

The Angel's Announcement

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[0 : 0 0] It is clothing white as snow. And for fear of him, the guards trembled and became like dead men. Now our passage for today. But the angel said to the woman, do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.

He is not here, for he has risen just as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead.

Behold, he is going before you into Galilee. There you will see him. See, I have told you. On July the 20th, 1969, it was announced that mankind had landed on the moon.

On the 8th of May 1945, it was announced that World War II in Europe was over. On November the 9th, 2020, it was announced that Pfizer-BioNTech had developed a vaccine against COVID-19 with 90% effectiveness.

Each were wonderful announcements. World-changing announcements, even. But none of them was the most important announcement ever made.

[1 : 2 9] That announcement wasn't made by a newsreader, a politician, or a medic. Not by any mortal. It was made by a heavenly angel 2,000 years ago.

The announcement itself comprised only three words. He is risen. Man has walked on the moon.

Wonderful. But Jesus Christ has risen. Marvelous. World War II is over. Wonderful. But Jesus Christ has risen from the dead.

Marvelous. A vaccine against COVID-19 has been developed. Wonderful. But Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. Marvelous.

See, the third day resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead changes everything. In heaven and on earth. No wonder God chose an angel to announce the resurrection of his son.

[2 : 3 2] For only such as an angel could have done justice to this universe-changing event. The announcement of the resurrection of Jesus Christ changes our past, our present, and our future.

Our mind, our body, and spirit. Our life now. Our life hereafter. These verses in Matthew 28 from verse 5 to 7 contains the most important announcement ever made.

Have you listened? And how has this announcement changed you? Let me suggest from these verses we could spend all week and all year and all millennia speaking from these verses.

But let me suggest from these verses this morning that we're called to do four things. Stop and listen. Come and see. Go and tell.

Wait and watch. These four activities. These four activities are all centred around the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That forms the central spoke around which Christianity works.

[3 : 5 1] Devotion. Salvation. Evangelism. And everything else. Prepare to hear the angel again. As he announces over the millennia and over the miles.

You seek Jesus who was crucified. He's not here. He has risen. Listen. First of all then. Stop and listen. Stop and listen. It was last week we first encountered this angel. His appearance heralded a great announcement.

In March last year when a national lockdown was announced. The Prime Minister himself made an announcement. He didn't leave it to one of his civil servants.

It was a huge announcement that would have huge implications for everyone in the UK. And so it was left to the most important person to make it. In the same way the presence of this angel should alert us to the importance of the announcement he has for us.

[5 : 05] That is more or less what we learned last week. The guards at the tomb were shaking with fear. But it would seem from verse 5 that the woman who had gone to the tomb were also afraid.

The words which come from the angel's mouth. The first words are don't be afraid. Actually the verbal form Matthew uses here. Would perhaps be better translated as stop being afraid.

Stop being afraid. The implication being that these godly women were already afraid. And the angel is calling upon them to stop being afraid.

Isn't that something else? But the first words to come from heaven after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead are... Stop being afraid.

I find this utterly compelling. That God's first concern is to calm the fears of these women who had come to the tomb looking for their Lord.

[6 : 19] That God's first concern as it were is for them. That he would give them reasons to help them overcome the fear which has so taken a hold of them.

You know that some variant of stop being afraid is the most frequent command of God in the whole Bible. It's almost like the higher law of God.

His command which transcends all others. Don't be afraid. God made you. And God knows everything about you.

God knows that we are a generation of the afraid. Or we may project confidence to others especially on social media. But inside.

When we're all by ourselves. It's a different matter. We're afraid of our own shadow. In the beginning when Adam and Eve first sinned.

[7 : 26] The first emotion to which they admit is fear. Adam says, I heard the sound of you, God, in the garden.

And I was afraid. Ever since when God looks at humankind. Yes, yes, he sees our sin. But more than that. He sees generations of the afraid.

You know, I'm not going to ask you whether you're afraid or not today. I'm going to ask you of what are you afraid today? Are you afraid of being exposed?

Found out. Afraid of the light. Afraid of the dark. Afraid of the night. Afraid of the day. Afraid of being with others.

Afraid of being alone. Afraid of the noise. Afraid of the silence. Whatever it is you fear.

[8 : 28] Listen to the voice of the angel as he commands you saying, Stop being afraid. God knows your fears. And the resurrection of Jesus Christ provides you with every reason to overcome your fears.

Yes, God does not command us to stop being afraid without giving us a strong reason. You might as well command the tide to go back on itself as to tell us to stop being afraid without giving us a reason.

And God does. And what a reason he gives us. You know, there are times that it's right to speak to God and to tell him about ourselves.

But there are other times when it's better to listen to God as he tells us about himself. What God says isn't just about himself, but about us also.

And so now's the time not to speak, but to listen. Sometimes in order to shake us from our fear, God needs to give us what we might call a telling.

[9 : 39] And so the angel begins to speak. It's not for us to ask him questions. If we want to overcome our fears, we just need to listen. That's one of the problems with us proud human beings.

We don't want to listen to God giving us a telling. Rather, we want to add our own opinions to his announcement. But now's not the time to speak.

Now's the time to listen. And the angel says, I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen.

There it is. The greatest announcement ever made. It is not for us to speak. It is for us to listen. The reason why we can overcome our fears and stop being afraid is right here.

Jesus Christ is no longer in the tomb. He has risen. The message of the resurrection of Christ is the answer to the fear of Adam in the garden, ashamed as he was of his sin before God.

[10 : 49] It is the answer to all our fears. Fear belongs to the fall. And to the consequences of sin. The answer to fear belongs in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Do you want to overcome your fears? Then don't speak. Don't speak. Listen. Listen to the greatest announcement ever made.

Greater than the end of war. Greater than man walking on the moon. Greater than the development of a vaccine which will extend our lives for a few years, but not indefinitely.

Secondly. This is devotion. As we listen to God speaking to us. I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.

He is not here. He is risen. Second thing we want to see from this passage today.

[11 : 54] Come and see. Come and see. I'm not a psychologist. But if I was, I'm certain I would find the psychology of the angel's announcement fascinating.

His concern is not just to make the announcement, but also the mindset of these fearful women who, because of their devotion to Jesus, had come to anoint his body.

He says to them, come and see the place where he lay. Come and see. God always gives a reason to believe his word.

And here it is. Come and see the place where he lay. The Jesus who these women had seen crucified some 36 hours previous and buried soon after.

This Jesus, he's not here. He's risen. And the angel invites them to come and see the place where once he lay. You know, I love the way the English Standard Version translates this phrase.

[12 : 59] The place where he lay. Lay is in the past tense. He once lay there, but he lies there no longer.

He is risen. He's not lying on that too many more. Come and see is the angel's invitation to investigation. To the investigation of the factuality of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

It's almost like he says to these women, you don't have to take my word for it. Go and check it out for yourself. The word of the angel should be enough for them and for us.

But if there should remain any doubt at all, then go into the tomb and see where Jesus once lay. You know, I have noticed that the vast majority of debates between Christians and those who aren't Christians revolve around issues other than the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

They concern matters of creation. Of philosophy, of science, of religion. Yes, even the problem of pain.

[14 : 10] But in the last analysis, this angel didn't come to debate anything at all. He has come to announce the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

He doesn't have time, nor would it seem the will, to debate anything else than this. He's come to draw humanity's attention to the empty tomb of Jesus.

But that empty tomb, which according to one Christian apologist, is the best attested fact in all of human history. Come and see for yourself.

Examine the evidence and you'll be drawn to the same conclusion millions of others have over the centuries. Jesus is no longer in the place where once he lay. And even though I don't want to major on these issues because the truth is that the word of the angel should be enough for us, let me point to these three apologetic fundamentals.

We'll go back to these next week. But let me point to these. First, Jesus died. Jesus died. You seek Jesus who was crucified. That's what the angel says.

[15 : 24] Some try to disprove the resurrection of Jesus on the basis that he didn't die on the cross, but rather he fell into a swoon and the cool of the tomb revived him.

Well, according to the angel, it wasn't that way when he said about Jesus, he was crucified. Secondly, Jesus was buried in the right tomb.

Jesus was buried in the wrong tomb. What I mean by that is that these women did not go to the wrong tomb. Again, some people over the years have tried to disprove the resurrection of Jesus on the basis that the woman must have gone to the wrong tomb.

And therefore, it wasn't surprising they didn't find the body of Jesus there. Well, again, not according to the angel who says, come and see the place where he lay.

And then thirdly, the tomb was empty. The tomb was empty. The body of Jesus was not there. You have to account for this historical fact in all your logic and reason.

[16 : 34] The angel says he's not here. In a couple of weeks, we're going to see that the authorities made up a story suggesting that the disciples stole Jesus' body.

But not according to the angel who says he has risen. But the point of it all is this.

Stop being afraid. Listen to the word of the angel. But if that's not enough for you, come and see the empty tomb of Jesus for yourself.

Think through what these events mean. Don't be distracted with the other issues you're struggling with. Focus upon this. Jesus was crucified, but on the third day he rose from the dead.

There is no other rational explanation which obeys the law of Occam's razor better than that. People think Christians foolish.

[17 : 37] But are we really so foolish to base our faith both upon the word of God and the evidence of the resurrection? God's interest isn't in our fruitless speculation.

It is in the solid establishment of our faith and in the assurance of the things in which we believe. Many years ago now, when I was going through Free Church College, this might surprise you to know, I went through a period of great doubt.

I wondered how, in the light of all the bad things that were happening in the world, how there could be a God at all. It went on for weeks.

Until, on a long walk one day, I revisited the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It was then, God renewed my assurance in him and in salvation.

Try it for yourself. The hymn, Because He Lives, I Can Face Tomorrow, is very well liked in Christian circles, but we don't sing it.

[18 : 52] Why not? It's because it says, you ask me how I know he lives. He lives within my heart. You know, that line's not true.

It's not true to life, to experience, or to scripture. The reason we know Jesus lives has got nothing to do with a subjective feeling in our hearts, but an objective fact of history.

The tomb was empty and Jesus rose on the third day. Come and see for yourself. Third. Third. Go and tell.

Go and tell. If the angel's first command is in the area of devotion, and is second in the area of salvation, then his third is in the area of evangelism.

He commands these women, saying, go quickly and tell his disciples that he's risen from the dead. Had Jesus not risen from the dead, where he's still in his tomb, the Christian church would have no motive for evangelism and no message of hope with which to evangelize.

[20 : 11] After all, the word evangelize is taken from a Greek word meaning good news. The announcement, proclamation of good news. In the world of the day, heralds would stand in the town square and announce a military victory.

That was good news. Or they would announce a royal birth. That was good news. And the Christian church has the best news of all to announce.

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. You know, I sometimes wonder whether the church's definition of evangelism is too broad.

Too broad. Given that the good news we are to proclaim is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, is our definition of evangelism too broad? Is evangelism merely a prophetic voice against immorality in society?

Is evangelism merely good works? Is evangelism merely preaching truth from the Bible? No.

[21 : 21] Evangelism, by definition, is the verbal, word-containing and word-based proclamation of the good news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He says, go quickly and tell.

Go quickly and tell. That's what the angel commands the woman. The angel doesn't say, go and tell his disciples that he is disappointed with them.

The angel doesn't say, go and care for the disciples in my name. The angel doesn't say, now it's time to preach our way through the book of Micah on a Sunday morning.

The angel says, go and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead. This is to be the church's primary message.

If you were to stop a man in the street in Glasgow today and ask him what he thought the main message of today's church is, he'd probably refer to the church's views on marriage and human sexuality.

[22 : 30] And I'm not saying the church's views on these things are unimportant. But of first importance is that the man in the street knows enough about the church to know that we are fixated by and fascinated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We use the word broken record to speak of someone who only ever speaks of the same thing over and over and over again. Shame on us as a Christian church for not being broken records when it comes to the resurrection of our Lord.

Go and read your way through the apostolic sermons in the book of Acts. And you'll find one common thread running through them all.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ. Go and tell. It is the fundamental call of the gospel. Not stay and be silent, but go and tell. Don't wait for them to come in.

Go and find them. Not show them by your good works. Tell them the good news. If when other great announcements were made, the moon landings, the end of World War II, the development of a vaccine for COVID, all we could do was talk about them for weeks afterwards.

[23 : 52] Surely the greatest announcement of them all, that salvation has been won, that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, deserves for us to be devoted to evangelism and mission.

It's not a job for the professionals. It's a job for all of us. Go and tell. And then lastly, wait and watch.

Wait and watch. The angel's message to these women finishes with the words, Behold, he is going before you into Galilee. There you will see him.

Having risen from the dead, Jesus goes back to the place where his public ministry all began, in Galilee. These women are to go to the disciples with a message of patience and watchfulness.

Wait and you'll see him in Galilee. Watch for him there. Yes, implicit within this most important of all proclamations, he is risen, is another universally important declaration.

[25 : 05] He is coming and you will see him again. We'll come back to that in a moment. What I want you to notice at this point is who the angels commanded the woman to go and tell, to go to Galilee, where they'll see Jesus.

Namely, the disciples. In light of how the disciples to a man had abandoned Jesus during the crucifixion, isn't this a marvelous command?

Because it means that although they had given up on Jesus, he had not given up on them. It means that he still loves them. And he longs for them to be reconciled to him.

Like the prodigal son of the parable, they run away from him. But like the beloved father in that story, he runs to embrace them and welcomes them home.

And that's the most remarkable thing. For if it had been me who had been so abandoned, forsaken in my time of need, I would have taken my revenge.

[26 : 08] And what an awful vengeance I would have wrought. Especially in Peter. Peter, the big mouth, who'd been my closest friend, denied me three times.

I would have called down heaven's fire on him. And far from wanting to see him again, I would have locked him away in a padded room all by himself. But not Jesus.

The risen Jesus goes far beyond my vengeful spirit. He's fixed not on revenge, but on reconciliation. Not on getting even, but on loving his disciples.

And that's wonderful. Isn't it wonderful? Isn't it wonderful? Because it means there is hope for those of us who have abandoned Jesus. Hope for those of us who have denied Jesus in the past.

Perhaps there are some here this morning who for many years have been walking away from him. Perhaps not publicly, but most certainly privately. But now we've come back to our senses and we're thinking, well, Jesus won't want me back.

[27 : 15] That Jesus somehow has revenge and judgment on his mind when it comes to me. No. No. And no again, there is no vengeance in his mind.

Just reconciliation. He doesn't loathe you. He loves you. He loves you as much now as he did before you abandoned him in the first place.

You may have given up on him, but he has never given up on you. And even now, like that father in the story of the prodigal son, he runs to embrace you.

Come home to him. But then as we close, I want to come back to that universe changing thought. That thought which is implicit within what the woman are to tell the disciples.

He is coming. And you will see him again. That's the message I really want to leave with us all today. Not just that Jesus has risen.

[28 : 22] He has. This is the most glorious announcement in all of history. But not just that. Not by a long shot. The fact that Jesus has risen from the dead is the prelude to an even greater event still to come.

For this Jesus, who met the disciples in Galilee, as we'll see in three weeks time, shall come again. Not this time in the weakness of Bethlehem's stable and Golgotha's cross, but in the glory of his father, of all the mighty angels.

He shall come and every eye will see him. Not as he appears in Galilee, but as he appears over the whole world. Every eye will see him, whether they believed in him or not.

We shall all hear the trumpet sound. And the sky having been torn apart, we shall see the exultant Jesus appearing before us in heavenly majesty.

If you were a Christian today, how wonderful the prospect of that day. Fills us with joy and hope. But also with eagerness to go and tell.

[29 : 39] For there are many, yes, even with their own family, perhaps, for whom the day of the return of Christ shall be the worst of all days. For having spent their lives denying him, on this last day he shall deny them.

And so for us all, I want to leave us with the words of the angel. First direct. He is not here.

He is risen. And then implied. He is coming. And you will see him again. What will you do with these truths?

Let us pray. Our loving heavenly father, we thank you for the proclamation of the angel. Without the resurrection of Jesus, there would be no motive for evangelism and no message to evangelize with.

This is the greatest news ever. That news which helps us overcome our fears. That news which helps us to stop being afraid.

[30 : 50] That news you call us to go and tell. That news which tells us that Jesus is coming again.

Father, we ask that there wouldn't be one of us present to you this morning who would not be ready for the day of Christ's second coming. That by faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, as we believe the gospel of truth, that we ourselves would come to faith in him.

Commit our lives to him. We ask these things in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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