

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon Title: From the Resurrection to the Ascension, Matthew 28:1-15 and Other Scriptures

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Last Sunday, I gave the narrative from Jesus' triumphal entry to the crucifixion. This morning, I will share the narrative from the resurrection to the ascension. A lot of things happened from the time Jesus arose from the grave until he ascended into heaven.

Forty days or so passed. And, after spending three days in the tomb, Jesus arose and completed the work he came to do—and that was/is providing a sinless sacrifice through which people can be reconciled to God. Before he ascended into heaven, however, Jesus had several more things to accomplish. In fact, he had many things to accomplish. I think the general population thinks Jesus arose from the grave and went into heaven, but no—he had things to do.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 28:1-15 ¹*After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.*

²*There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.*

⁵*The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”*

⁸*So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”*

¹¹ While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. ¹² When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³ telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ ¹⁴ If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” ¹⁵ So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

EXPLANATION: When Jesus rose from the grave, he spoke to the women first. He asked the women to be his messengers. I just love this part of it all. The disciples fled when Jesus was crucified, and the Bible says the women watched from a distance. They weren’t afraid. In the terrible moment of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the women were the most faithful.

The morning after his burial, women went to his grave. Why did they go? Matthew says they went to look at the tomb. They went because they weren’t in hiding. They went because there was nothing to fear. They went to pay their respects, or maybe they went to reminisce about their time with Jesus. Mark’s Gospel tells us they went to anoint Jesus’ body, and they wondered who would have rolled the stone away from the grave. Why did they go? I believe they went to grieve the loss of their good friend in the same way we grieve the loss of people—in the same way we go to cemeteries and remember.

I’m not too crazy about a funeral being called “the celebration of life.” Of course, it’s a celebration of life, but nobody at a funeral is celebrating. Maybe on a rare occasion when somebody was so sick, it really was a celebration for them to be gone, but you know—what’s wrong with just grieving the loss? What’s wrong with just showing the emotion and just grieving the loss? These women didn’t contain it. They went to grieve the loss.

So, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were facing the reality of grief the best way they knew how to do it. Jesus was gone, or so they thought. The angel told them not to be afraid, but they were. As the Scripture says, they were afraid but filled with joy. Fearful joy – have you ever experienced that emotion? Maybe you have.

The women had an image in mind, that's for sure. They imagined the Lord Jesus dead. What they did NOT imagine was that he would not be there. What a privilege for them to be chosen as the messengers of the resurrection!

YOU JUST NEVER KNOW WHO JESUS IS GOING TO CHOOSE TO DO HIS WORK.

A couple of weeks ago, I told you about this mother named Salome, who wanted her sons, James and John, to have these great places by Jesus in his kingdom. But, they weren't there at the tomb, were they? And so, the women, the messengers, became the people who were there. God might choose you to do his work!

John's Gospel tells us Mary Magdalene ran to Simon Peter and told him the body of Jesus was gone. And, Peter and another disciple ran to the tomb, and they saw strips of linen and the cloth that had been wrapped around the head of Jesus. John chapter 20 verse 9 tells us they still didn't understand Jesus would rise from the dead. A few years ago, I preached about the dull disciples...about how Jesus told them what was going to happen and how they just didn't get it. But, in the days to come, they would get it, and in the days to come, all of the teaching of Jesus would make sense to them.

Jesus appeared to the women, and Matthew tells us they held his feet and worshipped him. John's Gospel said Mary Magdalene did not recognize him at first and assumed he was the gardener. In a way we don't understand, as we gather from Scripture, the resurrected body has some way of being able to hide its identity until it wants to be made known. Mary Magdalene thought Jesus was the gardener, and she inquired whether he had moved the body of Jesus. Then she recognized Jesus.

Not wanting to be outdone, the chief priests—the purveyors of fake news of the day—on Resurrection Sunday, paid the soldiers to tell a lie. And, the Scripture says the Jews still believed their story at the time of Matthew's gospel writing. And, do you know, many people in the world still believe the lie today? And, as you've heard me say numerous times, the reason people believe fake news is because they really, really want it to be true.

As recorded in Luke 24, on the same day as the resurrection, two men walked toward Emmaus, a village that was seven miles from Jerusalem. They talked about what had transpired the last couple of days. Now let's think about this: Two men were just on a regular daily journey walking, and they were just talking about what happened. And, then the Scripture says Jesus joined them. I just imagine Jesus walking a little faster and catching up with them. And, as they were talking, he made it sound as if he didn't know what they were talking about, and they asked if he was a visitor to the area since he didn't know.

For quite a while, they spent time together talking. When they arrived at Emmaus, they invited Jesus to eat with them. When he blessed and broke the bread, the Scripture says their eyes were opened, and they knew him...and then he vanished out of their sight. The Greek word for vanish or disappear is *aphontos* [af'-an-tos], and what it means is a literal disappearance from sight. Jesus did not say, "*See you later,*" and then get up and walk out of the door. He disappeared, and he was out of sight. You see, the resurrection body—and it's a real body, not spirit...just a different body than we know—as least the body of Jesus, had the ability to appear instantly and to disappear instantly. The resurrected body has no limits. The two men talked about how their hearts burned earlier in the day when he opened up the Scriptures to them, and they went back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples what happened.

That night, the disciples were in a room with shut doors. They were hiding because of their fear of the Jews...*would they be the next victims of the hate against Jesus?* And, then Jesus appeared to them, and what did Jesus say? "*Peace to you.*" He didn't knock at the door. He just appeared in the room. He showed them the wounds in his hands, and he showed them the wound in his side. And, then Jesus left them. Thomas was not with them. He showed up a little later, and the disciples told him what happened. And, Thomas just said, "*Unless I see and feel these wounds myself, I won't believe.*"

You know, Jesus made a second appearance—eight days later, and Thomas was with them at that time. And, the Scripture doesn't say that the disciples said, "*Hey Jesus, Thomas has to see.*" The Scripture does not say that Thomas said, "*I have to see.*" The Scripture says Jesus showed up and said to Thomas, "*Touch my hands, put your hand in my side, have faith and believe.*"

I want you to listen to me this morning: Jesus met Thomas at his point of need. The other ones were probably already satisfied, and probably the other people who had heard Jesus were there were satisfied because of the eye-witness testimony of the people they trusted who saw Jesus. But, not Thomas. Thomas needed hard proof. Thomas was a hard sell. He just didn't take others' word for it. Thomas wanted to see with his own eyes. He wanted to feel with his own hands.

APPLICATION: Everyone listen—here's a principle for you to walk away with today—

JESUS WILL MEET YOU AT YOUR POINT OF NEED.

What is your point of need? Your point of need is different than my point of need. We may have some similarities, but you know, God knows all the intricate differences in our minds and in our personalities, and he knows all the intricate differences in our needs. And, he will send his Son Jesus to meet us at our point of need.

SCRIPTURE: John 20 verse 30 and 31 says Jesus did many signs in the presence of his disciples which were not written in the Gospel, but John wrote these things so that *“you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*

Some time passed, and the disciples were out fishing. They knew how to fish. Remember, some of them had been fisherman before they were called to be disciples. And, now that Jesus had died, they didn't have the rabbi walking around the region, leading them and teaching them. Jesus had made a couple of appearances to them, but it still hadn't all come together for them. And, so someone said, *“Hey, let's go fishing. We know how to do that.”* But, they had a night of failure. They were out on the boat, and they had fished all night and didn't catch any fish. And, then Jesus appeared on the shore, but they didn't recognize him at first. And, he told them to cast their net on the other side of the boat. They had heard that before, and they knew who it was who told them. And, they cast their net on the other side of the boat.

I want you to think of the absurdity of the instructions. You'd been fishing on this one side of the boat. All the fish are on the other side of the boat. *"Son, you've been fishing here, now move over there"*...to professional fisherman. Jesus said, *"Cast your net on the other side,"* and they knew it was their Savior.

And, Peter was so excited, he just took off his robe and just dove into the water and swam to the shore to be with Jesus. He wasn't going to try to walk on water this time. He just dove. The others brought the boat to the shore, and when they got to the shore, they had this net full of fish...But, Jesus already had a meal prepared for them. There was a fire there, and there was fish and bread all ready to be eaten. And, Jesus said, *"Come and have breakfast with me."*

And, while they were sitting there, Jesus asked Peter three times, *"Do you love me?"* And, each time, Peter said, *"Yes."* You see, just a few days earlier, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times. And, Jesus, out of his love and mercy, allowed Peter to redeem himself. He redeemed Peter! Peter denied him three times. Jesus asked him three times, *"Do you love me?"* and each time, Peter said, *"Yes."*

WHEN WE BLOW IT IN THE WORST WAY, JESUS WILL REDEEM US IF WE ARE HUMBLE.

In Luke's account, chapter 24, we read—

SCRIPTURE: Luke 24:44-49 ⁴⁴ [Jesus] said to them, *"This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."*

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, *"This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*

Jesus gave them some instructions, and John tells us Jesus did so many things that the Scripture says, *"I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."*

And, John’s very next word and final word in his book is “*Amen*,” which means “so be it.”

But, the story is far from over. The Apostle Paul tells us much later in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 6, Jesus appeared to the disciples—not only the disciples, but the Scripture says Jesus “*appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living...*”

Many years later, Paul was converted. You know the story of the Apostle Paul. Paul had been this persecutor, this tormenter of Christians, and when he wrote to the Church at Corinth, he brought up what was already known—that Jesus had appeared to more than 500 brothers and sisters. And, at the time of Paul’s writing, he said, “*A lot of them are still alive today.*”

And, in the book of Acts, Luke continues the story. Read with me in Acts –

SCRIPTURE: Acts 1:1-11 ¹*In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach* ²*until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.* ³*After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.* ⁴*On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.* ⁵*For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”*

⁶*Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”*

⁷*He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.* ⁸*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

⁹*After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

¹⁰*They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.* ¹¹*“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do*

you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

The exact sequence of how it all happened in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts is not exactly easy to follow, but during one of his appearances to his disciples, Jesus said at the end of Matthew—

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 28:18-20 ¹⁸“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

The disciples soon picked Matthias to replace Judas, and then they waited ten days, as they were commanded, in Jerusalem. And, in Acts, chapter 2, we read—

SCRIPTURE: Acts 2:1-4 ¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

EXPLANATION: These simple men from Galilee spoke the languages of the God-fearing Jews from at least fifteen nationalities who were assembled together. They heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their own languages, and the Scripture tells us about 3,000 people came to faith in Jesus Christ on that day.

THIS WAS THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH AGE, THE AGE WE FIND OURSELVES IN RIGHT NOW.

Do you understand it? I hope your eyes are being opened here. We are still in that age. Acts 2—it started right there, BAM! And, we are still in that age. And, one day the church age will end, and there will be a new age. There will be a new kingdom. But, right now, we’re in the church age.

Folks, we have the Holy Spirit power that was in Acts chapter 2—the same Holy Spirit that healed people, the same Holy Spirit that enabled and empowered these disciples to speak the languages of the God-fearing Jews who were together from all over the world. It's the same Spirit that's with us today.

The Apostle Paul, before he was converted, was a persecutor of Christians. And, here's what he said about the resurrection...[Ah, this was powerful...As I was typing out my notes for the message, I reminisced on all the Resurrection Sundays I remember throughout my life and different sermons and *how do you preach this passage differently or do you just preach the same thing the same thing you preached before?* Sunday's always coming, as I tell the staff. Sunday's always coming. When people ask me, "*How are you doing today?*" *Sunday's always coming!* Why? I have to be ready. I have to be ready to preach. But, as I was preparing this message and I got to be thinking about this resurrection power of Jesus, waves of chills kept going over my body because it is the most incredible thing that has ever happened in human history. And, I'm a part of it! And, you're a part of it!]

Here's what the Apostle Paul said—listen and empty your mind so you can take it in—

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 ¹² *But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?* ¹³ *If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.* ¹⁴ *And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.* ¹⁵ *More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.* ¹⁶ *For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.* ¹⁷ *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.* ¹⁸ *Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.* ¹⁹ *If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

EXPLANATION: And, what he meant there was that if we have no hope beyond the grave, we are doing nothing but wasting our time. And, the world should just pity us for being such fools. And, then Paul says in verse 20—

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 15:20 ²⁰ *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead,*

APPLICATION: So, my question to you is this, this morning:

WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THE RESURRECTION?

To you, is it a fairy tale? To you, is it mythology?

CONCLUSION: Does the resurrection story transform your life? I hope it does. And, if you have not believed before today, I'm encouraging you to believe and to let others know you believe.

I saved a detail here for the very end of the message. Earlier, I told you how Thomas just had to see and feel to believe. And, Jesus told him, *"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

Jesus was talking about us. I'm in the Bible! We're mentioned right here. You know, Paul—when he wrote 1 Corinthians later on—he said, *"Hey, there's still plenty of people still alive who remember Jesus."* There were people alive who saw him after his resurrection, but time passed, and then there were fewer and fewer and fewer.

And, then eventually, there was one day when there was only one human remaining who remembered seeing Jesus in his resurrected state, and then that person died. And, then 100 years passed, and then 200, and 300, and 400, and 500, and 1500, and then almost 2000 years have passed, and here we are now. We are mentioned right here in Scripture. There is a special blessing for us who have believed but have not seen with our eyes.

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