

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST
New Perspective, Power, and Purpose!
Matthew 28:1-20

We live in days of instant news. With the advent of the internet, CNN, and around the clock news reporting, earth-shaking events are brought into our homes almost immediately. But in times past news of great events often had to be passed on by word of mouth or some other archaic means. Such was the case in nineteenth century England as the people anxiously awaited news of the battle of Waterloo, where Wellington faced Napoleon. A signalman was stationed atop Winchester Cathedral. He was to watch the sea for an incoming message, which he would pass on to another man on a hill. The message would then be relayed from hill to hill until finally the outcome of the battle reached London and beyond.

At long last, a ship was sighted through the fog, which lay thick on the English Channel. The ship's signalman sent the first word – *Wellington*. Then the next word – *defeated*. Then the fog closed in and the ship could no longer be seen at all. “*Wellington defeated!*” The disastrous message was sent all across England, and a deadly gloom enshrouded the land.

After a few hours, the fog lifted. The message from the ship was relayed again, this time in full: “*Wellington defeated the enemy!*” Now as the complete message raced across the English countryside the nation rejoiced.

When Jesus died on the cross and was buried in the tomb, the message the disciples got was – *Jesus defeated!* The giant colossus Death that stalks the land slaying all the sons of men had finally slain the Son of Man. As Michael Wilkins remarks, “The shadow of death had claimed the land – not just in Galilee of the Gentiles, but throughout the earth. The bright hope of salvation that Jesus announced seemed to be extinguished.” Into the Master's tomb had gone all the hopes and dreams that these men had cherished for the last three years.

But wait! What's this? After three days the dense fog of defeat and disillusionment lifted and the full message came through – “Jesus defeated the enemy!” What did the angel say? “*He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the places where he lay*” (28:6). O yes! He is risen indeed!

Human perspectives can be so faulty. Too many people fail to look past the cross of Good Friday and the occupied tomb of Easter Saturday. Many are ready to acknowledge the historicity of the crucifixion. Others still look in vain for an occupied tomb. I have discussed this point with professors of theology who do not believe in the physical resurrection of our Lord. Their perspective of the scene at the tomb is enshrouded in a kind of intellectual fog. They're simply not seeing the whole picture. It took the women at the tomb a while to see the whole picture. The inescapable irony for them was that as they approached the tomb of our Lord, the soldiers, “the ones assigned to guard the dead themselves appear dead while the dead one has been made alive” (Donald Hagner). Human perspectives can be so faulty. The women's reaction to the mighty angel, the gaping mouth of the empty tomb, and the prostrate soldiers is a reaction of fear. These women are literally going where no man has gone before!

I'll say it one more time: how tragic are faulty perspectives of the events of Easter! If we are to fully enter into the Christian life in all its richness, then we must come away from this weekend with a new **perspective**, a new **power**, and a new **purpose**.

A New Perspective

That's what happened to these women. They arrived at the tomb filled with sadness, a sadness that would deepen into outright fear. But the angel reassures the women, and then commissions them to go quickly and tell the disciples, "*He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him. Now I have told you.*"

Look at verse 8. As the women hurry away from the tomb they are still afraid, yet filled with joy. Suddenly Jesus Himself meets them. And what is their response? They clasp the Master's feet and worship Him. This is always the response of those who look past the cross and the occupied tomb to the empty tomb – joy and worship! The presence of the risen Jesus turns fear into worship!

The women have a new perspective. For the first time they see the whole picture, and their lives will never be the same. Their future now includes Jesus. He is going before them, no doubt preparing the way. Does your future include Jesus? Do you sense that He goes before you preparing your way? If your answer is no, then you need a new perspective.

I love what the Master says to these women in v. 10: "*Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.*" Did you hear what Jesus called the disciples? "My brothers!" Isn't this beautiful? What an honour! This is as good if not better than what our Lord had said while en route to the Garden of Gethsemane. "*I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you*" (John 15:15). True disciples of the Lord become friends of the Lord and even brothers unto the Lord.

This is perfectly consistent with what the Lord said earlier on that occasion when someone told him that his mother and brothers were waiting outside, wanting to speak with him. Pointing to his disciples he said, "*Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother*" (Matt. 12:49-50). This ought to give us an entirely new perspective as we celebrate the resurrection. We are all brothers and sisters in one family of faith. What's more, all who truly believe in Jesus as the Risen Savior his disciples, his brothers and sisters. This means that we can face tomorrow and plan for an eternity together.

A New Power

But the resurrection means more than merely a new perspective. It means a new power for life. I challenge anyone to show me a power that can come close to the power of the Lord. Even before his crucifixion no one could withstand his power. When he was arrested in the Garden, he asked the mob, "*Who is it you want?*" "*Jesus of Nazareth,*" they replied. "*I am he,*" Jesus said. And John records that when Jesus said, "*I am he,*" they drew back and fell to the ground (Jn. 18:6).

Look again at the empty tomb. The mighty angel has rolled away the stone – not so that Jesus could get out – but so that the disciples could get in. There is a violent earthquake. The soldiers shake and become like dead men! It reminds us of the words of the prophet Malachi, words that George Fredrick Handel so beautifully incorporated into his *Messiah*, "*Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire*" (Mal. 3:2).

This is the One who has all power and authority. There is no power like this known to humans. We do know something of the massive power of the atomic bomb and of intercontinental ballistic missiles that wipe out entire cities. We are able to harness the mighty power of Saturn rockets that can

launch shuttles into space. But with all that power at our fingertips, we do not know how to raise someone from the dead. It took the power of God Almighty to raise Jesus from the dead, and that is but a portion of his power.

What does this mean for us? It means that as we live with a resurrection perspective we must focus on the One who is risen so that we can tap into resurrection power. Then, as Michael Wilkins so ably puts it, “We will have the power to accomplish anything to which Jesus call us – controlling our temper, overcoming addictions, remaining faithful to our commitments, maintaining patience ...” in times of testing. Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli remind us that:

“Love is stronger than death, goodness and power are ultimate allies, not enemies; life wins in the end; God has touched us right here where we are and has defeated our last enemy; we are not cosmic orphans ... If only we did not keep Christ mummified in a casket labeled ‘history’ ... he would set our lives and world afire as powerfully as he did two millennia ago, and our new pagan empire would sit up, take notice, rubs its eyes, wonder and convert a second time.”

Who among us does not secretly yearn for this power? If we had it our churches would be full and our jails would be empty. If we had it there would be revival in our land. And that brings me to my last point.

A New Purpose

The resurrection not only bequeaths to us a new perspective and a new power for life, it also gives us a new purpose for life. It would be hard to improve on the words of F. Dale Bruner:

“Has anything like the resurrection of Jesus Christ happened on our planet? Christians do not believe so. Precisely because it is the event par excellence, it follows almost naturally that the great responsibility of those who know this event is, of course, Mission. The resurrection does not happen for its own sake, and Matthew’s gospel does not end, therefore, with the resurrection; it ends with the Great Commission of world-wide mission.”

Because Jesus lives, we can face tomorrow, not only with a new perspective and a new power, but with a compelling and impelling purpose for our lives.

Jesus did not come to make us keepers of the aquarium. He came to make us fishers of men! He said, “*He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters*” (Matt. 12:30). There is no neutrality when it comes to being a disciple of Jesus. We are either part of the problem or part of the solution. He came to seek and to save the lost. We are either working with him to gather souls into the Kingdom or else we are having a negative influence – scattering as he calls it.

Let’s finish by taking one final look this morning at the last sentence in Matthew’s gospel. “*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*” (28:20). Could we ask for anything more? Does this not furnish us with a new perspective on life? Does not the presence of the Almighty provide us with a new power for life? Does not the sheer joy that comes to us through that divine presence give us an impelling new purpose for our lives?

The fog has cleared. The message is now complete. “**Jesus defeated the enemy! He is risen!**” So let us take this grand and glorious message to all the hilltops and high places where we live.