

RESURRECTION SUNDAY 2016

INTRODUCTION

Today we celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. The World calls today Easter Sunday, however, instead of Easter, I prefer the name "**Resurrection Sunday.**"

The word "**Easter**" actually comes from the word "*Eostre*" (*also Estre, Estara, Eastre, Ostara, and similar spellings in various sources*) which is the Anglo-Saxon name for the pagan goddess of spring and fertility. Many of the traditions used in her worship survive to this day. The Easter Bunny, a symbol of fertility, the Easter egg, painted with bright colors to represent the sunlight of spring.

Today, we look beyond the name and the pagan celebration to the true celebration of Resurrection Sunday. It's not about Easter bunnies, or Easter eggs or hot cross buns it's about celebrating the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ arose from the dead on the first Resurrection Sunday.

With that in our minds, let's journey back to that first Resurrection Sunday morning and examine four events at the tomb of Jesus that day and see what they mean for us.

MESSAGE

Matthew 28:1-15 (NLT) Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb. 2 Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. 3 His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. 4 The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint. 5 Then the angel spoke to the women. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying. 7 And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Remember what I have told you." 8 The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel's message. 9 And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to him, grasped his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid! Go tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there." 11 As the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and told the leading priests what had happened. 12 A meeting with the elders was called, and they decided to give the soldiers a large bribe. 13 They told the soldiers, "You must say, 'Jesus' disciples came during the night while we were sleeping, and they stole his body.'" 14 If the governor hears about it, we'll stand up for you so you won't get in trouble." 15 So the guards accepted the bribe and said what they were told to say. Their story spread widely among the Jews, and they still tell it today.

1. THE WOMEN VISIT THE TOMB

Matthew records the fact that two women came that morning. The other gospels mention that more than two came. As they came, they were probably sad, defeated and discouraged. They were coming to pay their last respects to the body of the Lord.

What were their motives for coming that morning?

Some came to look - Matt. 28:1 - Maybe they were coming to make sure that everything was in order at the tomb.

Some came to labour - Mk. 16:1; Lk. 24:1 - These verses teach is that some of the women came to perform one last labour of love for the Lord Jesus. They came to finish preparing His body for burial. They wanted to serve Him one last time.

Some came to linger - John 20:11-18 tells us that Mary Magdalene lingered at the tomb after the others had already gone away. She was a woman that owed much to Jesus. There had been a time in her life when she had been possessed by seven demons. Her life had been radically changed by Jesus and she loved Him more than life itself, she was one of the last at the cross, and she was the first to see Him after He had risen from the dead, She loved Him so much for what He had done for her. Surely her heart was broken that morning, but still she came to love Him and worship Him!

Can we identify with these women?

- ***Do we have a desire to be near Jesus?***
- ***Do we want to shower Him with grateful acts of love, serving Him faithfully?***
- ***Do we just want to linger in His presence, loving and worshiping Him and serve Him faithfully?***

2. THE ACTIVITY OF THE ANGEL

God sent an angel to the tomb that morning to proclaim the good news that Jesus was not dead but alive.

That angel had a special role: He came to remove obstacles!

Obstacle 1: He Rolled The Stone - Mark 16:1 tells that while the women made their way to the tomb to finish preparing the body for burial, one of their concerns was how to remove the stone.

- That stone represented the finality of death.
- That stone said, ***"He is gone forever!"***
- It was not a stone they could move on their own!

But the Lord took care of that stone! Not to let Jesus out, He was gone long before that angel arrived on the scene. The stone was rolled away so that people could look into the tomb and see that it was forever empty!

The first obstacle to faith, the rock of hopelessness has been rolled away! Once they saw the tomb was empty, hope could arise in their hearts.

Obstacle 2: He Removed the Soldiers.

The chief priests and the Pharisees were concerned that the prophecies of Jesus might actually come true, and they wanted a guard to be posted at the tomb.

- So they sealed it with Pilate's seal and they posted a company of guards at the door.
- That detachment of soldiers stood as an obstacle between the saints and their entrance into the tomb of Jesus.

However, when this angel appeared these battle hardened men fainted at his feet like a bunch of teenage girls at a rock concert!

The second obstacle to faith, the enemy's forces, trying to keep people from believing, was removed!

Obstacle 3: He removed their unbelief: As this angel began to speak to the women that morning, the greatest obstacle of all was removed - **unbelief!** His message inspired them to believe in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead!

Today the Lord wants to remove those same obstacles from our lives:

- **Obstacle 1:** *The rock of hopelessness has been rolled away! We have hope and a future because of the resurrected Christ.*
- **Obstacle 2:** *The enemy's forces, trying to keep people from believing the truth. This morning the Lord wants to open blinded eyes to see the truth that there is an empty tomb. Our King is risen!*
- **Obstacle 3:** *The obstacle of unbelief! Is there still unbelief in our hearts or do we truly believe that Jesus has risen from the dead?*

The angel also came to remind them of important truths:

1. V. 5 **Of The Past** - They were reminded of the crucifixion. Of course, these ladies needed no such reminder, they had both been there. Still, the fact of His death is emphasized. This reminds us of the importance of the death of Jesus on the cross. His death provided the sacrifice that was needed to cleanse sinners from their sins and to make them right with God.

2. V. 6 **Of The Present** - The angel told them them, **"You are here at this tomb, but Jesus isn't! He is risen!"** This was the greatest proclamation ever to fall upon human ears!

- ***His death was the perfect, eternal payment for sin,***
- ***but His resurrection was God's receipt for the full amount!***

You see, a dead Savior can save no one! But a living Savior can offer salvation to all who come to Him by faith.

When Jesus died on the cross, He said, "***It is finished***".

3. V. 6 **Of The Promise** - They were reminded that His resurrection should not have taken them by surprise! After all, it was what He said that He would do all along.

4. V. 6 **Of The Proof** - The angel's invitation was for them to look into the tomb and see for themselves that Jesus was gone! Later, when the Peter and John arrived there, John recorded the fact that the linen cloths that had been wrapped around Christ's body were lying there like an empty cocoon, while the napkin that had been about His face was folded in a place by itself. This sight caused John to believe in the resurrection.

The arrangement of the grave clothes are of such importance:

- First, there was no sign of human intervention. If someone had taken the body, they could not have removed it through the grave clothes. They would have taken the body with them still wrapped in the cloths.
- Neither would they have taken the time to fold the napkin, but it too would have been taken with the body, or at least it would have been discarded in a haphazard manner. In short, the empty tomb was a scene of perfect order.

This served as proof that the resurrection had taken place.

5. V. 7-8 **Of The Plan** - They were to go and share the good news that Jesus was risen from the dead. Those disciples who were cowering in fear that the next cross might be their own were to receive the glorious news that Jesus had conquered death and was alive forevermore!

What a glorious message those women were given that day! It was a message of hope. A message of life. A message of victory. It was a message that every one needed to hear. It still is!

- May we never forget that the message of that tomb is as fresh today as it was then!
- Jesus is still alive and people trapped in the bondage of fear and sin still need to hear about it.
- May we do as they did and carry the message with swift feet and joyful hearts to a world that needs desperately to hear about a risen Lord!

3. THE APPEARANCE OF THE SAVIOUR

As the women were going to tell the others, Jesus Himself met them in the way.

- He came to give them a personal word of encouragement and hope.
- He came to them personally so that they might know firsthand that He had indeed risen from the dead.

It is a wonderful thing to hear from others what Jesus can do. But, there is nothing like meeting Him for yourself! When they met Him, they were overcome joy and they fell at His feet in worship! That is the natural reaction of those who love Him!

When the Lord spoke to these ladies, it was to **comfort their hearts** and **confirm their mission**. He assured them that all was well and that the time to be afraid had forever passed.

As we celebrate Christ's resurrection today, Jesus wants to do the same for us!

- ***He wants to comfort us, no matter what we face. He is our risen King. We rise up with Him and live in Him. He will never leave us nor forsake us and He has a mission for us.***
- ***He wants to remind us of our mission – "Tell others that I'm alive!"***

THE ALLEGATIONS OF THE ENEMY

Not everyone who heard about the events at the tomb were overjoyed. We see in the closing verses of our text that the enemies of the cross and of the resurrection were already gathering to try and find a way around what had happened that day. The enemy still tries to convince people that Christ's resurrection is a lie, but we know there is an empty tomb; we know that Jesus is risen from the dead, and we know by personal experience that He reigns in our heart.

CONCLUSION

Today we have remembered the events recorded on that first resurrection day:

The women:

- Some came to look.
- Some came to labour.
- Some came to linger.

The angel came to remove obstacles:

- ***Obstacle 1: The rock of hopelessness has been rolled away! We have hope and a future because of the resurrected Christ.***

- **Obstacle 2:** *The enemy's forces, trying to keep people from believing the truth. This morning the Lord wants to open blinded eyes to see the truth that there is an empty tomb. Our King is risen!*
- **Obstacle 3:** *The obstacle of unbelief! Is there still unbelief in our hearts or do we truly believe that Jesus has risen from the dead?*

And to remind us:

- **Of The Past** - *They were reminded that Jesus died for them.*
- **Of The Present** - *"You are here at this tomb, but Jesus isn't! He is risen!"*
- **Of The Promise** - *Christ's resurrection should not have been a surprise.*
- **Of The Proof** - *The empty tomb and shroud.*
- **Of The Plan** - *To share the good news that Jesus is risen from the dead.*

Jesus met them personally

- To comfort them and encourage them in the midst of their situation.
- To remind them of their mission to tell others.

The allegations of the enemy

- The enemy wants to hide the truth
- But we have the Risen Christ living in our hearts!

This was the first Resurrection Day, it won't be the last! Because He lives, those who place their faith in Him will live too! Those in the graves will come forth one day, **1 Thessalonians 4:15-17** We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. 17 Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever.

Praise God for that day when death lost the battle with Life forever! Praise God for the day the battle was forever won for you and I! Praise God for that first resurrection day and the promise of the second resurrection day for which we joyfully long.