

The Appearance of the Risen Jesus to Some Women (Mat.27.55-28.15)

WestminsterReformedChurch.org

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12-2-2007

Matthew 27:55 - 28:15 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. ⁶² 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. ^{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. ⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ 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." ¹¹ While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. ¹² And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers ¹³ and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' ¹⁴ And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." ¹⁵ So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

Introduction

Matthew 27.55-28.15 is the textual unit before us for today's sermon. This is one of the largest sections that we have covered in a single message; so, you might wonder why we are approaching the Gospel in this way. Why would anyone think that this unit should not be broken apart? Note some things from the reading that push in the direction of this unity. In general, the entire section unfolds by references to some women. 1) While Jesus hung on the cross, when He died, and when the soldiers proclaimed the truth that truly He is the Son of God, they were there and they witnessed all that occurred (27.55, there were also many women there, looking on). They followed Christ from Galilee; they are His disciples who ministered to Him; they seem to be the stable ones; they are loyal; they are there while the dead body of our Lord hangs on the cross till evening. 2) When Joseph takes Jesus down from the cross and puts Him in the tomb, the women were there, **sitting opposite the tomb** (27.61). 3) Two of these women encounter the angel that opened the tomb of Christ (28.1). 4) Running from the angel (with joy) they meet Jesus. Matthew's "behold" indicates that this is the heart of this narrative: **behold, Jesus met them** (28.9). 5) Finally, Matthew intertwines this appearance of Christ with the story of the stolen body (28.11-15) by telling us that while the women were on their way to find the disciples some of the soldiers went to the chief priests and out of that meeting came the stolen body story.

Everything in the account from 27.55-28.15 unfolds by reference to some women; this account is like an arrow pointing to and leading to Jesus' appearance to the apostles. The connectedness compels reflection on the text as a unit, even *including the deceptive actions* of the chief priests and elders. Therefore, the title for this message is "The Appearance of the Risen Jesus to Some Women." Since the story line leads up to that appearance and then away from it, we have two points of outline: The background of His appearance and the details of His appearance. At that point, we are ready to wrestle with implications and applications.

1A. The background of His appearance

The following things give us the setting (or background) in which Jesus showed Himself alive from the grave: the reality of His death, the timing of the event, and an encounter with an angel. By viewing what led up to His appearance, we will be able to understand the appearance itself better.

1) The reality of His death

The fact of Jesus' death is critical in the account. The one who appears to these women is the one who died on the cross (27.50). The settled fact of the death of Christ has its *confirmation*

in the burial of His body in a tomb and in the securing of the tomb by Roman soldiers.

a) Burial in a tomb

Thus, a rich man who was a follower of Christ by the name of Joseph gets the permission of Pilate to bury Jesus. All the details confirm the death of Christ: Pilate's release of the body, the customary wrapping of a dead body in white linen for burial in a tomb, the placement of the body into the tomb, rolling a large rock over the opening, and the fact that the women observe not only His hanging there dead on the cross for hours, but they also observe His burial. Thus, we read: 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 (27.55-61).**

The allusion is unmistakable here to the fulfillment of the prophecy that they would place the Messiah not only with the wicked, but also with the rich in His death (Isa. 53.9, **And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth**). Messiah is not violent nor is He a deceiver.

b) Securing of the tomb

Interestingly, the actions of the chief priests and the Pharisees confirm the death of Jesus and serve as background to His appearance: They go to Pilate (who has many visitors during this time so soon after he washed his hands of the entire mess) and they get his authorization to place guards at the tomb. They say some remarkable things to Pilate. They call Jesus an impostor, a deceiver, and they tell Pilate that when Jesus was alive He spoke of His resurrection after three days: ⁶² **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' (27.62-63).** Consequently, they want Pilate to authorize the securing of the tomb to prevent the disciples of Jesus from stealing His body and claiming His resurrection. If that happened then, they say, the fraud at the end would be far worse that it was at the beginning: 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" (27.64).** Pilate gave his permission, and through all of these actions, the leaders confirm that Jesus is in fact, and on their view thankfully, dead, buried, and no longer a threat. He is no longer a threat as long as no one believes what He said about His resurrection after three days. Therefore, they have soldiers seal and guard the tomb to eliminate the possibility of a stolen body and a stolen body hoax (27.65-66).

There is no question regarding the fact of His death (this speaks to the interesting context back then in which it was so clear and evident that Jesus is divine that many denied His humanity and with it His death; it is anti-Christ to deny that Christ has come in the flesh, 1 Jn. 2.18).

2) The timing of the event

Another part of the background to the appearance of Jesus to the women is the timing of the event. Literally, in 28.1, Matthew says, "after the seven and into first of the seven." In other words, after the seven days, that is, after the seventh day Sabbath and early on the first day of the seven days, that is, on Sunday the first day of the week, two of the women mentioned earlier went to see the tomb. That is all that Matthew tells us. By minimizing what they did and reducing it to simply coming to see the tomb, the narrator places emphasis on what? What do you think? He emphasizes the day of the event. The day that Jesus appeared to these women is Sunday underlined and in bold print.

3) The encounter with an angel

Furthermore, preparation for His appearance comes by means of an angelic encounter that, practically speaking, scared the guards to death: 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. The**

women, however, do not fall into a death-like stupor, and the angel speaks to them with words of comfort, proclamation of the resurrection, invitation to see the empty tomb, and commission: ⁵ **But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ 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"** (28.5-7). With this encounter fresh in their minds, with the announcement of Jesus' resurrection sinking deep into their souls, and with the commission ringing in their ears, they run from the tomb to find the disciples. They do so with fear and great joy as Matthew says in verse 8: **So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.**

Accordingly, the women are on a mission to make a report to the apostles. They are running to find them. They are running from the empty tomb of Jesus. They saw Jesus die on the cross and they saw Him buried in this tomb. Now, they are obeying the command of an angel to go and tell. Fear, awe, and joy flooded their souls because of this angelic encounter that focused all of their attention on Jesus who was crucified (28.5). The angel proclaimed the fact of Jesus' resurrection and invited them to look into the empty tomb (28.6). Then, he commanded them to go and testify to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Notably, the angel commands them to testify of Jesus' resurrection *to His disciples*. They are to tell them three things: a) that He has arisen from the dead, b) He is going before them into Galilee, and c) there they will see Him.

The reality of Jesus' death confirmed by His burial and the actions of the people who killed him, an emphasis on the day as Sunday, and the encounter with this angel who announces the resurrection of Christ and displays the empty tomb are *sub-points* as background to the main point of the narrative, which is the appearance of the risen Jesus to some women. Let us now turn to the details of His appearance, which we must understand in light of the background.

2A. The details of His appearance

There are five things here: a greeting, worship, comfort, commission, and aftermath.

1) A Greeting

With outstanding understatement, the writer tells us that as they went running along, Jesus met *them* and greeted *them*: ⁹ **And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!"** (28.8). There is grace in the direction of things here.

2) Worship

And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. In context of Jewish monotheism and in context of the fact that even angels refuse worship, this giving and receiving of worship is itself testimony to the resurrection of Jesus as the seal of His exalted person and station.

3) Comfort

¹⁰ **Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid."** What do you make of this way of calming by commandment? There is a basic fact that we ought to face when we worry, fear, or become depressed. What is it? The basic fact is that it is our duty to stop it and turn away from it. How can it be so simple (surely it is more complicated)? It is that simple if you have your heart set on the Lord Jesus in worship!

4) Commission,

Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me" (28.9-10). Clearly, this interruption of their marathon is not intended to distract them from their mission because in the brief encounter, Jesus picks up on the command of the angel and sharpens it. The angel them to give this promise to the disciples: **"he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him"** (28.7). Jesus sharpens the promise of the angel into a command: **go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me** (28.10). They will see Him but to do so they must go to Galilee.

He calls His disciples brothers (**tell my brothers**). They forsook Him, but He never, for a moment, forsook them.

5) Aftermath

The women ran from the tomb to find the disciples. Jesus interrupted them momentarily, but encouraged them to finish the task the angel commanded them to do. As they resume, no doubt running with a deeper sense of awe and joy, the chief priests acknowledge the fact of the empty tomb by offering an alternate explanation, by fabricating a stolen body story. They do this as damage control when the guards report the events that took place at the tomb ¹¹ **While they [the women] were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place.** ¹² **And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers** ¹³ **and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.'** ¹⁴ **And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble."** ¹⁵ **So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day (28.11-15).**

Matthew records the response of the soldiers when the angel scarred them into a death-like stupor. He cites this part of what happened to give background to the stolen body story. Clearly, they go to the chief priests in a posture of weakness. Granted, they were at the disposal of the chief priests, but they were under the authority of Pilate. It makes sense that they did not go to Pilate with a report that they saw an angel and in fear of him they trembled and became like dead men (28.4). What happened to them sends them to the religious leaders and not to Pilate. They failed at the job that the chief priests gave them to do: guard the body; do not let the body of Jesus Christ leave that tomb!

Moreover, they report what happened (**all that had taken place**, 28.11), which means that they tell the priests that an angel caused an earthquake, rolled back the large stone from the opening to the tomb, and sat on the stone triumphantly. We do not have the exact words of their report. The entire account suggests that their fear was short-lived since they could easily lie about the event when paid to do so.

To them, something religious, mystical, and spiritual took place at the tomb, but these soldiers are not believers in Christ, even though they saw the angel and the empty tomb. However, they do not lie to the priests. From their perspective, something unusual, something religious happened in connection with the dead body of the religious person, Jesus, whom they sealed in the tomb that they guarded because of the fear of religious deception. There is a religious-mystical-spiritual flavor to this situation in which these pagan Roman soldiers find themselves. Thus, they go to the priests.

To be sure, they would be ill disposed to go to Pilate with the admission that they failed to do their job to keep the body of Jesus in that tomb. But can you imagine these men telling Pilate (or their commanding officers) *all* that happened at the tomb? No doubt, Pilate would have their heads in a basket as much for such a story, for such a lame excuse, as for failing to do their jobs properly. Imagine going to your boss and explaining that you failed to do your job because an angel prevented you from doing it by scarring you into a death like sleep. Your boss would say, "Yes, I see that you were sleeping on the job, and I would like to put our relationship to sleep by getting your resignation, within the hour!" He would do that if he did not put you on medical leave for lunacy.

We have to consider this fabricated story side by side (back to back) with the appearance of Jesus to the women. It is ironic and almost comical that first the religious leaders post a guard to assure that the body is not stolen, and then they fabricate a story that His body was stolen. Are these people fickle or what? Therefore, as we brainstorm about this text, we have to include the stolen body story in our search for implications and applications of Jesus' resurrection appearance to some women.

Implications and applications

There are many things to ponder here. We will consider a few suggestions as a beginning.

1) Insight into the gospel

Matthew reports the resurrection as a fact of history regarding a corpse. The body of Jesus hung on the cross for hours after He died, then He was buried, and then He arose from the dead leaving the tomb empty.

Women witnessed the death, burial, and resurrection. The gospel at its core is an angelic proclamation: He is not here in the tomb; He has risen as He said.

2) Here, we have insight into the gospel in relation to the unbelieving mindset.

The action of these soldiers only makes sense if the tomb were empty; an angel rolled the stone away from the entry, sat on the stone, appeared to the soldiers, caused them to tremble with knees knocking, and put them into a death-like sleep.

Now the guards do not hear the message of the angel to the women. They have no framework of thought by which to correctly assess what happened. Jesus does not reveal Himself alive from the grave to the soldiers. They see an angel with all the splendor of brightness and whiteness, they see the stone rolled away, and they see the empty tomb, but they do not see Jesus and they have limited information by which to interpret this unique event.

Consider the explanation of a person (this is an actual account) that jumped from an airplane at 16,000 feet and that landed safely in a haystack even though his parachute failed to open. He says, "Man I am thankful to be here; I was lucky that I just happened to fall into that hay stack." He has a naturalistic worldview, so, he does not thank God, but he is thankful for this miracle-like unique event. It is simply that strange things occur, even in a naturalistic universe. He has no context in which to properly view the event and thank God for His providential care.

Likewise, the soldiers, and remarkably, the chief priests are unable to grasp the significance of the empty tomb because they have no appreciation of the things of God. They have no appreciation of the things of God because they suppress the true framework of thought that would lead them to greater and greater understanding.

The impious and pious alike suppress the truth in unrighteousness: the soldiers accept bribes and proclaim lies; the priests commit bribery to advance lies that they concoct. They do it in the face of contradiction: on one hand, they place guards to prevent a stolen body story, and on the other hand, they bribe the same guards to promote the lie of a stolen body. Thus, by suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, they manifest unbelief that grounds their lack of submission to God and that thereby cuts them off from the light of truth and commits them to darkness. As Jesus put it, "how great is that darkness."

In darkness, they proclaim a false story.

He shows how unbelief opposes the fact of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

Beginning with unbelief regarding who Jesus is (underestimating Him), and beginning with unbelief in His resurrection from the dead, unbelieving people seek to explain Jesus as an imposter (deceiver). Furthermore, they try to explain the empty tomb and counter the proclamation of His resurrection by lies, fabrications, and falsehoods (lying; deceiving; they claim He is a deceiver! They do what they judge Him as doing). Hence, we have the stolen body story.

Matthew's record shows how to proclaim the gospel.

He shows that sinners confront a choice between Christ and a lie.

Thus, they must hear and heed His words or they are like a person who builds his house on sand. The storms of life and the winds of judgment will blow against that house, it will fall, and great will be the fall of it. Those who hear and heed His word build their lives on solid rock. For them, when the storms of life and the winds of judgment blow against that house, their lives, their total existence before God, and forever, will stand safe and sound forever.

Believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is the risen Lord and you will be saved.

3) A call to worship

It is amazing to consider who it is that appeared to some women. Consider the context. Jesus went through the trials, mocking, humiliation, the darkness of God-forsakenness, and

physical death. Then they put His dead body in a tomb. On the first day of the week, on the first day of a new era, God made Him both Lord and Christ by raising Him from the dead. He comes forth from the grave as exalted Sabbath king and universal sovereign, and the first thing that He does is He appears to some women, disciples who ministered to Him (no thousands of angels; now crowds clapping). Now, we have to simply have to stand in awe before Him when He speaks His first words as King of kings and Lord of lords. What are His first words? They are the words of welcome, the words of hospitality.

What is in such language?

What do we convey by greeting someone with the word, “greetings” in the plural?

To greet is to address someone in a friendly way. A greeting is a gesture or word of salutation on meeting (salutation: acknowledgment of someone, a recognition, giving recognition; acknowledging their presence; a small way of giving someone special recognition by showing appreciation for their coming, their presence, their very being). Thus, you say, “Welcome, it is good to see you. Welcome, welcome, come in, take your coat off, sit down, and make yourself comfortable.” A greeting is an icebreaker; a hand warming at a wood stove. It sets a good tone for meeting and presents a friendly atmosphere.

What do you take home from this meeting of Jesus with these women? How can we find the words to capture this manner of conduct? Who is this man? How can we describe Him? As the incarnate Son of Man and Son of God, Jesus greets the women with humble loving-kindness. They respond by worshipping Him at His feet. We do not know what they said. The text just says, **And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him (28.9b).**

4) A summons to follow Christ’s example

After reading this account, we can never think lightly of “customary language” of common courtesy (Hello, Hi, How are you doing? Welcome, welcome; greetings.) It may be customary, but it is neither light nor commonplace. The example of our Lord teaches us that courtesies are important in human relationships; we should not think of courtesies as more bothersome than good. If you want to follow the best example of how to love other people, then take note of this greeting.

Still, most important here, Jesus informs us that this welcome extends to His brothers. Again, the disciples forsook Him, but He never for a moment forsook them. Therefore, you follow the supreme example of Jesus as Savior, sovereign, risen Lord, and elder brother when you extend the warm welcome of hospitality to His brothers and sisters.

Amazing is it not? We have earth shaking events and earth shaking news. Jesus is alive from the dead. A new week has begun; a new era of redemptive history has begun. Now, God gave Jesus as universal sovereign to be head of the church. Here, He shows Himself full of humble loving-kindness and He calls us to follow the example of family love. It goes hand in hand with worship of our sovereign Lord.

To Him be all honor, glory, and dominion, now and forevermore, amen.