

Angelic Message

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Date: 08 April 2012

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[0 : 00] Just like this morning for a few minutes to look back at this chapter in Matthew, Matthew chapter 28, as we've looked at the Gethsemane and we've looked at the crucifixion and today we come forward to look at the resurrection.

And as I was reminding the children, we remind ourselves of the resurrection actually. Each Sunday that we worship, we worship on the first day of the week because it's a recognition that it's on that first day of the week that our Lord God was resurrected and the New Testament Gospel of Grace was introduced.

And we mark that as we come together in public worship. And so often when we do so and when we come to Scripture, we find that Jesus Christ is the one who will take us out of our comfort zone. He has that great ability of taking us out of our comfort zone to a place sometimes that we're not particularly happy with.

Sometimes where we're challenged, sometimes even where we're afraid. Now that's not a bad thing if we allow the Gospel and if we allow the truth of the Gospel to speak to us and we allow the grace and the goodness and the love of God to enter into our experience.

But today we're looking briefly at the resurrection, this resurrection message and this resurrection narrative, which is not given to us as a fabled narrative.

[1 : 28] This isn't just make believe that we're looking at today. It isn't written in that basis, but it's written on the basis of being a historical narrative.

It's telling us, albeit an unusual story, a unique story, but it's still telling us a historical narrative account of Jesus Christ, who claimed to be the Son of God, who died on the cross on Good Friday as the children were telling us, and then on the third day was resurrected from the grave. And possibly the challenge for us today isn't about whether we believe in the evidence of the resurrection, which sometimes seems to be the objection that many people have.

There's no real evidence of the resurrection, and I'm not going to spend a lot of time on that evidence today, but maybe it's not so much an evidential issue for us as a heart issue.

And that's what I would like to probe today, that it may be for us a heart issue that we don't want to believe the resurrection. We don't like the thought of what the resurrection means, so it's maybe not so. We can sometimes couch it in terms of evidence, because that will maybe satisfy our intellectual position, but it may be that it hides an attitude towards Christ and towards God and towards submitting to the reality of this truth and what it will mean for you or for me. And that may be, that is one of the things I would like to probe today and question with you. But what I want to begin by saying is to remind us that there is life, there is life out there. There's a lot of talk about extraterrestrial life, isn't there? I'm sure there's a lot of serious scientific debate about extra life and life on other planets, and there can't possibly not be in this massive universe, there must be life elsewhere, and a great deal of energy and effort is expended on looking for extraterrestrial life. I'm not going to speak about ET today, but yet this passage and many other passages in the Bible speak about angels and speak about God, both of which remind us that there is life out there, more than just what we know and what we experience. Yet talk of angels and talk of God and heaven is often rubbish by many people.

Now the Bible speaks a lot about angels. There's 165 references to them in the New Testament alone. Spiritual beings, spirits mainly that can take on the appearance of human beings, messengers, mostly the Bible would say unseen, supernatural beings nonetheless, who live in heaven with God.

[5 : 09] Now angels come into the gospel accounts quite a lot, and maybe some of us don't even, at least at some of the accounts, we wouldn't even think it's strange that they're mentioned, because it's part of our culture, it's part of our thinking. Think of Christmas time, the angelic

announcements, amazing announcement from heaven. We bring you good news of great joy, a Savior has been born, the angels appear with this great message. They break into the human experience, they break into the human cycle of life, because they have amazing news about Jesus Christ, who comes from heaven and comes into our experience. Then they come for and they come alongside Jesus Christ at various points in his ministry, in his temptation, and as Neil preached about a couple of weeks ago in Gethsemane as well. And here we have the angels coming again, and they bring from heaven this significant message, also this hugely significant and important message, that

Jesus Christ, who on the cross on the Friday died, was dead, gave himself up to death. On the third day, we are told as the women come to anoint his dead body, they say, he is not here. He has risen just as he said, come and see the place where he lay, and then go and tell the others, and some of the other gospel accounts give us slightly different or expanded messages that they bring to the women at that point. So we have the angelic message, and it's a very significant and a very powerful message, and one which has reverberated through the centuries and been the means of the transformation of many, many people's lives, as they have recognized that the Savior in whom they trust is not dead and not in the grave, but is risen and is living with all the implications of that, which we will look at briefly. So there is life out there, there are angels, and there is also the reality of where the angels come from, they have come from heaven. The angels have come from heaven with this message. So there isn't just here and now, there's not just what we see today, there's not just the bricks and mortars of St. Columba Church and the uncomfortable pews, but there is more than that, much more than that, there's not even just our life beyond church today, and our hopes and our ambitions and our dreams fulfilled or otherwise in life, there is a real place, there's God's place, there's the angelic home, there's the place where the souls of believers who die before Christ returns go to be with them, there's the place where the risen Savior is.

So the Bible presents us with all of these things, presents us with a reality beyond our own, a reality which we accept by faith and which transforms the perspective of our living. We know there's something more significant, if we know there's something beyond this life, if we know that Christ has come from heaven with a specific job, then we recognize that he must be listened to, specifically as he is the risen Savior, the one who came to defeat the power of death and for whom that death defeated is guaranteed because of his resurrection to all who will believe on him. So there's life out there and that reminds us that there's life after death. The resurrection of Jesus is a clear evidence of that, isn't it? That there is life beyond death, that Jesus Christ evidences that by his resurrection and by the fact that he ascended to the right hand of the Father after 40 days to intercede for his people, to be the Savior of his people. Now we know that Jesus' death and resurrection is unique and it speaks into our own need and it speaks into our own circumstances. Jesus, the author of life, comes specifically to die for his people on the cross, to die the death that we deserve, to take the wrath of God, the just wrath, the just anger of a pure and holy God against our sins, to take that cost himself on the person of his Son in order that if we trust in him, the price has been paid and we might live. And the guarantee of that is his resurrection, isn't it? Having given himself over to death on the third day, he reveals that death cannot hold him.

It cannot hold him. It cannot hold the author of life. The author of life bursts from the grave to seal what he has done, to remind us of God's approval of what he's done and to reveal to us that there is resurrection for us as we've fallen behind him and trust him.

[10 : 56] The empty tomb, the circumstances around the empty tomb, the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, the prophecies fulfilled, the transformed lives of shuddering, fearful disciples, men and women who went on to turn the world upside down, all speak of the unique power and authority of Jesus Christ and of his resurrection, which we recognize as Christians today and put our trust in.

It's unlike any of the other biblical rising from the dead, isn't it? Lazarus, et al. Because Lazarus went on to die again, didn't he? But Jesus rose on the other side of the grave, victorious over death, so that he says to all who will trust in him, even though you die, yet you will live. You will also enjoy resurrection and heaven and fellowship and friendship continued with Jesus, our Savior that we have now, continued in heaven. Resurrection is hugely important because death affects us all and death is the curse of sin. And Christ came to deal with that, that the fact that our lives don't face God naturally, don't look to God, don't worship God, don't serve God, don't love God, we go our own way. We might not be kind of bad people as we measure ourselves by everyone else, but God

says in His perfect holiness and justice and goodness that the way to heaven is barred unless you come through me. Just the way to heaven is barred unless you come through me. It's hugely significant and it's backed up by what He's saying here.

So very briefly, then, what reactions do we see to this truth in the passage? Do we see fear? Do we see joy? Do we see worship? Do we see fear? The women are very afraid when they meet the angels and the guards were also very afraid and the angels speak into that. It's very interesting, the angels say that more than once. They say that at Christmas time as well, don't be afraid.

And they say here, don't be afraid. And Jesus says to them, don't be afraid. And I know you, I've told you this probably 365 times in this church, but that's because 365 times it says, don't be afraid in the Bible. There's a don't be afraid for every day of the year in the Bible because our tendency is to be afraid of the whole concept of life out there or of God or of Jesus Christ being sovereign and having a significant place and to whom you are accountable in your life.

There's great fear there. There's great fear in things that we think we can't control between the awesome reality of angelic beings that are not just like us of God Himself to whom we will give account. All of the talk of sin and death and the whole concept of death itself can make us afraid so that we come to church. And sometimes I think people who come to church for the first time don't come back because they're afraid. They don't like the kind of ease with which we sing about and talk about sin and death and the grave and they think, well, it's crazy. I don't want this. And we would rather avoid that. And we were also sometimes afraid of the consequences of believing. What will it mean for us? Because deep down you're maybe sitting and thinking, I know this is true, but I'm not committed to Christ. And I don't give Him His rightful place. And I'm afraid of taking that step of faith. There's a great fear of that, of responding to the truth of God, the consequences of believing. I will all I can say is repeat what God Jesus says here and the angels say, don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. God knows, He knows you're afraid. Don't be afraid.

[15 : 23] It's good news. It's great news. It's news that we will live eternally with Him, that we can be forgiven, that we can belong with Him, that we can be in the place that we were created to be in, having been made in His image, created to be in relationship with Him. He says, don't be afraid.

Don't listen to the lie of Satan which keeps you living in that place of triviality and insignificance away from God. Come to Him and recognize as the angels at the birth of Jesus said, we bring you good news of great joy. And that brings me on to the joy that was also part of the reaction of the women. It was a kind of mixed reaction, wasn't it? The women, they ran away from the tomb and versed, afraid yet filled with joy and ran to tell His disciples. And that joy would have been then multiplied a hundred times when they met with Jesus. Great joy. And isn't that, sometimes it isn't. But oughtn't that to be the reality for us as we worship today and as we think back of the day when we came to faith in Jesus Christ, if we are Christians today, when we understood our need and we recognized the forgiveness that we received and the transforming power of the Spirit of God in our lives, giving us grace and an ability to also forgive others, the incredible joy of knowing that this life is not just random and purposeless and that we have a future and a hope and a direction and a purpose, when we've realized that Jesus Christ is a great guy to know, great guy to trust in, the most significant being in the universe that we will all stand before and He offers to be a redeemer. The joy of reconciliation with Him now. And that great verse that we've begun the service with, where the sting of death is removed, we've been talked recently in our city group about death and talking about how sometimes we're still afraid of it.

I don't think that's wrong. That's wrong for a moment. But we're not paralyzed by fear because the sting of death has been removed. It still remains the enemy, but it's a defeated enemy.

And the guarantee of our resurrection is the guarantee that comes from putting our trust in Jesus who today is the risen Savior. It's a joy of coming home, isn't it? When you become a Christian, you feel that you've come home, come home. And lastly there in terms of reactions is worship, fear, joy and worship. That's the ultimate response that we look for, isn't it, in our own lives that Jesus looks for, that we're made in this image, made to worship, made to adore Him, made to put Him first, not just to come to worship once a week, every so often or whatever, or Easter or Christmas, but our lives, lives of worship. Romans 12 that we give our lives, living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service that we give back to God, that we live our lives with Him in first place. We dethrone ourselves from that first place, and even family and job and ambition and pleasure and recognize the all of the rightful place under

His Lordship. And He demands not just the end of our lives, the dregs of our lives, but He wants from all of us. And there's so many great people here today, people with gifts and talents and youth on their side and all kinds of things that they have been given by God, will they give it back in adoration and in worship. So the challenge as we close is if you don't have faith today in Jesus Christ, if you've just come in off the street maybe today, or you've come because you think it's a good thing to do at Easter and it's brilliant to see you, but you're not a Christian. Can I ask you to consider the claims of Jesus Christ and consider what your life is about, and consider the direction that you're going in, and pray that if you can't see these things that pray to God, even though you might struggle to believe in Him, pray that He will show you the truth. Take a [19:58] Bible, if you don't have a Bible, take one of ours, we've got plenty, we can replenish them anytime. Take one and read the Gospel of John, or read Matthew's Gospel, and find out about Jesus Christ. Don't rest, seek Him out. Speak to us if you want to know more about Jesus. Understand sometimes and apply your own brokenness to the healing gospel of Jesus Christ, your own mortality, and pray that God will open the eyes of faith so that you will see Him. And as believers today, this resurrection morning, can we remind ourselves of the truths of 1 Corinthians 15, that Paul is so eager to stress, you know, there's no resurrection, our faith is futile and vain, we are stupid, ignorant and foolish, if we believe in a dead Savior. The resurrection is crucial to our understanding, and if Jesus stayed dead, there is no hope. Close the doors, eat all the cakes downstairs, feel free to do so as you go, but don't come back. There's no point in having any more services, if Jesus isn't risen. We are to be more pitied than everyone else in this world. If we are gathered here to worship someone who cannot receive our worship, who's dead, the resurrection is crucial for us. Know that, know the price has been paid, know the depth of the love that you experience and I experience. Know that the grave will not hold us. Know the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives transforming us. Know what it is to be forgiven and transformed. Know what it is to have

Jesus Christ interceding for us in heaven today. Know these things and make Him a Lord. Give Him that rightful place, because there He promises life and life to the full. May that be our experience today. Christ is risen. Amen. Let's bow our heads briefly and pray. Heavenly Father, hear our prayers we ask and bless us as we consider the truth of Jesus and as we consider the reality of worship, a Savior that we have been created to worship and help us to worship by our lives. Help us to worship with our voice as we praise and with our feet as we walk, with our hands as we serve, rise as we think of where we go and what we do and ears with what we listen to in our mouth, what we say. Lord, help us to give you that place of Lordship and may it be evident to others. May your spirit work in the hearts of any who today may have come in without any thought of God or of Christ or of the relevance of Jesus to them. May by your power and grace they be touched and transformed and changed forever in a good way. Take away any fear that may be in our hearts and give us joy as we submit to the living God for we ask it in His precious name. Amen.