

“VALIDATION”
MATTHEW 28:1-10

Throughout human history, there have been a few individuals who have amassed large numbers of devoted followers through their extraordinarily winsome personalities, or their exceptional communication or leadership skills, or their uncanny ability to deceive or manipulate. Some of these individuals have been so influential that their devotees have grown exponentially even after their deaths. Some have become founders of worldwide religions; some are considered divine.

Krishna is purported to have lived on earth 5,000 years ago. Today he is the most revered deity in Hinduism. Buddha is a spiritual guide who lived in India 2500 years ago. Mohammed, who wrote the Koran and founded Islam, lived in Saudi Arabia about 1400 years ago. And Joseph Smith, who wrote the Book of Mormon and founded the Mormon church, was an American who lived just 200 years ago.

Most of these men were writers, preachers, or teachers, and when they died, they left behind documents and materials that are considered sacred by their followers. However, *when* they died, they remained dead, and their bodies, even today, continue to decay beneath the earth just like all other human beings who have died.

All, that is, but one. What sets Jesus of Nazareth apart from every self-proclaimed or perceived prophet, spiritual guide, or revelation of God, is that when He died, He did not *stay* dead. He was raised from the dead. And His resurrection has profound implications, not only for His followers, but for all of mankind.

For the past four years, we have been studying the book of Matthew verse by verse. In the last few weeks, we have explored what is commonly called “The Passion of Jesus”- His suffering and crucifixion which led to His death. Last week, we looked at some events that occurred in the last three hours Jesus was on the cross. There was darkness over the whole land. There was a massive earthquake that caused the rocks to split. The sixty-foot high, four-inch-thick curtain in the Jerusalem Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And many saints who had died and were buried in tombs, came to life. These phenomena were divinely orchestrated to validate the significance and efficacy of Jesus’ death. In other words, God the Father was dramatically declaring that Jesus was, indeed, His Son, and that His death did, in fact, provide the way for mankind to be reconciled to Him.

But how can we be sure? Consider Matthew 28, **verse 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.*

The first day of the week is Sunday. Jesus died at 3:00 PM on the previous Friday afternoon. It would have taken a while for guards to confirm His death, and then to remove Him from the cross. Luke tells us that a man named Joseph of Arimathea received permission from Pilate, the Roman governor, to handle the body of Jesus and place it in His family’s tomb. Several women from Galilee who had witnessed Jesus’ crucifixion, including His mother and Mary Magdalene, helped Joseph prepare Jesus’ body for burial. They had to do this hastily, since Sabbath began at nightfall and the law prohibited them from doing any kind of work on the Sabbath. So, after placing Jesus’ body in the tomb, Luke tells us that they returned home to prepare spices and ointments in order to complete the burial process after the Sabbath was over.

The earliest they would have been able to do this was Sunday morning, and so they made their short trek to the tomb at daybreak. Matthew tells us that the day before, the

religious leaders in Jerusalem had sought and received permission from Pilate to secure the tomb with guards and a seal on the stone, for they were afraid Jesus' disciples would steal His body and spread a rumor that He had risen from the dead.

Surely these women knew that guards had been posted at the tomb and that they would have been unable to move the massive stone that blocked its entrance without their help. Perhaps they were hoping that the guards would have compassion on them, and that they would be able to persuade them to get into the tomb. Whatever they had planned or hoped for, something happened that changed everything.

Verse 2. *²And 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.*

Remember, there had been an earthquake on Friday when Jesus was hanging on the cross. I suggested to you that it was divinely orchestrated—that it was God's commentary on the cross. I believe this earthquake was *also* divinely orchestrated, and that it was God's commentary on the resurrection of his Son. Matthew indicates that the timing of this earthquake coincided with the angel's appearance, who was sent by God from heaven. He also wants to make it clear that it was not the earthquake that moved the stone, but the angel.

And we can also deduce that the angel did not roll back the stone in order to let Jesus out of the tomb, but to let the women *in* so they could see for themselves that the tomb was empty and that Jesus had already risen from the dead. But undoubtedly, when they saw the angel, His extraordinary appearance shifted their attention, at least momentarily, from the tomb to Him. Look at **verses 3-4.** *³His appearance was like lightning, and His clothing white as snow. ⁴And for fear of Him the guards trembled and became like dead men.*

These guards had been given strict instructions to protect these premises from what they were told were fanatical disciples who may try to steal Jesus' body, and I can imagine they were well prepared to do so. They were not, however, prepared for a supernatural being who looked as though he had come straight from the throne of God. At the sight of him, and then after seeing him effortlessly roll back the massive stone, they were paralyzed by fear.

But the angel seemingly ignores them, for he did not come for their sake; he came for sake of Jesus' friends and family who had arrived at the tomb. And you can be sure that his appearance at the very moment of their arrival was also divinely orchestrated.

Look at **verses 5-6.** *⁵But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here, for He has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay.*

Mark tells us in his Gospel account that on the way to the tomb the women had been discussing who would roll away the stone from the entrance. That question had been resolved, but what they discovered at the tomb had raised a number of other questions.

There is no record of the women asking any of those questions, but Matthew tells us that the angel, literally, "answered" them, suggesting that he knew exactly what they were wondering. The guards were off to the side, trembling with fear, and the sight of the angel naturally caused the women to be afraid as well. But the angel says to them, "Do not be afraid," or literally, "Don't *you* be afraid." Understandably, the guards had reason to fear for they were on the wrong side of God regarding these things. But the angel had come with some *good news* for them, and he begins by calming their fears so that they could fully appreciate what that good news was. *"I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here, for He has risen, as He said."*

More than once, Jesus had told His disciples that He must suffer and die, but that He would rise again. Apparently, they thought He was speaking figuratively, for after He died

none of them were expecting anything other than that He was gone for good and that His death was final. People don't rise from the dead. Death is irreversible.

But significantly, the angel reminded these women that Jesus had, indeed, predicted He would rise from the dead, for it was important that His followers understand that His resurrection was exactly what He told them would happen.

The angel then invited the women to go into the tomb and see the place where Jesus had been laid. On Friday afternoon they had helped Joseph of Arimathea place Jesus' body in that very tomb, and they knew exactly where His body was supposed to be. So, when they saw that the body of Jesus was gone, they had more proof that Jesus had risen. But was it enough?

Look at **verse 7**. *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.*"

The angel makes it clear that this news was not something for them to keep to themselves. It was meant to be spread, especially to Jesus' disciples.

Verses 8-10. *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."*

The women had encountered an angel and had seen the empty tomb, but now they had concrete, objective proof that Jesus was alive. There He was, standing in front of them, greeting them, calming their fears and anxious thoughts. Incidentally, I cannot help but wonder if Jesus wasn't rewarding them for their faithfulness and devotion to Him. These women had been there at the cross, the last ones to see Him alive, and they were the first at the tomb. Now they are the first to have the joy of seeing their risen Lord.

They were so excited that they took hold of His feet, a recognition of His sovereignty and divinity. For Matthew also says that they worshiped Him. They realized, perhaps for the first time, that Jesus was no mere mortal. Having risen from the dead, having reversed the irreversible, having done what no human being had ever done before or could ever do, they acknowledged that He was, in fact, God.

As I said at the beginning, Jesus' resurrection from the dead has profound implications, not only for these women and His disciples and other followers, but for all of mankind. But before I address those implications, let's spend some time worshiping Him for who He is and what He's done.

“Validation”

Matthew 27:1-10

Main Idea: Jesus is raised from the dead, validated by the earthquake, the angel’s announcement, the empty tomb, and the appearance of Jesus himself.

Female followers of Jesus visit the tomb (1)

They intend to ask the guards to roll the stone from the entrance

They intend to anoint Jesus’ body for burial

The earthquake and the arrival of an angel (2-4)

A simultaneous occurrence? (2)

Who moved the stone? (2)

The appearance of the angel (3)

The guards’ reaction to the angel (4)

The angel’s announcement to the women (5-7)

“Do not be afraid”

“You are looking for Jesus but will not find Him here”

“Jesus has been raised”

“Jesus has fulfilled His promise”

“Go and tell His disciples about this”

Fearfully and joyfully, the women depart quickly (8)

Jesus meets the women on their way (9-10)

When He greets them they fall at His feet (9)

He gives them instructions for His disciples to meet Him (10)

BECAUSE HE LIVES JOHN 14:18-19

Jesus was having a conversation with His disciples just before He was arrested and then crucified. He Himself knew what was about to happen—for He had come into this world for this very purpose—but He was preparing them. When He told them that He was about to die, they were confused and troubled and terribly afraid.

But Jesus told them some things in chapter 14 of John's gospel in order to comfort them and give them hope. He said, *"I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live" (14:18-19).*

Jesus knew He was going to die, but He was informing them that death would not be able to keep Him in the ground—He was going to rise from the dead. And He said that His resurrection would have profound implications for their lives as well. It would give them the assurance that one day they, too, would rise from the dead and live forever.

"Because I live you also will live."

Isn't that the ultimate issue of life? The ultimate issue is what is going to happen to you when you die. Is there something you can look forward to beyond the grave, and if there is, will it be eternal life in heaven?

Most people don't like to think about death and go to great lengths *not* to think about it. But when a loved one dies and we *have* to think about it, it's common for people to say something like, "I know he/she is in a better place". Sometimes we say such things in order to comfort ourselves or those who are grieving with us. Sometimes it's because we just don't want to consider another alternative. In other words, when we are *forced* to face mortality, we at least *want* to believe that there *is* a heaven, and that we and our loved ones will go there when we die. But how do we know if there really *is* and if we really will go there, or whether our belief about it isn't just wishful thinking?

Youths in the Arab world are willing to become suicide bombers because they've been told by their religious leaders that blowing themselves up and killing as many of the enemy as they can in the process is their only sure ticket to heaven. But what assurance do they have? Is it true just because their religious leaders say it's true?

On the other hand, those who don't believe in God, who believe that life is the result of a random series of events and a process of natural selection, have a very different conclusion. If there is no God, if I'm merely an evolving blob of protoplasm, then death *is* the end of my existence, and therefore my life is nothing more than a fading ripple in the waters of time.

Ah, but Jesus said, *"Because I live you also will live."* The believer's hope of heaven does not rest on personal opinions about God and the hereafter. Neither does the believer's hope rest on personal experience. It rests on an objective fact—an historical event that changed the course of human history.

Which brings us to Sunday morning; three days after Jesus died on the cross and was buried. When Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus encountered the angel sitting on the massive stone after He had rolled it back from the tomb's entrance, when they heard Him say that Jesus was not there, but had risen just as He said He would, when they looked in the tomb and saw that His body was gone, and, then, when Jesus Himself met them when they were running back to tell the disciples, it changed their lives forever.

It also changed the lives of all followers of Jesus. For later that day Jesus appeared to

Peter, and then to ten of the disciples, and later to more than 500, before He ascended into heaven after forty days.

They touched Him. They put their hands in His wounds. They ate with Him. They conversed with Him and they were absolutely convinced that Jesus was alive. Jesus, their Leader, their teacher, their friend had come back to life! And so convinced were they that they spent the rest of their lives with *one* ambition—to bear witness to *this* event—to declare that Jesus was risen! So convinced were they that all of them were willing to experience persecution, abuse, imprisonment—all but one of them were murdered because they would not deny or recant their testimony in the bodily resurrection of Christ.

Why? Because His resurrection proved that He was who He said He was—Messiah, Son of the living God. It demonstrated His divine power. It established that His death on the cross did accomplish what He said it would—the forgiveness of sins and the defeat of the powers of darkness. It proved that Jesus was telling the truth when He said, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though He dies...”* (John 11:25-26).

The question is: Do *you* believe in Him? Do you know for sure that *you* have eternal life?

I don't know all of you. I don't know everyone's personal story or spiritual journey. I don't know where all of you stand in relation to Jesus. What I do know is that *He* knows...and He cares. What I do know is that when Jesus died on the cross, He bore *your* sins in His body, and He did it because He loves you more than you will ever know. I also know that He invites you to receive His gifts of forgiveness and friendship and eternal life. And if you want to be assured of eternal life then confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). Put your trust and your confidence in Him.

That simply means you believe that Jesus is no ordinary or even extraordinary man. He's the Son of God who came into this world to save sinners, like me and you. It means that Jesus is God's one and only provision for you to be forgiven, reconciled to God, and given eternal life. It means that you stop living for yourself, and you live for Him, who loves you so much he died in your place. It means you quit trying to earn God's favor by being religious or righteous, because that's a dead end. It's all about trusting what Jesus did for you.

Some of you might be thinking to yourself, “Yeah that sounds pretty good. I might do that...but not just yet. I've got some things I'd like to do first. I want to spend some time grabbing for all the gusto I can get. I'd like to keep my options open for a while. I want to taste a little of this and try a little of that. I'll get around to Jesus later.”

I plead with you not to procrastinate. You don't know what's going to happen to you even later today. What is more, none of us knows when Jesus is coming back. But I assure you it could be any time. And I also want to remind you that if you die or if Jesus comes back and you haven't received him it will be too late to receive God's gift.

I plead with you to decide today what you will do with Jesus. You may not be *convinced* today that Jesus is the Messiah, Son of the Living God, who died on the cross for your sins and rose from the dead. But at least decide that you will start investigating to see if it's true. It's the most important step you'll ever take.