

Kenny Moorner - The Importance of the Empty Tomb

Before I begin my lesson today, in earnest, I feel I need to publicly say something about some recent events. You're familiar, I'm sure by now, with the fact that the president of this country recently announced a transgender day of visibility. I think it's important for anyone to preach against sin and I think what the President has done is recognize something that is sinful. And I'm going to be quite honest with you today. I think it's time for us to speak out even more. I think far too often Christians are passive. And they are quiet about sin. All sin is wrong, any sin is wrong. But it seems to me that some sins are egregious. There is a severity to some things and the consequences of that severity is severe as well. And I think part of our responsibility as Christians and I think part of my responsibility as a preacher, as one who stands before people publicly, is to not be ashamed to speak the truth. And if I might make somewhat of a confession to you, I think probably I have in the past years of my life, probably done less preaching against things that I should have done instead of more. And I am hoping that in the days that lie ahead to try to take a more active approach in terms of publicly stating what the Bible says about so many things that in this day and age are being somehow legitimized. And so even this morning, I want to mention a passage that is the foundation for us and for anyone who is moral, for anyone who is godly, for anyone who understands that God created everything, and He created us. Verse 26, of Genesis one says, Then God said, "Let us make man in Our image, according to our likeness, let them have dominion over the fish of the sea over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So, God created man in His own image, and the image of God He created him. Male and female, He created them," and what I've just read is the truth. And anyone who violates that truth will be held accountable to God. And so, we have an obligation to state that, and I hope, as I said, that we not only as individuals but we as a church as much as a collective voice can be raised. I hope we will always take a stand. We have an interesting location. We are up by a university, a public university and I think as a result, we do have some obligation. And I hope to maybe address some of those things in the near future as I preach from this particular pulpit. But I did feel the need and I hope you'll understand the need that I had to say what I said this morning.

Now to my lesson. This is a passage that Jerry just read not moments ago. It is a passage which tells us about an event that took place over 2000 years ago. On a day like today, the first day of the week. Sometimes as we say, the Lord's Day in which a stone was moved back, was rolled back from a tomb. And the man inside the tomb who was dead came forth. And as a result, it is probably the most important spot on the planet because the event that took place on that spot was the event that changed our lives. Matthew, like the other synoptic gospel writers and John, bring us right to the door of the empty tomb. Everything we believe stands or falls on what happened at that spot. That's how significant this is. And Paul is quite plain about it in first Corinthians 15 When he says "Now if Christ is preached that he has been raised from the dead How do some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? But, if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty, and your faith is also empty." You see how important the resurrection is? How

plain and how simple is Paul's words when he says if Jesus was not raised from the dead, then in essence, over 2000 years after he said it, let me finish my translation of his thought today, then we all ought to be anywhere else but here. If Jesus was not resurrected from the dead, we're all living a lie. And the way we're spending our time this morning and the way we spend our time every Lord's Day morning is a fraud. It means nothing. The only benefit that we have is we get to see each other but in terms of spiritual and eternal well-being, what Paul said is if Jesus is not raised from the dead, all of you are living a lie. But if he was raised from the dead, if he was raised from the dead, then the things that he said are true, he is God and the things that he said are true. But everything stands or falls on what happened at that spot. I want you to understand that. Stand or falls. Everything about life stands or falls in reference to that spot on that Sunday morning, years ago.

Everyone, whether you're a friend, or a foe of the resurrection, everyone understands the significance of the resurrection events. That's why over the past centuries, there's been so much discussion about it. And I mean, a lot of discussion about it. And the discussion has to do with the validity of it. Did it happen or did it not happen and so this morning, what I would really like to do is move from the importance of it, which first Corinthians 15 does show. I want to move from the importance of it really to a little evidence about it because I think this is important. And I'm not trying to always offer cliff notes but I think it's important for us to get just maybe a few primary points of emphasis in our minds about why I believe this morning that Jesus did rise from the dead and I hope you can agree with what I'm about to share with you. Some people say that the spot doesn't even exist. That Jesus wasn't even buried. That his body was just cast aside into a pit like of common criminal. That's what would happen when people were hung on the cross. When criminals were hung on the cross and they died. Their bodies would be taken down and they would in essence be thrown into a ditch and their bodies would be taken by people or eaten by animals or whatever and some people would suggest that that probably was what happened to Jesus. Others say Jesus never really died. Some would say that he simply fainted on the cross. His body was taken down. His body was buried and in the cool of the evening his body was revived, and he left himself. He left the tomb and went on his merry way and there are other stories. There are stories that the body was stolen, that the disciples came, and they took the body so that that would look like a resurrection action. Or there was a case of mixed locations where people actually looked into the wrong tomb. They looked in a tomb that was already empty and so therefore verifying that his tomb was empty but yet they had looked in a wrong tomb and that's what some people would claim.

But I don't want you to remember something about all these theories. And there are others but the ones that I just mentioned are primary and of all those theories, none of them hold any shred of evidence. That's what I want you to remember. There is no legitimate evidence that any of that happened, that any of what I just said happened. And you and I can criticize the critics. And I think there is a place to do that. I think there is a place to criticize what some would say and how some would say this is what happened. This is why the tomb was empty. It's not what you say, but it's what others say. And I think there's a place to criticize that. But I think the better thing for us is, how do we know? How do we know that Jesus rose from the dead? And I think by doing this we take an offensive posture and not a defensive posture. So that's what I want to do this morning for just a minute.

Let me share some things about why I believe Jesus rose from the dead. There's all sorts of material about this. If you want to spend about six or eight years reading, just put in resurrection of Jesus into some internet search and all sorts of stuff will come up. Good and bad, right and wrong. But a lot of stuff will come up because a lot of people are interested in that. People research and people write about it a lot. People I know over the past several days. Even this morning, I was reading, doing some reading by people that I have great respect for who were writing about the resurrection. And so, I began to read some of what they had written. You and I have heard a lot of classes and sermons about the resurrection of Jesus and you're going to hear one today as I have already indicated. But as I said, let me offer these three reasons why I believe that Jesus actually did rise from the dead. And here's what I would suggest. I would suggest that you just jot these three down, won't take you just second jot to them down. And do a little research and do a little study on your own because we're just going to touch on some of the evidence this morning. But I would like for you to jot these things down. And even if you want to challenge these things, challenge them. I think what it'll do is I think it will strengthen your faith and that's what I hope to do.

The first thing I would suggest is that he was seen. After he died, he was seen. If people saw him die, and the same people even saw him alive after that then that is a lot of evidence, right? It is if we can prove that He died, and we can prove that people saw him after he died but saw him alive. That's tremendous evidence. I can't think of better evidence for the resurrection than that particular type of elements. So, did he die? Well, let's just let's talk about that just a bit. Did he die? You can turn to Matthew 26 and 27. We're not going to this morning. You can also turn to Mark 14 and 15 or Luke 22 and 23 or John 18 and 19. You can read those chapters in those gospels and the evidence severely points to the fact that yes, Jesus died And some would even argue that we know more about the death of Jesus than any other figure in antiquity. I want you just to think about that for just a moment. We know we know some details about him. We know how he died. We know he died by crucifixion. We know about the beatings that preceded the crucifixion. We know about the trial that preceded the crucifixion. We know about the things people said to him. And about him while he was walking to the cross. And while he hung on the cross. We know about the spear that pierced his side and we know about the fluids that left his body. That spear did pierce his side. And we have an official inquiry. This was interesting to me. I'm sure you've read this. But this is interesting, but we have an official inquiry from Pilate about "Is he dead?" Mark 15, "When evening had come because it was the preparation day that is the day before the Sabbath. Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God coming and taking courage, went into Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus and Pilate marveled that he was already dead. And summoning the centurion, he asked him if he had been dead for some time. So, when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Jesus." Now, it doesn't take an extremely smart person, although I would imagine the centurion was. To go to the body and to say, I understand he's dead. I can go back and now report to Pilate that yes, he is dead. And Pilate had found out that this from this centurion. And while modern critics may question the centurion in his ability to determine that, most people I know of can tell when a person's dead. They knew a corpse when they saw a corpse.

Let me mention just a side note about all of this, if I may. You will notice, as you always do, that the legitimacy of what I'm saying is being validated today by what's found in Scripture. And that would be one of the arguments that some might make if they were here in this audience this morning and said

well, you're simply talking about Scripture and all you are referring to are statements that are made by people who have been written about and who have been in the Bible. And I understand that. But I think there's plenty of evidence to indicate that what's in the Bible and what's in the text of the New Testament is true. And if that's a drawback for you, then then I would love to have another conversation with you. There are some who would say, well, I don't accept what the Bible says. And I understand that they say that, but there's evidence and plenty of evidence to say that what the Bible says is true. So, if that's a drawback for you, let's talk and let's think about that. But the New Testament documents in my view, based upon what I've seen the evidence say are definitely reliable.

Further, on the day of Pentecost, when Peter and the apostles were preaching, part of their sermon was, "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders and sign which God did through him and your image, as you yourselves also know, him being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands and you've crucified and you put him to death, whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it." Front and center in this, this in this first sermon that was given by Peter and these other apostles in different languages so that everybody there could understand in their native tongue. He says he was killed, and he was crucified, and He was put to death. And the passage tells us that God raised Him up. And what's interesting to me about that, is that what Peter and the other apostles says is that "just as you yourselves know." He said, I'm saying things to you that you can verify. Some of you can verify. Some of you can verify as easily and as accurately as I can, or as we can. He says you know that, and you saw it. On down in the same text in verse 32, Peter said, we're all witnesses. We're all witnesses of these things. All these things are things that all of us can verify because we were there. We were eyewitnesses of what happened. And it wasn't just the apostles. First Corinthians 15 beginning in verse 3 tells us this, "For I delivered to you, first of all that which I received, that Christ died for our sins according to Scriptures. He was buried. He arose again on the third day according to Scriptures, and that he was seen by Cephas, then by the 12." We verified that already. After that he was seen by over 500 brethren than at once. That's particularly significant. 500 people at one time. Listen to what he says. 500 people at one time saw him which tells you that that cannot be illusion of any kind. You can't get 500 copies of the same story and they all agree. There were 500 people who saw him at one time and here's further what he says, "of whom the greater part remained in the present." Some have fallen asleep, but most people are still alive. Ask him, talk to them about it. Ask them whether or not they saw it. And what Paul says is, they'll tell you they did. "After that he was seen by James then by all the apostles and then last of all, he was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time." Paul says you can check me out, you can verify what I'm saying. You can check me out. The resurrection of Jesus was not something that happened in some isolated spot. This was public. This was public. And I think that's significant. He was seen. He was dead. He was buried. And He was seen. We don't talk much about the burial. I don't think it's that significant. I mean, historically it is significant. But if he was dead, and if he was seen alive, it's clear. It's clear that he had been buried and that he had come to life and that's exactly what the text would tell us.

So, let me go to what is I think a second piece of evidence. His followers' lives were changed. I'm going to look at two or three passages of Scripture to share with you just quickly this morning about this. When you get to Acts 26 this statement is made, "then Jesus said to them," referring to as apostles, "all of you will be made to stumble because of me this night for it is written, I will strike the shepherd

and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." See what he is saying is that the shepherd will be struck, in essence, and the sheep will be scattered. "But after I have been raised," understand he's talking about himself, "after I've been raised, I will go before you to Galilee, Peter answered and said to him, even if all are made to stumble because you, I'll never be made to stumble." I love Peter. Lord, say what you want, you're not talking about me. "And Jesus said to him assuredly, I say to you that this night before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." Later in the chapter that's exactly what happened. But in this instance, Peter said to Him, even if I have to die with you, I won't deny you. And the text said, so said all the disciples, every single one of them. Every single one of them. Their faith had been minimized. And maybe to some degree, their faith had even been lost. I don't know that probably is not an accurate way to say it, but for lack of a better term, they were going to question it because the text tells us in verse 56, "that all the disciples forsook him, and they fled." They all did. Of all the people that should have not forsaken him and stayed with him it was disciples. But all forsook and all of them fled. So, when you get to this passage in John 20, the evening of the resurrection, "then on the same day at evening," that's the evening of the resurrection, "being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut, where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews." This is this is after he has been resurrected, you see. They are assembled, but they're assembled for fear of the Jews. "Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, Peace be with you. And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord." What you have here is a transition. They've gone from they all forsook him, and they fled to being assembled in a room, Jesus coming to them and saying, let me show you now who I am. So, you can verify who I am, who I was and who I am now. And they were glad. The text says they were glad when they saw the Lord. I'll tell you how glad they were when they saw the Lord because when it was time for them to preach, they were arrested. By the Sanhedrin. By the council, they were arrested. This was after the resurrection and they were instructed by the Lord Himself, you go preach, and they had done that. And while they were in the Sanhedrin, Gamaliel said to the Sanhedrin, while the apostles are there in their midst, Gamaliel, who was part of the Sanhedrin said, we can't stop what's happening here. If these men are preaching Jesus and it's legitimate, what we do to them is not going to stop. So really what Gamaliel has said to the council is, we're wasting our time. If God is behind it, it's going to come whether we like it or not, and if God's not behind it, it's going to fade no matter what we do. That's what Gamaliel told them, and they agreed with him. Verse 40 says, they agreed with what he said. "And when they had called for the apostles and beaten them." They thought, you know what we agree with you, but let's just do as little damage as we can. "So, they call for the apostles and beat them and commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus and let them go." In other words, they beat him and said, don't do this anymore. Stop it. And then beat him and let him go. "And they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." Does that sound like Matthew 26 to you? Does this sound like they were hiding because they were scared of the Jews? Is that what that sounds like to you? Doesn't sound like that to me. And further, verse 42 says, "And daily the temple and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." I've made this statement many times. I talked about it last week. The last place I'd start preaching if I'd been flogged and beaten and told don't preach anymore, the last place I'd gone is to the temple. And that's where they started. That's where they started. How often did they do it? 24/7. When you're scared, you don't do that. When you're confident you do that. They were confident. They were confident. These men were changed men. These men were changed men.

And then finally very quickly, the third reason that I would suggest to you this morning that Jesus rose from the dead is because his enemies couldn't deny it. Why bring this point up? Why even mention this? This would be the easiest way to denounce that he was risen from the dead. Right? What would it have taken? You say he's risen from the dead. We say he's not. What's the one thing that the enemy, the simple thing they could have done, to prove that he wasn't risen from the dead. Go to the tomb. Roll back the stone. There he is. So enough of this nonsense. Enough of this "he's risen from the dead" nonsense. There's his body. That's all they had to do, and they couldn't do it. They could not do it. And what better place to do it than in Jerusalem? The enemy's headquarters. What better place to do this than right there in the city where it all happened? Everybody knew where the tomb was. Everybody could just go to the tomb. Why did that not happen? Why didn't it happen? Because he was risen. Because he was risen. If the dead body of Jesus had still been in the tomb, Christianity would have died right there. Listen, on the spot. On that spot. They'd opened that tomb, and he is still in there, Christianity and everything we're doing today would have died right there on that spot. Right there on that spot. Instead, it first flourished, and it will flourish forever. Why is that? Because he lives. I serve a risen Savior. I serve a risen Savior.

I want to close this morning with these powerful thoughts. This is from Revelation one. This is powerful. This is this is Jesus' description of himself. "His head and hair were white like wool as white as snow. And his eyes like a flame of fire his feet were like fine brass as if refined in a furnace and his voice is the sound of many waters." As John views who he is. "He had in his right hand seven stars. Out of his mouth went a sharp two edged sword and his countenance was like the sun shining and its strength and when I saw him I feel at his feet as dead. He laid his right hand on me saying to me do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives and was dead. And behold, I am alive evermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of death." Is that not powerful? Jesus said I have the keys. I have overcome. Not only am I alive, I am alive for evermore. And today the hope that we have, that Jerry discussed as he talked about the death of Christ, the hope that we have is not found in his death. If that's the hope we have then we are miserable. But the hope that we have is found in his resurrection. And that this morning is what I preach to you not only this day, but every Lord's Day. We have great hope because of Christ and what Christ has done for us and because he lives.

If you're here this morning, and you have never accepted, and I say that term in every biblical kind of way. If you've never accepted Jesus Christ, as your Lord and as your Savior and as your King, you need to do that. Because if you don't do that, this is the negative part. If you don't do that you're going to die in your sin. And if you die in your sin, you'll be resurrected, but you won't be resurrected to be with him. You'll be resurrected to be away from him forever. So those are your options. Those are your choices. And I have to be fair, that's why I talk about both of the options. But what I'm saying to you this morning is it's your choice. It's your choice. And I hope this morning that if you need to respond to gospel as Eddie leads us in this invitation song, that you will decide to follow Jesus. If we can help you with that come as we stand and as we sing.