

Prayers

To God

Praise God as you are led; pray in thanks for Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead, pray for the defeat of the powers of death, pray for the glorious and eternal success of God's salvation plan, and pray about everything Easter day means to you!

For Self

I thank You, Lord Jesus. I do not deserve Your love. I do not deserve the compassion You have shown to me in dying for my sins. I do not deserve the liberty You have given me despite my sins, and I do not deserve the home in heaven You have planned for me! Yet this is all Your gift to me which flows from Easter day! Glory be! I praise You my Lord and God! Alleluia!

For others

Pray for the world that passes Easter by; pray for those who reject Jesus not knowing how else to respond to Him; pray for Christians who struggle to preach the message of God's love or live it out by faith; pray for the world to be turned upside down because of Easter day!

Meditation

'The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad' (Psalm 126:3)

We are glad because of the love of our God:

Jesus has been raised from the dead!
Angels have proclaimed the Good News!
Satan has been roundly defeated!
Love has won a great victory over sin!
Mercy is triumphant over judgement!
Faith has been fully justified!
Grace has been shown in action!

We are glad because of the love of our God,
Which has been made known to us in Christ Jesus
Through His life, His death, and His glorious resurrection!
It is true! We believe, and we are saved: ALLELUIA!

Bible Passage

Matthew 28:1-10

¹ After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

² Suddenly there was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, approached, rolled back the stone, and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was white as snow.

⁴ The guards were shaken with fear of him and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women,

'Do not be afraid, for I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay. ⁷ Go quickly then, and tell His disciples;

"He has risen from the dead, and He is also going ahead of you to Galilee, where you will see Him."

Listen, for I have told you.'

⁸ So then, fearful yet overjoyed, they left the tomb quickly and ran to tell His disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them and said,

'Greetings!'

They approached Him, took hold of His feet, and worshiped Him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them,

'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and they will see me there.'

Review

Thank God for Easter day! Thank God for the resurrection! Thank God that Jesus walked the pathway of suffering for us and took on Himself the burden of sin and evil! Thank God that through Him we can be reconciled to God! Thank God that we now have the proof He loves us, now and for eternity! On this day, Bible study takes on a different feel, because the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the heart of our faith. We study the means by which we are saved, and an event that has literally changed history!

This passage is truly remarkable. Each Gospel tells a slightly different story of what happened and we need to be respectful of the fact that true witnesses tend to report the same incident in very different ways. Yet because of this it is almost impossible to try and collate a single record of what happened on Easter morning, and we must let Matthew's account speak for itself.

Going to the tomb

The Resurrection story begins with the dawn of the first day of the working week after the Sabbath, our Sunday, when two women go to the tomb early, most likely as the sun rises. They were Mary Magdalene and 'the other' Mary (see Thursday's study), apparently to 'see the tomb' (28:1). They could do no more because the tomb was sealed.

As they arrived, two things happened which would have scared the wits out of any of us, let alone two disciples in a state of shock at what had happened to Jesus. There was an earthquake, and an angel appeared. Just after Jesus died, an earthquake had opened tombs, so it seems that God continued His work immediately the Sabbath was finished! This time, the story is even more dramatic. An angel of the Lord came from heaven, rolled back the stone in front of the tomb, and sat on it (28:2)!

We can hardly imagine the scene. It reads like a vision of Daniel; for example, Daniel saw in a vision the coming of '*one like a Son of Man*' (7:13), a figure Matthew equates with Jesus, and being presented to the '*Ancient of Days*' whose appearance was '*white as snow*' (7:9). The appearance of the angel of the Lord is like God Himself, displaying the glory of God! The angel's sitting on the tomb stone symbolises regal authority, magnificence and power. No wonder the guards, soldiers whose normal work was ceremonial duty in the Temple, were awestruck! They fled (28:4), leaving the women standing before the angel (28:4)!

The message of the angel

The women at the tomb were as petrified as the soldiers. They did not flee, but remained, and were rewarded by hearing the angel speak. In words typical in scripture of an appearance of Almighty God, whether in person or via an angel; the message was this, '*do not be afraid*' (28:5)! In this way, God holds out the hand of love and acceptance to these two women as the first witnesses of the Resurrection.

The women were invited to look into the tomb and see for themselves the empty tomb (28:6). It is almost impossible to imagine how they must have felt as they did this and even more extraordinary that Matthew records all this. However well known the women were, they had no legal authority as witnesses within the social order of the day, and we only know for certain who one of them was! Matthew had to swallow some male pride and shed some cultural baggage to write the truth in his Gospel!

The angel's message is astonishing. If we did not otherwise know, we might still be wondering what had actually happened to Jesus! But the angel announces '*He is risen!*' (28:6), a phrase that was to become a statement of faith for early Christians. Now Jesus had earlier told his disciples that He would rise and go ahead of them to Galilee (17:9, 26:32); it was a message repeated, but necessary. The women would have to persuade the disciples that Jesus was indeed raised as the angels said and they must indeed do what He had told them earlier.

Galilee

The fact that Jesus went to Galilee is also important. Galilee was the place where Jesus' ministry started and it would now be the place where His ministry would end. Following the lead of the prophets, Matthew presents the north of Israel as the place where 'light' comes from (e.g. Isaiah 9:1,2, '*... Galilee of the nations; the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light*'). So why did Jesus not stay for long in Jerusalem?

For Jesus, Jerusalem was a place that had '*slaughtered the prophets*' (Neh. 9:26, and Matt. 21:35, 22:6), where He had been judged, mocked and slaughtered. So it is not surprising that in Resurrection power, Jesus left the place that symbolised all that was wrong about a religious system that had failed to bring salvation to the world. Also, by going to Galilee, Jesus began the walk of the Early Church as it ultimately moved away from Jerusalem and into the wider Jewish world, and eventually, through the apostle Paul, into the Gentile world.

Meeting with Jesus on the way to the disciples

Matthew says that the two women were 'fearful yet overjoyed'. It is easy to understand why! As they ran to tell the disciples, the women clearly understood something of the incredible significance of what had happened. Their two emotions of fear and joy are today understood to be two of the most important emotions, occurring together with an adrenalin rush through the body. This would have focussed their minds considerably, and it makes the whole story more real, and unlikely to be false.

Yet the best was just about to come for these two witnesses. Jesus appeared to them, alive, and spoke to them, saying 'greetings!' It sounds so formal, but the word Jesus used was more like 'hello', a happy and normal open greeting, but this is the risen Jesus speaking! The women had no words, and they fell at His feet and worshipped Him. The message they had to convey to the disciples was confirmed by the Master Himself (28:10)! The empty tomb was an important part of the evidence of the resurrection, but for the disciples as a whole, the power of the resurrection would be shown in the fulfilment of Jesus' own words, and their coming meeting with Him in Galilee.

Let each of us who read these words do so with awe, for this is real history. The resurrection is the awesome evidence of God's love for each one of us, and like the first disciples, He calls us to meet with Him now! Two women experienced for the first time what countless millions have since come to know and discover to be the very heart of their life and Faith; the presence of the Risen Christ in power and authority. For Matthew, this was enough, and little more needs reporting.

Application

Discipleship issues

Awesome News at the heart of history

Easter Day is a source of real joy and eternal thanks. It is the proof that God's love does indeed triumph over Satan and all evil. It is the confirmation we need that death, the ultimate weapon of evil to separate us from our maker, has been defeated. It verifies that God is able and willing to forgive and restore His people; and so much more! There is a great deal to explore within this passage, but we must acknowledge that all of this is central to the history of God's saving in the world. Before Good Friday and Easter, the Bible story always looks forward to what God intends to do to restore His relationship with people and creation, broken at 'the Fall'. Then, after the great event, and in the books after the Gospels, Scripture proceeds first to describe the response of the disciples to the Resurrection leading up to the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1,2). Secondly, it tells the story of the preaching of the Gospel (from Acts 2 onwards), focussing on the death and resurrection of Jesus and the building up of the new people of God, the church.

Easter - Christ is alive!

There has never been another day like Easter day in all history. Christians know that the resurrection is real because they have found that Christ is indeed alive. Other people have either never come across this supreme revelation of God, or they reject it because it has never been adequately explained to them, or because they actively reject it for their own reasons. What no one can do is to dispute the fact that the events of the first Easter day fundamentally changed world history. Whilst others debate the meaning of the resurrection and pour over the details, people of faith accept the power of Easter Day and the revelation of God's love for His Son Jesus, for all people if they will receive it. Christian faith rests supremely on this; the evidence of Good Friday and Easter day provides us with all we need for faith in the all-sufficient saving power of God.

There is no end to the path of discovery and life of faith that lies after Easter day. Once opened out to the possibilities of God's resurrection power, all things become possible within the will of

God. Matthew knew this, and he concludes his Gospel not with a long description of 'what happened next', but with two pertinent and basic pieces of information. Firstly, he describes the Jewish plan to cover up the story, and exposes it as a fraud. Then, he tells us about the final meeting between Jesus and the disciples, which directed them forwards in God's strength to do His work and spread the Good News of Salvation (28:18-20). This will take up the last study in the book of Matthew.

Questions for groups

- 1. Put into your own words what you think happened at the resurrection, and what you believe it means.*
- 2. Does the appearance of angels at the resurrection help you understand what happened at Easter? Why do you think God used them to announce the resurrection?*
- 3. If you had the chance to ask God right now, what more would you like to know about the resurrection, and why do you want to know this?*

Final Prayer

All praise be to You Lord Jesus Christ. You are our Lord, You are our Saviour, You are the Risen Christ. Bring us back in spirit to the garden tomb from which You were raised, so that we too may experience Resurrection joy and gladness; and may we know more of Your power, Your Salvation and Your Love, both now and in eternity. AMEN