

Rolling Away the Stone and Resurrection

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Date: 19 April 2020

Preacher: Marvin Wiseman

[0 : 0 0] Well this morning we plan to deliver to you a second part of a two-part message having to deal with the resurrection and the subject of life. And in our last session together we simply extolled the values and the preciousness of life itself. And this morning we want to consider more in particular an exposition of Matthew 28 which deals with the resurrection of Christ from the grave.

And as the point has been made a number of times in the past, apart from the bodily physical resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christianity has really no evidence to stand on. That is absolutely everything as regards the cause of Christianity. Without it there is no such thing as biblical Christianity. It is all vested in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And as the point has been made a number of times in the past, all anyone at that early time in Jerusalem would have had to have done to head off this thing called Christianity at the past and give it a permanent grave would have been to produce the body of Jesus Christ. But that was an impossibility because he is not there. He is risen and he lives to this day and he one day is going to return and we will see him in person. So if you would please let us, and I do trust that you've got your Bible there, we'll be looking at a few passages in Matthew 28 that we've already read in our last session together. And we'll be tying some things together from John's

Gospel and from Acts chapter 3. But we will be moving kind of rapidly. So what I want you to do, please, is look at Matthew chapter 28 and I'll read just a few verses there. Then we're going to fast forward to John's Gospel chapter 11 and then we will be back to Matthew and then we may end up with Acts chapter 3 but we may not get to Acts this morning. If we don't, there's always next week. So if you would please look at Matthew's Gospel chapter 28. Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, and I think we can safely assume that the other Mary is not the Mary the mother of our Lord, but it is Mary the sister of Martha and the sister of Lazarus. And verse 2, and behold a severe earthquake had occurred. Now I just want to draw attention to that for the simple reason that this isn't the first earthquake within this short period of time. And I don't know exactly what to call this unless it is just a brand new earthquake altogether or if it is perhaps what we would call an aftershock from the original earthquake that is found in Matthew chapter 27. Because there we read in verse 51, the veil and the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shook, the rocks were split, and there was a kind of earthquake that took place there.

It is referred to in verse 54, the centurion and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening became very frightened. So we've got an earthquake, either two completely separate earthquakes or an original earthquake and then the aftershocks thereof and it doesn't make any difference. But I think it is interesting to note that in connection with both the death of Christ there was an earthquake and the resurrection of Christ there is an earthquake. I'm not real sure what to make of that other than the fact that God is simply seemingly making the rocks cry out as to the monumental aspect of what is taking place. And I suspect that so far as planet earth is concerned, earthquakes and lightning and all of that good stuff would be much in order because that is nature's way of acting up as well. So we've got an earthquake here and in chapter 28 we are told that an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And we've described that a little bit in the past but I want to refresh your minds by reminding you that what this stone was was a huge circular stone. It was just a big disk that might have been as much as five feet in diameter and perhaps a foot thick. So think of it if you will please as a big five foot circular stone a foot thick. Well you can imagine what the thing would weigh. And it was situated before the mouth of this tomb which was much like a cave that had been hewn out of the side of a mountain. And the reason it was hewn out was because it was limestone and it was pretty easy to do and they were accustomed to doing this

so they would go in and carve out a huge area inside for the placement of all of these bodies and some of them held as many as 12 or 15 bodies. And then on the outside of this of this cave would be of course the hole and it was usually about four feet high. And then there was a trough, a trough about the width of the thickness of the stone which would be about 12 inches. And it was created and chiseled out of limestone as well and it was put on a slant so that the stone could be rolled up the hill and away from the mouth of the tomb. And then when the time came to close the tomb they would simply remove the obstacle holding the stone back and allow it to roll back down and cover the mouth of the tomb. That way no wild animals or anything like that could get in. Well the stone was who knows how many hundreds of pounds it weighed and although we don't have it I don't believe in Matthew's Gospel but it is in others at that women when they were on their way to the tomb to finish the embalming process which was cut short because they could only do a temporary job because of the Sabbath approaching. As they were going all of a sudden one of them turned to the other and said wait a minute something we forgot. Who's going to roll away the stone? Of course neither of them or both of them together would not be able to do that but that's well taken care of and we read in Matthew chapter 28 that the angel came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. I tell you and his appearance was like lightning and his garment as white as snow. Just let your mind try to focus on what that scene must have looked like. For sure scary, terrifying, I mean absolutely captivating in every way.

[7 : 36] These guards who were there I'm sure their eyes were so big they almost popped out of their head and we read in verse 4 the guards shook they trembled for fear of him and became like dead men. I think that means they were transfixed they were they were paralyzed they were unable to move unable to respond they just stood there staring at this scared witless because nobody especially themselves had ever seen anything like this and if it looked to them like it was otherworldly it's because it was there was nothing that they could compare this with they were just struck beyond imagination they shook for fear of him and became like dead men. I think that means they were paralyzed just unable to move unable to do anything and the angel answered and said to the women do not be afraid and the tendency would be for them to be as scared as the guards were for I know that you are looking for

Jesus who has been crucified he is not here for he has risen just as he said come see the place where he was lying some translate that see for yourself where he was lying I remember years ago when we were in Israel we went to the tomb of the Holy Sepulcher which is traditionally regarded to be the burial tomb of our Lord and it is it's actually they built a whole church around it it's the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and that's why it's given that name because it is believed that that is where the actual spot where Christ was placed and and of course with all the tourists there there's a long line to wait to get in and when you get in you have to stoop down and it is about four feet high you have to stoop down and get in and then you can stand up when you get inside and and there is a ledge that is laid out on the right hand side and it is well worn limestone looks like a slab and it is perfectly smooth because millions and millions of tourists have been there seen that site and rubbed their hands over that site and have literally rubbed it smooth almost like glass over hundreds and hundreds of years and the millions of people that have visited it.

And it cannot be determined conclusively that that was a site because there are a couple of other places that are purported to have been the real site so that goes on. But still it was just a an absolutely magnificent thing to witness.

And you know that if this wasn't the actual literal site, it's a very good possibility it was. But if it wasn't, then it was very much like the real site and it gave you an unexplainable kind of feeling. So what I want you to keep in mind now is the fact that the resurrection has taken place.

The angel has been there, has informed the women and told them that they were to go to Galilee and that they would see Jesus there. Now I want you to see something that is transpiring, that is all part and parcel of this same event, and it is very much connected to it.

[11 : 21] But we'll have to go fast forward to John's Gospel and chapter 11 in order to see it. It is very, very significant. And it's just one more beautiful example of how, as we've often said, everything in the Bible is tied together to everything in the Bible. And I'd like you to look first of all at John chapter 11 and verse 38 and recognize that this is in connection with the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

And why this is important is because this happened only about two weeks before the crucifixion of Christ, maybe three at the most. But I want you to understand that the raising of Lazarus and the

crucifixion and Jesus Christ resurrection were separated only by a few weeks. So you've got to keep that in mind.

And yet, while everybody was completely amazed at the resurrection of Lazarus, yet nobody expected the resurrection of Christ from the dead. And the reason they didn't was not because they didn't realize that Christ had power. And he demonstrated that with all of his miracles. And he demonstrated when he raised Lazarus from the dead, but to raise yourself from the dead, when you are the one who's dead, that's a whole different thing. And this is one reason I suspect why those who were most surprised at the resurrection, and the first ones to deny the resurrection, were his own apostles. We'll see that later. All right, if you will, please, let's go to John chapter 11 and verse 38. We'll just jump into the middle of the story. Jesus, therefore, again, being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave. There's the kind of cave apparatus we were talking about. And a stone was lying against it.

Jesus said, remove the stone. Martha, the sister of the deceased, said, Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he's been dead four days. Jesus said to her, did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God? So they removed the stone, and Jesus raised his eyes and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hearest me. And I knew that thou hearest me always, but because of the people standing around, I said it, that they may believe that thou didst send me. When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he who had died came forth, just as if Lazarus is saying, yes, sir. He came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with the cloth. Jesus said to them, unbind him, let him go. Many therefore of the Jews who had come to Mary and beheld what he had done, believed in him. Now these Jews were friends, neighbors, relatives who had come to Mary to console her and comfort her. And some of them were probably among the professional mourners over the death of Lazarus. And they had witnessed this. And we are told that they believed in him. But, and this is very important, verse 46, but some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done. Therefore, the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council.

Now here is where I need to interrupt things and bring you some information that probably most of you know, but in case you don't, you really need to know this. The chief priests and the Pharisees are, of course, Jews, totally Jews, specifically Jews, no Gentiles involved at all. But there is another element of authority that is very active in Jerusalem, in fact, all throughout Israel at this time. And they, of course, are the Romans. You need to understand that we're dealing with two different authoritative elements here. One is Jewish. They have absolutely no power or authority at all, except what the Romans are willing to let them have. And that is limited, pretty much, to religious things.

[16:12] The Romans, of course, were polytheists themselves. They worshiped multiple gods, multiple deities. They had a god for everything. And they looked upon the Jews as being very odd and peculiar because they were monotheistic. That is, they believed that there was just one god, which was quite strange. But in a way of extending a SOP and giving some leeway to the Jews, they would allow them to pursue the religion that they wanted to without much interference. Unless, unless the practice of Judaism in some way or another spilled over into the political, for which Rome claimed total authority, then there would be problems. And Rome had only one way of solving problems and opposition. And that was always with massive brutality and overkill. And the idea was to instill an experience in the minds and hearts of any who would rebel against Rome that there would be a horrendous penalty to pay. And crucifixion was their most outstanding example. Picture if you can, hundreds, you heard me right, hundreds of people crucified, lining a road of crosses on either side of a highway. Hundreds of people moaning, groaning, screaming, crying out in agony, all dying the slow, torturous death of crucifixion. That's what Rome was capable of and had done it numerous times. And you think that would not put the fear into people?

To not make waves and to obey the authorities and all the rest of it? Well, that's precisely what was going on. Now here in John chapter, John chapter 11, where we read that the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council. Verse 47, this is the religious element. These are the Jews. These are people who operate and function under the permitted authority of the Romans. They convened a council and were saying, what are we doing? And this is all in connection with the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Their fear is the news of this man being raised from the dead is going to incite a new spark of enthusiasm.

And possible rebellion in the minds of our Jewish countrymen because they are going to associate Messiah ship. They are going to be thinking in terms like a whole lot of these ignorant masses do who already believe that Jesus is the Messiah. And they've lined up with him. And of course, we know there's no truth to that at all. We know the man is an imposter. He's not a messiah at all. But if enough people really believe this. It could start feeling nationally frisky and really present a problem with Rome. And you know how Rome takes care of its problems, don't you? So read on if you would. They are saying in verse 47, what are we doing? This man is performing many signs. If and this sign are talking about the word sign literally means miracle. Absolute hard and fast miracles, the kind that were physical that could not be denied. This man is performing many signs or many miracles. If we let him go on like this. All men will believe in him. They're just crazy enough to do that. And look. And the Romans.

We'll come. We'll come. And take away both our place and our nation. What does that mean? The Romans will come? Well, the Romans are already there. They've been there for a long time. The Roman army was occupational troops.

In Israel at this time. And they had occupational troops in a lot of different countries because Rome was the undisputed conqueror of the whole world at that time. All the Mediterranean bases. No one could stand up to Rome.

[20 : 57] And of course, the Jews were part of the Jews. And of course, the Jews were part of that. And if you understand anything about the Jewish religion, you know how desperately opposed it is to polytheism and the worship of other gods.

And when the Romans came in, they would bring expressions of their deities and figures of their deities and idols and things like that. And it just rankled the Jews to no end. But there was nothing they could do about it other than just go on hating them.

And there was a relationship between the Romans and the Jewish authorities that was very tenuous. And the truth of the matter is, the Romans hated the Jews. And the Jews hated the Romans.

But in order to allow the Jews to be more governable and more reasonable, Rome would allow them certain liberties, particularly in connection with their religion. But they had to get permission from them to do everything and anything.

And one thing they did, the Romans took away from the Jews the authority of capital punishment. They wouldn't let anybody put anybody to death. That was the authority of Rome.

[22 : 15] And of course, that's why that's why Christ was brought to Pontius Pilate was because they couldn't execute in themselves and they wanted Pilate to do their dirty work for them as a Roman. So if we let him go on like this, all men will believe in him and the Romans will come and take away our place.

Which is what? Position of authority, influence, perks, everything that went with it. This was the leading religious establishment in Israel. High priests, chief priests, Sadducees, etc.

They were the religious shakers and movers. They were the ones who made all the decisions for the people. They were the guardians of the temple. They were the ones in charge of the worship. They were the ones to whom any and every Jew would have to go for anything religious.

But a certain of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, that is to this council that is meeting.

They've called this meeting. This is a hurry, hurried up meeting, a crisis kind of meeting. We've got to deal with this situation. Call all the council together. And Caiaphas, who is the chairman of the whole meeting as the high priest, he finally stands up and says, Look, people, don't you realize what we're dealing with here?

[23 : 32] Don't you know anything at all? Can't you size up this situation? Don't you see what's happening? And they're all looking at each other. What's he talking about? Then he says, verse 50, Nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you as a nation, as a people, that one man should die for the people.

What's he talking about? He's talking about an expression that they use today that everybody's familiar with. Let's throw Jesus under the bus.

Let's make Jesus the scapegoat for this thing. Let's get rid of him. And when you do that, all of the inflation that has poured into the hearts and minds of these people by way of this messiahship, this air of messiahship will be punctured.

The air will all go out. The thing will go flat and it'll get back to business as usual. And if we don't do that, And the masses of people circulating around and talking with each other start making messianic claims and talking about Jesus being the messiah.

And why would they do that? Largely because Lazarus, he's part of the problem. These people who don't know anybody.

[24 : 51] Now, to me, this is the absolutely fascinating thing about this whole thing. Why didn't, why couldn't, these in religious authority say to themselves, Lazarus or to one another, Lazarus, dead, four days, really dead, tomb, sealed up, body, stench, Jesus, called him forth from the grave.

And he came forth. You were there. You saw this. What does this mean? Could he be?

Fellas, we need to really look into this. Could it be that we've been wrong? That Jesus really is the messiah? And if he isn't, how could he possibly raise someone from the dead?

We need to investigate this. No, no, no. Stop that short right now. We're not going there. We are going to operate under the assumption, what we all know to be true.

This man is not from God. He is not the messiah. Yet, he poses a real threat. And if enough people believe in him, they are going to present a problem that the Romans will not be able to regard as anything other than political.

[26 : 26] A political uprising and an effort to install, call this man, this Jesus from Nazareth, as the messiah. Do you realize what that's going to create in our nation?

The Romans, do you know, you do know, do, how they will put that down? How they will remove us from office? How they will brutally put an end to what they view as an early insurrection.

And the only solution is that one man should die for the people. And when we give Jesus over and see to it that he has done away with, that will take all the pressure off.

The nation will be spared. And we will remain in office under the good graces of the Roman government that is occupying us.

And verse 51 says, Now this he did not say on his own initiative. But being high priest that year, he prophesied, and of course he prophesied unknowingly, he didn't, he didn't know that he was delivering a prophecy, that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but that he might also gather together into one, the children of God who are scattered abroad.

[27 : 51] So, from that day on, they planned together to kill him. And when would that killing take place? How far removed is it from this?

In verse 51, it's just about two or three weeks. That's all. And very shortly thereafter, if you come down to chapter 12, and look at verse 1, Jesus therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany.

Well, we know what's going to happen in Passover. And Christ will be the Passover lamb, slain on the day that the usual Passover lamb is slain. That's only a couple of weeks away.

So, all of these things are going to transpire very quickly. And what we have beginning in chapter 12, with Jesus entering Jerusalem, as I've informed you before, John chapters 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and part of 18, will all take place in the space of less than 24 hours.

That's how rapidly this thing is going to be moving. So, the resurrection remains as the single event of Christendom that makes Christianity what it is, that makes Christ who he is, that makes you, as a believer in Christ, who you are, and what you are, and what your future is.

[29 : 25] So, all of these things are beginning to come together for these last few days. And we'll finish, we'll finish, actually, I'm out of time now, but we will finish Matthew, and then we'll go into Acts chapter 3, and see how that plays out after Pentecost.

And it is an amazing, amazing thing to behold. What, what it speaks to me about, once again, and, and I, I wish I could leave you on a more positive note, but it's a very realistic note.

And that is this. It is absolutely astounding, the lengths to which we human beings can go, to justify our unbelief.