

“Christ, Resurrected”
Matthew 28:1-15

Every Easter we talk about the resurrection. We gather on resurrection morning to read the story, be reminded of Christ’s life, rejoice in the good gift we have been given through His resurrection, and meditate on the essential nature of the resurrection. For the believer in Christ, nothing is more important. If He lives, we live, and if He is not alive, then we are of all people most to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:19).

So we rejoice in the resurrection, just like the disciples did on that first resurrection morning 2000 years ago. Or maybe not. On that Sunday morning, none of the Twelve was headed to the grave to see if it was empty. The women who went were not looking for the open grave; they were wanting to put more anointing spices on the dead body of their Lord. *No one* anticipated what happened — in spite of what Jesus had repeatedly prophesied (all from Matthew):

- ✓ “...for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” (12:40)
- ✓ 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 be raised up on the third day. (16:21)
- ✓ As they were coming down from the mountain [of transfiguration], Jesus commanded them, saying, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.” (17:9)
- ✓ And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is going 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 deeply grieved. (17:22-23)
- ✓ “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify *Him*, and on the third day He will be raised up.” (20:18-19)

They didn’t doubt because they hadn’t been told what was coming, but because the idea of the resurrection was so incredible and remarkable. Like creation out of nothing and the incarnation, it was one of God’s singular events. There had never been anything like it and it would never be repeated again (even our own coming resurrections are different because we won’t raise ourselves from the dead).

But once they saw the evidence of His resurrection, and saw the risen Christ — *everything changed* for Christ’s followers. And likewise, when we observe and believe the resurrection account, everything changes for us as well. *It is the most transforming event in the history of the world.* While you are familiar with the story, this morning let’s look at it again from the pen of one of Jesus’ disciples, Matthew.

CHRIST IS RESURRECTED. THE GRAVE IS EMPTY. LIFE IS FULL.

Because the tomb is empty, life has meaning. There is nothing to fear and there is something (worthwhile) to do. Let's observe that the story of the resurrection is told by Matthew in **three movements**...

As we do that, we do well to recognize that the basic elements of Resurrection Sunday are told by all the Gospel writers: they all emphasize the empty tomb revealing the risen Christ (Mt. 28:6; Mk. 16:6; Lk. 24:6; Jn 20:4-8). But the gospel writers all emphasize different aspects of the story and different participants in the story. Writing to a Jewish audience that was particularly interested in the workings of the religious system in Israel, Matthew alone tells the story of the guards and the attempted coverup of the resurrection.

Let's see that story in three movements...

1. The **Story** of the Resurrection (vv. 1-10)
2. The **Denial** of the Resurrection (vv. 11-15)
3. The **Implications** of the Resurrection (vv. 5-7)

1. The Story of the Resurrection (vv. 1-10)

- What happened on the morning of the resurrection? **Notice the time of the resurrection:**
 - ✓ Matthew says the events happened **after the Sabbath**. Remember that the Sabbath began at sundown on Friday and ended at sundown on Saturday; this phrase is unusual, but it suggests an advanced time in the day — “it’s way late...” Matthew is telling his readers that the events are clearly into the third day of Jesus’ time in the grave (Fri, Sat, now Sun). John tells us that it was still dark when the women set out for the grave (Jn. 20:1).
 - ✓ He also tells us the Sabbath is past by saying that **dawn [of] the first day** had begun. That was important because Jesus had prophesied His resurrection three days after His death (16:21; 17:23).
 - ✓ It might also be that Matthew is inferring something else to his Jewish readers:
 - This Sabbath was the last Sabbath observance for Jesus followers; now they will worship on the first day (Acts 20:7). So to say it is after the Sabbath might also be to suggest that Sabbath worship and everything related to the Old Covenant is in the past.
 - Similarly, the **first day** is the initiation of the New Covenant promises of God. “That Sunday was the dawning not only of a new day but of a new era in redemptive history.” [MacArthur]
 - ✓ Even the timing of these events tells us that there is something dramatic happening.
- **Notice the believers at the resurrection:**
 - ✓ **Mary Magdalene** was the woman from whom Jesus cast out seven demons (Lk. 8:2). From John’s account we know that she didn’t stay at the tomb; she evidently saw the stone rolled away and surmised that Jesus’ body had been taken and she ran to the disciples (Jn. 20:1-2). She was also returned to the tomb with Peter and John but evidently ran slower and stayed longer and was the first to see the resurrected Christ (Jn. 20:11ff).
 - ✓ The **other Mary** was the mother of James and Joseph (Mk. 16:1). These two Marys were also witnesses of the crucifixion and were at Jesus’ burial. So they knew exactly where to go — they would not have confused the grave with some other grave [which has been a theory of doubters].
 - ✓ There were at least three other women there (and perhaps more) — Salome (Mk. 16:1), Joanna and others (Lk. 24:10); so at least five women were at the tomb that early morning.
 - ✓ It is notable that **they came to look at the grave** — they were coming with additional spices to anoint the body of Jesus and Matthew is probably emphasizing with the word **look** that they also had a problem — how would they remove **the stone** that had been rolled in front of the grave and then sealed with the Roman seal?

- **Notice the events at the resurrection** (events of vv. 2-4 are only recorded by Matthew):
 - ✓ **And behold** — “look!” — is Matthew’s way to draw attention to something of great wonder. There was an **earthquake** —
 - Matthew does not mean for us to infer that the earthquake is what dislodged the stone — he is clear that the angel did that (v. 2b).
 - He means us to understand God is acting. Especially in the OT, earthquakes indicated the presence and intervention of God and His power (Ex. 19:18-19; Ps. 18:7; Rev. 6:12; 8:5).
 - This is the second earthquake in this story (cf. 27:51); God is acting and fulfilling His plan.
 - ✓ With the earthquake, **an angel of the Lord** showed up and **rolled away the stone** and **sat on it**.
 - Both John (20:12) and Luke (24:1) tell us there was a second angel.
 - The description of the angel is like **lightning** and **white** (v. 3). The whiteness of his garments suggests his purity and holiness as a messenger of God; the brightness suggests the glory of God, which is radiated from those who have been in God’s presence (Moses, Ex. 34:29). He also reflects the glory that is inherent in Christ, revealed at the transfiguration (17:1ff).
 - This is God’s glory and wonder on display!
 - ✓ And in v. 4 we are introduced to the guards, who are terrified by the sight of the angels — they **shook** (the word used is from the same word as earthquake); this was no slight tremor. Then they passed out. They were full of **fear** for good reason — angels are powerful and able to carry out the wrath of God (Is. 37:36). At some point they evidently awakened and some ran to the city (v. 11).
 - ✓ In v. 5 the women are again central to the story —
 - The angel tells them **do not be afraid** — lit., “stop being afraid” — for those who are in Christ, there is no reason to fear the wrath and judgment of God (which is an encouragement to us). “The guard might well be alarmed (v. 4), but these who came to seek Jesus had no cause for fear.” [Broadus]
 - And the angel has further good news — **I know you are looking for Jesus...He is not here, for He has risen...!**
 - ... Similar statements are given by all the gospel writers — none gives the details of how it happened, but they all clearly affirm the reality of the resurrection.
 - ... The NT writers point out that all three members of the Trinity of God are active in the resurrection — that He was raised by the power of the Father (Rom. 6:4; Gal. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:3) and of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:11). And Christ had the power of life in Himself (Jn. 10:18).
 - ... Matthew seems to be emphasizing that last reality — He has risen (Himself).
 - ... He has also been resurrected, **just as He said**. He had promised (cf. 16:21), and this day was the fulfillment of that promise. Jesus promised both His death and resurrection — and His promises all indicated the necessity of both. He must be crucified and He must be resurrected to effectively fulfill the Father’s plan of redemption (Jn. 6:27ff; Mk. 10:45).

- The angel has evidently moved into the tomb and he invites the women to **come** inside and look for themselves (v. 6b). **What they saw** was the graveclothes still wrapped as if a body was still inside and the face cloth neatly rolled up (Jn. 20:5-8). Jesus had passed through the wrappings! ... [Aside: since Jesus was self-resurrected, the tomb was not opened by the angels to let Him out; He was already gone when it was opened; they opened it to reveal that He was gone.] ... These women were the first humans to see and testify to the empty tomb and resurrection.
- **The angel then tells them** to go to the disciples with the good news (v. 7) — **go now!** In the midst of the excitement of the day, the disciples might have forgotten that Jesus had said He would meet them in Galilee (26:32). This is the meeting of vv. 16-20. (N.B. — The disciples didn't believe the account: **Lk. 24:11** — “But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them.”)
- Arriving at the tomb, they were grieving, perplexed (about the stone) and fearful (of the angel).
- Leaving the tomb, they were fearful (worshipful, desiring the Lord) and joyful (v. 8). This is the beginning of the revelation of what the transforming work of the resurrected Christ will do.
- ✓ So the women **began running** to return with the news to the disciples. And then suddenly Christ was there — **And behold** (v. 2), **Jesus met them**. His **greeting** was with affection and joy so they immediately recognized and **worshipped Him**. (Now the tomb was empty **AND** Christ was present.)
 - This had also been Mary's response at the tomb (Jn. 20:10-18).
 - Note that the only other time Jesus' disciples worshipped Him in this way was after He walked on water (Mt. 14:33). Worship of Jesus was common for others (e.g., Magi; leper; mother of James & John; "Legion," man born blind...), but not the followers and friends of Jesus. Until resurrection. The resurrection transformed their understanding of Him so they worshipped.
 - They did what everyone (believer and unbeliever) will do one day — **Phil. 2:10-11**.
 - Christ is our friend; He is our brother; He is our groom. And He is our GOD. Worship is always a fitting response from us; worship reverences Him and acknowledges I am not God.
- ✓ Jesus rightly accepts their worship and then reaffirms **do not fear** (they would not “lose” Him) and to go to the disciples (**my brethren** indicates a new familial relationship) with the message (vv. 7, 10).
- ✓ Not the stone, not the seal, not the guards, not the grave clothes, not death itself could keep Christ in the grave. God's plan could not be thwarted. Christ promised the resurrection. And He was.

“In the resurrection, God made a major statement: humanity is not a doomed race, for the fall can be reversed. The Messiah has come and he has completed his work, proving once and for all that physical death can be overcome and sin can be forgiven. The resurrection proves that sin and death (products of the fall) could actually be defeated—in real life and not just in theory. Christ's resurrection dramatically showed that through the promised Messiah, God had triumphed over Satan and would do so again.” [Casey Lute, *But God*]

- That is why Spurgeon said, “If you ask where God's glory is most seen, I will not point to creation, nor to providence, but to the raising of Jesus from the dead.” Amen.

2. The Denial of the Resurrection (vv. 11-15)

- On the day of the resurrection until today there have been attempts to discredit & deny the resurrection.
- Here is the irony: on that day, the disciples did not believe the initial reports but the Sanhedrin did.
 - ✓ Perhaps the disciples didn't believe initially because "it is too good to be true," and the Sanhedrin did believe because "our worst nightmare has come true."
 - ✓ Ultimately, the disciples were transformed by it and the Sanhedrin were hardened to it (Lk. 16:26).
- How did they attempt to deny the resurrection? (This story is unique to Matthew.)
 - ✓ **Some of the guard** went to the city to report what happened to the Sanhedrin (**chief priests**) — we don't know why, but for some reason some guards did not return to give an account (fear?).
 - ✓ They **reported all that happened** — they "spilled the beans" — angels and all. It is notable that they told the story of the resurrection and the Sanhedrin believed them.
 - ✓ Verses 12-14 give the plan of the Sanhedrin — "the disciples stole his body while we were sleeping." They were aware that they might need to come up with an excuse (27:62ff); they had at least several days to plan and their story is *astoundingly poor* —
 - If they were sleeping, how did they know the disciples had stolen the body?
 - If they knew the disciples had stolen it, how could they not get it back?
 - Why would the 12, who were hiding in a locked room, risk stealing the body from armed guards?
 - ✓ A **large sum of money** exchanged hands; lit., "silver." No idea how much, but they paid 30 pieces of silver to Judas and there were upwards of a dozen guards and they needed to ensure allegiance to the story so it had to be very substantial.
 - ✓ The story of the "cover up" was **widely spread**... (and still is today — and is *still* wrong).
 - ✓ These leaders who hated Jesus (Mt. 26:3-5; 27:42) were now drawing the guards into unbelief.
 - ✓ And that is the tragedy of this story — the souls of all these conspirators were eternally destroyed.

"God sent the message of Jesus' resurrection to these high priests through their own witnesses, the soldiers they themselves had posted, the most unimpeachable witnesses possible. Nor do the high priests dare to question this witness, they accept it as being entirely true. But what is the effect produced upon these high priests? Do they yield to this sure testimony? Does it go home to their hearts that Jesus promised to arise on the third day, and that he had now indeed arisen, and that angels from heaven had revealed the empty tomb? Not for one moment! Only one thought fills the heart of the high priests: to nullify this true testimony; and they are prepared to go to all lengths to do this." [Lenski, p. 1162.]

- ✓ "No [amount] of evidence will convince those who are stubbornly resolved not to believe."
- *Don't* come to this day and say, "that's a nice story." It's not a "*nice* story;" it's a horrific story (*God* dying). And it is the greatest story of grace and love ever told.
- *Do* come to this day and say, "Christ is alive. I should have died. God, on the basis of Christ's death, please give me mercy and grace and forgive me of my sin."

- ✓ Christ didn't die for His sin (He had no sin); He died for your sin (2 Cor. 5:21).
- ✓ And Christ was resurrected in His righteousness and for your righteousness (Rom. 4:25).
- ✓ There are almost certainly unbelievers here this morning. You *do* believe something about Jesus.
 - You either believe that you are good enough and don't need Jesus (and He died needlessly).
 - Or you believe that you only deserve God's wrath and you desperately need Jesus.
 - His death and resurrection demonstrate your need for salvation and your inability to provide salvation for yourself.
 - The way to have His salvation is to repent of your sin ("I deserve judgment and I am grieved that I have sinned against God") and believe in Christ only ("I trust that He paid my penalty of sin and I believe that He is worth living for today and into eternity").
 - If you don't believe, as Jesus told Nicodemus, "you must be born again" — you must believe.
- ✓ It is dangerous to come to the tomb, look in, and walk away unaffected or even worse, denying.

3. The Implications of the Resurrection (vv. 5-7)

- When you read narrative stories, it can sometimes be hard to know what the writer wants us to particularly understand. One of the clues the writers give is through the words of the participants.
- In this account, the angels speak a series of commands to the women — those commands not only instructed the women on how they were to respond to the resurrection, but they also help us to understand how we should respond to the resurrection. *What should we do?*

• COME (v. 6)

- ✓ This was an invitation — and many things might have precluded them from going inside —
 - They were in a "graveyard" — they might have wanted to come back in the mid-day.
 - The tomb was secured by the Romans and they might be implicated for breaking the seal
 - Something mysterious and holy had happened; their own sin might have precluded them
- ✓ But the angel invites — and he is reiterating the invitation of Jesus (11:28-29).
- ✓ If you are weary, fearful, broken, sinful — Jesus invites you to come to Him and trust in Him.

• SEE (v. 6)

- ✓ This was a further examination to examine the empty resting place of Jesus' body.
- ✓ The body is gone; it is resurrected. What He promised has come true.
- ✓ The angels invited the examination of the tomb (His resurrection stands up to every scrutiny).
- ✓ Have you looked and examined the claims and person of Christ? How do you perceive Him? Do you believe in the One who is the Son of God and worthy of worship (27:54; 28:9)?

• GO (v. 7)

- ✓ This command is not just for the benefit of the women, but for the benefit of others.

- ✓ Because Jesus is resurrected, there are things to do for Him (purpose in life), and ability to do those things in a way that honors Him. There is ministry because of the resurrection.
- ✓ The life of the follower of Christ is a life of going and serving (which was Jesus' last word, v. 19a).
- ✓ Are you going? Is your life useful to the Master? Are you working for Him?

- **TELL (v. 7)**

- ✓ We don't just "go" in general; our task is to go with a message. The women had a message for the disciples — the message was reconciliation (cf. Peter's reconciliation, Mk. 16:7).
- ✓ This is what Jesus would say to the disciples is the task of life (vv. 19-20). This is what we do.
- ✓ "We must say to people, 'He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.' This is powerful...astonishing good news. But good news must be told. If we do not tell it, our actions can only be the result of unbelief or that we do not understand what a great, powerful, and astonishing gospel it is." [Boice]
- ✓ At Christmas we sing, "Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born." At Easter we should sing, "Go tell it on the mountain that Christ is resurrected."

- **DO NOT BE AFRAID (vv. 5, 10).**

- ✓ Both the angels and Jesus told the women the same thing. (Because they *were* afraid.)
- ✓ Fear continues to control many people (even believers). I have good news from this story —
- ✓ The greatest thing the resurrection did for the followers of Jesus is that it removed fear:
 - They no longer feared Christ (or wondered about who He was, Mk. 4:40-41)
 - They no longer feared the religious leaders or the political leaders.
 - They worshipped in righteous fear and delight (v. 9)
 - They were emboldened with the gospel. You remember Peter don't you? He was the one who denied Christ because of fear (26:72). No, he was the transformed man who boldly spoke of his allegiance to Christ no matter the threat (Acts 4:19-21; 5:29-32). The resurrection did that.

CONCLUSION: **The resurrection** is not just the greatest story ever told, but it is the most transforming story ever told. Those who believed were changed. Because Christ was resurrected, because the grave was empty, life became full of meaning and purpose — and the believers were changed and transformed. This is the power of the resurrected Christ. This is why we worship Him alone.