

Lake Cities Community Church  
Easter Sunday, 3/23/08  
Pastor Craig Schill

## **SUPER Natural**

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**I enjoy reading biographies.** Christian biographies are great, but I also enjoy reading the biographies of cultural icons – they often provide great insight into the human condition. Rodney Dangerfield was one of our countries most famous comedians playing the part of a man who gets no respect. He wrote an autobiography, *“It’s Not Easy Being Me”* in 2004 at the age of 82, just a few months before his death. When he checked into the hospital, a reporter asked him how long he would be in. He said, “If all goes well, about a week. If not, an hour and a half.”

His one-liners brought him everything the world could offer: money, pleasure, fame and fortune. Dangerfield inspired the likes of Jerry Seinfeld, Jim Carrey and Tim Allen. He won numerous awards, and his characteristic red tie is on display at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington D.C.

But in the end was he satisfied? Was he laughing on the inside? It seemed to me as I read his book that his jokes often masked his own pain. He wrote of his absent father, “During my entire childhood, my father saw me for two hours a year.” He longed for his father’s love, but never received it. He joked with his audience: “When I was a kid, I got no respect. I asked my old man if I could go ice-skating on the lake. He told me wait till it gets warmer. When my parents got divorced (he joked) there was a custody fight over me...and no one showed up.” The audience laughed, while inwardly I wonder if he cried.

Now what does Rodney Dangerfield have to do with the resurrection? Good question. Only that his story is just one slice of a thousand lives that show us again and again that we live in a hurting world and that the ache of the human soul cannot be masked over by money or fame.

There is a time where every person comes to the conclusion, however painful, that this *natural world is a broken world – and perhaps, just maybe the super-natural is needed*. Maybe I do need God to make sense of things. And when that question is raised – the resurrection of Jesus Christ must be considered. Our text is found in Matthew 28, verses 1-9. Let's begin in the first verse to get the setting and circumstance.

### **Verse One: Time and Circumstance**

**Matt. 28:1** Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, **Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave**. Notice the time - After the Sabbath. What day is the Sabbath – Saturday (lit: *Shabbot*) – the day of rest, and the day after is Sunday. Have you ever wondered why we have church on Sunday, traditionally, and not Saturday, or Tuesday, or Monday? Because by worshipping on Sunday, the day Jesus rose from the dead, we proclaim the event's centrality to our faith! Ignatius of Antioch, wrote in as early as 100 AD: "(Christians) have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him." (Magnesians 9).

And so, on Sunday **"Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave."** The circumstance we are reminded of is that Jesus had died and the women, still grieving from the trauma of the crucifixion, are coming with spices to anoint the body.

Everyone dies, don't they? Presidents and Kings, comedians and crooks, saints and sinners. Religious leaders die. Jesus died. But, death, as tragic as it can be, is a very normal part of life. We will all die – some young, some old, sometimes of old age and sometimes tragically. In our Easter flowers memorial handout – you can see that many of us have lost loved ones. Behind each of those tributes is a story.

Most of us don't want to think about death. One person's tombstone reads: "I expected this, just not yet." We should expect death. It is part of the natural order. Francis of Assisi while hoeing his garden as asked what he would do if he were suddenly to learn that he was to die at sunset that day. He said, "I would finish hoeing my garden." It seems in our culture we are so surprised by death. Oh I'm going to die – I need to make a list and change my life! Agatha Christie wrote a story called "*Death Comes in the End.*" It does – so live life fully, so you are ready for it! Do now, what God wants you to do. Don't wait! But death is not the end of our story because a special messenger arrives in verses 2-5.

### **God's Messenger Arrives (2-5)**

[Matt. 28:2](#) And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. [Matt. 28:3](#) And his appearance was like lightning, and his garment as white as snow; [Matt. 28:4](#) and the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. [Matt. 28:5](#) And the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified.

The natural has now been turned into supernatural. An angel comes and his theme song is the rumble of a great earthquake. Angels are super-natural beings. Angels are servants of God. They do the bidding of God, and often they are the ones appointed to make important announcements. Angels were there when Mary was told she would have Jesus as a baby. Angels

were there at the birth. Angels were held back at the crucifixion, and here they are at the resurrection.

If when you think of an angel you think of a precious moment's figurine or a Willow Tree carving. Then you just need to be reminded that the angels here did not look like there. They did not invoke warm, fuzzy feelings and security. They would not sell well – because they installed great fear.. Four times the word “fear” is mentioned in our text. To see an angel in their glory, is fearful and terrible. But the angel says to the women, “Do not be afraid.” Calm down – I know the circumstances have brought you here and I have an important message to delivery to you Verses 5-7

### **Message Delivered: Christ is Risen!**

Listen! **Verses 5-7 “He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you.”**

The angel's message is that Jesus has risen from the dead! Come see – look here – It was not stolen. He did not pass out and wake up again. He rose from the dead!

And here we have the central teaching of Christianity. Yet are you ready to believe it? It is normal for a person to die – we've talked about that. But it is not normal for a person to comes back from the dead! To believe that a dead person has actually come back to life takes faith and a belief in the supernatural, yet some in the Church, are trying to remove the truth of the resurrection.

Retired Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong of Newark, N.J. said, “To literalize Easter has become the defining heresy of Traiditonal Protestant and Catholic Christianity.” A Danish

pastor wrote “There is no heavenly God, there is no eternal life, there is no resurrection.” These pastors who can’t move from the natural to the supernatural. They argue that we should remove all references to miracles and certainly resurrection from the dead! But we can’t do that! To lose the resurrection is to lose Christianity.

“The Resurrection is the center of Christianity,” said Gary Habermas a professor at Liberty University. And he is exactly right because the Apostle Paul said, “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain.”

**Christianity lives or dies by the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.** True Christians understand that, and skeptics understand that, as well.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century in England, two Oxford students set out to disprove Christianity. One was a well-known English literary scholar named Lord George Littleton. The other was Gilbert West. They agreed that if Christianity was to be discredited two things were necessary: To disprove the resurrection and to explain away the conversion of Paul of Tarsus. Lord Littleton took the question of Paul’s conversion and West the problem of the resurrection. They invested over a year for their studies, then met again to compare notes. Each was astonished to discover that the other had become a Christian and both published books on the matter.

A young college student named Josh McDowell was intrigued by the radiance and joy in the life of a group of Christians. He asked one young lady, why she was so joyful. She said, “Jesus Christ.” “Oh for heaven’s sake,” he replied, “don’t give me that garbage about religion.” She said “I didn’t say religion, I said Jesus Christ.” McDowell then engaged in a long study of Christianity that later became the book, “Evidence that Demands a Verdict.” When asked why he became a Christian, McDowell said, “For a very simple reason. I am not able to explain away an event in history – the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Add to that Lew Wallace, Robert Ingersoll, Albert Roper, Frank Morison, Lee Strobel and thousands of other who when they investigated Christianity ran into the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus is what the angel announced that Easter morning. But now we ask the question – “What difference does it make? Look now at verses 8-9

### **Life of Joy**

[Matt. 28:8](#) And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. [Matt. 28:9](#) And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him.

A life of Joy is what Josh McDowell observed in Christians around him, and it is what Mary the mother of Jesus felt and Mary Magdelene felt. Resurrection always produces joy! The dead is now alive! Spiritually, the resurrections confirm for us that our sins are forgiven. Death is not the end of the game. There is no more guilt and no more fear.

I started with Rodney Dangerfield as a slice of life for us to consider the fact that our world is broken, and that without the resurrection and Christ, there is an emptiness that many people realize only too late. Rodney Dangerfield – toward the conclusion of his book (and his life) wrote this: “You were 17 yesterday. You’ll be 50 tomorrow. Life is tough, are you kiddin’? What do you think life is? Moonlight and canoes? That’s not life. That’s in the movies. Life is fear and tension and worry and disappointments.”

He had everything the world could offer – at the end he died with fear and tension and worry and disappointment. Listen – the resurrection of Jesus is the tool that fixes this broken world. The resurrection starts with death and ends with life, where the world’s system starts with life and ends with death. Listen to another autobiography, from D.L. Moody – a man who embraced the truth of Christ’s resurrection.

D.L. Moody said, “Some day you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody of East Northfield is dead. Don’t you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now. I shall have gone up higher, that is all. Out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal – a body that death cannot touch; that sin cannot taint.”

Paul said, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” Where is it – it is gone! I do not fear death, because of the resurrection. I have made my peace with God and now in my short time on the earth, I can live with joy!

### **Conclusion:**

Maybe even now as the angel spoke to the women, God is speaking to you in your heart and you are realizing that God does exist and that Jesus was real, and he was killed and he did rise again from the dead. You know about the natural life – are you ready for the supernatural? Dangerfield was right about one thing – life is short – yesterday you were 17, and tomorrow you will be 50. But, your autobiography need not be a tragic one. Because of the resurrection there is life and joy. Not that life will be without pain or disappointment – but in the pain there is a God who says to you “do not fear.” Trust me with your life. It is your decision. Do you believe in the supernatural resurrection of Jesus?