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THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT THAT BEE!  
Matthew 28

Last Sunday afternoon I encountered a mini mystery. I played bass that morning on our worship team, so when I finished my sermon I stepped over to pick up my bass and play the last two songs. I had my iPad, so as I usually do I set it on the floor leaning up against the back wall of the chapel. When the service ended I set my bass down and headed to the other end of the chapel to chat with people as they were leaving. I did that for maybe 20 minutes until most people were gone. Then I went to pack up my bass. I did that, but my iPad wasn't there. That didn't concern me because sometimes Laurie will pick it up. But when I asked her about it she did not have it and had no idea where it was. I searched all over, but no iPad. I asked everyone on the worship team if they had seen it, thinking perhaps someone had moved it someplace so it wouldn't be forgotten or lost, but no one had it. In fact, all of them said they didn't even recall seeing it when they were putting our equipment away. I searched everywhere and asked everyone, but there was no sign of the iPad and no indication of what could have happened to it.

That afternoon I was left with a mystery that really nagged at me. I even asked Debbie to send out an email asking if anyone had any clues as to its whereabouts. Where was it? I feared it was going to end up being a mystery that would remain unsolved. To my great relief, it did turn up. Somehow it had gotten moved and mixed up with someone else's stuff and they found it. I was very happy to have it back, but still puzzled over how that all happened. That mystery will remain.

I don't like mysteries that have no answer. It still bothers me that there has been no definitive answer to the question of what happened to that Malaysian Air flight 370 a few years ago. I'd really like to know, but there's a solid chance we never will. There is a much more important question that every human ponders, a mystery that is enormous for us all. Today we are going to learn that this question has an answer. We will see the answer in Matthew 28.

EXPOSITION

THE WOMEN HAD CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

On Sunday morning a couple of days after Jesus had been crucified two of the women who followed him, both of them named Mary, went to his tomb. This was

the first opportunity they had to visit his grave. Jesus had died at the end of the day on Friday and the Sabbath began at sundown that evening. They would not visit the grave on the Sabbath. It ended at sundown on Saturday, but they didn't want to visit a grave in the dark, so the first chance they had to go to the grave was at dawn on Sunday morning, and that's when they showed up.

What happened to the women who went to visit Jesus' tomb was more than disorienting. It was a total shock. Momentous, world changing events had taken place that night before they arrived. What they saw when they got to that tomb was astounding. The guards who had been placed to make sure there was no funny business with the body of Jesus were conspicuously absent. The massive stone that had blocked the entrance had been rolled back and the tomb stood wide open. More astounding was there was a person sitting on that rock, and this person was like no one they had ever seen. He literally glowed with a brilliant light. They did not know who he was or what this meant, but they sensed that this was a powerful being. The being, whom they figured out was an angel, told them to calm down. They had no reason to be afraid. Then he told them that Jesus was not in that tomb anymore. He had come back to life just like he had told them he would. He invited them to see for themselves that the tomb was empty then urged them to go find the disciples and tell them the news. By the way, the stone wasn't rolled away to let Jesus out. He had the ability to get out of an enclosed tomb using his divine power. The tomb was open so that the women and later the disciples could look in and see that it was empty.

That was enough of a shock, but there was more to come. After being convinced that what the angel said was true they were thrilled. Matthew says they were "afraid yet filled with joy." They took off at a dead run, eager to tell the disciples this unbelievably good news. They didn't get far before they were stopped. They were stopped by Jesus himself, alive again after dying. He again told them to not be afraid, but to go tell the gang the best news they would ever hear.

#### THE GUARDS TOOK A BRIBE

Meanwhile the guards had a problem. We don't know exactly what they saw. My guess is they also saw the angel and they had the same reaction as the women did. I suspect they fainted. When they regained consciousness they saw that the tomb they were supposed to guard was wide open. The body they were supposed to guarantee didn't go anywhere was gone. Uh oh.

When Pilate learned what they had let happen he was certain to find them guilty of dereliction of duty. He might even conclude they had fallen asleep on watch. How were they going to explain this? “Well, what happened was...” There was no way they were going to go back to Pilate and tell him some bizarre story about a frightening glowing being suddenly appearing and it being so shocking and scary that they passed out. Pilate would be sure to conclude they had been hitting the wine bottles hard while on duty if they told him such a ridiculous tale. So instead of going to Pilate they tried the Jewish priests.

The religious leaders paid the guards to tell a story that was full of holes so big you could have ridden a camel through them. They were to tell people they fell asleep and while they were asleep Jesus’ disciples came and stole Jesus’ body, and that’s why his tomb was empty. Oh, right, that makes sense. You fell asleep while on guard duty, an infraction punishable by death in the Roman army. Not one or two of you, but the whole squad. And while you were sleeping Jesus’ disciples stole his body. The noise of moving that huge rock didn’t wake up even one of you? Guess you guys must have all been exhausted. By the way, if you were that sound asleep, how did you know Jesus’ disciples stole his body?

If I were one of the guards I would have said, “That’s your plan? We go to our commanding officer and tell him all of us fell asleep and failed in the one job you gave us? That’s the best you can come up with?” I’m pretty sure I would say there is no amount of money you could pay me to do that because I won’t get to spend it. I’ll be dead. The religious leaders convinced them that they would smooth things over with Pilate. I have no idea how they were going to do that. From Pilate’s perspective the guards had totally failed in their duty, whatever their story. So the Jewish leaders must have concocted some excuse that would placate Pilate enough to keep him from executing the guards. It must have been one creative excuse.

## JESUS SHOWED UP

Finally Jesus met with his disciples. It is important to notice verse 17. “When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted.” Remember that this was written by Matthew, an eye witness. He was there when Jesus appeared to them. What he remembered is that they worshiped him because they now knew who he truly was. As good Jewish men they had one fundamental conviction they would never, ever violate. They would only worship God. They might have great respect for different people, they might be awed by angelic beings, but they would only worship one person, and that was the true Creator God. When they worshiped Jesus they were making a loud statement that they now believed him to be God in human form. He

had proven that by exhibiting his power over the human race's greatest, most immovable enemy, death itself.

At least that's what most of them believed. Matthew notes that some of them doubted. They had trouble believing what their own eyes were telling them. They were in that, "I'm seeing this, but I don't believe it" mode. They had seen Jesus die. How could he be alive? This is vital for us to take note of because you will hear people claim that maybe the disciples concocted the story of Jesus rising from the dead because they wanted to believe it so much. We need to remember this verse. Some didn't believe it even when they saw it. They were not going to come up with some incredible story about Jesus rising from his grave because they didn't think such a thing was possible. They thought it couldn't happen even when they had proof that it had.

Many years ago when I was working for a ministry to college students I had the opportunity on several occasions to see a show put on by a member of that organization's staff who was a professional illusionist. He would do his magic tricks and use them to present the gospel of Christ. He could do some amazing things. One of the most amazing was he appeared to be able to cause his wife, who was his lovely assistant, to levitate in midair with her body completely horizontal. He would pass a hoop over her and under her to prove that she was not being held up by invisible wires. It was one of those "I can't believe I'm seeing this" moments. What I was seeing was not possible. For a brief moment I had that, "Does this guy actually have the power to..." but then I would think, "No, he is an illusionist. I don't know how he is doing this, but I know it is a trick. It's a really good trick, but it is a trick." And it is a trick. I know now how he did it and there was nothing magic about it. But when those disciples saw Jesus it was no trick. It wasn't magic either. It was the real thing, God's power at work.

Jesus told his disciples 3 important things that we all need to remember every day of our lives. All authority in all of creation has been given to Jesus. There is no power, no authority, no event that is outside Jesus' authority. Since that momentous day so long ago he has been ruling over everyone and everything. There is nothing that will ever happen in your life and there is no person you will ever have to encounter, who is outside the authority of Jesus. I hate dealing with the IRS. It is a monolithic, bureaucratic, arbitrary monster backed by the massive power of the federal government. I just want to stay off their radar at all times. But as intimidating as that organization might be, it is not beyond the authority of

Jesus. Some people are afraid of Satan. We don't need to be. He is not outside the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus also said we are not to keep the news of Jesus to ourselves. Every summer I go on the great peach hunt. I drive my poor wife to distraction with my obsession with good peaches. My problem is I love peaches, but a large percentage of the time when I buy them in the grocery store they range from disappointing to awful. I get so focused on peaches that Laurie bought a peach tree so we could grow our own. That turned out to also be disappointing at first because the peaches on it were terrible. This year for the first time we actually had some pretty good peaches on it. Let's suppose that everyone loves peaches the way I do, that we all are desperate to find a source of truly good peaches. And imagine that one of us finds a store that consistently sells outstanding peaches. They are so sweet and delicious and juicy that they put candy to shame. What if that person who has discovered this incredible resource then proceeds to tell exactly no one about it. Everyone this person knows is scurrying around trying to find good peaches and mostly having to settle for just okay peaches at best. People are talking with each other about what they have found, and this person, who has exactly what they are searching for, says nothing. Maybe this person just doesn't care about other people, or maybe they just don't want to be bothered. What would you think of that person? If you were desperately seeking peaches and this person was your friend and never said a word to you, how would you feel? I suspect you wouldn't be happy with them.

The disciples of Jesus had just learned the greatest truth in all of history. Jesus was alive. Jesus was God in human form and he had come to bring life, peace and hope to this world. He intends that for everyone. It had always been his intent. Isaiah 12:5 says, "Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world." The whole world was to know what God has done. In Matthew 24:14 Jesus said the good news would be preached in all the world. In John 3:16 and 17 it said, "God so loved the world." He loved the whole world. Verse 17 says that Jesus came not to condemn the world but to save it. The whole thing. So Jesus told his disciples, and by extension us, that they should tell people throughout the entire world what they had discovered in Jesus.

The last thing Jesus told them that is crucial is that he would never leave them. That's interesting because a few weeks later he would physically leave them. But he promised that he would continue to be with them even when he was physically absent. The longest Laurie and I have been apart since we got married happened 15 years ago. Laurie went as a chaperone on a missions trip Toby took with a choir

group he was in to Fiji and Tonga in the South Pacific. She was gone 2 weeks. I hated being away from her that long. I told her my heart would be with her. And it was. My thoughts were often focused on how she was doing, and I longed for her to come back. But I wasn't with her. She was thousands of miles away and when she encountered problems there I was of exactly zero help to her. There was nothing I could do about it. Is that how it is with Jesus? No, because Jesus is alive, he is God, who is able to be present everywhere even when not in a physical sense. Jesus said he would be with his people until the world ends. He will never, ever abandon us.

Every moment of your life, if you are a follower of Jesus, he is with you. He is there to strengthen you, encourage you, comfort you and even impact the events in your life. There is never a moment when he is not with you.

### THERE IS REASON TO BELIEVE

This is the climax of the story of Jesus' life. His death and his resurrection were the ultimate purpose of his coming into this world. But can we really believe this? A man rising from the dead never to die again sounds like a fairy tale or wishful thinking. This just doesn't happen. People die and that's the end. There is no coming back from death. That is our experience.

So why should we believe this? There are many people who will say miracles don't happen. But that is not a proven fact. It is a presumption. One can say, "I have never seen a miracle, so I find it very hard to believe they actually ever happen." But that is very different than saying they never happen. Not long ago I told someone about the green flash. This person had never heard of it and had never seen it. So he didn't think it was real. He thought I was trying to pull a joke on him. Does the fact that he had never seen it mean that it does not exist? He can assert that all he wants, but the fact is it does exist. I have seen it and I told him so. At that point he could only evaluate my veracity and trustworthiness.

So it is when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus. It was an historical event. It is not repeatable. One cannot do experiments in a lab to prove or disprove it. We know of it by the assertions of people who claimed to have seen it first hand. Are they trustworthy? It is helpful to remember that to a man there came a point where their lives were hanging in the balance. They could admit what they claimed was not true, or they could insist that it was true and suffer death as a result. They all stood their ground.

Then there's the issue of how the church exists today. It had to begin with thousands of Jewish people doing something they would have normally found absolutely abhorrent. They worshiped Jesus, a man. How did that happen? They began a movement that spread all over the world and continues to this day. How did that happen if Jesus was just a great man who died an unjust death?

October 19, 1781 British General Charles Cornwallis surrendered to American General George Washington at the Virginia city called Yorktown. That essentially brought an end to the Revolutionary War and established independence for the American colonies. But how do we know that actually happened? We didn't see it. We weren't there. We can't reproduce it. We know it happened because eye witnesses who were there have told us about it.

But there is another factor we must remember. How is it that America exists? Laurie and I have watched a few episodes of a TV production called *The Crown*. It is a history of Queen Elizabeth II of England. One of my main reactions to it has been, "I don't get it." In one scene, before she became queen, her father, King George, was on a train heading toward a particular town. Everywhere the train went masses of people crowded near the tracks just to catch a glimpse of the train and to cheer the king. People treated him with a deference that was nothing short of worship. When Elizabeth got married it was a massive event, such as we have recently seen on television. Here's what I don't get. What did those people do to earn such adulation? The answer is, absolutely nothing. They were simply born into a particular family and because of they they have been designated "royal." It doesn't make even a bit of sense. That's because I am an American. We have some neighbors who are British. They get it. To them the whole royal thing is natural and normal, something that is part of them and of their culture. But that's not true for me. Down deep in the psyche of anyone who is American is a great dislike of a system that elevates people to such heights just because of the family they come from even though they haven't done a thing. At least, it used to be that way until the Kardashians came long.

How is it that there is a people that has so much in common with England, whose roots go back to England, yet are so different? Members of my extended family have traced our family tree back to the 1400's in England. But I am most definitely not British. How is it that we exist as a separate nation and that our mind set, while much like theirs in many ways, is also distinctly different? The very existence of America as an independent nation and as Americans as very different people, is

proof that Washington did, indeed defeat Cornwallis and win our independence from England.

Similarly, we have to ask how it is that the church of Jesus Christ exists all over the world today. Thousands of years after Jesus walked this earth in places that are on the opposite side of the world from Judea, people are different, they worship him and are a part of his kingdom. Here's the crucial point: without the resurrection none of that would have happened. Without Jesus rising from the dead Judaism would have gone on, maybe affected by some teachings of the man called Jesus, but that's all. There is simply no explanation for the existence of the church apart from the resurrection of Jesus.

## IMPLICATIONS

### THE RESURRECTION PROVES GOD HAS INTERVENED

The greatest question in the human condition, the biggest mystery that we wish could be solved is, does God actually exist? It is reasonable and normal to wonder where all of this came from. How is it that we, and all of creation exists? There was once debate about whether all that exists has always existed, but now physicists are confident that it all had a starting point. What caused all this to begin, to come into being?

There are apparent evidences of design. Our brains can perform 38,000 trillion operations per second. The world's most powerful supercomputer can only manage a speed that is 2 one thousandths of a percent of that. I am using an iPad this morning. It can perform 944 million operations per second, a bagatelle compared to your brain. Do you have any doubts about whether my iPad was deliberately created by intelligent people or whether it just accidentally happened? If not, does it seem reasonable to you to wonder whether our far more powerful brains were created by intelligence or were fortuitous accidents?

Your DNA holds vast amounts of data. Every single strand of it in every cell in your body holds enough information to fill hundreds of pages. It is organized information. It spells out a formula that causes you to be. In 2012 two geneticists at Harvard were able to encode a 52,000 word book in strands of DNA. Researchers have made great advances and now report that they have methods of storing 215 petabytes of information, that's 215 million gigabytes, in a single gram of DNA. The point is, DNA is messages, encoded information.



When I was a kid on a few occasions we would drive up the Kern River Canyon. I hated that drive because it was on a narrow road full of twists and turns. But going through that canyon you could see the results of geological forces at work. You could see where water carved that canyon, and where massive forces caused the uplift of mountains and huge rocks. You could also occasionally see large rocks with things like, "John loves Kathy" on them. If you saw that would you think, "Wow, it's amazing that the forces of nature could create that. I wonder how that happened"? Absolutely not, at least if you have a functioning brain. You know instantly that is a message created by a sentient person. That message required intelligent design. If a simple message like that required intelligence, surely the infinitely greater and more complex message of your DNA must require a far greater intelligence.

So it is quite reasonable to posit an Intelligent Maker, whom we call God. But that's all we know about him. He's great, powerful and highly intelligent, but nothing else. And if this individual is real, where is he? Why does he not make himself known? Is this some being who created us, started the snowball rolling down the hill and then left the building?

We want some real world evidence that this being exists, and some sign that he is fact still engaged with his creation. The resurrection is that evidence. Jesus claimed to be that God living among us in human form. In John 10:30 Jesus said, "I and the Father are one." Well maybe he meant he and God were in agreement. They were one in the sense they were on the same page. That's not what he meant. His opponents who heard him that day understood exactly what he meant. They wanted to kill him. In verse 33 they said it was because he committed "Blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."

That's pretty tough to swallow. Jesus did a bunch of things to demonstrate that he had divine power. But all along he said he would do one last thing to prove his claim. In Matthew 17:22-23 he said, "The Son of man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life." He claimed he would die, but come back to life. He would defeat humanity's greatest enemy, death.

He made that statement in several different ways on a number of occasions. Essentially he said this would be the final proof. He would rise from the dead. When he did it, he proved that he was this creator God showing himself. He proved

that he is real, that he is much involved in this world and that he cares about us to a degree that we can't even imagine.

Because Jesus came back to life we know not only that God is for real, but we know who he is. We can know what he is like. And we know for certain that not only does he have all the power we could ever imagine, but that he also loves us to a degree that is beyond our capacity for understanding. He loves us so much he entered this world, died on that cross and then defeated death all so that we might have life, now and into eternity.

#### THE RESURRECTION PROVES HE IS WITH US

Jesus said he would never leave us. He said he has all authority. The resurrection affirms we can trust these statements. Every moment of your life as a child of God Jesus is with you. Not only that, but everything that happens is not an accident or something totally beyond his ability to deal with. He has all authority. Nothing is beyond his power and control.

Ephesians 1:19-20 says that God seated Christ "at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come." Not only is Jesus over every power in this world, he is "far above" all rule, authority and power. In other words, he is way, way more powerful than anything or anyone else.

Recently I've seen some about how China and Russia are seeking to challenge the US Navy. One of those ways is by building aircraft carriers. China has launched its very own, home built aircraft carrier, currently called the Type 001A, to challenge the US. However, you don't need to fret much over this, for the US is not just above, but far above China in this field of technology. Yes, the Chinese ship is big, just over 1000 feet long, and impressive. But it has a steam power plant, not the nuclear power plant of a US carrier, it doesn't have catapults to launch aircraft, it can carry about 52 aircraft as opposed to 90 for the latest US carriers. To top it off, while this new ship, slated to be operational in 2020 will give China a genuine carrier, the US has 11! We have more than the rest of the world combined. As far above China as we are, Jesus is infinitely farther beyond any power on earth.

Carissa and Michael are taking a vacation this week, heading for Maui. Just a week ago I was thinking about this as I was reading stories about Hurricane Lane and how it was going to turn Maui into a flooded mess. Then I saw stories about how

there was a brush fire on Maui that threatened the area Michael and Carissa will be going. Here's the thing that helped me: Jesus is far above all power and authority, including hurricanes and brush fires. That doesn't mean that they are guaranteed the perfect vacation with ideal weather, but it did mean I can be at peace and trust God. Jesus is with them!

## THE RESURRECTION PROVES THERE IS HOPE

I started by referring to great questions we all long for answers to. One of those is about the existence of God. The resurrection has answered that one. But another that is of critical importance to all of us is, do we have any hope beyond the grave? Is there life after death?

Death is the greatest of all mysteries. All of us will go there, but no one comes back to tell us what it is really like and if there is some way to defeat it. We urgently desire to know the answers to those questions. We need to know, for psychologists and psychiatrists tell us a person is not equipped for maturity and wholeness until they confront the inevitability of their own death.

The best news of all time is that the question of death has been answered. In 1 Corinthians 15:55 Paul wrote, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" Because Jesus rose from the dead, it is gone. Death no longer wins. It has no more sting. Recently Laurie and I were eating out on the patio, and a bee showed up. This bee, for some bizarre reason, took a perverse and persistent interest in me. It didn't bother her at all, but it wouldn't leave me alone. I tried to wave it away repeatedly but it would keep coming back. Now I've had flies annoy me that way, and they are a nuisance, but a bee is in a different league, for it is a threat. It can sting, and while that's not the end of the world, it's not on my list of fun things to do either. But what if that bee had no stinger? It would no longer be a threat. It might annoy me, but it can't hurt me, so I'm not afraid of it. Because of the resurrection death has no more sting! Yes, it is likely annoying, but it cannot hurt us. Do you get this? Death has moved from the category of an enemy, a fearsome foe that can do us ultimate harm, into the category of a nuisance. While we don't welcome it or enjoy it, neither do we fear it. For we know that as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:57 God "gave us the victory (over death) through our Lord Jesus Christ."



