

“The Women of Resurrection Sunday” Matthew 28:1-10

“1 Now after the Sabbath, **as the first day of the week** began to dawn, **Mary Magdalene and the other Mary** came to see the tomb. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. 3 His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. 4 And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead *men*. 5 But **the angel answered and said to the women**, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 "He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. 7 "And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you." 8 So they went out quickly from the tomb **with fear and great joy**, and ran to bring His disciples word. 9 And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go *and* tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me." (NKJV, emphasis added)

On Sunday, the Lord's Day, we celebrate Christ's resurrection from the dead. In this study, let us consider several important women whom Scripture highlights in the midst of the Gospel accounts. These are the women of Resurrection Sunday.

Scripture makes special mention of several women who were present on that first resurrection Sunday, when Christ was supernaturally raised from the dead. In fact, God chose several women to witness the events that transpired on those most important three days in the history of mankind. The mention of these women by name in the Gospel accounts is very significant because two thousand years ago, women were often looked down upon and mistreated in society. Yet, in God's eyes, women are equal in value and worth to men, and they have a special role to play in Christ's Church.

Some of Scripture's most extraordinary women include: Eve, Sarah, Rahab, Ruth, Hannah, Mary (the mother of Jesus), Anna, the Samaritan woman of Sychar, Martha and Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Lydia. These women have served as role models for Christian women throughout the ages, and they continue to speak to us today.

In this study, we will consider the women of Resurrection Sunday, focusing on, **FIRST**, the women at Calvary's cross, **SECOND**, the women at Christ's tomb, and **THIRD**, the women at the empty tomb.

First, let us consider the women at Calvary's cross.

Please turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 15. Let us read Mark 15:33-41: “33 Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. 34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" 35 Some of those who stood by, when they heard *that*, said, "Look, He is calling for Elijah!" 36 Then someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine, put *it* on a reed, and offered *it* to Him to drink, saying, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down." 37 And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. 38 Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!" 40 There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less

and of Joses, and Salome, 41 who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.”

In the parallel accounts in the gospel of Matthew and John we read:

Matthew 27:55-56: “And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.”

John 19:25: “Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the *wife* of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.”

If we put these three gospel accounts together, we get this composite account:

At Christ's crucifixion, on that good Friday of Christ's death for His people's sins, there stood by the cross of Jesus many women looking on from afar. These women included Jesus' mother Mary, Mary the wife of Clopas who apparently was Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, Salome (the mother of Zebedee's sons who was likely Jesus' mother's sister), Mary Magdalene, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem. These women followed Jesus and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee and had continued to follow Him since that time.

Did you notice that Mary Magdalene was referred to in Matthew, Mark, and John's accounts of Christ's crucifixion? Who was she? Scripture tells us very little about who Mary Magdalene was. It does tell us that she was a woman out of whom Christ had cast seven demons (Mark 16:9). In other words, Jesus had freed her of demon possession, and she had become a faithful disciple of Christ.

In Luke's gospel, we learn that during Jesus' earthly ministry, several women accompanied Him and His twelve disciples, as He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. Luke says that there were certain women “who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities,” including “Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and Joanna the wife of Chuza,” who was Herod's steward or the manager of Herod's household, and Susanna, and many others. All these women helped provide for Christ and His disciples, as they generously contributed to their support and financial needs (Luke 8:1-3).

All of these women were humble servants who loved Jesus greatly and desired to serve Him and learn from Him. They traveled a journey of eighty to a hundred miles from Galilee to Jerusalem to follow their Lord. As we have seen, God mentions some of these women by name. Their names are recorded for all time in Scripture as a testimony to the faithful service they rendered unto Christ.

John Calvin made an interesting observation about the women at the cross:

“Now though the Apostle John did not depart from the cross [John 19:26], yet no mention is made of him; but praise is bestowed on the women alone, who accompanied Christ till death, because their extraordinary attachment to their Master was the more strikingly displayed, when the men fled trembling.”

How strong their attachment to Christ must have been in that even when Christ was exposed to the lowest disgrace, these women did not cease to reverence Him.

Christ's disciples fled for fear of coming under the same condemnation as their Master. Yet, these women boldly kept near to the Cross; they clung to Jesus even when seemingly the whole world had deserted Him.

How difficult it must have been for these women to see Jesus so unjustly abused and disgraced. Simeon had told the virgin Mary in Luke 2:35 that "a sword will pierce through your own soul also." Christ's torments upon the cross now became Mary's torture; as she gazed upon His wounds, she must have been filled with inexplicable grief and sorrow and sadness at the death of her firstborn son.

Having considered the women at Calvary's cross, **let us secondly consider the women at Christ's tomb.**

Do you remember the women who were present at Christ's burial? In Matthew 27:57-61, we read:

"57 Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. 58 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. 59 When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed. 61 And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb."

So also we read of Christ's burial in Mark 15:42-47:

"42 Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. 45 So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. 46 Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. 47 And Mary Magdalene and Mary *the mother* of Joses observed where He was laid."

From these two accounts, we see that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses (whom Matthew calls "the other Mary") were present at the time of Jesus' burial and saw "where He was laid."

Again, no mention is made of Jesus' disciples. Where were Peter, James, and John, Jesus' inner circle of followers? Where were His other disciples—Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddeus or Judas (son of James), and Simon the Zealot?

They were no where to be found, but these godly women were. In the absence of the men whom Christ chose to follow Him and sent out to be His apostles, these faithful women became witnesses to the events of His crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection. The Gospel writers—

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—would depend on their testimony when they later recorded the events of these most important three days in the history of the world.

Doctor Luke adds in Luke 23:55-56 these words: “And the women who had come with Him [with Christ] from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. 56 Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.”

Luke notes the godliness of these faithful women who carefully observed God’s law, resting “on the Sabbath according to the commandment.” In the opening words of his gospel, Luke says that much of that which he wrote came to him through those who “were eyewitnesses.” It seems that these holy women were the eyewitnesses whom Luke depended on for his account of Christ’s burial. For these faithful women had followed Christ to His tomb; they had observed the tomb and how His body was laid.

We have considered the women at Calvary’s cross and the women at Christ’s tomb.

Third, and finally, let us consider the women at the empty tomb.

All four of the gospels give us an account of the resurrection. As we consider all four accounts, let us note the prominent role of Mary Magdalene in the account of Christ’s resurrection. How striking it is that it is not Jesus’ mother, the blessed Mary who was a virgin prior to Jesus’ birth, but rather it is Mary Magdalene, whom God highlights in each of the Gospel accounts. It is true that several other women were present at that time along with Mary Magdalene, and Jesus’ mother Mary may have been among them. But clearly Mary Magdalene is given the prominence in these accounts. Mary Magdalene, a woman saved only by the sovereign grace of God, was the first person who saw and heard Jesus after His resurrection.

In the opening Scripture reading from Matthew 28:1-10, we considered Matthew’s account of Christ’s resurrection.

On that first resurrection Sunday, God’s angel revealed the joyous news to this group of women, which included Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (Mary the mother of James). And He sent this group of women to tell Christ’s disciples the good news of Christ’s resurrection from the dead.

How did these women respond to the news they received? Matthew recounts that they responded “with fear and great joy.” Their joy is evidenced by the fact that they “ran to bring His disciples word.” Yet, before they even reached the disciples, Jesus met them along the way, telling them to “Rejoice!”

How did these women respond to Jesus’ appearance? What was their posture before the face of God, in the presence of Christ? They bowed down, and they held “Him by the feet and worshipped Him.” Then, Jesus tells the women not to fear, and He further instructs them to carry a message to His disciples—that they should go to Galilee and wait for Him there.

In the gospel of Mark 16:1-8, we read a similar account:

“1 Now when the Sabbath was past, **Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome** bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. 2 Very early in the morning, **on the first day of the week**, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. 3 And they said

among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" 4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away -- for it was very large. 5 And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. 6 But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. 7 "But go, tell His disciples -- and Peter -- that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you." 8 So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

When was Jesus, the Son of God, raised from the dead? "Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week." Just as the sun had risen at dawn, so also the Son of God had risen. As the prophet Malachi prophesied: "The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings" (Mal. 4:2). God created the Sun to give light to the world. Likewise, Jesus, the Son of God, is the light of the world. Just as the Sun penetrates the darkness with its light, so also Jesus gives the only spiritual light that can penetrate through the darkness of a sin-cursed world. So it seems appropriate that the first day of the week is called **Sun-day**. It is also interesting to note that even today in many other languages the name for Sunday testifies, whether intentionally or not, to our Lord Christ. In Greece, the first day of the week is called *hemera kyriake*, "The Lord's day." In Portuguese-speaking and Spanish-speaking countries, Sunday is Domingo, "Day of the Lord" (Kistemaker, Revelation, p. 92).

Scripture refers to Sunday as *the Lord's Day* (Rev. 1:10) because the Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead on the first day of the week. The term *Lord's Day* means a day that belongs exclusively to the Lord. God has consecrated or set apart the first day of every week as His sacred day. The Lord's Day belongs exclusively to the Lord Jesus; it is His day. Why is the first day of the week so special that God would call everyone in every age to dedicate it completely to Him and to His service? It is because it is the day on which Christ was raised from the dead. Christ's resurrection is the greatest and most important event in the history of the world. Therefore it seems fitting that we observe Christ's resurrection the first day of the week, 52 days a year, including on the day commonly referred to as "Easter Sunday."

Mark adds in **Mark 16:9-11**: "Now when *He* rose early on the first *day* of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. 10 She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. 11 And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe."

Christ rose early on the first day of the week. Note that Mark says that He appeared *first* to "Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons." We might expect Jesus to have appeared first to his mother Mary, or to Peter, or to his beloved disciple John, but He did not. Rather, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, who was indeed a trophy of God's grace. Jesus came to call "sinners to repentance" (Mark 2:17). What greater testimony is there to the good news of the Gospel than that the resurrected Christ appeared first to a woman who once had been under the power and dominion of Satan. Like the apostle Paul, God by His sovereign grace, redeemed this sinful woman and transformed her into a member of His bride, the Church. In gratitude to God for her salvation, Mary Magdalene became a bold witness for Christ, just like the Samaritan woman whom Jesus saved at the well of Sychar. Mary Magdalene "went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept." Yet, we are told that they had little faith. They were unwilling to believe Mary Magdalene's testimony that Christ was alive.

In the gospel of Luke 24:1-12, we read:

“1 **Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning**, they, and certain *other women* with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. 2 But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. 3 Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. 5 Then, as they were afraid and bowed *their* faces to the earth, they said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? 6 "He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, 7 "saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.' " 8 And they remembered His words. 9 Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 It was **Mary Magdalene**, Joanna, Mary *the mother of James*, and the other *women* with them, who told these things to the apostles. 11 And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter arose and ran to the tomb; and stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying by themselves; and he departed, marveling to himself at what had happened.” (emphasis added)

Luke emphasizes Peter’s act of faith. Most of the apostles did not believe the testimony of these women. Yet, the apostle Peter, who had just denied Christ three times, and also the apostle John did not dismiss their testimony. In Luke 24:22-27, Luke adds Jesus’ response to those who still did not fully believe the testimony of these godly women. Jesus said, “25 O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”

The whole Old Testament testifies to the Messiah who was to come. So we also benefit greatly by looking for Christ as we study the Old Testament Scriptures.

Finally, in the gospel of **John 20:1-18**, we read of Christ’s resurrection from a somewhat different standpoint, but once again God emphasizes Mary Magdalene’s role as a witness to the resurrection and as a chosen woman of faith:

“1 **Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene** went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw *that* the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 2 Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved [the apostle John], and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." 3 Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. 4 So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. 5 And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying *there*; yet he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying *there*, 7 and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. 9 For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went away again to their own homes” (emphasis added)

What happened when the disciples departed?

John continues in verse 11 “But Mary [Mary Magdalene] stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down *and looked* into the tomb. 12 And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. 13 Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." 14 Now when she had said

this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and *to* My God and your God.'" 18 Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and *that* He had spoken these things to her."

The women of the first Resurrection Sunday were blessed indeed. And perhaps no woman was more blessed than Mary Magdalene, the woman whom Jesus saved by His grace and made His faithful follower.

Clearly, not only men, but also women have a vital role in God's kingdom, in the Church of Jesus Christ. Let us remember the special love God has for women who follow Him faithfully, for those who seek to serve Him and obey Him. The women of Resurrection Sunday should be a model for all godly women to follow.

Whether male or female, let us all trust in Christ as those faithful women of resurrection Sunday did. Let us all cling to Christ and witness for Him boldly and without fear, as these godly women did. Let us be faithful to follow Him and serve Him. Let us rejoice, for Christ is risen indeed!

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