

# The Earthquake Which Changed Everything ~ Matthew 28:1-10

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ April 20, 2014

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. <sup>2</sup> There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. <sup>4</sup> The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." <sup>8</sup> So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup> Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."



This is the day our Lord Jesus Christ is risen, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

Like it or not, catastrophe and controversy drive TV ratings and our attention to world events. News stations are looking for the spectacular. And certainly we have had our fair share of that recently. We have been reminded of the Boston Marathon bombings and the missing Malaysian airliner. Some other recent tragedies have been catastrophic earthquakes. On January 12, 2010, a magnitude seven earthquake rocked the country of Haiti. The catastrophe was in the massive loss of life, estimated as high as 316,000 people. On March 11, 2011, a magnitude nine earthquake was recorded in Japan that caused the death of 18,000 people and \$235 billion in damages. These are certainly earthquakes that changed our impression of the world.

But taking nothing away from these earthquakes, there was another earthquake that was even more impression changing. It's not an earthquake which you will see registered on the great historical earthquake lists. It didn't cause catastrophic damage or loss of life. In fact, it's only mentioned in one place, and that is in the gospel of Matthew. And yet the scarcity of the evidence doesn't minimize the effect it had on humanity. Because this earthquake, is THE EARTHQUAKE WHICH CHANGED EVERYTHING.

1. It makes the fearful joyful
2. It makes the joyful purposeful

(1)

It all began with a few women going to pay their last respects to Jesus. After he had been crucified on Friday, there was little time for a proper burial with the Sabbath fast approaching when they could do no work (and have no contact with a dead body). And so now on Sunday morning, the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and another Mary went to the tomb of Jesus. It's amazing, isn't it? Even after all Jesus said about dying and rising from the dead, the only people going to the tomb of Jesus were a few

women. The other disciples didn't even bother going. The women didn't seem to be expecting much, in fact they didn't even seem to think it through, because neither of them were strong enough to roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb. And then, THE EARTHQUAKE WHICH CHANGED EVERYTHING happened. It was the earthquake which makes the fearful joyful.

It wasn't a normal earthquake which happened. This was caused by a supernatural event, not plate tectonics. What was that event? That was a holy angel coming down from heaven, and throwing the stone out of its groove as you or I would wave off a pesky fly. The angel's clothes were white as snow, his skin was as bright as lightning. If you want an idea of what the angel looked like, look up at the sun, and you get a picture of what the angel looked like. Now, the sun is pretty fierce even though it's 92 million miles away. Imagine if that angel was now right next to you, how would you feel?

I have no doubt you would be afraid, very afraid. Why do I know that? Because the Roman soldiers who were guarding the tomb were scared, they were terrified. And these aren't just wimpy green-horn soldiers, these are battle tested veterans of the most fearsome army in the world at the time. They knew their skills were no match for a holy angel. There is no doubt of the power, awe and majesty of holiness. So too with the women when they approached the tomb and saw the angel, they were terrified as well, they were afraid. Which is why the angel came to say, **"Don't be afraid!"**

Don't be afraid of my holiness, don't be afraid of the Romans or the Jewish religious leaders, don't be afraid of the empty tomb. You have no more reason to be afraid. And why shouldn't they be afraid? Because Jesus has risen. **"I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said."** He invited the women in to take a look at the place where Jesus' body had been laid, and there were only the grave clothes left. But they were not left in a disorderly and hurried way that would suggest grave robbers might have done, but as someone who might have actually risen from the dead.

It's not like he just disappeared, but his body rose from the dead. The angel invited the women to come in and see the empty tomb as a gift given to them by God. Jesus' death on the cross showed that he took away our sin, and his resurrection is proof of that, that the payment was accepted. It is proof that Jesus was who he said he was, he did what he came to do. And it's not like the angel removed the stone to let Jesus out, Jesus had already risen, the angel rolled the stone away not to let Jesus out, but to let us see in. And so what starts with fear, ends in joy.

It is that fear that Jesus has come to remove in our lives. Whether we care to admit it or not, we are all afraid – of some things, of many things. This comes as a result of the sin which infects our lives. We are afraid of what other people think of us. We are afraid of losing our jobs, we're afraid of the direction of our country, of our world. We're afraid of the unknown, we are afraid of death. We can condition ourselves to not be afraid, we can tell our kids, "don't be afraid," but that doesn't change the object of our fear. Jesus does!

He has taken away fear and replaced it with something else. He has replaced it with faith. We might think that seeing something as miraculous as an empty tomb would be enough to make the women, or anyone for that matter believe. But that would be Biblically inaccurate. The only thing that makes someone believe is the message of God, the message of Jesus risen from the dead, for **"faith comes from hearing the message."** It would be safe to conclude the guards watching the tomb captured the whole

scene – the angel coming down, the stone being cast aside, and the tomb which was empty. And yet this was not enough for them to believe the miracle, because they didn't have the message.

It is the message which creates faith in our hearts, it is this faith which gives us joy. THE EARTHQUAKE WHICH CHANGED EVERYTHING makes the fearful joyful. We are joyful because Jesus has conquered all of our fears. He has subjected our sin to captivity, he has broken the shackles of death. We don't have to be afraid of what people think of us, we don't have to be afraid of losing our jobs or the direction of the country or the world. We don't have to be afraid of the unknown or death because Jesus has made the unknown known, he has told us what will happen after death – we will rise and have a body like his glorified body.

(2)

And yet our lives as Christians will still be a mix of fear and joy, similar to what the women had as they left the tomb to go and tell the disciples. They were still trying to comprehend what had happened, they had seen the empty tomb, but there was still a lingering doubt of what happened to Jesus' body. Their doubt did not linger long, for Jesus appeared to them on their way and said, "**Greetings!**" You can just see the smile on Jesus' face as he showed himself to the women. The smile that you or I might give as we watch a loved one open up a present.

And just like that loved one might bound on over to you to give you a big hug or kiss, so the women bowed down to Jesus and worshiped him. Because Jesus makes the fearful joyful. But it is not only the fearful who are made joyful, the joyful are made purposeful. The angel had given the women a mission. A mission which was repeated by Jesus himself. "Go, tell my disciples – tell them I'm alive, and tell them to meet me in Galilee. The joyful women had been given a purpose by Jesus – a purpose to share what they had seen and what they had heard.

It is that same purpose we have as Christians today. Our purpose is threefold:

- 1) To remind ourselves of what we have seen and heard,
- 2) To remind other believers of what we have seen and heard,
- 3) To share with the world what we have seen and heard.

We have not seen Jesus' empty tomb with our physical eyes, but we have seen God working in people through his Word. We have seen God working forgiveness through the saving water of baptism. And the message you heard. That's easy – it's the message you hear in church every Sunday. It's the message you read in your Bibles.

It is this message that we need to be reminded of constantly. Not because we forget it, but because we know the power and strength it has. A good comparison I have heard for God's word is food. Can you survive on one or two meals per week? Certainly you can survive, you just won't be all that healthy. That's why it's recommended to eat three square meals a day. And so we should not be satisfied to just hear God's Word on a Sunday morning, but throughout the week in regular Bible reading and Bible Studies. We need to remind ourselves what we have seen and heard.

Just as God's Word is important for our own spiritual bodies, we know the benefits other believers can get from the hearing of God's message too. Maybe it's a brother or sister in Christ who is going through a tough time financially, physically or mentally. Maybe it's a brother or sister in Christ who just needs that encouragement to hear the word on a regular basis. This is our purpose as believers.

God also has given us the purpose to go out and share this message with those who don't know it yet. These may be people who have never heard the name of Jesus before, or it may be people who have heard about Jesus – but don't really know him the way the Bible describes him – as a loving risen Savior, not a belligerent law-giver. It may seem simple, but that's because it is. Anything else a Christian does lines up with this three-fold purpose – helping out a neighbor, volunteering, giving to other charities. This is what THE EARTHQUAKE WHICH CHANGES EVERYTHING does – it changes everything. It changes you from someone with fear and without true joy to someone who has true joy. It changes you from someone who is looking for a purpose in life to someone who has a purpose. You have joy and purpose because God has chosen you to be one of his own.

Just as there has been earthquakes in the past, there will continue to be earthquakes in the future – some of these earthquakes may even capture the attention of the world like the 2010 Haiti earthquake, or the 2011 Japan earthquake. These earthquakes are reminders of how powerful nature is, and how little control we have over it. But while these earthquakes inspire fear, the greatest earthquake inspires just the opposite. And for a believer, THE EARTHQUAKE WHICH CHANGED EVERYTHING, makes him joyful and it gives him purpose. Because Jesus Christ has risen from the dead just as he said he would we have joy, and he gives our joy purpose to share this wonderful message with others, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. He is risen, he is risen indeed. Amen.