

**THE RISEN CHRIST AND THE PROOF OF HIS RESURRECTION**  
**(SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2011)**

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**SCRIPTURE READING:** 10 COMMANDMENTS; MATTHEW 28:1-15

Have you ever asked the question, “What is the most important event recorded in Scripture?” I am not sure that this is a question that can be truly answered because of all of Scripture holds together. It is one true and complete account.

But it is true that without the resurrection everything else that we believe would be in vain. How did Paul express this in 1 Corinthians 15?

**1 Cor. 15:17** And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins!

Charles Spurgeon said, “The resurrection is a fact better attested than any event recorded in any history, whether ancient or modern.”<sup>1</sup>

Your faith has a firm foundation resting in the record of Scripture and also the historical witness to the resurrection. There is a challenge in lining up all the details found in the four gospels and in other parts of the NT, but this is not a challenge to faith but actually a strengthening of the witness of the record found in Scripture. Our attention this morning will be focused on the record found in Matthew’s gospel.

The resurrection is then at the heart of our faith. It is the basis for your hope and assurance. For we live now in the age of resurrection. **It is the reason why you can be told to rejoice in all circumstances**, because you have a most solid foundation for a life of faith and hope in the promises of God.

**You are called to live in light of Christ’s glorious resurrection as a witness of His triumph.**

We will look at Matthew 28:1-15 in two parts: vv. 1-10 and vv. 11-15.

**1. FAITHFUL WOMEN BECAME THE FIRST HUMAN WITNESSES TO THE EMPTY TOMB AND OUR RISEN LORD, vv. 1-10**

**Matt. 28:1** 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. **2** 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. **3** His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. **4** And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead *men*.

**5** But the angel answered and 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 is risen, as He

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<sup>1</sup> John Blanchard, eds. *The Complete Gathered Gold: a Treasury of Quotations for Christians*. Accordance electronic ed. (New York: Evangelical Press, 2006), n.p.

said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. **7** And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you. **8** So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word.

**9** And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, “Rejoice!” So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. **10** Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go *and* tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.”

If you read all the gospel accounts carefully you will note that none of the accounts record the actual event or process of Jesus’ resurrection. The focus is directed to the evidence that Jesus was truly raised from the dead and the response to that clear evidence. Before we look at Matthew’s account in greater detail, let me summarize the evidence or proof of the resurrection as presented in Matthew.

- 1) The witness of angels
- 2) The empty tomb witnessed by the women
- 3) The women who saw the empty tomb also saw Jesus in the flesh
- 4) The ridiculous story spun by the religious leaders to explain away the clear proof and witness that Jesus was raised to new life

Jesus in His ministry spoke clearly to His disciples that He would be raised on the third day. Throughout Scripture you see the importance of the third day as being a day associated with resurrection. Jesus was raised on the third day, which also happened to be the first day of the week, the day after the Sabbath.

The actual language in verse 1 is difficult but it is best to understand that early on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.

I emphasized the importance of these two women in Matthew 27. Look back to Matthew 27:56 and 61. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph were both present at our Lord’s crucifixion and they also watched Joseph and the others put Jesus’ body into Joseph’s new tomb.

**Verse 1 says that they came to see the tomb.** They were not at this point expecting to see Jesus raised to new life. Their understanding was not at this point complete but soon it would be. The reality of their current lack of faith strengthens the testimony found in Scripture.

I have mentioned throughout our study of Matthew how there are points of similarity or repetition between the beginning of Matthew’s gospel and the end his gospel. The account of the birth of our Lord and Savior foreshadowed His suffering and death. Remember how God used dreams in Matthew 1 and 2 and the dream of Pilate’s wife in

Matthew 27? Also in Matthew 1 and 2, God used an angel to guide Joseph so that he would fulfill God's will. Here in Matthew 28, God used angels to show His power and glory and provide direction to the women who came to the tomb.

Verse 2 records also a great earthquake. Only Matthew records this detail. The earthquake was used by God to put fear into the guards. It was also a witness to the mighty work of God announcing the new age of resurrection had arrived. We should also remember the earthquake that God sent right after the death of Jesus.

I think there is another theme that should be considered here that is found throughout Scripture. Very often God showed His power and glory in different ways, sometimes using angels, when His people were called to do something special.

Can you think of some examples of this?

Examples would include the calling of Gideon in Judges 6, the appearance of an angel to Samson's parents in Judges 13. Later in the OT, both Isaiah and Ezekiel were given powerful visions of God in His glory as part of their calling to serve in the most difficult work of being a prophet.

Even today, does not God sometimes use demonstrations of His power as part of His direction or as confirmation of what He has called us to do? This is not to say that you should wait around for something amazing to happen or that you must have some dramatic experience. No, God is free to work according to His sovereign power – using both the ordinary and at the times the extraordinary.

God showed His power and glory to the women who came to the tomb through the mighty angel described in verse 3. We know from Luke and John that there were two angels. Matthew is not in conflict but simply mentions the presence of only one of the angels.

In verse 2 we see also that one of the angels came and rolled back the massive stone which before had covered the mouth of Jesus' tomb. When Jesus was raised to new life, most likely He passed directly through the walls or door of the tomb. The opening of the tomb in verse 2 was definitely not to let Jesus come out but rather to let the women enter the empty tomb.

The mighty power of God both through the great earthquake and the awesome angels caused the guards to shake in fear and become like corpses or dead men. Here again you are to appreciate the humor of God and the irony of this account. The one's assigned to guard Jesus while He was dead became like dead men while Jesus was made alive.<sup>2</sup>

I don't know we can be certain of whether the two Mary's of verse 1 were present for the entire dramatic scene of verses 2-4. Were the soldiers still there surrounding the tomb in a coma-like state or had they fled the scene? What is clear is that the women saw the angels. This alone could explain why one of the mighty angels spoke to the women, "Do not be afraid...."

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<sup>2</sup> Hagner, 869.

The response of fear is an important part of this account. The guards shook for fear of the angel. The women eventually left the tomb with fear and great joy. Two times the women were told to not be afraid.

Last week we noted the important role of the women who served as witnesses of Jesus' death and burial. The role again of the women should be considered here in light of how women were viewed by their own culture. The Bible does not treat women as second-rate citizens but the culture of the day generally did think of them on a lower level than men.

**Women generally speaking were not regarded as being credible witnesses.**<sup>3</sup>

This strengthens the witness of Scripture. It also again testifies to the fact that God very often uses those whom society rejects or does not view favorably.<sup>4</sup> As Paul stated in 1 Cor. 1:27:

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty...

Consider again the words one of the angels spoke to the women that most beautiful morning:

“Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. **6** He is not here; for He is risen [He has been raised], as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. **7** And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.”

The women that morning came in sorrow to see the tomb. Seeing the awesome angels they were also filled with fear. Verse 8 says that they left with fear but I think we should understand that fear in a different sense for verse 8 says they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy! The incredible change in the women was the result of the words of the angel and the clear witness of the empty tomb.

And then in verses 9 and 10 we have a brief description of what must be one of the happiest moments in all of Scripture. **What a privilege these women were given to be the first people to see Jesus Christ after His resurrection.**

In verse 9, the NKJV says that Jesus met the women and said to them, “Rejoice!” That is a literal translation of the Greek word, but commentators and other translations suggest a much less formal greeting. I don't know that you can easily translate the sense, but Jesus' greeting to the women in our own words would be more like, “**Good morning or I am glad to see you.**”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Keener, 698 footnote 282 for a number of examples.

<sup>4</sup> Keener, 698.

<sup>5</sup> See HCSB translation. Also BDAG which gives as glosses, “*welcome, good day, hail (to you), I am glad to see you or good morning.*”

But this was no ordinary meeting with a friend. In Matthew 2, the magi from the east fell down before young Jesus and worshipped Him. Here Matthew shows clearly that the women were not just seeing a vision. The women came to Jesus and held Him by the feet as they worshipped Him. The details here are important. They were not worshipping a ghost or a vision but Jesus in a real but glorified physical body.

The word worship in some contexts can mean simply to bow before another person. But correctly our translations here have worship.

There is no way to capture the same feeling of the women who met Jesus on that glorious Sunday morning. But you are to often be filled with the response of worship and awe before our risen Lord and Savior, especially in our formal times of worship on the Lord's Day.

Paul expresses the attitude and actions you should also seek to demonstrate in 1 Thess. 5:16-18.

**1Th. 5:16** Rejoice always, **17** pray without ceasing, **18** in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

The angel at the tomb sent the women to tell the disciples. Jesus also sent the women to go to the disciples. Observe that in both verse 7 and in verse 9, the disciples were to go back to Galilee. That is where they would see Jesus. In both Luke and John, we read that the disciples also saw Jesus on Resurrection Sunday in Jerusalem. John 20 and Luke 24 record that Jesus met His disciples on the day of His resurrection. Paul in 1 Cor. 15 also speaks of Jesus appearing to Peter before appearing to the rest of the disciples.

Galilee was still where the disciples were to return. Galilee was where Jesus' public ministry began. Jesus ascended to heaven from Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives, but Galilee would be the place where the disciples would be given their final training. Galilee would be the place of restoration as we see further explained in the case of Peter in John 21.

Observe also in the words of Jesus to the women that Jesus calls the disciples **my brethren**. The 11 remaining disciples were probably at their lowest point at this time with every one of them having failed Jesus. But Jesus counted the disciples still as His brothers.

Galilee as we will again see next week was the location from where the Great Commission was given. Its importance is emphasized three times in this chapter in contrast with Jerusalem and its failed leadership as we see in verses 11-15.

## **2. FEARFUL SOLDIERS BECAME THE FIRST MISSIONARIES OF A FALSE MESSAGE ABOUT THE RESURRECTION, vv. 11-15**

**Matt. 28:11** Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. **12**

When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, **13** saying, “Tell them, ‘His disciples came at night and stole Him *away* while we slept.’ **14** And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will appease him and make you secure.” **15** So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

Verses 11-15 are the only record of this account, and these verses parallel the end of Matthew 27. Interestingly Matthew presents two groups on their way to spread a message. Two groups hurried away from the tomb that Sunday morning, the joyful women and the fearful guards.

The soldiers who were guarding the tomb went to the chief priests to share all the things that had happened – the earthquake, the angel, and the empty tomb. Though we are not told the reaction of the chief priests, you can imagine how they felt when they received the report from the guards.

In verse 12 we are told of another assembly of the chief priests and elders where they consulted together. The two verbs **assembled** and **consulted** have already been used a number of times in connection with the death of Jesus and the attempt to destroy Him.<sup>6</sup> The greatest of the religious and political leaders in Jerusalem again schemed together. They were absolutely not prepared to accept Jesus’ resurrection. What could they do? Well, they could at least bribe the soldiers to spread a false message. At least that made some sense. They also could hope to appease or perhaps even bribe Pilate if he heard about what happened.

But how ridiculous as you see in verse 13 was the message that the guards were to communicate. **His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.** What’s wrong with this false message besides the obvious lie in it?

First, as we see clearly from the gospels, the disciples were the last people you would have expected to come up with such a scheme.

Second, if the soldiers were sleeping, then how could they know that it was the disciples who were to blame?

But then again, the chief priests and elders had no other choice if they wanted to deny the reality of the resurrection.

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<sup>6</sup> συναχθέντες – used 24x in Matthew; first used in Matthew 2:4, the gathering of the chief priests and scribes before Herod the Great. Then more related to its usage here, Matthew 26:3, 47; 27:17, 62.

συμβούλιον – used only 5x in Matthew; this verb is used in connection with seeking to destroy Jesus: Matthew 12:14; 22:15; 27:1; 27:7; 28:12. In Matthew 27:7 it is used in response to Judas returning the money for betraying Jesus.

Matthew in verse 15 explains that this was the common message reported among the people of Judea at the time of the writing of his gospel.<sup>7</sup> It is often believed that Matthew wrote many years later but such an assumption is not required by verse 15.

We do have a witness many years after the resurrection. As I mentioned last week, Justin Martyr stated that this same false message was still being spread one hundred years after Jesus was raised.

## **FINAL APPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

### **You are called to live in light of Christ's glorious resurrection as a witness of His triumph.**

The gospel accounts of Christ's resurrection have not been recorded so that you might have the same emotional response as the first witnesses, but they have been written so that you might have the same assurance. You also should have the same response of worship and obedience. The witness that you are to have and the reason you are to share the gospel with others is also the same. It is not needs but truth, which forms the basis and impetus of witnessing to others. So although we live almost 2000 years after the time of Christ, there is still no more relevant message that we could share with others.

The account here presented by Matthew speaks to you again of the absolute sovereignty of God who can do all things. And though you don't nor should you expect to see "miracles" happening every single day, you are to live with the hope of the resurrection and with confidence that God continues His great work.

Listen again to a portion of Paul's prayer for the believers in Ephesus found in Ephesians 1:19-21.

**19** and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power **20** which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, **21** far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

As I mentioned there is no way to duplicate the emotional experience of those who met Jesus on that first Resurrection Sunday. But you are called to real fellowship with your risen Lord and Savior. It is not identical. Jesus is not physically present with us in worship or in our celebration of the Lord's Supper, but you do enjoy real fellowship with God. The meal we celebrate is known as **communion** for a reason.

## **Closing Hymn: 125**

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<sup>7</sup> This is the understanding of the word translated as Jews suggested by R. T. France.

### **Benediction – Hebrews 12:1-2**

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.