

Jesus Rises from the Dead (Matthew 28:1-10)

Jesus left the tomb in much the same way He would enter the locked room where His disciples were gathered later on that same evening (see John 20:19). His glorified resurrection body was no longer bound by time and space. He simply went where He wanted to go. The walls of the tomb could not contain Him, just as a clear pane of glass cannot stop the rays of the sun from passing through. The reason the angel came down from heaven to roll the stone away was to show the women, and the world, that Jesus had already left the tomb.

The earthquake that accompanied the angel's descent recalls the prophecy of Haggai 2:6–9, "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the Desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the Lord Almighty. 'The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,' declares the Lord Almighty. 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the Lord Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the Lord Almighty." It seems significant that an earthquake marked both Jesus' death and His resurrection. These quakes were obviously more than coincidences of nature; both quakes signalled that great and mighty acts of God were taking place. It is as though God the Father was tying the crucifixion and the resurrection of His Son together with a seismic knot. Since the women had also been at the cross, they may have made the connection.

The guards were afraid and shook and became like dead men, and the angel did nothing to alleviate their fear. He ignored them and addressed his words to the women, "Do not be afraid." This was the same greeting Gabriel gave to Zechariah (Luke 1:13) and to Mary (verse 30). When the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream (see Matthew 1:20) and when the angel appeared to the shepherds (see Luke 2:10), the greeting was the same: "Do not be afraid." That is the gospel in a nutshell. That is the message of Easter. King David has taught us to pray it and to take it to heart: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil," (Psalm 23:4).

At first the angel's words sounded too good to be true: "He is not here. For He has risen, as He said." It was a gentle way of saying, "I told you so! You should not be surprised. You should have known He would not be here anymore."

What could they say? Matthew does not record a single word that the women said in response to this good news, and Mark 16:8 tells us, "They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid."

If the angel had not told them what to do next, they very likely would have stood there for some time in amazement. So the angel told them to inform the disciples that Jesus was alive and to tell them to go to Galilee, for they would see Him there.

Matthew makes no mention of how the disciples reacted when they heard the report of the women. But Luke 24:11 tells us, "They did not believe the women, because their words seemed to

them like nonsense.” Not only did the disciples fail to believe that Jesus was alive, but they did not head straight for Galilee either. Instead, they came to the tomb to see for themselves that it was indeed empty. And they were still in Jerusalem, gathered behind locked doors, when Jesus came and appeared to ten of them on Easter evening.

Before the women made their way to where the disciples were gathered, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” Immediately they recognised Him and fell down and worshipped Him. Jesus repeated the message they had just heard from the angel. So as they ran off to find the disciples, they had more than the word of an angel; they could say that they had seen Jesus! His invitation to meet in Galilee was a repetition of what He had said to the disciples on Maundy Thursday evening (see Matthew 26:32).

It is noteworthy that Jesus calls His disciples “My brothers.” He knew they were going to feel guilty about the way they had all forsaken Him and fled in Gethsemane. But He wanted them to know that He had forgiven them. He was anxious to see them. They did not have to be afraid of what He would think of them when they saw each other again.

There may be further significance in the fact that Jesus calls them “My brothers” rather than “My disciples.” He seems to be inviting them to think of themselves as His colleagues, much as ministers today refer to each other as “the brethren.” Their seminary training was just about over. Soon they would be preaching the same gospel Jesus had been preaching for the last three and a half years while they watched and learned.

After this, Jesus appeared to many others, but Matthew does not mention all of these appearances. Jesus appeared to Peter (Luke 24:34), to Cleopas and his friend on the way to Emmaus (verses 13-31), to ten of the Eleven (John 20:19-23), and then a week later to all of them (verses 26-31). The apostle Paul provides a list that includes some of these same appearances and a number of others in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8. There is abundant eyewitness testimony to the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus.