

March 23, 2008
Easter Sunday

"Risen! Just as He Said!"

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. ² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. ⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." ⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Have you ever experienced a powerful earthquake? Then you know what it is like to shake like a leaf in fear. You have no problem recalling exactly where you were when the quake hit in the Bay Area about 20 years ago, or a few years in Paso Robles, or the Northridge quake or the Sylmar quake. These events of nature have a major impact on our lives. When the angel came down from heaven and rolled away the stone from Jesus' tomb, there was a violent earthquake. The combination of the violent earthquake and the appearance of an angel that flashed like lightning were too much for the Roman soldiers that guarded the tomb. They shook and became like dead men.

Nothing has impacted your life more than Jesus' resurrection from the dead. To be sure your life has been impacted by your job, where you born, your parents, your husband or wife, your schooling, and your health. All these pale in comparison to how Jesus resurrection has changed and altered your life from having no hope to having the greatest hope in the world. The angel told the women that they did not have to be afraid because Jesus had risen just as he said. He kept his promise. He came back. This creates an impact so powerful we will experience the effects every day of our lives on this earth.

Life without the promise

What would life be like if Jesus did not keep his promise to rise from the dead? We get a glimpse of this emptiness and fear in the women who were up at dawn to finish wrapping the body of Jesus. It says that "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb." They went to the tomb hoping to see once more the dead body of Jesus and finishing wrapping it with clothes and spices. There on his body were the bruises from many blows, the cuts in his head from the crown of thorns, the back that had been shredded by the whip, and the nails marks in his hands and feet, and oh yes the large gaping wound where the soldier stuck a spear into Jesus after he died. They had no hope of seeing Jesus alive or

eating breakfast with him even though he clearly told he would rise again on the third day. All they could think about was his dead body. They hoped it was safe and not desecrated.

Before we point our fingers at these women and criticize them for their lack of faith in Jesus' promise to rise again, why is it that we spend so many days of our lives on this earth with Jesus resurrection not as real to us as it should be? If Jesus has risen from the dead and he has, then I am living every day of my life here on this earth under his loving care and every day is bursting forth with his unchanging love. In John 10 Jesus tells us he is the Good Shepherd who gives his life for the sheep and knows his sheep and gives them eternal life. Then he says he has come to give us life to the full. Look at this Santa Maria strawberry. The warm sunshine is causing the berries to burst forth with blossoms and fruit. There is not a day of our lives on this earth when Jesus' unfailing love is not bursting forth in our lives. If only we could wake up and say with Psalmist, "This is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it." There is an old spiritual that says, "It's going to be a getting' up morning" referring to the day that Jesus returns. But really, dear Christian, if Jesus has risen as he said, is not every day of our lives a getting' up morning?

The Roman soldiers were clueless to what was happening. There was a violent earthquake. The stone was rolled away. They saw the angel and they became like dead men. No soldiers said to each other, "He is risen! He is risen indeed!" They were just as clueless as the people who put out the Hallmark cards for Easter. Forget finding an Easter card at Albertsons or Longs that expresses the hope of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. You will find cards with flowers, and bunnies and eggs, humorous cards and sentimental cards, but unless I missed it, you will not find one card with an open tomb and the words, "He is risen!"

Realize dear Christian if it were not for the grace of God these words "He is risen just as he said" would mean as little to you as it did the Roman soldiers or the people who design the cards for Hallmark. In Ephesians 5 the Apostle Paul reminds us, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light the Lord." You were born into this world totally clueless as to the reality of the resurrection, but then the voice of the angel rang out to you, "He is not here, he has risen as he said." When Jesus appeared to Thomas and showed him the nail prints in his hands. He has also appeared to you and he tells you in John 20, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." This open tomb of Jesus, the grave clothes, the body of Jesus with nail marks still in his hands, his conversation with the disciples on the way to Emmaus, all of this has become so real to you, just as it became real to the women.

Life with the promises fulfilled

"The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen as he said. Come and see the place where he lay." They were afraid as they carried their spices and linen clothes to finish wrapping a badly beaten and abused body of Jesus. Conspicuous by their absence were all the delicious foods they should have spent the night preparing to celebrate the resurrection with their risen Lord. The angel does not berate these women for their unbelief. Instead the angel says, simply and beautifully, "He is not here, he has risen, just as he said." He has risen. This word risen is used other places in the New Testament to describe how people get up after sleeping, or how they got up after Jesus healed them, or raised them

from the dead. Instead of a body lying in the tomb in supine position, Jesus was standing up. Our great hope is that after we die we will be raised up again and we will stand and see the Lord face to face in all his glory.

The angel told the women that Jesus rose just as he said he would. Jesus told them about his death even though they did not want to hear about it, but he always included the message that he would rise again on the third day. He compared his time in the grave to the three days that Jonah was in the belly of the great fish.

Then the angel invites them to come into the tomb and examine the forensic evidence. "Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee.' There you will see him. Now I have told you." The evidence for a bodily resurrection from the dead was there in the empty tomb. The Gospel of John tells us how Peter and John saw the clothes lying there and they believed because of the way the clothes were positioned and the head piece was neatly folded. Call out the crime scene investigation team. Let them help you sort through the evidence this morning.

Some years ago we made maracas for our Bible camp. We placed paper mache over a balloon. (Show example.). When the paper mache dried and the balloon was deflated and pulled out, the strips of paper still kept its shape. Look at the clothes around the body of Jesus. They are wrapped as if the body were still there, but the body is gone and the headpiece is neatly folded.

A few years ago an article appeared in Newsweek Magazine about Jesus resurrection, the first part of the article was favorable, but then it also quoted certain scholars who questioned the reality of the resurrection. The article quoted the late German Marxist Earnest Bloch who said 'It wasn't the morality of Christ's Sermon on the Mount which enabled Christianity to conquer Roman paganism. Rather, the impetus that drove the early Christians was the belief that Jesus had indeed been raised from death back to life!'" Even the heathen noticed how the early Christians took serious the message that Jesus had risen just as he said. They examined the evidence, they came to believe, and they told everyone what they saw with their eyes of faith. The early church penetrated the pagan Roman world by simply offering the evidence for the resurrection as it is presented on the pages of the Bible.

We are told that the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy. It is amazing how fear can turn into joy when the reality of the resurrection settles into the lives of people and changes them. Think of Job. He was so beaten down, so fearful that he was losing everything, so angry at God as he proclaimed with bitterness to his friends in Job 19, "Have pity on me my friends, for the hand of God has struck me." But then in that darkest hour of despair, the Holy Spirit turns on the light switch and Job sees himself standing with Jesus in the resurrection on the last day, "I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God." See the woman walking to the cemetery putting flowers on the grave, crying with tears of sadness, but now she walking away with tears of joy because she knows the angel's message is true. Jesus has risen just as he said he would and he will raise us up on the last day.

See the women run, lifting up their flowing robes and running as fast as they could to share the good news. Then Jesus appeared to them suddenly as he often did after his resurrection. "Greetings," they heard him say. The Greek word "Chairete" is a simple greeting such as "hello," or "how are you?" When this common greeting comes from Jesus it means more than just have a nice day. It means that you are now having the best day of your life. They respond by falling down, wrapping their arms around Jesus, and worshipping him. And Jesus tells them not to be afraid. The best moments of your life are those you spend with Jesus and listen to him speak to you and tell you how much he loves you. What was one of the first songs about Jesus that you ever learned as a child? "Jesus loves me...." (Sing with congregation) The resurrection makes this love real.

"Go and tell my brothers to go Galilee there they will see me" "Brothers?" How could Jesus call them brothers after they had been so unfaithful to him? Look into the empty tomb. It stands as monumental evidence that every sin, every doubt, every weakness of faith that was placed on Jesus and paid in full. Nothing has changed your life more than Jesus' resurrection. You have peace with God and Jesus now calls you his brothers and his sisters.

I hope I never experience another earthquake in California, but I know you will agree with me that we want Jesus' resurrection to shake up our lives and impact them even more, not just this Easter morning but every day of life here on this earth. Amen.