

## Introduction

I've mentioned before that one of the marks of great stories is that they bear up under the scrutiny of multiple readings. Not only this, the great stories offer up more to the reader or hearer whenever they revisit the tale. Each time you return, there is something new that you didn't see the first time. Often, these hidden treasures are things that appear early in the story that you didn't notice at first when they reappear later in the story. This is especially true in Matthew's gospel because the end of Matthew's gospel takes you back to its beginning.

Matthew's gospel begins with an angel announcing good news and here it ends with an angel announcing the good news of Jesus resurrection. Jesus' ministry begins in Galilee after he struggles with Satan in the wilderness for 40 days. At the end of Matthew's gospel, Jesus has once again, struggled and prevailed on the cross and the angel tells the women that Jesus is going ahead His disciples to Galilee.

But Matthew's gospel doesn't simply reach back to the beginning of his own account of Jesus. When you take a closer look at Matthew's account of Jesus' resurrection, you see that Matthew is drawing your attention all the way back to the very beginning, to the creation account of [Genesis 1](#).

The reason Matthew does this is because he wants to teach us something about the Resurrection of Jesus. Matthew wants his audience to understand that this isn't just another event in the history of the world.

The Resurrection is nothing short of a New Creation.

In these verses of [Matthew 28](#), Matthew shows us three ways in which the Resurrection is a new creation event where the world is being re-made:

1. The Resurrection brings a new Sabbath

2. The Resurrection unites heaven and earth
3. The Resurrection disarms the power of death

## The Resurrection Brings a New Sabbath

Verse 1 can literally be translated, “on the Sabbath, after it began to dawn toward the first of the Sabbaths.”

Here is the account of the Sabbath’s creation from [Genesis 2:1-3](#), “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. And on the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on it He rested from all His work which God had created in making it.”

The Sabbath, in the creation account, is the seventh day. The seventh day represents the completion of God’s work and God resting from His work. The Resurrection takes place on the day after the Sabbath. And theologians have noted that it occurs on the *eighth* day. The idea of the eighth day is an idea of newness, or new creation. Rather than simply starting over *another* week, the *eighth* day forges ahead into something new.

One of the great tragedies of the Fall is that humanity never seems to have entered into that Sabbath rest with God. Man was made in the image and likeness of God and one of the things this means is that man, like God, is to enjoy Sabbath rest. Since the Fall, the Sabbath rest was always a promise standing out in the future for mankind. The Sabbath is at the end of the week, something you are constantly oriented toward. Consider it this way, from Adam to Jesus, humanity had lost access to God’s Sabbath rest but was promised that they would one day have access again.

When Jesus, steps forth from the tomb on the *eighth* day, on the first of the new Sabbaths, everything has changed. The promised Sabbath rest of God is no longer a future promise, but it is now a reality that all of God’s people can enter into. Because of the work of Christ, we can enter into the Sabbath rest of the new Sabbath that is one of the results of the Resurrection. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and so, as [Hebrews 4:9](#) states, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

- › He is the one who performed the great work of salvation on the cross, and he is the one who could not be bound by the cords of death. He is the one who broke the power of sin and death. And all of this being accomplished, you can enter into the rest of the Lord of the Sabbath.

And what does this mean that you can enter into this Sabbath rest? That brings us to our next point that Matthew's account highlights for us.

## The Resurrection Unites Heaven and Earth

In verse 2 there is a great earthquake caused by the appearance of an angel of the Lord who has descended from heaven to roll away the stone.

One of the remarkable features of the gospels is the ways in which the boundaries between heaven and earth are broken down. But this remarkable feature is easily missed if we do not first understand how it is that heaven and earth are divided in the creation account.

On the first day of the creation, God created the heavens and the earth and said let their be light. On the second day of the creation, God placed a "firmament" or an "expanse" as a boundary between that which is below and that which is above. This firmament is a boundary between earth and heaven.

An interesting detail to note in the creation account is that God does not say "it is good" until day three. Put another way, the division and separation between earth and heaven is not declared good. The reason for this is because one of the goals of the creation is the eventual marriage of heaven and earth. As Peter Leithart puts it, "God's purpose is to bring heaven to earth, and to raise earth to heaven."

What is in view here is that the firmament veil that separates the earthly realm of man from the heavenly realm of God would be dissolved so that man could enjoy un-mediated fellowship with God.

This is clearly at play in Matthew's gospel is replete with the language of "heaven". In Matthew, Jesus proclaims the "kingdom of heaven". He tells His disciples about their Father who is in "heaven". And He tells His disciples that whatever they bind on earth with will be bound in "heaven". He tells His disciples to pray that things on earth would be as they are in "heaven".

Matthew's gospel is a gospel about heaven coming to earth and renewing earth. Just like the earthquake that made the Roman guards become like dead men, the invasion of heaven is shaking everything that can be shaken. In the Resurrection, the veil that separates earth and heaven is torn and man can now come into the presence of the Father, in the Son, by the power of the Spirit.

In the Incarnation, the Son of God came down from heaven. In the crucifixion and resurrection, all that stood between you and God's presence (your sin and the accusation of Satan) were definitively dealt with. In the Ascension Jesus, as the God-man ascends into heaven. At pentecost, the Spirit is poured out on the church as the downpayment of our future resurrection when Jesus will come again to consummate the union between heaven and earth in the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Consider how, even now, there is a man, Jesus Christ, in Heaven, and that the Spirit of God is on earth, indwelling the church. The Resurrection has broken down the barrier between heaven and earth. And all those who are in Christ are empowered by the Spirit of Christ to live in His resurrection power over the powers of the world, the flesh and the devil.

And this leads us to the third point...

## The Resurrection Disarms the Power of Death

If there is one power on earth that seems absolute, it is the power of death.

All men are subject to the power of death. All the greatest emperors, kings, generals and presidents throughout history have all succumbed to the power of death.

No matter what man does, he is unable to conquer death. Some attempt to ignore the reality of death and live out his days as though it isn't there. Others actively seek to cheat death by focusing on their health. And still others believe that science, medicine, and technology might hold the answers to the conquest of death. But none of these can stave off death.

And that is why the news of the resurrection from the angel in verses 6-7 is so amazing.

As one scholar put it, “For the first time in history, Death yields up a victim; for the first time, a man is raised.”

And it is important to draw a distinction here. The Resurrection of Jesus is unlike any other raising of the dead that the Bible records. Elijah raises a child from the dead and Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb. But the child and Lazarus would both be taken by death again.

But in the Resurrection of Jesus, the power of death has no hold on Him. Jesus is raised in newness of life and all who are in Him too can know that death does not have an ultimate hold on them.

## Conclusion

And this brings us to the conclusion where I want to give a sweeping exhortation and application. It is the title of this sermon, “Do Not Be Afraid”.

Fear plays a central role in our passage: The roman guards faint in fear. The angel tells the women to not be afraid. The women left in fear. And the passage concludes with Jesus’ telling them to not be afraid.

[Hebrews 2](#) teaches that the fear of death is the means by which mankind is subject to lifelong slavery to the devil. Throughout history, Satan has used the fear of death to manipulate and deceive people to their ruin.

But what [Hebrews 2](#) also teaches is that Jesus partook in flesh and blood so that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, the devil.

You need no longer fear death. Death has been defeated and you have eternal life in Christ.

[Romans 6:3-4](#) “Or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life...knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is

master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all, but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.