

Matthew 28:1-7 *Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men.*

The angel 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. Come, see the place where He was lying. Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold I have told you."

Now today I want us to focus on the angel's amazing resurrection message to the women, and by extension God's amazing message to us. But first, let me comment briefly on Matthew's account leading up the angel's message.

Notes on verses 1-4

1. Now when it says "after the Sabbath" we understand that Sabbath was Saturday, the day after the crucifixion of Jesus. The following day – the third day, counting from the day of the crucifixion – was Sunday, the first day of the week. Friday, Saturday, Sunday – the "third day" – the day Jesus predicted he would rise from the dead.
2. Matthew mentions the earthquake, not as what opened the tomb – the angel did that, rolling away the stone – but as God's announcement of a monumental supernatural occurrence. Remember that a similar earthquake occurred at the death of Jesus. Jesus' death and resurrection are the two most important events in the history of mankind! And both precipitated an exclamation of an earthquake from heaven!
3. The angel's sitting upon the stone portrays and proclaims victory (and even godly defiance) over futile human attempts to thwart Jesus' resurrection. The stone was not rolled away to let Jesus out – He was already gone. It was rolled away to let the disciples in – God's ultimate "show and tell."
4. The spectacular, brilliant appearance of the angel as "like lightning" and with "clothing as white as snow" reinforces the supernatural awesomeness of the encounter, and causes us to imagine the angel having recently been with God in heaven, reflecting His glory. (Like Moses when he came down from Sinai.)
5. The guards, having become paralyzed with fear by the angel, apparently came to and ran away shortly before the women arrived. Matthew goes on to tell the story of the fleeing guards reporting to the chief priests what had happened (28:11-15). The priests and elders paid off the soldiers to give a false account, saying the disciples had come by night to steal the body. This is undoubtedly because they feared the resurrection had truly occurred!
6. Matthew's account emphasizes the angel. Luke in his account mentions two angels, but here Matthew focuses on the one who spoke the resurrection message to the women.

The Angel's Resurrection Message (Matthew 28:5-6)

I see a 5-fold message of great hope and encouragement in the angel's words to the women. And I see by extension a similar message of hope and encouragement from God to each of us.

1. "Don't be afraid"

Surely the angel's initial meaning for the women was to not fear his brilliant and surprise appearance. But I see more. Certainly the women were coming to the tomb in mourning and fear of their future now that Jesus was gone. The angel was saying "don't be afraid" – Jesus has risen and soon your fears will be erased by great joy and hope for your future.

And I wonder how many of us come today to this service with fears. Perhaps you come with questions as to the veracity of this resurrection and fear what it's truth might mean for your life. Or you might come with fears about what the future holds because of recent trying circumstances. Either way, hear the angel, and God, say to you, "don't be afraid." Jesus has indeed risen, and His resurrection assures you that God is in control, has defeated death, and can bring victory to you over any fears you might have. Resurrection Sunday should break the chains of any fear and bring hope! Don't be afraid!

2. "I know that you are looking for Jesus"

God knows that we are all seeking Jesus, whether we know it or not. He is the answer to ultimate satisfaction and fulfillment that we all seek, for He is God in the flesh who came to give us "life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10) You might say that you are not really looking for Jesus, but you are looking for satisfaction and fulfillment in life – we all are. And Jesus has promised that He is "the way, the truth and the life." (John 14:6) If you have come to church this Easter Sunday not sure how to find life's true joy and purpose, look no further than Jesus the Christ. His resurrection from the grave assures you that He is the One – the only One – who can deliver on that promise.

3. "He is not here"

The women came to the tomb expecting to find his body, that they might anoint it. But He was not there. And for us who search, He is not found in religion, or in charitable endeavors or even in church. We can read and learn about Him through the Bible, but He is not even found there. We can hear good messages through teaching and preaching, but church, messages and the Bible are only signposts to direct us to Jesus. He is found in a personal encounter. He is found by inviting Him into our heart and life. He is found when we are "born again" by a renewal of life that can only be called a supernatural transformation. You hopefully sense Him here, but I can't find Him for you, though I can help you find Him. God says you will find Him when you seek for Him with all of your heart. Will you do that this resurrection Sunday?

4. "He is risen just as He said"

Jesus not only rose from the dead – He predicted that He would do so multiple times. But His followers just couldn't believe it until they saw Him alive after death. The message to you and to me is clear – He is risen. And He has risen *for you* and *for me*. He was really and truly and fully dead, and in His own divine power rose bodily from that tomb, transported through the grave clothes and the walls of that closed tomb and resurrected in a glorified body to be seen by many over a period of 40 days, including 500 at one time. (1 Corinthians 15:6) Yes that is meant to "blow you away!" That is meant to "wow" you beyond all other "wows." He predicted the impossible and the impossible happened. And if His predicted, bodily resurrection from the grave does not persuade you of your need to give your life to Him, then nothing will. Jesus said so. (Luke 16:31)

5. "Come see the place where He was lying"

This is God's ultimate "show and tell." Just as the angel invited the women to enter the tomb and see for themselves the empty tomb and the folded grave clothes, he invites us to personally ponder the claims of the resurrection. "Check it out for yourself" the angel is saying – don't just believe me. The resurrection is one of the most historically substantiated events of all time. Not only the Bible writes of it, but so do numerous secular writers, including the renowned ancient Jewish historian Josephus, who notes that this resurrection was held to be true by Jesus' followers. And now we see those early believers have multiplied into the billions in our lifetime. It is by far the most widely held religious belief in all the world. And countless followers, including me and many of those here today, would defend that Jesus is alive and has changed our lives. Will you make Him your Savior and Lord this Easter?