

**EASTER SUNDAY**  
**“BEHOLD EASTER”**  
**March 31, 2024**

**Matthew 28:1-10**

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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup> And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> But the angel said to the women, “**Do not be afraid**, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> 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.” <sup>8</sup> So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup> And **behold**, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and 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, and there they will see me.” <sup>1</sup>

This is God’s Word.

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On this Easter Sunday, we turn to one of a few passages that are likely being preached in the vast majority of gospel-centered churches around the world today. Today’s sermon interrupts our regularly scheduled series in Ecclesiastes, but not as a one-off necessarily, but ultimately to remind us of the significance of this day and even as the Old Testament king Solomon wrote in the Old Testament book we have been working through, point to the point of it all.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 28:1–10.

In a world that seems, to quote Solomon, to be little more than vanity and lamentable, there is hope. There is assurance. There is a reason and it is centered around today's passage and this message of new life.

Christianity stands or falls on the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> Everything else that Jesus did throughout his life on earth was valid, vital, and incredibly important. The cross, the sacrifice, the death as payment for the sins of humanity was essential. So, I do not minimize that or anything else Jesus did. His work and life were perfection. He is Son of God and God the Son. He is I AM. But, if there is no resurrection from the dead, then everything that is happening in all the churches around the globe today where there are sermons and songs is just a huge waste of time. Without the resurrection, just go collect eggs, get the new clothes, get the photos and have fun. All that is fine, by the way, but without the resurrection, there is no real Easter, no celebration, and certainly no need to ever come back to church on a Sunday not designated as a holiday.

But...there was a resurrection and by faith, we believe it to be true. The story is better than anything recreated in a mini-series, movie, or passion play. The reality is more supernatural than anything depicted in a painting or recreation. The truth is better than any illustration that tries to make the story more "relevant."

Today, we have read the without error, God-breathed, Holy Spirit inspired, never changing Word of God and this beautiful word is for God's glory all the time and for our good...all the time.

Today, more than ever.

A simple reminder for the Christians in the room.

An earth-shattering revelation for those who have never heard.

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<sup>2</sup> Platt, David. *Exalting Jesus in Matthew: Christ-Centered Exposition* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2013) 363.

A message of truth. Hope. Life.

A cry to the walking dead that life is God's gift, God's plan, God's perfection.

And a plea to the overly busy, to listen and hear, to see and behold.

The word "behold" appears three times in this passage. A simple translation of what is meant by behold is "Look at this!"

And the plea to "look at this" is not simply like a friend who wants to show you a meme on their phone. This is not a casual, "Hey take a look and see this funny thing." This word is filled with the emotion of one who is pleading for the reader, the listener, the friend, to stop. Look. Consider.

So...today, we will BEHOLD.

- 1. BEHOLD THE MESSENGER**
- 2. BEHOLD THE MESSAGE**
- 3. BEHOLD THE MESSIAH**

## **BEHOLD THE MESSENGER**

**Matthew 28:2-4**

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. <sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup> And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 28:2-4.

“Look at this,” Matthew says. There was an earthquake. An angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled the stone away. Then he sat on top of it. The narrative is clear. The tomb is already empty. The stone was not rolled away by Jesus, but by the angel. It was rolled away so that people could look inside and see it was empty.

The angel then sat on top of the stone and waited. Can you picture this? This being who looked like lightning. His clothing was so white it glowed. Nothing you’ve ever seen depicting this likely comes close to the reality of it. Yet, this moment is vital. It’s key. The dead Son of God is no longer dead. The two women, Mary Magdalene and another named Mary arrive early on Sunday to finish preparing the dead body of Jesus. They are met by the angel. But, prior to them seeing the angel sitting on the rock, the guards placed there by Rome have seen him. They are unconscious, passed out, laying on the ground. What a sight!

When you look back at the end of chapter 27 in Matthew’s gospel, you get the bad Easter story. It is the bad Easter story because it follows the crucifixion of Jesus, as it should, but it speaks of the bribery, the deceit, the scamming, the plan to collectively lie to the masses, to protect the government’s power, to protect the religious establishment’s role. It is an evil, conspiratorial mess and it’s right there in black and white as chapter 27 ends.

Think about this – it seems that those who hated Jesus took his words of resurrection more seriously than those who followed him.<sup>4</sup> There was the “lock up the tomb so his followers don’t steal the body” theme, certainly, but there seems to be this underlying fear that this guy may come back, or at least the story of his comeback will come. The seriousness of Jesus’s words resonates more with the enemies of God it seems. So, while the followers of Christ are in hiding, the enemies of Christ are at the tomb. Until...the angel of the Lord shows up.

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<sup>4</sup> Hagner, Donald. Matthew 14-28: Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33b (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 864.

But, chapter 28 gives us the good Easter.

## **BEHOLD THE MESSAGE**

**Matthew 28:5-7**

**<sup>5</sup> But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> 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.”<sup>5</sup>**

Behold...ladies...you look for the dead body of Jesus, BUT he is not here. He has risen. JUST LIKE HE SAID HE WOULD.

Wait though. Why these two women? This is no small thing. In a culture where women were marginalized to a degree that their testimony was not valid in court and their value as humans was degraded comes the one who has made all, man and women, male and female, intentionally from conception, on purpose, as his image-bearer. And to what some would say were the “least of these” in the culture, the angel appears and speaks. He speaks a message of hope, of life, of restoration and power.

“I know that you seek Jesus...”

“He has risen...just as he said.”

They are instructed to go tell the disciples. They are the ones entrusted with the most amazing, important, long-awaited, message to the world.

Why?

It is of historical consequence that it was two women who first witnessed the empty tomb and the risen Christ. Here, as C.S. Lewis calls

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<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 28:5–7.

them, the “daughters of Eve” witness the Lion of Judah’s overturning the deception of Eve and the first fatal sin of Adam. They have seen him buried. They will soon see him alive again. Behold.<sup>6</sup>

## **BEHOLD THE MESSIAH**

Messiah comes from a Hebrew word that means “anointed one” or “chosen one.” The Greek word for this is where we get the English word Christ. Thus, Jesus Christ means, Jesus the Messiah.

Jesus is the anointed one. He is the chosen one. He is the long-awaited one. He is the Son promised. He is the redeemer of the people. He is the restorer of the broken. He is ... THE ONE.

The message from the messenger was not simply one to contemplate. It all points to Jesus, the Messiah.

### **Matthew 28:9**

**<sup>9</sup> And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.<sup>7</sup>**

Behold...this is a good Easter. For this is the resurrection story. The one who lived to die, died to live so that we could die to self and live for eternity.

This resurrection is what makes funerals celebrations for Christians and leaves funerals of non-Christians as empty, hollow, overwhelmingly grievous, and always, always, always looking backward at a history that cannot be changed.

But the resurrection. Oh my. This changes everything. For this victory over death gives us hope. For the ones who surrender their lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The ones who behold and believe, who repent

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<sup>6</sup> O’Donnell, Douglas Sean. *Matthew - All Authority in Heaven and Earth: Preaching the Word Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 899.

<sup>7</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 28:9.

of their sin can not only live the rest of their lives here on earth with a hope and assurance of eternal life.

One more thing...

“Fear God” – that’s a theme throughout scripture and one we looked at last Sunday in Ecclesiastes 5. Fear the Lord. Why? Because he is God. He is all-powerful. He is a God of love, and though you may not fully understand this, his holiness means he is a God of wrath as well.

So, when a person is saved. When an image-bearer of God surrenders his/her life to Christ in repentance, they are born again. Truly made new. Dead is now alive. A name is secured – child. And this is the good news. This is the gospel. That though mired in sin and deserving eternal separation from God in a place called hell...there is a way out. A way to life. A way of peace. Of meaning. Of hope.

Through Christ, though we honor and come to God in awe because of his greatness and his sovereignty over all, based on the words of the angel and of Christ himself in this passage...we have something else going for us...

**<sup>5</sup> But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid,**

**<sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid;**

Jesus saves. Jesus calms our fears. Jesus is alive. And that is a good Easter. Take to heart the words of John the Baptizer...

**John 1:29**

**<sup>29</sup> The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”<sup>8</sup>**

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<sup>8</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 1:29.