

Startled into Life – The Surprise of Resurrection

Thomas Robinson, *The Life of Resurrection 2*, March 31, 2013

Matthew 27:55 – 28:10

[Friday, after Jesus' crucifixion] ⁵⁵ There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, ⁵⁶ among whom were **Mary Magdalene** and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

⁵⁷ When it was **evening**, there came a rich **man from Arimathea, named Joseph**, who also was a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸ He went to **Pilate** and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. ⁵⁹ And **Joseph took the body** and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud ⁶⁰ and **laid it in his own new tomb**, which he had cut in the rock. And he **rolled a great stone** to the entrance of the tomb and went away. ⁶¹ **Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.**

[Saturday] ⁶² The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate ⁶³ and said, "*Sir, we remember how **that impostor** said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.'* ⁶⁴ *Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first.*"

⁶⁵ Pilate said to them, "*You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.*" ⁶⁶ So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

[Sunday] **28:**¹ 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.** ² And 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. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.

⁵ But the angel said to the women, "***Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then 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.***"

⁸ So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and said, "***Greetings!***" And they came up and 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 there they will see me.***"

Isaiah 26:19

Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!

Ephesians 5:14

"Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and the Messiah will shine upon you!"

John 5:25-26

²⁵ "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself."

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* ¹⁹ *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,* ²⁰ *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*"

From Resignation to Astonishment

To begin with, Jesus was dead. It was not what his followers expected, but it was something they could understand. So far from the events of a week ago: *"Hosanna, to the Son of David."* The women disciples have watched: betrayal, trial, scourging, nails, cross, mocking, cry, darkness, death. Extravagant hopes crash. Now they watch as Joseph honors Jesus in burial. They loved him. They will never forget him. They had followed, supported. It was good. *"We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel."* (Lk 24:21) But now they can only visit the tomb, grieve their loss.

The priests gave the disciples too much credit. None of the eleven expected anything but what always happened when a messianic pretender got executed. The eleven knew that none of them could take Jesus' place. They were too stunned to plan. The tomb was sealed, guarded. One impostor stopped. Life sank back into its ruts.

Then the event happened. Jesus' resurrection changed everything, every disciple.

Nothing that Jesus said or did, from the Sermon on the Mount to the Cross, would now be remembered if that event had not happened.

What Is Happening?

We get raw, diverse memories, not a well-prepared narrative. Mark: a youth sitting in the tomb. But Matthew has heard other memories: an Angel like lightening. Mt wants it clear this is God's action. God says, this is my story, my very self.

But no angel or earthquake could be half so astonishing as Jesus' resurrection itself.

Jesus had raised Lazarus – death was rolled back, healed – Lazarus would die again. Now Jesus had not rolled death back but conquered it. He had come out the other side into resurrection life, transformed. This was the resurrection of the age to come, promised and hoped for but now come into the present. The end of the story now!

This was an event that no one expected. It forced a new understanding of Jesus, death and life, God and humanity, meaning, hope. It said the whole story of Israel has come to a wonderful climax. God has come just as he promised, but surprisingly!

Did it happen? If we believe the world is a closed, materialistic system with no God and no possible action of God within his creation; then no, it simply couldn't. But something happened! From Mary Magdalene on, the first disciples testified by word and action, life and death, that Jesus was raised from the dead never to die again. And they were transformed. They knew it was possible only as God's creative work in his own wonderful, complex world. It was ultimately a question of faith in God.

Waking Up to New Life: "Don't Be Afraid!"

No one experienced Jesus' resurrection as just an issue of factual belief. When the disciples were confronted with this astonishing event, the whole world looked different. It woke them up. No stupor of hopeless alienation and resignation. They could learn and grow and live fearlessly. Everything matters. We matter. Yes, we struggle, but God has taken on our sin and pain in Jesus' death and has created new death-conquering resurrection life that we begin to share by his Spirit even now.

Matthew writes his entire Gospel as a testimony to that life awakened by Jesus' resurrection. Jesus is not just a past historical figure but a living, present Lord. He gives life now. His words and actions challenge us on the deepest level. He is alive and active with us in every twist and turn of life – leading us into God's perfect life.