

“He is Not Here, for He Has Risen”

Matthew 28:1-10

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Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ 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.” ⁸ So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

– Matthew 28:1-10, ESV

Introduction: This Changes Everything!

Some moments in life truly do change everything! Sometimes we know that a moment we’re experiencing is changing our lives forever, like on our wedding day or at the birth of our first child. At other times, it is not so much in the moment but later, looking back, that we can see the difference the moment has made.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the single most powerful moment in all human history. It is the event that changed everything. When Jesus rose from the dead, He became the first immortal human being, and death itself was crushed in His victory. Nothing else that has ever happened in history can compare with this moment.

What difference does it make whether Jesus rose again from the dead or not? It makes all the difference in the world! If He rose again, then this singular fact of history and reality proves that everything He said was true: that His death was the atonement for our sins, His sacrifice is our forgiveness, and that we can truly have eternal life in Him and in Him alone. If He did not rise again, then He was a fraud and the Bible is a worthless book. Even more, it means there is no hope for humanity. We live, we try, we fail, we die. That’s it. The end. No resurrection of Jesus means no eternity, no salvation, no hope beyond whatever pathetic glory we can grab for ourselves during the short time we draw breath in this life.

But if Jesus rose from the dead, then He has indeed opened the door to eternal life; He is the door to eternal life. He has shattered death and hell and has brought immortality and everlasting glory to light in His unquenchable life.

Let’s look at Matthew’s account of this event and see how this event that changed everything caught everyone by surprise and how it changed their lives forever.

A. Expectations, vv. 1-3

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

I. What these Faithful Women Expected

One of the first things we notice in Matthew's account is that these women who loved Jesus so much were definitely not expecting Him to rise again from the dead. They were going out early in the morning "to see the tomb." Mark's Gospel tells us that they were bringing spices to anoint the body. When Jesus had been crucified, these women were standing at the foot of His cross. Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary," who was most likely Mary the wife of Clopas, both stood with the mother of Jesus at the foot of the cross as Jesus died. When Jesus was buried, they lingered near and left only when the Sabbath day was beginning. Now, they returned, hoping that somehow they would be able to get to the body of Jesus and anoint Him more properly, better than the rush job that was done when He was taken down from the cross.

They knew the tomb was sealed with a huge stone and that a guard of soldiers had been posted there. They knew they would not be able to get into the tomb themselves. They were clearly not expecting to see Jesus rise from the dead. They only wanted to honor and mourn their dead teacher and friend.

2. What No One Expected

The Jewish religious leaders had asked for a guard and Pilate had given them permission to post a guard. They expected Jesus' disciples to come and take the body away by night, so they secured the tomb well – a heavy stone, an official seal, a guard of soldiers. They expected malfeasance by the disciples, but no one – not the disciples, not these faithful women, not the guards, not the Jewish religious leaders, not Pontius Pilate – no one expected what Matthew relates happened: A strong earthquake shook the garden where Jesus was buried as a mighty angel descended from heaven and rolled the stone away and sat on it.

The heavy stone would likely have been round and sitting in a track, in which it would roll back and forth. Tombs were shared by family members, and would be opened and shut every time a new member of the family was buried. They were heavy enough that they needed several men to open and close them. Apparently, the angel came and removed the stone from its track and set it on its side, where he then sat.

Why would this angel come and remove the stone like this? He didn't do it so that Jesus could get out of the tomb. Jesus had already risen and had already left the tomb. Apparently, the immortal, glorified body He had after His resurrection was a real, physical body that could be held and touched, but that could also pass through walls.

Again, this is something no one expected. Sometimes we look down our noses at ancient people and think they were gullible or foolish. No wonder they believed in the resurrection, After all, these people lived in a pre-scientific age. Well, even people in a pre-scientific age knew that dead means dead. A dead body might be stolen by night by thieving, dishonest followers, but dead men do not get up and walk out of tombs, especially through heavy stones that still cover those tombs. This is not something anyone was willing to believe or thought could ever happen.

B. Fear, vv. 4-6

And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.⁵ But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

1. Terrified Guards

When the earth shook and the angel descended and rolled away the stone, the soldiers reacted the same way anyone in today's modern, sophisticated scientific age responded: They were terrified out of their minds! They shook, just like the earth had shaken. The verb translated "trembled" has the same root as the word for "earthquake," so first the earth quaked and then the guards quaked. Then, they passed out cold. That's what "became like dead men" means. They went unconscious. This is a dramatic and traumatic event for these soldiers.

3. Reassured Disciples

But to the faithful, loving women who had followed Jesus, the angel offers not terror but reassurance. He tells them *"Do not be afraid."* The soldiers had real reason to be terrified of this angel, but the angel does not want these dedicated women to be afraid. He tells them *"I know that you seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen. . . Come, see the place where He lay"*

The tomb was opened for this purpose, so the women could look inside and see that Jesus was not there. One of the biggest proofs for the resurrection of Jesus is that His body was never found. The Jewish religious leaders would pay some of the guards to say that Jesus' disciples had come in the night while they slept and stolen the body. This lie is easy to disprove on three points:

1. How would the guards be able to accurately tell the story of what happened while they were sleeping?
2. The guards were never disciplined for falling asleep.
3. The body of Jesus was never found, even though the disciples were persecuted, harassed, arrested and even put to death. None of them ever changed their story either.

Chuck Colson, who had been Richard Nixon's lawyer during the Watergate scandal, later came to faith in Jesus and he wrote: "I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world-and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible." — Charles W. Colson

So the angel offers words of powerful reassurance to these grieving women, words of comfort and hope: He is not here, for He has risen. . . Come, see the place where He lay." Then, the angel adds a gentle rebuke for their lack of faith with three simple words: "as He said." Jesus had clearly predicted His death and resurrection three times and had alluded to it a fourth time:

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. — Matthew 16:21

As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day." And they were greatly distressed. — Matthew 17:22-23

And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.” – Matthew 20:17-19

When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.” . . . Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” – Matthew 26:1-2, 31-32

So, looking back, it might seem amazing that none of the disciples expected Jesus to rise again from the dead, but these words were so shocking and so unbelievable that none of them believed them. Do we think we would have believed, if we had been in their position? Still, Jesus had said these things, and He had kept His promise. Our Savior can be trusted to keep His promises!

C. Worship, v. 9

So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.

1. The Right Response to Jesus

As the women are running back quickly to obey the angel and tell Jesus’ disciples the good news, Jesus Himself shows up to meet them. He greets them with a very common and joyful greeting, like saying “Good morning!” cheerfully. And the response of these women was exactly right: They came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him.

What a contrast these two women are when compared to Jesus’ eleven remaining apostles: All but one of them fled and was nowhere near the cross when Jesus died. Yet these women were the last to leave the cross and the first to arrive at the tomb, while the men remained in the Upper Room, presumably cowering in fear. Thus, these women are rewarded by being the first to see the risen Jesus and to be able to worship Him.

If you believe that Jesus rose from the dead, what if your response to Him? It’s not enough to merely intellectually assent that He probably rose from the grave, nor is it enough to flatly and disinterestedly affirm that He is probably the promised Messiah and the Son of God. No, the only right response is the response we see here from Mary Magdalene and the other Mary: Fall at His feet and worship Him!

2. The Right Reception by Jesus

Jesus receives their worship. He does not tell them not to worship Him. He receives and welcomes their worship because it is right and fitting because He is the eternal Son of God. Jesus’ initial words are the same as that of the angel: Do not be afraid!

For those who fall at the feet of the risen and glorious Jesus and worship Him, these words are powerful and true: Do not be afraid! We have no reason to fear. All things are under His feet and we are His forever. The best opposition men could offer – the stone, the seal, and the guards – could not stop Jesus from rising again. The best opposition hell could offer could not stop Him either. If we are falling at the feet of Him who crushes

the power of death and hell, what reason could we ever have to fear? What challenge could we face that would be too hard for Jesus? What burden could we carry that would be too heavy for Jesus?

Once the women have been received and reassured by Jesus, He then repeats the commission give to them by the angel . . .

D. Commission, vv. 7-8, 10

“ . . . go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

1. Come and See

When we take Jesus' commission and connect it back to the angel's commission, we can see a pattern that is great for us to follow: “Come and see” and then “go and tell.” Do you want to know who Jesus really is? Come and see! Do you want to know if He is indeed the risen Lord of all? Come and see!

Come to Jesus with expectation and search His word to see who He is, what he has done, is doing and will do. Come to Him and see with eyes of faith the wonderful beauty, matchless power, transcendent glory and matchless reign of Jesus Christ!

2. Go and Tell

Then, as you come and see who He is, go and tell others. “Come and see” must come before “go and tell,” for we must have good news to share. But once we have the good news because we have seen for ourselves who Jesus is and what he has done, then we must “go and tell”!

These women would go and tell the disciples, and the disciples would not believe them. So unexpected was the resurrection of Jesus that Peter and Joh would run and investigate the tomb for themselves, but the disciples would not believe the testimony of these faithful women. Perhaps part of the reason was the sexist attitudes of their culture: Why should they believe two hysterical women? But the larger part may have just been such shock that they dared not believe.

Later that day, as evening approached, Jesus would appear in the Upper Room to the eleven disciples, except for Thomas, who would not be there for this appearance. He would have to wait another week, until the next Sunday, and he would be disbelieving that whole time. We call him “doubting Thomas,” but he was no different from the rest. None of them believed until they had seen Him for themselves!

Once they believed, they would all go and tell. They would travel east to India and west to Spain, to the cultural capitals of Rome and Greece, telling the good news of the risen Lord! Once they had seen Him, they would never be the same again.

Conclusion: Have You Been Changed?

So here we sit this morning, on the other side of the world, 2,000 years later. Have you seen the risen Lord? Have you been changed by His presence, His power, His grace, His mercy? Have you heard Him say, “Do not be afraid” to your soul. If you haven't, won't you come and see? If you have, will you go and tell?