

Come And See—Go And Tell

Matthew 28:1-10

Introduction

Christianity begins where religion ends—with the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the ancient world the treacherous body of water at the Southern tip of Africa was called “the Cape of Storms”. It was a place where many ships met their doom. But after the intrepid navigator Vasco da Gama succeeded in rounding it safely its name was changed to the Cape of Good Hope”. Prior to the resurrection of Jesus Calvary (the place of the skull) was the cape of storms. But now we have been born again to a living hope (1 Peter 1:3). The death of Jesus speaks to us about the love of God and the resurrection of Jesus speaks to us about the power of God.

Now in Matthew’s gospel we see women arrive at the tomb (v.1); and an angel beside the tomb (vv.2-4). Matthew records the angel’s radiance—a face like lightening—clothes—brilliant—which causes the Roman and Temple guards to become like dead men in their fear. Radiance—followed by reassurance (vv.5-6); the angel announces the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead! The announcement prompts a request; (v.6) “. . .Come, see the place where the Lord lay. (v.7) And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead. . .”

Are you a Christ follower? Are you a disciple? Are you a skeptic? Agnostic? A.W. Tower once wrote; “Every man will have to decide for himself whether or not he can afford the terrible luxury of unbelief”.

Let’s take the angel up on his offer and see the place where the Lord lay. An empty tomb just outside the ancient walls of the eternal city Jerusalem.

A Grieving Investigation (v.1)

Matthew 28:1–10 (NKJV) Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.

The Gospel writers stand united in the fact that Jesus rose from the dead “after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn”; “Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb” (John 20:1-2). The Jews calculated days from sundown—to sundown—the Sabbath began on Friday evening—and ended Saturday evening—Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday—the first day of the week—as the sun peeked past the horizon.

A group of faithful women who had followed Jesus in life came to anoint his body in death with spices (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1). Mary Magdalene was a follower who had been healed by the Lord (Luke 8:2). The other Mary is identified in Matthew 27:56 as “Mary the mother of James and Joseph and again in 27:61—“and Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb”. The women did not come expecting life. They came to see the tomb.

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An Angel's Invitation (vv.2-7)

2And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it.

3His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow.

Matthew draws our attention to three things concerning the celestial visitor; his radiance (vv. 2-4); his reassurance (vv.5-6); his request (vv.7-8).

4And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.

Angelic appearances in the Bible did not prompt comfort. The usual response is terror. The guards shook for fear (phobos)—fear often produces terror or flight.

5But the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.

The angel ignores the terrified guards and speaks to the women.

The angel offers reassurance; “Do not be afraid”.

Both Luke (24:4) and John (20:12) tell us two angels are present at the tomb but only one speaks. What is the identity of the man sought? Jesus crucified.

6He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

The angel's message; “He is not here; He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay” (see also Luke 24:6). The word “come” means “come once and for all”—see and understand.

Our New Age friends would have us believe the angel should have said—“he is not here—he's everywhere!”

Jesus predicted both his death and his resurrection.

The Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search wisdom.

The friends of Jesus and the foes of Jesus both had access to an empty tomb.

If Jesus has not bodily and literally risen from the dead—Christianity is a fraud—Jesus is a liar—the gospels are fraudulent documents. Paul was right when he said (I Cor.15:17a) “if Christ has not been raised your faith is worthless” and “if the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (v.32b). If Jesus is not risen from the dead it is no better than the pagan religions and superstitions of human beings in every generation.

How then do we explain an empty tomb?

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Did this man Jesus really die? The Bible records a series of trials; beatings, and a cruel practice called scourging; where a man was tied to a marble pillar and beaten with a *flagellum*. This was a leather whip with metal or glass or bone knotted into the thongs. The whipping would leave deep lacerations—shredding the flesh. It would substantially weaken even the strongest man and limit the amount of time necessary to die on a cross. The testimony of every gospel is that Jesus did in fact experience those nails in hands and feet. The evidence seems to support his placement on a cross about 9:00 AM to 3:00PM. When Roman guards broke the legs of certain thieves who were hung with Jesus—they noticed Jesus had already expired. The Roman guard took his spear and penetrated the chest of Jesus just below his rib cage—penetrating the pericardial sac that surrounds the heart where John testifies that an explosion of blood and water came gushing from his side. He was taken from the cross by friends (Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea); wrapped in linen cloth with spices and placed in a borrowed tomb just before sunset. The body lay in that tomb just before sunset on Sunday morning.

Did Jesus simply swoon? Was His death an elaborate hoax? Did he somehow manage to survive the cruel chain of events only to recover and appear to eager disciples for a series of forty days; including appearing in upper room and inviting Thomas to handle his hands and feet and side. Appear by the Sea of Galilee; eat broiled fish; Fake his ascension into heaven and completely disappear and remain in some kind of self-imposed witness protection program and die later?

The tomb was empty because he never died? Highly implausible!

Even the skeptic and critic John Dominic Crossan admits; “Jesus’ death by execution under Pontius Pilate is as sure as anything historical can ever be. For if no follower of Jesus had written anything for one hundred years after his crucifixion, we would still know about him, from two authors not among his supporters. Their names are Flavius Josephus and Cornelius Tacitus”. All the New Testament writers believed Jesus really died. Josephus and Tacitus were convinced Jesus really died.

The tomb was empty because the body was stolen.

Think for a moment. The enemies of Jesus concede the body is gone. They accuse the followers of Jesus—of somehow over-powering a highly trained and well disciplined group of professional soldiers and removing the body. Matthew addresses this issue in verses 11-15; “Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened.”

Pause. The soldier’s report; “An angel showed up. We soiled ourselves. We pretended we were dead. The angel removed the stone and sat on it. Some ladies showed up. The angel told the ladies that Jesus was risen from the dead. We couldn’t help but overhear it. He invited the ladies to look into the tomb and see that Jesus was gone.

Back to the text. (v.12) When they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, “Tell them, ‘His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.’”

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But that's not what happened. The religious leaders knew Jesus claimed he would come back to life. In chapter 27:63 we see them saying to Pilate; "Sir, we remember that deceiver (planos—imposter) said while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise (egeiromai—present middle voice—to raise again)—stresses Jesus ability to bring Himself back to life from the dead. The present tense—means—certain—"I will raise Myself". They anticipated a conspiracy. To make sure that didn't happen—they requested Pilate to establish soldiers to guard a dead man's body! That asked for three days—since Jesus said he would come back after three days—**the prophecy was very specific.**

The religious leaders wanted a seal and a guard. Think for a moment. Pilate granted their request! Secure it yourselves. You make it as safe as you can.

Wait. How did we know the disciples came and stole Him away if we were asleep? Did we dream it? And what will the Governor do if we admit to sleeping on the job? Isn't that punishable by death? **We aren't detectives—but how can sleeping witnesses reliably report what happened while we slept? The religious leaders promise to protect the soldiers from the Governor!**

(v.15) So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day. The Roman guards are bribed and presented with another version of what might have happened.

The timid disciples suddenly become Israeli commando's and orchestrate the theft. They somehow create the illusion that Jesus is alive—and convince the women—they are seeing Jesus of Nazareth. They convince upwards of 500 people in post-resurrection appearances.

Not only do the followers of Jesus steal the body—but fabricate the lie of a resurrection and then proceed to live their lives as if this outlandish lie is in fact the truth! Within a generation all but one of these close disciples experience painful deaths—maintaining to the end the truth of their hoax!

The Gospels record the disciples were upset—unbelieving—depressed—cowardly! Skeptics, critics, investigators might conclude that Jesus' enemies stole the body. But if that's true—when the story of Jesus' resurrection began to gain traction and belief—why not just produce the dead body and quash the nonsense of a physical resurrection?

Philosopher Steven Davis writes;

“Early Christian proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem would have been psychologically and apologetically impossible without safe evidence of an empty tomb. . .in other words, without safe and agreed-upon evidence of an empty tomb, the apostles' claims would have been subject to massive falsification by the simple presentation of the body.”

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Does the option; “He didn’t really die” sound plausible?

Does the option; “The disciples stole the body” sound plausible?

Does the option; “The enemies of Jesus stole the body” sound plausible?

Another compelling reason to believe the Gospel narrative is that women are the first witnesses of the empty tomb. Women in Jewish culture and society were not seen as citizens or capable legal witnesses. If you were to fabricate a story of resurrection you would certainly cast the characters with more credibility. Jewish and Roman sources cite empty tomb! The writer Josephus and even the Jewish rabbi’s wrote to explain the disappearance of the body and the empty tomb. Common sense tells us the reason why the gospel writers record the women as the first witnesses of the empty tomb is because it is true! Dr. Paul Maier rightly observes that “if the resurrection accounts had been manufactured. . . women would never have been included in the story, at least not as first witnesses”.

7And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.”

The angel’s message is one of reassurance. And now the request. And what is the angel’s request? Come and see. Go and tell. This is the heart of the Gospel and the resurrection story.

“go quickly. . .” why quickly? No time to waste. What is your priority? Our precious Lord is risen from the dead. No time to waste.

A Savior’s Declaration (vv.8-10)

8So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word.

Fear (phobos)—is this a healthy fear? Are the women still confused over what has just happened? Are they uncertain over what has just transpired? Their fear is coupled with joy—and ran to bring the disciples word. When we have good news we must move quickly.

9And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, “Rejoice!” So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him.

Note the order: on their way to meet the Disciples the women meet Jesus (v.9a); the women hear Jesus (v.9b); the women worship Jesus (v.9c); the women obey Jesus (v.10).

Does it come as a shock to you the first word out of the risen Savior’s mouth is “Rejoice!”

The word is pregnant with grace and joy! Later Jesus will greet the disciples in the Upper Room with the word “Peace” (John 20:19). Paul later will write “joy and peace in believing” (Rom. 15:13)—in the risen Savior—the ever living Jesus—present—powerful—perpetual.

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The text reads “So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him”—they cling to Him the way any loved one clings to one who was dead and comes back to life. Worship here is not simple reverence or courtesy or homage paid to some earthly dignitary. This is worship. The kind of worship reserved for God. With worship comes realization—to worship God is to realize the purpose for which God created us.

**Jesus does not rebuke the women in their worship. Worship first—service second.
Worship is not simply a part of the Christian life—it is our life.**

William Temple wrote; “To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, and to devote the will to the purpose of God.”

10Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.”

The resurrection is a time for joy not fear. The women have seen an empty tomb—but now they see a risen Savior! The angel said; “*Come, see the place where the Lord lay*” (v.6)

The angel said; “. . .go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen” (v.7)

The women “. . .ran to bring His disciples word” (v.8)

The women “. . .went to tell His disciples” (v.9)

Jesus said; “Go and tell My brethren” (v.10).

What happened? Did the women make it? Did they ever get to tell the Disciples what they saw and heard and experienced? In Luke’s Gospel we have our answer;

Luke 24:9-11; “Then they (the women) returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. (10) It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the Mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles. (11) And their words seem to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them.”

The first resurrection message was preached by women to apostles. The message was rejected by Jesus’ closest companions and friends. These were men who walked with Jesus, and witnessed the miracles of Jesus and were participants in the earthly ministry of Jesus. Men familiar with miracles. Men who watched Jesus as he was seized by Temple soldiers. Men who knew about the arrest, the imprisonment and the mock trials. Men who watched Jesus die. Dead people don’t come to back to life. Not in their world. The disciples have the testimony of the women. The disciples have an empty tomb. The disciples have access to the shell that was Jesus’ burial cloth. **The disciples want to believe. They can’t. At least not now. The story is just too incredible.**

The Lord commands the disciples to meet Him in the Galilee. Who does Jesus have in mind when he says; “Go and tell my brethren?” Does this mean blood relatives? Does this mean

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spiritual relatives? We can only guess. According to John 7:5; “Nor neither did his brethren (adelphos) believe (pisteeuo—to trust rely cling believe) in him”. Acts 1:14 shows they come to faith—“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren”. It would appear—this miracle (the resurrection)—more than any other miracle—penetrated the stony hearts of his own recalcitrant brothers—to believe the truth about Jesus.

Conclusion

Come and see. Go and Tell. I love the story about a Sunday School teacher who asked the children in his class to bring plastic eggs on Easter Sunday. Each was put in the egg something that symbolized the meaning of the resurrection. The day came and the teacher took each child’s egg in turn, opening it and amplifying the content. One child had a tiny flower. The teacher spoke of new life that comes in Christ. Another picture contained a crayoned picture of Christ. Another had a small nail—and the teacher spoke of the nails on the Cross. Another had a pebble that spoke of the rock that blocked the tomb. But the teacher was dumb-founded when he opened Brian’s egg. Brian was seven and developmentally disabled. When the teacher opened the egg it was empty. When the teacher could offer no explanation—Brian shouted—“the egg is just like the tomb—empty!”