

“Risen!”

Matthew 28:1-15

April 4, 2021

Christ our hope in life and death? That’s what we’d thought? But now what? Mary’s heart was crushed. Just two days ago Jesus had been...crucified. How to make sense of it? She had seen Him do great wonders with divine power and authority. He had raised Lazarus from the dead! Now He was dead. She had been introduced to Jesus through her son James. When James left his business to follow Jesus, it seemed so radical and risky. But soon Mary herself had joined the band of disciples. After all, “someone had to cook for these boys,” she liked to quip. She dragged her aching body and throbbing head out of bed from a night of sleeplessness—her mind ever tormented by the haunting memories of that hellish day. Sabbath was over and the sun would soon be up. She was numb beyond tears now. She pulled her shawl tightly around her as she made her way through the brisk air to Mary Magdalene’s house. Mary Magdalene—who could have ever imagined that they would become—friends? Kindred spirits. They had only one thing in common. Jesus. And how radically different their lives were because of Him. But now He was gone. And life was empty; yet filled with unbearable sorrow. But you don’t stop loving because your loved has died. So the women simply made their way to the tomb at dawn on Sunday morning.

Scripture Reading: [Mt 28:1-15] → title slide w/pic

Prayer: “Father, by Your Spirit You have given us Your word. Now, by Your Spirit, give us faith that we too may see, believe, obey, tell, and worship.”

Matthew 28 presents 5 movements that lead us to a personal response to the resurrection. First, we see...

1. Divine intervention to reveal the empty tomb (Mt 28:1-4).

As the women made their way to the tomb early Sunday morning, they were not expecting anything out of the ordinary. Their hearts were heavy with grief and they were simply going out of love to finish anointing the

body (Mk 16:1). But they were about to discover that God had intervened to reveal that the tomb is now empty. In Vs. 2 God sent an angel of the Lord along with an earthquake to roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb. God was intervening to open the tomb, not so that Jesus can get out. Remember when Jesus later appeared to the disciples, the doors were shut and He suddenly appeared before them (Jn 20:19, 26). He did not need the stone moved to vacate the tomb. The angel opened the tomb so the disciples could get in to see that indeed Jesus is was longer in the tomb.

Matthew records that the angel’s appearance was like lightning and his clothing as white as snow (3). He had a radiance about him, having just come from the holy presence of God. There was no mistaking by the guards that this was not an ordinary man. Vs. 4 says they shook for fear and became like dead men—they fainted in terror! How ironic, those guarding the corpse became likes corpses themselves while the one they thought they were guarding had risen and vacated the tomb!¹ Second, we are given a....

2. Divine explanation for the empty tomb (Mt 28:5-6a).

[5-6a] Certainly the women would have been startled to find an angel sitting on the stone in front of the open tomb. The guards had fainted in terror yet the angel’s first words to the women conveyed peace: “Do not be afraid...” One commentator captured the irony of the scene this way: “Let those burly men shake and faint, but not you women of faith!”—don’t *you* be afraid² Notice that the angel affirms that Jesus has indeed died—He’s been “crucified.” But “He has risen, *just as He said*”—according to plan. The angel reminds them that Jesus had foretold His death and resurrection. Three times in Matthew...

- Mt 16:21 – “Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, **and be raised up on the third day.**”
- Mt 17:23 – “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; and they will kill Him, and **He will be raised on the third day.**”
- Mt 20:18-19 – “the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and **on the third day He will be raised up.**”

¹ R.T. France, *NICNT: The Gospel of Matthew*, pg. 1100.

² John Hiigel, *Partnering with the King*, pg. 268-269.

This was according to God's plan! God was reigning through Jesus' death, and now through His resurrection. By the way, did you notice the very precise language each time in Mt 16, 17, and 20: Jesus would not just rise. "He would be *"raised up."* While Jesus had the authority to take up His life again (Jn 10:18), in His perfect righteousness He would do nothing independently of the Father. He had entrusted Himself to the Father in death and now the Father would raise Him to life. This is significant because it indicates that the Father was pleased with the sacrifice of Jesus' life and that the sentence for sin was fully served. The Father, the righteous Judge, raised Jesus back to life certifying that Jesus had paid in full all that God's righteous justice demands. *The cross was the payment for our sin; the resurrection was the proof of purchase! The third movement is a...*

3. **Divine invitation to respond to the resurrection** (Mt 28:6b-7).

Having announced that the tomb was empty and Jesus risen, the angel invites the women to a two-fold response to what they have just heard. First, He says, "*Come, see* the place where He was lying." He gives them opportunity to confirm that what their astonished ears have just heard that the tomb *is* empty. This is an invitation to believe—to act in faith on God's explanation for the empty tomb.

Then He says, "*Go...tell.*" "Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead." They are to go to Galilee where they will *see Him*—not just the empty tomb, but the Risen Christ Himself! Two thousand years later, the church continues the mission that began with these women of faith—Believing and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is risen, triumphing over sin and death! Fourth, we see...

4. **An exemplary response to the resurrection** (Mt 28:8-11a).

The women respond to the angel's message in several ways that are instructive to us:

- *They obeyed as an act of faith.* Vs. 8 says, the "left the tomb quickly" to do just what the angel had instructed them to do—to tell the disciples. Vs. 11 has the same effect when it says, "while they were on their way." They would not have gone quickly to tell the

disciples has they not believed the angel's message. It's worth noting here that the gospel is not just something we believe. It is something we obey. *True faith results in obedient action!* In fact, both Paul and Peter warn of coming judgment for those who do not obey the gospel (2Thess 1:8; 1Pet 4:17). What does it mean to obey the gospel? It means taking action in response to God's interpretation of the death and resurrection of Jesus by forsaking our sin, trusting in the sufficiency of His atoning work on our behalf, and bending our knee in glad submission to His loving authority.

- *They rejoiced with a heart of faith.* Vs. 8 says they left the tomb with "fear and great joy." Like the fainting guards, they would have had only fear had they not believed the angel's announcement that Jesus had risen. The reason they have great joy is because they indeed believe the report that Jesus is alive. They were fearful because they had just had a supernatural encounter with an angel radiating the pure and holy glory of God. Yet holy fear harmonized with great joy because their hope was restored.
- *They spread the news that Christ had risen* (8). As we will seek next week, in just a matter of days Jesus would commission all of His disciples to do the same: **[Mt 28:18-20]**.
- *They worshiped Jesus with reverence* [9]. Notice it says they took hold of His feet. This was not a vision nor was He a mere ghost. He was physically with them in a resurrected body. Instinctively in that moment they knew they were in the presence of God and they worshiped Him.

Romans 1 says Jesus "was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead." The man Jesus has always been the Son of God, but through His resurrection He was declared and recognized to be superior over the rest of humanity. The word "*declared*" translates the Greek word *horizo* from which we get our word horizon. It means to mark off by boundaries (the horizon is a boundary marker, a line of distinction between sky and land). The idea here is that the *man* Jesus, when He rose from the dead, was

distinguished, set apart, over every other person and exalted as Lord over them. He is in a category of His own as the Son of God, worthy of worship by all people. And so these women of faith worshiped Jesus. Finally, we see...

5. **An affirmation of the resurrection by opposition** (11-15).

Those in opposition to Jesus responded in four ways that affirm the credibility of the resurrection:

- They received reliable testimony about the events of the resurrection [11].
- They made a payment on the reality of the resurrection [12].
- They invented a lie to cover up the resurrection [13].
- They guaranteed their scheme to oppose the resurrection [14-15].

The overall point is that Jesus' opponents don't refute or even declare unbelief in the resurrection. They didn't say, "you expect us to believe that?!" They simply tried to cover it up with lies. They remembered what Jesus has predicted (26:62-66), so rather than punishing the guards, they received their report as factual and acted on it.

Jesus' opponents did not reject Him because they lacked evidence. They actually affirmed the resurrection by their actions yet still rejected Him because of their hardness of heart. This brings us back to the principles we discovered last week.

- **Your heart can remain closed to the truth despite the evidence.** In other words, you can suppress the truth (Rom 1:18). You can have undeniable evidence and still reject it. Jeremiah says the *heart is deceitful* (Jer. 17:9), while Paul reminds us that the *mind is depraved/corrupted* (Rom 1:18). This is what we see in the chief priests. An *unwillingness* to believe because their hearts were hardened against God. But it's also true that...
- **Your heart can be open to the truth yet fail to trust it.** Unlike the women, the other disciples struggled to believe the news of the resurrection. Mark says that at first, "they refused to believe it" and

later when Jesus appeared to the disciples, "He reproached them for their unbelief and *hardness of heart*" (Mark 16:11, 13, 14).

This raises an important question. What will your response be to the resurrection? The guards responded with terror. The chief priests responded with hardened rejection. The women responded with immediate faith. The other disciples struggled to believe, but got there eventually. What will your response be? You must not only consider the *evidence* for the resurrection; you must also consider what your *heart* will do with that evidence—it's a response of both the mind and the heart. If there's one thing we learn from all the various responses to the resurrection in the gospels, it's this: ***Your heart will determine your response and your response will reveal your heart.***

You may say, "Ty, if I had enough evidence I would believe." But is it possible that your struggle is not with a lack of evidence but rather a crisis of faith? No amount of information will displace your need for faith.

Imagine that I purchased a kit to build an ultralight so I could fly. Yet after successfully building the plane and even completing the ground instruction of flight school, I can't bring myself to fly it. What if I even went back to school for a PhD in physics and aerospace engineering yet I still cannot muster up the courage to fly? You would say I have a crisis of faith. And the only thing that my crisis of faith would prove is that *vast information, even correct information, does not rule out the need for faith.*

Faith is essential to flying. Not only must you trust the laws of physics, but you must also believe that the aircraft you board is reliable. Yet a responsible pilot will not only fly by faith, he will do a safety check to verify that the aircraft itself is reliable. Faith and information/evidence work together.

When it comes to spiritual matters, many people fly by faith without having carefully examined if what they are trusting in is reliable. They consider themselves spiritual, they may even have "Christian" painted on their plane. But are the safety specifications true. Are they trusting solely in Christ Himself or are they trusting in their own religious practices (or their own ideas)? There is only one legitimate "aircraft" to transport you from earth to

heaven, from death to life, from judgment and condemnation to forgiveness and freedom. That one is Jesus Christ. He alone must be the object of your dependence and trust (Eph 2:8-9). Jesus Christ must be the sole runway that your faith lands on.

EXAMINE THE PLANE

So I urge you to examine the plane. What are you trusting in? It's time to fly. Yet flying requires faith and your faith must be supported with the truth if you want it to hold you up in the end. This is why examining the Bible yourself to discover who Jesus is and the meaning of His death is so important.

While you don't have to know everything about the "plane," you do need to know some essentials. Matthew 28:5-6 gives us two words that capture the essentials we must understand if our faith will fly: "the angel answered and said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been *crucified*. He is not here, for He has *risen*, just as He said...'"

First, we must understand the purpose and meaning of Jesus crucifixion. While many people were crucified in ancient times, Jesus' death was unique because He was no ordinary man. He is the Son of God who took on human flesh. After living a perfect life of sinless obedience to the Father, He willingly died on behalf of sinners. On the cross, Jesus endured the wrath of God's holy justice against sin for all who would trust in Him (2 Cor 5:21).

Second, we must understand the significance of Jesus' resurrection. Having fully paid the penalty of man's sin, God raised Jesus back to life. Rom 4:25 says that Christ was raised for our justification, meaning the resurrection is the verifying proof that God was fully satisfied with the death of Jesus to remove all our guilt and condemnation. In other words, the resurrection was God's way of saying that His wrath was fully spent on Christ for our sin and has now been replaced with His favor. That means that everyone who is united to Jesus in faith also receives God's favor because God's wrath for sin was fully satisfied. Through the resurrection, the power of sin is broken, death is conquered, forgiveness is offered, and eternal life is granted to all who believe in Christ.

The cross says no to condemnation; the resurrection says yes to God's favor. The cross is the payment; the resurrection is the proof of purchase, the seal of final payment on our debt.

BOARD THE PLANE

Finally, having examined the plane, I urge you to board the plane. Put your trust in Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ is not just mechanical—following a certain creeds or religious traditions. It involves a relationship with Jesus as a matter of the heart.

This is why Romans 10:9-10 says, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and *believe in your heart* that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; *for with the heart man believes*, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."

Believing in Christ means turning the allegiance of your heart away from sin and self (repentance) to trust in Christ alone as your Savior by confessing and following Him as Lord (faith).

Yet you may say, "what does it matter? I'm just going to live my life." That's the problem. You are alive so your life has to end somewhere—either in grace or judgment. Everyone is flying by faith in something: faith in a Creator or faith in evolution, faith in providence or faith in fate, faith in Jesus as the truth or faith in their own ideas, faith in Jesus' work of grace or faith in their works of self). Everyone is flying by faith. The question is, where are you going to land? Asking why faith in the Risen Christ matters, is like being in midflight and asking if it really matters that the landing gear come down or that the tires are inflated. You will either land by faith in Jesus or you will crash in judgment for your sin.

But what difference does it make now? What about life in this world? Well, the reality is that flying with Jesus as your pilot does not eliminate the possibility of turbulence. In fact, Jesus said to His followers, "In this world you will have tribulation. But take courage, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33). In other words, the flight may be bumpy as you encounter persecution from a world that rejects Jesus and hardens their hearts against those who follow Him. But Jesus determines the end of the journey.

Listen, there is no way around turbulence in this life. While we live in a world that is full of gifts and blessings, we also live in a world of pain and disappointment, where people harshly sin against us and we sin against others, but most grievously we sin against God. Our thinking is corrupted by self and our hearts deceived by sin. So, are you going to navigate through the mine field of life by yourself? Or will you follow Jesus who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Are you going to walk through pain and disappointment on your own, or will you follow Jesus who promises to love you, give you peace, and never leave you or forsake you on the journey? The question is not whether you will have turbulence. The question is, will you walk with God who alone can work all things to your ultimate and eternal good or will you do it yourself, knowing you can't control the outcome?

There could be no better news for you today. Jesus who has been crucified, Jesus who died sin's death, Jesus who took your place, has risen to give you forgiveness and freedom from sin, He's risen to give you truth and peace for this life, and He's risen to give you the hope of abundant life for all eternity.

The cross is the ultimate proof of God's love for you. And He offers His love, eternal and irreversible, to you today in person of Jesus Christ.