is dying. As my grandson discovered, we are mortal. It's been that way since the time of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But that's not the end of us, because our enemy death has been defeated by Jesus. Jesus,

who was dead is now alive. And because he lives, he's promised that we shall live also. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul tells us that the risen Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection. All who trust in him for salvation will also be resurrected and spend eternity with Jesus. Death is not the end for the believer in Jesus Christ. Hallelujah! For he or she is Heaven-bound. Our hearts can be at rest as we consider our own mortality. Heaven is waiting for the believer. We may not know what it looks like. We may not know when it's going to come, but we do know we will be with him forever. According to what Jesus has promised. Nothing can keep us from him, not even death.

A friend of mine is dying from cancer. He's presently on hospice care. I'll miss him dearly. But he is so calm and peaceful as he nears his death. And here's why: he said to me one day during a visit, "Uh, I'm not afraid. I'm actually ready to go. My faith means everything to me right now. I know where I'm going." Now those words tell me that he has hope – resurrection hope firmly built upon the resurrection.

How about you? Is that your testimony? Have you given much thought, in fact, about what's going to happen to you when you take your final breath in this world? A question I've asked people many times is this: if you were to die today, do you know for certain that you would go to Heaven? Now, someone listening in today may think, "No one can know that for sure, can they? And I would never be so presumptuous or arrogant to even say yes to a question like that." But the truth is, because of Easter, you can be confident about where your eternity will be spent – not because of anything you have done, but because of what God in Christ has lovingly done for you at the cross when He died to pay for your sins, and at the empty grave when he rose again. Because of Easter, believers can be confident that death does not have the final word over them. In fact, John wrote to fellow believers, "All these things were written in Scripture so that you may know you have eternal life." Know, with a deep certainty, hope. God wants to give you and me that kind of hope for our lives. It's simply a matter of believing in his son, Jesus Christ, who has promised "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."

Now, when Jesus talks about believing, he's talking about totally trusting in him and what he's done for you. And we can trust in him because he's been raised victoriously and his promise has been affirmed by God who raised him. Because of Easter, whoever believes in Christ shall not perish, but have eternal life. Jesus said that. And on Easter God affirmed that. So you can confidently build your life upon it. I've attended many

funeral services in which I've heard the deceased person's family members say "She went home to be with the Lord." That's a loaded statement when you think about it. It suggests both the existence of life after death and the potential for an intimate relationship with God, that they're going home. And I believe it's true. And Jesus promises that he'll take us to Heaven. But, before you can meet him face to face there, you must meet him by faith here. He's alive and he's available to anyone who will turn to him and trust him for eternal life.

So today you've heard the evidence. Death has been defeated. Jesus is alive. Won't you trust in him and rejoice in Him? For he is our sure and certain hope as we live out however many tomorrows we may have. There's a song that captures this confident hope and assurance that I love, and that was written by Christian songwriters Bill and Gloria Gaither. And it gives this testimony:

Because he lives, I can face tomorrow.

Because he lives, all fear is gone.

Because I know he holds the future,

And life is worth the living just because he lives.

Friend, it's true. The risen Jesus is the Lord over all our tomorrows. Hallelujah! He's alive. Amen.