

Matthew 28:1-10 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. <sup>2</sup>Suddenly, there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and going to the tomb, he rolled away the stone and was sitting on it. <sup>3</sup>His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. <sup>4</sup>The guards were so terrified of him that they shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup>The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid! I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. <sup>6</sup>He is not here. He has risen, just as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. <sup>7</sup>Go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead! And look, he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him.’ See, I have told you!” <sup>8</sup>They hurried away from the tomb, with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup>Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” They approached, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. <sup>10</sup>Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go, tell my brothers that they should go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

One thing about all this shelter-at-home or quarantine stuff is that there is a lot of sharing going on. Maybe it's from sitting in front of screens and phones so much, but it seems like there is a huge uptick in receiving forwarded information and media. “You’ve got to see this!” Multiple times a day, someone is forwarding me an e-mail or link for something that my life will not be complete without seeing. A picture. A video. A quote. Some well-intentioned inspirational saying or story full of doctrinal error. Or the television ad says I need to tune into their evening news so I don’t miss that ultra-important thing that is sure to affect all our lives. Or a friend or a neighbor will make mention of something they can’t believe I haven’t see yet. Whether it’s a gorilla and bunny that have become friends; some politician saying something stupid; this or that star or celebrity (and haven’t those become insubstantial terms) telling us how to live our lives. “Oh, you have to see this!” After all, it got 17 bazillion hits. Everyone is talking about it. It’s gone viral.

But it’s generally not something all that life-changing or important. Or even something that will be around a couple weeks from now. But now our God comes into our in boxes and screens and lives and passes on something to us that is all that important. That has held up quite well through all the fact-check of history. Something that cannot be over-hyped. Something that you really do have to see. Take a look. “Come, see,” is how the angel addresses those first comers to the tomb at the crack of dawn. How they were invited to see that something very important had happened. The most important thing ever. As the messenger from heaven announced to the visitors to the cemetery, “Come, see the place where the Lord lay. He is not here. He has risen, just as he said.” And now, even twenty centuries later, that initial excitement hasn’t worn off at all. As here in Matthew’s gospel, our gracious God grabs each of us by the hand, practically drags us along and announces the same incredible invitation, COME and SEE. Jesus Has Risen, Just As He Said.

Come and see. Jesus has risen. And here, the way this Gospel records that central event of all history, the economy of words is amazing. A couple words to fix the time, a couple more to tell the place. Naming two of the women involved, just enough so that as the Old Testament Scriptures declared, a matter could be attested to by the mouths of two witnesses. The huge earthquake, just like when Jesus died, only this one caused by an angel coming down and rolling back the stone. A real brief description of said angel. The guards so shaken up that they are out cold. And the facts are stated in the simplest way possible. “He is not here. He has risen. Come and see. Now go.” And that’s it. Just the facts, ma’am. Like someone talking so excitedly, he can just spit out the main essentials. Nothing to take away from the main point. Jesus is risen.

Risen of course, from the dead. That’s a point the Bible takes for granted in these Easter accounts. But a point many people seem to forget about. You can’t have Easter without Good

Friday. There is a cross involved here. A death. Death, which the Bible tells us in no uncertain terms, is always a consequence of sin. And that's where so many miss the boat. For many, Easter is fine – the pretty flowers, egg hunts and baskets for the kids, maybe even a rousing song or two of joy, and if they're lucky the obligatory hour in the pew. But when it comes to the cross and sin and what God expects and what He demands – then it's not fun anymore. And they don't want to deal with it. Sin and guilt – don't want to think about that.

See, our society has kind of an odd way of handling that. It's a plague called "lack of individual responsibility." Blaming anything or anyone other than oneself. It's not my fault. The naughty child. The unfaithful spouse. The person addicted to anything. The hardened criminal. The drunk driver who misses a turn and crashes. They aren't to blame. It's the poor social conditions in which they grew up; the education system that let them fall through the cracks, the government for not giving enough warnings and posting enough signs. And it's not hard for us to fall into the same lines of sinful thinking. Well, my spouse or kids drove me to that outburst of anger. That person deserved what I said about him or did to him. The government spends my tax money so foolishly, why should I be honest and report all my income. And it goes on and one for any "little white lie" I might tell or "ticky-tacky" little sin I might commit. At least it's not as bad as so and so does. Rationalizing our sins is a way of life.

But God doesn't play that game. With him there is accountability. It says in his Word, "The soul who sins ... will die." And "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." And "the wages of sin is death." God lets no one off the hook. He can't. He is the God of all righteousness and holiness. But fortunately for us, He is also the God of all grace and mercy. And He came up with and carried out a plan that would fulfill all his justice and still express his infinite love and grace. The plan that had God's Son taking full responsibility and making full payment for all sin. That God the Son did by becoming man, living a life of perfect obedience in our place and then suffering the hell and death we all deserved from God's just wrath. That was Good Friday.

And this is Easter Sunday. Now that stone slab on which they put the Godman is empty. The tomb of the crucified Savior is vacant. Come and see. Jesus is risen. The earthquake called attention to it. The guards, who probably thought this was the easiest duty they could pull, – after all, how tough could it be to keep a dead man in his grave – well, it was more than they could handle. And there stood the angel by the stone he had rolled away, not to let Jesus out, but to prove he was already gone. All of it proof that Jesus had risen.

Come and see. This is the most important fact ever. The empty grave. That risen Savior. It means everything to us. It means Jesus really is and always was God. It means what he paid on the cross was accepted by God the Father as a high enough price for everyone's sins. It means the hugest of victories. And not just for Jesus. Jesus had all our debts, all our sins, even our death with him when he was nailed to that cross. Your sin and mine were still hanging around his neck when he gave up his spirit and died. But when he burst free from the grave, there was nothing hanging on his neck any more. All that sin and death had disappeared. Like it says in John's first epistle, "This is why the Son of God appeared: to destroy the works of the devil." And that's exactly what happened when Jesus rose. The devil's work – using the guilt of sin and the terrors of death and hell as his awful weapons – that was all destroyed like an old condemned building being dynamited.

When Jesus rose, the devil's whole empire crumbled. The punishment for sin had all been paid by the infinite price of the blood and death of the Son of God. Our guilt is erased. What leverage can the devil have over us now? And even his fearsome weapon, death. I mean who gets

out of that one? Sounds like one of those dumb things certain kinds of fathers will say to their kids when they drive past a cemetery: “Hey, you know how many dead people in there? All of them.” Well, not any more. The Savior who took on everything the enemy could throw his way, smashed through even that barrier. Like in the movies, the bad guy is shooting away. And the good guy counts the shots – all six used up – it’s safe. Well, the devil shot everything he had into Jesus. Now the gun is empty.

All because Jesus has risen. Just as he said. See, this shouldn’t have been a surprise to anyone. These women coming to the grave. The disciples. After all, this was exactly what Jesus had said was going to happen. A lot of places in the Old Testament – all written about Jesus – predicted this. Time after time, Jesus told anyone who would listen that he was going to suffer, die, and rise again. From the less obvious, “**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again**” and “**as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish for three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.**” To saying it point blank, like in Matthew 16, “**From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests and experts in the law, and be killed, and on the third day be raised again.**” Could he have made it any clearer? And yet that seems to have been the furthest thing from the minds of Jesus’ followers. The mournful women going to embalm him. The scared-silly disciples locking themselves behind closed doors. People of our day, almost out of their minds panicking like God won’t keep his Word to do what is best for us. Well, these people weren’t remembering what Jesus had told them. And so they had pain and fear they wouldn’t have had to have. No wonder the angel seems surprised. “If you’re looking for Jesus, what are you doing here? This is a cemetery. Where dead people stay. Jesus has risen, just like he said.” Of course Jesus had kept his Word. He’s God. God has to keep his word.

And that’s even more great news for us. Because this Savior who kept his Word by dying to pay for all our sins and rising to prove the mission was accomplished. Well, he’s also made us some more promises. Like “**Because I live, you also will live.**” Ever seen a possum? Not usually seen as the smartest of God’s creatures. In fact, one of my famous bad dad jokes, after seeing a dead one on the road is, “Hey, kids. Why did the chicken cross the road?” “To show the possum it can be done.” But one thing that is smart about this creature is that it won’t go into any hole that has just one set of tracks leading into it. If there’s another set coming out, then he’ll go in. Now when it comes to death, it’s not that we really have a choice to go into the hole or not. But now that we see the Jesus’ tracks coming back out, it’s safe to go even in there. Even the ugly enemy death will be no more than a sleep from which we will wake up to a new and perfect eternal morning. Just like Jesus said. Just as he said.

Which is why everyone in this account keeps being told they don’t have to be afraid. In fact, it’s the “stop it” imperative. Knock it off with the being scared. You have the Savior who is always true to His Word. That no matter what the odds or how bad things might look, we end up winning, because He already won for us. If He has kept His Word in doing the very hardest thing – paying for our sins; removing the barrier between us and the Almighty. Well, we can know for sure that keeping the rest of his promises will be a piece of cake for him. That we can count on him to be with us on through this pandemic and any other issues – health or otherwise – until the end of the world. And then on to eternal life. That we can count on him to turn even the worst situations in our lives into hidden blessings on his perfect way. That we can turn to Him in any time of need and be assured of his perfect solutions. All for exactly the same reason. Come, see. And go, enjoy, and tell, and live in that peace and excitement. Because Jesus has risen just as he said. Amen.