

The King Rises from the Dead

Matthew 28:1-10

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We are probably familiar with the term “time warp.” A time warp is when something from another time shows up in our time. It could be from the past. So going to the Smithsonian is a time warp—we moderns enter the world of the past. This can be depressing when you see wedding gifts you received or childhood toys in a museum of history. It makes you feel old. Anyone ever see their dishes in a museum?

Time warps from the future are much harder to come by. We may see something and think it looks futuristic, or we might say, *it's a sign of things to come*. But we don't get actual things from the future. There are no museums of the future.

We rely on movies for this experience. The *Back to the Future* trilogy played this idea over three movies. The main character Marty goes from 1985 to 1955 in a time machine. He goes back to his hometown of Hill Valley, California. He is so different the ordinary town folks they don't know what to make of him. His clothes are different. His language is different. His music is different. They know something is different but they don't know why. They don't realize in him they are seeing the future—in a way experiencing the future—and if they caught it, understanding what the future is going to be like.

Spiritually speaking, we all live in Hill Valley, California. We can see the past. We live in the present. But we don't know what the future will be like. Futurists make tons of money writing and predicting the future. Great minds like Stephen Hawking and others constantly prognosticate mankind's future in space or colonies of survival on another planet. But nobody really knows.

Our teaching series this year has been focused on the kingdom of God from the Gospel of Matthew. Why? Because Jesus talked about it constantly. To hear one of Jesus' sermons was to hear about the kingdom of God. What is it? *It is the reign of God through Jesus*. It is a real kingdom, but for now a spiritual one. Jesus establishes his reign in the human heart when a person repents of their sin and believes that Jesus died for them as their Savior. Jesus is enthroned in that person's life. He becomes their King and hero. He rules and reigns in their life.

Now that sounds good doesn't it? I think so. Our hearts and lives need a different king than self, or sin, or anything this world has to offer. It also sounds great that there is a future dimension to this kingdom that includes eternal life and freedom from the brokenness and pain of this world. As a pastor, I get talking with people and oftentimes they'll begin to complain about their life or the state of the world or about politics, and I will wait for them to take a breath and say, “It's almost as if the world needs a Savior.” It's so true, isn't it? Who wouldn't be excited about a new and much better existence? What would it take for us to be convinced that something future has made its way into the present?

This brings us to the purpose of the resurrection of Jesus. Let's tell the story from the Gospel of Matthew and then see what the King's resurrection tells us about our future.

There is a massive back story here. Time only allows a quick summary. This is the first century. Jesus grew up in Nazareth but was born in Bethlehem which the prophets said was

where the Messiah would be born. Angels announced his conception and his birth. His mother Mary was a virgin, so right away, this is a supernatural life. As an adult, for three years Jesus taught, traveled, and did miracles that he said confirmed that he was the Son of God. He also told his disciples the reason that he had come was to die for the guilt of our sins. He even told them, on the third day after my death, I will rise again.

The cataclysmic events transpired on Passover week in Jerusalem. Jesus was arrested by the jealous religious establishment for whom he was a threat and antagonist. They manipulated the Roman governor Pilate into sentencing him to death. He was crucified and died on a Roman cross on Friday afternoon of Passover. He was buried within hours in a nearby grave, essentially a small room hewn out of stone and with a large round stone rolled across the entrance. That was Friday, then Saturday came and went, and we pick it up with Sunday morning:

"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." (Matthew 28:1 ESV) Two Marys. One is Mary Magdalene, a faithful follower of Jesus. She helped prepare his body for burial on Friday. She is first to the tomb on Sunday. She is a hero in the story and we named our daughter Madeline after her. The other Gospels tell of additional women in this little troupe. All women. All heading to the tomb to pay homage to Jesus.

Toward the dawn. At first light. To be Sunday by the Jewish calendar required sometime after 6:00am. Look what happened.

"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. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men." (Matthew 28:2-4)

This is the second earthquake in three days. There was one when Jesus died. It was so powerful the centurion who guarded him said, *"Truly this was the Son of God!"* (Matthew 27:54) Now another great earthquake. *Mega* is the word in the Greek. Why an earthquake? Earthquakes in Scripture are tied to divine activity. It's like God is saying, something big just happened. Added to the earthquake is the appearance of an angel. The angel of the Lord descends from heaven, grabs the stone over the front of the tomb and rolls it back. John says he flung it aside and sat on it. His appearance is noted. He looked like lightning. What is it like to look at lightning? We hardly know because lightning is so fast. Imagine the brightness of lightning...sustained. He is that radiant. Effulgent. So brilliant they can hardly look at him.

The effect on the Roman guards is what the military calls being shell-shocked. It's when you are so overwhelmed by something that you are effectively paralyzed. They became like dead men. This is the security force at the tomb that was reinforced at Pilate's word. This tomb was made as secure as they humanly knew how. These are not raw recruits, these are the best they had, which to know the Roman army of antiquity is saying quite a lot. Yet even they can't handle it. The earthquake. The sight of the angel of the Lord. It freezes them in fear.

And now the angel speaks,

"But the angel said to the women, '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. Come, see the place where he lay. 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.” (Matthew 28:5-7)

It’s curious that what paralyzes hardened Roman soldiers doesn’t affect these women in the same way. Are they bewildered? Certainly. Are they afraid? Who wouldn’t be? The angel’s first words are to reassure them, *don’t be afraid...like these boys over here*. And then the most wonderful words of announcement ever made, *“He is not here, for he has risen, as he said.”* Did they understand? Probably not. They were carrying spices and materials to complete the burial process. They weren’t anticipating anything.

The angel invites them to look in the tomb for themselves. *See where he lay, you will see he’s not here*. The fact that the tomb was empty was not in itself proof of a resurrection. Later the Pharisees will try and spread a rumor that his disciples stole the body. Tomb raiders not tomb resurrection. But you combine the empty tomb with an angelic appearance and a major earthquake and it gets you thinking, doesn’t it?

“So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.” (Matthew 28:8) I love that description because it’s so true to the human experience. When something overwhelmingly wonderful happens, we humans don’t know what to do with ourselves.

Have you seen these videos online of a couple sharing creatively the news of a pregnancy with their spouse or the soon to be grandparents? Or the soldier who comes back disguised as the catcher with his wife throwing out the first pitch? When the reveal happens, what happens? Human happens. Joy. Bewilderment. Confusion. *What? Who? How? Wow!* They departed with fear and great joy. And now their moment....

“And behold, Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’” (Matthew 28:9) Here now is the final proof for these women of Jesus’ resurrection—there he is! His first word to them was the common greeting of the day. It’s translated here, *“Greetings!”* We might say, *Hi!* or *Good morning!* or *Hey, how are ya?* This always strikes me. You’d think he would have something eternally profound to say, but he goes with *Hi!* I suspect he spoke the common language to ease their fear and put them at ease.

“And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.” (Verse 9) This is an interesting detail to include that they took hold of his feet. Why include that? You can’t grab a ghost. Jesus was no ghost. He was real. Physical. Present. Really there right down to his toes. There at his feet, they do what will be our eternal privilege—they worship him. What else could they do? They knew he had been dead; some of them personally buried him. But now here he is alive. They pay him the ultimate homage and worship him as God, for who else could he be?

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.’” (Matthew 28:10) Jesus echoes the words of the angel, *“Do not be afraid.”* I often share this with folks in our church when they are going through a scary time, do you know what the most repeated words of Jesus are in the whole Bible? *“Do not be afraid.”* It’s used twice in this section. In a sense, his resurrection means that we never really have to be afraid of anything ever again.

“Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee.” We know from other gospels that they do eventually meet up in Galilee. But before they do, a lot happens. These women tell the disciples. Peter and John race to the tomb. Both will look in and John will have his moment of belief that Jesus was raised.

Jesus appeared to two disciples walking along the road to Emmaus. They don't recognize him and he explains to them why the Christ had to be raised from the dead. He breaks bread with them, and then they do recognize him.

Later that day Jesus will appear to his disciples in the upper room. They won't faint like the soldiers but they are astonished. Jesus eats something before them as proof that he is really there, body and all. He appears again to them eight days later with Thomas there and invites Thomas the Doubter to come and touch the scars in his hands and side. We are told of many other appearances, even appearing to 500 people at one time. No doubt each time was a re-enactment of the experience of the women at the tomb—great fear and great joy. "*He is not here, for he has risen, as he said.*" (Verse 6) And that is Matthew's account.

A resurrection begs questions and answers. The most important question is, *so what? Or what does this mean?* It means many, many things, but this Easter I want us to see this through the prism of a time warp. So what is the future like?

We know what the present is like. And we know what the past is like. All the people of the past, their items are in the Smithsonian, their stories are in history books, and their bodies are in cemeteries. You likely drove by one recently. What did you think when you looked? We've trained ourselves to not think really anything, especially the reality every cemetery provides. *Someday that's me.*

For all the importance we place on ourselves and our lives and pursuits and schedules, all our self-importance goes right into that grave with us. Even the greatest people who ever lived, we can only talk about them in the past tense. They *were* this. They *were* that. In the present they are the same as all other past people—dead.

The present is somewhat similar in that the present world we live in is marked by suffering and difficulty—not all the time—but even when we aren't hurting or in a trial we know it's coming. This is the cloud that hangs over even our best moments. We know they won't last and that eventually we will be like the wrinkly, hunched over senior citizens around us. They were once like we are and they looked at old people and hoped it would never happen to them. And yet it has. All around us in the present tense is the reality that we are fading into the past tense. We *are* but we know we are sliding towards we *were*. We are all "ises" and "wases."

In our best moments of clarity, we dare ask the future tense, *what's to come?* What lies ahead? What will be my place and my experience then? How could we know?

What if someone from the future came into the present to fix our problem from the past? What if his coming signaled the beginning of the future in the present? What if the resurrection was actually the beginning of the future in the here and now? A sign of things to come? What if his coming means that rather than sliding toward the past, in him everything is sliding toward the future? God's kingdom. His rule and reign forever and my part in it.

Jesus' resurrection means all this and more.

There is another incident of resurrection in Jesus' story that helps us understand. In John 11 Jesus' good friend Lazarus died. Jesus comes to the grieving family. In their pain they say, "*Lord, if you had been here, [our] brother would not have died.*" (John 11:21) Jesus says, "*Your brother will rise again.*" (John 11:23) Martha says, *Yes, someday.* We see in Martha

confusion about future tense and present tense. For her, resurrection was only possible in the distant future. She didn't realize the power of future resurrection was standing right in front of her.

Jesus answers, *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."* (John 11:25) Notice the tense. *I am* the resurrection and the life. Present tense. Not someday. Now. Here. *Let me show you.* And he summons Lazarus out of the grave.

Martha is like so many of us even on Easter. We believe in a theoretical future of some vague kind of resurrection and we hope for the best. And we fail to realize that Jesus' resurrection means new life is now. It's here. Jesus doesn't say, *I will be the resurrection and the life*, he says, *"I am the resurrection and the life."* God's kingdom is here and now because the King of the kingdom has come and from now on new life and eternal life are available today for any who believe in him.

You may go on living in your present tense world but eventually you will be forced to consider the future tense. Two families in our church this week are dwelling on the future. I spent time on the phone this week with one family. A child has been born. Essentially born with no brain function and serious medical issues. They asked, "What do we do when this child can only survive by being attached to machines?"

The other family is on the other end of the spectrum. The Koedyker family lost Dart, the patriarch of their family. He walked with God for many years and by all testimonies was a faithful Christian man. A few days ago he was teaching some folks how to play shuffleboard when he had a massive heart attack.

In both cases, Christianity's answer is, *"I am the resurrection and the life."* The glory of that first Easter morning is a present reality right now. We have the confidence that the baby and the elderly man, the 49 Christians bombed in Egypt, killed on Palm Sunday...who knows what's awaiting you this week or this year—there is life eternal right here, right now for all who believe.

The first sermon I ever heard by our old youth pastor Don Helton, he told about a bar that he drove by when he went from college. It had a huge billboard on it that said, *Free Beer Tomorrow.* It's safe to advertise because it's never tomorrow, it's always today.

Easter isn't great merely because there's resurrection tomorrow. Easter is great because there's eternal life today. Tomorrow has invaded today through the resurrection of Jesus. Eternal life is here now for all who believe in him. *"He is not here, he is risen, as he said."*

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