

Title: Believe it or not!
Text: Matthew 27.62-28.15
Theme: The resurrection of Christ
Series: Matthew #129
Prop Stmtnt: Believing is seeing

Today is Resurrection Day. The significance of this day goes back beyond that of a bloodied cross and an empty tomb from 2,000 years ago. The significance of this day goes back to a garden thousands of years before that, where Adam, the very first human and the representative of the human race, chose to rebel against God, the creator, and perfectly wise and kind Sovereign. Adam's sin brought upon him and upon the human race the curse of death. From that moment we have been dead men walking. Our world is plagued with death because we are cursed by sin. We, as image-bearers of God, live out of alignment with God and as a result we never feel perfectly safe, perfectly secure, perfectly at rest. We live looking over our shoulder and with a constant state of unsettledness. We all know that something is wrong. Something is fundamentally wrong.

Our culture of the curse is the story of sin, death, violence, wars and chaos. But, it is not the only story. In the midst of our dreadful and painful history, God has been writing a new story within the story. Back in the garden when Adam sinned, God promised that sin, death and the grave would not have the final word. There would come One who would be a 2nd Adam. He would be a new representative. He would do what the first Adam failed to do. This 2nd Adam would love God perfectly. He would believe God completely and enjoy God thoroughly. He would be what Adam should have been, and would fix what we have broken. This 2nd Adam would pay for our sins. He would be our Savior. He would redeem us. He would be our Sacrifice. He would purchase our pardon and offer us forgiveness that is free and full. The OT is God going on record in promising a King and Savior, unlike any King and unlike any Savior. All of those promises seemed too amazing to be true and no one could grasp how they could all be fulfilled in one person. He would have to be God to do that all that. 2,000 years ago, God invaded our culture of the curse and disrupted the reign of death. The 2nd person of the Trinity took upon himself humanity and was conceived in a woman and born into this world in the appearance of a humble and helpless infant. This child became a boy, who became a man. At roughly 30 years of age, he emerged from his humble setting in Nazareth and began to teach, perform miracles, disciple, train, and tell people about what is wrong with this world by helping them see what is wrong with their own hearts. He invited them to rebel against the kingdom of death and repent of their sins and follow him. He was the King of the Kingdom of God! He was clear and compassionate about this. He evidenced his authority by showing power over demons, disease and even death itself. It was obvious. God had kept his Word. Here was the King! But, in spite of that, there were plenty who hated him because he exposed their sin and self-righteousness. He warned them of the judgment of God that awaited them if they did not repent. He threatened their power with a kingdom of truth and grace that would only take the humble. So, they plotted his death. And while they thought they were ridding themselves of their threat, they were carrying out God's plan for our salvation. This God-man, Christ Jesus died as a condemned criminal. To his enemies, he was charged with the crime of claiming to be God. In reality,

he was charged with our sins. There were 3 thieves who died that day. Christ died because he took something that did not belong to him. He took my sin. And in his death, he paid in full the debt of our sins. Back in the garden God told Adam that the price of sin is death. But, if the price of sin is paid, then what should happen to the consequence of death? We did not have to wait too long to find out. As we read in our text last Sunday, when Christ was dying on the cross, he cried out, "It is finished." The debt was paid. And Christ died. He did not die from exhaustion, he died from completion. He did what he came to do. At that moment the earth shook and tombs around Jerusalem were opened. Three days later on the morning of the first day of the week there was another earthquake and this time the tomb of Jesus was opened and our Savior rose from the dead as our sin-smashing, death-defeating, serpent-crushing, life-giving, curtain-tearing, earth-shaking, grave-busting, heaven-splitting, Grace-providing, hope-securing, kingdom-coming Messiah. He lived the life you could not live and died the death you could not die. His resurrection is evidence that the Father accepted in full the payment for our sin. The empty tomb is irrefutable proof that God will go as far as he has to for as long as he must in order to keep every promise that he makes. So, in that sense, the resurrection of Christ is a promise made by Christ and kept by Christ. Do you believe this? Do you realize that you cannot pay for your sin? Do you confess that you are not good enough? Do you trust in Christ alone, and not in your righteousness, or religion, or reputation, but standing spiritually naked before God, you humble yourself and admit your sin and trust in Christ alone? You will either believe Christ's promises or you will believe and participate in the cover-up. There is no middle ground. Maybe or sort-of are not options. Don't you hate it when people lie to you? Don't you hate it when people withhold information from you and don't tell you the truth about what is going on? The ultimate conspiracy and cover-up has always been about Christ. Our study of Matthew's gospel has made this very clear.

Read Text:

Go back to 27.63. The chief priests and Pharisees remember what Christ said, don't they? They remember he said, "After three days I will rise." That is a **promise** Christ made. So how do they respond to this promise of Christ? They respond the same way they have responded to everything else he said. They do not believe it. And their **unbelief produces blindness**. That is why it would not matter if the resurrected Christ stood right in front of them. The issue has never been about the sufficiency of or the integrity of the evidence, it has always been about pride. Their pride drove their unbelief, their unbelief drove their blindness and their blindness drove more unbelief.

Look at 28.6. The angel told Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, "He is not here, for he is risen, **AS HE SAID.**" In other words, remember? Remember that he said that? Oh yea! And in that moment, what happened? These women also remembered the words of Christ or the promises of Christ. They remembered them but when they remembered, they **believed!** They believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. And then what happened? **They saw Jesus!** And then they ran and told his disciples and the disciples believed and what happened to them? They saw Jesus. Belief in the promises of Christ produces sight, which produces more belief, which produces more sight. Believing is seeing!

(What Jesus said and what Jesus did) Therefore, this text is a **contrast** between those who heard what Jesus said and refused to believe it and those who heard what Jesus said and were willing to believe it. Which is a summary of the entire ministry of Christ. (**Matthew outline**) Look at ministry of Christ outlined by Matthew. Do you see the pattern? He teaches, then he performs miracles, then he teaches. Those who accepted his words were able to believe the miracles, but those who refused to believe what Christ said, were totally unfazed by what Christ did. In fact, what Christ did only added to their unbelief because they were intimidated by it. That is still true. If you refuse to believe what Christ says, it doesn't matter what Christ does, because if you refuse to believe what he says you will be blind to what he does.

1. **Unbelief in Christ brings a life of fear.** (27.61-66; 28.11-15)

A. **Fear of the truth.**

The chief priests and Pharisees were afraid. They were afraid because they rejected the truth about Christ and therefore hated Christ. And because they hated Christ they were terrified by him and by what he said. People who are afraid use force, fear, intimidation, threats, anger, violence, manipulation, terror, shame, exposure or anything they can get their hands on in an effort to get their way. In fact, people who are afraid will seek to acquire force, position, power, influence, and knowledge in order get their way. However, people who love Christ are set free from fear. They are free from having to be in charge all of the time. They are free to face the truth, free to embrace the truth, free to investigate the truth because they are not afraid of what the truth will reveal.

The chief priests and Pharisees are the imposters. They are the ones who use religion as a means to serve themselves. They twisted the OT into forming a system where they occupied positions of power from which they gained respect, power and wealth. The truth was, they did not care about others. They cared about themselves. Jesus is the truth. Jesus spoke the truth. Jesus was the light that exposed their lies and their lives. Jesus does that. Jesus tells us the truth about our lives. He exposes our sin, but not to shame us. He exposes our sin so that we will admit it and confess it and repent of it. Our sin is like a toxic cancer for our soul. If our sin is not dealt with, we will die in bondage, in rebellion and in condemnation. In order to be forgiven of our sin, we have to admit our sin.

What happens to those who refuse to admit that they are sinners? They are refusing to admit the truth. The fact that you refuse to admit the truth, does not change the truth. You can attempt to change the truth, but the truth is the truth. No matter what you do, the truth will never die because God never dies. That is why...

B. **Fear of the truth produces a life of anxiety.**

Some of you know the frustration of knowing that something is wrong with a family member but you just don't know what. You are unsettled because you don't know what is going on. You just want to know the truth. You know what it is like to not know what is going on at work, or with a relationship, and you just want someone to tell you the truth.

You resent it, even hate it, when someone lies to you. Why are we that way? Do you not see? We not only have these categories of truth and lies in our brains, but we have this deep, emotional and personal connection to it because that is the DNA of God in us. There is no getting around it. We have the divine image of God on our beings. We were made by God, for God; which means we were hardwired to know truth. When we lie, we give off clues. We don't make eye contact. We fudge our words. Our pulse changes. All of this happens because we were made by our Creator who is truth to live in truth. We are prone to despair when we conclude that everyone in the government, and everyone in charge just continually tells us lies. People who are afraid of the truth spend their lives looking in the rear view mirror. They cannot relax. Do you see what is going on in 27.62-66? This is called a "panic attack." Oh my goodness! What happens if?! Know what I mean? These guys have a problem because they have a guilty conscience and no one wants to admit it. They are fearful because they might be exposed. So, they try to exert their influence on the situation and they come up with the plan of sealing the tomb and posting a guard.

C. Lies never work!

So, what happens? They seal the tomb and post a guard. Then the seal is broken, the stone is removed, the guards are traumatized and the body of Christ is gone! Now, they have an even bigger problem. They were the ones who came up with the plan to seal the tomb and post a guard in the first place. But, their fear of the truth forces them to keep telling lie after lie after lie. The deeper you get the harder it is to admit you are wrong. In fact, the more you tell a lie, the more you believe lies and the more you believe lies, the less you can even tell the difference between what is true and what is false.

The truth is, my heart is deceitful, but I do not want you to know that. I do not want you to see that. So, I am tempted to do everything I can to hide that from you and the more I hide it from you, the more I believe that I am okay. But, it never works. Admitting the truth about my life and my sin sets me free. The very thing I fear (truth) is the very thing that sets me free, if I am willing. If I refuse to open the door that exposes the truth about my life, then I will block the grace from coming into my life.

Let's say that you are a hoarder. Your house has become so piled up with stuff that you can hardly live in it. The problem is so big that you do not even know where to begin. In other words, the problem is bigger than what you can solve. What do you do? If you keep the door closed and the blinds pulled, you hope no one will see inside and learn the truth about you. But unless you open the door and let someone in, you will never get the help you need in cleaning it out.

That problem is infinitely worse when it is your heart. Your heart hoards sin. It is embarrassing to realize what is in there. Inside your heart is the sin of self-righteousness, self-centeredness, pride, deceit, lust, idolatry, etc. In other words, it is really bad and you feel shame. Jesus comes along and describes what you are hoarding in your heart. What are you going to do? Are you going to admit that he is right and open the door or are you

going to get angry with him and argue with him and attack him and accuse him of all sorts of things because you are embarrassed but you don't want anyone to know?

When you disbelieve Christ, you lose everything! This is no game. This is life. You have a sin problem that you cannot fix. You need a Savior. You need to be rescued. You need to admit your need. You need to admit your guilt. If you reject Christ, you reject truth and will waste your life. There is a better way.

2. **Belief in Christ brings joy.** (28.1-10)

Christ is the most amazing and wonderful person in history. I want you to know him because I love you and I know that he will fill your life with joy because he is so amazing. Who else do you know who is like this? Christ was hanging on the cross after being unjustly tried. The soldiers, who were nothing more than goons and paid thugs, who not only scourged him, abused him, pounded him, mocked him, were now gambling for his clothes. With one word, Christ could have damned them and incinerated them on the spot. We are tempted to see these guys as nothing more than stupid and useless minions, right? But Jesus didn't see them that way, did he? In fact, he prayed for them. Strength is not intimidating your enemy with a death stare that says I will get my revenge. Strength is loving your enemy and praying for his forgiveness. That is what Jesus did. He asked the Father to forgive them. What happened? These soldiers believed didn't they? Remember the confession of the centurion and the soldiers from last week? The Father answered the prayer of Jesus because the prayer of Jesus put the fame and character of God on display. This is our King! Here are four reasons to believe.

A. **He tells you the truth.** (6)

Look at the contrast between Mary Magdalene and the chief priests. She loved Christ and was not afraid of the truth. She heard the truth, like the chief priests and she responded in faith. She saw the empty tomb and believed that Christ had risen from the dead. It seemed too good to be true, didn't it? Hold the phone, right there. Why do the promises of God seem too good to be true? Why are we so prone to disbelieve God's promises? We live accustomed to the current of the curse. We swim in the waters of death and breathe the air of decay. It is all that we know. We find it hard to believe God's grace because it is not of this world. It is not of our experience. But look at how amazing Christ is. He told her and the disciples the truth. The angel was only reminding her of it. And what was the truth? It was incredible. It was stunning. It was overwhelming. But it was true. Mary believed him and it brought (v.8) great joy! And if you believe him, you will see him. (9)

B. **He makes promises.** (6)

Every promise of Christ is another opportunity and reason to believe. The night before he died, he told his disciples what was going to happen. And then he said, I am telling you this now so that when it happens you will believe me. Over and over God goes on the record ahead of time in order to demonstrate that He is believable. He is not afraid to make promises and in fact he does. He said, "I will rise again." Christ makes promises to

give you reasons to believe. He knows that we do not believe perfectly. Look at the disciples! They ran away in fear because they did not believe in that moment, but they didn't stay that way because they couldn't stay away. Yes, they were afraid, but their belief in the promises of God drove their love that overcame their fear. The resurrection of Christ was obvious; they had to believe, right? The chief priests didn't. Again, their disbelief in the promises of God drove their hatred that only fueled their fear. Do you see it? God offers you a life of love and joy. Reject it, and you will have a life of fear. Christ not only makes promises but he keeps his promises.

C. He keeps his promises.

I will die, and he died. I will rise again and he did. I will meet you in Galilee and he did. Christ will never lie to you and will never lie about you. Many people will, but Christ won't. This issue is the very heart of our existence.

D. He cannot be stopped.

You can deny him, but you cannot destroy him. You can denounce him, but you cannot dethrone him. You can reject him but you cannot outrun him, outthink him, outlast him, or outlive him. Everywhere you go, he is. Even if you kill him, he will rise again. The only sensible and necessary thing to do is to love him, trust him, confess your need of him, surrender your life to him and believe him. And know this, one day you will see him. But if you believe him, you will be in the minority. The majority of people will chose to reject him. The Sanhedrin did, but two of them did not. The soldiers did, but the centurion and a couple of others did not. The Jews did, but the disciples and others did not. Those who believed were the ones who saw.

This political season is disgusting, isn't it? I'm embarrassed. I'm embarrassed because these guys aren't embarrassed. One of these characters is going to be our president. People ask me, who are you going to vote for? Johnny is my neighbor, so whenever I am not sure who to vote for in a local election, I always write in his name. Johnny, you will probably be getting at least one vote for president unless I write in Al Mohler, or Ligon Duncan. Do you ever feel like you have to hold your nose and vote? Do you realize that you will never be embarrassed by Christ? Do you know why I am not ashamed of Christ and the gospel? There is nothing about him to be ashamed of. He forgives your sin. He credits you with righteousness. He adopts you into his family. He gives you the Spirit. He places you into the church. He gives you eternal life. He embraces you. He sings over you. He intercedes for you. He will never leave you and will bring you home. He brings joy!