

## **Easter Sunday Sermon**

Sermon by Pastor Diana J. Perkins

**March 27, 2016**

**I have just finished reading a devotional book written by Beth Moore called “Voices of the Faithful.” It is a collection of stories from missionaries around the world recalling experiences they have spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who have never heard. As I was reading this book, I thought of all the years that I have known about the birth of Jesus, the ministry of Jesus and the death and resurrection of our Savior. As far back as I can recall, I have heard these stories and was taught the Bible. When I read the stories of how excited people are when they hear the gospel for the first time and it sinks into their heart so they accept Jesus as their Savior, I feel humbled. How many times have you heard this story? What emotions are stirred within your heart when you read Mark 16? Because of the familiarity of the story, do you hear the words without comprehending the wonder of the magnificent gift that God gave to this world so that we might have eternal life? Jesus Christ willingly gave His life that we might live forever with Him in heaven and escape the judgment of God that is going to come to this earth.**

**Friday night at 3:00 PM became the “first Good Friday”. Jesus died after crying out “It is finished!” His mission was accomplished and He was victorious! Though it appeared to be a victory for those who hated Jesus and rejected Him as their King, the truth was that His blood paid the price for the salvation of souls from Satan’s grip. From the narratives of the Scriptures, it seems right to say that women were the last ones to leave the body of Jesus and the first ones to return to the tomb that first Easter morning.**

**Jesus had been buried in a rich man’s tomb whose name was Joseph. It had never been used and it was borrowed for it would be needed for only three days. Jesus had told his followers and the crowds that He would rise the third day, but the disciples didn’t remember the saying. The hostile crowd remembered it as they repeated it to Pilate and asked that guards be placed at the tomb and the stone needed to be sealed tightly so that his disciples couldn’t come and steal the body away claiming that He had risen from the dead. It is wonderful how things that are meant for evil get turned around and bring glory to God. Those unbelieving guards witnessed the earthquake that rolled away the stone and they witnessed the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. They could have rejoiced and believed and had their names written in the Lamb’s book of Life. Yet they chose to return to the chief priests, report all that happened and the leaders and chief priest decided to bribe the soldiers to tell a lie to cover the truth. They gave them large sums of money to tell everyone that Jesus’ disciples came during the night and stole his body while the soldiers slept. They promised the guards that should the story reach the governor’s ears, they would talk with them and they had nothing to worry about. The**

soldiers took the money and did what they were told to do. See Matthew 28:11. This confirmed the truth that Jesus had said concerning the story of the rich man and Lazarus. In Luke 16:30, a rich man had died and was in torment. He asked Father Abraham to send Lazarus to give him a drop of water to alleviate his suffering. Abraham told him that he could not grant the request because during the two men's life spans, Lazarus suffered and the rich man refused to help him. He was concerned only with himself and didn't lift a finger to help the beggar. Now the tables were turned and Lazarus was happy and the rich man was miserable. There was a divider between the two places and neither could cross over to the other side. Then the rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his five brothers so they wouldn't come to the same place that he was now in. Abraham told him that they could read what Moses and the prophets wrote and pay attention to what they declared. The rich man said that that was not enough but if someone from the dead went and warned them, they would listen to him and turn to God. Abraham declared that if they won't pay attention to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen even to someone who comes back from the dead.

The resurrection story is a perfect example of this scenario. These soldiers witnessed the miracle of the resurrection, yet willingly lied and covered the truth in exchange for money and assurance of protection from the governor. There was no fear of God and of the consequence of rejecting the truth on the final Day of Judgment.

In John 16, Jesus had told his disciples that for a little while they would not see him but after a while they would see him. They didn't understand what he was saying to them concerning the fact that he was going to the Father. They spoke among themselves and asked, "What is the meaning of what he is saying to us?" Jesus understanding that they were perplexed explained it in this manner. He told them that they had questions about what his words meant. He told them that for certain they would cry and be sad but the world would be happy. They would be sad for a period of time, but when they understood, they would be happy too. He likened it to a woman who gives birth to a child. After the pain of giving birth is over, she forgets about it for the joy of holding a newborn child that is brought into the world. He told them that they would also be sad for a season, but later they would be so happy that no one would be able to change the direction that they would take. That was fulfilled after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. The disciples were filled with the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost and there was nothing that stopped them from spreading the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

John 20. Mary stood at the mouth of the tomb as the stone was already rolled away. She ran to Simon Peter and to Jesus' favorite disciple and told them that the Lord had been taken from the tomb and no one knew where he had been taken.

Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb, running side by side and the other disciple ran ahead and got to the tomb first. He looked inside but didn't enter. Peter, upon arriving at the tomb entered and saw the strips of cloth. He also saw the strips of cloth that had covered Jesus' face. It was rolled up and in a place by itself. The other disciple entered the tomb and when he had seen it, he believed. At that time they didn't know that the Scriptures said that Jesus would rise to life. The two of them went back to the other disciples.

Mary Magdalene stood crying outside the tomb. She was still weeping when she stooped down and she saw two angels inside. They were dressed in white and were sitting where Jesus' body had been. One was at the head and the other at the foot. The angels asked her why she was crying. She answered, "They have taken away my Lord's body and I don't know where they have put him." As soon as Mary spoke these words, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there. But she didn't know who he was. Jesus asked her, "Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" She mistook him for the gardener so she answered, "Sir, if you have taken his body away, please tell me, so I can go and get him." Then Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said "Rabboni" which means "Teacher." Jesus then instructed her not to touch him because he had not yet gone to the Father. But she was to tell his disciples that he was going to his Father and his God, as well as her Father and her God. Mary obeyed Jesus and went to the disciples declaring that she had seen the Lord and she told them the message that he had commanded her to tell them.

The disciples were afraid of the Jewish leaders and on the same Sunday evening, they locked themselves in a room. Suddenly Jesus appeared in the middle of the group. He greeted them and showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw him, they were very happy. After Jesus greeted them he told them that he was sending them just as his Father had sent him. He breathed on them and told them to receive the Holy Ghost.

Thomas the Twin was not present when Jesus appeared in the locked room. When they told him that they had seen the Lord, he refused to believe. He would not believe unless he saw the nail scars in his hands and was able to touch them with his finger. He also must put his hand where the spear went in his side and until he was able to do that, he refused to believe. A week later, the disciples were assembled together and Thomas was present. Jesus came in while the doors were still locked and stood in the middle of the group. After greeting the disciples, Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and look at my hands. Put your hand into my side. Stop doubting and have faith. Thomas answered, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said, "Do you have faith because you have seen me? The people who have faith in me without seeing me are the one who are really blessed."

John continued his writing by stating that there were many miracles and events that happened that never got written in the book. However, there were written so that people

would put their faith in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God. If you have faith in him, you will have true life.

I pray that each one of us will study the word of God until every doubt is dissolved in our minds and hearts concerning Jesus Christ. The Bible is a book that is living and will sanctify us through and through if we allow the Holy Spirit to do its work.

Jesus can overcome doubts as he did with Thomas. Yet there are people who are witnesses to the truth of God's power and word who will not believe regardless of the evidence that is presented to them. They love darkness because their deeds are evil and they refuse to allow the Holy Spirit to convict them of their evil ways that they might turn to the one who cleanses from all sin and directs men to a life of holiness.

Read 1 Corinthians 15 to learn more about the kind of body that we will have for eternity. In verse 42, it states that our earthly bodies will die, but after Jesus raises us from the grave, our new bodies will live forever. These ugly and weak bodies will become beautiful and strong. As surely as there are physical bodies, there are spiritual bodies and our physical bodies will be changed into spiritual bodies. The first man Adam was made with a physical body; the last man Adam is a life-giving spirit. He rose from the dead with a spiritual body and the likeness will be given to every believer when the time comes. The first man was made from the dust of the earth; the second one came from heaven. Everybody has a physical body like the first Adam. All believers will receive the new body likened to the one that Jesus had when he rose from the dead. Our earthly bodies will decay and this body cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Not everyone will die, but we will all be changed in a twinkling of an eye when Jesus returns. Our bodies will be changed from corruptible to one that won't die or decay. The Scriptures declare:

**Death has lost the battle! Where is its victory? Where is its sting?"**

**Sin is what gives death its sting and the Law is the power behind sin. But thank God for letting our Lord Jesus Christ give us the victory!**

**Dear friends, stand firm and don't be shaken. Always keep busy working for the Lord. You know that everything you do for him is worthwhile.**