

Do Not Be Afraid

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[0 : 00] Well, happy Easter to you this morning. We're continuing on with this three-part mini-series from the end of Matthew's Gospel.

And this morning we're going to look at chapter 28, mostly verses 1 through 15. We'll save the Great Commission for later, though there's a verse in there that's really critical to the whole chapter. But turn with me now, if you will, to page 835. Now, in Vancouver, we're told that an earthquake is coming.

It's not a matter of if, but when. Some of us are preparing for that day and others of us are procrastinating. Earthquakes used to be called acts of God by some insurance agencies. I don't know if that's still the case, but I approve of that if that's the case. Earthquakes are disasters. Natural or supernatural. They disrupt. They disturb.

[1 : 02] They disorient. They destruct. They destabilize life. Without going too far into the science of earthquakes, they take place under the surface.

They are powerful. They're beyond our control. And the death and resurrection of Jesus was accompanied by two earthquakes. The day our Lord died and the day he rose.

And our Lord's death and resurrection, like an earthquake, was and is, in a word, powerful.

Authoritative. Probably the key verse in Matthew 28 is our Lord's words in verse 18.

Look down with me at that. It's on the right column, the second column, near the bottom. Jesus said, Our Lord's death and resurrection is the foundation for his authority.

His power shared with the Father and the Spirit. His authority has been identified by some and denied by others throughout the Gospel of Matthew. But all who encounter him experience and reacted to his authority in one way or another.

[2 : 17] The effect of the event, that is, his resurrection, is a reaction then to the risen Lord's death. And now seeing him again. And some will receive his authority and others will reject his authority.

Based on the news of his rising. And not even the news of it, but the encounter of him. But our Lord's resurrection from the dead then compels all attention.

And it will also confound the action of many. So this morning I want to look at two responses to the discovery of our Lord's resurrection. His rising again.

And the first one is this compelling dimension of his resurrection. And the other is the confounding description of his resurrection. So first the compelling authority of our Lord's resurrection.

After the dawn of the first day of the week. We learn of an appearance of angels. Of lightning brilliance and purifying reality. As well as an encounter of women followers and male guards in that garden.

[3 : 24] The women are seeking something that doesn't exist. A dead man. The religious leaders are preventing something they cannot. A risen man. And our Lord's resurrected encounter was then preceded by an angelic appearance to the two Marys.

They knew of something Jesus foretold. But neither grasped it beforehand. The angels appear with power and under authority of God.

The God of heaven and earth. And so the angel states then. I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. The angels knew something more about Jesus than the seekers.

Angels purpose isn't to scare people though that was their effect. They are messengers. Authorized to share a divine message. The word of the Lord. And what is that message this first Easter morning?

They say he is not here. He is risen. As he said. And this last phrase is pointing to the authority of our Lord. He promised it.

[4 : 31] And through his death and now his resurrection. He is delivering on this promise. It is a powerful statement. A powerful claim. Based on his authority.

The angels then continue in the same vein. As authority functions. The angels then issue two commands. They say. Come and see where he lay. And.

Then go and tell the disciples. He is risen from the dead. And he is going on to Galilee. The women are compelled by the authority of what they see.

And hear. And quickly without delay. But with fear and joy. They are compelled. They encounter Jesus.

It's followed by this. The Lord Jesus Christ then comes to them. And these women are prepared to give a witness of the resurrection. The women though.

[5 : 30] When they encounter Jesus. Fall down and worship him. After his greeting of them. When he just says greetings. And the angels. As they said.

Then come and see. Well now they actually don't have to hear that from Jesus. They encounter him. And they are encouraged by him. As they actually see him in his flesh. In his blood.

In his bones. Jesus repeats. Everything that the angels commanded. Except. Or sorry. Including. Don't. Be afraid. I wonder.

Don't you find that just a little bit surprising? Fear and joy. Seemed like a natural response to a miraculous event like this. But think for a second what it is that keeps Christians from sharing this good news that Jesus died.

And rose again. It's fear. Isn't it? Well quite by accident this week I came across an article called this.

[6 : 31] Don't gasp. Seven harsh truths that will improve your leadership skills overnight. I was a bit suspicious and cynical. As you might have been as well.

But nevertheless this was the first truth I found really interesting. That the leaders are to pump the fear out of the room. I wonder if the author took this truth from the Easter story.

Jesus said to the disciples. These two women. Don't be afraid. Well. Our Lord's authority is compelling. He takes the fear out of the situation.

By telling them not to be. Knowing that all authority on heaven and earth has been given to him. Through his death and his resurrection. And as moving as his death must have been for these women.

Our Lord's resurrection is what then changes them. It changes them from fearful sinners. To faithful servants. It's the first thing.

[7 : 35] Our Lord's death and resurrection is compelling. But it's also confounding. Not all received the news about Jesus' resurrection the same. And the guards had the same knowledge to go on as these two women.

And while the women were lifted up by an angelic appearance. The rolled back stone. And even fear. The guards trembled and became like dead men. That's in verse 4.

With the same knowledge. And they were seeking. A dead. Now you weren't seeking a dead man. Like the women. But they were interested in sealing him.

Keeping him there in the grave. But they failed. Though I might add no worse than Peter and Judas. The disciples and the crowds. The story continues in verse 11.

Some of the guard. Though not all of them. Then made their report to those who authorized them. So the chief priests. The elders. They take counsel together.

[8 : 35] They assemble together. And what do they do? They conspire against the Lord. And they concoct a false story. These false authorities.

Concoct this story. That goes against the facts. And even against their own original plan. The very thing that they tried to prevent.

The missing. An absent. Or a stolen body. Is now the story they are. Charging the soldiers to spin. The false authorities are confounded.

As they conspire against the Lord. This is what Psalm 2 tells us. That the Lord laughs at those who attempt. To author another kind of salvation story.

Well the evidence suggests an empty tomb. And a personal encounter with the risen Lord. And as one commentator states. That the resurrection was personal. But it was public.

[9 : 35] It was also planned. And powerful. But let me add another P to that group of descriptions. Of the resurrection of our Lord that morning. It was also permissive.

Now the Lord in his grace lets another story. Or another news run. He doesn't prevent it. He doesn't put a gag order on this false story.

As if to say though. Go ahead and tell your story. And let's see what happens. Well even in the confounding authority of the Lord. Of heaven and earth.

His grace permits stories. And in doing so confounds the world. The world thinks it's really wise. But it's not.

And Paul about his gospel. Of power and authority says this. In 1 Corinthians. He says. Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?

[10 : 34] Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? We preach Christ crucified. Add to that in risen again. As he goes to chapter 15 later in this letter.

But Christ. The power of God. And the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God. Is wiser than men. And the weakness of God.

Is stronger than men. Our Lord's resurrection. The power of his being alive again. Confounds the world in which we live.

Well as you know. Today is April Fool's Day. And the resurrection is no joke. Jokes shelf life.

Far less than fads. And fashions. And phases. But our Lord's bodily resurrection. Has stood the test of time. The resurrection of our Lord is powerful.

[11 : 30] Compelling some. Confounding many. And our Lord's bodily resurrection. Has stood up to scrutiny. And cynicism. And I can't think of a better day.

Than April Fool's Day. To celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. Our Lord may have said. Don't be afraid. But he didn't say. Don't be a fool. Fools for Christ.

Believe for good reason. But not to be fooled. By false stories. Fools for Christ. Take our Lord's word.

And press through. Fear to come and see. That is to perceive and understand. The gospel. And then to go and tell. About the grace.

Of our Lord Jesus Christ. And that he is. Lord and Savior. And that it's by the power of his Holy Spirit. That we're convicted of our sin.

[12 : 26] We're convinced that he is the Lord and Savior. Risen from the dead. Our whole lives are converted. And transformed. Born and we live a joyful life. Because of what he's done for us.

And we're compelled into the world. To make this news known. You know on Christmas. We sing this hymn called. Go tell it on the mountain.

I think on Easter. We should have. We should have. A similar sin. To a similar tune. Called. Go tell it in the world. That Jesus Christ. Is risen. Well if our Lord's death.

And resurrection. Were presented by a form of punctuation. I don't think it would be a comma. A period. Or a question mark. But an exclamation mark.

The authority and power. Of this event. And the reality of it. To exceed that of our. Regional earthquake. That we're to anticipate. It has that.

[13 : 25] It has exceedingly more power of that. Because Jesus is risen. He has come. And he will come again. I speak to you in the name of the Father.

The Son. And the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.