

THE WITNESS OF HEAVEN AND EARTH TO THE RESURRECTION

Matthew 28:1-15

A. INTRODUCTION.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the linchpin of biblical Christianity. *Without it*, the whole edifice of truth comes tumbling down. *With it*, everything else is verified as is no other religious claim on earth. Basically there are only these two opinions and conclusions.

1. *If it did not happen*, then as Paul declares in I Corinthians 15, v. 14, “our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain,” v. 17, “you are still in your sins,” v. 19, “we are of all men most to be pitied.”
2. *If it did happen*, then we may conclude from I Corinthians 15, v. 14, “our preaching is vital, your faith has a living hope,” v. 17, “you are no longer under the condemnation of your sins,” v. 19, “we are of all men most enthralled and blessed.”
3. So in Matthew 28:1-15 we have both of these attitudes described.
 - a. The resurrection of Jesus Christ did happen, vs. 1-10.

The evidence here is of a powerful heavenly witness.
 - b. The resurrection of Jesus Christ did not happen, v. 11-15.

The evidence here is of an earthly, scheming, deceitful witness.

B. THE WITNESS OF HEAVEN TO THE RESURRECTION, VS. 1-10.

1. It is “the first of the Sabbaths,” vs. 1.

“Now after the Sabbaths, as it began to dawn toward the first of the Sabbaths,” is a Hebrew idiom describing early on the first day of the week.” So Calvin, Lightfoot, Edersheim, etc.

2. The angel of the Lord descends with power, vs. 2-8.

There seems to be a desire here that heaven make a tumultuous announcement by means of “an earthquake” and “an [radiant] angel of the Lord,” with an associate (Luke 24:4). It is not sufficient that Christ simply appear alive; he could have rolled the stone away; no, heaven must declare the glory of this event.

The Jewish guards trembled (Matt. 27:65-66), knowing the suggested rumor that Jesus’ body would be stolen; but this angel is not a puny disciple; probably they became unconscious due to the shock of their unholy persons being confronted with a holy

messenger from a holy heaven whose majesty was overwhelming. Further, their hearts had not the slightest spark of hope; here their unbelief was unmasked.

But the women, Mary the mother of James and Mary Magdalene, while also fearful, yet have a different interest, even if ever so faint. The mere presence of the angel commences to ignite that hope; surely something astonishing is happening, and many incidents of wonder that surrounded the Lord Jesus are now recalled to mind.

Then the women are instructed that Jesus has risen from the dead, and they are to go and inform the disciples. Notice their departing attitude: “they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His [Jesus] disciples.”

3. The Lord Jesus testifies to the women, vs. 9-10.

En route, the Lord Jesus meets the women with a greeting, “Hello;” “How are you;” “Good morning!” As a result the women “seized his feet” and “worshipped him.” Now the heavenly witness is confirmed. They were overwhelmed; now many seeming unrelated pieces of the puzzle begin to fit together. They were animated as never before, and must tell the disciples.

4. So this (heavenly) witness turns the world toward Christ.

Friends, this is a heavenly witness that not only has a heavenly origin, but also is in agreement with heaven, and has its hope rooted in heaven. This witness is about the glory of the plan of redemption instigated by the triune God. This witness is about “the second man [Christ who] is from heaven,” as opposed to “the first man [Adam] who is from the earth” (I Cor. 15:47-48).

Do you identify with these women, their new hope and excitement, their forlorn *seeking* after Jesus, their being *found* by Jesus, their *embrace* of Jesus, their *worship* of Jesus, their *obeying* of Jesus? Here is the evidence of a heavenly revelation of the truth that results in the embrace of the truth.

C. THE WITNESS OF EARTH TO THE RESURRECTION, VS. 11-15.

Exactly how long the guard remained unconscious, we do not know, except that they awoke while the women were running to the disciples, and some immediately reported to the chief priests. But how did they react to the stunning witness? With humbled belief? In no way.

1. The guard testifies to the High Priest, v. 11 (recourse to formal religion)

These Jewish temple guards witness with the thought of their mortality in mind, to “keep out of trouble,” v. 14, not that of yielding to the truth that has been emblazoned before their very eyes. Of these men, like their masters, it may be said, “they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead,” Luke 16:31.

2. The Sanhedrin hatches a scheme, vs. 12-14.(unbelief of formal religion)

So a plot is hatched to avoid confrontation with the truth; here is the modus operandi of formal, humanistic religion. It cannot suffer the witness from heaven; it “rages against the

Lord and His Anointed, saying, let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!" Ps, 2:2-3.

3. The guard promotes the scheme, v. 15.(dishonesty of formal religion.

Here a falsehood is perpetuated over the centuries; but it is a falsehood still. There is no limit to the devilish conniving of an unbelieving heart, as Judas well testifies. How the obedience of these guards to the religious establishment contrasts with the obedience of the women to the heavenly witness!

D. CONCLUSION.

There are two opposite witness here; one is from God's heaven, and the other from man's earth. One concerns the witness of the revelation of Jesus Christ; the other concerns the witness of the revelation of man and this world.

1. The false humanistic witness concerns man as represented by sinful Adam, man who is said to come from the random molecules of earth, man who is of the earth earthy, man who worships man.
2. The true biblical witness of Easter concerns the man who came from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. The resurrection is the indication of who this man is, the Holy One come from the Father. As Paul writes in Romans 1:4, this is He "who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness."
3. Our worship is of God not man, of the last Adam not the first, of the risen holy Christ not unholy and earthly religion.