

“Alive in Me” // Matthew 28:1–20 // *Instead of Me* #5

Welcome everybody and Happy Resurrection Day at all our campuses! First, let me acknowledge that this is a special weekend—and there is a handful of you who aren’t really sure you want to be here. **Easter is one of those times when people** feel like they have to be here.

- I know **some of you got the “but you can’t skip church on Easter”** speech earlier this (**morning**)—Jesus rose from the dead, you have to get out of bed...”
- **I know of one conversation that took place between a husband and wife just this (morning).** She was upstairs getting ready, and she thought he was... but when she came out he was still sitting in his pajamas in front of the TV. She said, “Why aren’t you ready? We need to go.” He said, “I don’t want to go to that church.” “Why not?” she said. 3 reasons: “1. Nobody is friendly to me. 2. Everyone is suspicious of me. 3. I just don’t like it.” She said, “First, that’s not true. Some people are friendly there. #2. The suspicion is mainly in your head. #3. You’re the pastor. You have to go.” That was my wife and I this morning.

Seriously, there’s a lot of pressure to preach on Easter Sunday. This is like Super Bowl Sunday for us. I’ve got to convince some of you who only come once a year—whom we **affectionately call CEO Christians**—that you should come back next week. **And that’s a lot of pressure.** My wife knows this and she was trying to encourage me last night. She said, ‘**Honey, relax. Don’t try to be witty, funny, or intellectual. Just be yourself.**’

Works Consulted:

“Believe Again,” Andy Stanley.

“Risen for Me,” James MacDonald

“The Resurrection (Parts 1 & 2),” John MacArthur

“The Great Awakening,” Tim Keller

But this is it, isn’t it, Summit Church? The RESURRECTION OF JESUS—this is everything! **If the Resurrection happened, it’s ‘game-on’ for all things Christian.** And if it didn’t, then it’s GAME OVER, because everything else we believe is a hoax!

Let me read our very simple text this morning: **Matthew 28:1**, After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to view the tomb. ²There was a violent earthquake, because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and approached the tomb. He rolled back the stone and was sitting on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. ⁴The guards were so shaken by fear of him that they became like dead men.

⁵The angel told the women, “Don’t be afraid, because I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here. For he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.

The angel said, ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there.’ Listen, I have told you.”

⁸So, departing quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, (that’s a phrase we’ll talk about more in a minute) they ran to tell his disciples the news.

⁹Just then Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” (In Greek, ‘chaire-te’, which is basically the equivalent of us saying, “What’s up!” (It’s really casual and slang. I point that out because we sometimes have this image of the resurrected Jesus walking around like “*ahh...*” but

Jesus was raised just as he lived: a man you could talk to, relate to, and confide in. A friend. They came up, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus told them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there.”

The women had **not sure what to expect at the tomb that day**—

- We know they were worried about a heavy stone sealing the grave that they weren’t sure how to move;
- They were probably worried about the cranky Roman guards who had been there all night guarding the tomb.

What is certain is that the women who came that morning were **NOT expecting a resurrection**. Did you see where in **vs. 1** that it said they came “to view the tomb”?

- This is like our going to a graveside to place flowers. **Mark tells us they had brought perfume** to anoint the body, which was their version of putting flowers.

They weren’t sure what to expect, but the **one thing they absolutely did not expect** was an empty tomb with the stone rolled away and an angel chillaxin’ on the top.

- **You’ve got to hand it to them**—they loved Jesus enough that they want to be near him, even in death, but even they—these faithful women—didn’t expect the resurrection: **Nobody expected no body**. But that’s what exactly **what they found**.

Now, archaeologists are exactly sure where the tomb of Jesus is.

They have it narrowed down, they believe, to 1 of 2 possible locations: one is called ‘the **traditional site**’, it’s a small enclosure just outside the Old City, hewn out of rock; the other is *a tad farther* away, called **the Garden Tomb** and *looks to me more* like what is being described in the Gospels.

- **I’ve been to both**, stood inside of both of them, and **they are a little different**—the traditional one is narrower, the Garden one is

pretty spacious; what I can tell you they have in common is that there is no body in either one.

- No body **was ever found** or **has ever been** found.

The empty tomb is a significant piece of evidence, because producing a body would have been the easiest way to end this movement before it started. But despite the fact that it was put inside a tomb and guarded by Roman soldiers, no body was ever produced! Why?

Here’s what happened instead: ¹¹ As they were on their way, some of the guards came into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. ¹² After the priests had assembled with the elders and agreed on a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money ¹³ and told them, “Say this, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him while we were sleeping.’ ¹⁴ If this reaches the governor’s ears, we will deal with him and keep you out of trouble.” ¹⁵ They took the money and did as they were instructed, and this story has been spread among Jewish people to this day.

- But does the claim that they stole the body **make sense**?
- ***I mean, ask yourself: Is their behavior from this point on consistent*** with what you’d expect from them if they had been lying?

You see, the Christian movement spread through the world faster than anyone would ever have expected by a group of people with no resources and no public stature, compelled forward only by their claim that Jesus had risen from the dead

- **(And BTW, when they said he was risen, it was clear** they did not mean some spiritualized, metaphorical illusion, like “Jesus was risen in spirit” (as if he’s with us like we imagine grandma watching over us); or 2) “he’s risen in our hearts” (like he’s some kind of force); or 3) he’s risen in that his teachings live on through us (like Gandhi). **Jesus was an actual person** with an **actual body** that went into an **actual tomb**, a body that was in the tomb under

Roman guard when they all went to bed on Saturday night and gone when they got up the next morning.

What drove them was the **“fear and great joy”** we see reflected in the women in vs. 8. We’re going to see that in the **Apostles** and the earliest Christians from this point forward—those emotions are going to fill their writings, and they show **us why this story can’t be** either a lie or a made-up legend (which are the two most common rebuttals of the Christian claims of resurrection.)

- The **idea with “a lie” being...** the idea with **“a legend”** being that this was just a myth that grew up over time as the story of Jesus got repeated through oral traditions until gradually these supernatural claims got repeated as fact.

“Fear and great joy”

- **“Fear” because if Jesus was resurrected**, because Jesus was not just some religious leader who taught **good things** and helped people find **fulfillment and peace**. No, he was the Son of God, as he claimed, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. God had come to earth.
- **“Joy:” If the resurrection was true**, God had come to earth for them, not as a foe to condemn, but as a friend to save, and everything they’d ever been afraid of, he had control over.

These emotions, which, again, characterize the testimony of the earliest Christians and fill the writings of the Apostles, **only make sense** if they actually believe Jesus rose from the dead!

For example: In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul says, ³ **For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he**

¹ Paul’s conversion most likely took place AD 34 and his visit with Peter and James on AD 36 (Köstenberger, Quarles, and Kellum, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 1st ed., 398–400).

appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time (plus, there was actually another 1000 who joined by live feed from their North Jerusalem campus—he didn’t even bring them up), most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also...”

- **Now, the book of 1 Corinthians is one of the 4 letters of Paul** that no scholar—conservative or liberal—disputes were actually written by Paul and in the early 50’s A.D.
 - Which means **less than 2 decades** after Jesus died, belief in the resurrection was common among Christians and considered the core Christian belief.
 - When **Paul wrote this, ¹ (vs. 6)** he points out that most of the 500 people who had seen Jesus after he resurrected were still alive.
- **And what’s more, Paul says here that this belief** in the resurrection was something he had received—which means he didn’t come up with it; it was taught to him, first from Jesus and second from others.²
- **In addition to that**, scholars say the **rhythmic way** Paul talks about the death and resurrection of Christ in this passage indicates it was part of a Christian **creed** used to transfer critical information to people who couldn’t read or write.
 - (Paul in 1 Cor 15 basically quoting a song sung in the early Christian church: “Christ **died** for our sins and was **buried in a tomb**. He **rose** from the dead and was **seen by 500.**” I’m sure it rhymed better in Greek—but you get the idea: he’s quoting a song lyric)
- **The point is** that **the resurrection was something believed** by followers of Jesus from the very beginning, not something that got added in through decades of oral tradition.

² **We know Paul’s conversion was around 34 A.D.**, we know that because of the dates he spells out in the book of Galatians) which no one really disputes, which means belief in the resurrection was common then, too.

So, you *really can't write it off* as a legend—

So, were the chief priests right, that the Apostles were lying, then?

Well—and no scholar disputes this, either—Paul, along with all the other Apostles, and these women, **went out testifying with “fear and great joy,”** giving away their wealth and lives freely, claiming that they had seen Jesus risen from the dead.

- **We see that “fear and great joy”** easily in their writings and in the testimonies they gave before their martyrdom.
- **When you lie about something**, you do it to gain something—wealth, or power, or honor. But **their testimonies led them to the opposite place**, but they still did it with “fear and great joy,” and that would only make sense if they really believed he had risen.³

The late **Dr. Thomas Arnold**, professor of Modern History at Oxford University, author of the widely acclaimed 3-volume history of Rome,⁴ said, *“The evidence for Jesus's life, death and resurrection has been shown to be satisfactory (according to the standards of any historian). It (holds up) according to the common rules for distinguishing good evidence from bad. Tens of thousands of persons have gone through it piece by piece as carefully as any judge reviewing the most important case. I have myself done this many times over, not to persuade others but to satisfy myself. Throughout my life I have made a career of studying the histories of times and events, examining and weighing the evidence for what was written about each of them, and I know of no other one fact in the history which is proved by better and fuller evidence than this one: Jesus Christ died and rose again from the dead.”*⁵

³ Maybe you think, “Well, maybe they were a little ‘off’. Religious crazies.” History is full of people like that. But **scholars point out that the rhetorical sophistication** of Paul's letters and the normalcy of the relationships he alludes to in his letters **take him being “crazy” off the table. All of the Apostles (as well as all these women) appear to be ordinary, healthy people** who embraced sacrifice and

Honestly, I don't know how you avoid the conclusion!

The question Matthew and the other Gospel writers pose to us is: What are you going to do with this evidence?

Every week in this series I have shown you how Matthew **places people in the story** that give you possible ways you might respond. You are supposed to see yourself in these groups, because these are potential ways people respond.

Which of these describe you?

Let's start with...

1. The women, who respond with fear and great joy

Again, fear—not like fear when you are terrified that you are in danger—like when your grandma was mad at you—but an awe that came from recognizing Jesus was who he said he was.

Joy. Jesus was God come to earth to rescue us because he loved us, not as a foe to condemn, but as a friend to save. **Not to bring judgment** but to bear it in our place. And everything that we were afraid of in life, he had overcome for us.

And what that means is... (Stop... ADON)

If Jesus raised from the dead...

- **Guilt doesn't have the last word in our lives.**
 - Yes, apart from him, we stand condemned.

martyrdom with fear and great joy because they had seen Jesus risen from the dead, and thus they knew that their sacrifices would be worth it in the end!

⁴ *History of Rome*, (3 volumes, 1838–42). See also [here](#) for similar claims from contemporary scientists and history professors.

⁵ Edited lightly for ease of readability, though the sense has not been changed at all.

- But he took the full penalty of our sin on the cross so that there is no more condemnation for those of us who are in Christ Jesus.
- GUILT DOESN'T HAVE THE LAST WORD (**RIP**)
- The empty tomb means **injustice doesn't have the last word.**
 - Yes, we live in a world where unfair things happen.
 - But God is going to overturn all those bad things and redeem us into a world where all wrongs are righted and he heals us for eternity.
- The empty tomb means **addictions don't have the last word:**
 - In the resurrection God has released a power on earth that can renew all that sin has destroyed.
 - Maybe you've messed up your family, or your marriage, or your own life.
 - This resurrection means that if you ask him, he can make all things new in you.
- The empty tomb means **pain doesn't have the last word.**
 - This world has been described as a veil of tears where we watch everything we love eventually fall apart—everything departs at some point: our families, our bodies.
 - Maybe you've watched someone with Alzheimer's in their last terrible days. Maybe you've experienced the death of a loved one; maybe a child.
 - The **resurrection shows you that that kind of pain** does not have the last word. Through Christ, we are being redeemed to place where there are no more tears or crying.
- The empty tomb means **Despair doesn't have to have the last word.**
 - Listen, as long as Jesus is alive, there is hope for you.
 - No **matter how dark the night may seem** to you right now, because Jesus is alive he can bring the dawn of resurrection into your life.
 - (*I love the image given here in Matthew of Jesus being resurrected at dawn. They all went to bed in despair, tossing*

and turning with worry in their beds. **All that changed with the dawn of resurrection.**

- The empty tomb means **Death doesn't have the last word.**
 - All those who die in Christ are raised with him to an eternal existence—life forever with him and those that love him.
 - I love this quote by **Billy Graham**: "One day you will hear that Billy Graham is dead. Don't you believe it. I'll be more alive than ever, I will just have changed addresses." (PIC)

If Jesus resurrected, none of these things that cause you grief—guilt and injustice and addictions and pain and death and the loss of loved ones—have the final word. I could do others: The empty tomb is the final word.

So, you could respond with fear and joy. Or, you could be like...

2. The chief priests, who close their eyes to the evidence

Rather than seeking out the truth, they pay the guards to lie, because they don't want the resurrection of Jesus to be true.

I think **these represent those people who secretly know**, or at least suspect, that Jesus is who he says he is, but they **come up with reasons not to believe** because they don't like the implications of it being true.

(They might even convince themselves that there are real reasons for doubt—but at the **end of the day they just don't want** to believe.)

- **You see, if Jesus rose from the dead, it means that he is Lord.** He has absolute say over our lives. It means that his agenda trumps our own. It means I can't enjoy pet sins, spend my money or pursue my own agenda as I want anymore. **If he rose from the dead, he lays claim to all of it.**
- If Jesus rose from the dead, **it means that I have nothing really to boast about.** Deeply ingrained in us is a desire to set ourselves

apart from others, to think we are better. If Jesus rose from the dead, it's not true: Like everybody else, I was so bad that Jesus still had to die save me. I am, essentially, on the same footing as every other human that has ever walked the face of the earth.

- That's hard for us to believe, because deep down we want to show why we are better than others.
- To **believe in Jesus takes a humility** that admits you had to be saved like everybody else because you were really no better and deserved hell like the rest of them.
- **And, if Jesus rose from the dead, then I have to admit** that there may be things he is doing on earth that I may not understand. And that is hard for a lot of us because we are angry at God because he didn't do something we thought he should do. **But if Jesus raised from the dead**, we have to acknowledge that ultimately, he is right and we are wrong, and we have to consent to trust him even where we don't understand. And **this is hard for a lot of people** because they just feel angry at God and it's hard to trust him and acknowledge that he has a plan that ultimately will be for the best.

Are you like the chief priests? In your heart you are convinced that Jesus is probably true—or at least you suspect that he might be—but you never really press in because you **don't like the implications** for your life if it is true?

Don't you read this and think, "How pathetic do these chief priest look!" Covering over the resurrection!

- **Don't you realize that your own excuses for not coming to Jesus** will look equally foolish and pathetic when viewed from the lens of eternity? **Why would you turn away from the evidence?**

3. The soldiers, who respond with fear without joy

Vs. 4 gives us the most interesting insight into the soldiers: ⁴The guards were so shaken by fear of him that they became like dead

men. But then, vs. 15 ¹⁵They took the money and did as they were instructed, and this story has been spread among Jewish people to this day.

Fear without joy: These soldiers, of all people, should have been convinced of the truth. But most of them never did anything with it.

- **Scholars** say 1 or 2 of them may have come to Christ later, because otherwise, how would we know this story?
- But **most just took the money** and kept their mouth shut.

Why turn their backs on what had the potential to be the most important moment in history for just a little money?

- **Here's why:** Because the distractions of life have a way of keeping us from considering the most important questions.
- **Illus. Pascal's dance where a monster comes in and savagely murders one of the dancers.** (*Everyone watches, cringes, and then goes back on dancing.*)
 - **How could you ignore it?** Yet that's what we do.

The soldiers represent those who give only passing attention to the weightiest matters. **This is the most important question** you will ever consider: Did Jesus raise from the dead?

Not only is turning away from this question insane, but do you realize what you are **keeping yourself from?**

- **If Jesus raised from the dead**, he can give you joy in the midst of trials, direction and clarity in your times of doubt.
- **If Jesus raised from the dead**, he holds the key to the meaning and fulfillment in life you've always been looking for; he's **the one that can give you hope and joy** even in the face of death—whether your death or those of someone you love.
- **I talked with someone recently** who came back from the funeral of a little girl who had died. And they **said what I often hear** Christians say, "I don't know how you could ever make it through this if you weren't a Christian." **Truthfully, I don't either.** The joy I have of knowing that the grave is not the end, and that I have a

hope that stretches beyond the bounds of this life—I **don't see how you wouldn't despair** without that kind of belief.

Let me show you two final groups: ¹⁶The eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted.

Here we have...

4. The disciples, who worship through their doubts

I talked about this a few weeks ago, but I find this really **encouraging**, that even after all they'd seen, some of the disciples still struggle with doubt.

- **Acts makes it sound like** even after Jesus had started to ascend some were still doubting! They were like, "I don't know... I've seen the David Blaine special..."
- **How could they doubt?** And the answer is that what Jesus was doing, or not doing, was so confusing, that they still had questions.

Doubt is a common Christian experience. Every year I teach a class to college students here in the summer as part of our CP... doubt is a common experience.

But here's the question: Can you let the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus make you doubt your doubts? Maybe there is an explanation to your question.

- **One of my favorite definitions of faith, is that** Faith is when the **unexplainable meets the undeniable.**
- **The question I often ask people** when I'm talking to them is, "What if Jesus appeared to you, right now, and told you that he wasn't going to answer your question but he was who he said he was... Would you be willing to suspend your doubt, or at least hold it loosely?"

- That's what faith is. **UNEXPLAINABLE... FAITH IS ACCEPTING...**

I know that **some of you have stopped believing, stopped coming to church** because of your doubts.

- I want to invite you to come back and seek answers. **Like these disciples**, many of us still have questions.
- **But we have learned to trust Jesus** because of the resurrection (UNEXPLAINABLE / UNDENIABLE), and we are allowing him to teach us through the doubts.
- We'd love for you to join us and to **learn to trust Jesus** here. **Come back next week! IT'S WHO WE ARE**

Talk to your campus pastor and we'll get you into the right group.

Finally, we have...

5. Us, who receive the Great Commission

¹⁸Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

This is the called the Great Commission. It's the ultimate point of why Jesus came. That this good news that Jesus lives, Jesus loves, and Jesus saves should be preached in all nations.

- **In vs. 6 when Jesus told Mary** that he was going to Galilee, this was symbolic for the world. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew,

Jesus' going to Galilee is always synonymous with him reaching out to the Gentiles.⁶

- **Like when you get back from a foreign trip and just want a steak...** This is where Jesus wants to go.
- **It is his focus.**

If this is true—if Jesus really rose from the dead, that he is who he said he was—then we must tell because everyone needs to know! And we **need to go to the ends of the earth** to tell them JESUS LIVES, JESUS LOVES, AND JESUS SAVES, even if it means that we risk incredibly to do it.

- **Illus: Cure for cancer?** What if the evil drug companies offered you money to not release it? (FTR, I actually think they are good and ½ of you work for one) What if people threatened you? I'd hope you say, "It's worth it!"
- **Isn't the gospel 1000x more important even than that?** Aren't we willing to put ourselves through financial sacrifice, even put our lives in danger, to get it out?

Here's an amazing thought: We were the ends of the earth when this was given! These 1st Apostles endured all kinds of suffering and deprivation and persecution so that we can know.

MUSIC

Isn't it our turn? There are still so many places around the world where people haven't had a chance to hear and respond.

- I think of **SE Asia** where I lived...
- OR the **Pamiri people in Central Asia**, who live in the most remote mountain range in the world—and yet some of our people are there taking the gospel to them.
- **They have to hear.**

Let me close by giving a final word to our guests: I always fear that when I talk about this you say, "See, this is what I hate about you Christians. You are always trying to convert us." **Do you know what I say to that?** You are right.

But can you not **at least understand why I am doing it?**

- **Penn Jillette, the atheist:** "A lot of my atheist friends get mad..." I can respect that. What I don't understand is people who believe this and don't try to persuade me. *'How much do you have to hate somebody...?'*
- **I won't force you or pressure you**, but I think **you deserve to know the truth** so that you can decide.

And yes, I'd love you to believe! And chances are that person seated beside you who invited you, they'd love you to believe, too. (Secret: that's why they invited you. They were hoping I'd convert you and it just got weird).

And **maybe you are ready to believe today**, or maybe you are just curious enough that you'd come back and just investigate these things with us. **We'd love that!**

Well, like your CP said at the beginning, we're going to give a chance to you to be baptized. 106 last week.

Some of you are ready to believe now. You are convinced that Jesus is who said he is, that he raised from the dead, and you are ready to declare that through baptism!

- *Baptism is the public declaration... first act of obedience.*
- *Others of you may have been saved in the past... a confession of your faith in Jesus.*

⁶ See Matthew 4:15, for example. John MacArthur, May 19, 1985, "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ Pt. 2," sermon on Matthew 28:8-10

- **What if I was baptized as an infant?** I always say this: I respect that—but baptism in the NT is always a confession of your own faith, a declaration that you are not shamed to go all in with Jesus. So, it's time to ratify your parents decision with a choice to get baptized on your own!
- **We have everything you'll need.**
- "MY FRIEND WON'T WAIT..." YES THEY WILL. IF THEY ARE SO SELFISH AND DEGENERATE THAT THEY WON'T... UBER DRIVERS?
- ****COUNSELORS** getting into place: *not a good time to go to the bathroom!*

Prayer

- Receive Christ
- Strength to stand and step
- **No one should come alone:** do what we did last week and **turn to your neighbor**

