

Sealing the Stone and Setting the Guard

by Carter Conlon

Carter Conlon's sermon emphasizes the futility of trying to suppress Christ's resurrection and the transformative power of faith and prayer in overcoming life's challenges.

Duration: 32:31

Scripture: Matthew 27:62

Topics: "Christ's Resurrection", "God's Sovereignty"

Description

This sermon from Matthew 27 and 28 titled 'Sealing the Stone and Setting the Guard' emphasizes the futile attempts of men to suppress the power of God, paralleling the guards sealing Christ's tomb to modern-day efforts to silence the name of Jesus. The message highlights the victory of Christ's resurrection over all human attempts to contain or control God, inviting listeners to embrace the life and freedom found in Jesus.

Transcript

This morning I'd like to speak to you from the Gospel of Matthew chapter 27. If you will, it's a message entitled, Sealing the Stone and Setting the Guard. Father, I thank you with all my heart, God, for the touch of your Holy Spirit.

I thank you, Lord, for your strength, for your power, and for your mercy. God, Almighty, I ask you in Jesus' name, touch these words, touch every heart, touch the frailty of my human vessel. God, enable me, Lord, to speak in a manner that will truly bring honor to your name.

God, I thank you for this with everything in me. Oh, Jesus, Son of God, perhaps the words that I'm about to speak have never been more important in our generation than they are now. Would you give us ears to hear? Would you give us hearts to embrace? Would you give us vision to see a victory that's not available to those who simply live outside of the realm of God? Would you help us to embrace, Lord, what gladdens your heart? We thank you for it with all of our hearts today, in Jesus' name.

Sealing the stone, setting the guard, beginning in Matthew 27, and beginning at verse 62, and I'll read right through to Matthew 28, verse 6. On the next day, which followed the day of preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, 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 the disciples come by night and steal him away, and say to the people, He is risen from the dead.

So the last deception will be worse than the first.

Pilate said to them, You have a guard. Go your way and make it as secure as you know how. So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.

Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone from the door and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as the snow.

And the guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. But the angel answered and said to the women, Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who is crucified. He is not here, for he is risen.

As he said, Come see the place where the Lord lay. Now, before I even get into this, I want to read to you from Psalm 2, a question the psalmist writes. He says, Why do the nations rage and the people plot a vain thing? In other words, why do the nations of this world continually return to a course of action which they can never hope to accomplish? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bonds in pieces and let us cast away their cords from us.

He who sits in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall hold them in derision. Then he shall speak to them in his wrath and distress them in his deep displeasure.

It's a question that history teaches us. Time and again throughout the course of history, nations, peoples, societies rise up. And they say, Let us put away this Christ.

Let us put away the testimony and seal it up, the testimony of the living God. We don't want this testimony among us because it puts restrictions on our behavior. We want our behavior to be unchallenged and unchanged.

We want to, as when sin entered into the human race in the Garden of Eden, we want to be the ones who declare what good is and what evil is. We do not want God or his people telling us that there are certain modes of behavior that are spiritually acceptable and others that are not. And so to break free from conscience, let's put restrictions.

Let's put away, let's seal up this testimony. Let's guard it. Let's get it out of our school system.

Let's put it away from our colleges. Let's drive it out of the marketplace. Let's sandblast it off of every wall where it's written.

Let's get rid of it. Let's even get rid of nativity scenes at Christmas time in our towns and our communities. Let's put away this Christ one more time.

Let's put him in a tomb and let's seal it with all the power that we have and we've attained. But the Bible says he who sits in the heavens shall laugh and hold them in derision. Matthew chapter 27 where we started in verse 62 tells us they consider Jesus Christ a deception and they feel that society is better served by keeping him securely locked away from all public consideration.

On the next day which followed the day of preparation, the chief priest and the Pharisees gathered together to Pilate saying, Sir, we remember while he was still alive how this 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.

Let's lock him away. Oh folks, it's so sad to have to stand here today and say that we in this nation have attempted again to do the same thing that others through history have done. We've attempted to lock Christ away from our children, away from the public sphere, out of even sporting events.

Can you imagine that? Forbidding young athletes to pray before a game in a high school or something like that. Almost unthinkable. I've only been in America now for, this is the 22nd year, I never would have thought I'd ever live to see the day that this country is now in.

The total shunning of everything that is righteous, the exalting of what is evil, the putting away of what is good, the attempt the society is making to push Christ out of all of its borders. Pilate said to them, you have a guard, go your way and make it as secure as you know how. In other words, use your accumulated wisdom, use all of your authority and guard what you feel that you have accomplished.

Go ahead America, I challenge you in the name of Jesus Christ, the living God. Go ahead, use all your wisdom, use your power, use your authority and guard what you feel you have accomplished. But I remind you of something, he who sits in the heavens shall laugh.

And verse, the second verse of Psalm 2 says, the Lord shall hold them in derision. When you look at the original translation it means it will be a sport to him watching you try to do what could never be done. You cannot push the living God out of anywhere because he is omnipresent, means he's everywhere all the time.

You cannot push him out of any society. You can pretend that you have, you can tell the people that you have and you set a seal, you guard it the best you can. But you can't push somebody who is everywhere out of anywhere.

You simply can't do that. You can't, you can't with our physical hands push air out of this room. You can try and you know if you tried, if somebody got up today and said, folks, hold still, I'm going to push all the air out of this room.

The rest of us would just sit here and watch you while we waited for the ambulance to come and get you. You no more can push God out of anywhere in this world than you can push air with your hands and your more sincere efforts out of this room. He is and always will be everlasting, eternal God.

Hallelujah to the lamb of God. The book of Ephesians, the apostle Paul, speaking of Jesus Christ, says he that means God, the father raised him from the dead, seated him at his right hand in heavenly places, far above all principality, all power, all might, all dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but in that which is to come. In other words, nothing in this world can take authority over the one who sits in absolute unconquerable authority.

That's where Jesus Christ is today. He's alive from the dead. He's at the right hand of God.

Every name that is named, every name in the news today, every country, every ruler, every military power, every ideology, everything is under the lordship of Jesus Christ. He sits in absolute authority. Psalm 2 verse 5 says, then he will speak to them in his wrath and he will distress them in his deep displeasure.

There's a time when God just draws back and says, one more time, enough of this, enough of humankind pretending to be God. I'm going to show you who God really is. One more time.

And you think you can contain me. You think you can roll a stone in front of the testimony of the living God. You think you can set a guard and put a seal in front of that testimony and I'm just going to sit back and let you do it.

No, the scripture says, God says, I am the father to the fatherless. When you enter into their fields, I will come and fight for them. I will defend those who cannot defend themselves.

I will defend the widow. I will defend the helpless. I will stand at the right hand of the poor.

There was another time in history, in the book of Esther, I'll just read it to you. When a command was given to completely defeat the people of God and take away all that they had accomplished in that society, history does repeat itself. In chapter three, verse 12, it says that the king's scribes were called on the 13th day of the first month and a decree was written according to all that Haman commanded.

Now, Haman was a man who weaseled his way up the government channel into authority. To the king's satraps, to the governors who are over all the provinces, to the officials of all the people, to every province according to its script and to every people in their language. In the name of King Ahasuerus, it was written and sealed with the king's signet ring.

And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces. Here's what it said, to destroy, to kill, to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the 13th day of the 12th month, which is the month Adar, and to plunder their possessions. Now, God was about to exercise his complete authority over the nations of this world one more time.

You wonder, how was he going to do it? How was God going to speak? Was he going to send angels? Was he going to send an invading army? What was he going to do? No, he had a plan. And his plan always involves that which the world cannot see. His plan was basically this, a young girl that he had strategically placed in the palace, in proximity to the king.

And she gave an instruction, she said, go gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan and fast for me, neither eat nor drink for three days, day or night. My maids and I will fast likewise, and I will go to the king, which is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.

In other words, he placed a little army of people, insignificant to those who are walking in their own strength, their own reasonings, and their own power, a little army of people that before they spoke to the king would spend three days and three nights speaking to God. It's always been through prayer. There's never been an awakening.

God has never moved his hand throughout history on a national scale without somebody somewhere spending time and laying hold of him in prayer one more time, talking to God in secret places when no one else can see it. And even if they did know, can you imagine if those who were in authority, those who had all the reigns of power as they sought, they had the army at their disposal. They had all the positions that that secular society offered.

Maybe the report came that this little group, this little girl and her friends are praying, her maids and a couple others over here are praying for three days. They would have mocked it. They would have laughed.

What good could that do? But you see, it was the plan of God. It was the plan of God, not only to pray, but to throw their lives in with their prayer. Esther said, after three days, I'm going into the king and I'm prepared to violate the law that has been passed.

And if I perish, I perish. In other words, I'm putting my life in with my prayer, but I'm not going to stand idle and let the devil destroy the people of this nation. I'm not going to let my heritage be plundered.

I'm not going to let my family, my future be taken away. I'm not going to let kids go to school and be told there is no God. I'm simply unwilling to do it.

I'm going to do what has always moved the heart and the hand of God. I'm going to pray. I'm going to fast.

I'm going to go to the throne of God. I'm going to talk to God about the honor of his name. I'm going to remind him of his promises.

I'm going to go to God and say, remember you wrote in the scriptures of my people are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray. You said you would hear from heaven. You would forgive our sin and you would heal our land.

And so God, we simply come to you taking at your word. We're not trying to create something. We're not trying to invent something.

We believe that you are God. We believe that from time to time, the heathen will raise their head and believe that they can exalt themselves above the knowledge of God. But you made the heavens and the earth.

You are the one who said by the mouth of your servant, David, why do the heathen rage and the kings of this world? Imagine a vain thing. You are the one who told us that when we pray, you would fill us again. One more time with boldness.

You would stretch your hand out through our hands and begin to heal people all around us in our neighborhoods, in our communities, in our families, in our homes, in our workplace. You are the one who give us boldness to speak your word with all authority and to take authority over powers and principalities of hell that are trying to destroy the society that we're now living in. In Matthew chapter 28, you see the testimony of Christ as it was at that time, sealed up in the tomb.

And they were doing the best they could. In chapter 28, verse 1, it says, Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, came to see the tomb and there was a great earthquake. The angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone from the door and sat on it.

Now the guards represented their kingdom. You can see them standing there with their shields, their swords, their weaponry, their seal on the stone. And the seal was actually a rope that they put across the front of the stone and they sealed it on both sides.

In other words, this can't be tampered with by the order of the king, by the order of all the secular and religious authority that's backing it, that exists. This stone cannot be rolled away. It's like our society says, by the authority that we have, you cannot mention the name Jesus anymore in the school system.

By the authority that we have, you cannot do this, you cannot do that. You must only do this, you must only do that. And these guards represented that full secular authority that was around and alive in those

days.

But suddenly, an angel came. And I find it curious that he not only rolled away the stone, but he sat on it. You see, the guards represented their kingdom.

The angel represented the one who sits in the heavens and laughs at these attempts of men to eradicate his name. He sits in a place of full authority, full rest. This angel is representing the one who sent him.

I'm here to show you that I represent the one who rose from the dead. I represent the one who sits at the right hand of God and sits with all power and all authority over all of your efforts. And the scripture tells us the guards became like dead men.

In other words, they became like the death they were trying to preserve. They became like what was really in their hearts in the first place. And the angel said to the Marys who came to the tomb, do not be afraid for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.

He's not here. He's risen. Come see the place where the Lord lay.

In other words, come and see the place where death used to be. Now I'm going to prove to you that Christ is alive. If you're not sure today, you've come to this house and you like the songs, you're curiously interested in what you're hearing, but you say, would you give me some tangible proof that this is real? Well, you've heard people singing on this platform today.

You've heard a testimony. I stand here before you telling you that Christ has totally transformed my life. The Bible says if anyone's in Christ, he becomes a new creation.

The old things are passed away and behold, all things are become new. I thank God for that. I have lived it.

I have walked it. I, I need no argument. Christ is in me.

He's the hope of my life. He's given me strength. He's taken me from where I used to be and brought me to where he's taking me today and tomorrow.

But I promise you that if you move towards Christ today, if you're just willing to get up and go to what everyone is telling you no longer exists, you simply move towards the living God in your heart. Something says, I just know in my heart that what I'm hearing is the truth. No matter what anyone has ever told me, there's a strange warming in my heart.

And I know this whole society is trying to get rid of the one that I'm being strangely drawn towards. The devil is trying to tell you that I have you sealed. I have you sewn up.

I rolled a stone over your mind. I rolled it over your marriage. I rolled it over your life.

I rolled it over your hope. I rolled it over your children, your future, your heart. I've sewn you up.

But if you'll get out of your seat and move towards the promise of God that he made to you in his son, Jesus Christ, your testimony, I promise you, your testimony will be to your friends, come and see where death used to be. It's no longer there. My hope, my heart, my home, my children, my family, my mind, my future, everything about me was already sealed and declared to be dead.

But Easter Sunday in the year 2016, the stone rolled away and the power of God came into my life. You're going to be among the rest of us who say to your friends, come and see where death used to be. I used to be hopeless, now I'm filled with hope.

I used to be filled with hate, now hate died and I'm filled with love. I used to be selfish, now all I want to do is be given for other people. My family were long gone, but I turned to God and I believed, come see, come see what God has done.

He's alive, he's alive, he's alive, he's alive. He who sits in the heavens shall laugh. He who sits in the heavens laughs at every argument hell has ever presented to you, telling you you have no hope, you have no heart, you have no future, you're no good, you'll never amount to anything, God laughs at those arguments.

And I challenge you with all my heart, why don't you just let God laugh at the devil one more time? You say in your heart, I don't believe your lies anymore. I don't believe you say, I don't believe what others have spoken over my life. I don't believe even my own heart that condemns me.

Because there's a verse in the Bible that says if my heart condemns me, God is greater than my heart. And so you say, Lord, I'm inviting you to laugh over my enemies today. I'm inviting you to laugh over all the places where death has tried to reign in my life and my home, my heart, and my future.

I'm inviting you to give me resurrection life. Jesus is alive. He's alive, he's alive, he's alive.

It's an old hymn that I used to sing years ago and I just love it. Because he lives, I can face tomorrow. Because he lives, all fear is gone.

Oh, thank God. God sent his son. They called him Jesus.

He came. He'll never forgive. He lived and died to buy my pardon.

An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives. Because he lives, hallelujah, I can face tomorrow. Because he lives, all fear is gone.

Because I know he holds my future and my life is worth the living. Hallelujah. Just because he lives.

Sing that chorus again. Because he lives, I can face tomorrow. Because he lives, all fear is gone.

Because I know he holds my future and life is worth the living. Just because he lives. I want to give an altar call.

It's so simple. Come and experience life. Come and say no in Christ's name to everything that's tried to destroy you.

To take your hope, your heart, your mind, your home, your future. Open your heart to the one who died that you might be forgiven. And gave you a promise of life.

Husbands and wives that are here, your home might be in trouble. Would you just have the courage to take each other's hand and make your way here. And we are going to believe God for miracles today.

We're going to believe God. The devil is going to walk out of here trembling. Because he knows that the power of God has been unleashed in your life.

And maybe you've been on the outside looking in for years. And today somehow God's just given you a glimpse through a window into life. Jesus died that you could be forgiven.

He took your place on a cross for the wrong that you've done. And when you open your heart to him, the fact that he did die cleanses you on the inside. Allows God to come back into your life again.

And you begin to change from the inside out. Religion is a person's own effort to try to change from the outside in. And you know how hopeless that is.

But Christianity is Christ's in you, Paul says, the hope of glory. Christ comes and your body becomes his dwelling place. And he begins to change you from the inside out.

You become a new creation. Your mind begins to change. Your heart changes.

I won't have to prove to you he lives. You'll know he lives. You'll know because you'll look in the mirror tomorrow morning and say, God, it's not possible.

Those are not the same eyes that I had yesterday. It's like another set of eyes looking back at me through mine own. That's who God is.

If you'll just make that choice. Just step out of wherever you are and say, I'm not going with death anymore. I'm going with life.

I don't care who tells me I'll never get out. I'm going with life. God can send one angel and set me free.

One messenger can set me free from this life of death. We're going to sing that song, The Blood that Jesus Shed for Me, if you would, Greg. And when we do, just join those that are already coming.

The balcony, go to either exit. The annex, you can step between the screens. The same thing in North Jersey.

You want life. You say, Pastor, I want life. I'm just tired of death.

I'm tired. I'm sick of it. No more.

I want life. If God promises life, I want life. I want life.

I'm not willing to settle for less than the fullness of what He gave me. Move in close, please, for those that are coming. Slip out of wherever you are as we sing.

Join us here at this altar, and then we're going to pray together. Thank God for you. Thank God for you who have come forward.

Thank God for you. And don't be afraid of the tears. Let God just deliver you from the pain, the hurt, the hopelessness of what you felt and what's been spoken over your life.

In many cases, for years. Let Him set you free. Today, I'm going to ask you to do something special, just to open your heart.

And just to pray with me and say, Jesus, I'm just done with death. I'm just done with death. I'm done with it.

You've promised me life. Eternal life with you and a full life while I live on the earth. So I'm just done with death.

I'm done with doing things my own way. I'm done with trying to be holy in my own strength. I'm just done with all of it.

And if you promise me life, if you're willing to be the source of my life and strength, then I'm going to open my heart to you. And I'm going to ask you to come into my life and be my God. Be my God.

I give you my life. I give you my whole future. I give you everything I am.

I put it all into your hands. And I trust that you won't fail me. I've lied to myself and others have lied to me.

But you're not a man, the Bible says, that you can't lie. You're God. Your words are absolute truth.

And so would you pray with me just as I lead you in this prayer. Lord Jesus, thank you for loving me. Thank you for dying for me.

So I can live. And so today I open my heart to you. I thank you for forgiving me.

And your willingness to receive me. In spite of all my failure. All my struggles.

All my trials. You took them all on yourself. So that I could be declared clean.

In the sight of God. I open my life to you. And I invite you to come into my life.

As my Lord. And my Savior. I believe.

That you will come to me. Even as I pray right now. And receive me.

As your own child. Fully restored. With a hope.

And a future. I believe. That death has no power.

Over my life. My home. My future.

Any longer. I belong now. To the one.

Who defeated death. And by the power of God. Was raised from the dead.

I believe. That because of you Jesus. I now have.

That same power. That same life. Being lived out.

Inside of me. I am a new person. The old things in my life.

Have lost their power. I am brand new. From this day forward.

Because of Jesus Christ. I thank you. With all of my heart.

This day. That Jesus Christ. Has laughed over my enemies.

One more time. And I am free. Hallelujah.

Thank you Lord. Thank you God.

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