

# Evergreen Presbyterian Church

11/3/24

Pastor Adam Parker

**Sermon Title:** Because Christ is Risen

**Sermon Text:** Matthew 28:1-15

## *The Resurrection*

**Matt. 28:1** ¶ 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.

**Matt. 28:2** 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.

**Matt. 28:3** His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

**Matt. 28:4** And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.

**Matt. 28:5** But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.

**Matt. 28:6** He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

**Matt. 28:7** 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.”

**Matt. 28:8** So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

**Matt. 28:9** And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.

**Matt. 28:10** Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

## *The Report of the Guard*

**Matt. 28:11** ¶ While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place.

**Matt. 28:12** And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers

**Matt. 28:13** and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’”

**Matt. 28:14** And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.”

**Matt. 28:15** So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

**Main Point:** There is no event in the New Testament that more powerfully displays the glory of God than the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

### **Outline:**

1. Because Christ is Risen, Death is Dead
2. Because Christ is Risen, His Enemies Tremble
3. Because Christ is Risen, He Cannot Be Stopped

### **Introduction**

If you are looking for wonderful and glorious things to see about God, there is no shortage of places to look in the Bible. You could go to the creation of the world in Genesis (or how David praises him for the creation in the Psalms); you could look at the rescue of Joseph’s family by their slave-brother Joseph; you could look at the rescue of Israel from Egypt or the giving of the law at Sinai; you could look at

the many victories God gave the upstart nation of Israel against their surrounding enemies... just look around and there's no shortage of glorious things to see.

The Bible is filled with wonderful and glorious things to learn and treasure about God. God is awe-inspiring, if we're willing to look.

But this is the resurrection. And it's the pinnacle of God's works: the high point, the completion of all of the promises that came before, and it is truly the fulfillment of everything that God had been doing since the creation of the world.

Although all of creation and every event in the history of redemption is a reflection of the glory of God, the resurrection shows God's glory in a special way.

Let me give you one example of what I mean: Paul says this in Romans 6: "Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father" (Rom. 6:4). What Paul is saying is that in the resurrection, we are witnessing an event that – more than any other – expresses the sum of God's perfections, and shows us the weight of the glory of God. Paul is telling us that the Father's perfection in its fulness is operative in the resurrection of Christ.

John Murray, in his commentary on Romans says that Paul is saying in this passage that the resurrection, more than any other event in the New Testament, perfectly signals the fulness of the Father's glory. There is simply no equivalent event we can look at to see a greater expression of the Father's glory than in the resurrection.

And so I don't have to tell you, it's worth it for us to be delighting in and rejoicing in this today. The perfection of the glory of God is right here before us, risen and victorious over death!

Today I want to show you three glorious truths that are ours as a consequence of the resurrection. First, because Christ is risen, death is dead. Second, because Christ is Risen, His Enemies Tremble. Then third, because Christ is Risen, He Cannot Be Stopped. That goes for him, but it also goes for his church.

There is so much glory here today, let's just look at a sliver of it in the time we have.

## 1. Because Christ is Risen, Death is Dead

The first thing I'd like us to see in this passage is that because Christ is risen, death is dead.

Look at verse 6. It's such a simple statement that the angel makes, but it's also so powerful: "I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen."

The angel is negative at first: what he is not. He's not "here." He's not in this tomb. He's not in this location where dead people are supposed to be. He's not dead. He's not what they think. They're wrong to be here. He's not bound by this thing called death. This is huge.

Think of the centuries and millennia before this, and for how long and powerful the reign of death was over all mankind. Parents. Dead. Grandparents. Great-grandparents, as far back as the first man and woman – all dead. Death is nearly as old as the human race.

God had told Adam and Eve, "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17). They spiritually died the moment they ate, and physical decay and death entered into their lives and the physical order of the world.

And death reigned after they ate. But death is not normal. Death is not good. Death is not natural. We're not meant to make peace with it. There is nothing more evil and unnatural than death. Death is ugly. It's a *de*-formation of what should be. Mankind was meant to image God and to live. Death is a perversion.

The Welsh poet Dylan Thomas was not a Christian, but many of us know his poem 'Do not go gentle into that good night.' In the poem he sits watching his father die, and he begs his father to fight against death with everything he has while he is fading, as if to say, please "don't yield to it." And you perhaps remember that line where he says,

"Old age should burn and rave at close of day..."

and then he says,

“And you, my father, there on the sad height/Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray. Do not go gentle into that good night/Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”

You know why that’s so powerful? Part of it is because many of us have been there and watched those we love taken by death. Death is our enemy. It isn’t our friend. It’s a thief. It’s horrible and unnatural and we’ve seen it firsthand!

But the other part of the power in what Dylan Thomas says is that we know it’s true! It should be fought against and hated! Death isn’t natural! Death is hateful! Death is evil!

With the exception of Enoch and Elijah, every human being that we know of has experienced death. And yet the angel says, “He is not here; he is risen.” The audacity! The power! The incredible promise kept!

And the death of death doesn’t just mean that in general death is no more. It’s more specific than that.

The death of death is good news, but who is it good news for? It’s good news for those in Christ. It’s good news for those who have repented and trusted in Jesus. Look at what Paul says in Romans 8:

“But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies.”

You see that qualifying statement: “If Christ is in you.” But this isn’t only spiritual life. It’s literal. He’s talking about a literal body being raised up and restored like Jesus’ body was raised up and restored. This is not some kind of metaphor, it’s as real as it gets. If you are in Christ, the same spirit who did what we’re reading today *will* raise you up, too. His real resurrection will become your real resurrection.

And what Dylan Thomas, it seems, may not have understood for himself, was that there is one who defeated death. He asks his father to fight. But there was one in whom his father could have rested. No matter how hard we fight, on our own we will succumb to death’s power.

Let me challenge you on this: have you spent your life in self-reliance, in your own strength, in trying to live with your own kind of righteousness, trying to be good, trying to please God... but apart from faith in Jesus, apart from repentance? If so, then death is not dead for you. Apart from Christ, death is still a part of your life and your future. Death is coming for you.

But do you see in this passage whom death will never again be able to come for? It's Christ. Death cannot touch him. He's defeated it. And in Christ we share in that victory.

If we will never come to Christ, we cannot know this freedom from death. If you refuse, then you cannot know this freedom from fear. You cannot know what Jesus offers. For you, death will still be on the table.

But if you come to Christ? You will find that indeed, death is dead. If you receive Christ? No condemnation. If you rest in Christ, all of the glory of the resurrection belongs to you, as well. In Christ Jesus, these things are yours now. They belong as much to you as they do to him, and now you can say to our old enemy, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55).

That enemy that has been with us since Adam is now a vanquished foe.

Because of Christ, death is now dead.

## **2. Because Christ is Risen, His Enemies Tremble**

Second, God's word tells us that because Christ is risen, his enemies tremble.

Think of this: all of Scripture has been the story of conflict between the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent, ever since the Garden of Eden. Pharaoh tries to snuff out the seed of the woman. Herod tries to eliminate the Christ child. The Jewish leadership pursue Christ to death. Over and over again, Scripture shows us the lengths that the evil one and his servants will go to in their conflict with God and his Messiah.

But I want you to see and appreciate this. The last response that Jesus had from his enemies was mockery, derision, and of murder. They had power over him. They mocked him for not being able to save himself.

They said things like, “He saved others; he cannot save himself.”

They said things like, “He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross.”

They said things like, “He trust in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

They mistook their power for moral authority and they mocked the best man who ever lived.

But here’s what I want you to see: how quickly things have changed. You see it immediately. The guards with their weapons, and their armor, first see the angel, and what do they do? It says in verse 4, “For fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.” Do you know what that takes, to terrify a Roman Centurion to death?

Julius Caesar, about a hundred years before the events in the gospels, wrote about the Roman Centurions, and you can read this in his book the Gallican Wars. But in it he claimed that Centurions were the toughest of the tough. He describes in detail how these men threw themselves into battle at the cost of their lives because they loved glory more than life. These men were murder machines, taught to fear nothing, taught to kill anything in their way. And yet here they see the angel at the tomb, and they are almost dead.

But what does the angel say to the *women*? “Do not be afraid.” The text is explicit that it is the women who shouldn’t be afraid. It’s almost hilarious. It’s like, “Good. Now that you fellows are good and afraid, we can talk to our friends over here”: they go on letting the guards be afraid, but they are explicit that the women shouldn’t be.

If we won’t look to Christ, we actually have good reason to fear Christ to the point of death. You know, one of the most fearful images in all of Scripture comes from the book of Revelation, where we see that while Christ lived in humility and weakness, that is no longer who he is. Instead, he is the one with the sword in his mouth; he is the one with fire in his eyes, the one who tramples the winepress of the wrath of God.

Many people love the idea of weak and humble Jesus, but rare is the modern person who is encouraged by the Christ in the book of Revelation. For anyone who is an enemy of God and will not come to Christ, the Jesus they one day meet will, in fact, be the fearful one, with fire in his eyes, preparing to deal with his enemies, and like the soldiers at the tomb, they will also “become like dead men.”

I don't say this because I somehow relish this terrifying sight for anyone, I say it because I'm telling the truth: what I'm saying here really is a fearful warning, and not one that we should shy away from teaching as a church. How much must we have to hate people to keep this from them?

So notice this: the soldiers are so afraid that they might as well be dead.

And then in verse 10 when the women see Jesus himself and not the angel, what is the *very* first thing Jesus says emphatically? “Do *not* be afraid.” Why? They have every reason possible not to be afraid. Well this man is their friend whom they love; this same man who was once under the power of his enemies now stands over death itself. The man who once submitted to the worst death the Romans could mete out now is over it all. And now, there's no longer room for mockery.

His enemies are on their heels now, terrified. Fearful. Evil has been defeated. Paul tells us in Colossians that when Jesus died and rose again he “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, triumphing over them” (Col. 2:15). Paul uses war and battle imagery to describe just what it is that Jesus has done here. That's the best analogy that he has to get across what's gone on here. Jesus took the weapons of death and has humiliated it and everyone who is on the side of death. And the enemies of Christ are now terrified, as they should be. And this is only the beginning!

But look at his followers: continuously hearing the call: do not fear. Don't be fearful. Don't be terrified. Not at me. Not at any weapon designed against you. Not against anything. Don't fear, period.

Because Christ is risen, his enemies, and our enemies, tremble. But believer, you do not fear and need not fear. You need not fear death you need not fear Christ, you need not fear anything. There is nothing now for you to fear in all of creation that can separate you from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ.



### 3. Because Christ is Risen, He Cannot Be Stopped

The third thing we learn from this passage is that because Christ is risen, he cannot be stopped.

Think of all the practical attempts that have been made to stop this from happening, even just in the surrounding passage: the guards, the seal, the attention of the authorities... all of them pushed aside by Christ.

And yet all of these steps... but none of them are actually capable of stopping Christ. I mentioned before that all of the Bible is the story of that conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. And what we've seen is that in that conflict the serpent and his seed failed. They tried everything they could, and failed.

Satan has repeatedly tempted Christ, and failed every time. Satan had noped to disarm Christ before he could get to the cross, so that he would become a sinner. Just like he succeeded with Adam, he hoped to do the same to Christ. But where the first Adam failed, Jesus was victorious. He pulled out all the stops trying to nullify Christ and his work.

The worst enemy of *heaven* could not stop Christ. The worst *earthly* enemies could not stop Christ. All of the forces of hell marshalled by their commander had nothing that could prevent the love of God in Christ from accomplishing the purposes of God.

And that powerlessness of the enemy doesn't just stop at the cross and resurrection. It's the story of the whole church and the mission God gives us. Next week, we're going to see that Jesus gives his disciples a mission. And this lesson this week is fundamental to understanding what comes next week: the success of the mission. The mission that Jesus gives his people is unstoppable, not because they are great and awesome and powerful and persuasive, but because of what we see here: Christ is unstoppable. Christ is all powerful.

Satan can't stop him. Death can't stop him. His enemies can't stop him. Guards can't stop him. Roman rulers can't stop him. Kings can't stop him. Pharaohs can't stop him. Caesars can't stop him. Nothing in all creation can stop him or separate

us from his love, Paul tells us. Because of Christ, all of these things are nothing but a shadow.

Years ago, Donald Barnhouse was the pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, and the story is told of Dr. Barnhouse, following the death of his wife, that he was taking his children to her funeral. Looking for an illustration of what had happened to their mother, Dr. Barnhouse pointed to the shadow of a truck that was crossing the road; and he said to the children, “Look at the shadow of that truck on the field, children. If you had to be run over, would you rather be run over by the truck or by its shadow?” The youngest child responded first, “The shadow. It couldn’t hurt anybody.” “That’s right,” said Barnhouse. “And remember, children, Jesus let the truck of death strike him, so that it could never destroy us. Mother lives with Jesus now—only the shadow of death passed over her.”

And here’s what today’s passage means for *us*: in Christ, all of the things we are tempted to fear now have no power. They have nothing. They can do nothing. They cannot hurt us. Now, in Christ, death really is but a shadow.

*Let’s pray.*