

“A DIVINE TSUNAMI”

Matthew 27:57-28:15

Dr. John Crocker, Crossroads Church, Albert Lea, MN. April 3-4, 2010

Easter

On December 26, 2004 a 9.3 magnitude earthquake struck beneath the Indian Ocean about 93 miles off the Northwest coast of the Indonesian island of Sumatra.

The earthquake deformed the ocean floor, heaving the overlying water into a mega tsunami. As the tsunami surge reached the shallows of coastal areas across Southeastern Asia the waves rose up in height to almost 100 feet in some places. Nearly 230,000 people in 14 countries perished. Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and Thailand were hardest hit.

Some fishermen were out in the Indian Ocean at the time. Because of the deep water beneath their boats the vertical displacement that created the monster tidal wave was practically imperceptible. They felt nothing.

Imagine their shock hours later when they returned home to find their villages swept away and their loved ones gone.

· When Jesus Christ arose from the dead a divine tsunami swept over the world. .

Even those closest to Jesus didn't realize what was happening. But the wave has swept beyond Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria, to the ends of the earth.

This wave does not bring destruction. It's a wave of hope, a “divine tsunami” that makes everything new.

· This weekend we fix our attention on the event in history that has made the greatest impact on the human race.

It's more than just a Christian holiday.

It is the sacrificial death and victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ; one amazing event in two sensational parts.

· The New Testament Gospels devote more attention to this event than to anything else about Jesus Christ.

Listen to Matthew's account, picking it up at Jesus' burial. *'As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him.'* (Matthew 27:57-58)

According to Jewish law, a criminal's body was not to be left hanging all night. It had to be buried that day. *'If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.'* (Deuteronomy 21:22-23)

Jesus' relatives were Galilean Jews. None of them owned a burial place in Jerusalem or in the surrounding towns.

But Joseph from Arimathea, a town about 20 miles Northwest of Jerusalem owned a tomb in Jerusalem. He was a wealthy man, a member of the Jewish ruling Council.

Joseph had become a follower of Jesus.

The Roman governor granted him custody of Jesus' body and Joseph became the undertaker.

'Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the

tomb and went away. *Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.* (Matthew 27:59-61)

· Did Joseph and the two women believe it was all over for Jesus?

Of course they did! To them Jesus was as dead as a Passover leftover.

The women kept their little vigil at the tomb, to remember and to grieve.

· But death could not hold the Son of God. Jesus arose from death, and he lives forever.

Jesus' disciples were completely flummoxed. The shock waves of his resurrection made their heads spin. Could it be true?

They were soon convinced it was real.

In Matthew's report we find some **reasons** why the resurrection of Jesus Christ should make a powerful impact on our lives.

I. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST DEMONSTRATES GOD'S POWER Matthew 27:62-66; 28:1-4, 11-15

The people responsible for having Jesus crucified determined to prevent any skullduggery by Jesus' followers.

^{27:62} *The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate.*

⁶³ *"Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.'*

⁶⁴ *So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."*

⁶⁵ *"Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how."*

⁶⁶ *So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.*

The hard-hearted priests refused to consider what the guards reported. They determined to eliminate all evidence of Jesus' resurrection.

They bribed the guards to report that Jesus' disciples had stolen his body while they were asleep.

The soldiers took the money and spread the lie.

The priests could have investigated and discovered the truth. Instead they stooped to bribery to try to squelch the truth about Jesus.

· The most tragic trait in human nature is the propensity for seeing the convincing evidence of Christ's resurrection, being unable to refute it, and yet determined to reject it.

What the mind cannot deny, the will may nevertheless reject!

Right now, across America in their Easter homilies some clergymen are saying that it doesn't matter if Jesus actually arose or not. What mattered was that his followers believed he did and that they found strength in their belief.

That may sound so sweet, but it's a heap of putrefied tommyrot! It galls me to think how much worthless drivel is spewed from American pulpits on this day when we affirm and celebrate the literal physical resurrection of Jesus Christ as the only basis of authentic Christian faith.

Those who preach the worthless claptrap that Jesus arose only in the hope of his desperate disciples are modern counterparts of the unprincipled chief priests in this Gospel report.

· The chief priests belonged to the Sadduceean religious party in Judaism. The Sadducees didn't believe in the supernatural, or in life after death.

That's why they were sad, you see.

Today we call that theological liberalism. It is essentially religious anti-supernaturalism. It denies God's phenomenal activity in human affairs.

"Despite our efforts to keep him out, God intrudes. The life of Jesus is bracketed by two impossibilities: a virgin's womb and an empty tomb. Jesus entered our world through a door marked 'No Entrance' and left through a door marked 'No Exit'." (Peter Larson, *Prism*)

We are not observing an empty annual religious tradition. We are celebrating the truth that in an awesome historical event God intervened in the hopeless human predicament. In the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and by his resurrection from death God forgives sin and gives new life to all who repent of sin and place their trust in Jesus as their Savior.

Bunnies and bonnets and colored eggs are just cute doodads that have been tacked on to Easter through the years. But they offer absolutely no good reason why anyone should become a Christian.

Around the time of the French Revolution a fellow named Lepeaux tried to popularize a new religion as an improvement on Christianity. He was getting nowhere. He asked Bishop Talleyrand what he should do. After a moment's thought the bishop said, *'I would recommend that you be crucified and then rise again the third day.'*

Nothing can replace or improve on genuine Christian faith that is founded completely on the fact of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.

The historical evidence is solid. Consider the report of Jesus' post-resurrection visits with his disciples. If it were mere fabrication, why were they all prepared to die as martyrs for preaching the gospel of Christ?

What about Christ's appearance to more than five hundred people at one time, most of whom were still living when the Apostle Paul wrote about it? (1 Corinthians 15:4-6) It was an open invitation to verify the resurrection by talking to the eye-witnesses.

· The proof is strong enough to satisfy skeptics. God demonstrated his power in the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, from the grave, from the tomb.

The authorities placed a seal and posted a guard at the tomb.

But that was as useless as putting a milk bucket under a bull.

^{28:1} *After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.*

² *There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.*

³ *His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.*

⁴ *The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.*

The resurrected Jesus Christ didn't sneak quietly out of the tomb.

The empty tomb was the epicenter of a cosmic shock. Heaven bombarded the earth, and the earth shuddered.

In the wake of the resurrection a tsunami of God's power swept across the nations. Its waves destroyed the fortresses in which the devil has held the souls of people imprisoned in fear and hopelessness.

The waves created by that shock are still sweeping across the world wherever the gospel of Jesus Christ is told.

That's why at Easter true Christians declare with conviction: "Christ is risen!"

· Have you opened your life to the impact of Christ's resurrection? The awesome resurrection of Jesus Christ is the power that forgives our sins and gives us eternal life when we confess our sins and place our trust in Jesus alone as our Savior. That's why we celebrate Christ's resurrection.

II. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST CONFIRMS GOD'S PURPOSE

Matthew 28:5-10

God keeps his promises.

In all God's creation only people were created with the capacity for an intimate relationship with the Almighty God. God said he created mankind in his image and according to his likeness (Genesis 1:26-27).

Not even angels have this privileged status.

· The original humans exercised their God-given freedom to choose. An evil presence invaded God's creation and tempted them to disobey God. They fell for the lie. That's how sin became part of the native human experience. It opened the way for evil to take hold of the human race. It defiled God's image in them. The inevitable result was that the first humans forfeited the beautiful intimacy they had enjoyed with God.

Their defilement corrupted the entire human race. The New Testament says this break caused by sin was so profound that people became enemies of God.

The Apostle Paul wrote, *'Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation--.'* (Colossians 1:21-22)

· Because of his amazing love and great mercy, God planned to reconcile mankind to himself. At the right time God sent his only Son to pay the penalty for our sins, to break the power of evil, and set people free to have a right relationship with God. That's how much God loves people. I read in Paul's letter to the Romans, *'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'* (Romans 5:8)

· Matthew's Gospel tells us God sent an angel from heaven to assure the women that the empty tomb wasn't bad news but good news.

^{28:5} *The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified."*

⁶ *He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.*

⁷ *Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."*

Imagine going to a funeral home to view the body of a dear departed friend and to give your condolences to the family. As you enter you look around and ask where you might find the deceased. Then you hear these words, *'He's not here. He got up and left. He said to tell anyone looking for him they can find him at home.'*

The women must have been stunned as they felt the impact of God's purpose being worked out.

⁸ *So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.*

These women ran as if they were shot out of a cannon. Then, whoa!

⁹ *Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.*

¹⁰ *Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."*

· There's a little word, tucked inconspicuously into verse 10. But it's tremendously important.

It's the word "brothers." *'go and tell my brothers.'*

Jesus called his followers his brothers for the very first time.

That's because the adoption procedures had just been completed.

Christ's resurrection means that those who put their trust in him are adopted into God's family.

The Apostle Paul said God adopted us as his children through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:5). He also wrote to the Galatian churches, *'You are sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ.'* (Galatians 3:26)

If you have placed your trust in Jesus Christ, then you are a child of God, the King of Kings. That was God's purpose for your eternal destiny all along.

What happened at the tomb was not some inexplicable freak accident of nature. It was God's purpose working out; God's plan for us.

· Every Easter we return to the same essential truths, the facts of Christ's death and his resurrection.

But it's not a bundle of stale facts. It's alive inside you; it's supposed to sizzle in your soul.

The famous cellist Pablo Casals was teaching a class of advanced cellists. Their technical abilities were quite impressive. But the maestro had this to say to one of them, *'You are playing the notes, but not the music.'*

It's a tradition, a religious custom, to be in church on Easter morning to sing about Christ's death and resurrection.

But for many people it's just the notes without the music. There is no music in their souls. The truth has never touched their hearts or made any difference in their lives.

They're missing out on what Christ's resurrection is all about.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ made a huge impact on Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and has reached the furthest parts of the world.

It makes an impact on everyone who is ready to receive it.

This is the central core of Christian truth that changes people's lives.

Do you have the confidence that all your sins are forgiven and that you are a child of God and that nothing will ever separate you from his care?

· If you don't believe in the supernatural or the spiritual, there isn't much anyone can do to persuade you that this is true.

But if you believe there is a powerful God, you have every reason to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and to accept God's awesome purpose in it for yourself.