

**Sermon**  
***Easter 2017***

***He is Risen***

Matthew 28:1-10; Acts 10:34-43; Colossians 3:1-4

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A pathologist was testifying in court:

- Lawyer: Doctor, before you performed the autopsy, did you check for a pulse?  
Witness: No.  
Lawyer: Did you check for blood pressure?  
Witness: No.  
Lawyer: Did you check for breathing?  
Witness: No.  
Lawyer: So, then it is possible that the patient was alive when you began the autopsy?  
Witness: No.  
Lawyer: How can you be so sure, Doctor?  
Witness: Because his brain was sitting on my desk in a jar.  
Lawyer: I see, but could the patient have still been alive, nevertheless?  
Witness: Yes, it is possible that he could have been alive and practising law.

Evidence is very important when determining past events. And that is what most court cases are about. The judge or jury have to determine what happened in the past to decide the case. The main method of doing that is taking evidence – what witnesses saw or heard.

Legal proof is different from scientific proof. The principles of the scientific method are based on the ability to repeat events. You make a prediction, you come up with a way of testing the truth of that prediction and you test it. If it is true, the test will show that repeatedly, not just once.

With legal proof, we are not testing principles. We are asking did an event happen once in the past. It is not repeatable. Just because it could happen, does not mean it did happen.

As we turn our attention to historical proof, we are in the field of legal proof not scientific. And when we consider the resurrection of Jesus, it is a historical question. Did this event occur or not? The basis for determining the truth is testimony as it is in court. Being a past event, we can only turn to witnesses for the answer.

Today's readings are the testimony of such witnesses. We have Matthew (himself a witness) telling the account of what he and his fellow disciples experienced. In particular, the women who went to the tomb early that Sunday morning, have described what they saw. As they arrived an angel appeared and opened the sealed and guarded tomb. It was found to be empty. The angel told them that Jesus had risen from the dead.

They then met Jesus. The man who was so dreadfully tortured to death on the Friday, greeted them. Literally, what he says to them is, "Rejoice," (which is not inappropriate under the circumstances!) They go to him and grasp his feet and worship him.

They treat him as God – and he does not stop them. There are several other places in the Bible where people start to worship an angel or a man but in other cases the person himself stops them saying that he is not divine and they must not worship him. But, Jesus does not stop them – therefore he accepts their worship. I have said in the past that Thomas was the first to call him God – that may be true but these two Marys were the first to worship him.

In the passage from Acts, about a year has gone by and the Apostle Peter was preaching to a Roman centurion. He told him about Jesus - summarising his life and his miracles. He emphasised that he was an eye witness to Jesus' life, saying, "We are witnesses of everything he did..."<sup>1</sup> He then testified that Jesus had risen from the dead:

They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen--by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.<sup>2</sup>

In a later letter Peter wrote:

We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty.<sup>3</sup>

Peter did not preach a message based on nice ideas or empty philosophy – he told people what he had experienced.

First the two women, then a few followers, then most of his followers see and hear him, eat with him and touch him. The Apostle Paul tells us that there were 500 gathered together at one time who saw him. Again, these are eye witnesses. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:6 that most of those 500 were still alive when he wrote in about 55 AD, although a few had died.

This was not a case of hallucination – you can't get 500 people hallucinating the same thing together. This was not the wishful thinking of the grief-stricken, not with the evidence of touch, of his eating food with them and meeting them repeatedly over a period of 7 weeks before he ascended.

Sir Edward Clark, a leading barrister, commented on the evidence for the resurrection:

"As a lawyer, I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter day. To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on evidence, and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect. The gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class, and as a lawyer I accept it unreservedly as a testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate."<sup>4</sup>

I want to show you now some other speakers on this matter of evidence.

[Film clip: *Who do you say I am* <https://vimeo.com/187962934> ]

If Jesus is God – what does it mean for us here, today? It means that Jesus died in our place to carry all the sin, all the curses, all the separation from God. He died to be our rescuer, our saviour. His resurrection showed that offering was sufficient and effective. Death could not hold him.

Today, we celebrate his rising to life again. Will you acknowledge him as your Lord and God? He allows you not to; but he calls each of us to follow him. He calls you to obey him. He offers forgiveness and real, abundant life.

I urge you to consider where you stand on this matter.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 10:39

<sup>2</sup> Acts 10:39-41

<sup>3</sup> 2 Peter 1:16

<sup>4</sup> In John Stott, *Basic Christianity* (London: InterVarsity Fellowship, 1969), p. 47.

- If you don't know - you need to sort it out.
- If you know you are not with Christ, you need to ask his mercy.
- If you believe but it doesn't affect you, you need to take seriously the path you started out on so well. You need to follow him whole-heartedly. You need to be worshipping regularly, learning his ways and his truths. You need the support of other Christians and you need to be serving in his Kingdom.

There is an opportunity today to recommit your life to Jesus Christ. For some of you it will be a re-affirming of what has long been true. For some it may be a first time. For some a recommitting after being away for a time. Will you pledge your life to follow Christ?

*Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. Thank you for dying for me on the Cross and paying the price for every sin I have ever committed. I turn from that sin now and ask you to come into my life as my Saviour, Lord and friend. Thank you for hearing this prayer. Amen.*

If that prayer is significant or interesting to you or maybe it irritated you – in any case I would to give you one of these little booklets – it will help you understand better what Jesus has done for you.

Now, for all of us who have trusted Jesus as saviour and accepted his authority, the words from our reading from Colossians apply to us:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.<sup>5</sup>

God bless you!

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<sup>5</sup> Colossians 3:1-4