

# Preparing for Eternity

## Matthew 27:62-28:7

### INTRODUCTION:

What a wonderful day this is! All over the world people are celebrating the resurrection of Jesus as the Son of God, the long awaited Messiah, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

**He has Risen** from the grave and He is alive forevermore!

But we do that every Sunday, don't we? As we gather together with fellow Christians around the Lord's Table, we take the bread which represents Christ's body that was sacrificed for us on the cross and drink the cup which represents His spilt blood, not only to remember that Jesus died for us, but also to proclaim that He is coming again.

### All Stand and Read Scripture

Matthew 27:62-28:7 (NASB)

<sup>62</sup> Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, <sup>63</sup> and said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I *am to rise again.*' <sup>64</sup> Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." <sup>65</sup> Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it *as secure as you know how.*" <sup>66</sup> And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.

<sup>28</sup> Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. <sup>2</sup> And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. <sup>3</sup> And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. <sup>4</sup> The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. <sup>7</sup> Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you."

### Prayer

So we serve a risen Savior, and we look forward to that day when we shall stand with Him in a glorious heavenly home which He has prepared for all who have loved and served Him.

The Apostle Paul wrote of his anticipation of that day.

## 2 Timothy 4:7-8 (NASB)

<sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; <sup>8</sup> in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

You know, as much as I love life, I, too, long for the day when I shall see Him, and be with Him, and be with all those people of God who I had the privilege knowing during my time on earth. Especially those who have gone on before.

I don't know if we will be able to look back at snapshots of our life here, but how wonderful would it be to be able to look back at this precise time and place and see each and every one of us here and look around us and say "Yes, we all made it!" As we are looking at this replay of our life, we would say "Look, Mindy was there and Carol and Bob and Destiny and Roy" (and all the rest of us here) "and **look** we are all here!"

You see, this is precisely WHY we are here this morning, to study God's Word, apply it to our lives, and **PREPARE each other for ETERNITY!** If we can encourage each other to fight the good fight, finish the course, and keep the faith, we also can look forward to the day when we will meet Christ in Heaven!

I want to see family and friends once again. I want to meet the apostles and thank them for their sacrifice. But, more than anything, I can't wait to meet Christ face to face! Not in **fear**, but in total joy and excitement and **THANK HIM** for saving **ME!**

I don't look upon death with fear, but with anticipation.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not wanting to die. But yet, one of these days my physical body will die and so will yours.

One of my messages a few weeks ago was, "**LIFE IS SHORT. DEATH IS CERTAIN. ETERNITY IS FOREVER**" When our life on earth is compared to eternity, it is as a strike of lightning. It comes and it goes in a flash of time. And then we will **ALL** die. And when you die, your eternal soul will face eternity. "**LIFE IS SHORT. DEATH IS CERTAIN. ETERNITY IS FOREVER!**"

It is how we **PREPARE FOR ETERNITY** that will determine if we meet Christ in **fear** or **eternal joy** when He comes again. But the good news is that we no longer have to fear death because Jesus died on the cross for us so we could be reunited with God. And He rose from the dead on the third day to confirm that all He had taught was from God and true.

It is important to understand WHY Jesus HAD to die on the cross. The Holy Spirit reveals to us through the scriptures that we were all born into sin.

The scriptures tell us that Adam and Eve ate of "the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil" in the Garden of Eden. Their sin caused them to die spiritually and be separated from God. For this reason we are guilty sinners as well.

Romans 5:12 (NASB)

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—

Satan thought he had won the battle. He thought he had condemned man to be permanently separated from God because God, by His nature, cannot be in the presence of sin and disobedience. And there is a penalty for sin and it is punishable by spiritual death.

This is WHY Christ had to die on the cross.

Romans 6:23 (NASB)

<sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We were born into a sinful state and had no way to restore ourselves back to God. But God, despite our sinful nature, still loves us and desires that none should perish.

2 Peter 3:9 (NASB)

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

This morning let us look at how Christ's death, burial, and resurrection can affect our lives.

## I. The Evidence of the Resurrection.

### ILLUSTRATION:

Does anyone here NOT believe that World War II actually happened? Why not?

Because there were witnesses! Most of us here today were too young to live through World War II. But Roy was alive at the time. "Roy, did World War II happen?" (Wait for response)

Because there were millions of witnesses, we can **know** that World War II existed even though we were not there. Many of the witnesses actually recorded the events in books, newspapers, magazines, radio and TV broadcasts, and even personal letters that we still have today.

I wasn't there when the Germans surrendered in WWII. But I believe we won and I have two good reasons for believing that.

1. First of all, through the years I have heard the testimony of those who were there and I have read their accounts. They fought the battles. They saw the victory achieved and they passed the good news on, and I believe them.

2. But I also believe because I realize that if we had not won that war our world would be greatly different today. We would not be a free country. We would be an oppressed people. Our society would be different. Our world would be vastly different if Germany had won that war.

The message of Resurrection Sunday is that soldiers and seals and stones can never stop the plan of God. God marches on and His plan will be accomplished. We believe that because the tomb is empty and because Jesus Christ is alive.

I wasn't there when Jesus rose from the dead. But I believe it with all my heart, and I have two good reasons for believing that He arose.

1. First of all, I believe in the resurrection because eyewitnesses have told me that it is true.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (NASB)

<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; <sup>7</sup> then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; <sup>8</sup> and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

I believe it because the Apostle John wrote

1 John 1:1-2 (NASB)

1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life— <sup>2</sup> and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—

In other words, the apostle John is saying, "I want to tell you what we saw, what we felt, what we experienced. I want to tell you about Jesus."

I believe it because reliable people who saw what happened passed it on.

2. But maybe more important than that, I believe it because our world is greatly different because Jesus is alive. Drug addicts have been cured by it, immoral people have been freed by it, hardened criminals have been reformed by it, the hopeless have been encouraged by it, sinners have been sanctified by it, and skeptics have been convinced and convicted by it.

Paul wrote,

1 Corinthians 15:14 (NASB)

<sup>14</sup> and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.

There would be no reason for us to meet this morning if Christ were not alive!

## II. The Power of the Resurrection.

As we learned in last week's message, Jesus, through God, is in total control of this final week. In fact every molecule of creation for all time has been and will be in sovereign control by the authority of God.

Every action that will unfold will be scripted by God. God spares no details. The unusual arrangement to Jesus made to send two of His disciples to get a young donkey that had never been ridden.

These were done to convey to you and to me, beyond a shadow of any doubt, that every event, every person, down to the betrayal of Christ by Judas was **ALL** prescribed by the Father. It is the unfolding of the eternal purpose and plan of God for this week to rescue those who will believe in His Son from the curse of sin.

Let's look at some of the supernatural events that occurred in this final week and how God set up the scenario.

Christ entered this world with no fanfare. He was born in a manger in Bethlehem. But the final week was setup so millions of people could witness the **death** of His Son on the cross, His **burial**, and His **resurrection**. He chose the weekend of the Passover. This was the largest event in the world and it occurred in Jerusalem in front of 3 million people.

Matthew 27:50-54 (NASB)

<sup>50</sup> And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. <sup>51</sup> And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. <sup>52</sup> The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; <sup>53</sup> and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many. <sup>54</sup> Now the **centurion**, and **those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus**, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

The chief priests and Pharisees found that out that trying to alter God's plan was pretty silly. After they had crucified Jesus they came to Pilate and Matthew tells us,

Matthew 27:63-66 (NASB)

<sup>63</sup> ..."Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I *am* to rise again.' <sup>64</sup> Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." <sup>65</sup> Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it *as* secure as you know how." <sup>66</sup> And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.

I don't know if you see the humor in that, but I think God must have. Can you just imagine the hosts of heaven looking down, watching the priests and Pharisees issuing orders, and those soldiers grunting and straining to roll the stone into place, putting the seal of the Roman Empire on it, and then standing guard to make sure that nothing happened?

Matthew 28:2-4 (NASB)

<sup>2</sup> And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. <sup>3</sup> And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. <sup>4</sup> The **guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men.**

What a scene! God spoke the word, and instantly an angel descends, the earth is shaken, the stone is rolled away, and the soldiers are paralyzed with fear.

The stone was only rolled away so that those coming could see in...not for Jesus to get out. He was no longer in there anyway.

You see, the chief priest and Pharisees were trying to stop the inevitable. They were trying to seal up the Son of God. But, you can't stop God. Not with stones in front of tombs or seals or soldiers. And we smile at their futile efforts. You can't stop what God is trying to do in our world because God will be victorious and you will either be on His winning side or you won't.

And then to top it all off, Jesus appeared in person to hundreds of people after the resurrection to prove that He had risen from the dead. More witnesses.

### **III. The Triumph of the Resurrection.**

John 3:16-17 (NASB)

<sup>16</sup> "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

#### **A. Forgiveness of Sin.**

Of course, the main benefit is that Christ defeated Satan and provided a way that our sins could be completely forgiven. Satan thought he had won the battle when he caused mankind to fall away from God in a bondage of sin that we were incapable of overcoming. But God loved us so much that despite our sinful condition, He was willing to allow His Son to die on the cross as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. Most importantly, He raised Christ from the dead to confirm that everything that Christ had taught and prophesied was true.

#### **B. Freedom from the Fear of Death.**

As a Christian, another benefit is the way we look at life and death. As Christians, we no longer have to fear death. When God talks about death in the Scripture He uses different words than we use.

- **Jesus talked about death as being like a wedding.**

Jesus told us that the church is like a bride waiting for the coming of the bridegroom and that glorious moment when she will be with Him forever and ever.

- **He also tells us that death is like sitting down at a banquet with God.**

God has invited us to His banquet. It will be a time of joy and happiness and fellowship, and Jesus says, "Death is like that."

- **Jesus also says, "Death is like going home."**

Have you ever been away from home for a period of time and got homesick? Or how many times have you reached the end of a busy day and you were finally able to say, "I'm going home!" It is wonderful to be able to go home and relax, to feel the love and warmth of home, and to know that you have a share in all that happens there.

This is how Jesus describes death.

### **C. Eternal Life with God.**

All of this results in the benefit that God provided a way for us to be saved through His Son and obtain eternal life with Him for eternity. It is a free gift of God.

Fifty days after Christ's death, Peter was preaching to the Jews on the day of Pentecost. I would like to use some of his sermon here.

**Acts 2:36-41 (NASB)**

**36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."**

**37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"**

Peter reminded them that they had crucified the son of God. The scriptures tell us that they were pierced to the heart.

- They had seen the day turn dark.
- They had felt the earth shake, and seen the rocks split.
- They had seen the veil ripped in half in the temple.
- They had seen the people who were once dead walking around in the streets of Jerusalem.
- They had heard and many had seen the empty tomb.
- They had heard of the guards who had seen an angel in front of the tomb.
- And no doubt, some had even seen the risen Christ.

Just like the centurion and the guards at the cross and the guards at the tomb, these people unconditionally believed that **"This truly was the Son of God"**. They became witnesses for us because if these things had not really happened, they would have just laughed at Peter's message.

So they asked Peter, "What must we do"? And here was Peter's response.

**38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.  
39 For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many**

as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” 40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!” 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

## **CONCLUSION:**

As I thought about this Easter message I wanted so much to paint a beautiful picture of an empty tomb and a beautiful spring day. I wanted to lift up the glorified Christ and say, "That is what it is all about."

But I am fearful. I am so fearful that on an Easter Sunday I might paint a picture of false hope. And because the message of His resurrection is so wonderful, I might cause you to think that everything is all right – but it isn't, not for everyone.

You see, some homes are peaceful, while others are not. Some marriages succeed, but others do not. Some banquets are occasions of joy, but some are not.

In the same way, the empty tomb is the greatest source of joy for a Christian. But it is also the greatest source of judgment and condemnation for those who are not.

We dare not forget that this life is a **preparation for eternity**. An eternity in which we will be among the saved or the lost forever and ever.

If you believe the Jesus is the Son of God as the Jews did on the day of Pentecost, the next step is to 38 “Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”.

We offer God's invitation, realizing that maybe there is someone here who has never ever accepted Jesus as Savior. If God is tugging at your heart this morning, the promise conveyed by Peter is true for you also...

39 For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”

**This is purpose of our life, to Prepare for Eternity.** If you are without Jesus then come now, repent of your sins, and be obedient to Him in Christian baptism, arise to walk in newness of life. God's invitation is offered to you. Will you come as we stand and we sing?

## **He is Lord.**

He is Lord. He is Lord.  
He has risen from the grave and He is Lord.  
Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess  
That Jesus Christ is Lord.