

GRAND RESURRECTION

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.

Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.

As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (John 20:1-17).

The hours of Saturday night passed silently until the darkest time of all, just before dawn. And all the while, Jesus lay as a prisoner of death in the grave. The great stone stood firmly in its place, the Roman seal remained unbroken, and the Roman guards continued on duty. Suddenly a great earthquake shook the land at the approach of an angel from heaven, surrounded by God's glory. All the soldiers fell to the ground as if they were dead.

The guards saw Rome's official seal to the tomb shattered as the angel rolled away the heavy stone as if it were a pebble. Then they heard the angel speak at the entrance to the cave: "Son of God, come out! Your Father calls You." Immediately Jesus rose, walked out of the grave, and proclaimed, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Through the reeling of the earth, the flashing of lightning, and the roaring of thunder, the eyes of the soldiers remained riveted on Christ's radiant face. Was this the One they had seen standing as an unresisting prisoner in the judgment hall before Pilate and Herod? the One for whom they'd made a crown of thorns? the One whose back had been lacerated with a scourge? the One they had nailed to the cross? the One they had mocked? the One the priests taunted, wagging their heads as they said, "He saved others; he cannot save himself" (Matthew 27:42)?⁷⁴

Now in awe and fear, they knew that nothing could hold Him prisoner of death. If they had piled mountains upon mountains over His grave, He would still have come out alive!

As the glory of the angels vanished in the first glimmerings of dawn, the soldiers struggled to their feet, stumbling like drunks, and headed into Jerusalem, telling the news to everyone they met. As they were making their way to Pilate, the report came to the Jewish authorities, and the chief priests sent for the soldiers to be brought to them first.

Still trembling from the events at the grave, their faces still colorless, the Roman guards testified convincingly that Jesus had been raised from the dead. They told the whole story exactly as they had witnessed it. There had been no time or motivation to speak anything but the truth. As the priests listened, their faces went deathly pale. Caiaphas tried to speak. His lips moved, but no sound came. Ultimately, as the soldiers turned to leave, Caiaphas found his voice and said, "Wait! Don't tell anyone what you saw."

Then the priests made up a lie for the soldiers. "Report that His disciples came during the night and stole His body while you were asleep." What an unbelievable lie! If the soldiers were asleep when the disciples stole the body, how could they have known? And if the disciples had stolen His body, surely the priests would be the first to condemn them! The soldiers were horrified at the thought of bringing upon themselves the charge of sleeping on duty. That was a crime for which they could pay with their lives. To pacify the soldiers, the priests promised them protection and hush money if they followed their instructions.⁷⁵

Back at the garden tomb very early that Sunday morning the women who had stood at the cross made their way to the tomb, carrying spices to anoint Jesus' body. The thought that He might have risen from the dead didn't enter their minds. As they approached the garden, they asked each other who

would roll away the great stone that blocked the entrance. They knew they couldn't. Then they felt the earth begin to tremble beneath their feet and saw the sky illuminate with glory. When they reached the tomb, the stone already had been moved, and they found no body inside.

Mary Magdalene, who had reached the tomb first, wasted no time in running to tell the disciples. Moments later, when the other women arrived, they sensed they were not alone. Looking around, they saw someone sitting by the tomb. It was the angel who had rolled away the stone.

The brightness surrounding the angel frightened them, and they turned to leave. The angel's words stopped them in their tracks. "Don't be afraid; I know you are looking for Jesus. He isn't here! He's alive! Come and look at the place where His body rested. Then go quickly, and tell His disciples."

Only then did the women recall His words about rising from the dead, and they realized they had no need of the expensive anointing spices they had brought.

Mary, not having heard the news of Jesus' resurrection, reached Peter and John before the other women and shared the shocking news that someone had taken the body of Jesus. So the three of them ran back to the tomb and confirmed what Mary had told them. They saw the shroud there, but no Jesus.

When Peter and John left the tomb and returned to Jerusalem, Mary lingered behind, overwhelmed with grief and wondering who could tell her what had happened to Jesus' body. In the midst of this perplexity, her eyes filled with tears, she heard a voice asking, "Why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?" (John 20:15).⁷⁶

Through her tears Mary could see a figure and presumed it to be the gardener. She asked, "If you took the body away, tell me where you put it." Mary feared the gardener might have thought that this rich man's grave was too honorable a

place for someone crucified as a criminal. If that were the case, she would find an appropriate place. Her mind went immediately to the tomb where she and her sister had buried Lazarus before Jesus raised him from the dead.

Then Jesus addressed her again, this time by her name. “Mary!”

She knew instantly this was not the gardener—it was the resurrected Jesus! For a moment she forgot He’d been crucified, and rushed to embrace His feet, exclaiming, “Master!”

Jesus raised His hand and said, “Not now. I must ascend to My Father. Go to My disciples and tell them I am going to My Father, your Father; My God, your God.”

Mary left quickly to share this incredible message.⁷⁷

As long as Jesus lay in the grave, Satan hoped that Jesus would not take up His life again. On Friday afternoon Satan claimed the Lord’s body and set his own angels to guard the tomb. He felt bitterly angry when the angel from heaven arrived on Sunday morning and scared away his angels! As Satan watched Jesus step out of the grave alive, he knew that his kingdom was doomed and that he would ultimately die.

The priests became the tools of Satan when they arranged for Jesus to be put to death, and on Sunday morning they were still entirely in his power. When they heard the report of the resurrection, they were afraid of the reaction of the people and felt that their own lives were in danger. Their only hope was to try to cast Jesus as an impostor and to deny His resurrection. So they bribed the soldiers, secured Pilate’s silence, and spread their lies as far as they could.

However, there were some witnesses they could not silence. Many people had heard the soldiers’ startling report on their way into the city. Also, there were others who had been raised from the dead at the same time that Jesus rose. Then Jesus Himself appeared to some, confirming that He was alive. Thus, from that day on, it was the greatest dread

of the priests that they themselves might sometime encounter Jesus face to face.

Just as Jesus' words about His death had been fulfilled, so now were His words about His resurrection. He had told His disciples, "I lay down my life, in order to take it up again. . . . I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again." And to the priests He had said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 10:17, 18; 2:19).

Outside the broken tomb of Joseph of Arimathea Jesus had stated in triumph, "I am the resurrection, and the life." Only God could speak such words. All creatures live by the will and power of God who made them. We are all dependents; we are all recipients of life from God. Only He could honestly say, "I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again." In His divinity Jesus had demonstrated His power to break the shackles of death.

At His resurrection Jesus raised a great number of people who had died. These were people who had worked for God and had given their lives to speak the truth about Him. The earthquake at the time of Jesus' death had broken open those graves, and when Jesus arose, they rose too. During His ministry Jesus had raised the dead on more than one occasion. He raised the son of the widow of Nain, the ruler's daughter, and Lazarus. But none of them were raised to live forever. In time each of them died again. The people who came to life at the time of Jesus' resurrection, however, rose to immortality and ascended with Jesus at His ascension as trophies of His victory over death and the grave.

To the believer, Jesus is both resurrection and life. He said, "I am come that they might have life, and . . . have it more abundantly" (John 10:10, KJV). In Him everything that has been lost through sin will be restored. Life is in Him, and He will bring back to life everyone who chooses Him as Savior. In fact, the moment we accept Jesus, we have everlasting life.

Referring to the Lord's Supper, He said, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day" (John 6:54). To the Christian death is a sleep, a time of rest. All Jesus' friends are safe in His care, and when He returns they will be with Him in His glory forever.

At the last day the voice of Jesus will be heard from heaven. It will penetrate graves and open them, and those who "sleep in Jesus" will rise to life. At His own resurrection only a few graves were opened, but at His second coming all His sleeping friends will hear His voice, and rise to life and immortality.⁷⁸

The promise of Jesus' second coming remained fresh in the minds of the disciples all their lives. They knew that the same Jesus they had watched ascending into heaven would return. The same voice that had said "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20) would one day welcome them into the kingdom of heaven.⁷⁹

The disciples now understood the work they had been commissioned to do. They knew they must share the truths Jesus had taught them. They must tell the story of Jesus life, death, and resurrection, the mysteries of salvation, and the power of God to forgive sins. Through the Holy Spirit's power they would share these themes everywhere.⁸⁰