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The Miracle of the Empty Tomb

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This week's bible reading is from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 28 verses 1 - 10.

Introduction

In a park in San Francisco, there is a large stone hanging from a rope, with a sign saying: "Weather Check Station". It's simple to use - if you want to know what the weather's doing, check the stone. If the stone's wet, then it's raining; if it's dry, it's fine. If the stone is swinging it's windy; if you can't see the stone it's foggy; if the stone has been blown away, then it's a hurricane.

Why am I talking about a weather stone? Well there is a link with our theme this morning. The large stone in the park was on the end of a rope; in the Gospel reading there was a large stone at the entrance to Jesus' tomb.

Just as the stone in the park could tell you about the weather; so too, the stone at the tomb can tell us something crucial about Jesus. Want to know what really happened on that first Easter Morning? Then check the stone!

Not Dead

When we do check it, we discover that it had been rolled away. How and why? Clearly something had happened - and that something was Jesus rising from the dead, just as He said He would.

But it wasn't Jesus who had moved the stone. Matthew tells us that it was an angel of the Lord who rolled the stone away. It was also this same angel who greets the women, telling them of the news that Jesus has risen from the dead – just as He said He would. So Jesus was right all along. Everything He said would happen, did – including His Resurrection.

Significance

Now it's difficult for us today to appreciate the truly enormous, world changing significance of this event, because we're so used to it. For many modern Christians it's a case of, "yes, yes we know, Jesus rose from the dead, splendid – but what's for dinner?"

Today though, of all days, we really ought to try and appreciate what this means, not just for us, but for the whole of humanity. In reflecting on this, we need to remember we are dealing with actual historical events. You're not here this morning to listen to myths and fables, or tall tales made up by

men. You're here this morning to hear again the truth of the Resurrection of Jesus and its importance for today's modern world.

It's All True

By this I mean that the Resurrection guarantees that all Jesus' promises are true: the promise of forgiveness for the repentant and faithful. The promise that Jesus' followers will also be raised from the dead, just as He was. The promise of eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven; as Jesus said: "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

In fact all Jesus teaching has been ratified by the Resurrection: therefore it has to be taken seriously. Indeed the whole of Scripture both Testaments, has been ratified by God through the power of Jesus' Resurrection.

The Resurrection not only vindicates Jesus, but it is also a powerful witness that God is real. The earth, life, us - we are not just a result of a blind process of chance. We are created by God, in His image, and the Resurrection of Jesus is proof of all that.

Sceptical

Today though, our modern world is deeply sceptical about all of this, and dismisses it with an impatient wave of the hand, refusing to believe any of it. All the mainstream media outlets are almost totally silent on the matter of God – to them He just doesn't exist and religion is nothing more than an odd curiosity, a peculiar anachronism that hopefully will one day disappear for good. And as for Jesus – well He was just some historical Jewish teacher, whom they can simply ignore with impunity.

The Invisible God

Throughout this pandemic, there has been virtually no talk of God on national TV on any mainstream media channels. No call to prayer. Throughout this crisis God has been largely ignored by our nation. It seems to me that, as a people, the UK has effectively said to God, "we don't need you or your help – we can deal with this ourselves."

Whilst I find this deeply frustrating (and I do) I say these things not as judgement against the modern media, or the nation – that is for God to decide – I say this as a factual observation of just far, how deeply, western culture has fallen away from God, from His Son and from His Word.

Question

I suppose my point is this: if the Resurrection did happen (which it did) and if Christ rose from the dead (which He did) then that has to be taken seriously, even by the modern world, and not just scoffed at and waved away. The Resurrection of Christ is the single greatest event since Creation itself –so yes, it demands an appropriate response.

I think the question I'm asking is this. How do we get the modern world to take God seriously? To take Jesus and His Death and Resurrection, seriously?

I really wish I had a clever and insightful answer to that question, I really do; but I don't - and I don't know anyone that does. But that doesn't mean there's nothing we can do and we can just forget about it, as not our problem. We do have a role, and we do have our part to play.

Response

Firstly, the simplest and easiest response is to live out the Resurrection in our own lives. Make sure Jesus is real in us - by who we are, how we live and by what we say. In this way we can declare the message of the Risen Lord to those around us. We need to let people know that we are followers of Christ, and whenever we have to opportunity, tell them why. He rose from the dead, that's why. Let our lives declare the truth of His Resurrection.

Secondly, pray - pray for our nation. In your own time and in your own way, pray for our nation – pray that God will call us, as a people, back to Him once again. Amen.