

He Has Risen
Matthew 28:1-15
Key Verse: 28:6

"He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay."

Happy Easter! Today let's listen to the good news that Jesus has risen, as told in Matthew's gospel. This is the most important message to each of us, and to all people. It is more important than victory in war, economic recovery, or breakthroughs in medicine and technology. It is a matter of life to the dead. We can find true hope, and new power to live a victorious life.

After Jesus died on the cross, his body was buried in a new tomb cut out of a rock by Joseph of Arimathea. As Joseph rolled a huge stone across the entrance, it must have made a thudding sound. It signaled the finality of Jesus' death; everything seemed to be over. Mary Magdalene and another Mary had seen everything: the crucifixion, Jesus' death, and his burial. They would probably have spent the night by Jesus' tomb if possible. But the Sabbath law required them to go home. So they left. The disciples were nowhere to be seen; they had all fled at Jesus' arrest (26:56). Ironically, the Jewish leaders remembered Jesus' promise to rise again (27:63). They were afraid that Jesus' disciples might steal the body and say he had risen. So they convinced Pilate to seal the tomb and post guards (27:66). The tomb seemed well-secured, so that no one could go in or out.

Then Sunday morning came; it was the first day of the week. Verse 1 tells us that the previous day was a Sabbath. But it was no ordinary Sabbath. It was a historical Sabbath. It was like the first Sabbath, when God rested after finishing his creation work. Yet this time, it was the Son of God, Jesus, who rested in the tomb for a day, after finishing the work of redemption on the cross. Jesus had opened the way for mankind to come back to God. As bright sunlight burst forth that morning, it signaled a new era: heavenly sunlight dawned on mankind. It happened first in the hearts of the two Marys. At dawn on Sunday morning, they returned to Jesus' tomb to look at it. There was nothing they could do; but they wanted to look anyway. They were compelled by their love for Jesus. They loved Jesus because he had first loved them. They had found salvation in Jesus and they just wanted to be near him. They seemed helpless and insignificant. But their love for Jesus was precious, and God would use them for his good purpose.

When the women arrived at the tomb, they found that something totally unexpected happened. There was a violent earthquake (2). The earth, which had received the body of Jesus, split open to release him to life. It reminds us of Jonah being expelled from the belly of the huge fish (Mt 12:40). An angel of the Lord came down from heaven. He was shining with heavenly glory and power. He went to the tomb, rolled back the stone, and sat on it (3). He did this in the full sight of the Roman guards. These tough soldiers could not lift a finger. At the mere sight of an angel, they shook and became like dead men (4). Here we see that Almighty God was ruling over this event. Evil men thought they could keep Jesus' body in the grave. They thought they were in control. It was a delusion. When God exerted his strength, their power was broken. God accomplishes his salvation purpose without fail; the opposition of sinful men is insignificant in comparison.

When we read this narrative carefully, we learn that the angel's visit was for the sake of the women. He had come to open the tomb for them. He said to them, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay" (5,6). The angel first comforted the women. Though amazing happened around them, they did not need to fear. Almighty God, who was in control, knew their hearts and wanted to work together with them. The same angel who terrified ungodly soldiers comforted these godly women, "Do not be afraid; I know why you are here." He emphasized that Jesus had risen. This is good news. Let's consider two truths it teaches us.

First, the resurrection proves that God accepted Jesus' sacrifice. At the Last Supper Jesus explained the meaning of his death. Jesus died as a sacrifice for our sins, as our Passover Lamb (Mt 26:28; 1 Cor 5:7). Jesus shed his blood to redeem us from the bondage of sin (1 Pe 1:18-19), to purify us from all sin (1 Jn 1:7), and to cleanse our consciences so that we may stand before the living God (Heb 9:14). Through Jesus' blood we enter into a new covenant with God. We have become his dear children who can dwell in his Most Holy Place (Mt 27:51; Heb 10:20). However, if Jesus had remained in the grave, we might wonder about this. We might think of Jesus' death as a beautiful yet sad story. We would not have assurance of victory over sin. Paul said, "...if Christ has not been raised, your faith is

futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15:17). By raising Jesus, God demonstrated that Jesus' sacrifice was sufficient. This assures us that Jesus' blood has power to do what he said it would do and that he is the Christ of God, the Savior of the world. We can have victory over sin by faith in the Risen Christ (Ro 4:25). Second, the resurrection showed Jesus' victory over death. From the time of Adam's sin, death reigned over mankind. Romans 5:12 says, "...sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned...." Death was the undefeated enemy of all men, and the great equalizer. No matter how great a person was, he died. No one could defeat death. Ghengis Khan conquered vast lands and subdued innumerable people. But he died in 1227 A.D. at the age of 65. Howard Hughes was so rich that he bought one hotel in Las Vegas to live in. Shortly afterward, he bought a smaller one next door in order to remove its neon lights that kept him awake at night. Hughes died on April 5, 1976 at the age of 70. Michael Jackson won the hearts of millions around the world through his singing and dancing. The Guinness Book of World Records recognizes him as the most successful entertainer of all time. He died June 25, 2009 at the age of 50. Jack Lalanne was America's first national fitness coach. He demonstrated effective exercise and healthy eating habits on his television show, which aired from 1951 to 1985. On his 70th birthday he towed 70 boats, carrying 70 people while swimming handcuffed and shackled. But he also died on January 23, 2011 at the age of 96. Man's destiny is to die once (Heb 9:27). No one can prevent it with technology, drugs, money, education, exercise, or anything else. The devil exploits us by tormenting us with the thought of death (Heb 2:14-15). He fills us with such fear, sorrow and despair that we can become like dead men, even while we are still breathing. When we are paralyzed by Satan, we waste our lives, seeking cheap thrills to soothe our anguished souls. We squander all of the talents and abilities God has given us. This is indeed tragic.

However, the good news is that God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus satisfied God's justice fully through his death. Then "God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him" (Ac 2:24). Death had no claim on Jesus. God raised Jesus by his mighty power. Romans 6:9 says, "...since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him." Jesus won an eternal victory over the power of death.

Jesus rose again to live forever. This Risen Christ is alive today and willing to come into our hearts to live. Romans 10:9 says, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." The Risen Christ gives us eternal life the moment we believe (Jn 5:24). The world we live in is in transition from the reign of death to the reign of life in Christ. So we experience sorrows and pains. But nothing can separate us from the eternal love of Jesus (Ro 8:39). Jesus gives us eternal joy and peace, even in the midst of painful struggles.

Furthermore, Jesus has promised to raise us up. Paul calls Jesus "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Co 15:20). In John chapter 6, Jesus himself repeated four times: "I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn 6:39,40,44,54). We cannot grasp the deep meaning of this with mere human reason. We need the Holy Spirit to enlighten us. So Paul wrote: "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead..." (Eph 1:18-20a). We find two elements of good news here.

In the first place, Jesus gives us a new hope: the riches of his glorious inheritance. This inheritance includes a new eternal body and an eternal home. Our present bodies are compared to an earthly tent (2 Cor 5:1). They are characterized as perishable, dishonorable, weak, and natural (1 Cor 15:42-44). We experience many agonies such as diseases, deformities, aging, and so forth. We want to be like idealistic teenagers forever, but we find gray hairs, wrinkles, excess fatty tissue, shortness of breath, arthritic pains, loss of memory, and so on. Inevitably these bodies fail. But Jesus promises us new bodies which are imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual. These new bodies never age, they feel no pain, they can travel from one place to another instantly; they are agile, energetic, handsome and beautiful forever.

In John 14:2 Jesus said, "My Father's house has many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you." The King James Version translates rooms as "mansions." Jesus gives mansions to his children as a gift of grace; there is no mortgage. These mansions are made of imperishable material; they never perish, spoil or fade (1 Pe 1:4). They never need repairs. The plumbing never breaks, the electricity never fails, the roof never leaks, the basement never floods, and the lawn is always green and lively. These mansions are in a city, the New Jerusalem. The city and its streets are made of pure gold (Rev 21:18,21). There are no potholes. The neighbors are all good people who bear the image of Jesus; there are no wicked people who cause trouble. Even animals play well together, as the lion lies

down with the lamb (Isa 11:6). There is no sickness, pain or death, but only life, peace and joy in the love of God forever (Rev 21:3,4). This is our hope. When this hope fills our hearts, we can live joyfully in this world even in the midst of trouble.

In the second place, the Risen Christ gives us power as we live in this world. Consider St. Paul. We think of him as a man of courageous faith, and he was. His strength came from Christ. While pioneering the Galatian churches he experienced harsh opposition. Jewish leaders expelled Paul from Pisidian Antioch. They plotted to stone him in Iconium. When this plot was exposed, he fled. But in Lystra Paul was stoned and left for dead. His disciples gathered around him, perhaps to have a funeral service. But something happened. Paul got up and went back into the city. From that time, he did not run from opposition; he visited all of the places where he had been mistreated and told the disciples, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Ac 14:22). He was not a superman. He had faith in the Risen Christ. This was his power source to live a dynamic and fruitful life as an apostle of Jesus. We, too, can experience the power of the Risen Christ through faith. We can live victorious lives for his glory despite the reality of strong opposition. We can live fruitful lives in this world and then receive a glorious eternal inheritance in his kingdom. This is all possible through Jesus' resurrection. Praise God! Thank you, Jesus!

Now, let's come back to our story. It is unlikely that the women could understand the full magnitude of the angel's message. But the news that Jesus had risen rang true in their hearts, and ignited a holy passion. Their sorrows began to melt. Then the angel told them of two things that could be the basis of believing the resurrection message: Jesus' word, and the empty tomb. Jesus rose just as he said. Jesus had told his disciples repeatedly that he would suffer, die and rise again (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19). After the Last Supper he had promised specifically to meet them in Galilee afterward (26:32). Jesus' followers must have heard these oft-repeated words of Jesus. But they did not accept them. They did not want Jesus to die because they loved him. Moreover, it was hard to believe that anyone would rise from the dead, for it went against their life experience and the testimony of history. Still, even though they did not accept them, Jesus' words had come true. Jesus gives us his words so that we may believe the resurrection. But many people fail to believe because they do not experience an expected emotional feeling. Jesus' words are true regardless of how we feel. When we believe his words simply, we can have resurrection faith. The angel showed them the empty tomb. Jesus' body was not there. Jesus rose from the dead. Among all the great religious leaders, only Jesus' tomb is empty. The bodies of Buddha, Confucius, Socrates, Mohammed, and all others are in their graves. They were conquered by death. But Jesus' tomb is empty because he triumphed over death. The empty tomb is a historical fact that stands as a basis for believing the resurrection of Jesus.

To the angel, the women had a solid basis on which to believe that Jesus had risen: Jesus' words, the empty tomb and the angel's message. Now it was time for them to go and tell his disciples. It was urgent, so he told them to go quickly (7). They were not trained religious leaders. But they became the first resurrection witnesses. It was God's blessing upon their faithfulness. It was God's expression of love for the disciples as well. These women carried this great message of life to the disciples. This is God's redemptive grace toward women. In the garden of Eden it was the woman who was tempted first and made Adam stumble. But here, it was two faithful women who carried the message of new life to a dying world. These women were indeed precious to God and a blessing to mankind.

The women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Once again something totally unexpected happened. Look at verse 9. "Suddenly Jesus met them. 'Greetings,' he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him." Jesus himself appeared to these women and greeted them. They knew he was more than a man; he was the Son of God. So they worshiped him. Jesus received their worship because he is God. Here we see a prelude of the restored relationship between God and mankind. Jesus' death and resurrection set these women free from sin and death and restored them as true worshipers of God. Incidentally, the fact that they clasped his feet tells us that Jesus' body had risen. The resurrection was not just a spiritual phenomenon; it encompassed the body as well. In Christ, God redeems all of his creation--the physical, as well as the spiritual.

Jesus continued, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." Jesus called the disciples "my brothers." They were probably hidden in scattered corners, grieving over the loss of Jesus and crying over their own mistakes and failures. They felt unworthy to be called his disciples. At the root, their problem was fear; they were afraid of death. Jesus had solved this problem through his resurrection. Now he invited them to new life as his brothers. Hearing this gave them strength to get up and go to Galilee. There the Risen Christ would commission them.

In verses 11-15 Matthew tells us how the religious leaders responded to the resurrection. They plotted to cover it up, bribing the guards with money. But just as the truth of Jesus could not be suppressed in his death, it cannot be suppressed in his resurrection. While they pressed down this truth in Israel, it would spread to the whole world through the disciples.

Today we have heard the good news of Jesus' resurrection. In response, what should we do? First of all we should believe the message and worship Jesus. Next we should go and tell others this good news. People are perishing under the power of sin and death. It is the problem of all mankind. No one else has been able to solve this problem. But Jesus rose from the dead to give us eternal life in the kingdom of God. Let's share this message with students on our campuses, and with friends and neighbors during this Easter season, and continually. May God richly bless you.