



Series: Easter 2022

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Title: If Jesus Got Out of the Grave, There's Hope for Sinners

Introduction

Happy Easter Mercy Church! My name is Spence and I serve as the lead pastor here of Mercy Church. I imagine a lot of you are new here to church so let me just say welcome. We are so glad you are here. We've been praying for you.

It's funny by this time in the service most people newer to church are thinking either "ok this place is alright." OR - Oh lord what have I gotten myself into? Well, good Already news - First we have LOTS of exit doors at both of our campuses. I know you have looked for them. So, if you need to sprint out, you can.

BUT I do want you to know if you are newer that Jesus built the church with you in mind. Jesus talked about his own

ministry like it wasn't a VIP Club for the super holy, but instead was a hospital for sinners. That's what we want to be like here. A church where weary sinners with burdens, problems, struggles, fake lives that look good on the outside but are dysfunctional on the inside - where all people can find hope in God. Where ALL people can discover and deepen their relationship with Jesus. So, you are very much welcome here and we want to help you take your next step with Jesus, whatever that is.

Today being Easter, we are going to open the bible and look at where it talks about the resurrection of Jesus. If you come back next week, we'll be looking at the book of Exodus. We are in a series of sermons just walking through that book. Looking at how God delivers his people from slavery in Egypt. And we are talking about how that same power that set 2 million people free from the most powerful nation in the world in Exodus...that same power to save & heal us is still working here for you and me.

But today is focused in on the resurrection. Every year we pull our attention here because our whole faith hinges on whether or not this really happened. And the big idea is simply this - **If Jesus got out of the grave - there's hope for sinners.** Which is everybody. Listen there are only two kinds of people in the world - Sinners...and liars. We all sin. And We all suffer from other people's sin. I mean look at just this WEEK in the news.



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Shooting in NYC - evil. The bombing in Mariupol Ukraine - just evil. Even if you have no prior knowledge of Christianity before walking in here you can agree with the basic Christian claim that the world is broken. And Christianity not only offers an explanation for that, but it offers a solution!

And what I'm telling you today is the greatest news the world has ever heard because the resurrection of Jesus means there's hope for sinners...of all kinds. Hope for those who hide their sin and fake being holy, and those who live wide open with their sin. Hope for everybody. Like I said the church is to be a hospital for sinners. And the cure is the resurrection power of Jesus.

Let's get into it and I'll show you why we believe he did get out of the grave and why it matters to us. LUKE 24.

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. 3 They went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were perplexed about this...

A few things to note here. The tomb is Jesus' tomb. Jesus was crucified on Friday. They had taken Saturday off to rest because it was the sabbath. And now as soon as they could

they are coming to the tomb to perform a common ritual where they use spices to care for the body of the deceased.

And they find the stone rolled away. And perplexed – like as soon as they were starting to think about what COULD have happened. Like what are the possible rational explanations for there not being a body. Let me tell you the common theories then and now:

- First – someone broke in and **stole the body**. An idea that Matthew's gospel tells us was created by the priests who bribed the Roman soldiers to spread as a cover up because they were confused & pretty alarmed by the whole thing.¹ Of course the huge problem is...Roman guards were at the tomb. Guarding it. That's what guards do. Bunch of disciples aren't getting in. They are holed up in hiding. We'd know if they raided the tomb because Rome would have mounted an attack on them.
- So, what else could have happened? Maybe he wasn't dead when we put him in here? This is called the "**Swoon Theory**." But that's preposterous. He died a gruesome death. They even stabbed him in the side to make sure he was dead. These guys were pros at killing people. This isn't the princess bride where he's

¹ Matthew 28.11-15



MOSTLY DEAD but not all dead. Versions of this theory are VERY popular in the Muslim world. Not because it is plausible...but because of what is at stake. **We'd rather believe irrational explanations that deny God than rational explanations that accept him.** Because if he really did get out of the grave...THEN we gotta rethink who he is. Cause he can't JUST BE A GOOD TEACHER if he got out of the grave. He's more than that. We gotta rethink how we respond to him.

- 3rd idea - **Everybody just lied about it.** And the lie outgrew the truth. Problem - There were 500 eyewitness testimonies of Jesus appearing to people for 6 weeks after his resurrection. This isn't one guy saying this happened. Or even 12. It's hundreds. And they have nothing to gain by knowingly lying. Most of them were killed for saying Jesus rose from the grave. Peter was crucified upside down. John died in prison. Several were burned at the stake & others were beheaded. If they weren't killed, they were ostracized for it. They didn't GET anything for preaching about a resurrected Jesus. Which is why Paul says

"17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 18 Those, then, who have fallen asleep in Christ have also perished. 19 If we have put our hope in Christ for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone. -- 1 Corinthians 15:17-19 "

He's right! If Christ didn't rise from the dead - Christians should be more pitied than anyone on the planet. But if he did - then there's hope for sinners. So, I am staking everything on the fact that he got out of the grave.

The late Dr. Thomas Arnold, professor of Modern History at Oxford University, author of the widely acclaimed 3-volume history of Rome, said, *"The evidence for Jesus's life, death and resurrection has been shown to be satisfactory (according to the standards of any historian). It (holds up) according to the common rules for distinguishing good evidence from bad. Tens of thousands of persons have gone through it piece by piece as carefully as any judge reviewing the most important case. I have myself done this many times over, not to persuade others but to satisfy myself. Throughout my life I have made a career of studying the histories of times and events, examining and weighing the evidence for what was written about each of them,*



and I know of no other one fact in history which is proved by better and fuller evidence than this one: Jesus Christ died and rose again from the dead.”² - Dr. Thomas Arnold

See here’s the thing. I cannot make you believe he rose from the dead. And in fact, That’s not my job. My job is to announce it to you & to plead with you to believe it. And I say plead because of what is at stake in this news. But all I can do is put it before you and make the case and then whether you choose to believe it or not is going to be between you and God. But if it’s true...then there’s hope for sinners.

3 They went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were perplexed about this...suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothes. 5 So the women were terrified and bowed down to the ground.

Ok. Just to be clear. These are angels according to the gospel of Matthew. Not like cupid though. Think more like...warriors clothed in light. Usually when they show up, they have to tell the people they appear to...fear not. And if they showed up to you...you’d probably do what these women did. And I want

you to hear the question they ask these women. Because it is the question for us today.

“Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” asked the men. 6 “He is not here, but he has risen!”

Why are you looking for the living among the dead? That’s a really simple but also deeply profound question. The surface meaning of course is that the answer to their question...what happened to Jesus...is that he has risen! And what in the world would a living person be doing in a tomb? Why are you looking for the living among the dead?

But I want you to hear the angel asking you that same question. Have you noticed how we keep going back to **empty tombs** to try and find life? I mean can you imagine if these women came back an hour later? The next day? And every day for the next 20 years? Is he here? You’d think they were insane.

And yet that’s us. We keep going to things, over and over, that we hope will give us life. But they are tombs that hold nothing but death.

² *History of Rome*, (3 volumes, 1838–42). See also [here](#) for similar claims from contemporary scientists and history professors. (Borrowed from J.D. Greear “Alive in Me” sermon on Matthew 28.1-20).



- I've watched guys deal with addictions for YEARS. And they KNOW there is nothing but death there, yet they KEEP going back. Man, I've had a friend and a cousin both lose their lives to drug addictions. An empty tomb where there is nothing but death. I've watched men and women destroy their lives through porn addiction. THEY KNOW it's a tomb. And even though they hate it they still go back to it. Because of how strong it is. And I'm standing here telling you in FULL awareness of how strong addiction is - of how fierce its grip is - that because Jesus got out of the tomb - there's hope for sinners. Because God says the power that brought Jesus back from death is now at work in us. Rom 8.11. And I know people on the other side that through the power of Jesus they are free. just last month we had a few guys graduate from a porn addiction recovery program here at our church. BUT that isn't by willpower. Will power doesn't get you out of the grave. Only RESURRECTION power can do that. Christian let me speak HOPE to you - YOUR friend, your child, your family member you've been praying for - IF JESUS GOT OUT OF THE GRAVE THERE IS HOPE! DON'T GIVE UP HOPE! KEEP PRAYING! The LIVING God is listening.
- Some things are even good things that we MAKE INTO TOMBS by looking for LIFE in them. Tell you one I struggled with as a pastor - work. Work is a good thing. You were created to work. BUT...work was never

meant to be where you found your SIGNIFICANCE. Performance Reviews & Promotions - they are good blessings but when you find your identity in them...they become tombs. Listen I'm only 39 but I've been working long enough to tell you the pull is strong to sacrifice my health and family in order to SUCCEED at work. So that people will see me as successful. Why? So, I can be somebody! What am I DOING? SUCCESS is an empty tomb. There's no LIFE there. But good news - there is hope for sinners enslaved to their work.

- Last one I see a lot - I know it's crazy to think - but we make tombs out of our own kids. I've got 4 kids so I'm in the kids sports space. I love it. But when you give your devotion to it - your time & money & energy - THAT's what DEVOTION IS - time, money, & energy... You are telling yourself and your kid - THIS is where LIFE is. Say whatever you want but your actions speak way louder than your words. Man as recreation its awesome. I love it. But as the focus of your life - it's an empty tomb. A knee injury at 17 years old should NOT create an identity crisis in a person. BUT - if your identity is built on sports for 10 formative years...it will.

you fill in the blank. What is your tomb? You may not have ever realized it but I'm telling you right now...it's a tomb. And



the very shrewd lie we believe is that even though all I found was death last time...I'll go back again.

Remember how he spoke to you when he was still in Galilee, 7 saying, 'It is necessary that the Son of Man be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day?'" 8 And they remembered his words. -- Luke 24:1-8

And the angel reminds them of the very message Jesus had preached to them. It is necessary. He HAD to die. Jesus is gonna talk more about that in a minute.

But what the angels are saying is - don't you remember? Everything that happened in the life and death of Jesus...went according to God's plan. Jesus told them this was going to happen. And that's how it happened. Just like he said.

And that is true to this very moment. God is fully in control of every single miniscule detail that got you to where you are sitting right now. Isn't that crazy? The friend that invited you, the situations in your life that created that friendship...that right now you are wondering how in the world you EVER became friends with them...Yes all of that is happening just like God planned. Because he's in control.

And Easter is telling you...God planned for Jesus to die. He had to. To pay for your sins and mine. But God also planned for Jesus to break free from death. So that we could have LIFE

free from those tombs. And that's what we celebrate on Easter.

I'm going to jump a little way down to verse 36. The disciples are all at dinner and I love Easter dinner. Jesus shows up. Like appears out of nowhere while they were talking about the rumor of the resurrection.

36 As they were saying these things, he himself stood in their midst. He said to them, "Peace to you!" 37 But they were startled and terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost. 38 "Why are you troubled?" he asked them. "And why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself! Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see, I have." 40 Having said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 But while they still were amazed and in disbelief because of their joy,

Hey that is a great picture of what happens when you become a follower of Christ. You are amazed and in disbelief because of your joy. **These followers went from mourning their murdered savior to having dinner with him.** Jesus coming back to life brought new life to them too. And joy. Man, that's what characterized the early church and it's what comes to all believers. JOY. And I want that for you. Fullness of Joy. They are experiencing Psalm 16.11 – "In your presence there is FULLNESS of JOY."



Empty tombs offer empty lives, but the risen Jesus offers hope for sinners.

I promise you. My life is not MISSING OUT because I chose Jesus. I don't envy the world of sin that God saved me from. I am tempted to it. All the time. And sometimes I still go back to those tombs. Don't look to me for perfection. BUT...I'm telling you...Jesus is better than those full tombs of death. You've BEEN THERE. There is nothing for you there!

he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" 42 So they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate in their presence.

Again, making sure they don't think this was just some apparition or ghost. This is a fully human person.

44 He told them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you — that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

Listen church – The resurrected Jesus keeps going back to the bible to teach these disciples. Like, I would think him standing there would be the main point of attention. But no, the angel at the tomb said...remember how Jesus talked about the bible? And Jesus on his way to this dinner met a couple guys

on the road...disguised himself...and taught them how the whole bible pointed to himself. And here at dinner he's saying...LOOK AT THE BOOK! It's all in there! If you knew my word, then my resurrection would not be a surprise. It would be an expected victory. And the resurrection is this big stamp of proof that God keeps his promises to you. So, his promise that in Christ your sin is removed from you as far as the east is from the west. The resurrection Guarantees you God has the power and desire to forgive you from your sins and give you new life.

46 He also said to them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead the third day, 47 and repentance for forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And look, I am sending you what my Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high." -- Luke 24:36-49

This last section right here announces to you the HOPE for sinners. The core of our faith is a message. This is big if you are new to Christianity, I'm not sharing with you a set of rules to live by. That's not the core of the faith. Maybe that's been your hang-up with religion. You think of it as a set of rules. Maybe that's been your experience. But the core of Christianity is an announcement of NEWS, not rules. I see 3 ways this news we call the gospel gives hope to sinners:



Gospel Hope: sinners are saved from their sin.

When Jesus breathed his last breath on the cross, he said “it is finished.” What was finished? Well...justice was finished. Every single one of us is a sinner. Which means we chose our way over God’s way at some point in our lives. And it is our sin that separates us from God. We rebelled against God like a rebellious child does against their parent. But because God is a just God, sin must be paid for.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. -- Romans 6:23

Your wage - what you owed for your sin - is death. Been that way since the first sin. God isn’t just going to let sin slide. You’d hate a god like that. No, we need a God who will bring justice to every wrong. Including our own wrongs. That sin has to be paid for.

Here’s how I told it to those that were there on Good Friday night:

If you come over to our house and we are outside cookin dinner and throwing the football. And you get mad cause you are too competitive for yard football and you like break my fence in a fit of post loss rage. We have a problem. That fence rail costs some money to replace. Post Covid - it’s now \$80k or something. I can either make you PAY. OR I can forgive you.... but if I forgive you...the fence is still broken. SOMEBODY still has to pay. My forgiveness transfers the burden of paying for

the fence OFF OF YOU...who deserve to pay it...and onto me who did not do it.

The same is true with the gospel. Sin is a breaking of God’s commands. And incurs and debt. Because the sin is against an infinitely holy God, your debt is death. Eternity apart from God. You gotta pay it (which you can’t). Or he takes it on himself and forgives you. And the reason we Christian’s get so hype is because in the greatest act of forgiveness of all time...God paid the price for your sin and extends forgiveness to you. If Jesus Got out of the grave...there is hope for sinners!

Gospel Hope: sinners get God!

That last verse, verse 49...gives us such a promise that I want to encourage you with. Our hope is not JUST in the idea that we will go to heaven one day. It’s that when we believe this gospel message...God himself comes to live with us. Isn’t that wild? That’s the promised power Jesus is talking about. God comes to dwell with us. That’s where the power to change comes from. That’s where the power to forgive comes from. It comes from God with you. It’s where approval comes from. Don’t have to chase it anymore. You have God. What more could you need. His presence brings security - How powerful is the notion that if you are in Christ, you will NEVER be alone ever again? Because God will be with you. That’s true for those who believe.



Gospel Hope: sinners get victory over death

I must tell you this has been a difficult month for our church. In the past 4 weeks we've lost two young men in our church to traffic accidents. In fact, one of their funerals was right here where I'm standing yesterday afternoon.

But here's what I know - death is not the end for those in Christ. In Christ death has lost its sting and we are guaranteed to be in the presence of God. Michael Muzik was 21. Way too early man. BUT...here's what I know. Because Jesus got out of the grave - there's hope for Michael. Michael lives.

But that is only a promise for those who believe. And I want to implore you don't play games with God. Don't delay your response to him because life is far more fragile than we give it credit for. Receive his forgiveness today. Receive this gospel hope. Be reconciled to God. I plead with you.

6 For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. -- John 3:16

You must believe. I want to offer you the chance to believe today. Close in invitation.