

## RESURRECTION OF THE KING

**DEVOTIONAL READING:** Matthew 28:1–10

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 27; 28:1–10

### MATTHEW 28:1–10

**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.

### KEY TEXT

*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*

## GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

### Unit 2: Liberating Gospels

LESSONS 5–8

### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List facts of Jesus' first post-resurrection appearance in Matthew's account.
2. Compare and contrast that account with those of the other Gospels.
3. Sing with fellow classmates "Because He Lives" as an act of communal worship.

## LESSON OUTLINE

### Introduction

- A. When Everything Changed
- B. Lesson Context
- I. The Empty Tomb (Matthew 28:1–7)
  - A. The Women Arrive (v. 1)
  - B. The Angel Appears (vv. 2–4)
    - God's Fireworks Show*
  - C. The Angel Speaks (vv. 5–7)
- II. The Risen Lord (Matthew 28:8–10)
  - A. The Women Obey (v. 8)
    - Fear and Joy*
  - B. Jesus Speaks (vv. 9–10)

### Conclusion

- A. He Is Risen!
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## HOW TO SAY IT

Arimathaea *Air-uh-muh-**thee**-uh* (*th* as in *thin*).

Cleophas *Klee-o-fus*.

Magdalene *Mag-duh-leen* or *Mag-duh-lee-nee*.

Nicodemus *Nick-uh-**dee**-mus*.

## Introduction

### A. When Everything Changed

“Rome wasn’t built in a day” expresses the foolishness of expecting change to happen immediately and completely. But people frequently characterize events like the dropping of the atomic bomb, the Apollo 11 moon landing, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and 9/11 as having changed everything. And to some extent, they are right. Events that have worldwide repercussions, test the limits of human ingenuity and technological prowess, and/or expose great hatred or capacity for unity—these often do mark the *beginning* of a shift in how we think of ourselves and our world.

Today is Resurrection Sunday, when Christians around the world focus attention on a Sunday two millennia ago. On that day *everything* actually did change, and the world has never been the same.

### B. Lesson Context

Jesus' followers had hoped He was the one who would redeem Israel (Luke 24:19–21), but He had been brutally executed at the hands of the Jewish leaders and Roman officials (Matthew 26:47–27:50). Ominous events had accompanied His death. A deep darkness covered the land (27:45). The curtain of the temple was torn from top to bottom, and an earthquake had split rocks and opened graves in the area (27:51–53). The manner in which Jesus died led a Roman centurion and other guards to acclaim Jesus as the Son of God (27:54).

Matthew 28:1–10 is the first of four resurrection narratives in the Gospels (see Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20). These all paint the same picture in broad strokes: Jesus Christ was crucified, buried, and rose from the dead. The overarching truth of these three events guides each writer, even when they differ on details. And the differences in emphasis and detail among the resurrection narratives should comfort us. They indicate that the accounts are not the product of a conspiracy created by a group focused on getting their stories straight. The resurrection narratives complement one another as they affirm that witnesses saw an empty grave and the risen Savior.

Every Gospel account counters the disinformation and lies of the chief priests and Pharisees that resulted after Jesus' resurrection. Many Jews anticipated that God would inaugurate His kingdom in its fullness at the end of history. At that time, the righteous would be raised bodily to eternal life (Daniel 12:1–2; John 11:23–26). Because the Jewish leaders feared that Jesus' disciples would steal the body from the grave and then claim Jesus was alive, the religious leaders had convinced Pilate to authorize guards to be placed at the tomb (Matthew 27:62–66).

## **I. The Empty Tomb**

**(MATTHEW 28:1–7)**

### **A. The Women Arrive (v. 1)**

**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.**

Sunset marked *the end of the sabbath*. Dawn of *the first day of the week* (Sunday) was the first opportunity to go to the tomb to care for Jesus' body. *The sepulchre* and the stone to close it had been provided by a wealthy disciple named Joseph of Arimathaea (Matthew 27:57–60). Nicodemus had aided Joseph in placing Jesus in the tomb on Friday, though without any ceremony—the Sabbath and its rest fast approached with sunset Friday (John 19:38–42). The women arrived on Sunday, not out of a sense of morbid curiosity or even simple mourning, but with spices to continue preparation of Jesus' body for burial (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1).

*Mary Magdalene and the other Mary* have key roles in Matthew's passion narrative. In contrast to the apostles, the women were present at Jesus' crucifixion (Matthew 27:50–56) and saw where He was buried (27:57–61). Mary Magdalene was a follower of Jesus from the early days of His ministry. Jesus had delivered her from a terrifying case of demon possession (Luke 8:2). We remind ourselves that Magdalene is not a surname in the modern sense. Rather, it designates this particular Mary as being "from Magdala."

The "other" Mary was the mother of James and Joses (Matthew 27:56) and possibly the wife of Cleophas (John 19:25). Though the other Gospels name additional women (see Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10), Matthew may have focused on these two because of their prominence among those of Jewish background who first read his Gospel.

## B. The Angel Appears (vv. 2–4)

### 2a. And, behold, there was a great earthquake.

*Behold* is used to call close attention to what follows. An *earthquake* had also occurred at Jesus' death (Matthew 27:51). God's presence or work was sometimes accompanied by grand disruptions of nature (examples: Exodus 19:16–19; Acts 16:26). Those who did not know that God was present would be terrified in the face of nature's fury without realizing that the far more terrifying Lord of the universe was present.

*What Do You Think?*

Do displays of natural destruction cause you to fear God? Why or why not?

*Digging Deeper*

What place do calmer natural scenes have in causing you to revere the Lord?

### 2b. For the angel of the Lord descended from heaven.

Angels *of the Lord* had played a pivotal role in Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus, communicating and making clear God's words and intentions (Matthew 1:20; 2:13, 19–20). Even without speaking, the angel's presence here suggests the tomb was emptied by divine agency *from heaven*, not by physical, human activity.

### 2c. And came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

Stones used to close tombs were usually disk-shaped and extremely heavy. For added difficulty in accessing the tomb, those guarding it had placed a seal on the stone (Matthew 27:65–66). That the angel *rolled* it *back* singlehandedly points to his power.

Interestingly, Jesus had already risen and left the grave before any of the Gospels indicate that *the stone* was moved. The resurrected Lord could enter or exit a locked room without opening the door (example: John 20:19–20, 26–27). He did not need the stone to be removed in order to exit the tomb.

**3–4. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.**

The angel's *countenance* was similar to Jesus' own during the transfiguration (compare Matthew 17:2). The angel's physical appearance clearly marked him as a supernatural being and caused *the keepers* great *fear* (compare 17:5–6). The Greek verb translated *did shake* is related to the noun translated "earthquake" (see Matthew 28:2a, above). The echo of this word makes the stated quaking seem more violent than if it stood alone. This was not a shiver; it was a human quake. Revelation 1:17 describes a similar reaction by John to a vision of the ascended Jesus.

Notice the irony: Jesus is alive, but the guards who thought they were guarding a dead body were themselves like *dead men*!

## GOD'S FIREWORKS SHOW

I shot awake around 4 a.m. Even with my eyes closed, I kept seeing flashes of light coming in through the windows. Looking out the sliding screen door, I saw not the prowlers I expected but the black sky itself erupting with light!

I had never seen lightning like this—continuous, with no break in the brightness. There was no rain, no thunder. I gasped when the sky brightened nearly to daylight for a brief moment. It was as if God was putting on a fireworks show.

I wonder if this is how the women felt when they saw the angel at the tomb: dazzled, mesmerized. They sought Jesus, and God sent a stunning sight to greet them. Then as now, those who seek Jesus find Him and find themselves in awe. This week seek Jesus without an agenda. Though there probably won't be an angel or a lightning show, know that God is prepared to amaze you when you seek His Son.

—K. D.

### C. The Angel Speaks (vv. 5–7)

#### **5a. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye.**

Earlier in Matthew, an angel had told Joseph not to fear the events around Jesus' conception and birth (Matthew 1:20). Now, even though the guards—whom we would expect to be pinnacles of courage—were incapacitated, the women were called to *fear not*. This *angel* was potentially a much more frightening presence than the guards. The women's reaction to this exhortation is not immediately revealed (see 28:8, below).

**5b–6a. For I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said.**

One would expect a crucified man to both be and remain dead. But in Jesus' case, crucifixion and death were the last barriers to fulfilling the Father's plan. *Jesus* had *said* He would rise from the dead on the third day (Matthew 16:21; 17:9; etc.), although the disciples clearly had not understood what He meant (examples: 17:22–23; John 20:9).

Jesus knew He was not caught up in some tragic accident of history. His death and resurrection confirmed His identity as Lord, Messiah, and Son of God (Acts 2:22–24, 36; Romans 1:4). Death was handily defeated by the Creator, the Lord of life (1 Corinthians 15:54–55). The immediate effects of Jesus' crucifixion—suffering, abuse, humiliation, and painful death—are past (Philippians 2:6–11). The continuing results of that crucifixion—the forgiveness of sins—endure (Hebrews 10:19–23).

This is the first explicit notice that Jesus *is risen*. The New Testament contains no accounts of Jesus' resurrection per se. Instead, there are records of disciples finding the tomb empty and encountering the resurrected Jesus (examples: Matthew 28:9, below; 1 Corinthians 15:3–8). These serve as part of the validation that the event occurred, even though no one was present to observe it.

Paul's letters consistently emphasize the Father's role in raising the Son (examples: Romans 6:4; Galatians 1:1; compare Acts 5:30). The Son had trusted the Father and submitted to the Father's will even to the point of death (Matthew 26:42; Luke 23:46). As a result, the Father had exalted the Son.

#### **6b. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.**

The emphasis on the empty tomb counters any notion that Jesus' followers were only experiencing Christ's spiritual presence. Jesus' resurrection involved the coming to life again of His physical body—even though that body was changed (see Matthew 28:3–4, above; compare 1 Corinthians 15:35–53). Jesus had been dead for three days, but He was alive again. *The place where the Lord lay* was vacant!

#### **7a. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead.**

The Old Testament insisted that testimony be confirmed by two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). But women were not considered reliable witnesses and so were normally not called on to bear witness in Jewish courts. No one in the first-century AD world trying to fabricate this story would have made women the lead witnesses to it. How extraordinary that the Lord chose female disciples to be the first witnesses to the resurrection!

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were not called to testify that Jesus' body was gone, which anyone could see by looking in the tomb as they had. Instead they carried the much more wonderful and astounding message that Jesus *is risen from the dead*. From this point forward, the resurrection of Jesus would be the heart of the church's proclamation (example: 1 Corinthians 15:1–4).

The *disciples* to whom the angel referred may have been the larger group of Jesus' followers that the remaining 11 apostles were a part of (Acts 1:15). However, it is more likely that it was the eleven to whom the women were to *tell* the message (compare Matthew 28:10 with 28:16).

*What Do You Think?*

How does your belief in the resurrection of Christ influence your daily life?

*Digging Deeper*

What changes might a greater focus on the hope of resurrection make in your routines?

**7b. And, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.**

Galilee was the area of primary focus in Jesus' ministry (Matthew 4:12–25; 9:35–11:1; Luke 8:1–3). The particular city of ministry focus was Jerusalem. The disciples were reminded to leave the *city* of primary focus and return to the *area* of primary focus.

Jesus had earlier told the disciples that He would go before them *into Galilee* after He had risen (Matthew 26:32). Far from Jesus' death throwing off all their hopes and dreams, the disciples would come to know that His death was always part of Jesus' plans. Far from thwarting His intention to meet with them, His death was a necessary step toward that fateful day. Within a few weeks Jesus would commission those who had deserted Him, just where He had said He'd find them (28:16–20).

Just as the Old Testament phrases "the Lord hath spoken" (Jeremiah 13:15; etc.) or "thus saith the Lord" (Exodus 5:1; etc.) emphasized the need for the hearer to heed what was said, *lo, I have told you* lent additional authority and urgency to the angel's message.

## **II. The Risen Lord** **(MATTHEW 28:8–10)**

### **A. The Women Obey (v. 8)**

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

In obedience, the women left *quickly* in a mixture of emotion. Their *fear* likely stemmed both from awe of their contact with the angel and the magnitude of what they had heard. But they were also awash with joy that was sweeping away the grief of previous days. This *great joy* propelled them to *run* on their mission to tell *his disciples* about Jesus.

For how surprising it would have been to the first-century church that the women were the first to testify to Jesus' resurrection, Matthew had not hidden the importance of faithful

women throughout his Gospel. Jesus' genealogy mentioned four ancestresses (Matthew 1:3, 5–6). Throughout His ministry, Jesus had had significant encounters with women (examples: 15:21–28; 26:6–13; 28:1, above). Though women's voices can be lost in history—especially when most believers were illiterate, and those who were not were usually men—their role in this narrative celebrates the very beginning of faithful women's bearing witness to Jesus' resurrection, which has continued through the centuries.

*What Do You Think?*

What prevents you from running to tell others the news of Jesus' resurrection?

*Digging Deeper*

Is testifying about Christ to other believers a precursor to evangelizing? Why or why not?

### **FEAR AND JOY**

My mother plans carefully, always has an exit strategy, and researches excessively. She packs extra sunscreen, extra napkins, extra everything. And she always has an emergency fund for unexpected bills.

One day this risk-averse woman decided to go skydiving. It was totally against her character! But even though she was scared, she wanted to know what it felt like to be completely out of control, just once. Following her safe, though ungraceful, landing, Mom had the biggest grin on her face! It's one of my most joyous memories of her.

My minister likes to say, "The safest place you can be is living dangerously in the will of God." God doesn't always ask safe things of us—just ask the women who were told to report that Jesus was alive! When we're obeying the Lord, even if we're afraid, He'll be with us. What's one scary thing you can do for the Lord this week? Do it, and rediscover the thrill and joy of obedience.

—K. D.

## **B. Jesus Speaks (vv. 9–10)**

**9a. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail.**

As though the honor of announcing the angel's words was not enough, the women were *met* by Jesus himself! Their faithfulness to Him was rewarded in His faithfulness and care for them.

*All hail* is a Greek greeting that can also be translated "rejoice" (example: Matthew 5:12). The astute reader might hear more echoes from Jesus' birth: a form of the Greek greeting here described the reaction of the magi when they saw the star over the place where the Christ child was (2:10). Jesus' greeting also echoes the taunts Jesus suffered as He died (27:29). These women would have heard those taunts. Though the soldiers had not been sincere, giving reverence to Jesus was appropriate from His birth forward, and never more so than on the day of His resurrection.

**9b. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.**

The women's actions on encountering Jesus make two very important points. Taking hold of Jesus' *feet* shows that Jesus was present physically, having experienced a bodily resurrection (see Matthew 28:6b, above). He was not a hallucination, vision, or phantom.

Second, they *worshipped* Jesus, and Jesus accepted that worship. The Old Testament Scriptures make clear that worship belongs to God alone (examples: Exodus 34:14;

Deuteronomy 8:19). Neither angels nor apostles allowed people to worship them (examples: Acts 10:25–26; 14:11–15; Revelation 22:8–9). The women’s actions signaled that they rightly believed Jesus was God in the flesh.

*What Do You Think?*

How do you express your worship of Christ outside of church services?

*Digging Deeper*

What Scriptures inform your worship habits?

**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’ words reinforced the angel’s commands to *be not afraid* and to *go tell* (Matthew 28:5a, 7a, above). The call to fearlessness also parallels earlier commands Jesus gave His disciples when they experienced awesome demonstrations of His identity and power (examples: 14:27; 17:7).

While the angel called the eleven “disciples,” *Jesus* emphasized His special familial love for them by calling them *brethren* instead (compare Matthew 12:46–50; 25:40). His command also makes clear that the men’s fleeing during Jesus’ trial and crucifixion did not result in His abandoning them. All that He had said would happen really would happen.

It appears Jesus spent at least seven days in Jerusalem (John 20:19, 26) before He moved on to *Galilee* for a time of intense teaching with His disciples (John 21; Acts 1:3–11). Isaiah 9:1–2 calls this region “Galilee of the nations,” and Matthew 4:15 calls it “Galilee of the Gentiles.” Since “Gentiles” simply means “nations,” the reference to Galilee here probably alludes to the large numbers of non-Jews who resided in Galilee. It is highly fitting that the resurrected Jesus would launch His program of salvation from Galilee into all nations (Matthew 28:19–20).

*What Do You Think?*

What fear do you need to set aside in order to faithfully obey God?

*Digging Deeper*

In what ways does Christian fellowship bring you confidence to act without fear?

## Conclusion

### A. He Is Risen!

At the center of Christian faith is the affirmation that Jesus rose from the dead. This is the testimony of women who saw the empty tomb and who encountered the resurrected Jesus. We can trust their words, and we can live in the light of the message they were given.

Believers have a new start and new life in Christ. We need not fear the grave. The resurrection of Jesus has changed everything, and we have been entrusted with that message. Because we are released from the fear of death, we are free to live for God. The faithful life requires much of us, but all that we do begins with the joy and awe of Jesus’ resurrection. From there we go out into the world to announce His resurrection and the invitation to join in His kingdom.

Jesus’ resurrection demonstrates that the kingdom of God has broken into history. Its final consummation will come at the return of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:20–24; Revelation 11:15). Believers may be confident that, when Christ returns, the Father will bring with Christ the dead in Christ who also had submitted and entrusted themselves to the Father (1 Thessalonians 4:14;



2 Timothy 1:12). The resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee of the believers' resurrection and transformation at Christ's second coming (example: 2 Corinthians 4:14). As believers, we live between the ages. The kingdom has been inaugurated, but we await its consummation (Colossians 1:12–13; Hebrews 12:28; 2 Peter 1:10–11). May our lives reflect God's kingdom presence on earth in anticipation of the day we will experience it fully with Him.

### **B. Prayer**

We praise You, our Father, because You sent Your Son, Jesus, to die for our sins. We praise You because You raised Him from the dead and You will raise us to eternal life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

Our King is risen! Everything has changed!