

**MATTHEW 28:1–10.** (EHV, alt.)

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. Suddenly, there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and going to the tomb, he rolled away the stone and was sitting on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. The guards were so terrified of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid! I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen, just as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. Go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead! And look, he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him.’ Behold! I have told you!” They hurried away from the tomb, with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, **“Greetings!”** They approached, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, **“Do not be afraid. Go, tell my brothers that they should go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”**

Dearly beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, have you ever seen an angel of the Lord so thunderstruck?

When do *you* state the obvious as an exclamation? When the implications of what has just happened or what you have just done or said or seen, and the circumstances in which it occurred, dawn on you so suddenly that all of your senses are seized at once in shock or surprise or awe.

For instance, you settle in for a long ride in the car and doze off. When you wake up, you’re pulling into the driveway of your destination. “Hey, we’re here!” you say, which has the effect of annoying everyone else, who had been awake for the entire journey and already knew quite well that they had finally arrived.

Or you go to your first bull sale. After watching these huge twelve-hundred-plus-pound animals parade in front of you one after the other, you finally look down at your catalogue and exclaim, “Look, these are only *yearlings!*” Which amuses all the seasoned ranchers sitting around you.

But have you ever seen *an angel of the Lord* so thunderstruck like that? “You are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen, just as he said. . . . Go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead! And look, he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him.’” And then it’s as if he suddenly becomes conscious and realizes what he’s doing and saying. “Behold! I have told you!”

In most other circumstances, we might find such an obvious statement to be annoying, amusing, or just plain foolish. But not this circumstance. Not today. Today, the emotion, captivation, exhilaration, and jubilation of the angel is ours too. Let’s listen again to his obvious statement about an extraordinary occurrence: “Behold! I have told you! I have told you that Jesus *has kept* his word! I have told you that Jesus *will keep* his word!”

### **1. Jesus *Has Kept* His Word**

Darkness had come over all the land from 12 to 3 p.m. two days earlier. At 3 p.m. Jesus had cried out in a loud voice and given up his spirit. At that moment the earth shook and the rocks split. Watching and hearing and experiencing all this from a distance were three women—

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the apostles James and John, also known as Salome. After Jesus died, Salome apparently left, but the two Marys stayed there.

In the meantime Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus's body and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock, which was in a garden near Golgotha, where Jesus died. The women, without knowing that it was going to be Jesus's tomb, had been sitting facing it the entire time, and they saw Joseph lay Jesus's body there.

These women had cared for Jesus's needs in Galilee, so they resolved to care for his dead body now. The Sabbath day began at sunset on Friday and ended at sunset on Saturday. So they waited, and immediately after the Sabbath was over they went out and purchased some spices.

As the sun was just beginning to dawn on that first day of the week, those three women, together with a woman named Joanna and perhaps some others, made their trip back to Jesus's tomb. They passed the buildings of the city in silence, the people inside still sleeping soundly. They left the city limits and entered the garden. The birds were just beginning to rustle and sing. Beads of dew still hung on the petals of the blooming flowers and on the leaves of the trees. The morning mist was still hanging in the air—the type of mist that causes you to jump at the slightest movement, and then just as soon to wonder if you had only imagined it.

The silence was unsettling, so they quickened their steps and began to discuss how they were going to roll away the large stone that Joseph had placed in front of the tomb. They were disheartened, scared, and uncertain, yet their love for Jesus urged them on.

Suddenly the ground began to shake violently. They had to hang on to the nearest swaying tree and at the same time clutch their expensive spices for dear life. When the earthquake stopped, they were more saddened than ever. They had just experienced an earthquake when their Lord died, and now this earthquake brought that painful memory rushing back to the surface of their consciousness all too soon. But they recovered themselves and hurried on.

When they got there, they saw that the stone was off to the side. According to John, it seems as if Mary Magdalene immediately threw her spices into the arms of her friends and ran back to tell the disciples at that point. But the other women cautiously approached, bent over, and went in. Jesus was not there, but a young man was. His appearance was like lightning and his clothes were whiter than my alb—a terrifying sight. But the young man spoke soothing, calming words, “Don't you be afraid.”

It's a pity that he had to tell them these words at all. They were afraid because they were in the presence of holiness. And the only thing that causes fear in the presence of holiness is sin. Their reaction in that cemetery garden was the same as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, when they hid from the holy God who had only been good to them.

They were also afraid because Jesus was dead, and so what they didn't want to think about was the very fact the angel stressed. “I know that you are looking for Jesus *who has been crucified.*” He did not say what the women expected him to say, what we expect him to say, “You are looking for Jesus who was buried here.” “You are looking for Jesus who used to lie here.” No, the characteristic that defines Jesus for the angel and that should especially define Jesus for the women is this: He is the crucified.

And that is supposed to make them *not* afraid? Yes, because the Scriptures had prophesied that he would be crucified and Jesus himself had prophesied that he would be crucified. More importantly, the Scriptures and Jesus had prophesied that through his crucifixion and death God would declare the world innocent of sin. And if sin was taken away, then every reason to be afraid, of God, of the angel, was also taken away.

The angel wants to say, “You are looking for the One who kept his Word and suffered the death he promised. And if he is the one who has kept his word by being crucified, then he is also the one who has kept his word by being raised from the dead on the third day. He is not here. He is risen.” **He is risen indeed!**

You see, while the women were making their journey to somewhere, Jesus had been making one from somewhere. Around 6 a.m., perhaps sooner, while the women were on their way to the tomb, Jesus’s alarm clock went off, the alarm of his word: “Time to rise!” His lungs heaved again and he got up from death, just as if he had been sleeping. There in the darkness of the sealed tomb, he unwrapped and neatly arranged the strips of linen around his body, and rolled up the burial cloth that had been around his head and placed it there separately. Then he left. Not through the entrance. He just left.

In the meantime, God sent an angel of the Lord down to remove the guards and to roll away the stone, not so that Jesus could get out, but so that the women, and we by faith, could get in and see the awesome truth: Jesus had performed the greatest miracle ever; he had conquered death itself.

“And if you don’t believe me,” the angel told the women, “come here! See the place where he lay. You can see that the indentation fits the description of the Jesus you are looking for. You can see the linen and the cloth lying neatly here. This was not the work of thieves.”

If Jesus’s word about his resurrection was good, then his word about his crucifixion was also good. He had suffered for them and taken away their sins. God had declared them innocent. Jesus had drawn all people to himself, including them; he had reconciled them to God. “The only thing dead,” the angel is telling them, “is your sin and your death. So you might as well put away those spices.”

“Behold! I have told you!” the angel joyously declared. He’s telling you too.

Are *you* afraid? Of God? Of the world? Of the devil? Of death? Listen to the angel: “Do not be afraid. Jesus has been crucified for you. He has borne your sins. He has made intercession for you. He has won for you a permanent ‘not guilty’ verdict before God’s judgment bench. If he had stayed dead, then you could be afraid; then you *should* be afraid.

“But he is not here! He is risen! **He is risen indeed!** Therefore God can only be gracious toward you all the time. Neither the devil nor your conscience can ever accuse you, or, if they do, they can only lie, when you trust in this Crucified One. The world cannot lay a finger on you, because even if they kill you, Jesus has destroyed death and brought life and deathlessness to light through the gospel. He has kept his word!”

## 2. Jesus *Will Keep His Word*

This in and of itself would be enough to cause the angel, to cause anyone, to marvel, “Behold! I have told this to you!” But friends, Jesus had more good news to announce to the women through the angel, meant for us too.

The angel continued, “Go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead! And look, he is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’” Notice how in all of this God stresses the power of his Word. Jesus’s crucifixion is the result of his Word. Jesus’s resurrection is the result of his Word. Jesus doesn’t first appear to the women himself; he has a messenger tell them, so that the emphasis is on the Word. Jesus doesn’t first appear to the disciples himself. He has the angel send the women as messengers to tell them the good news and remind them of his Word. The emphasis is always on the Word.

And now the angel reminds them of another promise Jesus had spoken to them on Holy Thursday: After rising, he would go ahead of them into Galilee (Matt. 26:32). And could the women or the disciples now doubt that Jesus would keep this word? He had kept his word to rise from the dead! What possible promise could he *not* keep? He *has kept* his word, and so he also *will keep* his word.

Jesus has made you some amazing promises in his word too. He promises that when you bring your children to be baptized, he will make them the pledge of a good conscience before God the Father and wash all their sins away. He promises that he will be truly present in bread and wine to forgive your sins in the Lord’s Supper. He promises that he will always be there in the good news of his life, death, and resurrection to give and strengthen faith *whenever* it is preached. He promises to be with you, not just in one locale like Galilee, but here in church and *wherever* two or three gather together in his name. He promises that he will always be with you even outside these walls. He promises that he will listen to and answer all your prayers. He promises that he will take you and all believers to heaven when you die.

In the meantime he even promises that he will take stillbirths, murder, the loss of a job, intense personal struggles with sin, famine, war, political unrest, tsunamis and tornadoes, thunder and rain, the untimely deaths of loved ones and yes, especially your own death, and cause them to work together in perfect harmony to bring about only what is eternally good for those who trust in him and love him.

Is Jesus promising too much? Is his mouth bigger than his muscles? Friends, he also promised to rise from the dead. “Come here and see,” the angel says. “He is not here. He is risen! **He is risen indeed!**”

And friends, he will do even more than he has promised. For what did Jesus promise the women and the disciples? He promised *one* thing before the fact and then also through the angel—to meet them *in Galilee*. And what did he actually do? First he met Mary Magdalene when she came back to the tomb, *in Jerusalem*. Then he met the other women *in Jerusalem* as they were on their way to relay the angel’s message to the disciples. He repeated to them that they should tell the disciples that he would meet them *in Galilee*. Then he appeared to Peter *in Jerusalem*. Then he appeared to Clopas and probably Luke on the way to Emmaus, *near Jerusalem*. Then he appeared to the rest of the disciples, minus Thomas, *in Jerusalem*. Then, a week later, he appeared to all the disciples again, including Thomas, *in Jerusalem*. *Then* he appeared to them in Galilee.

Friends, what blessings has Jesus given you just today that he has not promised you?

He has not promised you a house to live in.

He has not promised you a bed to sleep in.

He has not promised you a family.

He did not promise you that you'd wake up this morning.

He did not promise you that, after a long, cold, and snowy winter, you would get to celebrate his resurrection on a warm and sunny day.

He did not promise you a delicious breakfast.

He did not promise you a beautifully decorated church building and talented musicians and singers.

Musicians and singers, he did not promise you your talents.

He did not promise you pews lined with the children of God singing his praises so joyfully that even the angels might blush.

And as surely as he rose from the dead, he did not promise me that I would get to stand in front of you today and proclaim this joyful news to you.

But here I am, brothers and sisters, and here you are, and guess what? Jesus is not dead! He is risen! **He is risen indeed!** Behold! Now *I* have told *you*. I'm no angel. I'm not the first to tell you, and I doubt I'll be the last. But oh, what a privilege! Oh, what a thunderstruck joy!

Behold, I have told you: Christ has kept his promises. Christ will keep his promises. Christ will also do much more than he has promised. Because Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed!** Alleluia!