

**Matthew 28:1-15**  
**The Resurrection**  
**Notes from a sermon preached at Christ Church Liverpool**

How do you know if you're being had? How do you spot a con? Well I guess there might be all sorts of ways. But one of the things I've noticed about people trying to con others is that they are always in a hurry.

They want to give the impression of being relaxed and calm – but they want the deal done fast before you notice there's something amiss. That guy selling dodgy leather jackets at a motorway service station is always in a hurry to catch his plane home or get to his meeting. So you'll have to pay him, in cash, now. The e-mail from Nigeria naming you the beneficiary of a will starts off gently enough but, in the end, they always need your bank details urgently to make the supposed transfer.

And to be honest peddlers of religion and spirituality can often be a bit the same. I've found people selling crystals and pushing psychic healing get short tempered quite quickly once you ask them what the evidence is that people using their methods are actually healthier than people who don't. And there are endless tele-evangelists who perform quick miracles, and then ask for equally quick credit card donations.

Well the great news this morning is that the Bible is not like that. Matthew, the eye witness who wrote this account of Jesus' life, isn't some spiritual con-man wanting to hoodwink you by flashing an impressive looking trick with someone's dead body in front of your eyes.

He actually invites us, three time in this passage, to LOOK into the reality of Jesus' resurrection and to see that this really happened in real history. And, as we'll see, that has implications for us today. Because the physical, historical, real resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the crowning, final, absolute reason why each of us, today, needs to put the whole of our lives in his hands.

When he wrote in Greek, Matthew used the word "look" three times in these verses – and we're going to think, just for the next ten minutes, about the things this eye-witness of Jesus wants us to look at:

V2 Look, there was a great earthquake  
V9 Look, Jesus met them  
V11 Look, the guards went into the city

**1 Look... at the empty tomb**

It must have taken a lot of guts to go and visit Jesus' tomb just 36 hours or so after he had been executed for treason.

The male disciples, who, to be fair, were probably more likely to have been arrested than the women, were still hiding away indoors and it is left to these two women called Mary to go and pay their respects to their wonderful, but now dead, leader.

The Jews and the Romans were both determined to avoid any hint that Jesus had come back to life – so they had put a massive stone over the entrance to the grave, sealed it and posted a guard. It's hard to imagine a more frightening situation for these young women to walk into. But such was the significance of Jesus for them that they went anyway. At dawn they walk through the silent graves expecting to find the guards and the stone.

Only to find something far more scary – and far more wonderful.

The ground itself is shaken as an angel, gleaming white fire, pushes the massive stone aside and reduces the proud guards to quivering lumps of jelly. Is it that Jesus is not dead? Has he just fainted and the angel come from God to let him out of the tomb? Not at all. Jesus is already gone. The stone was no obstacle to him. The angel didn't come because Jesus needed help to get out – he came because the women needed help to get in.

The angel invites them, v6, to go in and take a look at the patch of ground where Jesus' body was. And where he is no more The angel knows exactly who they are and why they are there. And he has come, v6, to tell that that they do not need to look for Jesus in a graveyard.

Jesus is alive, resurrected, risen – just like he said. And not only that but Jesus is going to carry on where he left off. Jesus is not retiring – he is carrying on teaching his followers and being good news to the world. That's why they are told to follow him to Galilee – the place where Jesus did most of his teaching and performed most of his miracles.

From there the good news about Jesus so going to go out to the whole of the world.

And that first Easter Sunday it began with an empty tomb. These women were capable, brave and courageous. They weren't the kind of people given to silly flights of fancy and inventing stories about people rising from the dead. If they were they wouldn't have been at that heavily guarded tomb in the first place.

They saw that grave was empty. An angel from God invited them to look, to study, to see that there was nobody there. They were not conned. The angel was quite happy for them to look around. This was not some silly magic trick with bones. It was an actual, real, historical, resurrection.

And if there was any doubt remaining in the women's minds it was quickly dispelled because Matthew invites us, with them, to...

## **2 Look... at the risen Christ**

I was listening to an interview on the radio the other day with someone who used to be a minor TV star in the early 1970s and has just got a role in some new TV programme. When he was given the part he went home and said to his wife – "you know as soon as they see my name in the Radio Times or on the credits they're going to say "I thought he was dead."" Well a few months later the programme was on and the man's daughter came home from college and said she'd been talking to a friend whose parents had watched the programme. When the guy's name came up in the credits the husband turned to the wife and said "*my goodness, I thought he was dead.*"

Well if it's a shock to discover that a minor TV star you've completely forgotten about for 30 years is still alive imagine how shocking it must have been for the two Marys to see alive someone that, only two days earlier, they had personally seen killed in one of the most brutal, public and final ways imaginable.

It's no wonder that, after "hello" the first words Jesus says to them are "do not be afraid."

And the response of Mary and Mary tells us two really important things about the risen Lord Jesus.

*V9 – They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him.*

Firstly it confirms that Jesus is no ghost. They can touch him. This is not some "spiritual" resurrection. This is a real, physical, flesh and bone, resurrection. Jesus, stood in front of them was just as real, in fact in a way more real, that I am here in front of you. Because,

unlike me, Jesus' body was never going to die again.

The second thing we learn here is that the women understand what Jesus' resurrection proves. He is God. Just as he had been claiming throughout his ministry. He has done what no other person could do – kept his promise and defeated death. So they worship him. And Jesus doesn't say "oh, get up, don't be silly." He accepts their worship. It is what he wants them to do. Worship – adoration, giving of honour and giving of your life, is what the risen Jesus wants.

That is how we ought to respond to him, perhaps particularly on this day when we remember the resurrection but, more importantly, every day.

Thirdly Matthew invites us to...

## **3 Look... at the "alternative"**

Mary and Mary weren't the only ones who had had a really unusually experience that morning of course. The guards had been there too. There's no evidence that they saw the risen Jesus.

But they certainly felt the tremors, saw the angel and knew that the grave was now empty.

What on earth were they going to do? If you were a guard allowing the person you were guarding to escape was a crime for which you could face the death penalty.

They are faced with the possibility of their own execution. So they come up with a plan. They know that the Jewish leaders will be desperate to keep this quiet. So if they go and tell them what happened perhaps they can get someone else to smooth things over with their bosses?

Well, from their point of view, the plan works brilliantly. The Jewish leader not only agree, v14, to keep the soldiers out of trouble, but they pay them a big fat wedge of cash to keep quiet about the whole thing (though it didn't work because obviously one of them has blabbed to Matthew afterwards!).

The Jewish leaders knew that Jesus had said he would rise from the dead. They knew that the disciples had not come and stolen the body. They had said, as Jesus hung on the cross, that if he came down, if he came alive again, then they would believe in him. But of course they don't. You see for them it's not

that the resurrection isn't convincing. It's that it isn't convenient.

They have really, really, really good evidence that Jesus is alive. They have been told by very reliable witnesses that something miraculous has happened at that tomb – exactly as Jesus had told them it would just hours earlier.

But they still will not believe it really happened. They prefer a ridiculous fantasy about a bunch of fearful disciples who had run away as soon as Jesus was arrested silently moving a massive stone and creeping past sleeping soldiers to steal the body – even though they **know** that is not true.

And I think we can often be quite similar in our attitude to Jesus Christ and his resurrection.

It's not that the evidence isn't convincing. There are four reliable, independent accounts in the Bible all telling us that Jesus, bodily rose from the dead to new life.

Nobody ever produced a body to back up this claim that the disciples stole it. And the disciples went to their own deaths asserting that Jesus was risen.

The evidence isn't convincing – but quite often it's not convenient. Because we know that, when we acknowledge that the resurrection really happened we will need to do what Mary and Mary did. Not literally grasp Jesus' feet. But certainly bow down before him and worship him.

Because the resurrection is true we must treat Jesus as king of our world and of our lives. Because the resurrection is true we must listen to what Jesus says and be obedient to him. And so often that's not convenient is it?

Well the great news this morning is that, however long you have been putting off making Jesus your king, because of the resurrection the door is open this morning.

You can know and be in a living relationship with Jesus Christ, the risen king of the universe, today. There is nothing you need to do but recognise that you have done wrong by rejecting him so far, say that you are sorry and ask him to be your ruler from today onwards.

You don't need to pay any money, join a club or make a pilgrimage. You just have to say you are sorry to Jesus and decide to listen to what he says and trust him with your life.

And you can do it with confidence – because he is risen.

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