

# He Rose from the Dead

*Matthew 28:1-15*

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## Introduction

Well, here we are, nearing the end of our sojourn, reading through and contemplating the implications of the Gospel according to Matthew. Matthew is accomplishing many things in his account of the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Abraham, the son of David, the Messiah. He has shown us how Jesus is the fulfillment of the pictures portrayed through the history of the world as seen through the eyes of the Scriptures of ancient Israel. Out of that vision we have found several prominent ideas. He is the promised savior. He brings to light the blessings promised to Abraham. He lives out the Old Covenant intentions that failed in the life of the nation of Israel. He explains the meaning and purpose of the law and brings a new and better instruction from the mountaintop. He is the promised king, to rule a new kingdom. He inaugurates a new covenant with a new people. Indeed, the Gospel of Matthew displays intently the Gospel *in* Matthew.

Early in this series I challenged each of you to take the time to read through the Gospel in a single sitting (or at least just few). That challenge is repeated now. If you did not read it through before you missed out on seeing the connections and flow from section to section. Whether you have or have not read it through before, read it through now. You will see the themes come together in a more vivid way especially as we bring this set of sermons to a close. Reading, learning, understanding, and living out the Bible is not an exercise of merely grabbing some verse or two to answer a problem or situation you are facing. It is comprehending the Bible's overall message. Yes, it is often detailed and often difficult to put it into practice in the myriad of life's concerns. You won't do this well at all if you think you can grab a word or phrase or two and think you've got this down.

This section of the text is in the overall conclusion of Matthew's gospel that began at the beginning of chapter 27. The opening of the Gospel set the stage. The first several chapters provided both a thematic and exemplary introduction to the overall story. The we worked through the five sections that are recognized by their units of teaching beginning with the Sermon on the Mount. When we came to chapter 27, we entered the climactic conclusion. The opening and closing both had appearances of angels seen in 1:20 and again in 28:2. People respond with joy at the message in 2:1 and again in chapter 28.

This final unit can be viewed as a chiasm. A literary device we have described before where sections parallel each other around a central section. Most often the central piece carries the key or at least significant portion of the meaning of the overall unit. This is not how we in our modern, western world organize and outline our thinking but was common in the ancient world. The movement would still be forward, perhaps even chronological, but main point or them would have been focused on the center. This section can be portrayed like this:

A	27:57-61	Jesus dead and buried
B	27:62-66	posting of guards
	C	28:1-10 appearance of angel and resurrected Jesus
	B'	28:11-15 report of guards
A'	28:16-20	Jesus living and sovereign

Matthew is just one of the four accounts that complement and supplement each other in the telling of the Gospel message. None of the accounts is a complete, comprehensive re-telling of Jesus' life and teaching and that is no less true than with the account of the events of this great day. There are many more details that are seen in the other Gospels that expand or give a different perspective on this event. But this week we continue to see the climax of the Gospel of Matthew's presentation of Jesus and his work. Matthew's original readers likely knew at least the basics and the important implications of Jesus' life. His Gospel would have been important to fill in gaps in their knowledge and likely be an encouragement in their current situations. But this gospel could have used for sharing this message with unbelievers as well. With that in mind, as they would have been reading along, they would have come to the end of what we know as chapter 27 and likely thought something along these lines: "I thought he was 'God with us,' now he is gone," "he didn't turn out to be much of a king," "so much for facing opposition with confidence, you still lose," "there really isn't much hope in this 'gospel thing' is there?" But our text this morning begins in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 28, verse 1 where we find a fearful discovery. While you are finding your place in your copy of Scripture this morning let's pray.

## **A Fearful Discovery (vs. 1-7)**

### **The Quest (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.*

Likely leaving while still dark several women made their way to the tomb to rendezvous to provide a more appropriate burial for Jesus. It was a quest with potential challenges and pitfalls, full of emotion and apprehension. Matthew highlights Mary Magdalene and Mary the wife of Clopas. They are probably a pair, younger with older and may have been together the night before. They went to see a tomb, a place of death. In their quest, they intended to find a corpse and hoped to stall its decomposition (or at least make it smell better). They, like many of the other followers of Jesus seemed to have forgotten what Jesus had told them. In their sadness and confusion, they were already going on about their usual lives.

Often our quests take on this flavor as well. We forget the radical call that Jesus makes of his disciples and the glorious promises he has for us. We seem to constantly have this desire to substitute our own wisdom and plans for what Jesus has declared and prepared.

### **The Quake (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.*

Before they had arrived, and angel had descended and with another great earthquake the stone was rolled back. The images would recall passages from Zechariah and Daniel to the astute reader. The stone didn't need to be moved for the contents of the grave to leave. It needed to be out of the way, rather, for those outside to see the "contents" clearly as daylight arrived. This angel was not like anything seen before by the guards and they quaked in their boots and became like dead men. They likely ran away at this point, just prior to the arrival of the women.

Heavenly messages and messengers have this effect on people. The appearance of glory and holiness is more than we can handle. Notice what was not stated to these men, who represented unbelief and rejection. We have seen angel appearances in Matthew before. What have they said in those earlier accounts? "Do not fear" was not uttered at this point. They were to fear the power and majesty represented by this angelic presence from the Most High.

## The Question (5-7)

*But the angel said to the women,  
"Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.  
He is not here, for he has risen, as he said.  
Come, see the place where he lay.  
Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead,  
and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.  
See, I have told you."*

But when the women arrived a different scene occurred. The angel answered their unstated question, first by assuring them not to be afraid. Indeed, the entire discovery of moved stone and angelic being would be quite a fearful discovery. Yet the angel knows they are looking for a dead body that had been beaten, mutilated and crucified. The angel, surprisingly for the women, simply states "he is not here." He then reminds them of their own level of unbelief. He states, "he is risen as he said." And then he proves this to them by showing them the empty tomb. But that is not all, he challenges them to spread the word to his disciples and go quickly. Mark's account has them not sharing this with anyone along the way because of their fear and confusion.

We too don't want to believe everything Jesus says. We want to pick and choose what to hear, understand and obey. But in that we are likely to miss the main point and the blessing of belief. We often want to believe just a part of the gospel. Frequently we grab on to forgiveness and neglect the parts about a new position, a new life, a continuing need for that forgiveness and the like that leads to struggle in life. But that brings us to the next section. Here we see the response to this affirming declaration.

## **An Affirming Declaration (vs 8-10)**

### **The Wonder (8)**

*So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.*

At this prompting we find these women running to tell his disciples. There is some thought that they might have split up because the twelve were not all in the same place that would explain some of the differences in the Gospels' accounts, but they still had a fear that was mixed with joy. The awe and wonder in their minds must have been nearly overwhelming. Not that they had not heard about or even had witnessed directly many great and wondrous events already, they likely were starting to piece together the implications of this momentous occasion.

We too should come to gatherings like this morning with wonder, joy, excitement, and fear as we recall and rehearse the power of the resurrection. He is not in the tomb just as he said.

### **The Worship (9)**

*And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!"  
And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.*

But as they made their way to the disciples they ran into an unexpected friend. Jesus met these women. Here we are told that they recognized Him. Because of their recognition they acknowledged him as their Lord. And in that they immediately fall to worship at his feet. They had watched all the vivid details of his death. They were aware of his burial. They sat and contemplated his remarks from the cross and rehearsed his teachings. Now, when faced with his presence, they could do nothing less than put many of these pieces together and fall to worship him, an act reserved for God alone. These women were among the first to witness and worship Jesus of Nazareth as resurrected king of the Jews, of the Roman world, of the universe!

How common is our response to the resurrected presence of Jesus? We truly should fall on our faces in worship, not just because we are reading this today, but because he has promised he is with us always. He greets us each morning! He promises to energize us each day. Do we believe that and worship in that? But the story for these disciples isn't done yet, there is still more to hear and learn and some of that requires them to wait.

## **The Wait (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.”*

And yet, knowing the persistent “fear” that was present with them, Jesus himself told them not to be afraid. Their faith and joy and reverential worship would propel them to carry out Jesus’ instruction with a boldness that belied their status in their world. They were to instruct the disciples to make their way to Galilee after the festival and begin this ministry from whence it began, anew. There would be some wait for this to all come together. They would go to Galilee and then return to Jerusalem for the next festival at Pentecost 7 weeks later. Next week’s sermon will provide Matthew’s final sequence that his readers know has further implications as the gospel of the kingdom goes forth. But the difficulties that Jesus has warned his disciples and Matthew has warned his readers about returns with a foul deceit.

Obeying in the face of promise is the essence of faith. Our “little faith” is so often revealed because we need more information or proof before we do what he tells us. But we indeed face opposition to our life as exemplified in the next section, a conclusion to a foul deceit.

## **A Foul Deceit (vs 11-15)**

### **The Predicament (11)**

*While they were going,  
behold, some of the guard went into the city  
and told the chief priests all that had taken place.*

While the women Jesus spoke to were on their way to inform the disciples about what they had witnessed and the message from Jesus himself, the guards had left and went to the priests and shared their experience of this glorious event. Perspective changes everything doesn't it. Those with open hearts had their faith increased, their hopes renewed, and their worship overflowed in this encounter. Those who were skeptical, blind, and rebellious were hardened even when hearing the wonder of what had taken place. They were now in a predicament that required some action to attempt to thwart further disruption in their plans.

Unbelief works all around us as Matthew promised earlier in this Gospel. Accusations and challenges will be just like the one found in the following proposition made with the soldier-guards.

### **The Proposition (12-14)**

*And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel,  
they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said,  
“Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’  
And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.”*

You see, as one commentator pointed out, the Jewish leaders put more stock in Jesus' resurrection prediction than the disciples here. Pastor Jon stated this last week as we read about the setting of the guard. They wanted the guards to prevent some mischief. However, even when they are confronted with an amazing account, they work from the evil in their hearts to suppress this glorious truth. In fact, remember back in chapter 12 the Pharisees had come asking for some sign to confirm Jesus' claims of authority. Let's go back and read that account from Matthew 12:38-41

*Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.”  
But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.  
The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.*

This sign is right in front of them, and they reject it. They concoct an even less believable story and pay handsomely to promote the lie. The absolutely will not believe! Even believers will create lies to avoid facing the power of God working in our lives to expose remaining idols and unbelief that carry with us. In fact, not only in the day of Matthew's original writing, but even today, this story has a strong persistence.

## The Persistence (15)

*So they took the money and did as they were directed.  
And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.*

A sad and painful commentary on the depth of depravity that rests over the human heart. A cloud of unbelief and fear that can only be lifted, a shroud of hatred and rebellion that can only be removed by the power of God himself. The power of the Holy Spirit to cause us to see and believe this gospel.

## Reflect and Respond

Indeed, this account is full of glory. One writer has said this: “God’s authentication of Jesus has been made so abundantly plain that no one who is not corrupted by self-interest or bribe should resist the claims of the Christian faith; belief is no option, it is morally and by evidence, obligatory.” And yet that “obligation” can only be met in Jesus himself. Matthew has been pointing this out all along. He has demonstrated the need for a supernatural work to remove the pain and evil that is present because of the fall. That is the message in Jesus’ healing and casting out of demons. Matthew’s readers are now reminded that the story wasn’t over. The affirmation has occurred. There has been triumph over death. In a couple of weeks on the Sunday that churches all over the world use to celebrate this event, Pastor Steve will remind us of the grand implications of this glory. But I want to briefly hear from the apostle Paul as he interprets Jesus and highlights this. He does so in several places, but I would like to read Ephesians 1 in this light. Reading in chapter 1, verses 3 down to 14:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

Belief in the gospel requires that God had to lavish his grace on us, so that when we heard the word of truth, we could believe in him and be sealed with his Spirit. One of the other gospel writers recalled a statement by the disciples, that in the presence of the risen Lord, they felt their “hearts burn within them”. Shouldn’t that be true of us as well? Should we not fall at his feet in worship with the women. Let’s do that right now as we stand and sing in reflection to the great truth: Christ is risen!