

## Matthew 28:1-10 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

### The Resurrection of Jesus

**28** After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup>His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup>For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup>But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup>He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup>Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” <sup>8</sup>So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup>Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup>Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

### “RESURRECTION EARTHQUAKE”

In the Bible unusual natural events often accompany God’s mighty works. At the Exodus the Red Sea parted to let the Hebrew people through. When the Commandments were given, a dark cloud descended over Mount Sinai. At Jesus’ birth, an unusually bright star led the wise men to Bethlehem. On the day of Pentecost, a mighty wind blew as the Holy Spirit was given. As the world’s Saviour suffered and died on Good Friday, a strange darkness descended upon the earth. On Easter morning, a great earthquake occurred as God raised his Son from the bondage of death.

Matthew 28:1,2: “...as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, for an angel... descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.”

Earthquakes are often frightening and destructive events. The West Coast of North America has experienced great several earthquakes and they are preparing for more. Years ago, my mother told me of an earthquake she felt as a girl here in Southern Ontario. Dishes rattled in the cupboards and furniture moved around, though no great damage occurred. But to a young boy it sounded quite frightening. Now earthquakes are generally not good at all. We might consider this Covid-19 pandemic as similar to a great earthquake. It certainly has rocked our world and shaken up our lives in very negative ways. But earthquakes are not all bad. The book of Acts tells of a great earthquake which

shook the foundation of a prison in Philippi. Paul and Silas were set free from their chains and the prison doors flew open. They preached the Gospel to the jailer and that night he and all his family were baptized and saved.

Jesus' resurrection is like a great and blessed earthquake. What it accomplished is all good.

*First, Jesus' resurrection unleashed a great wave of grace.*

An earthquake on the ocean floor can cause a great tidal wave to crash upon the earth. Many thousands of acres of land can be covered by the flood.

Jesus' resurrection unleashed a great wave of grace upon the whole earth. Jesus' resurrection is the sign that God had accepted His Son's sacrifice for our sins. Divine forgiveness was poured out and made available for all sins, for all people, for all time. The resurrection means that God the Son had accomplished the great work the Father sent him to do— save us from our sins and reconcile us to God. The famous preacher, Charles Spurgeon, once said, "There may be some sins of which a person cannot speak, but there is no sin which the blood of Christ cannot wash away."

Yes, like a great and blessed earthquake Jesus' resurrection unleashed a wave of grace upon the earth. We can say that we live in a forgiven, reconciled world. And now each of us is invited to let it be true in our own lives. Repentance doesn't mean getting your life in order so God will forgive you. It means recognizing your need, turning to Jesus the Saviour in faith and receiving the forgiveness that has been poured out for you. The power of God's forgiveness then works in you so that you are changed and become more like Jesus, with the fruits of the Spirit coming alive in you. We can say that God's great wave of grace brings about our repentance.

*Secondly, Jesus' resurrection brought about a great rearrangement.*

A great earthquake can alter the landscape, significantly. What was high becomes low; what was low is now lifted up. Things are moved about and rearranged.

Jesus' resurrection caused a great rearrangement. It started with Jesus himself. There was nothing lower or more degrading than dying on a cross. But at the resurrection, God exalted Jesus to the highest place, giving him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord.

Jesus' resurrection also caused a great rearrangement of the powers. Verses 3-6. "The angel's appearance was like lightning...his clothing was white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men." The guards were ordinary men, but they represented the great military and political power of Rome. They were there to instill fear

in anyone who might approach the tomb. Yet at the resurrection, they were the ones who became afraid, almost to the point of death. Their power to instill fear was overturned. The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was here; for he has been raised, as he said...come, see where he lay.'"

Fear is the power that Satan and even other humans use to control us. But at the resurrection the power of fear lost its sting. Brute political power and the power of evil were overturned. The mighty were taken off the throne and the humble were exalted. On Easter morning the love of God in Jesus Christ was revealed to us as the greatest power in this universe. All the powers that claim supremacy now – fear, sin, evil, death, COVID 19, are still kicking but have lost their ultimate power. They cannot and will not prevail. They cannot separate us from God's love. God's promises will be fulfilled. God's Kingdom is eternal.

One of the greatest upsets in sports history occurred in the 1969 Super Bowl. The New York Jets unexpectedly defeated the heavily favoured Baltimore Colts. John Dockery, a Christian and Jets lineman at the time wrote, "Late in the third quarter I looked up at the scoreboard and a message flashed through my mind. We are going to win. Easter shares with us that Jesus won--not Satan."

Absolutely. On D-Day in 1944, Allied troops invaded Europe, and at great cost, broke Hitler's stronghold. From then on, even though the Nazi troops still fought for a time, the final outcome was sure. Hitler would lose and the Allied troops would win. The Easter message is that God fought the decisive battle and won the decisive victory. The final outcome is no longer in doubt. Jesus' resurrection has brought about a great rearrangement.

*Finally, Jesus' resurrection opened the way to heaven.*

A powerful earthquake can open a great crack in the earth, leaving a gaping crevice. So Jesus' resurrection opened the way for us to enter God's heaven. The door is now open for forgiven sinners to live with Holy God and his redeemed people forever. How do we enter? How can you be sure that on the last day you will not be lost but brought safely to eternal life? It's by identifying with the Crucified and Risen One through faith and baptism. "I am the way to the Father's house," he said. "Follow me."

Now coming through Jesus may seem to be a narrow way, but on the other hand, the way is open for all. The opening will accommodate everyone who comes to Christ with even a mustard seed of faith. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Perhaps you've heard the story of the faithful Christian woman who died. As people passed by her open casket to pay respects they noticed a fork in her hand. Everyone wondered what that fork was all about. Well, her family said, at church suppers she would always tell people to keep their forks after the first course, because she said, the best part is yet to come.

We don't deny the pain and sorrow and grief of death, but we say that it has lost its ultimate power. Because of Christ the Risen One we know the best is yet to come. Death is a gateway to eternity, opened for us by Christ's resurrection from the dead. Yes, Jesus' resurrection is like a great and blessed earthquake – unleashing a wave of grace upon the earth, rearranging the landscape, and opening the way to heaven.

In commenting on this story William Barclay says that there are now three things for us to do. 1) Believe. Believe in God; believe also in Christ, the Risen One. 2) Rejoice. Jesus said to the women, "Greetings"! That word is derived from one which means rejoice. We can rejoice not only on Easter Day but every day, even in these days of turmoil, for we live in a world in which Christ is risen and God reigns. 3) "Go and tell!" The Risen Christ told the women, "Go and tell." Go and tell someone of the great resurrection earthquake that has changed the world once and for all, and all for good!