

“What Good News Do We Have in COVID-19?” // Matthew 28:1–20 // *World Upside-Down* Easter 2020

Well, Happy Easter, Summit Church! I would never in a million years have thought that this is how I'd spend Easter 2020. But here we are.

- We've officially been on lockdown for about a month!
- I know some of you are probably starting to get a little stir crazy, to say the least. I heard someone say that during this time people's mood at home toggles between moments of boredom and panic.
- My family has taken more neighborhood walks in the last few weeks than we have in all the years leading up to this one. Which has been great.
- But still. I'm not sure if this quarantine is harder on extroverts or introverts. Extroverts, raise your hands (?): Of course it's hard on them because they want to get out and SEE PEOPLE!
- But introverts, raise your hands--they are frustrated because they are trapped indoors all day having to talk with all of you people who don't have your hands raised.
- So, it's rough on everybody, but hopefully you're making it.
- I've had a few perks in the quarantine: I'm working out more than ever. But the flip side of that is that I'm also eating more junk than ever. My goal in this quarantine is simply to break even. Which is always my workout goal, btw. But I'm definitely trying to avoid that Quarantine-15. Some of y'll are turning that COVID-19 into COVID-25.
- This quarantine has revealed to me that the 4 things I most love in life are: 1. Eating out at restaurants. 2. Actually going to church. 3. Anything deemed non-essential by the gov. 4. Touching my face. I flippin' love to touch my face. Seriously, just saying that. Some of y'all just touched your face. I really want to touch my face right now. Pray for me.

So, our circumstances this year find us in a much different place to celebrate Easter, but our message is the same: CHRIST IS RISEN. Take a minute to let that sink in. Christ. Is. Risen.

Feel the good news of that. You see, if that is true, COVID-19 can only hurt us up to a point, because Jesus took the sting out of death. Christians get sick and even die like other people, but death is not bitter or terrifying. When Jesus got out of the grave he got out victorious over death, disease, cancer and the Coronavirus. And that's good news.

There was a tradition in the ancient church that on this day if believers encountered each other on the street, one would say, "Christ is risen." And the other would respond, "He is risen indeed." Let's do that together. I'll say 'Christ is risen;' you look at each other and say 'He is risen indeed!' Right now, pick out that person you think that most needs to hear it... (2x)

But here's the question: Is it true?

One of the problems in this pandemic has been the prevalence of fake news. You've probably heard contradictory reports about how long this is going to last, what precautions are the right ones to take,

appropriate social distance measurements, where the virus originated, whether 5G is making it worse, which medicines are going to work, how fragile our medical system is, or any number of things.

- Fake news can be disastrous when you make major life decisions based on it. BTW, I learned that the first major scandal in our country involving fake news occurred in 1835, when the editor of a NY newspaper published a series of articles claiming that signs of life had been discovered on the moon. The articles gained traction because they featured quotes misleadingly attributed to a celebrated astronomer named Sir John Herschel. Because no one knew where Prof Herschel was at the time, the editor figured that he would be difficult to track down and so the hoax would be safe. It became known as the Great Moon Hoax.
- ~~Around the same time another one occurred with P.T. Barnum. In his show he paraded out an elderly woman named Joice Heth whom he claimed was the nurse who helped deliver George Washington at birth. Evidently people couldn't do math back then, because that would have made her at least 160 years old. Turns out, she was actually a 79-year-old slave Barnum had purchased for the show. But gullible people still paid money to see her. And I know I just ruined "The Greatest Showman" for some of you. But it was fake news, and it sold well.~~

To many people, the resurrection of Jesus sounds like fake news. To some, it sounds like little more than a wishful thinking; a fairy-tale ending to life for people who can't handle the fact that we're all alone in the universe and there's no sweet-by-and-by waiting for us in the sky when we die.

Others assume the accounts of the resurrection were rumors made up by over-excited religious zealots to give themselves the trump card in the religious controversies of their day. After all, if your leader rose from the dead, then that gives you the final word on whatever you are talking about. Maybe inventing the resurrection was their ploy to gain power or raise money. I mean, tragically, we've seen religious charlatans do this throughout history. And maybe that's what was happening with the resurrection.

But there's a phrase repeated over and over in the Gospels that challenges that interpretation of the events. The phrase is **"Come and see!"**

It's a phrase we see repeated throughout the life of Jesus.

- In **John 1**, Jesus reveals the fact that he is the Messiah to a man named Philip. He does so by revealing to Philip secrets about Philip that no one could have known. So Philip runs home and tells his brother Nathanael that he's met the Messiah. Nathanael just scoffs at him. Philip's response? **John 1:46, "Come and see."** Come and see for yourself.
- In **John 4**, Jesus encounters the woman at the well—an outcast woman, shunned by her society. Jesus does the same thing with her he did with Philip: he reveals to her secrets about herself she thought nobody knew, and shows her that he cares for her anyway! So she runs into town saying, "I have met the Messiah--the one promised by all the prophets." And people were like, "Seriously? Why would we listen to you?" Her response, **John 4:29, "Come and see."**

The most important of these happens in Matthew 28. Let's read the story: **1 At dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. 2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. 5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. **Come and see** the place where he lay.**

Come and see. See if this is made up. See if this is wishful thinking.

And so the women went to the tomb, and took a look for themselves.

And then they ran and got the rest of the disciples--all of the guys--who were hiding together in a room for fear that the authorities were coming for them next. The women give their report and the men respond with disbelief, dismissing it as the ravings of a woman overcome with grief. The women respond with basically the same words, Luke 24:11, "Come and see for yourselves." So Peter does. Come and see.

Let's keep going in Matthew 28: **11 While the women were on their way** (that is, going to tell the 11 disciples huddled in the upper room about the empty tomb), **some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.** **12 When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money,** **13 telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.'** (There it is: fake news!) Then they told them: **14 If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble."** **15 So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.**

So there we have it. The first counterclaim to the resurrection. Deliberate fake news: the disciples stole the body and made up the story of the resurrection to gain some political advantage.

But, you have to ask yourself, does that claim make any sense?

- First, how could a group of untrained fishermen and carpenters successfully sneak past a Roman garrison guarding the tomb? I mean, these were elite Roman soldiers, and they knew that falling asleep on guard duty was punishable by death. And you're saying ALL 12 fell asleep at once, while a group of untrained fishermen snuck past, hoisted away a 2 ton rock and stole a body?
- Second, what motive would the disciples have had to make this story up? What did they gain from this lie? **One scholar said, "When what we teach we know to be false, what motivates us to do that is a desire to line our own pockets with money, not get whipped and beaten and imprisoned and killed."** But that is exactly what happened with the Apostles. Testifying to this gained them no political power or monetary windfall. Every one of the Apostles was hunted down, imprisoned, tortured, and most were executed.
- Saying they intentionally lied means that some time between Friday when Jesus died and Sunday morning when he was reported as resurrected, something like this went down:
 - It's Saturday morning and all the disciples are out on an early morning fishing trip and they're pretty depressed about Jesus being executed the day before. And they start talking about how much they miss him and reminiscing about how meaningful his teaching was.
 - And Thomas says, "Remember that story about the Good Samaritan? I loved that story." And all the disciples are like, 'Yeah...'
 - And Andrew says, "And remember that time when they were going to stone the woman for adultery and he leaned down and wrote in the dirt and said, 'Let him who is without sin cast the first stone?'" Remember that? "That was awesome."
 - And all of the sudden Peter jumps up and says, "WAIT! I know! The cause of Jesus doesn't have to end here. Let's say he resurrected! In fact, let's say that was the whole point of his life: to die for our sins and be resurrected."
 - And Thaddaeus says, "Will we get popular doing this?" And Peter says, "Probably not. We'll be hated, cast out of our communities, and spend our whole lives running from Jewish and Roman authorities."
 - And Matthew, the former tax collector, says, "Will we get rich?" And Peter says, "No. They'll probably confiscate our property and throw us in prison."

- And John says, “Well, will we at least have the satisfaction that we are pointing people to eternal salvation?” And Peter says, “No, because what we’re telling them isn’t true—and we know that. So, if there is a God, they’ll be no heaven for us.”
- And they all looked around at each and said, (shrug), “Sounds great. I’m in.”
- And out they go, and one by one they are hunted down. And as they and the people they love are being drug off to be killed they are winking at each other saying, ‘Stick to the story! This is going to be great!’
- Honestly, do you find that explanation compelling?

No, I mean, the only thing with the power to compel them to do this was actually having seen the empty tomb for themselves.

- Listen: what transformed Thomas, famously called “Doubting Thomas,” from a doubter into someone who was tied to the back of a chariot and drug through the streets in modern day India was not that he screwed up his courage or read a Tony Robbins’ book—What turned him into a fearless witness was the simple fact of the empty tomb.
- Or remember Peter, who, out of fear, denied Jesus 3x on the night before his death--once to a middle school girl? Ask yourself: What transformed a fearful, cowardly Peter, into the bold leader of the church; one willing to undergo crucifixion himself for his testimony? What else could it be but the resurrection? I mean, would Peter, who denied the living Jesus, really have been willing to die for one he knew was dead?
- I have to agree with Sir Lionel Luckhoo, one of England’s royal lawyers, who said: **“I have spent more than 42 years as a defense trial lawyer appearing in many parts of the world and am still in active practice. I have been fortunate to secure a number of successes in jury trials and I say unequivocally the evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt.”**

Come and see. The evidence is clear for all who want to see it. That’s the first meaning of the phrase, “come and see:” This actually happened. It’s backed up by all the prophecies in the Older Testament. Dozens of places prophesy that the Messiah would come, suffer, die, and be raised again. Come and see for yourselves.

But the presence of that phrase in this story raises another question for us: **Why didn’t everyone “come and see”?** I mean, the invitation was public: the empty tomb was there for all who wanted to come and see it. But many of those who heard about the resurrection--like the soldiers, and Pilate--treated it with indifference. They just never took time to investigate it. Meh. Pilate just flat out said, “The question is not that concerning to me right now.” This seemed like a religious curiosity, and he just wasn’t that religious of a person, and furthermore, his life was consumed with more pressing matters, like how to run the government, how to collect taxes, how to keep the peace, and how to keep his boss happy. It’s not that he went and investigated the evidence and found it lacking; he just wasn’t that motivated to investigate.

This is where I find most people still are today. I don’t find many people who really consider the evidence and leave unconvinced. Most just never press into the question because they just don’t think of it as that pressing of a question for them right now.

But why did some, like the disciples, find it so pressing while others didn’t? Why did some risk their lives to RUN to the tomb to “come and see” for themselves when others didn’t?

Well, think about it: For the disciples, everything in their world had been turned **upside-down** with the death of Jesus. This guy that they had been following for 3 years was dead, and if he really was dead it meant all their hopes for the future were dead and they had wasted their lives. But if he was resurrected, well, that changed everything. It meant that they had a reason to live after all. Even more, he was the only thing worth living for. If

he resurrected, his death on the cross really was the payment for their sins, like he had said. It meant that they didn't have to be afraid of death. Earthly things need no longer be their primary concern; what mattered was where they stood with him and what they were doing for his eternal kingdom.

Like I said, for most people the story about the resurrection is met with a "meh." They've never pressed into it because it's just not that pressing of a question to them.

But now, with the Coronavirus, for many of us, life looks different. Many of us are realizing how fragile life actually is. How near and close death can be. And if our only hope is the medical system, or our health, or our jobs, or what we have in the bank, or our national security, we're on shaky ground.

And, a time like this makes us realize the brazen stupidity of living as if the 70 or 80 years of earthly life are all that matters, with no thoughts about death or the judgement or what comes next.

Maybe some of you are finally in a place where you are ready to come to that tomb and see for yourself.

Let me ask: Where is your hope for the future in a time like this? What is the basis of your hope for the future?

- Is it just in the odds? You're like, "Only 3% die, or maybe it's 10%, but I'm young and healthy, or I live in a rural environment, or I'm practicing good social distancing, so I'm probably ok."
- And maybe that's true or maybe it's not. For frame of reference, in the global flu epidemic of 1918, which many are comparing this to, 50 million people around the world died--which was about 3% of the world population. Over 500K of those were here in America--more than the number of American casualties in WW1 and WW2 combined. One historian writes of that period: "People felt symptoms in the morning and were dead by nightfall. Bodies were picked up from front porches to be carted away to graves dug by bulldozers. A man was shot for not wearing a mask. Schools were closed. Ministers spoke of [the end of the world]."
- *At this point, the coronavirus seems to be as dangerous as the influenza pandemic of 1918, if not more so.* The mortality rates are similar, if not greater, for the coronavirus worldwide, (because) a person can have the coronavirus for up to two weeks and not know it, and therefore can spread it more widely."¹
- Playing the odds is not a firm place to stand. Because here is another stat: 100%. It is APPOINTED to every single man and woman, 100% of us, once to die, and after this the judgment. The eventual death rate of every person on earth holds steady at 100%.

As John Piper says, "This is a time when the fragile form of this world is felt. The seemingly solid foundations are shaking. The question we should be asking is, Do we have a Rock under our feet? A Rock that cannot be shaken—ever?"

What if God, in love, is shaking our physical foundations, letting us experience a temporary tragedy, in order to wake us up to a far more serious tragedy--an eternal one--the tragedy of dying not right with God?

Maybe you are having a hard time seeing how something like this could be an expression of God's love.

- In one sense, it's not. Diseases like this are a part of the curse. The curse from our sin--that brings tsunamis and cancer and car wrecks and the coronavirus--that curse is part of his righteous judgment on sin, judgment that breaks his heart, but judgment that we, the human race, have brought on ourselves.
- But even though it is part of the curse, Scripture teaches us that God can still use something like this in love. He can use the temporary affliction of the body to wake us up to the eternal needs of the soul.

¹ John Piper included this report in *Coronavirus and Christ*, as of yet unpublished manuscript. Loc 45.

- I heard it described like this: There was a lumberjack...
- Our world is no place to build a life. It's under judgment for sin. No foundation we look for here will last. Only in the resurrection of Christ will we find the Rock--the hope--we are looking for.

And that's our message. At the **end of Matthew 28**, after the disciples have come and seen, Jesus changes the command from "Come and see" to **"Go and tell"** Every person in every nation needs to hear this message about forgiveness of sins and hope beyond the grave. So, go and tell them!

Listen: That's our one message. Let me make it simple. Here's our message--whenever I am preaching, this is what I'm trying to get across:

1. **Every idol, every other foundation besides Christ, will fail.** All of them ultimately will fail you. They are all going to come crashing down in the chainsaws of judgment. This is true of us at all times, but in a time like this with the Coronavirus, we feel it more.
 - Richard Baxter, a 17th century British pastor, used to pray before he preached, "Lord, help me to preach like a dying man to dying men." That's what I want to do.
 - You and I may not have the virus. Some of us may have it. But we are all dying. Whether it's 7 months or 70 years, it comes for all of us.
 - It was said that in the sinking of the Titanic there was a pastor who was among those floating in the water. He quickly realized that help would never get there in time, and that because of hypothermia most people would be dead within 20 minutes. One of the survivors said he was frantically swimming around from passenger to passenger pleading with them to turn from their sin and trust Christ. That's what I am doing. Like a dying man to dying men.

2. **Jesus is our only hope for salvation.**

- Our world stands condemned, but Jesus offers salvation.
 - Some of you may be new to the Bible: I always tell people when they are new to Christianity that I can summarize the WHOLE Bible in 4 statements: bad news/worse news/ good news / better news
 - Bad news: We are condemned because of sin: we've chosen our own way
 - Worse news: Nothing we can do about it. Religion can't fix it. Good intentions can't fix it. The law of sin and rebellion is written deep into our souls.
 - The good news? What we couldn't do God, in love, did for us. He lived the life... He paid it all. He has conquered death! And one day he is going to recreate this world, and he'll wipe it free of all coronavirus and suffering and death.
 - Even better news: It's a gift you only have to receive. It's a gift. John 1:12
3. And that leads to the last part of our message: **The same God that conquered death for us will take care of us in life.** We know that if God did not abandon us at the cross in the moment of his death, there is no circumstance in our lives at which he will abandon us either! There was never a more hopeless time, humanly speaking, than when the Son of God was in the grave. At that point, it seemed like the end. The disciples themselves were despairing. But Easter is a reminder: He is risen! And as sure as he walked out of the grave, he promises life to those of us living in the shadow of death. The same care he shows us at the cross is the same care he holds us in all the days of our lives.

To those not yet believers: Are you ready to acknowledge that you need God? Each of us has 2 problems; one we feel in a time like this; one we may not. 1. Life without God won't work. Nothing can protect us. 2. We stand condemned under his judgment: It is appointed unto man once to die... God is seeking you. Like the father in the prodigal son story, he stands even in this, waiting on you to come back to him.

To those who are believers: Let this shake you to show you the only place you should trust, and renew your commitment to go and tell.

Do you need to receive Christ? Pray this prayer with me...

Let us know by texting "comeandsee" to 97000

