



17 | MATTHEW 27:45-28:10

WORDS OF COMFORT AT THE RESURRECTION

In Jesus' resurrection, we have the power to overcome the fear, despair, doubt, and the enslaving sin of the old life. Jesus is alive!

Outline

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Call to Worship

Jesus said... "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." —John 11:25-26

Songs

Living Hope
King of kings / He is Lord
Up from the Grave He Arose
Christ the Lord is Risen Today
See What a Morning

Announcements

WELCOME: We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet if you are visiting with us.

Introduction

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! Hallelujah! He is risen! He is risen indeed!

Many of us know this because he's raised us from the dead. You remember your old life? You were miserable. I was lost and dead in sin. But now we have trusted in Jesus and his resurrection! He's alive, and he lives in you and me.

The resurrection **gives the greatest comfort to believers**. It teaches us that **wherever there is a crucifixion and burial in our lives, there is a resurrection**. Often what we think is the very end of something, where we are crushed and undone, it is the beginning. If you are lost and **without Christ today, there is no hope**. For the lost person, the pain in this life will continue for eternity. Jesus doesn't want this for anyone. That's why he came to die. **He "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"** (1 Tim 2:4).

MOM'S DEATH

For the Christian, every crushing experience, **every suffering is an entrance to a deeper knowledge of God**. The **suffering is divorcing us from our old life**, where we worshipped the good feelings and pleasures and comforts of this life. In suffering, in our own crucifixions in life, **the believer unites with Christ and dies to this world**. And through those times of crushing, we exit the graves we were once in: graves of sin, selfishness, anxiety and paralyzing fear, bitterness and anger, and all the filth of the desires of the flesh, lust and life dominating sins. Through our trials, we become weak and powerless, completely dependent on Christ, and we rise with Christ to "walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:3).

This kind of crucifixion and resurrection experience happened early on in my Christian life. **I had been a believer for 3 months, when on New Year's Eve 1989 in the bayou of Louisiana**, just after midnight, it had just turned 1990, a new decade, and I heard the voice of my sister. "There's something wrong with mom. Matt, come quickly!" So I rushed to see our mother, and it looked like she was sleeping, but she was already gone. She was 49 years old. She had a massive heart attack.

In that moment, though I was incredibly sad and shocked, I was not struck with the anxiety and anger of my old life. In that moment, I was carried by God on eagle's wings. I was filled with the Holy Spirit, and I told my sister, no matter what happens, God is in control. That truth intoxicated me, that God had me and would carry me. I knew so little about the Bible as a new believer, but I knew God was with me.

God turned that crucifixion into a resurrection. He placed me 800 miles away from Louisiana to Chicago with my father. There I met my wife when we were 16 years old. From there I studied theology in my undergrad and planted churches in Spain. You know the rest of the story. God wants to take your worst trials and show you how his strength is made perfect in weakness. **Your pain and suffering is never a result of God punishing you**. There is "no condemnation" in Christ (Rom 8:10).

Perhaps you are crushed and crucified in life. You want to experience that power of his resurrection this morning. You may be **stuck in some life-dominating behavior** that you can't stop—anxiety, anger, addiction, despair. You've been there and done that, and you want to get out!

You have a **relationship that you need to reconcile, but you've tried with no success.** You **need a major change in your life**, but **you're afraid to fail again** and again. You are in a major trial, and you feel alone and perhaps abandoned by God.

You feel stuck. This Resurrection Day, you can know that **your trials are meant not to condemn you, but to draw you closer in relationship to Christ.** Jesus is alive!

BEING STUCK IS COMMON

Jesus came to give us real life and get us unstuck! There was no one more trapped than Jesus Christ on the cross. Yet, he laid his life down freely for us. **They put him in the grave, but that grave could not hold him.**

Key thought: In Jesus' resurrection, we have the power to overcome the fear, despair, doubt, and the enslaving sin of the old life. Jesus is alive! In him we have power over the sin, self, death, and hell. Hallelujah, he is risen from the dead!

1. A WORD OF **TRUST** FROM THE SOLDIERS (27:45-54)

No one was more "stuck" than the soldiers. They had **not** grown up hearing of faith in the Lord. They were **raised in the paganism of Rome.** Could God save them?

The **Roman soldiers that crucified Christ certainly did not understand the theology of the resurrection,** but they did understand something. They realized that **Christ's power was not confined to his humanity.** It began to dawn on some of them that this was the Son of God, who **in some way was transcendent beyond this cross he was hanging on.** With deep awe and wonder, one of the Roman officers, a centurion witnessed **something beyond Jesus' humanity and peered into his nature as God in human flesh.**

Matthew 27:45-54 | Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ⁴⁷And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." ⁴⁸And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." ⁵⁰And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. ⁵¹And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵²The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

THE FIRST CONVERTS WERE ROMAN SOLDIERS

That centurion and those with him saw the miracles. The earth quaked. The dead were raised and walking around Jerusalem. The temple's curtain was torn in two from the top to the bottom. They realized, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Mt 27:54).

Imagine what they were going through. They were realizing who they had just crucified! **They crucified not an earthly king, but the Divine King, the Son of God**, the Savior of the world.

Jesus had prayed, "**Father forgive them for they know not what they do**," and if their faith was real, and it seems to be, then **these Roman soldiers were the first to come into the kingdom** after the cross of Christ!

We know that in the early church, there were a good number of Roman soldiers who would worship with both the rich and the poor, free and slave. The church was quite the motley crew, as it is today. It's likely that some of those first soldiers who worshipped the Lord were a handful that had crucified him.

Here is an incredible truth. Jesus can never be "stuck". Yes, He was nailed to a tree to bear our sins, but death has no power over the prince of life. This is the key to the Roman centurion's testimony.

SOLDIERS AT THE GRAVE

Remember after the crucifixion and burial of Christ, Pilate told the soldiers, "Go, make it [the grave] as secure as you can" (Mt 27:65). **Sixteen heavily armed Roman soldiers were set there in front of the tomb**. These Roman soldiers had seen the Lord crucified. Some stationed at his tomb may have participated in putting him to death. Jesus had predicted he would rise from the dead on the third day.

In Matthew 28, we read that while those Roman soldiers were guarding the tomb, a glorious angel that looked like lightening, and there was a second earthquake. The first was at the cross when Jesus died, but now Christ has risen from the dead. And the angel rolls away the stone, not so that Christ can come out of the grave, but so that we can see in! We read about the soldiers, "for fear of him [the angel] the guards **trembled and became like dead men**" (Mt 28:4).

Some may have thought, "**That Roman centurion told me that this was the Son of God**. He has power over the elements and nature, and maybe even power over death." They would all find out as Sunday approached, that yes, indeed, "**Truly this was the Son of God!**" (Mt 27:54). Some of these soldiers also may have made up the newly converted soldiers in the early church.

PAUL AND THE ROMAN PRETORIAN GUARD

When Paul was under house arrest in Rome, **he shared his testimony of Jesus "throughout the whole imperial guard"** (Phil 1:13). The imperial guard, known as the Praetorians, were the elite of the Roman army and were paid double a normal soldier's wage for their service. Later, Paul was chained to Pretorian Roman soldiers for several years when he was imprisoned in Rome (Acts 28:16). He had plenty of time to evangelize them!

Some of these soldiers must have heard through the years about those two earthquakes and the power of Jesus on the cross and in the resurrection. Many of them came to know Christ and joined with the previous soldiers in saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

What about you? You may feel so far away from God. It doesn't take much to see that you were created by Christ and for his kingdom. You are not your own. You may know about Christ, but do you know him personally? There is no hope for those who have a mere superficial knowledge of Christ. Have you surrendered your life to him. Do it now! Entrust your life to Christ, by his death and resurrection, right now. **What better day to become a new creation in Christ than on Resurrection Sunday!**

2. A WORD OF HOPE FOR MARY MAGDALENE (27:55-56)

Another word of comfort comes from the women. We hear a great word of hope that is spoken to Mary Magdalene. Remember Jesus had cast seven demons out of her when she came to faith in Christ. We learn that she likely had plenty of money, but that didn't take away her problems. She needed Christ!

A HOPELESS SINNER

Mark 16:9 | Now when he [Christ] rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons.

This story gives me so much hope for those that we consider hopeless. There are so many people in our congregation today who at one time you your life you were like Mary Magdalene. Like Mary, at one time you were without Christ, harassed by the devil, hardened to God with...

thoughts of suicide
bitterness and hatred
deep depression and despondency
horrific nightmares
violent, uncontrollable rage
self-inflicted injuries
restlessness and insomnia
anguish and torment

But like Mary, Jesus touched you, and he made you whole!

A HOPELESS SITUATION

In Matthew she is described as being with several other women, looking at the horrific sight on the cross, the crucifixion of the Son of God.

Matthew 27:55-56 | There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, ⁵⁶ among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

Mary was with John the disciple and Mary, Jesus' mother at the cross. We read in **John 19:25**, "standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister,

Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene” (Jn 19:25). They were close enough to hear him speaking from the cross (Jn 19:26–27). Mary stayed there until the bitter end.

Mark’s Gospel tells us that it was only thanks to Mary Magdalene that the disciples even learned where Jesus’ body was laid after his death. Mark records that Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Christ in order to give it a proper burial. Joseph had access to Pilate because he was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of Jewish leaders (Mk 15:43). All four gospels record Joseph’s action of retrieving Jesus’ body. Mark adds that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses secretly followed Joseph to the tomb and “saw where he was laid” (Mk 15:47).¹

John 20:11 | But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb.

Have you been there? A situation looks utterly impossible? Remember Mary had already seen Jesus do the impossible. [talk about Mary’s story.]

Mary was the last at the Cross. She followed Joseph of Arimathea to the tomb. She saw where the body was laid. She had some inside information. She had informed the disciples that the Lord’s body was missing. So she goes back to the tomb. And she is weeping. Now, she feels someone has desecrated her Lord’s grave. Someone has stolen the body of her Lord.

There was evidently **no thought of resurrection in Mary Magdalene’s mind**. She had seen up close the devastating effects of the bitter blows Jesus had received on the way to the cross. She had witnessed firsthand as His life ebbed from Him on the cross.

She had watched as His lifeless body was unceremoniously wrapped in linen and hastily prepared ointment and left alone in the tomb.

She thought she was coming to the tomb for one final expression of love to her Master—to whom she knew she owed everything. She wanted to finish preparing his body.² But now the body was gone.

THE CAUSE OF HOPELESSNESS

John 20:12-15 | And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.¹³ They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but **she did not know that it was Jesus**.¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”

What was the cause of Mary’s hopelessness? Jesus was standing right in front of her, and **she didn’t recognize him**. Mary turns around. She’s upset. She’s done with

¹ Liz Curtis Higgs. *Unveiling Mary Magdalene: Discover the Truth About a Not-So-Bad Girl of the Bible* (New York: The Crown Publishing Group, 2004), 180.

² *Ibid*, 181.

niceties. She's desperate to find the Lord's body. She wants some time alone with him. Like you would at a funeral as you approach the casket.

She turns around, and here is a man she assumes is the gardener. Without accusing him or judging him she just says, "Tell me where you've laid him, and I will take him away." Can you imagine? Little Mary Magdalene is ready to carry a dead body herself.

The evidence is mounting. She's seen the empty tomb. She's seen the angels. When is she going to realize it's Jesus?

There he is, the risen Lord, appearing for the first time. But she doesn't recognize him. **She thinks he's the gardener.**

What about you? Do you feel abandoned by Jesus? Don't ever forget the precious words of Jesus.

Hebrews 13:5 | I will never leave you nor forsake you.

THE CURE FOR HOPELESSNESS

The cure for hopelessness is to listen for Jesus' voice.

John 20:16-18 | Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her.

Jesus looks at this one who was so dedicated to her Lord, and he says, "Mary!" Immediately, she knows. She knows that voice. She knows that love in his voice. "Mary!" The risen Christ knows her name.

Our risen Lord knows your name too! He's been calling you since you were born. You know him, but perhaps you've been running from him. Listen you don't need to run! He has conquered death for you. He has done all that you need to be justified before a holy God. He has lived the perfect life. He's died an all-atoning death. He will exchange your record for his if you will just come to him!

3. A WORD OF JOY FROM THE ANGEL (28:1-10)

We've heard from the Roman soldiers and Mary Magdalene. Now let's listen to the message from the Lord's angel that rolled back the stone and sat on it.

THE JOY OF KNOWING JESUS' VICTORY

At sunrise on Sunday, Mary Magdalene and one of her friends go out to see the tomb. We've heard her story already from the book of John. Jesus greets her. But then the Scriptures focus on a message from the angel.

Matthew 28:1-6 | 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. ² 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.³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.⁴ And for fear of him the guards **trembled and became like dead men**.⁵ But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

The Angel's Presence. When the angel came down, his power caused a great earthquake. His presence was like lightening, so he was gloriously bright. The guards fell down like dead men. Jesus was supposed to be dead in the tomb, but the only “dead men” we read about are these guards who “trembled and became like dead men” (28:4). I imagine that they are pale, frozen in place, and perhaps lying with face flat on the dirt.³ What can 16 Roman soldiers do against such transcendent power?

The Angel's Witness. He is not here! Jesus conquered death and hell! He's no longer in the grave. In another place, we hear a wonderful question.

Luke 24:5-6 | Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.

Do you understand that Jesus has conquered death and hell and the grave? You don't have to be afraid of death. Because of Jesus, death is the gateway to eternal life. He lived the perfect life on my behalf. In his death, he paid for my complete sin debt. And in his resurrection, his victory is secured.

Do you want to know something else that is amazing? Romans 6 says that when I was baptized into Christ, I was baptized in his death.

Romans 6:3-4 | Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

When Christ died, I died with him. When Christ was buried, I was buried with him. And when Christ was raised from the dead, I was raised with him. We as children of God are united to Christ by faith, and our debt is paid, our victory is secured!

THE JOY OF TELLING OF JESUS' VICTORY

This Resurrection Day, so many do not know and have not heard that Jesus has conquered our sins. We need to tell them.

Matthew 28:7-8 | “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.” ⁸ So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

³ Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 900.

The angel commands Mary Magdalene and her friend to go and tell the disciples that Jesus is risen from the dead.

We can all relate with Mary Magdalene. From what we know of her, she had money, but money couldn't take away her problems. When Jesus found her she had seven demons. But Jesus touched her and healed her and restored her. Mary Magdalene had a story to tell. **What's your story?**

THE JOY OF WORSHIPING THE VICTORIOUS CHRIST

Maybe the most precious part of this story this morning is the personal greeting of Jesus to his disciples. They were worrying and distraught and dismayed. But Jesus wasn't. Jesus is the victor!

Matthew 28:9-10 | And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

What are we called to do? We are called to worship Jesus. Oh, if we could take hold of his feet and just "be still and know" that Jesus Christ "is God" (Psa 46:10). Worship him. It's worship that takes away fear. It's worship that encourages us to tell the story and witness to our loved ones and family members. Let not your heart be troubled, Jesus is our victorious King of kings and Lord of lords!

Conclusion

Today would be a wonderful day to take that step of faith with the Lord. No matter who you are or what you've done, Christ is waiting for you, extending his hand to you. You may be like the soldiers, seemingly so far away from God, but they could see that he was the Son of God. You may be like Mary, you have everything money can buy, but you are still tormented by life and by your own sin and by the devil. To all who will come to him, he says: "All day long I have stretched out my arms to you" (Rom 10:21; cf Isa 65:2). Listen to him. He's calling you now!

Revelation 3:20, NIV | Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

I heard the story of a **missionary in Brazil** who discovered a **tribe of Indians** in a **remote part of the jungle**. They lived near a **large river**. The tribe was in need of **medical attention because a contagious disease** was ravaging the population. People were dying daily.

A **hospital was very nearby, just across the river**, but the Indians would not cross it because **they believed it was inhabited by evil spirits**. They believe that to enter the water would mean certain death. **The missionary explained how he had crossed** the river and was unharmed. They were not impressed.

He then took them to the bank and **placed his hand in the water**. They still wouldn't go in. He walked **into the water up to his waist** and splashed water on his face. It didn't matter. They were still afraid to enter the river.

Finally, he dove into the river, swam beneath the surface until he emerged on the other side. He punched a triumphant fist into the air. He had entered the water and escaped. It was then that the Indians broke out into a cheer and followed him across.

That's exactly what Jesus did! He entered the river of death and came out on the other side. No wonder we celebrate the Resurrection!⁴ Hallelujah! He is risen! He is risen indeed!

Benediction

Hebrews 13:20-21 - Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

⁴ Max Lucado, *Six Hours One Friday: Living in the Power of the Cross*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 127.