

Christ Is Risen

The fact of the Lord Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead is wonderful news for mortal men and women. It means our Saviour has defeated death and the grave. It means He has delivered from judgment all God's elect for whom He died, who otherwise, through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. It means death is not our final state, nor the grave our final destination. It means a way of life, through the grave, has been opened for us into the presence of God.

We who believe

The fact of the resurrection is, of course, doubted, denied and dismissed by most as impossible. But for the women present that morning by the empty tomb, and all who believe their testimony, and the testimony of scripture, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the indisputable fact that fuels our faith. By Christ's resurrection we have the good hope of entering heaven with these very bodies suitably changed, there to experience and enjoy life with Christ forever.

A service for the dead

However, the women – there were at least five – who travelled to the garden early on the first day of the week seem to have had little expectation of the Lord's resurrection. They with their male counterparts had forgotten what Christ had told them about rising again. Their purpose was to anoint the body of Jesus with spices and perfume, and their conversation as they approached the tomb was about the stone they had seen laid across the entrance and how they might gain access.

Sure, sealed and secure

The women would be unaware a guard had been placed at the sepulchre since the time of the Lord's burial to prevent any interference with the body. Matthew tells us the chief priests and Pharisees, 'went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch'. It seems Christ's enemies paid more attention the Lord's words concerning His rising again than did His own followers.

An angel opens Christ's tomb

It was these guards who had the first indication of the Lord's resurrection. Matthew tells us there was an earthquake, just as there had been at the time of the Lord's death. The earth shook as Jesus' spirit returned to His body. At this moment an angel descended from heaven and rolled away the stone from the sepulchre entrance and sat on it. This dramatic scene was witnessed by the guards to their great fear and distress. Any notion of them being asleep, as they afterwards claimed, is ludicrous.

Reconciling the events

Realising the stone was not across the sepulchre entrance threw the approaching women into confusion. No mention is made of the group splitting up but it seems likely Mary Magdalene upon realising the tomb was open and Christ's body was missing at once returned to Jerusalem to tell Peter and John. It may be she was not present when the other women were met by the angels.

Swapping one task for another

Approaching the sepulchre the women became aware of first one, then two angels who tell them the Lord Jesus is already risen from the dead and no longer in the tomb. Their ointment and spices would not be needed, instead they had other work to do. They must bear the news of Christ's resurrection to the Lord's disciples. 'Go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.' The mention of Peter personally was not to grant him pre-eminence above the others but may suggest Peter had separated from the disciples following his denial of Christ.

Stunned with fright

As the women contemplated their return to Jerusalem they were trembling and amazed. So much so it seems they might not be able to fulfil their duty. Mark tells us, 'neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid'. We may well imagine their astonishment. In their confusion and hesitation it seems they missed Peter, and we assume John, and

finally Mary Magdalene who now reached the tomb.

Two disciples arrive

The two disciples quickly confirmed the open tomb and missing body but do not seem to have seen the angels. John tells us they returned to their home. Now the Saviour makes His first appearance and tenderly speaks with Mary as she stands weeping at the tomb. Then the Lord approaches the other women as they hesitantly return to Jerusalem. He personally convinces them of His resurrection and encourages them in their task of informing the disciples.

Lessons from the resurrection

In our service we shall briefly consider the fact of the Lord's resurrection, noting evidence supplied by some obvious witnesses, and some less obvious. We shall note in passing the persistent unbelief of the disciples. We shall also remind ourselves of the importance and significance of the Lord's resurrection with its comforting doctrines of present grace and future glory.

Amen

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