

The Fact of the Empty Tomb

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[0 : 0 0] Matthew chapter 27, we'll begin reading at verse 57, and we're going to read into chapter 28 and end at verse 15. Matthew 27, 57.

As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him.

Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb. The next day, the one after preparation day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate.

Sir, they said, we remember that while he was still alive, that deceiver said, after three days I will rise again. So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day.

[1 : 0 7] Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first. Take a guard, Pilate answered.

Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how. So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard. After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

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.

His appearance was like lightning and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.

He is not here. He has risen just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, he has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee.

[2 : 1 8] There you will see him. Now I have told you. So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy and ran to tell his disciples.

Suddenly Jesus met them. Greetings, he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, do not be afraid.

Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. There they will see me. While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priest everything that had happened.

When the chief priest had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, you are to say his disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.

If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble. So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed.

[3 : 19] And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day. As we've been studying the book of Acts together, one of the things that has struck me has been the central place that the resurrection of Christ has in the preaching of the apostles.

I think more emphasis than what I see in our own day on the resurrection of Christ. According to the apostles, Christ's resurrection is just as important as his death.

It's like saying, well, which is more important to breathing, inhaling or exhaling? Well, they both are. Which is more important, the death of Jesus or the resurrection?

Yes, they're both equally important. In fact, many times the apostles speak of the two of them in the same breath. I could give you dozens of texts about the resurrection in the book of Acts, but here's one, Acts 3.15.

Peter's telling the Jews in Jerusalem, you killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead, and we are witnesses of this.

[4 : 35] You killed him, God raised him, and we are witnesses. And that was Peter's message to the Jews. His message to the Gentiles at Cornelius' house was no different.

Speaking to the Jews, I'm sorry, speaking to the Gentiles, he says, they killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen by witnesses, even us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

So the message, he is risen, is at the very heart of the gospel. The very heart of the gospel that we are to take to the nations.

It's not enough to know that Jesus died. You must also know and believe he rose from the dead, for this is the message, the word of faith that we are proclaiming, that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

All four gospel counts end with the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the climax of the gospel message. Now, the other thing that strikes me about the resurrection in the book of Acts is its insistence on credible eyewitnesses of the risen Christ.

[6 : 02] Remember, you killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead and we are witnesses of this. And that's spoken of throughout the book of Acts. Indeed, it was one of the qualifications for an apostle when they needed to replace Judas.

Peter says, one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection. And that's what they claim as they went everywhere preaching his resurrection from the dead.

We saw him. We ate with him. We heard him. We touched him. And not just us, but many more. The apostle Paul could write, Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures and was buried.

He was raised on the third day according to the scriptures. And he appeared to Peter and then to the twelve. And after that, he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living.

And then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. And last of all, he appeared to me also as to one born out of due time. You remember how the resurrection was a game changer for Saul of Tarsus.

[7 : 14] He thought it was a lie. He didn't have any use for Jesus of Nazareth having been raised from the dead and did everything to wipe out his memory from the earth.

That is, until he met the living Jesus on the road to Damascus. And it changed his life. It changed his whole trajectory of life thereafter. He became a bold witness of what?

Of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. So why all this emphasis on eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus in the New Testament? Well, it's to verify that Jesus really did rise from the dead.

It's to be an anchor to our faith in historical facts. You see, Christianity is not based on mere ideas, but on things that really happened.

God's eternal son became a real man, as much a historical figure as George Washington. He really lived in Palestine 2,000 years ago.

[8 : 16] He did miracles. He taught the people. He was crucified by Pontius Pilate. He died and was buried in a tomb. He physically rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. These are the facts as witnessed by those who saw these things.

And we have far more proof of this than we ever have, that George Washington ever lived and died. Establishing the factual basis of the resurrection of Christ is crucial to the veracity of the whole Christian religion.

The Apostle Paul can hang the whole of Christianity's claims upon the resurrection. He says, If Christ is not raised from the dead, then there is no resurrection of the dead.

Then our preaching is useless. Not worth a little bit. Worth nothing. And so is your faith. Useless. Futile. Since it's not based on fact, but fiction.

And furthermore, we are liars. We are not good men. Good men do not lie to others. And we have testified that God raised him from the dead. And furthermore, you are still in your sins.

[9 : 35] Because the only sin bearer is still held by debt. The debt of death. Still unable to escape.

And your dead loved ones in Christ are lost altogether. They will not rise to eternal life. Since death still reigns. And we are to be pitied more than all men.

Since we have no real hope after death. And we're still under sin's wages and debt to death. You see how Paul puts the whole thing on the resurrection of Jesus.

The whole Christian faith stands or falls with the historical fact of Jesus rising from the dead. And if he didn't rise, then none of it matters at all.

It's not worth another day of your life. The Bible's not worth wasting another minute to read. Life's too short to go on playing games.

[10 : 35] Playing church. Playing religion. Turn off the lights. Sell the building. I'll get another job. Find another religion. If Jesus did not rise physically from the grave.

I love the no-nonsense kind of guy that Saul of Tarsus was. It's all worthless if Christ has not been raised.

But, he goes on to say, Christ has indeed risen as he said. Therefore, all of the claims of Christ are true.

Therefore, the whole book is true. And it is pure treasure to have it. He lives and he's coming back to judge the world with justice.

God has given proof of it to all men by raising him from the dead. Nothing matters more than that you receive this Jesus as your Lord and Savior. If he is risen, then all life apart from Christ is useless and ends in eternal damnation.

[11 : 41] In him there's hope both for this life and the next. So repent and repudiate your whole past life of living without Jesus. Making life work without Jesus.

Trust in him alone for the forgiveness of your sins. Nothing is more important if Christ is risen. So Christ in Christianity is worth nothing or everything.

There's no middle ground. And it's the testimony of God and other eyewitnesses that Christ is risen. And therefore, he is worth everything. And that's why our Bibles are so careful to establish the historical, factual evidence of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

That's why the end of the Gospels give us these eyewitness accounts of what happened. And so we're going to turn to the end of Matthew's Gospel and see this point made.

And let the fact of the resurrection, brothers and sisters, feed your faith in this risen, living Lord. We're going to look at the guarded tomb, the empty tomb, and the empty tomb explained.

[12 : 54] First of all, the guarded tomb. So Jesus is dead, and he's in the tomb. And we're going to see that the tomb was guarded.

Now, the tombs of the pharaohs inside the great pyramids were guarded by elaborate systems of booby traps that would cause anyone breaking in to steal the treasures buried with the pharaohs to lose their lives.

But there are no treasures inside of this tomb. Only Jesus' body. He died with absolutely nothing. They even stripped his clothing from him and gambled for it as he died on the cross.

And yet, his enemies insist on guarding this tomb. Why is that? It's not because of the treasures hidden with him.

Well, they have their reasons. Verse 62 says, This happened the day after his burial. That would be Saturday. That would be the Jewish Sabbath, the day of rest.

[14 : 05] And isn't it interesting how the Pharisees who condemned Jesus for breaking the Sabbath when he healed on the Sabbath, nevertheless find a loophole for doing some unfinished business of their own on the Sabbath.

So worship must be put on hold as they hurry off to Governor Pilate on this matter of business. Well, they had gleefully rejoiced in how quickly they had been able to eliminate Jesus.

But after a night of high fives and congratulating themselves, their giddy celebration was interrupted by a concern. Sir, we remember that while he was still alive, that deceiver said, After three days, I will rise again.

So they were not concerned in the least that Jesus would actually rise. That's not even on the radar. No, not at all. Not a chance of that happening.

He's good and dead. We saw that. And they verified the real death, the historical death of Jesus. No, what they were concerned about was that his disciples might come and steal his body and then tell everybody that he had risen from the dead.

[15 : 18] And so this last deception would be worse than the first deception. I mean, it was bad enough having this man Jesus going around claiming to be God, claiming that he would rise from the dead.

It'll be even worse to have people believing that he actually did rise from the dead. It'll only feed the frenzy of the Jesus as Messiah movement, and that would mean less followers of us.

We simply can't have this. And we would say to these Pharisees and chief priests, your fears are so unnecessary. You don't need to worry about Jesus' disciples coming to steal the body of Jesus to fake a resurrection.

They're not even thinking resurrection. Would that they were. Would that they at least had in their minds those words that Jesus spoke of how on the third day he would rise again.

But Pharisees, rest your case. That is not even in their brains. They didn't remember these words of Jesus, even though he spoke them often to them.

[16 : 28] Far more than he spoke them in public. And so far is this from their minds that even when the resurrection happens and they're told that he is risen, they still will not believe it.

When the women saw the empty tomb and the two angels told them, Why do you look for the living among the dead? He's not here. He is risen. Remember how he told you while he was still with you in Galilee?

Remember how he told you? The son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again. He'd said it often to them.

Then, afterwards, after the angels told them, then they remembered his words. But when they ran back and told these things to the other, to the 11 disciples, their words seemed as nonsense to them and they did not believe them.

So, we need to realize that a fake resurrection was not at all in the minds of the apostles. They weren't even thinking resurrection at all.

[17 : 39] And even after Jesus appeared to the 11, all at one time they would sooner believe that they were looking at a ghost than to believe that he actually did what he said and rose from the grave.

Remember, Thomas wasn't at the first time, the first time that Jesus appeared to them. And he told the others who told him, we saw him. I won't believe it unless I put my fingers in the nail prints and my hand into his side.

I will not believe it. Unbelief, unbelief, unbelief, unbelief. It marked the followers of Jesus. They were not expecting. They had forgotten anything.

Let me say this. They didn't understand when Jesus told them he's going to be crucified and rise the third day. They did not understand it. And we quickly forget what we don't understand.

If you don't understand something in the Bible, ask somebody. Find out what it means. We easily forget what we don't understand. They didn't have a clue what Jesus meant when they said, I'm going to rise on the third day.

[18 : 45] And they did not have it on their minds. And so these enemies of Jesus remembered the promise when even his own disciples had forgotten it. So they are pressing Pilate to give the order to make the tomb secure until the third day passes.

They even remember the day that Jesus said he would rise. And Pilate grants their wish. Take a guard. Go make the tomb as secure as you know how.

Maximum security was their aim. And they made the tomb doubly secure with a guard. That's a band of armed Roman soldiers provided by Pilate.

And by a seal. A cord. A cord covered with clay or wax that would be pressed over the seal. And the opening of the grave between the opening and the rolled stone.

And it would be affixed there. Either wax that would dry there or clay that would dry there. Therefore, if there was any shenanigans going on, the clay seal would break. And you would know somebody had tampered with it.

[19 : 53] So there. Now. They can go home and sleep at night. Again. Knowing that the disciples will not come and steal him. They have all their bases covered.

They have made the tomb secure. Can you think how foolish that looked to the angels in heaven? Amen. Was there a smile on the face of God?

The Bible says he laughs when he sees the folly of men. Well. Even this foolish action of Jesus' enemies is overruled by God to make another proof for the factual resurrection of Christ.

Because it undercuts the cover-up story that we're going to see later on. That they'll circulate. No. They secured. This whole thing secured the first eyewitnesses to the empty tomb.

They were Roman soldiers. So that's the guarded tomb. Let's look at the second point. The empty tomb. And the first thing I want to say is that there were no eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[21 : 03] There were no eyewitnesses. No human eyewitnesses. And what I mean is this. There were many who saw the empty tomb. And there were many who saw the resurrected Christ.

But there were no human eyes that we read of that were there and actually saw life return into the dead body of Jesus. And actually saw him get up and exit the tomb.

Now it appears that Jesus was already alive and gone from the tomb even before the earthquake. And before the angel removed the stone and sat on it. Jesus certainly did not need the stone to be rolled away in order to get out of the tomb in his glorified resurrection body.

Later on, two occasions we find when the disciples were behind locked doors. That suddenly Jesus in his resurrection body stood before them.

So you see, the stone was rolled away from the entrance. Not so Jesus could get out. But so others could get in and witness that the tomb was already empty.

[22 : 08] That Jesus was nowhere inside. That he had indeed risen. Just as he had said. That's the message the angels gave to the women. When they arrive and the stone was rolled away and they go in and the angels say, he's not here.

He's risen. Just as he said. Come and see. Go and tell. You see, it was for them to be able to come and see. Come and bear witness. That he's not here.

And so these two Marys were coming to the tomb at dawn not to steal his body. It wasn't in their thought. It was to finish preparing him with the spices that they had to cut short because of the onslaught of the Sabbath that was coming as Jesus was buried.

And now they're wondering, how are we going to get that big stone rolled away from the door? They saw Joseph and his men roll it across the opening. And they don't have the strength to roll it.

But before they get there, it was all taken care of for them. And we worry about a lot of things, don't we, that we never have to really worry about. It was taken care of.

[23 : 15] There was a violent earthquake for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and going to the tomb. He rolled back the stone and sat on it. And his appearance was like lightning and his clothes were white as snow.

Now, the earthquake, no doubt, broke the seal. Don't you think? At least it was broken when the angel rolled the stone away. And one angel was all it took to take care of all those armed guards securing the tomb.

None of them stopped him as he was rolling the stone away. None of them got in his face and said, you can't do that. This is protected body.

And the reason they didn't stop him was not because they were sleeping. You need to see that. The reason that they didn't stop the angel was not because they were sleeping.

No, the Bible says the guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. They were rendered powerless. But not before they saw that the tomb was empty.

[24 : 19] So much for their making the tomb secure. I mean, the body had been there when we sealed the tomb. But when the door opened, it was no longer there.

That's their message. That's what they saw. It was empty. Well, after the women saw the empty tomb and heard the angel's message, they ran to tell the disciples.

And as they went, they were the first to see the risen Lord. And they fell at his feet and clasped his feet. It was a real body. You could lay hold of his feet. They spoke with him.

They heard his voice. So there's the empty tomb. Jesus had risen. Well, we come to the empty tomb explained.

Because these guards have got some explaining to do, wouldn't you say? Their charge was to go make the tomb secure, to guard it, so that the disciples couldn't come and steal the body.

[25 : 24] Well, we're told some of them went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. Those are important words. They told the priest everything that had happened.

They told the whole truth. We were there. We were keeping watch. We weren't sleeping. And suddenly a violent earthquake shook us. And an angel as bright as lightning with clothes like snow came down from heaven and going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.

We couldn't resist him. We had been rendered useless as dead men, frozen with fear. We couldn't move. But you need to know that when that stone was rolled away, there was no one inside.

So the very guards sent to secure the tomb become, in the plan of God, the first men to bear witness to the empty tomb, to the resurrection, the fact that he is risen.

Now, this takes the chief priests completely by surprise. That's not why they were guarding the tomb. They were guarding against thieves, the disciples, and a lie that they would spread.

[26 : 41] They'd not figured on real resurrection. They'd only prepared for the potential stealing of the body by the disciples, something that had never even entered into the mind of the disciples.

And so the chief priests and elders quickly convened a meeting to deal with this unexpected turn of events. If we don't act now, men, it will be too late. And all the evidence that they received was pointing to one thing.

Real resurrection. Jesus was alive. All the evidence was pointing in that direction. So it's a moment of truth for these chief priests and Pharisees, isn't it?

What will they do when confronted with the truth? What will they do when the truth is staring them right in the face by undeniable eyewitnesses? These soldiers had nothing to gain, believe me, by telling the whole truth.

They were really putting themselves in jeopardy, as we'll see. What will they do? Well, their answer was to suppress the truth.

[27 : 53] That means to push it down. To devise a cover-up. And we say, why not rather just embrace the truth? Why not rather just tell the truth, chief priest?

Is that not the role of a priest, to speak the truth? Why couldn't you say, you know, we thought this Jesus of Nazareth was a deceiver.

But he's risen from the dead, just as he said. And his resurrection proves that his promises are true. And he is indeed more than a man.

He is God in the flesh. Come from God to save his people from their sins. He is our Messiah. The only mediator between God and man. We were so wrong.

He was innocent and we murdered him. He was the king of glory and we killed him. Why not just tell the truth? Well, it means they would have to face their sin.

[28 : 55] Murder, lies, and deception. And this would only cause the Jesus crowd to grow if they admitted the resurrection.

And would cause their crowds to dwindle. And their envy would not allow them to tell the truth. Their hearts would not allow their mouths to speak the truth. Out of the heart proceeds the overflow of the mouth.

And their love of power and praises of men would not hear of speaking the truth. And their pride and self-righteousness would not stoop to own their own sins before others.

You see, they were slaves of sin. Just like every one of us are born. Slaves to one sin or another. And so what did they do? They do what we do. We suppress the truth.

The very truth that would have set them free. And by further lies, they cheat themselves and others from dealing with the truth. They thrust salvation away from themselves and judge themselves unworthy of eternal life.

[30 : 03] They didn't want the people to hear what the soldiers had told them. The truth. The whole truth. And nothing but the truth.

Instead, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money telling them, You are to say His disciples came during the night and stole Him away while we were asleep. It's the very reason they secured the tomb in the first place, isn't it?

So that that wouldn't happen. And now here they are. Making that the cover-up. Well, it would take a lot of money to get a Roman soldier to say that.

To say that His disciples came during the night and stole Him away while we were asleep. Sleeping on guard duty was a serious crime carrying potential death sentence.

And hard-nosed pilot was not known for going light on punishment. So the Jewish leaders had to cough up a large sum of money to persuade them and then also to assure them that if this report gets back to Governor Pilate, we'll satisfy him too and keep you out of trouble.

[31 : 20] In other words, we've got more money where this came from. By the way, where did that money come from? Some widows. They gave their mites to the temple treasury out of love for the Lord.

The people of God who tithed their money and brought it to the temple. Oh, we've got lots of money. And we'll satisfy Pilate too and keep you out of trouble.

What their money could buy. A betrayer, Judas. We got 30 pieces of silver for him. Wonder what they gave these soldiers. Wonder what they had to give to Pilate.

No doubt the message did get back to Pilate. So we'll see. Yes, you've got the money to buy a betrayer. To buy some false witnesses.

To stand up and lie about what Jesus had said. To buy off a governor. To pay for a cover-up. But there's one thing your money won't do.

[32 : 27] It will not buy the forgiveness of one of your sins. They had murdered the Lord of glory. And now they're paying hush money from the temple treasury to try to cover up his glorious resurrection.

These are the very same religious leaders. That said of Jesus. That deceiver. That deceiver.

These were the same ones so concerned lest the disciples of Jesus would pull off a greater deception. And they're now found in the act of spinning a web of deceit themselves.

Lying. And paying people money to promote the lie. To tell the lie. To hush. So the soldiers took the money.

And they told the lie that was put in their mouth. His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep. Anyone with a brain in their head can see that their cover-up story was full of holes.

[33 : 38] How do you know the disciples stole his body since you were sleeping? After all. You can't prove it.

Isn't that why you had posted a guard in the first place? To keep this from happening? Nevertheless, writing some 35 years later, when Matthew sits down to write his Gospel of Matthew, he is able to say in verse 15, this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

It's been spun on now for some 35 years. That the reason the tomb was empty is because the disciples came and stole it away while the soldiers were sleeping. A hundred years later, the Christian apologist Justin Martyr addressed the Jews in his dialogue with Trifo.

And Martyr says to the Jews, You have sent chosen and ordained men throughout the whole world to proclaim that a godless and lawless heresy had sprung up from one Jesus, a Galilean deceiver whose disciples stole him by night from the tomb.

This lie has lived on a hundred years, you see, after the resurrection. It's like when Jesus' disciples went to all the earth with the Gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection.

[35 : 02] The Jews had assigned their chosen men to go around and to proclaim, Oh, it's all a lie. That deceiver Jesus, his disciples, stole his body.

And what the Bible calls a lie, purchased with hush money, they called the truth. And what the Bible calls the truth of the resurrection, they call a lie.

And so in their cleverness, professing themselves to be wise, they became fools and they exchanged the truth for a lie. And they called evil good and good evil.

And that's how they explained the empty tomb. And you need to know that. That's why it was written down in Matthew.

Because if it's true, close the book, get out, and find another religion. It's that important. Therefore, let me tell you about that lie and where it came from.

[36 : 03] Don't be deceived by it. Here's what happened. And so God puts it in his Bible. Now it was hard to kill Jesus, but they found it harder still to keep him dead.

For up from the grave, he arose because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. And having risen, he appeared to many witnesses who testified that he was alive.

So his enemies succeeded in persuading many with their bribes that Jesus did not rise. But one thing false witnesses did not do, they did not really keep Jesus dead.

And all their lie could not keep him from appearing to witnesses, one after another. 500. That's more than twice this crowd, maybe three times this crowd.

All at the same time, they saw him. And by the time Paul is writing, he says most of them are still living. You could go ask them. That's a lot of eyewitnesses, isn't it?

[37 : 08] All of that. No, lies only cover up the fact that he's alive. And they can only cover it up for a while because truth has a way of surfacing.

Doesn't it, kids? You ever lied, kids, and thought, wow, I got mom off my back now. And then somehow, the truth comes out.

Be sure of this. Your sins will find you out. And this lie about the disciples stealing, all it can do is just cover up the truth.

And only for a while. The best of lies are only for a while. Because a great unveiling is coming. When everything that has been hidden will be revealed.

And all those murder mysteries in 48 hours will be revealed. Who really killed the victim? And all the lies and deception and deeds done in darkness and words spoken in darkness and motives of men's hearts, it'll just come out into the bright noonday.

[38 : 23] And be seen for what it is. And all who denied the resurrection of Jesus will personally meet him. For he's coming again in power and great glory and every eye will see him.

Even those who pierced him. Even those who lied about him. Even those who conveniently believed the lies and ignored him. For God now commands all people everywhere.

Now that's you and that's me. He commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has appointed a day when he will judge the world with justice.

And he'll judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. And he's given proof of this. You see, God is wanting to give proof of what's going to happen.

There's going to be a judgment day. You're going to stand before the judge. He's my chosen judge. And I have proven to you that the judge will be there.

[39 : 24] He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. The empty tomb is proof that the day of judgment will happen.

And the judge will be there. Is this world really going to end with a final day of judgment like the Bible says? Doubters, here's your proof.

The empty tomb. The judge is alive and well. He's coming again to judge. And the resurrection is the proof that God has given to all men. That he will be there and you will be there.

Are you ready for that? That's truth brought right up to your door. Now, what will you do with the truth? You see, you're in the position now that those chief priests were in when the truth was brought to their door by the soldiers.

It was a moment of decision. A moment of truth. Will they embrace the truth and condemn themselves and cry out to God for mercy? Or will they stuff the truth and go on vindicating themselves and go on ignoring the truth?

[40 : 35] What would you do? You see, the resurrection of Jesus brings us all to a moment of decision. His resurrection proves that he really is who he claimed to be.

God in the flesh. Your creator. The only mediator. The only savior from sin. The one good enough.

The only one good enough to earn heaven by his deeds. The judge of all men. And as such, he has a claim on your life. That's what the resurrection says. He's got a claim on your life.

Your love. Your allegiance. Your trust. Your obedience. Your worship. And he expects you to surrender your will to him.

And those who surrender to him win for eternity. And those who don't lose for eternity. You know, some people deny the resurrection, but many, many more just ignore the resurrected Christ.

[41 : 41] For every man that denies the resurrection, I suppose you'd find ten that just ignore the resurrected Christ. They would say, I believe he rose from the dead.

In fact, many of them quoted the Apostles' Creed this morning. Crucified under Pontius Pyle. Buried. Dead. Buried. Risen again the third day.

But they still refuse to bow to him. They still refuse to give him his rightful place in their lives as Lord and Master. They still go their own way. They still do their own thing.

They're still busy living for self and ignoring him. It is not enough, my friend, to say, I believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Hell is full of people that believe Jesus died and rose again.

The demons believe this and tremble. But they do not bow and worship. They do not love Jesus. They do not serve Jesus. They do not trust Jesus.

[42 : 38] They do not obey Jesus. And so we're back to where we started, aren't we? Christianity is an all or nothing religion. It all stands or all falls together.

It's either absolutely worthless or it lays claim to all that you are and have. And God has staked it all on this one reality. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

That clears the field of all middle ground. Of all fence sitters who would tip the hat to Jesus but not surrender to him in faith and repentance.

You see, he's not even worth tipping the hat to if he's a liar and deceiver and still in the grave. If Jesus is not risen, find another religion.

Find something else to live for. Or Paul would say, just eat and drink and be merry. Because tomorrow we die and it's all over anyway if Christ is not risen.

[43 : 41] But if he is risen from the dead, as he said, then his claim on you is absolute. Then find your place on the ground with Thomas saying, my Lord and my God.

Yield yourself entirely to him in that sweet surrender of repentance and faith. Receive him as your savior to save you from your sins. Receive him as your Lord to be obeyed in everything that his word says to you.

Give all that you are to him. Receive him as your prophet to teach you. Your priest to die for your sins and plead with God for you.

Your king to rule over you and to defend you. You see, it's all or nothing. Which will it be? And believers, he is risen. And all the blessings of your salvation flow from this fountain.

He is risen. So believe it and enter into the joy more and more as you see the proof of it in scripture. You read the eyewitness accounts.

[44 : 49] They've been put here for you, for me, to be assured of the truth of it. Then give up yourself again to the Savior. Give yourself wholly to him.

Make use of your risen Lord every day. Live upon him moment by moment. Run to him. Learn from him. Look to him continually.

And prove by your holy life the power of the resurrection of Jesus within you. And then spread abroad this glorious gospel of Christ's death and resurrection.

Come and see. Now go and tell. Let's pray. Our Father, we are glad that you included in the record of scripture those who came and saw.

And then went and told. And therefore, our faith does not rest on some cleverly invented stories. But rests on historical facts proven by eyewitnesses and many, many of them.

[46 : 02] Thank you for all you have done to assure us of this glorious reality that Jesus was once dead, but is now alive forevermore.

Teach us then to live upon this living Savior. To talk to him always because he is alive. And to worship him because he is alive to receive our worship.

And bring some to bow before him for the first time as their Lord and God and Savior from sin. We bless you. Our Father in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.