

April 9, 2023

Matthew 28:1-10

“Jesus: The Real Deal!”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

A couple of weeks ago I was in a conversation with one of our members and her fiancé. They pointed me to an article that relates an incident in Kenya, Africa. It's about a Kenyan man who claims to be Jesus Christ. The article states, and I kid you not:

Popular Kenyan self proclaimed Jesus Christ of Bungoma (yesu wa Tongaren) now claims that his life is in danger. This is after a section of residents of Bungoma were overheard saying he must be crucified during Easter the same way Jesus was crucified. The residents have assured him that if he is truly the messiah, he will resurrect on the third day and go to heaven after the crucifixion so he should not worry at all. He has since reported the matter to the police station.

Sometimes real life is better than fiction! And maybe one should think twice about claiming to be Jesus Christ - at least in Kenya. All kidding aside, the words of Jesus from Matthew 24:23-24 are quite appropriate: "... if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand." Isn't it something else?! Many have come on the scene to even perform great signs and wonders - some fake and some demonic - but there is only one who died on the cross and had a spear thrust into his heart to then rise from the grave! And there were eyewitness who saw both his death and him alive. Today we consider **Jesus: The Real Deal!**

Unheard of that one really dies and rises again! And you better think twice before you dismiss it out of hand. We have eye-witness testimony! Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:6, "... he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time ..." and many of them were still living at the time when this was written. And how about these words from a Jewish historian who was a Roman sympathizer - not a Christian - who wrote around 60 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus (93 AD):

At this time there was a wise man called Jesus, and his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. Many people among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive. Accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have reported wonders (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:63-64).

Jesus: The Real Deal! And there is so much more we could say, but that will have to be enough for now, for we want to get to the heart of what this resurrection means for us as Christian people. And to do that, we look to our gospel lesson for this morning. There was a great earthquake and the stone was rolled away from the tomb. An angel of the Lord sat on the stone. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary arrived. The gospel of Matthew records: "... the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he

said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.”

Notice the contrast. Unbelieving guards trembling and becoming like dead men. Not so for the women as they hear a powerful message from this angel of the Lord at the tomb: “Do not be afraid!” Why are these words for the women and not for the guards? The reason: the women seek Jesus and they are appointed to be witnesses of one of the most astounding events that has ever been recorded in human history. The guards, however, do not seek Jesus. They only seek to guard and keep him in the tomb as do all unbelievers who love the darkness instead of the light. All unbelief wishes to overcome the light. But as the apostle John says of Jesus in his gospel account (1:4-5): “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Still, the darkness tries. But **Jesus: [is] The Real Deal!** And he says to us: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (John 8:12).”

Can you imagine what it must have been like for the women at the empty tomb? The loss of a loved one hurts beyond words. Then you come to take care of the body of the one you love and now it’s gone. The place of his burial is in shambles. They are afraid of the whole situation. Not only are they afraid of the whole situation before them, but they see their own sin in the look of lightening and the white as snow clothing of this angel of the Lord. And they behold their own mortality in the guards who are like dead men. And where is Jesus the one they love?

So it is with us, that we may also become afraid when we are confronted with things similar to these. Do we not see this everywhere around us? Do we not look into the purity of heavenly things and see our own impurity? Do we not see that all the order in the creation is in shambles, including our own lives? Do we not feel an emptiness within our hearts because of someone we once touched and hugged and kissed, but is today no longer with us? Are we not afraid of these things for ourselves when we are faced with our own death? What’s it like to die? Does it hurt? What will happen to me? What’s next?

Those words to our first parents in the garden were for all of us: “... for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die (Gen. 2:17).” That eating marked, for each and every one of us, a twofold death: first, we have been disconnected from the life of all the living, and second, we are all facing the day when we will stop breathing and forever be lost in hell. As the prophet Ezekiel writes in the Old Testament: “the soul who sins shall die (Ezek. 18:20a).” There is death and hell when we break the loving commandments of the loving Creator. No one escapes the two-fold death of Genesis. There is every reason to be terrified.

But our gospel lesson continues: “So they [the women] departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.’” The women at the tomb heard it once from the angel and then heard it from the Lord Jesus himself: “Do not be afraid.” Jesus is alive! He has risen! This is their comfort and ours. Joy is pushing out all the fear. And today we long after these facts and are able to have the comments from Scripture to help us to understand all that had to take place.

Paul tells us in Romans chapter four that Jesus trusted in his Father and obediently went to the cross and died for all our sins. This obedience was counted as true righteousness. But it was not counted for Jesus alone. This righteousness is now ours too because we believe in him who raised Jesus from the dead for our justification. And, as his righteousness has been credited to us by faith, so also has his resurrection from the dead! Consequently, in John 14:19, Jesus says: “Because I live, you also will live!” **Jesus: The Real Deal!**

Death and hell are not the final words that will be applied to those of us who believe in Jesus and all that he has done. Still, we may want to ask: “What’s it like to die? Does it hurt? What will happen to me? What’s next?” It is true that dying can be a most difficult thing, but in our last moment, the Scripture uses the imagery of falling asleep. A mother once explained it to her concerned son in the following way:

... do you remember when you were a tiny boy how you used to play so hard all day that when night came you were too tired to undress and you’d tumble into your mother’s bed and fall asleep? That was not your bed, it was not where you belonged. You would only stay there a little while. Much to your surprise you would wake up and find yourself in your own bed in your own room. You were there because someone had loved you and taken care of you. Your father had come with big strong arms and carried you away... death is just like that. We wake up some morning to find ourselves in the other room where we belong, because the Lord Jesus loved us and died for us.

No doubt dying was difficult for the thief on the cross who repented. Nevertheless, Jesus laid out before him and us his and our movement from death to what is next. Jesus said to him, “Today you will be with me in paradise!” That’s our answer. We take our last breath as if we are falling asleep only to wake up and find ourselves in the presence of Jesus - paradise! Jesus is real and all that he gives to us is real. And that is why all our terrors turn to joy!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott

<https://rerotv.com/news/kenyas-self-proclaimed-jesus-christ-of-bungoma-says-his-life-is-in-danger-over-rumours-to-crucify-him-at-easter/>