

Resurrection and Baptism!

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, for a little while this morning we're going to turn back to Matthew chapter 28, the chapter that Bekah read for us. It's the last chapter and this is the last sermon that we'll be doing on the Gospel of Matthew. Now it's almost a year to the day that we started this series in Matthews. It was on the 1st of December 2019. So we've done approximately between 45 and 50 sermons on Matthew, which is the longest series I've ever done by miles and miles.

It's Thomas's fault. It was something that suggested having a really long series. But I'm really glad because it's been fascinating and fresh, I think, and it's the kind of Gospel that allows you to learn something new every time that we come to it. So it's about a year since we started. But it's almost 100,000 weeks since the events that are recorded in Matthew 28 actually happened. This is a long time ago, nearly 2,000 years ago, as we know. However, they remain vitally relevant and vitally important for us as we think about them and consider them. You know that sometimes with films or with books, that they can be really great right up towards the end.

And then the climax is really dull and boring or just disappointing. It doesn't match what you were expecting to happen. We watched a film last night called Dark Water, which actually had a pretty good ending. It was quite climactic. So that was good. And that was, although it was a bit of a depressing film, if you've seen it, if you haven't seen it, I'll not spoil it. But it's a kind of true story.

Anyway, that's beside the point. But here we have this book of Matthew, which is part of the 66 books of the Bible. And its climax is absolutely devastating and powerful. And it's the single most important historical narrative that was ever written, these verses of Matthew 28. Because these words have changed the lives of millions of people, having heard them and recognized and come to recognize who Jesus is and what He's done and what He's achieved. So it really is a climactic chapter. And it's not disappointing in the slightest for us to consider. So that really the theme today is about resurrection and baptism, because they both come into this chapter very powerfully. And of course, this is primarily about the resurrection of Jesus. Over the last number of weeks, we've been looking at leading up to His crucifixion, the last supper, and in the crucifixion and His death.

And now we come to this climactic end of the book of Matthew, which is the resurrection of Jesus on the third day. Okay, so it's God's antidote to despair. Because really, as we know about it, and okay, I'm going to just talk about things that we don't really like talking about for a little while. Because I think that's very important because it brings us round to the hope that comes from it. But death is the end, isn't it? The death is the end of all hope. It's the greatest anti-climax. So we're talking about climax and we're talking about great endings. Well, death is really the very opposite of that for us. And it's the concentrated finale of all that's wrong in the world and all that's wrong in our experience. And maybe all that's wrong that we feel in our hearts. It's just that desperate end to life. And I think for many people in the world in which we live, particularly if they live their lives without reference to God and without reference to spiritual truth or spiritual reality, their thinking is encapsulated for me very, very powerfully in the brilliant but flawed song of Freddie Mercury of Queen. It's an amazing song, but I believe it's flawed fundamentally and brutally at its core. You see, there is no time for us. There's no place for us. What is the thing that builds our dreams? Yet slips away from us.

[4 : 33] Who wants to live forever? You know, the words of the great refrain, the great chorus of that song. Who dares to love forever when love must die? But touch my tears with your lips. Touch my world with your fingertips and we can have forever. And we can love forever. Forever is our today. So you see the thinking of that song and the thinking and I think it does help explain how a lot of times that people think and it's the experience of many people that love is fleeting, that love can't really fully be grasped, that happiness isn't always happiness, that life passes, that we can become content with the myth that forever will just make forever today. We'll just make what happens in our day-to-day experience. We'll make that forever. That's the only forever there is. And we wrestle and battle with and it's in many poems and many songs, isn't it? The paradox of beauty and joy and yet suffering and pain and illness and death and evil and darkness. And even in the best of times there's that shadow knowing that something's going to end. And for many who don't maybe enjoy love and family and wholesome living and wholesome life for whatever reason, today's forever can be absolutely hopeless. It can be a rubbish forever. Their experience of today, sorrow or brokenness or guilt or failure or emptiness or poverty. And you know, we can absolutely associate with people like that who says, well, who would want to live forever? If this is all there is, if this is the climax of the experience of living, who would want to live in this environment and in this world forever? And really Jesus is saying and the message of the passage here is that His resurrection blows that thinking apart and blows that philosophy apart. And it challenges us to take note of who Jesus claims to be and what He says about life and what He says about death and how He can change our lives forever. So there's that element that comes into the thinking and the reality of the claims of Jesus. And as we've seen as we've studied this last forty, six, forty, eight weeks or however long it's been, we've unpacked the character and the person of Jesus that He is God in the flesh, He's God the Son, who had no ordinary life and certainly not an ordinary death. We've seen all this leading up to this and His preparation for and His prediction of what was going to happen in these last number of months. But in His death on the cross, we see the death of the author of life, the greatest paradox of all time, the death of the author of life. Born miraculously, into dire poverty, family knew crushing bereavement, unknown for the majority of his life. But yet when he became a public figure, he spoke and he preached like nobody else ever. He healed the sick, he raised the dead, he performed miracles, but he always spoke about moving towards Jerusalem, moving towards the crucifixion. He always spoke about that. He made clear that he's the only person who ever lived that came to die, specifically and intentionally. And then as we saw maybe two or three weeks ago that he told his disciples on the third day, he would rise again expecting that resurrection. And he did. And this chapter speaks about that. And why is that the story of Jesus?

Why does it take that direction? Why does it move like that? And why did he die and why was he resurrected? Well, because he's claiming, and this always therefore remains relevant for all of us in our lives, because we all face that enemy one day, is he claims that death is a spiritual issue, not a natural one. Very unpopular reality for us to consider. But the Bible unpacks and makes clear that sin and evil entering the world resulted in this great and horrible reality. A humanity that chose to reject the worship of God and the love of God and run our lives on our own, independently of Him, was the disaster that has brought this world into the turmoil and brokenness that it sees. Because God is a holy and a pure being. He can't ignore or accept sins, destructiveness as if it was okay, the disease of sin, as if it was not a problem, it's okay. No problem, just live without recognition of your Creator and God. He couldn't do that because he knew that he couldn't live in the presence of sin. Therefore, we can't live in His presence as sinners. And he passed the only sentence he could pass in His holiness and justice, which was death and separation from eternal life, from Him, from love, hope and joy, ultimately in Him as its source.

That is horrible truth. It's universal truth and it's serious truth for us. And if we were leaving it there, it would be depressing truth and miserable truth and horrible truth. But Freddie Mercury got it right on one of his lines when he said, love must die. He is absolutely right. And that is absolutely the core of the Christian message is that the author of life, the author of love, Jesus Christ, came to bring about the death of death because he knows and experienced will tell us that no one is able to defeat the power of death in and of themselves. No one is able to self-resurrect. No one can live forever. The song is right in that sense. He knows that none of us can make ourselves right with God by how we act or what we do in our own strength. It's just too much. It's too much of a way. It's too much of a burden. He's too holy. It's impossible. But in

His love and in His grace, He recognizes that He had to come in our place to provide the answer. Because none of us love God perfectly and one another perfectly. And that's really the summary of the Ten Commandments, to love God and love one another perfectly. We can't do it. It's impossible.

[11 : 43] But Jesus came, God the Son. And He lived that perfect life that we couldn't. He loved God and He loved His neighbor perfectly. But then He died the death that we deserve. He died in our place.

Love must die. His love for us was so great. He recognized our need was so great. He would come in our place and He would die in our place so that we can live and know resurrection and fellowship with God. And so this chapter speaks into that. It's like if you had a visual picture of this chapter, it would be a big seal. You know, the seal used to put on an envelope where the king had a queen or someone important had a letter to send and they would close, you don't see it now, but you close it, you drip some wax in it, then stamp, you would seal it. Just, and it would be the king or the queen or the company seal that would go on it. Well, this chapter is like that. It's just a big seal on what God has done. It's the guarantee that what Jesus came to do has been accepted and has won the victory. That He has defeated death for anyone who will put their trust in Him. Anyone who believes His verdict, anyone who recognizes who He is and who puts their trust in this astounding act of love for them can know His friendship and can know this new start and this new life that is stronger than death, that will allow us to be raised beyond death into eternal life.

It's a great truth and it's a truth that's transformed our lives as Christians and makes us live and think differently and it's the truth that's transformed Sarah in her own life as well.

He gifts us this. We don't earn it. We don't work for it. We don't have to wait until the end of time to find out about it. He just gifts us this gift of life now as we put our trust in Him and a future now but also beyond this broken world, which I think is always best summarized by Jesus Himself who says it'll be a place of no more tears. And isn't that what really is the hardest thing?

Is it whatever happens that there are tears? Now there might be different tears today and from Sarah and me probably, okay? But they're different. They are tears of joy. They are different kind of tears, but the tears of sadness will have gone when Jesus takes us to be with Him. And therefore this chapter which we've read about the resurrection of Jesus is probably the ultimate chapter on hope.

[14 : 38] And hope is such a great thing in life. Have you ever met anyone who is entirely devoid of hope? It's a terrible place to be and it's a terrible thing to experience, to be hopeless, utterly and completely hopeless. Now we know just now in a societal way, we know about that a little bit, just now don't we with COVID-19 and with the restrictions and the trouble and the difficulties and the fear and the masks and all the separation that we've heard about the vaccine. And that brings us hope. And that's good, that's right, different vaccines from different places. And we put our hope in that that maybe things will get a bit back to normal, that we'll all be able to meet together, a whole church will meet together, families will meet together, Christmas will be normal, all these great things we hope for and that's great and that's good and that's important.

And we pray about that and we pray that they do get a really effective vaccine and we thank God for the skill and the expertise of the people that spent months and months and months spending hours and hours looking for this vaccine. But we also know that this vaccine will not help us love God and love one another better. It won't heal broken hearts and it won't meet our deepest longings. But the gospel does. And the gospel that is the good news of Jesus Christ isn't wishful thinking hope, you know, simple minded people need something just to give them wishful thinking to keep them going in life. It's not like that. It's not vague optimism. Everything will turn out alright in the end. It'll be fine. It's not a vague kind of hopeless optimism. Nor is it the kind of just the hope that says I'm going to make the most of this life and just go for it.

Which is unrealistic, I think, often in the face of suffering and pain and difficulty and loss and guilt which we face in our lives. But this is a sure and certain hope. It's not wishful hoping. It's a sure and certain hope based on the character, the claims, the promises and the historical reality of Jesus Christ who lived and died and who rose again in the third day.

Billy Graham, the great evangelist, not from St. Columbus but the American Billy Graham said, there is more evidence that Jesus rose from the dead than there is that Julius Caesar ever lived or that Alexander the Great died at the age of 33. Now, who wants to live forever? If we cling on to that hope and then cling on to a resurrected Savior who promises as the first who was resurrected to raise all who trust in Him to new life and eternal life. So nearly done. What is His word for us today? What is Jesus' word? What is Heaven's word for us today when we're faced with this monumental fact? When we're faced with this historical reality, what's the word for us?

What takes it into twenty-fourth century Edinburgh for us? Well, I think it's the words that we hear coming from Heaven in this chapter. We hear it from the lips of the angel who says to the women who come to the tomb, don't be afraid. You're looking for Jesus? He's risen. So it's don't be afraid. And then Jesus says in verse 10, He says the same thing when they meet Him. He says, don't be afraid. Go and tell my brothers and there they will see me. And later on He goes and says to His followers, I am with you always. Isn't that great? In that most monumental of historical facts that turns really our thinking and reality of life upside down and you might think, oh, that's great, that's nice or whatever. But He knows that usually a response to that is fear. It's fear of the unknown and it's fear of the spiritual realm that we can't really see and it's fear of maybe our lives being turned upside down. It's fear of all kinds of things and He says, look, don't be afraid.

[19 : 03] I'll be with you. I'll be with you always. And these are great words and I hope they're comforting words for us today. Because the response is interesting as well, isn't it? Of the various people that hear about the resurrection. The women and the disciples, some of them doubt, but we're told that they trust in Him with fear and great joy. There's that weird mixture of emotions. Yes, they're afraid. Yes, they run to the tomb to see the resurrected Savior. And there's great joy as well as fear. And that is often how it is with us as believers, as Christians in our lives. There's things we're afraid of. We move forward in faith and we trust in Jesus and we hear His voice telling us not to be afraid. And we also have great joy. And you know, in this pandemic, the church should really be a place and the church of God and the people of God should really be a people of joy, not slapstick, stupid joy that is annoying for people going through difficulty, but a deep seated joy and a hope that goes beyond the physical reality of what we're going through. I don't think we should really be spending our time moaning and grumbling and complaining about what's happening.

I don't think that's a great thing to do because we have this great good news of great joy. I think we should be shining, not whining. And I think that's important in these days because we have a great message, even though we might sometimes be afraid, we have great joy. So trust and joy was the response of the disciples. But we also know there was others and there's always the side of it in the gospel, those who denied it and who didn't want to know about it and who turned away while they were going through some of the guard went to the city and they told the chief priests when they had, when they heard about it, they gave the soldiers money, they bribed them and said, tell the people that the disciples stole the body. And Matthew says, and that was believed even to the day of the writing of the gospel. So there will be people who deny.

And we all need to ask which group we're going to be part of and how we're going to respond to this message and this glorious truth. And then Jesus finishes by saying, you know, go therefore, says the disciples, made disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you and behold, I am with you even to the end of the age. So the message of the good news has always been for the Christian church to go and tell it, go and share it, make disciples and be baptized.

And we've got a saying in Scotland, I think it's Scottish anyway, that says, it's better felt than tell. So I've tell you, and now Sarah is going to feel you, feel the message to you. And she's going to tell it from her own experience. And so there'll be a telling, but it will be from her heart.

And that's very important. So I've finished saying what I'm going to say at this point, and I'm going to invite Sarah up, who's going to share her own story of coming to faith in this risen crucified and risen Savior. And we look forward to that.