The Authenticity of the Risen Savior
Matthew 28:11-13
90-282

We have been, over the last four Sunday nights, looking at some portraits of Christ. Obviously at this particular time of year there's a greater amount of interest in the person of Jesus Christ because it is Christmas season, after all. And although our country seems to be making a maximum effort to remove Christ from Christmas, He still remains at the focus for most people and it's a good time to be reminded of the importance of knowing the salvation that comes alone in Him. And we've been looking at some portraits of Christ over the last three Sunday nights and another one tonight is before us.

In the tenth chapter of Romans, and you don't have to look at that, I'm just going to comment on it, in the tenth chapter of Romans and verse 9, there's a very important statement there. The Bible says this, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved." That's a very definitive statement. Saved from what? Saved from divine judgment. Saved from eternal hell. Saved from punishment. Saved from your sin. Saved from guilt. How is one saved from that? If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you shall be saved.

One of the things that must be believed in order for a person to be delivered from sin and death and judgment and hell is the resurrection of Christ. And so I want to talk about that and I want you to look at the end of the gospel of Matthew. Matthew is the first gospel in the New Testament, the first record in the order of the New Testament, record of the life and ministry of Jesus. And, of course, Matthew culminates his gospel with the history of our Lord's resurrection.

There was a scientist many years ago in Canada by the name of G.B. Hardy who was searching for the true religion. And he said, "I really have only two questions. One, has anybody ever cheated death? And two, did he make a way for me to follow? Those are my only two questions." And he went on a search and he found that Buddhist's tomb was occupied. And so was Mohammed's and so was every other religious leader who ever lived. But Jesus' tomb has been empty since three days after He was crucified. This was a profound discovery, that this Jesus who claimed to be God validated that claim by rising from the dead. That answered the first question. And the second question, did He make a way for me to do it as well was answered by the words of Jesus who Himself said, "Because I live, you shall live also." His resurrection then becomes the guarantee of our resurrection. His resurrection is not only the proof that He is God but it is the prototype of our own resurrection.

You cannot accept the Jesus of the Bible and not accept His resurrection. And if you acknowledge that He rose from the dead by His own divine power, then He stands alone as absolutely unique, for no one has ever been able to raise himself from the dead. We look for the reality of life after death.

That's not foreign to us. Even Solomon said in articulating human wisdom in Ecclesiastes 3:11, "God has set eternity in their heart." Part of being human is feeling the pull of eternity. Part of being human is having built into you reason, an understanding of cause and effect which takes you back to the original cause which has to be God. Part of being human is having moral law written in your heart. Part of being human is having a conscience that excuses or accuses you when you do what is good or what is evil. And part of being human is feeling the tug of immortality. And that's why Hardy asks the question. What happens after I die? Whether you're talking about American Indians who used to bury the pony with the warrior who died so that he would have a horse to ride at the happy hunting ground, or the Greeks who were buried with a silver coin in their mouth so they could pay the fare across the mystic river. Or the Pharaohs who were buried in the pyramids with a solar boat so they could sail through the future life. Eternity is written in the human heart. It's just not acceptable to us, to most of us, that we are protoplasm waiting to become manure and make the flowers grow at the cemetery. There is something in us that reaches out to immortality and is planted there by God. And to put it simply, you will live forever. You will live forever somewhere. The question is whether you have an eternal life with God or an eternal death in punishment away from Him, a deathlike existence.

And in order to be sure that you have eternal life, the Bible says you must confess Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead. You must believe that Jesus died as a sacrifice for sin and rose from the dead. Now there are certainly many people who are skeptical about the resurrection and they want to deny the resurrection. It's particularly a quasi scholarly thing to do. To come up with the idea, if you're a professor at some university or if you're a research person or sort of self-styled scholar, even a recognized scholar, it's...it's sort of popular, it sort of goes with that territory to be skeptical of the Bible, about everything in the Bible, for that matter, to be skeptical about Jesus' virgin birth, to be skeptical about His deity, to be skeptical about His miracles, to be skeptical about His death and certainly to be skeptical about His resurrection. But the Bible gives the record of His resurrection. And it also gives the record that there were many people who saw Him after He was raised, over 500 people. In fact, 500 saw Him at one time and that's a historical record laid down for us not once but several times in the gospels and reiterated through the rest of the New Testament, affirming the reality of that by the testimony of others.

What are the explanations if we're going to deny the resurrection? If we're going to say Jesus didn't really rise, how do we explain it away? Well through the years several theories have been offered, and I'll just throw them out because I want you to see how people who reject the resurrection think. First is called the swoon theory. That says Christ never died, he just went into a semi-coma. He was just down deep in some kind of sleep because of all of the suffering that had occurred on the cross and they assumed that He was dead, and so they put Him in the tomb and, you know, when they wrapped Him and put the spices that they typically did in the wrapping, it was the reviving effect of the spices, the coolness of the tomb and He woke up and he showed up and His disciples had assumed that He had risen from the dead. Is there any possibility that that could be true? Well, it might help you to know that it was invented in 1600 so it took 1600 years to think that one up, a man by the name of Venterini(?). And before 1600 all early records were emphatic about the fact that He died. And everybody knew the Roman proficiency at killing people, at crucifying people at the tens of thousands and at knowing whether someone was dead. And the record says that when they came by they knew He was already dead so they ran a spear into His chest and out came blood and water, indicating the severing of the pericardium around the heart. He was dead.

If He was only in a semicoma, then you have to conclude that He successfully survived a really an unbelievable beating, lashing prior to the cross. He survived crucifixion. He survived the spear rammed into Him. He survived being handled like a corpse would be handled with not particularly good care. He survived being entombed with about, I suppose as much as 75 pounds of spices wrapped around His body, including His head. He survived in that condition three days with no food or water, woke up without medical help, having lost most of His blood. And then moved the stone away, chased off the Romans who were guarding His tomb and convinced everybody that He was God. And by the way, when He was done with that He walked seven miles to Emmaus on feet that had been shredded by nails. Give me a break. It's ridiculous.

Well the other theories go like this. There is what's called the "no burial" theory. He wasn't there because He was never put there. The reason when they went to the tomb they didn't find Him is He was never put there. They took Him off a cross and they threw Him in Gehenna which is the city dump where they threw criminals, the corpses of criminals. He wasn't there on Sunday because He hadn't been put there on Friday.

That theory doesn't work. Why did the leaders want the tomb sealed if nobody was in it? That doesn't make a lot of sense, does it? And why did they ask the Romans to guard it if it was empty? And then why did they invent the story that the body was stolen, why didn't they go to the dump and produce it?

Oh there's a third theory offered called the hallucination theory, that He never really did come out of the tomb. All the people who thought they saw Him were hallucinating. They thought they saw Jesus because they wanted to see Him so badly that they actually actualized Him in some kind of mental image that they thought was reality.

That theory doesn't work for too many reasons to go over. The tomb was empty, it was empty, that's not a hallucination. For all the disciples who...who wanted to see Him alive so badly that they might have hallucinated Him into some kind of semi-reality, there were the Romans who had no interest in His being alive, and they knew He wasn't there. And how could the church be built on hallucinations? How could 500 people have the same hallucination at the same moment, when 500 saw Him at the same moment in Galilee? And since they didn't expect Him to rise from the dead, they were sad and unbelieving and bemoaning that He was gone, how could they in any sense be pathologically prepared to hallucinate or to sort of mentally actualize a supposed resurrection?

Well, you say what about a mass hallucination? Don't they happen? There have been some mass hallucinations like Fatima but that was something Satan would...would do, or demons would do. And certainly Satan and demons would never give the resurrection of Christ sort of hallucinating false representation. And, of course, we have to ask the question again, where's the body? If it's only a hallucination, what happened to the body?

Another view is called the telepathy theory. This says there was no physical resurrection but God sent back telepathic mental images to the disciples so they would think that He was alive. This wasn't their own wish and sort of actualized hallucination, this was God.

That doesn't fly because that makes God a deceiver, doesn't it? That makes God in some

kind...some kind of a trickster. It founds the Christian gospel on deceit. If God says you have to believe He was raised from the dead in order to be saved, and He wasn't raised from the dead at all, but God simply tricked you into thinking He was, then God is Satan. It makes liars out of all the disciples, all those who claimed to touch Him, all those who claimed to have held Him, to seen Him and heard Him and talked with Him and eaten with Him and walked with Him. And if it was telepathic, it must have been a telepathic video because it ran for more than seven miles on the way to Emmaus. And then that telepathic image sat down and ate. That's a stretch.

Furthermore, the disciples on the road to Emmaus with whom Jesus after He rose was walking didn't recognize Him. Maybe God wasn't able to get the picture into focus. And again you have to ask the question, where was the body? If it was a hallucination why wasn't the body still in the grave?

There's another theory that's been popular through the years called the seance theory. A medium, conjurer of spirits, somebody who is a contact person with evil spirits, conjured up the spirit of the dead Jesus by occult power. That doesn't work either because it doesn't answer the question where was the body and why is the tomb empty and how could they touch Him and talk with Him and walk with Him and eat with Him over a prolonged period?

Well there's another theory called the mistaken identity theory. Someone impersonated Jesus. Whoever impersonated Jesus must have crucified himself because when Jesus met with the disciples He said, "Look, see the nail prints in My hand, see the spear thrust in My side." It's a pretty high price to generate scars like that to make a false impression. And then how do you explain that this person who is pretending to be Jesus walked through a wall? Or miraculously created breakfast by the side of the Sea of Galilee? Or appeared and vanished? And how do you explain that this person impersonating Jesus ascended into heaven while everybody was watching? Cause that's what Jesus did. And the disciples had been with Jesus twenty-four seven for three years, they knew who He was. They couldn't be fooled by an imposter and after all, where was the body again? And why was the tomb empty?

It's amazing the extent to which people will go to fabricate ridiculous explanations to explain away the one thing that if they would believe that would save them from eternal judgment. Renan, the French atheist, really was bent on destroying the resurrection. He said it was based on the testimony of one eccentric delirious frightened woman named Mary Magdalene who had seven demons and was hysterical to the point of insanity. Oh, of course, there's no evidence of that whatsoever, that was just his own evil heart spewing out his attitude toward Jesus. No different than...today I was reading a CNN report where of all places there's a play going on at St. Andrews University in Scotland where Scottish reformation started called "Corpus Christi" written by an American that depicts Jesus as a drunken, foul-mouthed homosexual. You can come up with any kind of concoction you want if you're going to reject the true Christ. But all the evidence is going to militate against that. There is enough evidence in the Bible to believe the truth, that's why it's there. It's written so that we might believe that He is the Christ, that He died, that He rose again. The evidence is all in. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then why didn't the authorities produce the body? They could have stopped the church in its track. They could have stopped all apostolic preaching. They could have ended all discussion.

Now some...some skeptics and some critics understand this, one named G.D. Yarnold wrote a book called *Risen Indeed*and he suggested that the body of Jesus evaporated into gases in three days.

There's no evidence for that. Of course it's ludicrous. But he understands the problem. If Jesus didn't rise, then how do you explain an empty tomb and no body?

Well, the most common theory and the one that is held up most often in critical circles is the theft theory. That the body of Jesus was stolen to falsify the resurrection. The disciples came. They somehow got pass the Roman guard, the seal, rolled the stone away, stole the body. Well some have actually said the Jews did it to make sure He didn't rise from the dead. Well, then why would they secure it in the tomb and put the Roman guard there if they were intending to steal it? That's ridiculous. Somebody else has suggested the Romans did it. They had absolutely no reason to do it, not believing in Jesus or in resurrection and being on guard there. That leaves the only logical possibility that the disciples stole it and even if they could have, would they have? Would they have stolen the body?

Let's look at the end of Matthew and chapter 28. This is really an amazing portion of Scripture. Verse 11, this is after the resurrection, okay? "Now while they were on their way, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. And when they had assembled with the elders and counseled together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers." What's that called? Bribery. "And they said, 'You are to say His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.'" This is the fabrication of the lie that proves the resurrection is true. And verse 14, "If this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble. And they took the money and did as they had been instructed. And this story was widely spread among the Jews and is to this day and even to this day." There are many who are still saying the disciples stole the body.

Go back to verse 11. The guard, the Roman guard, not just one person but the guard which is the plural sense here, reported to the chief priests, the Jewish leaders, the religious leaders of Israel, what had happened. And what had happened was the resurrection. Now this is a problem for them. They've been trying to eliminate Jesus for a long time. Mass murder was employed to try to kill Him when He was a child in the massacre that Herod brought against all the male children under two in the vicinity of Bethlehem. They...they finally captured Him through the betrayal of Judas, they used injustice to sentence Him to death. They used blackmail of Pilate to get him to execute Him. They tried to use force to keep His body in the tomb. And so desperate are they to eliminate Jesus that even when He rises from the dead and they've been told that's what happened, they will use bribery to silence the truth of His resurrection and to perpetrate a lie.

Let's go back in the chapter to the first verse and kind of get the picture here. "After the Sabbath, Saturday, began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Sunday. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave where Jesus had been since Friday and behold a severe earthquake had occurred for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, came and rolled the stone away and sat on it. And his appearance was as lightning and his garment as white as snow...and look at this...and the guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men." This is a very traumatic experience...an earthquake, an angel, stone rolls away and the guards were the ones who went into comatose shock.

Now from there we jump to verse 11. "While they were on their way," who's that? The women on their way to tell the disciples that Jesus was alive. You remember verse 5, the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, I know you're looking for Jesus who's been crucified, He's not

here for He has risen just as He said, come see the place where He was lying and go quickly and tell His disciples He's risen from the dead." Verse 8, "They departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them and they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him."

"Now, while they were on their way, behold some of the guard came into the city." Not all the guard, I think probably some of them stayed at the tomb. By now the stone is away, the earthquake has settled down. They're coming out of their sort of instantaneous coma that they were thrust into by the blazing glory of this angel. By now they have checked the tomb. They have checked the grave and like everybody else who checked it, they have found grave clothes lying in their place but no Jesus. They don't know what to do about this. So some of them are sent, dispatched to go to the chief priests to tell them what happened.

Go back to chapter 27 for a minute and verse 62. On the next day, which is the one after the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gather together with Pilate. This is after Christ has been buried. And now the chief priests and the Pharisees get together with Pilate and they say, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive, that deceiver said after three days I'm going to rise again. Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day lest the disciples come and steal Him away and say to the people He's risen from the dead. And the last deception will be worse than the first. Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard. I'll give you some soldiers, go make it as secure as you know how.' And they went and made the grave secure and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone."

This Roman guard was given to the chief priests and the Pharisees by Pilate, delegated really from Pilate to the authority of the Jewish leaders. Believe me, Pilate wanted no more to do with Jesus. If there was going to be anymore trouble with this Jesus, Pilate's wanted to do anything he could to mitigate it, even turning over some Romans to the Jewish leaders to use as a guard to make sure the disciples did not come and steal His body. You know, since they were under the Jewish authority, when the earthquake came and the angel appeared and they all went down into a coma, when the time came when they finally came back to their senses, when they checked the tomb and nobody was there, they knew where they had to go and to whom they had to report because they had been delegated of the Jewish authority, the official leaders of Israel, the Sanhedrin, they needed to know what happened. And so it says in verse 11, "They were on their way into the city while the women were on their way to tell the apostles, they came into the city, reported to the chief priests all that had happened." What did they say? "Well, we were out there and there was this tremendous earthquake, unbelievable earthquake, everything was shaken all over the place and then there was this blazing glorious angelic being and the stone was rolled away and the seal was broken and, you know, we don't remember what happened after that for who knows how long. We do know this, the body is gone."

And their worst fear had come true, these Jewish leaders. Interestingly enough, the Jewish leaders become the recipients of the first news of the resurrection of Jesus. He said it, He said, "Destroy this body and in three days I'll raise it again." I don't think the disciples had even yet heard since the women were still on their way. And the story of the Romans was a truthful report. They showed to the chief priests everything that happened. There are a couple of comments in the fourth chapter of Acts. In the fourth chapter of Acts, Peter is preaching and you know all about that. And if you go down to verse...well, let's see, Acts 4:10....

Peter filled with the Holy Spirit says, "Let it be known to you, all of you, all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead." Here's Peter preaching the resurrection very soon after. "By this name this man stands here before you in good health." Of course he's talking about that healing. Back in verse 2 it says, "Being greatly disturbed," that is the leaders because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead, so they laid hands on them and threw them in jail. They came right out preaching the resurrection, preaching the resurrection.

Now go down to verse 16. He ordered them to go outside and the council began to confer with one another and this is what they said, "What shall we do with these men for the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem and we cannot deny it? But in order that it may not spread any further, we've got to stop them from speaking." It's really amazing, isn't it? They never deny the miracle. They just want to stop it from spreading. And, you know what? That's exactly what goes on today with skeptics and critics, they can't deny it. There's no way to deny it. They can't come up with a reasonable explanation. They cannot undo the testimony of multiple eyewitnesses on different occasions. There's really no way to deny it, but they...they hate it, they resent it, they just want to stop it from being proclaimed.

Do you remember when they were crucifying Jesus back in Matthew 27 the chief priests were mocking Him? The elders and scribes, the Sanhedrin, the same people were mocking Him. And this is what they said, "Let Him come down from the cross and we will believe in Him." He did better than that, He endured the cross, died there and came out of the grave and they still didn't believe in Him. He did something greater than come off the cross, He came out of the grave. And that news panicked them. They should have fallen on their faces, embraced the truth that He was God the Messiah, seen Him as their Lord, declared their faith in His resurrection, repented of their sin and false religion and been delivered from sin and death and judgment. But they weren't interested in that. And it's always that way with skeptics, it's always that way with critics, it's always that way with the hard-hearted. So all they wanted to do was stop the spread of the story, get rid of it. And so in verse 12, the guard reports in verse 11, the chief priests in verse 12 call a council, the assembly with the elders counsel together. Matthew uses this phrase, "assembled with the elders," as a technical term to discuss the meeting of the Sanhedrin, 70 men, the elders of Israel who had the leadership responsibilities. They had a formal meeting, it would be like a senate meeting. And they took formal council. This same phrase about counseled together is used three other places in Matthew to refer to the passing of a resolution in this body. This is a formal constitution of the ruling body of Israel and they've got a problem on their hands. The body is gone, the tomb is open, a supernatural earthquake has occurred, a supernatural angel has appeared. The Romans were literally knocked into coma by the shock of the event. Grave clothes are visible lying exactly where they were indicating that nobody took Him out of there. He passed through the grave clothes and left them right where they were. They know that.

So they get together and establish a resolution and their resolution is...we're going to create a lie. We're going to perpetrate a lie. And they really have to do a couple of things. One, they have to bribe the soldiers. So, verse 12 says, "They gave a large sum of money to the soldiers," *argurea*in the Greek, silver, it's actually silver. Judas they had bought for 30 pieces of silver, that's what they did, you know. They weren't finished trying to buy off Jesus or sell Him off cheap.

This must have been a lot more since...there could be as many as a couple dozen men in the guard and there might have been ten or twelve men who came back to report, we don't know, maybe less than that. But there were a lot of men to buy off here so the sum might have been much more than the 30 pieces they give to Judas. But they're glad frankly to pay any price for this lie. So they bribe the soldiers to lie.

Secondly, they tell the soldiers to spread the lie. In verse 13 they said, "You are to say His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep." That is so ridiculous. How would you know they stole Him if you were asleep? It's ludicrous from its very outset. We know what happened because we were asleep. But this was the only thing that made sense. Forget the hallucination. Forget the seance. Forget all those other ridiculous theories that make no sense because they can't explain the empty tomb and where the body is. At least this explains the empty tomb where the body is. The disciples stole it. Forget the imposter theory, the telepathic theory, the no burial theory, the swoon theory. They knew this was the only thing that made any sense. And so the soldiers become preachers of the anti-resurrection gospel. They've got nothing at stake. They're crass, tough men. They could care less about Jesus. All they want is money. They're glad to accommodate. But, of course, this is ridiculous.

They shouldn't have been sleeping, by the way. They knew that. And I don't think they were. I mean, the Roman watch was two to three hours max. Three hours, basically four watches through the night of three hours cover the twelve hours if there was that much darkness. So sometimes it would go down to two hours. They just had the...whoever was on watch, and there would be more than one, it would be a few, they would all have to fall asleep in a very short watch of just two or three hours at the most. They didn't fall asleep. And I'll tell you another reason they didn't fall asleep, not only because they had short watch, because if you fell asleep and lost your prisoner, what happened? You lost your life, that was Roman military law. That was a capital crime in the Roman military. If you lost your prisoner, you paid with your life. And so this is a...this is no small issue to them. We're going to go out and we're going to say, now let's get this right, you've given us all this money and we're going to say that the body was stolen while we were asleep. That's a risky position because the death penalty was prescribed for soldiers that failed in their duty and lost their prisoners.

So in verse 14, the Jewish leaders say this, "If this should come to the governor's ears, we'll win him over and keep you out of trouble." The plot thickens, right? Pilate was really the commander of the Roman troops. It was Pilate that commissioned these men and handed them over to Jewish authority. And they say we will persuade him, is what it says, or we will satisfy him, we will secure you, we will remove your anxiety. We'll keep you out of trouble. If it looks like a court marshal and a death, we'll come to your rescue.

So they bribed the soldiers with the money. They promise a protection. They told them to go spread the lie everywhere. And verse 15, "They took the money and did as they had been instructed," and here, friends, are the first preachers that came from the resurrection, Roman soldiers. And they said, "He didn't rise. The disciples stole His body while we were sleeping," that's it. They did as they were told, as they were taught, *didasko*. And it was effective. "This story was widely spread among the Jews and is to this day." Matthew's writing 30 years later, it was still the conventional wisdom. It's still the best critical theory today among liberals and deniers of the Bible. They knew the truth, they knew it, the Romans knew it, the Jews knew it, they knew it, they never denied any of His miracles. They

knew that the miracles were spreading all over everywhere. They never denied that, but they hated the truth, they produced a lie, published a lie to save their own hides. And the Romans joined in for money.

So non-believers become the first proclaimers of the anti-resurrection. And since that time the world has always been full of those people who for money will lie about Jesus, right? Pick up *Newsweek* magazine, read the article on the birth of Jesus written by a man who for money will propagate the lies about Jesus, including His birth and life and death and resurrection and Second Coming. It all gets attacked in that article. And it became the common view 25, 30 years later, as late as Justin Martyr who lived I think about 115 on to about 160 something in that second century. Justin Martyr says, "You Jews selected men, sent them into all the world proclaiming that a certain atheistic and lawless sect had arisen from one Jesus, a Galilean deceiver whom we crucified, but His disciples stole Him at night from the tomb and deceived men by saying that He's risen from the dead and ascended into heaven. That absurd and blasphemous medieval Jewish legend became so popular it was known as *Toldath Jesu(??)*." It found its way not only into the comments of Justin Martyr speaking to the Jew Triphon(?) but it becomes a medieval legend and here it is in modern liberal theology today. The lie still abounds about this.

You know, from the standpoint of the life of Jesus it is the last insult against Him. There were insults against Him from the start of His life and certainly all through His ministry. This is the last insult, the apostasy of Israel is final. They lied even about His birth. Do you remember what they said? They said to Jesus one day, they said, "We're not born of fornication." That's...that's an old one, isn't it? People say that today, that's the DaVinci Code. Jesus had a relationship with Mary Magdalene and they had a child. Or it's the old story of Mary getting pregnant by a soldier named Pantera and Jesus being an illegitimate child. That starts with the Jews at the time of Jesus who said, "At least we weren't born of fornication," denying the virgin birth. They denied the beginning and they denied the end. They lied about the start and they lied about the finish. The Bible makes it clear that He was born to a virgin. And all the evidence indicates that that is indeed the case.

But if He is God virgin born, then they have to accept the fact that what He says about them is true. And they won't accept that, so they lie about His virgin birth, even though the facts are clear. They lie about His resurrection even though the facts are clear. It's all about loving sin, it's all about hating righteousness. It has nothing to do with the evidence. I mean, if you just look at the resurrection of Jesus Christ, an empty tomb, grave clothes sitting there, an earthquake, stone moved, Roman soldiers in coma, immediately there are at least ten appearances of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, to another woman, to Peter, to two on the road, to twelve on the following Sunday evening, to the twelve again eight days later, to seven of them by the sea in Galilee, to five hundred in Galilee, then to James, to eleven of them minus Judas on the Mount of Olives from which He ascends into heaven. They knew He was alive. And that's why, listen, they would go out and preach the resurrection and die for it. You can't turn people into martyrs for a lie. If they had stolen His body, why would they go die? Why would they preach a risen Christ that they knew was a deception and die for that? They were unanimous in their affirmation that He was alive, unanimous in their proclamation that He was alive, unanimous in their willingness to die for that truth. Their faith was so confident and so strong, it was absolutely unwavering. They set themselves against the very authorities that had killed Jesus and they knew that they would receive the same. They boldly confronted the same leaders from whom they once had run in fear. When Jesus was taken prisoner, those apostles scattered in fear. Now they run right back to confront those same leaders with a

resurrection proclamation. And it's so extensive and so constant that the leaders say, "You have filled Jerusalem with this teaching." And thousands of people believed, three thousand on Pentecost, thousands more and thousands more. And in a matter of weeks there must be 25 thousand believers.

By what power then do you turn cowardly, simple, poor, illiterate preachers into world changers? Not by a lie, not by a deception. They were not eloquent. They were not educated. They were not brilliant. They were not oratorical. They were not masters of argument and logic. They were not magicians. They were not charlatans and clever con men highly skilled. They were not particularly persuasive or clever. The power of their life that has changed the world up to this very day, and will continue to do it, was the reality that Jesus Christ was alive. It's the only explanation. They believed in the resurrection and they preached it. They had every opportunity to satisfy themselves as to the truth of it. They saw Him. The ate with Him. They touched Him. They met with Him. They could examine all the evidence. They could touch His hands, and His side, and His feet, and they did. That's why Acts begins, "Jesus appeared to them with many infallible proofs," infallible proofs. They were absolutely convinced and they gave their lives for it. And the Holy Spirit inspired them to write the record of the New Testament which is convincing to all those who are open to it. And we would give our lives for the same fact that Jesus Christ lives. The Jews couldn't deny the resurrection. No way. All they could do was lie.

You say, "Well, couldn't it have been the truth that the disciples stole the body?" Look, you don't bribe people with money to tell the truth. They were already coming with the truth. They came and told the Jewish leaders the truth. They had to buy them off and bribe them to lie. So the lie becomes the greatest proof of the truth. They knew that the only way they could explain an empty tomb was that the disciples came and stole the body. And so that's the lie they came up with. But there's no way those disciples scattered and cowardly and fearful and having a hard time believing and morose and despondent about losing Jesus Christ as they are obviously indicating in the trip to Emmaus when they're moaning that He's gone. No way they would have been transformed into powerful preachers who would die for the truth of the resurrection if in fact the resurrection didn't really happen and they didn't have ample evidence. It's ludicrous to believe that the guards were asleep, all of them, and could still report exactly what happened. It's ludicrous to believe that they would have to be paid to tell the truth. The whole explanation is self-condemned and what you're left with is Jesus rose from the dead. And if He rose from the dead, He has power over death. If He has power over death, He has life in Himself, He's the source of life. If He's the source of life, He's God who gives life. If He's God then what He says is true and what He says is salvation is only through Him.

Simon Greenleaf, the Harvard professor of Law wrote this, "All the Christianity asks of men is that they would be consistent with themselves. That they would treat its evidences as they treat the evidence of other things. And that they would try to judge its witnesses as they deal with their fellow men when testifying to human affairs and actions in human tribunals. The result would be an undoubting conviction of their integrity, ability and truth." Simon Greenleaf says...Just apply the same laws to the testimonies of those who saw the risen Christ that you would apply in any court case, stack up the witnesses, the eyewitnesses, in excess of 500 on numerous different occasions at least ten, all affirming the same thing, all eyewitness accounts, all having seen, heard and touched the risen Christ and just treat their witnesses with the same integrity that you would treat any other witnesses in a human court and the evidence is overwhelming.

The Lord Jesus rose from the dead. That means that He is God. But it also means this, that He had accomplished on the cross the work that God sent Him to do. God the Father sent God the Son to do a work on the cross. What was it? To bear our sin, to die in our place, to be punished on our behalf, to...to be, as it were, a sacrifice for our sins. And when near death He said, "It is finished." He had bore our sin. He had died our death. He had taken our place, received the judgment of God on behalf of all who would ever believe. And because He did it so perfectly, and because He accomplished exactly what God wanted Him to accomplish, He arose. And when He arose, the Bible says He went into heaven and took His place at the right hand of God and is forever exalted and given a name above every name which is the name Lord. And you must confess Jesus as Lord, the one who paid for your sins, the one who rose from the dead and therefore has offered a fitting sacrifice which satisfies God. God being satisfied with Him lifts Him to heaven, seats Him on His throne where He reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords forever. There is no salvation in any other than Jesus Christ. You must confess that He is indeed Lord as God has named Him Lord for what He has done.

And you must believe in His resurrection or you cannot be saved. This is God's word to us. This is God's plan. Salvation awaits all who confess Jesus as Lord and believe in their hearts that God has raised Him from the dead. To deny the resurrection is to deny His deity. It is to deny the sufficiency of His sacrifice. It is to make Him a liar, the apostles a liar, the Scriptures a liar. To believe in the resurrection is to affirm the Bible is true, Jesus is God, He did rise, the gospel message is the truth. And it is and it alone saves. Join me in prayer.

Father, as we bring this to a conclusion tonight, we have really looked at THE most monumental of all the events in the passion of our Lord. So much focus in recent years with Hollywood getting into this has been on what happened before the cross, the beating and the whipping and the horrific physical abuse. But what really needs to be looked at with care and great depth is what happened after the cross, and that's the resurrection. God, how we thank You that the tomb of Jesus is empty, it's been empty all these centuries because He lives and He ever lives to make intercession for us. He lives and because He lives we can live also by faith in Him. Because He conquered sin and death and hell and rose to heavenly glory, we too in Him can conquer sin and death and hell and rise to heavenly glory and even sit with Him on His throne, the Scripture says. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in Me though he were dead yet shall he live. And whoever believes in Me lives forever." We thank You that we find eternal life in Christ even when we leave this veil of tears, we leave this earthly existence, we enter into that eternal glory and joy and peace that awaits us in the heaven of heavens. But only if we confess Jesus as Lord and believe that You raised Him by the very power that is His from the dead. Thank You for the truth of the resurrection in which we are clearly given the proof we need that He is the one He claimed to be and by which we ourselves through faith are given that very eternal life which He displayed in His own resurrection. We thank You that in trusting Him we shall live with the very life that is divine, granted to us from Him the source of life.

What great immense truth this is and may it be sealed to every heart, especially those who at this point may not yet believe, may not have confessed Jesus as Lord. O God, how I pray they would do that even now, that they would be flooded with the conviction and the clarity of this truth of resurrection, grasp it with all their might, repent of their sin, confess Jesus as Lord, affirm they believe that He died for them and rose again. And in thus believing and acknowledging Him as Lord be delivered from death and punishment into eternal life. This is our prayer. We thank You that we who know You have experienced the glory of this deliverance and live in it moment by moment,

awaiting that day when we enter into the full inheritance of what You've promised to us in the life to come. We bless You and thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

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