

Matthew 23-06-04a

Good morning, welcome to Sunday morning here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 4th of June, 2023. We're looking at the wonderful story of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew chapter 28.

We'll take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study, and then we will begin. Father, what a privilege it is to spend this time together, to be, uh, receiving the ministry of your Holy Spirit and looking at the wonderful truths pertaining to the Lord Jesus in his life, his work, his death, his resurrection, and the example that he has set for us in terms of relying on your word and your spirit for our daily walk through life. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together, that God and the Holy Spirit will make it meaningful and pertinent to each of our hearts, that we will be more motivated, more greatly encouraged, more focused and centered on living our lives in a way that pleases you and glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ.

We ask it in his name. Amen. Reviewing what we saw in Matthew chapter 28 last time, there seemed to be something of a difference in going over to John and John's account.

And in fact, there are differences in all four gospel accounts pertaining to the resurrection. And this is construed in different ways. Those who want to disbelieve scripture, uh, talk of these differences in terms of contradictions, hopelessly irreconcilable accounts.

Uh, those of us who know better, uh, look at these with great interest because those differences tell us important things and bring them to our attention and highlight them. And there is a purpose and it really takes a look at each of the gospel accounts individually, uh, to see why some details are included and some others are not. We've seen this in the past.

When you look at, uh, the blind men outside Jericho, were there one, were there two, the Gerasene demoniac, was there one, were there two? And, uh, this is not something surprising, fresh or new, but it has been grist for the mill for people who want to attack the veracity of the Bible. There are so many issues because the issue they attach to is so important, which is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. You remember when we went through first Corinthians, uh, 15 and Paul's emphasis on, if Christ is not raised, your faith is futile and we're yet in our sins.

The resurrection is central and the details that are given in the gospel therefore come under close scrutiny for those who want to suggest that it did not take place. This is, uh, obviously going to be something Satan encourages in some cases, perhaps sponsors, but, uh, differences. If you read across the gospels, you can do this with a chronological Bible or a parallel Bible.

I have, uh, a couple of books that are designed to be parallels, new gospel parallels, Pauline parallels. Um, there's an entire volume just with John because the synoptic gospels, you can put them side by side and compare and contrast. But, uh, John, uh, has of course an independent and a more theological point of view.

So there's a whole separate parallels book just on the gospel of John looking at, uh, early church fathers, um, extra biblical literature, the gospel of Thomas and so on. It's quite fascinating to compare and contrast. What is our purpose here? Uh, first of all, we want to affirm our confidence that all scripture is God breathed, inspired by God.

It is accurate. It is without error. Uh, that doesn't mean that our understanding of it doesn't often, uh, incorporate error.

Uh, and there are many allegations of, uh, contradiction, particularly in this account because it is so central. It is found in all four gospel accounts. There are also, uh, further descriptions of the interval between the resurrection and the Ascension in the first chapter of Acts and in, uh, some allusions by the apostle Paul.

Uh, so what do we make of these contradictions? I'm not going to spend time exegeting the contradictions. I would rather look at the scriptures and what they can tell us by way of their inclusions and omissions, which are, uh, often construed to be contradictory. First of all, and we were looking at this last time because early in the morning on the first day, this is where we are.

If you go to Matthew chapter 28, after the Sabbath verse one, as the first of the week began to dawn, the Jews did not use names for the days of the week. Um, it's a bit of a conundrum or, uh, I'm, I'm a little unhappy with the fact that we do have names for the days. We also have names for our months and most of them incorporate pagan, imaginary gods and deities and celestial things that were thought to be, uh, somehow powerful.

So we have sun day, not S O N D A Y, but the, it's, it's solar day. It's, uh, dedicated to the sun that tomorrow will be moon day. And then the day after that you have, uh, Tuesday, which comes from the Norse, and then you have Woden's day, which comes from the Norse.

And you have Thor's day, which comes from the Norse. And you have Freyja's day. She's a Norse goddess.

How this worked in, you'd have to look it up. I don't know. I don't particularly care.

And then, uh, the Sabbath day for the Jews is Saturn day. So all of these godless, pagan, Bible-less allusions to our days, we'd be better off doing like the Jews and just numbering our days. So they would say the first day of the week or two days before the Sabbath or the day after the Sabbath, they hinged everything on God's Sabbath day, enshrined in

the 10 commandments.

And, uh, that's a good way to do. And don't get me started on the months of the year. So after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, this is a great way to refer to our days, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.

Uh, we're already in trouble. We're already under attack with that verse. Why? Well, how many women visited the tomb? So we have this verse, Matthew 28, one in Mark chapter 16, verse one, we have a different enumeration of who went.

Mark 16, one says, now, when the Sabbath was passed, Mary Magdalene, Mary of James and Salome brought spices. Matthew doesn't mention Salome. Uh, Salome is a pretty universally believed to be, uh, the mother of Zebedee's sons, James and John, Mrs. Zebedee and, uh, Mary the mother of, or of James.

So these three are mentioned flip over to Luke chapter 24, verse one, and we have yet a different selection of ladies mentioned. Luke chapter 24, verse one on the first day at, uh, of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them came. Who is they? Well, you look up to, uh, the preceding context to see the ladies who had come with him from Galilee following after verse 55, uh, and they observed the tomb and how the body was laid that by the way, 2355 is important in countering another one of the, uh, resurrection contradiction allusions, uh, that you find or allegations.

Um, and so you compare that then at 24, one through 10, uh, and the list of the women is down in verse 10, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, that's new Mary of James. We saw her in Mark and the other women with them told these things to the apostles so far. The only consistent personage is Mary Magdalene and, uh, Mary of James.

In fact, I think in Matthew we have, uh, the other Mary. There are actually four Marys on hand at this point. We talked about three of them last time and the meaning of the word Miriam and why this was such a popular name gets very confusing because Miriam was a popular name.

Joseph was a popular name. And, uh, Jacob, which is translated James in your King James and most other Bibles, uh, were extremely popular names in this time. And so they have to have, uh, an appendage put on Mary Magdalene or Mary of James or Mary, the mother of the Lord or, uh, some other distinguishing element because otherwise, uh, and I know people who have family members, uh, even in our church, we have several, uh, Dan's of our acquaintance, uh, Dan, Daniel.

And, uh, if you're, if you don't have some context, it can be confusing. Which one are you talking about? So then you go to John, look at John chapter 20, verse one, John chapter 20. Now on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early while it

was still dark.

She alone is mentioned and she saw the stone had been taken away. She ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved. So Mary comes, she sees the stone has been rolled away and she runs back to Peter and John.

That's, that is how John gives the story. So how do we discover who all were, who was at the tomb? Well, there are actually six women. If you combine these accounts and, and take a look, um, and it is important that all of these early witnesses, other than the Roman guards are women, the ones who go and tell the disciples are all ladies.

And, uh, it is not, uh, hard to find people who will point out that the testimony of women, even multiple women, uh, was given very little weight in this day. And if the resurrection account was going to be fabricated by somebody who wanted to convince everyone that Jesus was actually raised from the dead, uh, they wouldn't start the story with the witnesses that nobody thought counted. And it is the counterintuitive nature of God's purpose that he arranges for the first and foremost witnesses to the resurrection and the empty tomb to be ladies.

And I find this compelling as a point of application. Many times when people want to make a decision or want to form an opinion and express a belief about whether or not there is a God, whether or not Jesus was the son of God, whether he was the Messiah, whether he really existed, whether he actually lived the search for the historical Jesus went on a quest to figure out if it was just all myths and legends, or if there was a real Jesus. And many times people will appeal to the strength of the evidence.

Well, I believe because like in a courtroom, the preponderance of evidence favors this or favors that. Um, and yet in God's plan and in God's presentation of himself, of his plan for salvation, of his purpose for his people, old Testament and new, his, uh, son, the Lord Jesus Christ, his presence, his promises, his principles, the doctrines, all of the things that pertain to our life in relation to God and in relation to each other, it doesn't ultimately come down to the strength of the evidence. Well, the evidence just isn't strong enough for me to believe.

What is the problem with that point of view? What does it mean if people say, well, uh, I just don't find enough evidence to, to compel me to believe. God is not looking for wonderful, rational, evidentiary, uh, people who can weigh evidence in a scientific balance and say, well, you know, the evidence for slightly outweighs the evidence against, so I will believe in God. That would be the filter, right? If God was looking for people to be his own people, to accomplish his purposes, to represent and appreciate his glory, to serve him now and dwell with him in the future, well, what I'm really looking for are people that are really good at parsing facts and arranging lines of argument and, uh, dismissing and undermining, uh, fallacies and, and false and, uh, weightless arguments.

I really need these people that have got a forensic sense of argumentation and they can, they can sift through a lot of facts and evidence and arrive at a conclusion. That's who I want. Do you find that anywhere in the Bible? What is the criterion? And I need mentioned nothing more than Hebrews chapter 11, by a careful analysis of the preponderance of evidence, Abraham decided to leave Ur of the Chaldees and go to a land that God had shown him on a map and brought him a soil sample and reminded him that, you know, in the ancient day, this is the probable location of the garden of Eden.

And he really ought to get back there and, uh, consulting the geologists and the geographers and the map makers and those who traveled by caravan. Abraham decided, I think there probably really is a land there. I think it may in fact be the, the place where I can find Shem, my, my ancestor still alive and functioning as the Melchizedekian priest.

And okay. I think you've convinced me. I believe I'll go.

Is there any element of that anywhere in scripture when Moses is chasing goats in Midian for 40 years, and then there's a glow on the mountainside. And he says, I'm going to turn aside and see this great site. Did he bring a team of Egyptian scientists to come and say, you know, this is not real fire.

You notice how close I can get. And it's not hot. Do you see that the bush is burning and not consumed? You can't call this a burning bush because the bush is not in fact burning.

Let's do some more scientific. And this voice could be coming from anywhere. You know, there's somebody hiding behind a rock speaking to you.

What's to say this is the actual God, much less the God of your fathers, the God of the, of the future Israel, uh, people in land and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who who's to say that voice could be coming from anywhere. You know, I can make a snake out of a cane. If, if you give me a little preparation time, it is always faith.

So let me preface what we're about to look at by saying our belief in God, in the Lord, Jesus, in the integrity of scripture, in the value and power of God's truth doesn't hinge on, well, if somebody can show me a valid contradiction in scripture, I'm done. It's over. Uh, because a, there are no actual valid contradictions in scripture, but even if somebody could pose one that we couldn't refute, I have a choice to make.

Is there actual integrity and I am just not able to reconcile this apparent contradiction or is there something that is beyond my current ability to understand, Paul says, let God be true. And every man, a liar and every man would include me and my deceitful heart. We make our decision for, or against God for, or against the truth of scripture for, or against faith in God's promises in God's principles, in God's plan and purpose in the historicity and validity of the scriptural record.

We make those decisions not based on, well, have I tested it structurally and there's not

a crack or a chip, or there's not a splattered bug. My windshield is perfectly clear. It's safe for me to go drive.

Um, there's, there's a great thing you encounter from time to time. It's been around a very long time, but there is a paragraph composed of words, not a single one of which is spelled correctly. Uh, it says something along the lines, uh, you would think that if you messed up the spelling of words and would is spelled W L O U D, uh, and words is W R D S. Every single word in the paragraph is misspelled.

And yet, when you look at that paragraph, you can tell there are misspellings, but you can read every word. Not one of them is spelled right, but you can tell what it's supposed to be. And you get the entire gist of the paragraph without a single word being exactly right.

Do you ever drive your car and there are bug splats or cracks or chips in your windshield? If you heard me give this illustration many times, but I do a lot of driving and it amazes me that I have no problem. I've never had any dubious lack of confidence in where I was going or what turn I should make based on the fact that there were some places in my windshield that I could not see through. It's not perfect.

I don't have a crystal clear, unblemished view of the terrain, the road, the signs in front of me, and yet I have no difficulty navigating them. Why if let's say there's a big splat, I went through Lufkin, Texas, or was going to Lufkin, Texas one time to, to do some work. And I ran into what I later found out.

They affectionately call down there a swarm of love bugs. These are little bugs full of some kind of gray intestinal matter. And when you run through a swarm of them, they splatter on the windshield and it turns to a sticky, opaque, mud-like film.

And it's worse if you turn your wipers on. They started splatting. It got very, very splattered.

I could still see to drive, but I thought, well, I'll hit my wipers. Well, that just smeared it across like a paintbrush. And then I couldn't see anything.

I literally had to roll my side window down and stick my head out to get over to a gas station on the edge of town and get some water and clean it off. The water in my sprayers was insufficient to get this gook off of my windshield. And I asked somebody there, what is this? And they explained, um, you have to have a complete lack of information.

Uh, you know, almost no visibility before you feel it is really unsafe to drive. The time it is unsafe to drive is if our lack of visibility for our surroundings is because we are not looking at scripture. We are not placing our confidence in scripture and we are cursed because we are trusting in man and making flesh, our arm, our strength, any amount of

scripture gives us light on our path.

Thy word. You think about the day that David wrote, how much of God's word was in existence when David wrote, uh, thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. How much of the 66 books of the Bible did he have? Five.

He had the Pentateuch and that was it. Are you kidding me? It's narrative in Genesis. It's narrative in Exodus.

It's law and ritual in Leviticus. It's more history in numbers. It's more law in Deuteronomy.

And David says, your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. If David had the flashlight of the Pentateuch, how much light do we have with 66 books of the Bible? But if you don't turn the light on, if you don't look where the light is shining, if you don't comprehend and evaluate and make decisions based on what that light reveals, you're in big trouble. Does the lens of your flashlight have to be perfect? Does your light bulb have to have no spots or blemishes on it whatsoever to shine light on your path? I've seen, look at the light bulb in a barn after several years.

I can show you light bulbs in our barn that, uh, you'd be surprised any light gets out at all. But when you turn the light on, it still shines. You can still see well enough to everything you need to do, but it's, it is not a pristine unblemished bulb.

That's the nature of the scriptural record. And you know this, but anytime someone wants to start attacking the integrity of scripture, what is their real argument? Well, here is a logical contradiction. So you should no longer believe in God, Jesus, old Testament, new Testament truth, because here is an apparent contradiction and logic dictates that you not believe logic should outweigh faith.

There is the wonderful song. I know not when my Lord may come at night or new day, noon day fair, uh, or with I'll walk the veil with him or meet him in the air. There's so many things I do not know, but I know whom I have believed.

We have faith in the person of the father, the person of the son, the person of the spirit, the, uh, persons who lived and walked this earth as God's people and received revelation from him and recorded it for our benefit. Uh, this is something unbelievers can't understand. Well, I don't find a logical basis to believe in God.

My basis for believing in God is not logic. Logic will come after. I can reconcile.

I can explain. I can actually benefit by looking at apparent contradictions and in finding out why this says this and why that says that and why at first blush, they don't seem to agree, but looking deeper, there is a wonderful truth there and God tagged it with a little bump in the road to get me to stop and look at it. And it's a wonderful thing.

And that's what we're going to look at. Examine the resurrection. There are, there are two places where this kind of attack is focused.

One is on the origin of everything. Genesis versus science, evolution, secular humanism, mechanistic, um, imaginary, um, and unknown, uh, means by which random molecules assemble themselves into living, reproducing things. Um, and it's, it's a funny thing because, uh, there is no evidence supporting life from non-life without some kind of intervention.

Uh, it's never been observed. There is no explanation for how it could happen. There are theories, there are hypotheses, but they can't be tested.

Well, the conditions of the early earth are no longer around. They can do all kinds of things in the lab. They could take each individual part of it and test that individual part and say, if you, if you put those together, let's say, uh, you're a mechanic and somebody brings you in a car that, uh, had some terrible accident and you don't know what all's wrong with it.

Well, you could try to diagnose the whole car, or you could take it apart and send the alternator to a, uh, an alternator shop, send the radiator to a place that can check or replace the radiator. You could take each individual part and get it tested. And if you reassemble all known good parts, the car will work.

Um, in theory, it's not always my experience, but, uh, ideally it should. And so these ideas that, that, uh, are put in place of the biblical record, they say, well, you're, that's just purely faith. Exactly.

People who say, show me enough evidence. We just saw that at the end of chapter 27, come down from the cross and we will believe meet my standard of evidence. And I will logically believe, you know, that is not true.

Jesus has been giving them an abundance of testimony, an evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign and no further sign is going to be given to it. Except this one, Jesus did many signs. John says, I couldn't get a book big enough to record that.

These have been written that you might believe these signs have been written. This is sufficient to authenticate that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God, and that believing not parsing, not logically deducing, believing, and this is the filter who is God looking for smart people, reasonable, logically gifted people or people who are seeking him when he reveals himself, it is a positive response. I am grateful.

I am so glad there is a God like our God who is righteous and sovereign and just and is the embodiment of love who is everywhere, who knows everything, who is all powerful, who is unchanging and doesn't ever go back on his word or change his character and is true and the author and source of all truth. That appeals to me. I am, when I find out

there is a God like that, I am drawn.

There are other people who are horrified that there is an all powerful being who is righteous and just, who holds people on this earth accountable, who will not tolerate sin, who cannot continue to sustain the lives of those who have consciously and willfully chosen to distance themselves from the only source of life. To have that life, you have to want it. To live in God's future kingdom, you have to love and appreciate the God of that kingdom.

There is no life apart from God and apart from his son. He that hath the son hath life. So it is important to recognize that having believed, having confidence that there is a God and that the Bible is true and is not mistake ridden and fallible and unreliable, starting from the standpoint of that belief, we go and look for the truth into which each different account fits harmoniously, productively, in an edifying way, looking at it and seeing how these align and support each other.

It actually becomes evidence in itself. If somebody wants to prevaricate, if they want to deceive, if they want to perpetrate a falsehood, one of the first things they do is anybody that's going to be questioned as a witness, they try to get together ahead of time and say, let's get our story straight. Let's be sure we all say the same thing.

Watch Forensic Files or Cold Case or any of these. I like those because it's real life. And rather than fictional movies and such, you see human nature revealed.

You see our futile efforts to overcome the corruption of our nature, our inability to control passions. It's all there on display. And I just find that more interesting.

I find reality more interesting than fantasy. Personally, nothing wrong with fantasy. I just like reality because that's the kind of hairpin I am.

So the starting point is belief. If you are a skeptic, nothing is going to be good enough. There's not enough evidence for intelligent design.

Your evidence is faulty. It's flawed. I can attack it on this basis and that basis.

It starts at creation. It starts with the earliest history as recorded in the Bible. It is attacked.

No, God did not create the heavens and the earth. He did not follow the sequence that is found in Genesis. In an orderly and phased fashion, as indicated by the evenings and the mornings, there was not a worldwide flood or any kind of flood as described in Genesis 6 through 8. And therefore, you shouldn't believe in God.

It is much easier to start with our confidence in our Heavenly Father. And He has a purpose. His ways are higher than our ways.

His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. And what I don't understand, there are people who think, well, if I don't understand it, it's not logical, it's not real, and it's bunkum. I have to be able to grasp it.

If there's a God, I have to be able to fully understand what He's doing. You know, the whole syllogism that looking around at the evil in the world, either God is willing but not able to fix evil, or He's not able to fix it because He doesn't want to. He has the ability, but He doesn't want to.

He's either not willing or He's not able because evil is not fixed. And so my conclusion is He is neither willing nor able, and there is no God. In any of my three cases, He's not worth worshiping and dedicating my life to because why doesn't He fix evil? My standard of come down from the cross is how can you allow child abuse and all of these other horrific things that you see around the world, mass murders and school shootings and the wiping out of entire groups of people in countries.

If there was a God, He would not allow that. The fact that it goes on tells me there is no God. This is a faulty way of reasoning.

The same level of attack that happens on the existence of God, on God's creative work, it is one of the main evidences for our faith in God. What may be known of God is manifest where? In creation. The things which are created can be seen when I look at the heavens and I see His handiwork.

That is enough testimony that I now reveal the kind of heart that I have. Am I responsive to God or not? The application of this is it's not just a salvation decision. We have the same human heart all through life.

We have regeneration. We have the indwelling and hopefully the filling of the Holy Spirit. We have the the residence of the Word of God.

But our heart is still tricky and untrustworthy. Follow your heart is the worst advice ever given. And we have to be careful as believers to recognize that we walk by faith and not by sight, by faith and not by sight.

It doesn't mean that when we can see, we can leave off faith, but whether we can see or we can't see, it is faith that drives us to God, that gives us the hope that enables us to love both God and one another. But remember, if somebody starts throwing dust in the air about the integrity of scripture, their goal is to undermine your faith. Your faith is only underminable in that fashion if it rests on logic and not on a heart response to the transcendent God and His ever present Holy Spirit and the words and the works of the Lord Jesus Christ and the full expression and explanation of those words in the writings of the apostles and the Old Testament prophets that we have before us.

We make the decision of whether or not we are for God, whether or not we believe in

God and what God has said first. All the rest is added unto you. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Everything else will fall into line. Well, the second great point of attack beyond creation and the existence of God is the resurrection, which is the new birth, the new life and its inception. Life begins in Genesis chapter one.

Resurrection life, eternal life hinges on what we have before us at the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and the empty tomb. So it likewise has come under some of the heaviest attack of any part of the Bible. Well, because we are believers and we know that these attacks are not legitimate, we're going to quickly see how and why they are not.

It is important for us if we notice a difference, as say we did last week, looking at the account in Matthew and the account in John, two of the widest apart accounts of the ladies at the tomb talking to the disciples. What is the sequence of events? Who does what? When is this something that should concern us? Is there a mistake in the Gospels? If it's not a mistake, what exactly is going on? That's what we'll look at when we come back from the break.