

“Do Not Be Afraid?”

(Matthew 28:1-10)

Introduction

➤ On Resurrection Sunday, it is common to hear preachers declare: “Without the resurrection of Christ, there would be no salvation!” Which, of course, is true. But it is also true to say, “Without the birth of Christ, there would be no salvation.” And it is also true to say, “Without the sinless life of Christ, there would be no salvation.” And it is also true to say, “Without the substitutionary death of Christ, there would be no salvation.” Likewise, it is true to say, “without the resurrection of Christ, there would be no salvation” (1Cor.15:14, 17). Every aspect of the person and work of Christ is essential to our salvation.

Resurrection Sunday (“Easter”) represents the culmination and completion of Christ’s redemptive work. The resurrection is God’s “Amen!” to Jesus’ “*It is finished*” (Jn.19:30). Before Christ could supernaturally rise from the dead, He had to die a sacrificial/substitutionary death on the cross. Before Christ could die on the cross, He had to live a sinless/righteous life. Before Christ could live a sinless life, He had to be miraculously born of a virgin. All of these events – specifically the “weekend” of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection – happened precisely according to “*the definite plan and foreknowledge of God*” (Acts 2:23; see 4:27-28).

➤ The actual crucifixion of Christ last six-agonizing hours (from 9am-3pm). As horrific and unimaginable as that is, it is only part of what Jesus suffered that day (in less than 24 hours):

... He was betrayed by one of His own apostles [Matt.10:4; 26:14-16, 25, 47-50; Jn.6:70];

... He was arrested, by order of the Jewish chief priests and elders (with a small army of soldiers and people armed with swords and clubs) in the Garden of Gethsemane, just after midnight on Friday morning [Matt.26:47-56; Mk.14:43-52; Lk.22:47-53; Jn.18:2-12];

... He endured three phases of a mock Jewish trial, where Jesus was vehemently interrogated, falsely accused, mocked and beaten (lasting until sunrise, Friday morning) [Matt.26:57-68; 27:1; Mk.14:53-65; 15:1; Lk.22:54-71; Jn.28:23-23];

... He endured three phases of a mock Roman trial, where Jesus was vehemently interrogated, falsely accused, mocked, and scourged/flogged [Matt.27:2, 11-26; Mk.15:1-15; Lk.23:1-25; Jn.18:28-19:16];

... He was led to the Praetorium (palace) and was, once again, mocked and tortured by the Roman soldiers, and having a crown of twisted thorns embedded into His head [Matt.27:27-30; Mk.15:16-19];

... He made the long walk to Golgotha/Calvary, carrying the cross – perhaps only the horizontal (cross) beam known as the Patibulum (which was 5-6 feet in length and weighed 75-125lbs.), or the whole cross (which weighed more than 200lbs.) – until the Roman soldiers made Simon from Cyrene carry it for Him [Matt.27:31-34; Mk.15:20-23; Lk.23:26-33; Jn.29:16-17];

... He was nailed to the cross, using long and sharp spikes through His wrists and feet, while He laid upon the cross which was flat on the ground, and then dropped upright into a hole in the ground, and the soldiers gambled for His clothing [Matt.27:35-36; Mk.15:24; Lk.23:33-34; Jn.19:18-18].

... After He “*gave up His Spirit*” (Jn.19:30), committed His spirit into the Father’s hands (Lk.23:46), and “*breathed His last*” (Lk.23:46), the soldiers took Jesus down from the cross and His body was given to Joseph of Arimathea who prepared Jesus’ body for burial and buried Him in a new tomb [Matt.27:57-60; Mk.15:42-46; Lk.23:50-54; Jn.19:31-42];

... Jesus remained in that tomb for three calendars; sealed under Roman authority and guarded by Roman guards [Matt.27:62-65; 28:4, 11].

➤ Then came Sunday morning! Today, as we celebrate Resurrection Sunday, we are going to specifically look at the biblical account of Jesus’ resurrection from the Gospel of Matthew.

Matt 28:1-10 ~ “Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.’ ⁸So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹And behold, Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.’”

➤ I have outlined this passage by identifying the different individuals represented in this narrative.

1. The faithful women (vs.1)

➤ Matthew recorded for us that it was very early on Sunday morning that these women headed to Jesus’ tomb: “*Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb*” (vs.1). At the “crack of dawn” (John recorded that “*it was still dark*”; Jn.20:1), on Sunday morning, Mary and Mary (and “*the other women*” who were with them, Lk.24:10) went to Jesus’ tomb. They were faithful to Jesus during His life, and faithful to Him at His death (no wonder they were the first to see Jesus resurrected).

Matt 27:60-61 ~ “... And [Joseph of Arimathea] rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. ⁶¹Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.” (see Matt.27:55)

➤ These women were clearly expecting Jesus to still be in the tomb, as they came to anoint Jesus’ body with “*the spices they had prepared*” (Lk.24:1; see Mk.16:1) – even though they had seen Joseph and Nicodemus wrap Jesus’ body in “*linen cloths*” and “*about seventy-five pounds*” of spices (Jn.19:39-40; Matt.27:61). While the apostles (who were much more of a target) were hiding “*for fear of the Jews*” (Jn.20:19), these women continued to minister to Jesus – albeit in memorial (or so they thought!).

2. The angel’s arrival (vs.2-3)

➤ Whether or not these women were actually at the tomb when the angel arrived is debated, but it is quite certain that they heard and felt the effects of the “*great earthquake*” (vs.2; *megas seismos*; “seismic” lit. great or massive quake or tremor). This earthquake occurred when “*an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and rolled back the stone*” (vs.2). The earthquake could have been caused by the angel’s arrival, or the means he used to roll back the stone. This is for sure: the angel of the Lord did not roll the stone away in order to let Jesus out, but to let the women and disciples in (Jesus would not have needed help getting out of the tomb; cf. Jn.20:19, 26). It seems the angel “*sat on*” (vs.2) the stone while he waited for the women.

This was the second earthquake in just three days. Earlier, on Friday afternoon during Jesus’ crucifixion, we read:

Matt 27:51-54 ~ “And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵²The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake [*seismos*] and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’”

➤ The angel's appearance is described as being *"like lightning"* (vs.3). The word translated *"lightning"* (*astrape*) is used to describe a very bright or brilliant – temporarily blinding – light, or the literal occurrence of lightning. Here the angel's appearance is as bright as a (continuous) flash of lightning. In addition, his clothes were *"white as snow"* (vs.3) making his appearance all-the-more brilliant (angels are not naked-fat-babies-with-wings). There can be no doubt that his appearance was that of divine splendor of God's radiant purity and holiness.

Luke 2:8-9 ~ "And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear."

➤ It is important to know that the angel did not raise Jesus from the dead – the angel was the resurrection messenger and tomb tour-guide. Jesus' resurrection was a Trinitarian accomplishment: God the Father (Gal.1:1; Col.2:12), God the Son (Jn.2:19; 10:18), and God the Spirit (1Pet.3:18; Rom.8:11) were all involved in raising Jesus from the dead.

John 10:17-18 ~ "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

3. The petrified guards (vs.4)

➤ When get a further sense of the awesome manifestation of this angel by seeing how the Roman guards responded: *"And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men"* (vs.4). The guards, who were soldiers (Matt.27:65), grew so afraid of the angel before them (and not doubt the preceding great earthquake) that they had their own personal earthquake: *"trembled"* (vs.4; *seio*; base of *seismos* vs.2) and *"became like dead men"* – paralyzed and struck catatonic by what they saw.

From what we read in these verses; the guards were terrified at the mere presence of the angel. The angel did not verbally or physically threaten them; he did not make a menacing sound; he did not point a flaming sword at their heads. In fact, the angel did not speak to them at all. It was as if they were not even there – they, Roman military soldiers, were seemingly of no consequence. He was merely sitting on the stone that was rolled away (vs.2). And they were petrified at his presence.

Luke 1:11-12 ~ "And there appeared to [Zechariah] an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²And Zechariah was troubled [*tarassō*] when he saw him, and fear [*phobos*] fell upon him."

➤ Contrary to the rumors that were spread, and continue to be spread today, the guards were not asleep not did the disciples steal Jesus' body. The guards knew exactly what happened.

Matt 28:11-15 ~ "While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. ¹²And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers ¹³and said, 'Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' ¹⁴And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.' ¹⁵So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day."

➤ They went to the chief priests because Pilate (the Roman Governor) would surely have had them arrested and probably executed for failing to keep their assignment to keep the tomb secure (Matt.27:62-66). The chief priests (Sanhedrin), not caring about what the resurrection events, devised a three-fold plan: 1) Bribe the soldiers, 2) Spread a lie about the body, and 3) Protect the soldiers from political harm. The news of Jesus' resurrection brought fear, anxiety, and confusion to most of the Jewish leaders – but not repentance. The absurdity of this lie is remarkable.

4. The angel's message (vs.5-7)

- The women, on their way to the tomb, they asked each other: *“Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?”* (Mk.16:3). Once they arrived, they realized they did not need to roll the stone away because the stone was already rolled away: *“And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back – it was very large”* (Mk.16:4). They came expecting to find a closed and sealed tomb, with Jesus' body inside. They found the tomb open, the body of Jesus gone (Lk.24:3), the stone rolled away, and an angel of the Lord sitting on it.
- The Greek word translated *“angel”* (vs.2, 5; *angelos*) can literally mean “messenger”, which is one of the main roles of angels. Completely ignoring the petrified soldiers, the angel had a threefold message for these faithful women. This message contains three commands (imperative verbs).

The first command from the angel was *“Do not be afraid”* (vs.5). The guards were not the only ones afraid of the angel's appearance. In the Gospel of Luke, we read that *“they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground”* (Lk.24:5). Everything about the angel's appearance indicated that he was a heavenly being, possibly have come from the presence of God. He quickly assured them that he was not bringing the bad news of God's judgment, but the good news – the greatest news! For he knew that they were *“seek[ing] Jesus who was crucified”* (vs.5).

He then said one of the greatest sentences ever uttered: *“He is not here, for he has risen, as he said”* (vs.6). What a whirlwind of emotions must have been stirring in their hearts. The shock and awe of seeing an angel (the aftershock of a great earthquake). Hearing that Jesus was not in the tomb. Then hearing that He had risen from the dead! But we must not miss the phrase *“as he said”* (vs.6). God always does as He says. The word of God is always true, and the promises of God always come true (Jn.17:17; Heb.6:18).

Luke 24:6-8 ~ “He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.’ ⁸And they remembered his words” (see Matt.16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 26:1-2)

The second command that angel gave to the women was: *“Come, see the place where he lay”* (vs.6; see Mk.16:6; Lk.24:3). The angel then graciously gave the women proof of Jesus' resurrection. He wanted them to see with their own eyes that Jesus was not there – that He indeed had risen from the dead. And they did (Mk.16:5). But more important than the empirical evidence of an empty tomb was the infallible promise of God – *“as he said”* (vs.6).

Thirdly, the angel told the women to *“go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you”* (vs.7). This is exactly what the women did:

Luke 24:8-10 ~ “And they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles” (see Jn.20:2-10)

- Three commands: 1) do not be afraid, 2) see, and 3) tell. They were divinely appointed messengers of the Gospel – the “good news” that Jesus is risen from the dead, the Lord and Savior of all who believe in Him. This is similar to the commission given by Christ to all of His disciples:

Matt 28:19-20 ~ “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

- Can you imagine these women refusing to obey they angel's command? Can you imagine any one of them saying, “I'm too shy ... my religion is private ... I'm too busy ... maybe later ... someone else will do it”? Yet, this is the unthinkable reality of Christians disobeying Christ's Great Commission – refusing to evangelize unbelievers; refusing to share the Good News of the Gospel; refusing to tell others that Christ is risen from the dead!

➤The angel promised that they would “*see*” (vs.7) the risen Jesus Christ, and see Him they all did!

5. The risen Lord (vs.8-10)

➤To say that the women were a kaleidoscope of emotions is probably an understatement. As is evident in harmonizing the Gospel accounts, they were a mixture of “*fear and great joy*” (vs.8) – “*for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid*” (Mk.16:8). They did not know whether to laugh or cry; to shout it from the rooftops or to remain silent; to leap for joy or to tremble in fear.

✓**Illust:** “A holy fear, mixed with great joy, is one of the sweetest compounds we can bring to God’s altar” (Charles H. Spurgeon; “Expositional notes” on Matthew 28:1-15).

➤Matthew recorded for us that “*they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples*” (vs.8). They were not going to tell anyone but disciples of Jesus – just as the angel instructed. Such great news has to be shared!

➤However, their emotional rollercoaster ride was not over. For Jesus met them along the way: “*And behold, Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’*” (vs.9). We can only imagine the euphoria and hysteria they felt when they saw and heard from the risen Christ! The word “*Greetings!*” (*chairō*; vs.9) could also be translated “Rejoice!” (see Matt.5:12). With this greeting, Jesus clarified their emotions for them – this was a time for rejoicing because Jesus is risen from the dead!

Through His resurrection, Jesus triumphed over sin and death for all who would ever believe in Him. The salvation of all true believers has been eternally secured by Christ. As Christians, our faith is not futile and we are no longer in our sins (1Cor.15:17). And the sufferings of this present world cannot compare to the “*glory that is to be revealed to us*” (Rom.8:18).

➤Understandably, when they recognized that it was Jesus, “*they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him*” (vs.9). This is appropriately a vastly different response than they gave to the angel. For God alone is worthy of our worship. This is an act of abject humility. They bowed before Christ, taking “*hold of his feet*” (vs.9), in a posture an act of “worship” (“*worshiped*” [vs.9] *proskyneō*; lit. to bend the knee; see Matt.28:17; Jn.4:22-23).

➤While I am sure they would have been content to remain with Jesus, these women had a job to do: “*Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me’*” (vs.10). This is essentially the same message from the angel (vs.5-7). The women did as they were instructed (Lk.24:11). Such Good News is meant to be shared and is too good not to share (see 1Cor.1:23; 2:2; 9:16).

Matt 28:19-20 ~ “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Mark 16:15 ~ “And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.’”

Luke 24:46-48 ~ “and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things.’”

John 20:21 ~ “Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’”

Acts 1:8 ~ “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Conclusion

➤ I have titled this message “Do not be afraid?” as a question because in this passage, and throughout the Bible, there are commands to “be afraid” and to “not be afraid.” We find four references to fear in Matthew 28:1-10:

vs.4 ~ “And for fear [*phobos*] of him the guards trembled [*seiō*] and became like dead men”

vs.5 ~ “But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid [*phobeomai*] ...”

vs.8 ~ “So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear [*phobos*] and great joy ...”

vs.10 ~ “Then Jesus said to [the women], “Do not be afraid [*phobeomai*] ...”

➤ It is worth noting, at the outset, that neither the angel nor Jesus told the guards to not be afraid. In the Bible, we find this paradox: those who truly fear God do not need to be afraid of God, but those who do not fear God should be terrified of Him. Scripture reveals for us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Prov.1:7) and wisdom (Prov.9:10). In other words, those who truly believe in the God (i.e., the God of the Bible) will naturally respond with fear. For God is just, holy, living, and sovereign – “*a consuming fire*” (Heb.12:29) – who has both the right/authority and the might/power to condemn sinners to eternal hell. A true fear of God will lead someone to seek to be right with God, which comes only through a saving faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, those who truly fear God do not need to be afraid of God because they have received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Their fear of God turns to a reverence for God. The one who truly fears God is humble before Him and seeks to glorify Him in everything.

However, those who have no fear of God are those who deny God and rebel against Him. Since they have no fear of God, they remain condemned under God’s just wrath. Without a fear of God, they are unrestrained with regard to sin and depravity. They are not filled with biblical knowledge and wisdom, but are regarded in the Bible as fools (Ps.14:1). They arrogantly blaspheme God and rebel against His commands (Ps.36:1). Such people should be terrified of God, for they are in the crosshairs of wrath and condemnation (see Jn.3:18, 36).

➤ We see this “fear” and “fear not” parallel in Matthew’s Gospel:

Matt 10:28-33 ~ “And do not fear [*phobeomai*; pres., pass., imp.] those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear [*phobeomai*; pres., pass., imp.] him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹Fear [*phobeomai*; pres., pass., imp.] not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³²So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ³³but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”

➤ The one who truly fears God, has nothing else to fear (1Jn.4:18). A true fear of God eclipses all other fears.

Matt 14:26-27 ~ “But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified [*tarassō*], and said, ‘It is a ghost!’ and they cried out in fear [*phobos*]. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid [*phobeomai*].’”

Matt 27:54 ~ “When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe [*phobeomai sphodra*; feared greatly, “extremely terrified” (NET)] and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’”

Luke 23:39-43 ~ “One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, ‘Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!’ ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear [*phobeomai*] God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man [i.e., Jesus] has done nothing wrong.’ ⁴²And he said, ‘Jesus, remember

me when you come into your kingdom.’ ⁴³And he said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’”

Rev 14:7 ~ “And [the angel] said with a loud voice, ‘Fear [*phobeomai*] God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.’”

➤ Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – the one and only Son of God, and one and only Savior from God – God made a way for us to be saved. A true fear of God leads to a true faith in Jesus Christ.

If you truly fear God, you will receive Jesus Christ – the one and only Son of God and the one and only Savior from God – as your Lord and Savior, and (when you do) you will have nothing to fear.

Those who reject Jesus as the Christ have no true fear of God, and (consequently) they should be terrified of Him. For He is a holy God who justly punishes sin, and that punishment (for those who reject Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior) is the condemnation of eternal hell.

The salvation of God comes only through the Savior from God.

John 11:25-26 ~ “Jesus said to [Martha], ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’”

1 John 5:11-12 ~ “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.” (see Jn.3:16, 36; 14:6; Acts 4:12)

➤ Jesus Christ was born to live a sinless life, to die a sinner’s death, and raised to life conquering both sin and death forevermore. This is the Good News of the Gospel. This is the power and promise of Christ’s resurrection. He is risen ... He is risen, indeed!