

**Matthew 28: 11-20; “Faith in the Resurrection of Christ”,
An Easter Sermon delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, on
April 8th, 2012, In the Afternoon Worship Service.**

The importance of exercising faith in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ ought to be more carefully considered by both believers and unbelievers. If you are an unbeliever you ought to recognize the fact that the only way that you shall ever really come to know God and to have eternal life, will be if you will believe in Christ's resurrection. God the Father has appointed the Lord Jesus Christ to be the only Savior of sinners; the only Savior for all of Mankind. And He is not dead, He is living and seated at the right hand of the Father in the glory of that other dimension we call heaven. In Romans Chapter 10, verse 9 it says: “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.” It is only when you can believe in Christ having been raised from the dead, that hope can enter your heart that you can find and obtain a righteousness which is better than your own. Jesus Christ has worked this great salvation out, in His life of perfect obedience to God. He has wrought a perfect righteousness for all who will believe in Him. But to show this fact forth, that the problems of sin and death have been dealt with in Christ, and that redemption has been accomplished, and atonement made for all of your sins, God raised Jesus from the dead, if only you will believe. In verse 10 of Romans 10 it says, “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Now you must ask yourself at this hour, “Have I deliberately and sincerely come to believe in Christ's resurrection from the dead so that I can find a better righteousness than my own?” If you have not, then you are not yet saved from your sins. If you have deliberately and sincerely believed in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, you are saved. However, we want to go on beyond this, this afternoon. We want to look more in-depth at the subject of faith and unbelief in relation to Christ's resurrection, both then and now, in order that we might all exercise a greater faith. 1st of all we want to look at the denial of, and the lies told, concerning Christ's resurrection then and now. 2nd – We want to look at how some of His disciples worshiped Him and how some doubted. And then 3^{rdly} – We want to look at how faith in Christ's resurrection is linked to the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

1st of all – We want to look at the denial of, and the lies told, concerning Christ's resurrection, then and now. (verses 11-15)

You will remember that there were guards that the chief priests and the Pharisees had stationed around the tomb to secure it. The chief priests and the Pharisees had gone to Pilate, after the Lord Jesus was buried, and they asked that he would command that the tomb be made secure. This was because they considered Christ to be a deceiver. They say in verse 63 of Chapter 27, “Sir, we remember while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise.’” “Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come

by night and steal him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' "So the last deception will be worse than the first." But where was the deception of our Lord Jesus Christ in anything that He did? It was not in the miracles that He did, which were done by the power of God. It was not in the words which he spoke. which were the words which His Father had given Him to speak. No, the Lord Jesus always did and spoke those things which were pleasing to His Father. When He was brought before Caiaphas before He went to the cross, and He was asked about His disciples and His doctrine, He said in John 18: 20, "I spoke openly to the world." "I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing." There was no deception or guile or lies in the Lord Jesus. It was all to be found in these unbelieving Jewish leaders.

Truth and the faith in Jesus which flows from a knowledge of the truth are based upon facts. The fact was that guards who had been appointed to keep watch over the tomb "shook for fear" of the angel who came down to roll away the stone from the door of tomb. And when the women believed the words of the angel that the Lord Jesus had been raised from the dead, and when they went off to tell the Apostles the good news, it says in verse 11, "Now while they were going, behold some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. I believe that it is possible that they saw the Risen Lord, perhaps when He came out of the tomb, and then again perhaps, when He came up to the women and greeted them. So both the guards and the chief priests came to know the truth; that Jesus was alive. He was indeed risen from the dead. And yet, their wicked hearts would not let them repent of their wickedness of having had Jesus falsely tried and put to death. They must perpetuate their wickedness by paying a large sum of money to the soldiers, bribing them off, not just to be silent, but even worse, to deliberately lie and tell others, "His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we slept." Why do very religious men lie like this? Did they really believe that God does not see such things? For their lie is the denial of the reality of God and His future judgment. Did these men deny that the resurrection took place when they heard the report from the guards? No, they could not deny what had been told to them as an observed truth. Rather, it was, that they did not want the truth of Christ's resurrection to become known by others who did not believe, and so therefore they bribed the guards and fabricated a lie!

We should learn from this several lessons; that the truth of Christ's resurrection cannot really be denied because its veracity is supported by the plain undeniable facts of what happened that day which were corroborated by witnesses, both believing and unbelieving. The guards knew the truth and they told that truth to the chief priests. But let us learn that evil men will always try to explain away the truth about Jesus, and the truth as it is in Jesus. They will attempt to do this by lies and misrepresentation. This only goes to show that the plainest evidence will not convince men to believe or to hold to the truth unless the Holy Spirit convinces them that it is wise and right to do so. Just because men are presented with verifiable truth does not mean that they will believe in the resurrection of our Christ, or the

truth of His gospel. They will not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved unless grace is working in their hearts. See the deceitfulness of the human heart, that it would rather believe a lie than admit that Jesus Christ is raised from the dead, and thus open the door of their heart and mind to believe the idea that they need to be saved! It is grace alone that can change the leper's spots and melt the heart of stone.

Furthermore, this lie of the chief priests, which was given to the guards to tell others, has many inconsistencies and absurdities involved in it. The body is supposed to have been stolen by Christ's disciples while the guards slept? 1st - Is it at all likely that so many men would all fall asleep in the open air, at once? 2^{ndly} - Is it at all probable that a number of Roman guards should be found off their watch, much less asleep, when it would have meant instant death, according to the Roman military laws to be found in this state? 3rd - Could they have they have slept with all the noise which must needs have occurred by moving such a great stone? 4th - Is it likely that these disciples could have had sufficient time to do all this, and then to come and return without being perceived by any person? And 5th - If they were asleep, how could they possibly know that it was the disciples that stole the body of Jesus, or indeed that any person or persons stole him? Because if they were asleep, they could not have seen any person coming to steal Him. Therefore, the resurrection may be as fully proved as the theft. (So says Adam Clarke in his commentary) We need to understand that as William Cowper says, "Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan His works in vain." "God is His own interpreter and He will make it plain." It is much more difficult to believe the lies which are told about what happened on the day of Christ's resurrection than simply to accept the truth of what the Bible says, which was written by credible witnesses.

Many people in our own day still try to put forward the "swoon theory" of Christ's resurrection; that the Lord Jesus was crucified, they cannot deny that. But then they go on to say that when He was taken down from the cross that He only appeared to be dead, and then later on He came back to conscious life and was seen by the disciples in this state. But this is hardly creditable. Especially when one thinks about the Roman soldier who thrust his spear up into Jesus' body, into His heart, and everyone there saw the blood and the water issue forth, a sure indication that Jesus died from His wounds. No, the truth is, that many unbelieving people are scared of the truth of Jesus' resurrection. For if Jesus really did rise from the dead, then no doubt the Bible is true. And if the Bible is true, then they are really sinners under the wrath of God because of their sins, and they are really going to have to repent of their sins, and ask God to forgive their sins through Jesus Christ, if they are ever going to be able to have eternal life. This they cannot bear to contemplate. But even if men's hearts are so sinfully disposed as to think that the Bible's testimony is not true, is it not the most wonderful news in the world that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead? It certainly would be, for since Christ really has risen from the dead, then there is true hope and everlasting comfort which comes through believing in Him.

2nd – We want to look at how some of His disciples worshiped Him and how some doubted.

Verse 16 says, “Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them.” “When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.” This verse is very hard to understand in its context because Thomas did not see the risen Lord until 8 days after Jesus was raised from the dead. If Thomas was not there, there were only 10. Perhaps Matthew is speaking in general terms of “the twelve”. But let us try to understand. Back up in verse 10 Jesus had told the women that they were not to be afraid. They were to go and tell His brethren to go to Galilee, and there they would see Him. This message was faithfully communicated to the Apostles; not only the 11 Apostles, but also to all of Christ’s brethren in Jerusalem. So when it says that the 11 disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus appointed, it does not mean that there were not many others with them, because the women had sent word to all of Christ’s brethren in that area of Jerusalem and probably the word went even as far as Galilee. Indeed it seems probable to me that this going to Galilee which is mentioned in our text is also the occasion which is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 6. In that context, in verse 3 it says, “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.” “After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.” “After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.” There were appearances made that very day to Peter and others of “the twelve”, in or just outside of Jerusalem. I will assume that this calling the eleven disciples who were Apostles, “the twelve”, by the Apostle Paul, was simply a deliberate carry-over from what they had been called as a group while Judas was still alive. Judas, being now dead, was not with them. But the Apostle Paul may have also been thinking of Matthias who eventually became one of the twelve. When he wrote 1st Corinthians it was the eleven plus Matthias which would allow the number of “the twelve” to continue. Matthias was also a witness to Christ’s resurrection and was then later added to the number of “the twelve” in Acts 1: 26. He was no doubt one of the 500 brethren who saw Jesus on this occasion in Galilee.

But evidently Thomas was not there on the day or the night of Christ’s resurrection when Jesus made His appearances. He probably saw the other Apostles a short time after. But in John’s gospel it says that he did not believe their words to him, telling him that they had seen the Lord. He did get to see the Lord eight days later, and it was inside a house when the doors were shut. Had Thomas gone with the other ten when it says in our text that “the eleven disciples went away to Galilee”? I think that he did. And I think that he is one of those who “doubted” until he was able to see His Lord up close. I think that the “some who doubted” when they saw Him at the mountain in Galilee were some of these “five hundred brethren” who were seeing the risen Christ, for the first time. The rest, who had seen Him before,

and who might have had their doubts removed before, were the ones who immediately worshiped the risen Lord Jesus. In Mark's account of these things he said in Mark 16: 14 – "Later Jesus appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen." Again, if this "eleven" includes Thomas, it must have been later than the first night, or else the writers are just speaking of "the eleven" in a general sense without including Thomas.

Whichever it is, we need to understand how difficult it was for all of the Apostles to come to terms with Christ's resurrection. They saw Him but Christ had to prove Himself to them, that He was risen. Our Lord appeared a number of times, to His Apostles and also once to many of His brethren, and at most of these appearances there were still some doubters among them. This should show us something about ourselves believing in Christ's resurrection. If those who actually saw the risen Christ could still have doubts, then can you not see how easy it would be for any of us who believes to fall into the mistake of not remembering that Christ is so great in wisdom, power, presence, and might, to be with each of us always. Let me ask you whether you are remembering in your experience every day that Christ is risen from the dead? Are you remembering to worship the Living Risen Christ, each and every day when you rise? And do you continue to worship and to exercise faith in the Risen Christ as you go through each day? If you are consciously doing this by the power of the Holy Spirit, then you will be making progress in your faith. As you read your Bible and as you pray, remember that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. As you go out into the world to your work to your responsibilities remember that the Living Risen Christ is right there with you, dwelling in your soul, desiring to have fellowship and communion with you in your heart.

And then Finally and briefly – We want to look at how faith in Christ's resurrection is linked to the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Verse 17 says, "When they saw Him, they worshiped Him, but some doubted." "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and earth.'" "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." I do not know if you have ever thought about the context of this "Great Commission". The context is Christ's resurrection. In the Father's raising Christ from the dead, He has given to Him all power and authority in heaven and earth to save the Elect and to build His Church. Indeed, He has authority over all people and all things until the end of the world when He returns for His own. At that time Christ the Son will "deliver up the kingdom to the Father" that God may be all-in-all. But during this Church age, which will last until Christ returns, this Commission is in effect. The Lord Jesus is speaking to ministers especially in this commission because he speaks of "making disciples and baptizing them". This is the special duty of the pastors of all the true churches around the world in every generation of the Church age. But certainly the pastors need the help of the rest of

the body of Christ to fulfill this mandate of “going”, and seeing disciples made, and teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded. It is because Christ is risen and has all power and authority, that we can be confident that this commission shall eventually be completely fulfilled, and all of God’s Elect will be called, brought into the fold of His Church. As each believer responds to the truth of His Word, remembering that He is risen from the dead, they shall then go about by grace to do and to keep His commandments. These things can only come about because the Risen, Living Christ is always with His Church. This Great Commission was given to the Apostles. But the Apostles died long ago and went to heaven. There have been many generations of Christians who have gone about to keep the commandments which are found in this commission. And the reason that the Church continues to be built is because Jesus Christ is with her. Therefore, let us not lose heart, but realize that His promise is true for each one of us individually, who is trying to be his witness, and also for all of us collectively as His Church composed of many churches all over the world. Let us rejoice in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ whom we shall one day see face to face and live with forever, because He was raised from the dead.