

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

28:1-10

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

The principal subject of these verses is the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. It is one of those truths which lie at the very foundation of Christianity, and has therefore received special attention in the four Gospels. All four Evangelists describe minutely how our Lord was crucified: all four relate, with no less clearness, that he rose again. We need not wonder that so much importance is attached to our Lord's resurrection: it is the seal and headstone of the great work of redemption which he came to do. It is the crowning proof that he has paid the debt which he undertook to pay on our behalf, won the battle which he fought to deliver us from hell, and is accepted as our surety and our substitute by our Father in heaven. Had he never come forth from the prison of the grave, how could we ever have been sure that our ransom had been fully paid (i»¿ 1 Corinthians 15:17)? Had he never risen from his conflict with the last enemy, how could we have felt confident that he has overcome death and him that had the power of death, that is the devil? (2:14)? But thanks be unto God, we are not left in doubt: the Lord Jesus really rose again for our justification. True Christians are begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. They may boldly say with Paul, Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ, that died yea rather that is risen again. (i»¿ Romans 8:34 Rom. 4:25, 1 Peter 1:3) We have reason to be very thankful that this wonderful truth of our religion is so clearly and fully proved. It is a striking circumstance that of all the facts of our Lord's earthly ministry, none are so incontrovertibly established as the fact that he rose again. The wisdom of God, who knows the unbelief of human nature, has provided a great crowd of witnesses on the subject. Never was there a fact which the friends of God were so slow to believe as the resurrection of Christ; never was there a fact which the enemies of God were so anxious to disprove. Yet, in spite of the unbelief of friends and the enmity of foes, the fact was thoroughly established. Its evidences will always appear to a fair and impartial mind unanswerable. It would be impossible to prove anything in the world if we refuse to believe that Jesus rose again. Let us notice in these verses the glory and majesty with which Christ rose from the dead. We are told that there was a great earthquake. We are told that an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came, and rolled back the stone from the door of the sepulchre and sat upon it. We need not suppose that our blessed Lord needed the help of any angel when he came forth from the grave; we need not for a moment doubt that he rose again by his own power; but it pleased God that his resurrection should be accompanied and followed by signs and wonders. It seemed good that the earth should shake, and a glorious angel appear, when the Son of God arose from the dead as a conqueror. Let us not fail to see in the manner of our Lord's resurrection a type and pledge of the resurrection of his believing people. The grave could not hold him beyond the set time, and it will not be

able to hold them. A glorious angel was a witness of his rising, and glorious angels shall be the messengers who shall gather believers when they rise again. He rose with a renewed body, and yet a body, real, true and material. And so also shall his people have a glorious body, and be like their head.

When we see Him we shall be like him. (1 John 3:2). Let us take comfort in this thought. Trial, sorrow and persecution are often the portion of God's people; sickness, weakness and pain often hurt and wear away their poor earthly tabernacle; but their good time is yet to come. Let them wait patiently, and they shall have a glorious resurrection. When we die, where we are buried and what kind of a funeral we have matters little: the great question to be asked is this, How shall we rise again? Let us notice in the next place the terror which Christ's enemies felt at the period of his resurrection. We are told that, at the sight of the angel, the keeper did shake and became as dead men. Those hardy Roman soldiers, though not unused to dreadful sights, saw a sight which made them quail. Their courage melted at once at the appearance of one angel of God. Let us again see in this fact a type and emblem of things yet to come. What will the ungodly and the wicked do at the last day, when the trumpet shall sound and Christ shall come in glory to judge the world? What will they do when they see all the dead, both small and great, coming forth from their graves, and all the angels of God assembled round the great white throne? What fears and terrors will possess their souls when they find they can no longer avoid God's presence, and must at length meet him face to face? Oh, that men were wise, and would consider their latter end! Oh, that they would remember that there is a resurrection and a judgment, and that there is such a thing as the wrath of the Lamb! (Revelation 6:16)! Let us notice in the next place the words of comfort which the angel addressed to the friends of Christ. We read that he said, Fear not ye, for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. These words were spoken with a deep meaning. They were meant to cheer the hearts of believers in every age, in the prospect of the resurrection; they were intended to remind us that true Christians have no cause for alarm in the last day whatever may come on the world. The Lord shall appear in the clouds of heaven and the earth be burned up; the graves shall give up the dead that are in them, and the sea shall give up the dead that are in it; the judgment will be set, and the books shall be opened; the angels shall sift the wheat from the chaff, and divide between the good fish and the bad. But in all this there is nothing that need make believers afraid. Clothed in the righteousness of Christ, they shall be found spotless and blameless; safe in the one true ark, they shall not be hurt when the flood of God's wrath breaks on the earth. Then shall the words of the Lord receive their complete fulfilment: When these things begin to come to pass, and lift up your heads, because your redemption draweth nigh. Then shall the wicked and unbelieving see how true was that word: Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord (Psalm 33:12). Let us notice finally the gracious message which the Lord sent to the disciples after his resurrection. He appeared in person to the women who had come to do honor to his body. Last at the cross and first at the tomb, they were the first privileged to see him after he rose and to them He gives commission to carry tidings to his disciples. His first thought is for his little scattered flock: Go and tell my brethren. There is something deeply touching in those simple words, my brethren: they deserve a thousand thoughts. Weak, frail, erring as the disciples were, Jesus still calls them his brethren. He comforts them, as Joseph did his brethren who had sold him, saying, I am your brother Joseph. Much as they had come short of their profession, sadly as they had yielded to the fear of man, they are still his brethren. Glorious as he was in himself a conqueror over death and hell, and the grave the Son of God is still meek and lowly of heart. He calls his disciples brethren. Let us turn from the passage with comfortable thoughts if we know anything of true religion. Let us see in these words of Christ an encouragement to trust and not be afraid. Our Saviour is one who never forgets his people; he

pities their infirmities: he does not despise them. He knows their weakness, and yet does not cast them away. Our great High Priest is also our elder brother.

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