

The King is King!

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[0 : 00] Please turn back with me to Matthew chapter 28, a well-known passage to us, a very important and significant one.

But if we think, can you just think back to the last three Sundays to the passages we read, the triumphal entry, the crucifixion and now the resurrection.

There's actually an unexpected common denominator in all of the stories. And it's that the whole Easter story is saturated with fear.

There's fear that is integral to this whole story that we have. There's the religious leaders who are afraid of Jesus and his popularity.

There's the disciples who are afraid of moving up into Jerusalem because they know that the opposition they'll face there. And then there's fear as Jesus is arrested.

[1 : 04] And then there's denial of him. And then there's fear in the upper room after his death, before and after his crucifixion. And then the crucifixion event itself is soaked in fear.

There's just the palpable sense of death there and the unnatural darkness that descends, the earthquake, the resurrections, the soldiers' experiences, the authorities who, even after Jesus' death, are afraid that someone will come and steal his body and perpetuate this message of a Messiah, of a risen Savior.

And it all surrounds this atmosphere of death that there is at the crucifixion. And we know that, don't we, that these two are often bedfellows.

Fear and death often share the same bed, and it's a living reality that is within this story.

And I think that's something that immediately attracts the story to our own lives and to our own circumstances. I think probably today we live surrounded with a sophisticated fear.

[2 : 24] And in many ways we've eradicated much of the raw, crude fear in our comfortable first world lives. The fear that is attached to the lives of many people today, life threatening poverty, our starvation, a war, imprisonment for our faith.

These kind of fears we don't know about, and we sometimes think that maybe we've moved beyond them. And yet for all of us, I'm sure, to a greater or lesser degree, we are facing subtle fears at a daily basis in our lives.

Fear about our image. Fear about how we are perceived by people. Fear about being unpopular.

The great fear of failure academically, or in our careers, in our relationships.

Fear of illness, fear of growing old, all kinds of fear that are there. They may be more hidden than 11 more.

Sophisticated, maybe, sophisticated is not the right word, but they are there. And of course then there's the unmentionable fear, the fear of death. Now we simply can't talk about death today.

[3 : 43] It is that subject that no one is willing to address and speak about. We can dress it up, we can ignore it, we can mask it, we can move on to a different subject.

But it's that deep-seated, personal fear that death ushers into our lives. As we stop and think about it, the finality of it, the end that it ushers in, the separation from life and from our loves.

And the terrible loneliness of it, that whatever happens in life, that this is something we face on our own.

For some of us, even as believers, the process of dying may be not death itself, but the process of dying may be something that causes great fear.

And it is the antithesis of everything that we are, isn't it? Everything that we do, everything that we touch, everything that we are engaged in is towards life and towards action and towards empowerment.

[4 : 55] And yet death is what leaves us utterly powerless, naked, dust.

At all levels we find it the most uncomfortable of truth, because nobody ever avoids it sooner. Or later. That great absurdity is something we all face.

Nobody at any time, at any place, of any power, of any authority or dignity or significance or influence has avoided facing that great reality of death.

So it's a very uncomfortable fear, unmentionable fear rather. But there is also an uncomfortable fear, looking at these three different fears, that comes from many people, from God's truth, from the Bible, as Corrie preached brilliantly last week on the crucifixion of Christ, and spoke about the absurdity, the foolishness of the cross.

The way that it leaves people so uncomfortable, the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ on the cross, and all that he claims, the claims of beauty, of goodness and love that we possess as our own, he says are his gifts, the creation that we live in, that we enjoy.

[6 : 23] Its source is a source outside of ourselves. But it ushers in for us that spiritual reality that in that beauty everything is not okay, everything is not right.

There is chaos, there is turmoil, we are a people, a humanity steeped in guilt and evil. And sometimes if we are honest enough with ourselves, we are aware that it reaches into our own hearts.

And as a people we are guilty as those who have betrayed our Maker, betrayed God's law of love. His laws of love to him and to one another, we have fallen short of his standard, we are justly condemned by him.

We have ridiculed and rejected his claims to accountability of our lives, we have suppressed him and as a humanity we have even thrown ourselves.

So we are very uncomfortable and fearful in many ways of his truth. You will find that, won't you, in any conversation you have with friends who maybe ask about your faith or who you have the opportunity to speak about the gospel to, how quickly you sense they are uncomfortable with that.

[7 : 41] You know we talk about sharing the good news and jumping from the rooftops and telling them about the gospel and of course that is great. But it is not like the birth of a new baby which everyone loves to hear about.

The good news of the gospel is always soaked in and saturated in this recognition of our own need and of our own guilt before God. That it brings good news but leaves us uncomfortably needing to move from our position of independence before God.

The ultimate cost of that betrayal is of course separation from God and from life and from love and from beauty and from goodness eternally, consciously, so that death with all the fear that it engenders in us is not the end but it remains a frighteningly bleak prospect.

So it is important I think for us on this resurrection morning, it is good for us to consider being willing to face yourself in the mirror and admit fear.

Because fear is a real and palpable reality for many of us and often we suppress it but it is good to face up to our fears and be honest about them and then hear the word of God into our circumstances and into our lives.

[9 : 04] Because what comes across in the fear of the passion story and the events of the crucifixion and the resurrection is the voice of Jesus Christ, the voice from heaven, the voice from God, the voice that is for us.

And what does it say? It says, do not fear. That's the message that comes from the angel and it comes from Jesus.

So we have repeated and we always know that when things are repeated in a short space of time in Scripture that that is significant and important, that the women at the tomb, they are fearful, they've lost their Messiah, they are going to embalm a lifeless corpse, fear in the presence of death itself.

Then there's an earthquake and the guards are stupefied, it seems like they are dead. And so they have fear not just directly because of the events but because of all this happened in the last few days and the angels speak to them and say, do not fear.

And then they go and meet with Jesus and He says, do not be afraid. God, the gospel, Christ and the resurrection is the antidote to all our fears, all the fears we've spoken about, it is the antidote to all of these things that are so great and so opposing and frightening in our lives.

[10 : 44] The resurrection speaks of light in darkness. It speaks of love where there is hate. It is goodness overcoming evil.

It is truth renouncing lies. It is knowledge to enlighten our ignorance. It is life where there is death and it is hope rather than despair.

So the gospel message and the resurrection is a great message of hope and a great, because when the angel and when Jesus says, do not fear, it encapsulates the whole hope of the gospel and what it means for us to believe and what the resurrection means for us.

It is hope and life and it is hope to be shared. And that's the two things that I just want to go on and speak about in opposition to the fear that so often guides and guards and paralyzes our life.

Easter Sunday is about anything. It is about hope and about life. First Peter chapter 1 and verse 3 says, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

[12:10] Now if you've got a concordance, I don't know what people have concordances these days, but you can get them online, they're easy to use online, just get an online concordance and look up hope.

Look up all the New Testament references to hope. It's just peppered throughout the New Testament. It's a central theme of the New Testament and it's not that kind of vague ethereal wishful thinking that sometimes we use to define that word hope.

It is this great living, solid, real, meaningful hope. There's actually been some tremendous articles and messages on social media over these last few days, particularly yesterday and today about the resurrection.

Now let's pray that there's a lot, what was moaning about social media? I was saying that we should get out and enjoy life and close our iPads and not look up Facebook.

And that's true, there's a lot of rubbish on it. But there's also a lot of good things. So let's pray that the great message of the resurrection and the powerful message that gets across in many of these media gets to a huge amount of people and that the Holy Spirit uses these means and preaching and our lives and everything to live that hope and to share that hope and to enable people to see this living hope that is ours through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[13:39] It's a living hope. You see, that's very important for us. And this account reminds us of the factual nature. There's been a lot of good things written recently and in the last decade and centuries about the factual reality of the resurrection.

We have four gospels that give us narrative historical accounts with a specific day of the week, the first day of the week where the stone is rolled away, not for the benefit of Jesus to get out.

Jesus didn't need the angels to roll the stone away to get out. It was for the women to look in and see that Jesus Christ wasn't there. It was for our benefit. It was for fact. It was for proof that we see the stone rolled away.

It's the culmination of centuries of history and of prophecy from the Old Testament that we've been looking at in the mission of God. It was God's purpose. It was Christ's will willingly as you heard last week and freely to die in the cross, to give His life and to take up on the third day.

As the angel said there, just as he said, do not fear, for I know that you seek Jesus. He was crucified. He is not here. He is not here.

[14:59] He is risen just as he said. So in Matthew 26, just a couple of chapters earlier, verse 32, Jesus says that, but after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.

That's what the angels remind Mary to tell the disciples to go to Galilee, because this is what he has predicted, this is what he has said, he is not here.

They are very powerful factual words he has risen. And our belief is based on historical, verifiable facts of our risen.

It's not mystical. It's not spiritual. It's not make-believe. If there are so many things, isn't there, if in these early days those who had opposed Jesus Christ in the resurrection, heard of the resurrection, surely they would have done all in their power to present a body, to deny the claims.

It simply couldn't be denied. It is truth. There is a great quote, one of the quotes I did read on social media this week, from Charles Colson, who when I was young was called Chuck Colson, and he was one of the 12 who were indicted and imprisoned for the Watergate scandal in America and became a Christian in prison.

[16:34] His first book was very influential in my life called Born Again. And he says, I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How?

Because 12 men testified that they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, that then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned, put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world. They couldn't keep alive for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep alive for 40 years?

Absolutely impossible. And that brings us to the impossibility of the resurrection.

God in the flesh, the author of life, gave himself over to death, took his life up on the third day.

[17 : 33] God was pleased with him. The work was finished, it had been done. Sometimes impossible, does it not, that he would rise from the dead on the other side of death?

We need to think what kind of God is this. We do. Think back. Listen again to Corey Sherman last week. Go back to it. Think what kind of God is this?

What kind of God is nailed to a tree? What kind of God is victorious and can be raised from the dead on the third day? Clearly planned, clearly as part of His purpose, clearly for us.

It's impossible, but we recognize that Jesus on the cross takes our betrayal, takes our place in the dock, takes that mysterious separation, ultimate separation from the Father, death and hell to defeat our greatest fears, whatever they may be, particularly our fear of death and judgment and hell.

Pay the price. Victorious over all of that. And it is significant that we remember as Christians that our life of faith is a life which believes in the impossible, at least in the impossible, in a worldly sense to that.

[19 : 12] By faith we see and we know and we have experienced the risen Savior. Can you testify to that? On what is your testimony based?

Is it based on a kind of series of facts that you've learned and know, or is it that you've met with the risen Savior and He's touched your heart and soul and life, and that you know by faith that He is alive, and you've experienced your heart being turned from being a hardened, disinterested, ungrateful heart towards one that is warmed to Christ, that loves Him and His Word.

And we are a people who can say death is not the end and that our guilt is being atoned for, it's being paid and that we can live in the freedom of that. However impossible that seems to be, Christ is real.

He keeps us, He will transform us. He will answer our prayers His way. And He will save those who we think impossible to save.

As we pray for them and as we witness to them and as we gracefully live our lives among them and plead for them, He can change this city. He can heal its brokenness and our brokenness in the world in which we live.

[20 : 32] He has taken this thing out of our death. We are to be a people who believe in spiritual impossibilities in this day of spiritual decline and a belief only in the purely rational.

This is not irrational truth, it is beyond reason. It is above reason. It is spiritual and it is glorious. This is a hope that is a living hope and it's a hope to be shared.

We recognize that again from both what the angels say and what Jesus says, do not be afraid, then go quickly, tell the disciples that He has risen from the dead and behold, He is going before you into Galilee.

And then Jesus almost repeats. Now it is interesting that the angels necessarily repeat what Jesus says but Jesus almost identically repeats what the angels say, the messages from heaven, the messages from above.

And Jesus, there are slight changes, do not be afraid, go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, there they will see me.

[21 : 45] The first words of the risen Savior, the first words from heaven, they are not rebuke, they are not, well I told you so, they are not, why on earth did you abandon me at the fireplace?

It wasn't moralistic advice, it wasn't some great deep theological truth. It was, I hope it, this isn't a reverence, can you imagine Jesus saying it?

Can you, He is saying something great, He is saying something to His friends, He is saying something that they know, can you imagine, is it wrong to imagine His face?

I am not sure. Can you imagine Him saying, don't be afraid, go tell my brothers. I am sure He was smiling when He said it. It was good news, it was something gentle and yet something absolutely powerful.

Go and tell them, this is the news they absolutely need to hear. Go and tell them, I am here, there they will see me.

[22 : 50] It's the glorious, beautiful message of good news that He brings, a prodigal message, it's kind of prodigal father's message from the Son to the family.

It's a message of love, it's the vocalization of John 3.16 again, isn't it? For God's sake, I love the world. I gave, it's the only begotten Son.

His perfect love, that message is for us that He has risen alive, empowered to forgive, empowered to give us spiritual life, empowered to bring us into a relationship with Him again.

And it's a love which casts out our fears. One John 4 verse 18, it's not great verse that there's no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear for fear is to do with punishment.

Is your relationship with God one of fear because you sense punishment from Him? Is He an oppressive father? Is He a guilt ridden father for you?

[24 : 00] You're scared of Him? There's a reverential law, but not a cold fear because fear is to do with punishment. Christ could say, do not fear because He had received the punishment.

He had taken it so that He can say, do not fear in love for us as our Redeemer and our Savior. Yes, judgment, punishment is real.

We can't just soft soap it, we can't just deny it, we can't just rub it away and pretend it doesn't amuse Jesus, it's nice and loving and He would never do that. That isn't the justice and the character and the revelation and the nature of God we see.

Not is it the reality that is tangible because of death, which is the separation from God and from life. There is judgment, there is judgment for every single one of us, but in Christ the judgment has been that He has taken our place.

All who believe and trust in Him can know His love because the punishment has been dealt with by Him. If you sit here today without Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I'm not saying that you don't believe in His historicity, you don't think of Him as a good moral person or whatever it might be, but if you haven't taken Him as your Lord and Savior and are living in His shadow with a changed and a transforming heart, if you are without Christ, there is much reason to fear today.

[25 : 38] And that's not scaremongering, seek to do that. It is the reality, there is much in this world to be afraid of, physically but also spiritually because there is no other remedy.

This is the only way to the Father. There is no other remedy and He has made that plain and clear.

It's a message of great love that He has taken our punishment and it's a message of great love which we share and it's a message of belonging that we live and share.

Go and tell my brothers and tell my family. Jesus Christ reminds us that in His salvation He satisfies the core of our every longing.

What is our every longing? However it's anticipated or outworked, every action, every emotion, every sinew, every decision, what is it?

It's to belong. It's to be alive and to belong and beloved. That is the core of our being. That's what we were created for.

[27 : 01] We might try and deny it, we might try and be independent but we were created to belong, to be alive, to be part of a family, to be loved.

Primarily in relationship with God as our Father and also in relationship with one another. Sin is destroyed. Christ came to restore so that we belong.

We belong with Him as the curtain is ripped into as we saw two weeks ago. We belong because He has paid the price and He has defeated the power of death.

We belong because He came for us. You were reminded of that last week. He came for us. Now that's worth facing.

That's worth accepting and trusting and it's worth living and sharing. So you rise from here and I rise from here and we don't then deny it for another week or ignore it or just submerge it.

[28 : 06] We live it and we share it. We share that message of hope. We have to somehow get that message across to our friends. We have to know them.

We have to love them. We live out Christ likeness with them and we need somehow to be able to say to them through Christ, do not be afraid.

Go and tell my brothers. Go and share that message with the gospel. It should be for us a new hope and a new confidence that we have if this message of Easter penetrates beyond our skin.

If it penetrates beyond the few minutes that we're here and to our very souls and our beings, that we have this risen ascended Savior who is to be our friend.

And we know that there is judgment. We recognize that there is an unpalatable reality that people must face about their guilt, but it's guilt that can be assuaged across and guilt that is taken by the only innocent thing on our behalf.

[29 : 18] It's a great message. It is foolishness to those who are perishing, but it's the wisdom of God which we seek to live and share with others.

Let's pray and give thanks to God for His gift. Heavenly Father, we thank You for who You are and we thank You for what You have done.

We thank You that that work is finished and that the price has been paid, that we are no longer in that place of judgment, in that place of failure and guilt, but we are those who do not stand condemned in Christ as believers because we have accepted our need of You, our need of a substitute, our need of someone who could do what we couldn't do and yet who took what we deserved and who took that cost and that judgment and that wrath and who showed His power and victory and satisfaction for justice and love in His resurrection.

May we live that love. May it be primary in our lives as we so often fill our lives with things that are of dubious importance and dubious significance, things that are not going to last, things that will be like dust soon, even if they remain, soon we will be like dust.

So give us that perspective, Lord, and that trust in Your impossible power and the impossible goodness of Your message and the glory of what You've done and may we live it and may we serve You as humble children, knowing Christ as our elder brother and God as our Father, the Holy Spirit in our lives.

[31 : 18] Enable us so to do and grant us a great sense of the risen Savior today in our lives and in our hearts. We pray for any who have been convicted, whose conscience have been pricked by the message today, may they not submerge that message or suppress it, but may they cry out to the living God for forgiveness and hope and renewal and a future which is great and eternal in Him.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.