

THE WOMEN AND ANGEL'S MESSAGE OF THE JOY OF LIFE



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"In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, CAME MARY MAGDALENE AND THE OTHER MARY to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from Heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

"And the angel answered and said unto THE WOMEN, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead: and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you.

"And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy: and did run to bring His disciples word. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, **All hail.** And they came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell My brethren that they go into Galilee and there shall they see Me.

"Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day," Matthew 28:1-15.

The peculiarities of Matthew's last chapter are largely due to the purpose of his Gospel. Throughout it has been the record of the Galilean ministry, the picture of the King of Israel, and of His treatment by those who should have been His subjects. This chapter establishes the fact of His resurrection, but passing by the Jerusalem appearances of the risen Lord, as being granted to individuals and having less bearing on His royalty, emphasizes two points: His rejection by the representatives of the nation, whose lie is endorsed by popular acceptance, and the solemn assumption in Galilee so familiar to the student of universal domination, with the world-wide commission, in which the Kingdom bursts the narrow national limits and becomes so extensive with humanity.

It is better to learn the meaning of Matthew's selection of his incidents than to wipe out instructive peculiarities in the vain attempt after harmony. **First notice of his silence**, in which all the narratives are alike, as to the time and circumstances of the resurrection itself. That had taken place before the grey twilight summoned the faithful women, and before the earthquake, and the angels descent. No eye saw Him rise. The guards were not asleep, for the statement that they were is a lie put into their mouths by the rulers. But though they kept jealous watch, His rising was invisible to them.

The prison was shut with all safety, for the stone was rolled away. After He was risen, and the keepers standing before the doors, but there was no man within. As in the evening of the day, He appeared in the closed chamber, so He passed from the sealed grave. **Divine decorum required that that transcendent act should be done without mortal observers** of the actual rising of the sun which scatters forever the darkness of death.

MATTHEW NEXT ANNOUNCES THE ANGEL MINISTRATION AND HERALD. His narrative leaves the impression that the earthquake and appearance of the angel immediately preceded the arrival of the women, and the "Behold" suggests that they felt and saw both.

But that is a piece of chronology on which there may be differences of opinion. The other narratives tell of two angels, Matthew mentioning of one only may be due either to the fact that one was speaker, or to the subjective impressions of his informant, who saw but the one, or in variation in the number in finding contradiction or difficulty here. **The power of seeing may depend on the condition of the beholder.** It may depend, not as with gross material bodies, or optics, but on the volition of the radiant beings seen. They may pass from visibility to its opposite, lightly and repeatedly flickering into and out of sight, as the Pleiades seem to do. Where there is such store of possibilities, he is rash who talk glibly about contradictions.

Of far more value is it to note the purpose served by this waiting angel. We hear much of a herald angel of the Lord in the story of the Nativity. We hear nothing of him during the life of Christ. Now again he appears, as the stars, quenched in the noon-tide, shine again when the sun is out of the sky. He attends as humble servitor, in token that the highest beings gazed on that empty tomb without reverent adoration and were honored by being allowed to guard the sacred place.

Death was an undreaded thing to them, and no hopes for themselves blossomed from Christ's grave. **But He who had lain in it was their King as well as ours, and new lessons of Divine love were taught them as they wondered and watched.**

They come to minister by act and word to the weeping women's faith and joy. Their appearance paralyses the guards, who would have kept the Mary's from the grave. They roll away the great circular stone, with which women's hands, however nerved by love, could not have moved in its grooves. They

speaking tender words to them. There by the empty tomb, the strong heavenly and the weak earthly lovers of the risen King meet together and clasp hands of help, the pledge of the first fruits of the standing order henceforth, and the inauguration of their office of "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for heirs of salvation."

The risen Christ hath made both one. The servants of the same King must needs be friends of one another. THE ANGEL'S WORDS FALL INTO THREE PARTS. (With the voice of angels). FIRST HE CALMS FEARS BY THE ASSURANCE THAT THE SEEKERS FOR CHRIST ARE DEAR TO CHRIST.

"Fear not ye." He glances at the prostrate watchers, and almost acknowledges the reasonableness of their abject terror. To them He could not but be hostile, but to hearts that longed for their and His Lord, he and all his mighty fellows were brethren.

Let us learn that all God's angels are our lovers and helpers, if we love and seek for the Lord Jesus Christ. Superstition has peopled the gulf between God and man with crowds of beings. Revelation assures that it is full of creatures who excel in strength. Men have cowered before them, but "Whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers," our King was their Creator, and is their Sovereign, and, if we serve Him, all these are on our side, the true Deliverer from superstitious terror is the risen Christ.

Again, the angel announces in simplest words the glorious fact, "He is risen," and helps them to receive it in a double way. He reminds them of Christ's own words, which had seemed so mysterious and had turned out so simple, so incredible, and now had proved so true. He calls them with a smile of welcome to draw near. And with him to look into the empty place.

The invitation extends to all of us, for the one assurance of immortality, and the only answer to the despairing question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" That which is solid

enough to resist the corrosion of modern doubt as of ancient ignorance, is that empty grave, and the filled throne, which was its necessary consequence. **By it we measure the love that stooped so low, we school our souls to anticipate without dread or reluctance our own lying down there, we fasten our faith on the risen Forerunner, and rejoice in the triumphant assurance of a living Christ.**

If the wonder of the women's stunned gaze is no more ours, our calm acceptance of the familiar fact need be none the less glad, and our estimate of its far reaching results more complete than their tumult of feeling permitted to them. No wonder that swiftly new **duty which was privilege** followed on the new, glad knowledge. It was emphatically "a day of glad tidings," and they could not hold their peace. A brief glance, enough for certitude and joy, was permitted, and then with urgent haste, **they are sent to be apostles to the apostles**, or epistles to the apostles.

The possession of the news of a risen Saviour binds the possessors to be its preachers. Where it is received in any power, it will impel to utterance. He who can keep silence has never felt, as he ought, the worth of the Word, nor realized the reasons why he has seen the cross or the empty grave. "He goeth before you into Galilee, there shall ye see."

It was but two complete days and one night since Christ had said to the disciples that He would rise again, and, as the Shepherd of the scattered flock, go before them into Galilee. How long ago since that saying it would seem.

The reason for Matthew's omission of all the other appearances of our Lord in Jerusalem, with the exception of the one which immediately follows, and for the stress he lay on this rendezvous in their native Galilee, have already been touched on, and need not detain us now.

THE NEXT POINT IN THE NARRATIVE IS THE GLAD INTERVIEW WITH THE

RISEN CHRIST. The women had been at the grave but for a few moments. But they lived more in these than in years of quiet. **Time is very elastic, and five minutes or five seconds may change a life.** THESE FEW MINUTES CHANGED A WORLD. Haste, winged by fear which had no torment, and by joy which found relief in swift movement, sent them running, forgetful of conventional, proprieties, towards the awakening city. Probably Mary Magdalene had led them, as soon as they saw the open grave and had hurried back alone to tell the good news. And now the crowning joy and wonder comes. How simply it is told.

The introductory "Behold," just hinting at the wonderfulness, and maybe the suddenness of our Lord's appearance, and the rest being in the quietist and fewest words possible. Note the deep significance of the name Jesus here. The angel spoke of "the Lord," but all the rest of the chapter speaks of "Jesus."

The joy and hope that flows from the resurrection depend on the fact of His humanity, "Jesus." He comes out of the grave, the same Brother of our mortal flesh as before. It was no phantom whose feet they clasped, and He is not withdrawn from them by His mysterious experience.

All through the resurrection histories and the narrative of the 40 days, the same emphasis attaches to the Name, which culminates in the angels assurance of the ascension, that "This same Jesus," is His true humanity, who has bore up on high, our Forerunner shall come again our Brother and our Judge. It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, but that triumphant assurance loses all its blessedness, unless we say, too, "Jesus died for our sins according to the Scripture and rose again the third day."

NOTE, TOO, THE CALMNESS OF HIS GREETING. He uses the common form of salutation, as if he had but been absent on some common occasion, and met them in ordinary circumstances. He speaks out of His own deep tranquility and desires to impart it to their agitated spirits. He would balm their

joy that it may be the deeper like His own. If we may give any weight to the original meaning of the formula of greeting which He employs, we may see blessed prophesy in it.

The lips of the risen Christ bid us all "Re-joice." ("All hail.") **His salutation is not an empty wish, but a command which makes its own fulfillment possible.** If our souls welcome Him, and our faith is firm in His risen power and love, then He gives us a deep and central gladness which nothing, "That is at enmity with joy can utterly abolish or destroy." They rush to His feet, and the silent clasp of adoration are eloquent of a tumult of feeling most natural and yet not without turbid elements which He does not wholly approve.

We have not here the prohibition of such a touch which was spoken to Mary, but we have substantially the same substitution, by His command of practical service for mere emotion. That carries a lesson always in season. **We cannot love Christ too much, nor try to get too near Him, to touch Him with the hand of our faith.** But there have been modes of spiritual emotion, represented by hymns and popular books, which have not mingled reverence rightly with love and have spoken of Him and of the emotions binding us to Him, in tones unwholesomely like those belonging to earthly passion.

But apart from that, Jesus taught these women, and us through them that it is better to proclaim His resurrection than to lie at His feet, and that however sweet the blessedness which we find in Him may be, it is meant to put a message into our lips, which others need. Our sight of Him gives us something to say, and binds us to say it.

It was a blessing to the women to have work to do, in doing which their strained emotions might subside. It was a blessing to the mournful company in the upper room to have their souls prepared for His coming by these heralds. It was a wonderful token of His unchanged love, and an answer to fears and doubts of how they might find Him, that He sends the message to them as brethren.

In the hurry of that Easter morning, they had no time to ponder on all that it has brought them. **The resurrection as the demonstration of Christ's Divinity and of the acceptance of His perfect sacrifice, or as the pledge of their resurrection, or as the type of their Christian way of life, was for future experience to grasp.** For that day, it was enough to pass from despair, to joy, and to let the astounding fact flood them with joyful hope.

We know the vast sweep of the consequences and consolations of it far better than they did. There is no reason in our distance from it, for its diminishing either in magnitude, in servitude or in blessedness in our eyes.

No fact in the history of the world stands on such a firm evidence as the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. No age of the world ever needed to believe it more than this age does. **It becomes us all to grasp it for ourselves with an iron tenacity of hold and to echo in the fame of the materialisms and know-nothing philosophy of this day, the old ringing confession, "Now is Christ risen from the dead."**

WE NEED TO SAY LITTLE ABOUT THE LAST POINT IN THIS NARRATIVE. The obstinate blindness of the rulers, and their transparent lie to account for the empty grave. The guard reports to the rulers, not to the governor, as they had been handed over by Pilate for special service. But they were Roman soldiers, as appears from the danger which the rulers provided against that of their alleged crime against military discipline, in sleeping at their post, coming to his ears. The trumped up story is too puerile to have taken in any one who did not wish to believe it.

How could they tell what happened when they were asleep? How could such an operation as forcing back a heavy stone, and exhuming a corpse, have been carried on without waking them? How could such a timid set of people have mustered up courage for such a bold act? What did they do it for? Not to bury their Lord. He had been lovingly laid

there by reverent hands, and costly spices strewn upon the sacred limbs. The only possible motive would be that the disciples might tell lies about His resurrection.

That hypothesis that the resurrection was a deliberately concocted falsehood has proved too strong for the stomach of modern unbelief, and has been long abandoned, as it has need to be.

When figs grow on thistle, such characters as the early Christians, martyrs, heroes, saints, will be produced by a system which has a lie, known to be one, for its foundation.

But the lame story is significant in two ways: It confesses, by its desperate attempt to turn the corner of the difficulty, that the great rock, on which all denials of Christ's resurrection split, is the simple question, "If He did not rise again, what became of the body?" The priests' answer is absurd, but it, at all events, acknowledges that the grave was empty, and that it is incumbent to produce an explanation which reasonable men can accept without laughter.

Further, this last appearance of the rulers in the Gospel is full of tragic significances, and is especially important to Matthew, whose narrative deals especially with Jesus Christ as the King and Messiah of Israel. This is the end of centuries of prophecy and patience. This is what all God's culture of His vineyard had come to. The Husbandman cast

the Heir out of the vineyard and slew Him. But there was a deeper depth than even that. They would not be persuaded when He rose again from the dead.

They entrenched themselves in a lie, which wholly showed that they had a glimmering of the Truth and hated it. And the lie was willingly swallowed by the mass of the nation, who thereby showed that they were of the same stuff as they who made it.

A conspiracy of falsehood, which knew itself to be such, was the last act of that august council of Israel. It is an awful lesson of the penalties of unfaithfulness to the light possessed, an awful instance of "judicial blindness."

So sets the sun on Israel. And therefore Matthew, a Gospel, turns away from the apostate nation, which has rejected its kings, to tell in its last words, of His assumption of universal dominion, and of the passage of the glad news from Israel to the world.

Angels and Women's Message of the Joy of Life. "Rejoice, I say, and again I say rejoice in the Lord!"

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