

AM Matthew 27:45-28:10 Come...and go

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[0 : 00] We're going to read from the New Testament, from Matthew's Gospel, chapter 27, verse 45, reading down into chapter 28, verse 10.

And in case any eagle-eyed reader notices that there's no garden in this passage, let me reassure you it does appear in John's Gospel, though Matthew doesn't happen to mention it.

Matthew 27, verse 45. Now, from the sixth hour, there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.

And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, Ele, ele, lama, sabachthani. That is, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, This man is calling on Elijah. And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink.

[1 : 27] But the others said, Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him. And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit.

And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

And coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe, and said, Truly, this was the Son of God. There were also many women looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him.

Among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus.

[2 : 56] He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock.

And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb, and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

The next day, that is, after the day of preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate, Pilate said, Sir, we remember how that imposter said while he was still alive, After three days I will rise.

Therefore, order the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Lest his disciples go and steal him away, and tell the people he has risen from the dead.

And the last fraud will be worse than the first. Pilate said to them, You have a guard of soldiers. Go make it as secure as you can.

[4 : 13] So they went and made the tomb secure, by sealing the stone and setting a guard. Now, after the Sabbath, towards the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

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.

His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him, the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.

He is not here, for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 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. So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

[5 : 45] And behold, Jesus met them and said greetings. And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped him.

Then Jesus said to them, Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. And there they will see me.

Let's join together now in prayer. Well, let's turn now to the word of God and to Matthew 28. And the words of the angel in verses 5 to 7.

But the angel said to the women, Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said.

Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead. And behold, he is going before you to Galilee.

[7 : 00] There you will see him. See, I have told you. A few weeks ago, when the Russians invaded Ukraine, I read an article suggesting that this was a turning point in history.

And the writer listed a number of other turning points in history. French Revolution in 1789. The Russian Revolution in 1917.

The first atomic bomb in 1945. All important events. But as every Christian would point out, there was another turning point in history.

Far more important than any of those. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ changed human history.

Forever. And every true Christian can say that it has changed their lives forever. Now our reading today covered both the death and the resurrection.

[8 : 25] But I want to focus just on the resurrection. And specifically on these words of the angel. It's very striking how the gospels begin and end with angels.

Matthew's gospel in chapter 1. An angel appeared to Joseph to tell him that Mary would have a child. Then in chapter 2.

Then in chapter 2. It's an angel who warns him to flee from Herod. And then tells him later that it's safe to come back. Now, the end of the gospel.

Matthew 28. An angel appears to tell the women that Jesus has risen. Likewise in Luke's gospel. Though different appearances are mentioned there. In Luke 1. An angel appears to Zechariah to announce the birth of John the Baptist. And then, of course, famously to Mary to announce that Jesus will be born.

[9 : 36] Then in Luke chapter 2. An angel announces the birth of Jesus to the shepherds. And a whole choir of angels appear to praise him. And then, at the end of the gospel.

Luke 24. Two angels appear at the tomb. But these are all at the beginning and the end.

In between times, they appear just twice. Both times ministering to Jesus. After the temptation in Matthew 4.

And at Gethsemane in Luke 22. Jesus often spoke about angels. But during his ministry, it seems that they stepped back.

Giving Jesus the center stage. Watching and wondering. While Jesus is here. He is the messenger.

[10 : 40] But here, once again, at the end is an angel. With good news. Good news for the women. Good news for the world. He is risen.

From the dead. You could sum up his message in two words. Come and go.

Come and see the place where he lay. And go. Tell his disciples. And I want us to look at it. Under those two headings.

Come and go. The invitation and the command. And to see how these two words. Can be applied also. To us. First though.

Let's just remember the story. So far. Jesus had been arrested. Late at night. In the garden of Gethsemane. Tried before Caiaphas.

[11 : 42] And condemned. Handed over to Pilate. Who ordered him to be crucified. Crucifixion took place at the third hour of the day.

That is 9 a.m. At the sixth hour of the day. Where we joined it in our reading. There was darkness. Over all the land. Until the ninth hour.

3 p.m. When Jesus cried out. My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me? Quoting from Psalm 22.

In those three hours. We believe Jesus bore. The full wrath of God. Against. Our sins. And then it was over.

Jesus cried out. Again. With a loud voice. And yielded up his spirit. John tells us. What he cried. He cried out. It is finished. Or.

[12:44] Literally. It is accomplished. It's done. Salvation. Was complete. Great. Great.

Great. Portents. Had followed. The veil of the temple. Was torn in two. There was an earthquake.

The graves were opened. And even the centurion. Concluded. This. Was.

The son of God. Now all this time. The women. Were watching. From afar.

And Matthew. Makes a point. Of mentioning. Specifically. Two of them. Mary Magdalene. And Mary. The mother. Of James.

The same two Marys. Who came later. To the tomb. Take note of that. They had. Seen him. Die.

[13:40] They knew. He was dead. There then. Follows the burial. Joseph. Of Arimathea. A rich disciple.

Asks for the body. Of Jesus. To give him. A decent burial. Otherwise. He would have been. Thrown into. A common grave. Takes the body. Wraps it in linen.

Lays it in the tomb. Which he'd prepared. For himself. Cut into the rock. And lays a great stone.

Over. The entrance. To the tomb. To the tomb. To the tomb. To the tomb.

And the women. Once again. Watched. Mary Magdalene. And the other Mary. Were there it says. Sitting opposite. The tomb. Take note again. The same two women. They saw. Where he was buried.

[14:35] They knew. Which tomb it was. And they knew. That he was. Definitely. In there. The next day.

The Jews. Asked for a guard. On the tomb. So that no one. Could steal the body. And claim. That he'd risen. From the dead. Because they remembered.

Even if the disciples. Didn't. That he'd claimed. That he would. As for the women. They rested. On the Sabbath. And then. They came to the tomb.

Early. On the first day. Of the week. That is. On the Sunday. Matthew simply says. They came to see. The tomb. Mark tells us.

That they brought. Spices. To anoint him. According to the custom. Of the Jews. It was an act. Of great devotion. And these women. Were very devoted.

[15:30] To Jesus. Jesus. Last at the cross. First at the tomb. They loved. Their master. But even so.

They were expecting. A dead body. Their only problem. Was. Who was going to move. That stone away. But the angel.

Had got there. Before him. There was an earthquake. An angel of the Lord. Descended from heaven. Rolled back the stone. And sat on it. Shining in glory.

The guards. Understandably. Fled with fear. The women are left alone. No doubt terrified. crucified. But the angel. Reassures them.

Do not be afraid. He says. I know. That you seek. Jesus. Who was crucified. I know. You don't need to tell me.

[16:30] You don't need to explain. I know. And then comes. The grand announcement. He is not here. For he.

Has. Risen. Risen. And he invites them. To come in. And see for themselves. So let's. Look now. At that invitation. Come. See the place.

Where he lay. What. Would they have seen. As they. Entered. That tomb. There are two places. In Jerusalem. That. Could. Possibly. Be the site. Of the tomb. The. Official. One. If you like. The traditional. Site. Is the church.

Of the. Holy. Sepulchre. Where there is. A magnificent. Golden. Shrine. You can. Go there.

[17:26] But you can't. Really imagine. From that. What it might have been like. The other place. Is the garden tomb. That I. Spoke of.

To the children. Which is a first century. Rock tomb. Discovered in the. Nineteenth century. Whether it is. The actual place.

Or not. It certainly. Gives you a feel. For what it must have been like. I've been there. And you go through.

A low door. That hole in the wall. That you saw in the picture. And you come into. A small. Rock. Chamber. With a rock. Ledge. On one side.

Where the body. Would have been laid. And space. For. Maybe half a dozen. Mourners. To stand together. Beside the body. These women.

[18 : 25] Will have seen. That stone ledge. Empty. When Peter and John. Came later. They noted. The folded. Grave clothes. Lying there. And I'm sure. The women. Saw them too. But there was no. Denying it. The body.

Was gone. Gone. Now that in itself. Doesn't prove. The resurrection. If this were the only evidence. Then there would still be questions. To be answered. There was a famous. Archbishop of St. Andrews. Called James Sharp. A great persecutor.

Of the Covenanters. He was assassinated. In 1679. When his tomb. Was opened. In 1849.

[19 : 25] Mysteriously. It was found. To be empty. But that doesn't prove. That James Sharp. Rose from the dead. On the contrary.

There is evidence. To suggest. That the body. Was moved. In 1725. Could the body. Of Jesus. Have been moved.

No. It couldn't. Because the Jews. Had made absolutely. Sure of that. They anticipated. That possibility. The disciples.

Might come. And steal the body. And then. Lie to the people. And say that he rose. From the dead. Let's make sure. That. That doesn't happen. They put that stone. And sealed the stone there.

And they had. Put a guard on it. To make sure. The body. Could not. Be moved. Could Jesus.

[20 : 23] Have been alive. When they took him down. From the cross. And recovered. In the tomb. No. The women. Had seen him.

Dead. And the other gospels. Add that. The soldier. Had thrust a spear. Through his side. Just to make. Double sure. Could they have gone.

To the wrong tomb. No. We've already noted. That they were there. And they. Watched and saw. Where he was buried. Sherlock Holmes.

Said. When you have eliminated. The impossible. What remains. However. Improbable. Must. Be the truth. It all pointed.

To Jesus. Having. Really. Risen from the dead. Improbable. Though that might have seemed. Amazing. Though it was. There was no. Other explanation.

[21 : 30] And very soon. Afterwards. They would have. The proof of that. They would see him. With their own eyes. And later through that day.

Others would see him. And in the days to come. Many would see him. Seeing the tomb. Though. Was important.

The angel. Wanted them. To be sure. Had they. Only seen. The risen Jesus. And not seen. The empty tomb.

They might still. Have had doubts. The disciples. Actually did think. It was a ghost. At first. They might have thought. It was just a vision.

Or they might. Simply just. Not have believed. Their eyes. But the empty tomb. Plus. The resurrection. Appearances.

[22 : 27] Left no. Reasonable. Grounds. For doubt. Imagine a different. Scenario. Where the. Angel. Had simply said.

Outside the tomb. He is risen. Go home. And be happy. But had refused. Them permission. To go inside the tomb. Don't you think.

They would have. Some suspicions. Something. Odd. Is going on here. But no. The angel. Is completely open. And invites them.

To come. And see. For themselves. See. He is definitely. Not here. He is risen. And they ought. Not to be surprised.

By that. Because he had. Said he would rise. Three times. On the way. To Jerusalem. Jesus had said. He must suffer. And be crucified. And rise again.

[23 : 22] Matthew. 20. 18. For example. The son of man. Will be delivered over. To the chief priests. And scribes. And they will condemn him. To death. And deliver him over. To the Gentiles. To be mocked.

And flogged. And crucified. And he will be raised. The third day. They'd seen the first part of that. Fulfilled to the letter. Why should they be surprised.

When the last part. Was fulfilled. Come and see. The angel is saying. It has happened. It has happened. Just as he said.

Now God. Invites us also today. To come. And see for ourselves. Quite literally.

If you want. You can go and search. For the bones of Jesus. You can go. If you like. To the church. Of the holy sepulchre. And you can queue up. To go inside the shrine.

[24 : 20] But you won't find. Any bones there. Unlike. The shrines. Of the saints. That you find. In some cathedrals. Which still have bones. In them. There are.

No bones. In that shrine. In Jerusalem. Or you can go. To the garden tomb. It's quieter there. But still no bones.

In fact. They have. Matthew 28 verse 6. Written. On the door. He is. Not here. He is risen.

Jesus is unique. In this respect. Other religious. Leaders. All have their tombs. Where their bodies. Remain. To be venerated. By their followers.

You can go. To the tomb. Of Muhammad. In Medina. The Buddha. The Buddha. Was cremated. But his relics. Are still kept. In various places.

[25 : 20] I've seen. A supposed. Finger. Of the Buddha. In Hong Kong. Likewise. All the. Great political.

Leaders. You can still see. The body of Lenin. In wax. Outside. The Kremlin. These men. Are dead. But not Jesus.

He is risen. From the dead. But also. God. Invites us. To consider. The evidence. And that is what we are doing.

When we read. These scriptures. Christianity. Rests on. Faith. It's true. But it's not. Blind faith. It rests upon.

Historic events. That actually. That actually. Took place. Jesus actually. Died on the cross. He actually. Rose. From the dead. And the evidence.

[26 : 19] For that. Is recorded. For us. In these. Eyewitness. Accounts. Including. This account. By the women. And we're invited. To come. And read this evidence.

For ourselves. In a court case. Jurors. Are invited. To hear. The evidence. And weigh it up. And God invites us.

Openly. To read this evidence. Read the witness. Statements. Make up your own mind. And see for yourself. That it's true.

These are not. Just cunningly devised. Fables. The Lord. Is risen. Indeed. And what a difference. That makes. For these. Women. It's the difference. Between mourning. And rejoicing. Says in Psalm 30. You have turned. My mourning.

[27 : 14] Into dancing. In Isaiah 6. The Lord. Says. He comes. To grant. To those. Who mourn. In Zion. Beauty. Instead of ashes. In John 16.

He'd said. Your sorrow. Will turn. Into joy. I don't know. Whether these women. Literally danced. Probably not. But they departed.

With fear. And great joy. I'm sure. Their hearts. Were dancing. With joy. At the thought. That their Lord. Was risen.

And later. They. And the other disciples. Realized. What it all meant. Christ. Had conquered death. Both for himself. And for us. His sacrifice. On the cross. Had been accepted. And he had opened. The doors of heaven.

[28 : 14] For us. If. Christ. Had not risen. I suppose. Christianity. Might still survive. As an ethical system.

People would still. Remember Jesus. As a great. Moral teacher. But it would have no power. As Paul says. In 1 Corinthians. If Christ is not risen.

Our faith is in vain. But he is risen. We have a living Lord. Who is with us now. And an eternal future.

To look forward to. Death has lost its sting. We can look forward. To the future now. With hope. God. But if God.

Raised Christ. He can raise us also. Spiritually. Here in this world. And physically. At the last day. That.

[29 : 12] Is good news indeed. God. But there is a command. As well. Go quickly. And tell his disciples. That he is risen. From the dead. And behold. He is going before you.

To Galilee. And there you will see him. See. I have told you. Privilege always brings. Responsibility. These women were privileged.

To be the first. To know that Jesus. Had risen from the dead. They had a responsibility. Now. To tell others. Now. For the women.

That meant. Telling. The disciples. It was not yet time. To tell the world. That would come later. In the great commission. But first.

The disciples. Must know. And these women. Must tell them. And they must tell them. Not only that he was risen. But they would see him.

[30 : 06] In Galilee. They would of course. See him before that. But the angel is focusing. Upon the great gathering. That Jesus. Had himself promised.

That is the message. And they are eager. To deliver it. Verse 8. They ran. To tell. The disciples. It wasn't just a matter. Of obeying the angel.

They wanted to tell them. As soon as possible. And along the way. In verse 9. Jesus met them. And said greetings.

How often. It is in the course of duty. That we meet Jesus. That was the only thing. That could possibly delay them. They came and took hold of his feet.

And worshipped him. And he confirms the angel's message. Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers. To go to Galilee. And there they will see me. Do you notice there.

[31 : 07] The very slight change. In the message. The angel said. Go and tell his disciples. Jesus said. Go and tell my brothers.

These disciples. Who a few days ago. All forsook him. And fled. Peter. Peter. Who a few days ago. Had denied him. My brothers.

Now they really do have a story to tell. An empty tomb. And a risen Lord. Who in spite of all the disciples failures. Still loves them.

As brothers. Others. And yet we know. That they got a cold reception. Luke 24 tells us. Their words seemed to them like idle tales. But it was all true.

As the disciples would soon see for themselves. Now we too. Have a responsibility. To tell others. Good news.

[32 : 10] Has to be shared. Indeed there is that same pattern. Come and go. In our lives also. Come and be convinced yourself.

And then go. And convince others. Or to apply it more broadly. Come to Christ. And go. And tell others about him.

I knew a missionary once. Who adopted that. As his email address. Come go. At hotmail.com And it should be hotmail too.

Because it is urgent. If you still have doubts. Yourself. The invitation is still there for you.

Come. And see for yourself. But if you are a Christian. Go. And tell others.

[33 : 11] Today our mission is to the whole world. Matthew 28. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations. There is still a need though.

Even today. To tell the disciples. Not because they don't know. But to reassure and encourage them. That's what I'm doing essentially today.

Preaching this sermon. To most of you. You know these things. But it's good to be reminded.

Preaching to the converted.

Is not a waste of time. A large part of Christian fellowship. Consists in reminding one another. Of the great truths.

Of the faith. But the real challenge. Is to tell the world. Both by preaching. And by our private conversations.

[34 : 12] You may not always get a good reception. Like these women. What you say. May be regarded as idle tales. But this is good news.

And the world needs to hear. And we should be eager. To tell them. May the Lord help us.

To proclaim. A risen Christ. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing in conclusion now. The hymn.

Thine be the glory. Risen. Conquering. Son.