

Called to Proclaim the Resurrection

Bible Background • MATTHEW 28:1–15

Printed Text • MATTHEW 28:1–15 | Devotional Reading • 1 CORINTHIANS 15:12–22

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson we will: IDENTIFY how the women’s attitude changed when they met the risen Christ; RECALL how we reacted when we first accepted Jesus Christ; and COMMIT to sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with others.

In Focus

Sheila tenderly held their son in her arms. His skin was so soft and warm. He smiled happily in his sleep. “How about Robert Jr.?” she asked her husband softly through tears of joy. Robert gently hugged them both. They were speechless upon meeting the answer to their prayers for the blessing of a child.

The couple had been trying to have a baby since their Jamaican honeymoon thirteen years ago. They had waited until they were married to consummate their union. They were both young and healthy. But to their dismay, old-fashioned methods and modern medicine seemed to produce the same sad results, causing a deep-flowing discouragement in Sheila. Robert remained hopeful, though. He regularly requested prayer from their church’s healing ministry. He knew God had a plan for their family, so in faith he remained patient.

Now, he couldn’t believe how his sorrow had quickly turned to overwhelming, lifealtering joy with God’s promise finally fulfilled. “Actually, I was thinking Immanuel,” he replied with a bright smile. He took his son and paced back and forth, retelling parts of the story—their story—to the sleeping baby.

Sometimes the sorrow of unanswered promises, unexpected circumstances, or death blinds us from seeing the future joy God is preparing for us through answered prayers and promises fulfilled. Which stories in your life that demonstrate God’s glory have been too good to keep to yourself?

Keep in Mind

“Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me” (Matthew 28:10, KJV).

Words You Should Know

A. Sepulcher mnema (Gk.) — A memorial or tomb.

B. He is risen egerthe from egeiro (Gk.) — “He is raised,” to resurrect, get up, awaken.

Say It Correctly

Sepulchre. SEP-uhl-ker.

KJV

Matthew 28:1 In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.
2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.
3 His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:
4 And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.
5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.
6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.
7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.
8 And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.
9 And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.
10 Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.
11 Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.
12 And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers,
13 Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.
14 And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.
15 So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

NIV

Matthew 28:1 Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb.
2 Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it.
3 His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow.
4 The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint.
5 Then the angel spoke to the women. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.
6 He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying.
7 And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Remember what I have told you."
8 The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel's message.
9 And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to him, grasped his feet, and worshiped him.
10 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid! Go tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there."
11 As the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and told the leading priests what had happened.
12 A meeting with the elders was called, and they decided to give the soldiers a large bribe.

13 They told the soldiers, “You must say, ‘Jesus’ disciples came during the night while we were sleeping, and they stole his body.’

14 If the governor hears about it, we’ll stand up for you so you won’t get in trouble.”

15 So the guards accepted the bribe and said what they were told to say. Their story spread widely among the Jews, and they still tell it today”

The People, Places, and Times

Women. Jesus paid attention to women, included them, and acknowledged their place in the kingdom. At the risk of censure from a male-oriented society, Jesus talked to women, responded to their touch, healed them, received their emotional and financial support, and used them as main characters in His stories. Luke mentions a group of women who traveled with Jesus as He journeyed from town to town (Luke 8:1–3). Among them were Mary of Magdala, Joanna, and Susanna. These women provided financial support for Jesus and the twelve apostles. Women were the first at the tomb after the Resurrection. As such, they were the first to broadcast His victory over death (Luke 23:55–24:11). Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all called attention to the loyal women who participated in Jesus’ Galilean ministry and followed Him all the way to the Cross and the grave. The New Testament brings a distinct picture of women into focus. Jesus, and later Paul, elevated the status of women so that they could be full participants in the kingdom of God. However, they (as well as each man) are urged to use their responsibility, as well as their freedom, to find their place in the body of Christ. The spirit of freedom and love in Christ belongs to women as well as men.

Background

Women witnessed Jesus’ crucifixion up close. Women, who had known His healing power, gathered at Jesus’ feet in His finest and final hour. Motivated by gratitude, courage, and love, these women did not run away, hide, or deny Christ. In spite of His public humiliation and grotesque execution, these women wanted to be identified with the crucified Messiah. Although they could not trade places with Him or take Him down, these women were not watching out of helplessness or coincidence. They were witnesses to His crucifixion in preparation for their purpose of delivering the message of eternal faith that the Messiah had risen!

After Jesus died, His body was taken by the disciples and entombed. However, resonating among the religious leaders was Jesus’ prophecy that He would be raised in three days. To ensure that the disciples did not come back and steal the body and then fabricate a story of resurrection, a large boulder was set before the tomb and soldiers were assigned to stand guard. They did not perceive, even yet, His power.

At-A-Glance

1. Women at the Tomb (Matthew 28:1–8)
2. Jesus Appears to the Women (vv. 9–10)
3. Religious Leaders Bribe the Guards (vv. 11–15)

In Depth

1. Women at the Tomb (Matthew 28:1–8)

As Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to Jesus’ tomb, the earth quaked, an angel opened the tomb, and the guards became like dead men. It stands to reason that because there are no specifics given on the Resurrection process, the most important point made is that the tomb was, and remains, empty. While the women were on their way to the tomb, laden with spices and hoping the guards would allow them to anoint Jesus’ dead body in loving grief, an earthquake occurred. But the earthquake did not deter the women. The

guards, on the other hand, upon seeing the angel, were so afraid they fainted into a deep sleep, an act that would become for them a convenient alibi and lie to explain the empty tomb. But the women, instead of experiencing a teary-eyed, tragic scene at the sepulcher, were met by an angel.

The angel told the women that Jesus had been raised and instructed them to tell the disciples to meet Him in Galilee. Unlike the guards, the women's fear was not overwhelming, for they retained hope in the prophecies of a risen Messiah. Their fear was in seeing the unusual, but it was not immobilizing. Yes, they were frightened, but they were also filled with great joy. Their humanness made them afraid. Their hopefulness filled them with joy. Their fear was smothered by great joy as they listened to the angel, for their hope had been realized. The women were the first to know of the resurrected Messiah. Oh, what joy filled their souls! They were obedient and went to tell the disciples what they had seen (v. 8).

2. Jesus Appears to the Women (vv. 9–10)

Jesus first appeared to the women, not the eleven disciples. On their way to deliver the message, lest they be accused of relaying hearsay, the women were graced with the very presence of the Lord. As the women joyfully hurried to tell the disciples, Jesus met them and encouraged them to tell the disciples to go to Galilee where they would see Him. This was the Jesus they remembered, but He was now embodied in full divinity. They bowed to Jesus and grabbed His feet as a sign of ultimate reverence and submission.

Indeed, He was to be worshiped. He had fulfilled God's plan of salvation. Who could doubt that He was and is the Son of God? These women saw Him with their own eyes and believed. Even though the disciples had denied and deserted Him (all except John), Jesus forgave them. He sent the women to tell the brothers the Good News: Jesus was no longer dead (v. 10). Their relationship would now be even stronger than before. He would meet them in Galilee as He had previously told them (cf. Mark 14:28).

Sadly, the disciples were still afraid of the religious leaders and they were still hiding in Jerusalem (John 20:19). Therefore, Jesus met them first in Jerusalem (Luke 24:36), and later in Galilee (John 21).

3. Religious Leaders Bribe the Guards (vv. 11–15)

Some of the guards told the leading priests that Jesus was not in the tomb. What they feared had come to pass (v. 11). Of course, an urgent meeting had to be called to strategize. If people were excited about Jesus before the crucifixion, there would be no containing them (and Christianity) once the believers found out about Jesus' resurrection. The leaders knew they had to do something, so they decided to bribe the soldiers and get them to lie about Jesus and His resurrection (v. 12). The religious leaders were in a state of panic. Therefore, lying was not beneath their dignity. They had to stop Jesus and the Good News at all costs. In fact, these leaders were willing to support the guards in the lie that Jesus' disciples stole the body while the guards were sleeping (vv. 13–14). However, denying the Resurrection, ignoring it, or lying about it did not change the fact that Jesus had died and risen from the dead. The complete work of Jesus' coming was finished!

Search the Scriptures

1. What natural phenomena heralded the supernatural Resurrection (Matthew 28:2)?
2. Why did the angel roll the stone away (v. 6)?
3. What four messages did the angel give the women (vv. 5–7)?
4. What emotions did the women express upon receiving the call to carry the Good News of the risen Lord (v. 8)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What does Jesus' resurrection mean for believers everywhere? For sinners everywhere? For evil and death?
2. Why is it important for believers to share the Good News of Jesus' resurrection?

Liberating Lesson

When Jesus Christ rose from the dead, it was the most important, awesome, and unexpected event in history. It was so unexpected that the women who learned of it first, as well as the disciples, the guards who kept the tomb, and the religious leaders all reacted differently to the news. The Good News as we know it—Jesus Christ had overcome sin, death, and the grave and liberated us from the power and punishment for sin—was challenging news for those who held power.

As the Gospel is preached in the early church, people respond by accepting or rejecting it at the point of the Resurrection, because the wisdom of the world rejects it and tries to cover it up to maintain position and status quo. As disciples of Jesus Christ who preach of a Savior who overcame death itself, we can expect opposition and denial from those who have something to lose by acknowledging the power of God over the principles and practices of the world. In what ways has your faith community faced opposition when trying to preach the truth of Jesus Christ's life in the face of a culture of death? How can we be bolder to share the Good News when people may question the power of God to challenge our expectations and transform our lives?

Application for Activation

Christ met unbelievers where they were. He realized what many Christians today still do not seem to understand. Cultivators have to get out in the field. According to one count, the Gospels record 132 contacts Jesus had with people. Six were in the Temple, four in the synagogues, and 122 were out with people in the mainstream of life. When was the last time you told somebody about the crucified Christ and the risen Lord? Do you feel you lack opportunity? This week make a list of ten people who you come in contact with daily. Make it a point to ask them if they know Jesus, and share the tenets of salvation with them. As the women did, run and tell somebody that Jesus, the Christ, is risen!

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Matthew 28:1–15

¹ In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher.

When the sabbath was over, and it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and others went out to visit the grave. Counting days in the Jewish tradition challenges the suggestion regarding Jesus being crucified on Thursday. It is worthwhile to recall that the Jewish day begins and ends at sundown or 6 p.m. rather than midnight. He died and was buried before 6 p.m. on what we call Good Friday; that's day one. Saturday at 6 p.m. is the end of day two, and early Sunday morning, day three, God raised Jesus from the dead. This knowledge accounts for the three days between Jesus' death and resurrection.

Matthew highlights the roles of women in his Gospel. The first to carry the word is Mary and the first to carry the Resurrection message are women. God chose a woman in the beginning of Matthew, and Christ sent women first, according to Matthew.

² And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

The word "earthquake" in Greek is *seismos* (says-MOCE), which is where we get our English word "seismic." Earthquakes occur several places in the Bible, including at the Cross when Jesus committed Himself into God's hands (Matthew 27:51), and on Mount Sinai when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:18). Notice the association of these two earthquakes with liberation. The Hebrews had been delivered from Pharaoh and Jesus had been delivered from death. It was certainly this phenomenal occurrence that brought the centurion to proclaim, "Truly this was the Son of God" (from Matthew 27:54). To their astonishment, the women found that a great earthquake had occurred that Sunday morning. The angel of the Lord now appears and rolls away the boulder so that the women can see that Jesus has risen.

Celestial phenomena must also be considered. At various places in our lives, God shakes our consciences to awareness and our sinful selves to repentance, and great is the Resurrection to renewed, revived, and refreshed hope in Jesus Christ.

³ His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

The angel's appearance was as dazzling as lightning, and his clothes were snowy white. In some churches baptismal candidates worship in white to symbolize purity. It is fitting for the angel of the Lord to wear a bright, white robe, symbolizing the fact that Jesus has come through a great tribulation and now advises His people to be of good cheer. Not only because He has overcome the world, but also because our resurrected bodies will also bear the garment of light (Revelation 7:9–15). The description of the angel of the Lord echoes Daniel 10:6.

⁴ And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

The phrase "were shaken" (Greek *eseisthesan*, eh-SAYS-thay-sahn) denotes how the keepers of the tomb were shaking just as the earth had shaken. They were struck with terror and fell down as though dead. Of all the Gospel writers, only Matthew includes this detail. The appearance of the angel so terrified the guards posted at the tomb that they were rendered unconscious. The women were also in fear (vv. 5, 8; cf. Daniel 10:7–9; Revelation 1:17). According to the Gospel of Mark, the women were speechless (Mark 16:5). One can understand the women's fear in the light of the circumstances that surrounded the death of their Master.

⁵ And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

The angel spoke to the women saying in his own way, “Don’t be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus, the one who was killed on the Cross. There is reason, not for fear, but for joy, because Jesus who was crucified is risen from the dead.” These women had no reason to be frightened. They were beloved by the Lord. The angel spoke to the women only. The reaction of the believing women is set in sharp contrast with the reaction of the pagan soldiers. The angel reassured them that there was no need to be afraid. A woman of that time might have experienced fear for a number of reasons. However, Jesus elevated women to their rightful position in a biased society. And, in the end, the women came to believe in God’s call in their lives through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the fears the angel addressed here have to do with the reason they cannot find Jesus in the tomb. They came to anoint Jesus’ body with oil and spices, but cannot since He is gone. In the book of Mark, they raised the question, “Who will roll the stone away?” In Luke, they found the stone rolled away and went in, but did not find Jesus. In John, Mary Magdalene sees the stone rolled away and runs to tell Peter that “they” have taken Jesus’ body away. It is this panic that the angel addresses. Jesus is not stolen, lost, or taken away to some unknown place. He is risen.

⁶ He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

In both Matthew and Mark, the angel invites the women to enter the tomb and examine the place where Jesus was laid to rest. In John, the women are asked, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” The angel graciously extends an invitation to these women to believe God’s Word. Understandably, the women had been through a lot and had cause to be concerned about the body of Jesus. They had witnessed the government’s abusive treatment of Jesus and watched in horror as He was beaten, tortured, and forced to carry the old rugged cross. They were at Golgotha and heard the cruel accusations hurled at Jesus. The angel is assuring these women that it was God—not the government, the culture, or the opinions of man—who had the last word and that “He is risen.” The words of the angel echo throughout the Scriptures (see Matthew 28:10; Luke 2:10). They are meant to cheer the hearts of Christians in every age in the expectation of the Resurrection. They remind us that Christians have no cause for alarm, whatever may happen in the world. God does not want His servants to dwell in fear.

⁷ And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

The phrase “he is risen” is translated from the Greek word egerthe (ey-GAIR-thay), meaning “he was raised.” Jesus was raised to life from the dead just as He said He would be. The tone in this verse is just as urgent as the tone Matthew uses at Jesus’ triumphal entry in chapter 21, “immediately and straightway.” The Greek word tachu (ta-KHOO), which means “quickly,” is used here in conjunction with a past participle that means “having gone” to come together to mean “when you have gone quickly.” The women were to run and tell the disciples of Jesus’ resurrection.

There is no time for delay, apathy, or doubt. Jesus is not only risen, but also en route to the place where He devoted most of His earthly ministry, Galilee. It is also a major center of Judaism during the life of Jesus. There the women, the disciples, and others will see the man from Galilee, their friend and resurrected Lord.

⁸ And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

The “fear” Matthew refers to here is from the Greek word phobos (FOE-boce), which includes respectful, reverence, and a sense of awe in its definition. Since it is used in tandem with Matthew’s reference to “great

joy,” it can be concluded this fear is not the same as being afraid. The fear of the women did not disappear completely, but it was overpowered with a “great joy” because of the reality of the Resurrection.

Mark’s account specifically directs the women to “go tell His disciples and Peter.” Luke reads more casually, “And returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.” There is not the same intensity in Luke as there is in Matthew’s and Mark’s narration. John highlights the importance of the Gospel writer’s message to Christ’s disciples and Peter.

You may remember that John, identified as the disciple whom Jesus loved, outran the others to the tomb upon hearing Mary Magdalene say, “They have taken away the LORD out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him” (from John 20:2). Only John writes of the Jewish burial linen wrappings and their neatness, implying that Jesus experienced no particular anxiety or struggle in getting out of them. And such is the case with eternal things. They shall come to pass in God’s time and in God’s way. The message of the Resurrection is one of trusting in God. It also indicates His body had not been stolen. John also speaks of himself as the one who saw these things and as a result, believed (John 20:8).

⁹ And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

As the women obeyed the angel’s instructions, Jesus appears and greets them with the common greeting of the time. The person who meets the risen Lord lives in the joy of His presence. There is no indication the women ever doubted Him, but those who did—Peter, Pharisaic Jews, and pious priests—would meet the risen Savior and either worship Him, as Peter and the others did, or bribe the keepers of the tomb, as the pious priests did.

Those who believed touched His feet. There are times when kneeling at the feet of Him, who was, is, and is to come, is the most appropriate posture to take. By this action they are showing their submission to Jesus, as practiced in their culture when a subject rendered obeisance to a sovereign prince. They prostrate themselves in adoration. This gesture is viewed as a sign of a living faith where the touch and the bended knee welcomes the Christ. It has been said the condition of the heart is more important than the position of the body while praying. Conversely, the position of the body often determines the condition of the heart. His presence will surely call forth some form of worship.

10 Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

Jesus calls the women to believe in the promise of God, share the Good News, rejoice at His appearing, and not be afraid of others’ disbelief. The disciples labeled these women foolish (Luke 24:11) and refused to believe them. They were preoccupied with the sad turn of events: their denial (Peter), their loss (Judas committed suicide), their fear (abandoning Jesus), and their grief (the death of their Rabbi). And yet, they have nothing to lose by going to the place where they first met the Lord.

Jesus uses the word “brethren” (Gk. adelphos, ad-el-FOS) to refer to His disciples (John 20:17). Matthew records that Jesus had used the word “brethren” more generally and symbolically (Matthew 12:50; 25:40). Jesus also used the more familiar term “friend” before (John 15:15). If we think of their recent infidelity and cowardliness shown at the time of Jesus’ suffering, to call the disciples brothers is surprising. By calling them “brethren,” Jesus is not only showing them His love, He is also underlining their privileged position as co-heirs of His inheritance (Romans 8:17).

¹¹ Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. ¹² And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers,

The phrase “when they were going” is a single participle in the Greek. It suggests that even as the women were on their way, some of the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb went into Jerusalem and told the chief priests all that had happened.

The soldiers, although terrified by the earthquake, the angel, and the stone-rolling, had enough strength to go and report what had happened. It is interesting that Jesus’ enemies knew about the Resurrection even before the apostles. Being incapable of refuting the evidence but not willing to accept it, the enemies of Jesus tried to suppress it illegally. Their decision was not taken lightly. All the elders (the Sanhedrin) were involved. The translation for *sumboulion* (Gk. soom-BOO-lee-on) is “counsel” in this Scripture. It points to the fact that the soldiers and elders were all of like mind; they agreed in their plot to lie about Jesus.

The elders gave the soldiers a considerable sum of money in an attempt to bribe them. The betrayal of Judas cost them only thirty silver coins (Matthew 26:15). The effort to cover up their crime is going to cost them much more. The guards received enough money to bribe them to invent a lie.

¹³ Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. ¹⁴ And if this come to the governor’s ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. ¹⁵ So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

The idea is that the elders instructed the soldiers to say that the disciples had stolen Jesus’ body at night, while they were asleep. The elders were not concerned with the Resurrection itself, but with its repercussions on the people. The penalty for a guard or soldier sleeping on duty was death (Acts 12:19). The elders probably hoped to corrupt Pilate also with money. He probably couldn’t care less about the corpse of a Jew. The elders assured the soldiers that if the information reached the governor, they would do their best to calm him. Thus, the soldiers were to be free from all anxiety. In other words, the elders would accept responsibility if any difficulty should occur. The soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. This lie was commonly circulated among the Jews at the time when Matthew wrote this Gospel. Yet the truth remains, Jesus is risen as He said!

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

I Am the Resurrection and the Life
(John 11:17–27)

TUESDAY

Judas Returns Money, Hangs Himself
(Matthew 27:3–10)

WEDNESDAY

Jesus Crucified
(Matthew 27:32–44)

THURSDAY

Guards Secure the Tomb
(Matthew 27:62–66)

FRIDAY

Mary Meets Jesus Outside the Tomb
(John 20:11–18)

SATURDAY

Reigning Triumphant with Christ
(Revelation 20:1–6)

SUNDAY

“Meet Me in Galilee!”
(Matthew 28:1–15)