

Special Focus Session

April 17, 2022

JESUS LIVES—AND YOU CAN TOO

Matthew 28:1-10

Matthew 28 is one of my favorite chapters in the Bible. It begins with the resurrection and ends with the Great Commission. In so doing, it demonstrates the end of Jesus' earthly ministry and the beginning of ours.

In the previous lessons (from John's Gospel), we followed the Lord as He gave final instructions to His disciples. In them, He explained what would take place and encouraged them in their fears and doubts. But once the soldiers arrived in the garden and Jesus was taken away to be crucified, they surely thought all was lost. What they needed was a miracle...and a miracle is what they got!

Cosmic events (1-4). Verse 1 establishes the timetable of events. The other gospel writers also included the timestamp. By all accounts, it was still dark (but just barely so) on the first day of the week. Regarding this, one of my favorite commentators, Matthew Henry (c. 1700) said, "On the first day of the first week God commanded the light to shine out of darkness. On this day did He who is the Light of the world, shine out of the darkness of the grave." Such a momentous event was appropriately accompanied by cosmic events as well. An earthquake accompanied the angel and the rolling away of the stone (v. 2). The language takes the form of a reflection, indicating that this event had already taken place sometime prior to the ladies' arrival. A week earlier, Jesus told His detractors the "stones would cry out" to welcome Him to Jerusalem. Here, the very earth cried out to welcome Him back to life. The angel's appearance is noted in detail (v. 3) as was the soldier guards' reaction (v. 4). These details add to the historical validity of the resurrection event. For reflection: *Besides offering more historical validity to the event, are there other reasons that the gospel writers included such details here (and elsewhere) in Scripture?*

Angelic commands (5-7). The role of *angels* (as reflected in the meaning of the word itself) is primarily that of *messenger*. And that is the role most clearly reflected here. Notice first, the angel's *knowledge*: he knew why they were there; knew who they were looking for; knew where the Lord was and was not; knew that Jesus was risen; and knew what message to convey to both these visiting ladies and to the remaining disciples. Second, notice the angel's *commands*: do not fear; come and see; go and tell. Because of this event and its inclusion in God's word, we have the same knowledge as the angel, and we are charged with the same commandments as the disciples. During Easter Sunday celebrations all around the globe, pastors and teachers will be expressing those same truths to their congregations. Do not fear! Come and see! Go and tell! For reflection: *Every Sunday commemorates resurrection day, and every Sunday gives opportunities to share the good news of Christ. How well do you think your congregation follows this example? What do you think hinders us from being more effective in our message?*

Worship encounter (8-10). In my classes, I often mention the five functions of the church: 1) worship; 2) evangelism and missions; 3) discipleship; 4) service; and 5) fellowship. While all of these functions are important and necessary, I always emphasize that the greatest function is that of worship (see John 4:23). In fact, I tell my own congregation that if we gather together for any good thing, but fail to worship, then we have failed. These ladies had been given instructions and

ran with both fear and joy to carry them out (v. 8). Yet in all the emotion of the morning, and with their eager desire to get back to the disciples with the good news, these ladies stopped in the presence of the Lord, fell at His feet, and worshipped Him. Even the angelic instructions they had received involving the *plans* of Jesus took second place to the opportunity they had to worship the *person* of Jesus. For reflection: *Can you think of times when you have been so involved in church priorities that you failed in your personal priority of worship? How can we guard against making “work” more important than worship?*