

## **“The First Easter Sermon”**

**Easter 2022**

***Matthew 28:1-7***

You know, I once heard a story about a farmer named Farmer Jones... <sup>1</sup>

Farmer Jones lived in the countryside alone except for his dog.

And one day, sadly, Farmer Jones’ dog died...

And so Farmer Jones went to his **Baptist** pastor and said, “Hey pastor, my dog is dead. Could you possibly do a funeral service for him?”

The pastor told him, he said "Farmer Jones, I’m sorry, but I don’t think we can do a dog funeral service...but I'll tell you what, there's a new denomination down the street, and there’s no telling what they believe in, maybe they'll do something for the animal."

So Farmer Jones said, “Ok...I’ll go there right away.”

And then the farmer turned back to the pastor and said, “Hey pastor I’ve got another question for you...”

He said, “Do you think \$20,000 is enough to pay for a good service?”

The pastor replied, “Woah, woah wait a minute Farmer Jones, you didn’t tell me the dog was Baptist!”

You see, that changes things a bit...

Well, you know I think it’s safe to say that 2,000 years ago when Jesus Christ rose from the dead, that changed some things.

It was and still is to this day a game changer.

For you see, the fact that Jesus rose from the grave validates Jesus’ entire ministry and mission.

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<sup>1</sup> Family Times—Source Unknown, “Wanted a Christian Burial for His Dog” *Burial*, 2022

The fact that Jesus rose from the grave means that he really was who he said he was (the Son of God) and that he really did what he said he came to do—save sinners from their sins.

You see, the resurrection of Jesus means that Jesus wasn't just a good teacher...

He wasn't just a good man...

No, he is the God-Man who came to rescue the world from sin and judgment.

But again, the resurrection means everything.

As it's been said before, *"The Resurrection is in fact the hinge on which the door of Christianity turns."*

In other words, without the resurrection there is no Christianity.

It's that vital piece that holds it all together.

In fact, beyond the birth of Christ and the crucifixion of Christ, it is the resurrection of Jesus that is the very foundation of our faith.

As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15, *"If Christ did not rise from the dead, then our preaching is in vain, our faith is meaningless, and we are ultimately fools..."*

If Christ did not rise again from the dead, then what we're doing here this Easter morning and every Sunday morning is a big...utter...waste...of time.

BUT...

If the resurrection is true (and we believe it is), then that changes everything.

It is the greatest news in the world!

And it's one that we should never get tired of talking about...and one that we should never get tired of rejoicing over.

Well, obviously this morning we're going to be talking about the Resurrection.

And so if you have your bibles, go ahead and turn with me to the gospel of Matthew—Matthew chapter 28.

And here in Matthew 28 we're going to be looking at the first easter message ever preached...

“The First Easter Sermon.”

And so let's read this together, starting in verse 1...

<sup>1</sup> Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup> And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup> And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.”

\*\*\*Prayer

So here we have the first easter sermon ever given...

And you know, what's interesting to me about this sermon given here is that it's not a sermon preached by a pastor of a church...

It's not a sermon preached by one of the disciples...

It's not even a sermon preached by Jesus.

But rather as we just read, it's one that is preached by an angel.

You see, just as angels announced the birth of Jesus to some shepherds in a field around Bethlehem, God sent another angel to announce the resurrection of Jesus to some women who came to anoint Jesus' body that first easter morning.

And this angel no doubt must have gone to seminary or taken some preaching classes because as you look at this, the angel's sermon has three main points...like every good sermon should!

As you read what the angel told these women in this story, there are three imperatives...

Three commands he gives them in light of Jesus' resurrection.

And they are commands that we need to give heed to as well today.

And so if you're taking notes, number one, he first tells these women in verse 5—**Do not be afraid.**

Now, it's apparent in the text that these women were afraid because they saw something rather terrifying—an angel.

In fact, it's interesting, when you read the scriptures, every time someone sees an angel (Mary, Zechariah, the shepherds in Bethlehem, etc...) they all tremble with fear.

Why is that?

Well, I think it's because the human brain just isn't prepared to see something as majestic as an angel.

I mean, we're talking about one of the most powerful beings that God has ever created...

Of course, you're going to be a little afraid when you see something shining like lightning and clothed as white as the snow.

I mean it was so terrifying, the text tells us, that the Roman guards trembled and fell over like dead men.

They kind of just rolled over and played dead.

But the angel of the Lord here comforts these women, these disciples of Christ, by telling them, verse 5 ***“Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said.”***

So the thing that was to trump their fears was the reality of the resurrection.

It's almost as if the angel is telling them to get their eyes off their fears (what was making them afraid) and put them onto a greater reality—that their Lord was alive!

And because of that...they had no reason to be afraid.

Most of you know that right now we live in a world of fear.

Fear of getting sick—getting COVID or cancer...

Fear of what's happening in Russia right now and how that impacts our own country...

Fear of the direction of our country...

Fear of the rising gas prices (thankfully that appears to be going back down)...

Or maybe it's just the daily fears of...

- Raising kids
- Finding a job or keeping your job

Many people are afraid, wondering:

- How they're going to pay the mortgage
- How they're going to pay the bills
- How they're going to buy the groceries

And of course, there's the fear many have of dying.

But there are many people who live in constant fear and worry...

And the reality is, for us as believers, the Lord never promised that our life would be "care-free."

He never promised that our life as Christians would always be smooth sailing.

In fact, in John 16:33 he told his disciples the exact opposite...

He told them, "*In this world, you WILL have trouble...*"

In other words, life at times is going to be hard...

Life at times will be difficult.

Listen, sometimes Christians get flat tires just like non-Christians...

Sometimes Christians like non-Christians, have dogs that dig holes in their back yard...

Sometimes Christians struggle in their marriage...

Sometimes Christians get fired from their jobs...

Sometimes Christians have rebellious kids who stray...

Sometimes Christians get cancer...

Life, even for the believer, sometimes is hard and difficult.

But there are two things here that the angel says, in light of the resurrection, that I think should calm our fears.

Number one, because of the resurrection, we can count on the Lord's presence.

You see, the very fact that this angel declares that Jesus is "*not here...*" and "*...has risen*" is to say "*Jesus is alive!*"

That is, he's not dead anymore...

You haven't lost him...

He's come back to life...and *he's with you!*

In fact, in verse 7 he tells these ladies to go ahead to Galilee and there they will see him.

They will eat with him and visit with him, along with the other disciples...

Not only that, if you skip on down to verse 20, you will see that one of the last things Jesus ever said to his disciples before he ascended into heaven was this...

Again, it's Matthew 28, last verse, verse 20...

He said, "*And behold, **I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS**, to the end of the age...*"

Now, I don't know about you, but it seems a little strange that Jesus would say "*Behold I am with you always...*" as he's about to ascend into heaven.

Like, how can Jesus be with them if he ascends into heaven?

Well, it's simple...

It's because 10 days later after his ascension he would send the Holy Spirit.

And the Holy Spirit, God the Spirit, is now the primary manifestation of the Trinity among us.

Jesus, who is God, is now with us, by way of the Holy Spirit—the Great Comforter...

And so today because God is with us always through his Holy Spirit, because we have his presence...we have nothing to fear.

(Long Pause)

You know, I once read a story about a tribe of Native Americans with a unique practice for training young braves.<sup>2</sup>

On the night of a boy's thirteenth birthday, after much training he had one final test to pass in order to be considered a man.

He would be put in a dense forest to spend an entire night alone.

Now, up until this point he had never been away from the security of the family and the tribe.

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<sup>2</sup> Source Unknown. "Training Young Braves" Our Daily Bread, October 1.

But on this night, he would be blindfolded and led many miles into the wilderness

Well, when he removed the blindfold all he could see was complete darkness.

Every time a twig snapped, he visualized a wild animal ready to devour him.

He spent every minute of that night absolutely terrified.

Well, after what seemed to be an eternity, the sun began to slowly rise.

And looking around, the boy saw flowers, trees, and the outline of the path.

Then, to his utter amazement, he saw the figure of a man standing just a few feet away, armed with a long bow and arrow.

It was the boy's father.

He had been there all night long.

In reality, the boy had nothing to fear.

And Christian, there may be times in your life when you too will be overcome with fear...

And you may not always "feel" God's presence with you.

But **Hebrews 13:5** tells us that God will "*never leave you nor forsake you.*"

You can always count on his presence to be with you—to help you, to provide for you, and to sustain you in your time of need.

(Pause)

Well secondly, not only can you count on God's presence, but we can also count on God's promises.

We see this sort of tucked away in the middle of verse 6...

The angel tells them, "<sup>6</sup> *Jesus is not here, for he has risen, (here it is) **as he said...***"



You see, Jesus not only predicted his own death, but he also predicted and promised that after three days he would rise from the dead.

You may want to jot down the reference: Matthew 17 verses 22 and 23...

And so the angel here is just reminding these ladies at the empty tomb that Jesus was faithful to keep his promises.

He did what he said he was going to do.

And so it is with us.

Church, aren't you glad that our God is a promise keeping God?

And so if the Lord says he will never leave you nor forsake you—then guess what, he won't ever leave you or forsake you.

If he says that “All things work for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purposes”—then guess what, God works all things out for our good and his glory, even if things appear to be pretty bad in the moment...

If he says that “whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life”—then guess what, there's eternal life for all those who believe in the gospel...

God's promises are always kept...

And the resurrection is proof of that.

And so because of God's presence and his promises, as believers we have nothing to fear—not even death itself...

In fact, it's interesting, after the resurrection...

After Jesus' disciples saw him alive, these guys were no longer afraid of death.

They became fearless and would boldly proclaim the gospel everywhere they went—even though many of them would face unspeakable torture and horrible deaths.

But you see, because of the resurrection, they knew that the Lord was with them...

And they knew that his promises were true—namely, that he had conquered sin and death.

And so what did they have to fear?

I think the great hymn writer captured it well when they wrote: <sup>3</sup>

*Because he lives, I can face tomorrow  
Because he lives, **all fear is gone**  
Because I know he holds the future  
And life is worth the living just because he lives*

You see, when you believe in Jesus, you don't have to be afraid of tomorrow, nor do you have to be afraid of death itself.

You know, some of you are probably familiar with the name John Wesley, said to be the founder of Methodism.

Well, Wesley was baptized as an infant and confirmed in the Anglican Church.

He went through all the rituals of the church and considered himself to be a good Christian.

He was such a “good” Christian that he traveled across the Atlantic to serve as a missionary in the colonies of Georgia and the Carolinas.

However, the entire time he knew deep inside his heart although he was very religious, there was something missing.

Nonetheless, he boarded a ship to return to England.

And on the return voyage he met a group of Moravian Christians who were very “on fire” and joyous in their faith.

And it caught Wesley's attention.

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<sup>3</sup> Gaither, Gloria and Bill, “Because He Lives.” 1971

Well, on one particular night the ship encountered a ferocious storm.

Everyone, including the crew, thought they would sink and drown.

Wesley said that he was literally trembling with fear.

But when he glanced at the Moravians he saw that they were smiling and calmly singing songs of praise.

After the storm passed (as all storms do), he wrote about the Moravians...

He wrote *“the wilder the waves, the calmer they sang.”*

But it was in seeing their faith that he came to realize that he didn't have that same fearlessness when it came to death and where he would spend eternity.

He came to realize in that moment that he was not saved.

He wrote of this and said: *“I went to America to convert the Indians, but, oh, who shall convert me? I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well: nay and believe myself while no danger is near; but let death look me in the face and my spirit is troubled. Neither can I say, ‘for me to die is gain’ Oh, who shall deliver me from this fear of death?”*

Many of you know that in returning to England, Wesley attended a meeting on Aldersgate Street.

It was May 24, 1738.

While a minister was reading Martin Luther's preface to Romans, Wesley later wrote, *“I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine!”*<sup>4</sup>

After meeting Christ, his life was totally transformed.

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<sup>4</sup> Dykes, David. “Facing the Future Without Fear” *Jesus: The Perfect God-Man*, 2001 p. 7

And from that moment forward, he was a person who was able to face death and eternity, like those Moravian Christians...without fear.

This is what believing in the gospel does...

This is the message of the resurrection...

It tells us that we have nothing to fear—whether it be in life or in death.

Well, that's point number one from this first easter sermon delivered by this angel—"Do not be afraid."

The second point is this—the angel also declares "Come and See."

Verse 6 the angel says, "*Jesus is not here for he has risen, as he said. (here it is) **Come, see the place where he lay.***"

So the angel says, "Hey, Jesus is not here...in fact, come and see for yourself...check it out."

And if you're here today and you're somewhat curious or possibly even a skeptic regarding the resurrection—consider accepting the angel's invitation...

That is, **examine...investigate the empty tomb.**

Because listen, if you're going to refuse to believe that Jesus rose again from the dead, you still have to answer the question: What happened to the body of Jesus?

There is an empty tomb that needs an explanation.

And so what are the possible explanations?

Well, one of the more prominent suggestions is that someone stole the body.

That is, someone snuck in under the cloak of darkness and took the body—possibly to make it look like Jesus rose from the dead.

But who could have done it?

Some suggest that it was Jesus' own disciples.

But think about it...

These disciples would all march to deaths because of their testimony...

You mean to tell me that they were marching to their deaths...OVER A LIE?!

That doesn't make any sense.

No one willingly gives up their life for something they KNOW is a lie.

Besides, you know this...

People lie to get OUT of trouble...

No one lies to get INTO trouble.

If the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus, I've got to believe that at least ONE of them would have recanted their story when their life was on the line...

But not one of them did...

You know why?

It's because they just could not deny what they had seen—a dead man who was now alive...

Their own testimony and inevitable deaths proves they were telling the truth.

*“Well Brad, what about the Romans? Maybe they did it!”*

Let me ask you: how would they benefit from stealing Jesus' body?

You see, it was the Romans who were trying to get rid of Jesus.

It seems a little counterproductive then to steal the body of Jesus which would only encourage the notion that he's alive.

That doesn't make any sense.

Well, what else could account for an empty tomb?

Well, there are some people who will try and say, *“What really happened is that Jesus never really died...he was just hurt really, really bad from the crucifixion, he passed out, was placed in the tomb, but woke up...regained his strength, rolled a 2 ton stone out of the way of the entrance of the tomb, beat up a couple of Roman guards who were skilled in combat and escaped on his own.”*

It’s typically called the “Swoon Theory.”

I love how J. Vernon McGee, a famous radio preacher days ago, once responded to a woman who called into his radio show and said: “Our pastor said on Easter said that Jesus just swooned on the cross and that the disciples nursed him back to health. What do you think?

I love his answer, he said—*“Dear sister...beat your preacher with a cat-o’-nine tails with 39 heavy strokes; nail him to a cross; hang him in the blistering sun for six hours; run a spear through his heart; embalm him; put him in an airless tomb for 72 hours and see what happens.”*<sup>5</sup>

I love it!

Listen, the Swoon Theory is ridiculous.

Well, if no one stole the body (not his disciples or the Romans) and if the Swoon Theory carries no legitimate weight, then what’s left?

How about this?

That Jesus really was the Son of God...

And that he really did rise again from the dead.

Now, the empty tomb is not the only pieces of evidence that Jesus rose again from the dead...

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<sup>5</sup> Chappell, Dr. Paul, “The Swoon Theory” Ministry 127

I could go on and on with other pieces of evidence (the extra biblical accounts of the resurrection, the eyewitness testimony of hundreds of people seeing him alive) but here's the thing: for you, examine it for yourself.

Simply put: Consider the evidence.

I share this almost every Easter because it's so good...

But Dr. Simon Greenleaf, who was a former law professor at Harvard Law School and the one who wrote a 3-volume legal masterpiece called "A Treatise on the Law of Evidence" which has been called "the greatest single authority in the entire literature of legal procedure",<sup>6</sup> he once had this to say about the evidence of the resurrection of Christ...

He said *"According to the laws of legal evidence used in courts of law there is more evidence for the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ than for just about any other event in history."*

He concluded, *"Therefore, a person who rejects Christ may choose to say that I do not accept it, but he may not choose to say there is not enough evidence."*<sup>7</sup>

And so to the curious or even the skeptic: please hear me...

No one is asking you to check your brains at the door.

In fact, we're strongly encouraging you to use your brains!

To think it through.

As one theologian put it: *"The Bible is written for thinking men."*<sup>8</sup>

And so as the angel declared to these women that day...come and see for yourself.

Examine the evidence—namely, the empty tomb.

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<sup>6</sup> Federer, William J. "America's God and Country: Encyclopedia of Quotations" p. 267

<sup>7</sup> Greenleaf, Simon. "An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists, by the Rules of Evidence Administered in Courts of Justice with an Account of the Trial of Jesus." London, Second edition, 1847.

<sup>8</sup> McGee, Dr. J. Vernon. "Luke: Written for the Thinking Man" Why Four Gospels? 1986

Alright, one more...

The angel declares:

- Don't be afraid
- Come and See

But then thirdly, Go and Tell...

Verse 7 the angel tells them, “...**go** quickly and **tell** his disciples that he has risen from the dead...”

So, once you have come and seen, you now have a responsibility to “go and tell.”

However, sadly, for a lot of Christians when they think of evangelism they think less of going and telling, and more of inviting to church and having someone else tell them...

For a lot of Christians their idea of evangelism is, “Let's hold a worship/revival service, get lost people in the building, so that the pastor or the evangelist can tell them about Jesus.”

Now please hear me—I'm all for you inviting people to worship with us and them hearing the good news of the gospel in hopes that they would believe.

But when you read the NT you see that the Early Church had a very different strategy...

Yes, they would “gather” together for **worship**, but then they would “scatter” for **evangelism**.

In other words, each disciple had this calling on their life to “go and tell” others about Jesus.

However, I'm afraid that for many Christians and many churches today we've become experts on inactivity.

Sure, we talk about reaching the world, but we refuse to go ourselves and tell others about Jesus.



But Christian may I remind you that there are people you work with, interact with, people you rub elbows with each and every day, who need to hear the gospel.

And they need to it FROM YOU!

They need to hear from you (someone they know and trust and see every day) how Jesus has saved you and transformed you.

We together, as the church have a responsibility as individuals to “go and tell” others about Jesus.

Several weeks ago I came across a Washington Post article done back in May of 1998.<sup>9</sup>

The story shares of a young boy named Christopher Sercye who was playing basketball outside with his friends in Chicago.

As he was playing with his friends, they were approached by another group of teenagers when one of them opened fire, shooting Sercye twice in the abdomen.

His friends helped him get to within forty feet of the entrance to Ravenswood Hospital and then went inside and asked for help.

Well, sadly the hospital staff refused to help Christopher saying that it was against the hospital’s policies to administer aid to those **outside** the hospital.

Eventually a policeman was able to get a wheelchair and wheeled Christopher into the hospital where he was helped by the hospital staff...

However, it was too late...

Christopher died about an hour later.

In the article, it stated this, it said: *“In the twilight of a warm spring day, a boy lay dying outside a hospital’s doors. And no one inside budged.”*

You know, sadly, that story reminds me of a lot of Christians and a lot of churches.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1998/05/20/chicago-cringes-at-teens-death/a04521ea-811b-4789-94ef-051ff3ba369e/>

Surrounded by people who are dying and going to hell, we refuse to go and tell, and instead choose to only help those who manage to come inside the church.

But friend, that's not the way it works...

We're called not to isolate ourselves from the world, but infiltrate the world with the gospel.

We're called to "GO and TELL"—to engage and share...

You know, in a world full of BAD news...as Christians, we have some GOOD news worth sharing.

And that is that God demonstrated his love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, he sent Christ Jesus to die for us.

And three days later after his body was placed in a tomb, this Jesus rose again from the dead conquering over both sin and death.

So that whoever would believe in him and repent of their sins, would not perish, but have eternal life.

If you've never bent the knee to Jesus as Savior and as Lord, I can't think of a better time to do that than on Easter Sunday...

We would love to talk with you more about what it means to follow Jesus if that's something you would like to do...

If you have trusted in Jesus, then let's be faithful to our charge to "go and tell" someone this week about the love of Christ displayed on the cross and about his glorious resurrection.

Let's be faithful to share the good news of Jesus.

Let's pray...

## OUTLINE

- **Do not be Afraid (v. 5)**

You can count on...

- God's presence

*"God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.""*  
(Hebrews 13:5)

- God's promises

- **Come and See (v. 6)**

Consider the empty tomb.

Possible Explanations:

1. Disciples stole the body
2. Romans stole the body
3. Swoon Theory
4. Jesus rose from the dead

*"According to the laws of legal evidence used in courts of law there is more evidence for the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ than for just about any other event in history...Therefore, a person who rejects Christ may choose to say that I do not accept it, but he may not choose to say there is not enough evidence."*  
(Simon Greenleaf)

- **Go and Tell (v. 6)**

Every disciple shares the responsibility  
of going and sharing the gospel with the lost.

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