

**Matthew 28: 1-20; “Faith in Christ’s Resurrection”, An Easter Sermon**  
**delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024,**  
**In the Afternoon Worship Service.**

I want us to consider now, in this message, the importance of exercising faith in the risen, living Christ. I want you to see, that just as He revealed Himself to the women and the apostles on that day, that even now He is willing to reveal Himself to you, spiritually, in your heart and mind in accordance with His blessed word. He can come and convince you that He is alive forevermore. Let us ask ourselves whether we have strong and growing faith in our blessed Lord Jesus? If we have this kind of faith, it will lead us to rejoice in Him greatly. And, each and every day, we will be learning more of what it means to serve Him with all of our heart. So, in this message I want you to see,

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – That strong and growing faith in the risen Christ flows from thinking upon the facts concerning His Resurrection.** (verses 1-8)

It was the women, it says here who first came to know the fact of our Lord’s rising from the dead. It says in verse 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.” “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.” “His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow.” “And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.”

I think that we often picture this morning that Christ arose, as a very quiet morning. But from what it says here there was a great earthquake which brought on a great commotion in the hearts of the unbelieving men and believing women who were close to the tomb. The great earthquake came from God to shake the ground which broke the seal which Jesus’ tomb had been sealed with. When it came, an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and he came and rolled back the stone from the door and sat on it.

These were acts of power which God and His angels did. They were acts to free the Lord Jesus from the bonds of death and the grave. The victory over death belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ. But God the Father and God the Holy Spirit attested to this victory in helping Him by raising Him from the dead. God raised Him up, “having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it,” the Apostle Peter says in Acts 2: 24.

The ground must shake because Jesus Christ had overcome sin and death on the cross. His tomb could not stay a prison for Him. Rather, we should think of His death, His lying there in the tomb for 3 days and 3 nights, as His rest from His great work of Redemption. His work of His sufferings on behalf of sinners such as you and I was finished. And now He could rest. But now on this morning of the first day of the week, He would arise from this sleep with all the power and glory that His Father placed upon Him. When He rose from the dead, He burst the bonds of death’s dark prison house to open the door. And He set us free, we who were the captives of sin.

Faith in Jesus flows from thinking upon this kind of truth, the facts of Christ’s resurrection. And our faith is always based upon these astounding facts. The fact was, that the guards who had been appointed to keep watch over the tomb “shook for fear” of the angel who came down to roll away the stone from the door of tomb. And when the women believed the words of the angel, that the Lord Jesus had been raised from the dead, they immediately started off to tell the Apostles the good news. And at the same time, it says in verse 11 – “Now while they were going, behold some of the guards came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened.” They saw but they did not believe.

I believe that it is possible that these guards saw the Risen Lord. Perhaps it was when He came out of the tomb. And then again, perhaps they saw Him when He came up to the women and greeted them. Perhaps they fled away in fear before even that. But when they came into the city the chief priests came to know the truth; that Jesus was alive. He was indeed risen from the dead. And yet, their wicked hearts would not let them repent of their wickedness of having had Jesus falsely tried and put to death.

They must perpetuate their wickedness by paying a large sum of money to the soldiers, bribing them off, not just to be silent, but even worse, to deliberately lie and tell others, “His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we slept.” They did not want to believe what they knew was true. They would suppress the truth by forging a lie.

But we find something quite different taking place in verse 5. It says – “But the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.” “He is not here; for He is risen, as He said.” “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” “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.” “So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word.”

When an angel says to you, “Be not afraid”, it is a very great token for good to you. This angel knew who the women were seeking. They were seeking Jesus. He knew that they were seeking a dead Jesus, and so it was his great joy to declare to them that Jesus was not there; that He had risen, just as He said. There was great glory, there was great excellence and power, in their having the resurrection of the Lord Jesus declared to them by a heavenly messenger.

Listen to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15: 20-23 – “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” “For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.” “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all (all that believe in Him) shall be made alive.” “But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.” Do you believe in these coming realities?

These coming realities of eternal life all rest upon your having faith in Jesus Christ who will most certainly establish them for everyone who believes. Christ is the firstfruits of this great harvest of souls; souls being rejoined back together with their bodies on the Day of the Resurrection. “See the place where the Lord lay”, the angel said to the women. He is no longer there because He is risen. They saw this, and they believed! And in their believing they were commissioned by the angel to become witnesses to the Apostles. “Go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee.”

Now, again, this seems backwards. You would think that the angel would go to the Apostles himself, and declare to them these truths and then they, in turn, would come to the women and they would inform them. But it was not as the Lord would order it on this Day of Days. We find here an exception to the general rule. The believing women were not to be silent in regard to this all-important truth of Christ’s being raised from the dead. They were enlisted to tell the Apostles, who were in positions of spiritual authority, the truth, that so far they had been reluctant to believe.

Unbelieving Apostles would be told by the believing women, who had seen where the Lord lay, the truth that they should have already known, if they had been believing the promise that their Savior had given them many times during His earthly ministry among them. These women had this commission, and they heeded the angel’s words, and they went out quickly to run their holy errand. Theirs was a strong and growing faith because of what they had seen and heard! They went in submission to the angel’s words, and in submission to the Apostles, whom they would declare this truth to. They went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, it says in verse 8.

Now when it comes to this truth of our Lord’s having been raised from the dead, no believing person should be silent about it. Whether they are a woman or a child, or whether they hold a great position in the Church; all of the truth of God’s Word and the gospel rests upon this one doctrine, that Jesus Christ is raised from the dead. Therefore we cannot and we must not be silent. Behold the power and the glory of the words of truth; that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! Dear believer, there is power and glory in these words of truth. Do not be silent, but tell all the world that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. You may doubt yourself and your abilities to be able to speak, but do not be silent about this truth. These women had fear and yet they also had great joy. Their fear was because of the greatness of the power of this angel who had told them not to be afraid. Their joy was that Jesus was alive! And

that meant more to them than all of their fears. If this was true for them, then it is just as much so for us. We will have a strong and growing faith if we will believe these facts of the resurrection of Christ!

**2<sup>nd</sup> – That strong and growing faith in the risen Christ will lead you to worship Him.**

Verse 9 says, “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.” This is really an extraordinary statement. These women were simply going about to do what they had been commanded to do, and in going, they suddenly met Jesus. This was a great blessing to them, to be the among the first to meet Jesus after His resurrection from the dead. They met Him suddenly. They met Him unexpectedly. What wonder and joy filled their hearts as they heard Him say, “Rejoice!”

They did rejoice; they were rejoicing. They all fell on their knees and held his feet, the text says. They worshiped Him from that vantage point. He would not restrain or prevent their true and reverent and joyful worship. In light of what the women did here, let me ask you now: Do you joyfully worship Jesus in the way that these women did when they realized that their Savior, Master, Lord, and Friend had been raised from the dead?

Oh, I know that you cannot see Him, you cannot hold Him, you cannot embrace Him now. But you should know and understand that as a believer in His resurrection you can worship Him, even now. He is alive! He is alive forevermore! He is Risen! He is Risen indeed! May each one of you who has the physical ability to get down on your knees, in private worship, do so occasionally. May you bow your knees before the Father, may you worship the Son, and hold Him by the feet spiritually. May you rejoice in the Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ your Lord is raised from the dead!

Verse 16 says, “Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them.” “When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.” This verse is very hard to understand in its context because Thomas did not see the risen Lord until 8 days after Jesus was raised from the dead. If Thomas was not there, there were only 10. Perhaps Matthew is speaking in general terms of “the twelve”.

But let us try to understand. Back up in verse 10 Jesus had told the women that they were not to be afraid. They were to go and tell His brethren to go to Galilee, and there they would see Him. This message was faithfully communicated to the Apostles; not only the 11 Apostles, but also to all of Christ’s brethren in Jerusalem. So when it says that the 11 disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus appointed, it does not mean that there were not many others with them, because the women had sent word to all of Christ’s brethren in that area of Jerusalem.

And probably the word went even as far as Galilee. Indeed it seems probable to me that this going to Galilee which was mentioned in our text is also the occasion which is mentioned in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15, verses 3-7. In that context, in verse 3 it says, “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.” “After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.” “After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.” There were appearances made that very day to Peter and others of “the twelve”, in or just outside of Jerusalem.

I will assume that this calling the eleven disciples who were Apostles, “the twelve”, by the Apostle Paul, was simply a deliberate carry-over from what they had been called as a group while Judas was still alive. Judas, being now dead, was not with them. But the Apostle Paul may have also been thinking of Matthias, who eventually became one of the twelve. When he wrote 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians it was the eleven plus Matthias which would allow the number of “the twelve” to continue. Matthias was also a witness to Christ’s resurrection and was then later added to the number of “the twelve” in Acts 1: 26. He was no doubt one of the 500 brethren who saw Jesus on this occasion in Galilee.

But evidently Thomas was not there on the day or the night of Christ’s resurrection when Jesus made His appearances. He probably saw the other Apostles a short time after. But in John’s gospel it says that he did not believe their words to him, telling him that they had seen the Lord. He did get to

see the Lord eight days later, and it was inside a house when the doors were shut. Had Thomas gone with the other ten when it says in our text that “the eleven disciples went away to Galilee”? I think that he did. But I do not think that this time, he doubted. I think that he was one of those who worshiped. His was a strong and growing faith.

Perhaps at this time he became a great witness to others around him who were doubting. I think that the “some who doubted” when they saw Him at the mountain in Galilee were some of these “five hundred brethren” who were seeing the risen Christ, for the first time. The rest, who had seen Him before, and who might have had their doubts removed before, were the ones who immediately worshiped the risen Lord Jesus. In Mark’s account of these things he said in Mark 16: 14 – “Later Jesus appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.”

We need to understand how difficult it was for all of the Apostles to come to terms with Christ’s resurrection. They saw Him, but Christ had to prove Himself to them, now that He was risen. Our Lord appeared a number of times, to His Apostles and also once to many of His brethren, and at most of these appearances there were still some doubters among them. This should show us something about ourselves believing in Christ’s resurrection. If those who actually saw the risen Christ could still have doubts, then can you see, how easy it would be, for any of us who believes, to fall into the mistake of not remembering that Christ is so great in wisdom, power, presence, and might, that He can be with each of us always?

Let me ask you whether you are remembering in your experience every day that Christ is risen from the dead? Are you remembering to worship the Living Risen Christ, each and every day when you rise? And do you continue to worship, and to exercise faith in the Risen Christ, as you go through each day? If you are consciously doing this by the power of the Holy Spirit, then yours will be a strong and growing faith.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> – Strong and growing faith in the risen Christ will lead you to help out in the fulfillment of the Great Commission.**

Verse 17 says, “When they saw Him, they worshiped Him, but some doubted.” “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and earth.’ “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

I do not know if you have ever thought about the context of this “Great Commission”. The context is Christ’s resurrection. In the Father’s raising Christ from the dead, He has given to Him all power and authority in heaven and earth to save the elect and to build His Church. Indeed, He has authority over all people and all things until the end of the world when He returns for His own. At that time Christ the Son will “deliver up the kingdom to the Father”, that God may be all-in-all. But during this Church age, which will last until Christ returns, this Commission is in effect.

The Lord Jesus is speaking to ministers especially in this commission because he speaks of “making disciples and baptizing them”. This is the special duty of the pastors of all the true churches around the world in every generation of the Church age. But certainly the pastors need the help of the rest of the body of Christ to fulfill this mandate of “going”, and seeing disciples made. They need others in the church to respond personally, and to also go about to make disciples.

All of us need to learn to share the gospel. All of us need to teach others to observe all that Christ has commanded us. And as each believer responds to the truth of Christ’s word, remembering that He is risen from the dead, they shall then go about by grace to do and to keep His commandments. It is because Christ is risen from the dead, and He and the Father have sent the Holy Spirit, that we can therefore have a strong and growing faith. And we can go about to help in the fulfilling of the Great Commission. May it be so for each of us!

