

Matthew 28:1-10

I. Matthew 28:1 — 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.

Mark and Luke tell us that the women went to the tomb in order to anoint the body of Jesus (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1). They went after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week because that was the very earliest chance they had to go and perform their work, and labor of love. They didn't go because it was now *the third day* since Jesus had died. They certainly weren't expecting a resurrection. But "by chance," it "just so happened" that the day after the Sabbath, the first chance for the women to do their work, *was also* the third day since Jesus had died. And so already, we see that it is God who is at work. It is God Himself who *brings* the women to the tomb at dawn on the first day of the week.

They knew that a great *stone* had been rolled in front of the tomb, and they wondered who would move it for them (Mark 16:3). But they didn't know that the previous day a *guard* had also been posted. They didn't know that the tomb had also been *sealed*. Matthew just says that they went to see the tomb. They went to see the tomb because that's where they believed Jesus was. They went to see the tomb because that's where they had seen His body laid. They went to see the tomb because they believed that Jesus was dead.

II. Matthew 28:2-4 — 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. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.

There's always a serious danger that we end up over-sentimentalizing these verses. What's all of this really about? What does it all mean? An earthquake is something violent and certainly something very fearful. When the very ground beneath our feet begins to move and heave, we realize right away how very helpless and vulnerable we are. An earthquake in the Scriptures is often a sign of the activity and presence of God.

- ✓ Judges 5:4-5 — "LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, *the earth trembled* and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water. *The mountains quaked* before the LORD, even Sinai before the LORD, the God of Israel.
- ✓ Jeremiah 10:10 — The LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath *the earth quakes*, and the nations cannot endure his indignation.
- ✓ Nahum 1:5-6 — *The mountains quake* before him; *the hills melt*; *the earth heaves* before him, the world and all who dwell in it. Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and *the rocks are broken into pieces* by him
- ✓ Psalms 68:7-8 — O God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness, *the earth quaked*, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel.

The presence of God is an awesome and fearful thing, and so it's accompanied by awesome and fearful signs. This was not just an earthquake. It was a *great* earthquake. The NASB translates, "A severe earthquake." This severe earthquake is the result of the coming of a supernatural being. An angel of the Lord has descended from heaven. So clearly, God is at work. But what is He doing? Clearly, God is speaking. But what is He saying?

"An angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it." Three days ago, it was God Himself who made sure that His Son was given a proper and an honorable burial. Now it is God Himself who sends an angel from heaven to open the tomb. But *why* is this? Four verbs one right after the other heighten the sense of the mighty and powerful working of God. The angel of the Lord "*descended*" from heaven, "*came*," "*rolled*" back the stone, and "*sat*" on it."

"His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow." Once again, we have to be careful not to over sentimentalize – as though we wouldn't be terrified. Just like an earthquake, a heavenly being whose appearance is like lightning, and whose clothing is white as snow (Luke says "dazzling"; Luke 24:4) can only strike a paralyzing *fear* into the heart of any human being. The angel of the Lord is just reflecting in his person the awesome and fearful glory of God – from whose presence he has just been sent.

"An angel of the Lord descended *from heaven*," Matthew says. And so naturally, in the face of all these signs of the awesome and fearful glory of God, the guards trembled and became like dead men. These guards are not fainthearted and timid men. Otherwise they wouldn't have been assigned to the tomb. Otherwise they couldn't have been soldiers in the first place (27:65). And yet Matthew says that the guards "trembled." He uses the same word that he used for the earthquake – the guards "quaked" for fear. They literally lost control of their physical bodies and fell to the ground in a faint as men who are dead. The response of the unbelieving guards reminds us of the prophets Daniel (Dan. 10:9-10, 15) and Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:28; 3:15, 23-24) and of the Apostle John (Rev. 1:17) when they were confronted with the glory of God. Calvin writes: "Certainly, it is proper that the majesty of God should strike both terror and fear indiscriminately into the godly, as well as the [ungodly], that *all flesh* may be silent before his face."

So far, then, what do we know? We know that God Himself has sent an angel from heaven to break the *seal*, roll away the great *stone*, and render the *guards* utterly helpless and powerless. But why? Why should the seal need to be broken? Why should the stone need to be rolled away? Why should the guards need to be rendered helpless and powerless? Why is all this even necessary? What is God doing? What is God saying? And what will it all mean for the two Mary's who have come after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, to see the tomb?

III. Matthew 28:5a — But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid..."

In other words, the women were also filled with fear, and they also would have quaked and fallen to the ground as if dead – *unless* it had been for the angel's words: "Do not be afraid." When a messenger from heaven speaks words like these, it's wonderful good news. It means that this fearful display of the glory of God in the earthquake, and the supernatural angel, and the face

like lightning, and the dazzling apparel is not intended to bring death and judgment to mortal human beings, but instead, God's favor, and blessing and salvation. "Do not be afraid." Wrapped up and contained within these words is all the beauty, and glory, and power of the *Gospel* of Jesus Christ. "Do not be afraid."

IV. Matthew 28:5b-6 — "For I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has [been raised*], as he said. Come, see the place where he lay."

And all of a sudden we see it, and it hits us like a ton of bricks, and it overwhelms us with amazement and awe. Why did God Himself send an angel from heaven to break the seal, to roll away the great stone, and to render the guards helpless and powerless? Certainly it was not to provide a way for Jesus to escape from the tomb! Jesus had *already* been raised to life (no one knows at what time because there were no witnesses), and He could no longer be hindered by walls or barriers of stone (John 20:19, 26).

So why did God Himself send a mighty angel from heaven to break the seal, to roll away the great stone, and to render the guards helpless and powerless? He did all of this to *prepare* the way for the arrival of the women – the women whom He Himself was bringing to the tomb that morning. He did all of this to open the way *into* the tomb, *so that* the women could see the place where Jesus had been laid. "He is not here, for he has been raised, as he said. *Come, see the place where he lay.*"

O praise God for His infinite mercy and grace! Wrapped up and contained within these words is all the beauty, and glory, and power of the *Gospel* of Jesus Christ. In these words is the gracious invitation of God Himself to put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Jesus had already said that He would be raised – *at least three times* (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19). The angel even points this out – "He has been raised, *as he said.*" But here is the wonderful grace and goodness of God – that though the women had been repeatedly told that Jesus would be raised from the dead, and though they had even been told that He would be raised on the third day, and even though they came to the tomb on the third day expecting to find nothing more than the dead body of Jesus – in spite of all this, it was God Himself who brought them there that morning, and it was God Himself who had prepared the way for their arrival by sending a mighty angel from heaven to break the seal, to roll away the great stone, and to render the guards helpless and powerless. God did all of this *for the sake of the women*, so that *they* might rejoice and put all their trust in Jesus, Messiah. God wants the women to know that He has raised up Jesus, and not just that He has raised up Jesus, but that He has raised up Jesus for their sake, and for their blessing, and for their joy, and for their salvation. "Come," He said to the women, "*see* the place where he lay." "Come," He says to all of us today, "put all your faith and trust in Jesus, Messiah, whom I have raised up from the dead."

V. Matthew 28:7 — "Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has [been raised] from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him."

* NET; NRSV; HCSB (passive verb)

Remember, once again, that this message is not so much from the angel as it is from God Himself. It is God who has raised up Jesus from the dead. It is God who sent the angel. It is God who opened the way into the tomb. It is God who announces to the women that Jesus has been raised and who invites the women to look in the tomb. And now it is ultimately God Himself who sends the women with this message for the disciples.

But is there any sign of God's purpose and intent? The disciples have all abandoned Jesus and run away in the very moment of His greatest need (26:56). So what will the resurrection of Jesus *mean* for the disciples? "Go quickly and tell his disciples that he has been raised from the dead, and **behold**, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him." What we're truly meant to **behold** is the wonderful grace and goodness of God! The angel is clearly quoting the very words of Jesus Himself to His disciples:

✓ Matthew 26:31–32 — 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.**"

When the disciples first heard these words, they couldn't accept them because they couldn't believe they would fail like that. But now that they have failed, these are just the words that they most need to remember. God wants the disciples to know that He has raised up Jesus, and not just that He has raised up Jesus, but that He has raised up Jesus for their sake, and for their blessing, and for their joy, and for their salvation.

"Behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him." Wrapped up and contained within these words is all the beauty, and glory, and power of the **Gospel** of Jesus Christ. In these words is the gracious invitation of God to trust in the one remains *faithful* even when we are faithless (2 Tim. 2:13), and through whom we can have the forgiveness of our sins. "Behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him." And then the angel concludes:

VI. Matthew 28:7 — "See, I have told you."

The Gospel is literally everywhere in these verses. Surely the NET translation is right when it adds the exclamation mark! "See, I have told you!" Surely, every one of all the myriad angels of heaven would have longed to be this angel with this message for the women, and for the disciples, and now, today, for all of us. We have the *sure*, and *certain*, and *joyful* word of God Himself, delivered to us by His holy angel – See, I have told you!!!"

VII. Matthew 28:8 — So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Once again, if we're not careful we can over-sentimentalize these words so that we emphasize the part about "great joy," and somehow minimize the part about "fear." But Matthew clearly says that the women departed quickly from the tomb *with fear*. They didn't linger to ask more questions of the angel whose appearance was like lightning, and whose clothing was white as snow. They didn't linger to ask more questions of the supernatural being whose presence had been the cause of a severe and violent earthquake, and of hardened soldiers quaking and falling

to the ground like dead men. Did they still wonder if Jesus was really alive? Did they still wonder what a resurrected Jesus would really be like? Did they still wonder if He would be stern and rebuke them for their unbelief? Did they still wonder if He would be angry and chastise the disciples for their terrible failure? Would He be as fearful and terrifying as this angel? Did they still wonder what a resurrected Jesus would really *mean*? The women are filled with great joy because they've seen and heard the Gospel literally in every single thing that the angel has said and done. So then, why are they still afraid? Calvin writes: "If their faith had been strong, it would have given them entire composure by subduing fear; but now fear, mingled with joy, shows that they had not yet fully relied on the testimony of the angel." "They departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples."

VIII. **Matthew 28:9a** — And *behold*...

Matthew's favorite word. Look! Lift up your eyes and see! And marvel! And wonder! And rejoice!

IX. **Matthew 28:9a** — And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!"

How can this be?!? How can this possibly be?!? There is no face like lightning here. No dazzling apparel. No terrifying earthquake. But there is **JESUS**. And does Matthew say that He manifested Himself to the women? Did He suddenly appear to them standing somewhere between heaven and earth? Did He overwhelm them with His resurrection glory and majesty?

"And behold," Matthew says, "Jesus *met* them." Matthew couldn't have chosen any word more mundane. We're meant to think of Jesus walking along the same dusty path or road as the women. And then, when they "happen" to cross each other's paths and they see one another for the first time, it is Jesus who speaks first, and what does He say? Not, "I am here." Not, "I am Jesus, and I have been raised from the dead." Not yet does He say, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." But what does He say? "**Greetings!**" – Which is just the common, everyday, run of the mill, Greek word for "Hello." Or perhaps we could translate it, "Good morning!" "No choir of angels, no sound of trumpets, no visions of glory", says Bruner, but still there was Jesus, raised from the dead. And His first word to the women is, "Hello."

All wrapped up and contained within this one single word is all the beauty, and all the glory, and all the power of the *Gospel* of Jesus Christ. In this one word is the gracious condescending of a holy and almighty God to walk on the same dusty road with fallen sinners like we are and to clothe us in His salvation. Jesus wants the women to know not just that He has been raised from the dead, but that He has been raised for their sake, and for their blessing, and for their joy, and for their salvation.

X. **Matthew 28:9b** — And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.

Have our minds and hearts begun to swim yet in the ocean depths of His love? Jesus has literal *feet*. Feet that can be taken hold of, and touched, and felt. Jesus was there, truly, and in the flesh. He did not overwhelm the women so that they quaked and fell down as dead. He met them on the road and said, "hello," so that instead of fleeing away in terror, they might draw *near* to Him

(even taking hold of His feet!), in all the true joy and bliss of worship, and humble submission. And as the women take hold of Jesus' feet and bow before Him in worship, I can just imagine that finally their fear is almost gone.

XI. Matthew 28:10 — Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

What does it mean when the resurrected Jesus meets you on a dusty road, and says to you, “Good morning! Do not be afraid”? It means not only that He is alive, but that He is alive for your sake – for your blessing, and joy, and salvation.

Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.” He repeats almost exactly what the angel had already said, “behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.” But what does Jesus say that the angel does not – that perhaps not even any angel would have ever dared to say? “Go,” He said to the women, “and tell *my brothers* to go to Galilee, and there they will see me” (cf. 12:48-50).

And once again, wrapped up and contained within these few simple words is all the beauty, and glory, and power of the *Gospel* of Jesus Christ! Once again, we hear the gracious invitation of God to trust in the one who remains *faithful* even when we are faithless, and through whose resurrection life we can now have the forgiveness of our sins and true peace and fellowship with God. As the Apostle Paul says: “[He] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised *for our justification*” (Rom. 4:25).

From the very beginning to the very end of this glorious resurrection text, the Gospel of God's grace is being proclaimed. Have you heard it? Have you embraced it? Have you fallen down in joyful worship and glad submission before Jesus who died, but now is alive forevermore (Rev. 1:18)? Can you sing these words with all your heart: “For me He died; *for me* He lives, and everlasting life and light He freely gives.”