

Matthew 23-05-28b

We're in Matthew chapter 27, and we have seen the preparation of the body of the Lord Jesus by Joseph and Nicodemus, the presence of the ladies. We find out in comparing the Gospels that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Joseph, are present at this time. And you just have to admire the faith of these women.

They are the last to leave and the first to return. Their focus on the Lord Jesus is undiminished, not diverted, not in any way blunted by the horrific events that have taken place, the awful turn that things have taken. And it is very possible that these ladies had paid more careful attention and had listened more closely to the words of the Lord Jesus than his own disciples.

And it is particularly interesting to me in looking at the number three as it recurs over and over again. Peter, his famous denials are threefold. We've seen that it's actually three times three in these preceding 24 hours.

Nine times Peter has contradicted the Lord, refuted the Lord, not assented or agreed with what the Lord Jesus said, and then claimed that he didn't know the Lord and denied the Lord those three times in the courtyard. In the space of just a few verses, you have the mention of three ladies named Mary or Miriam. All of the ladies named Mary derive their name from the Hebrew root, which is first found in terms of a name with Moses' sister.

And you remember that it is famously Miriam who ensures that baby Moses in the bulrushes, when she stands watch, she hides and watches to see what will become of the basket with her baby brother in it. She sees the princess of Egypt, the daughter of Pharaoh, find the basket. She bravely comes forward and offers to provide a nursemaid for the child, which turns out to be her own mother.

But it is Miriam, and she has a rather famous failure later on where she gets struck with leprosy for criticizing this same brother many years later. But as a young lady, she is brave, she is faithful, and she is instrumental in essentially bringing into being the age of Israel, the presence of Moses who will be used by God to bring the people of Israel from being people to being a nation. And here you have three ladies with this name.

You have Mary, the mother of the Lord, who has been at the foot of the cross, and Jesus famously entrusts her care to John, the son of Zebedee, who is in all likelihood a cousin, his cousin, and it's in the family, but Mary is entrusted to John. And here you have Mary Magdalene, and you have Mary, the mother of Joseph, yet another Joseph reference in this context. And so you notice that in verse 62, on the next day, which followed the day of preparation, this is the high Sabbath of Passover itself, 15 Nisan.

As you begin chapter 28, it says, now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week

began to dawn. So this is, it doesn't say, you know, after, it doesn't say the next day, and the combination of inferences where these who go to Pilate and say, you need to secure the tomb until after the third day, you get the idea that they are looking forward a couple of days. They don't just say, well, secure it tonight or secure it tomorrow night, but it needs to be secured until the third day.

And so you have 14 Nisan, the day of the trial, the crucifixion, the entombment. The next day, which is Passover proper, 15 Nisan, which by my reckoning is Friday. Then you have the Sabbath and it is so designated here now after the Sabbath.

So this is after the day following the preparation, which is day one in the tomb, a full day. You have the Sabbath, which is the full day two. Now early in the morning on the third day, which is the first day of the week, early in the morning on the third day, as the first day of the week began to dawn.

So these ladies were there to the last possible moment. They had just enough time to get back to their home before dark on Thursday night. They had been away all day Friday, Friday night, all day Saturday, Saturday night.

But the earliest time upon which they could return because the Sabbath wasn't over until sundown and they don't travel at night. So as the dawn is breaking on Sunday morning, they get up early, they get dressed, they head for the tomb as the dawn is breaking to see the tomb. And at this point, when they arrive in verse two, behold, there was a great earthquake for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.

His countenance was like lightning and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards who are still present, this has been a rotating guard. You could imagine they might be spelled every four hours or every eight hours or each watch.

The days were typically divided into watches and there would be a four hour watch. And so there had been a series of guards who were at the tomb. And this particular watch has probably been there since the middle of the what we would call the middle of the night, which would be they would have come on at 3 a.m. So there would have been or even 4 a.m., just depending on how they how they divided the watch at 8 p.m. to midnight, midnight to 4 a.m. These guys might have come on at 4 a.m. and spelled their predecessors.

And so they are on duty. And the guards shook for fear of the angel. The guards see this angel whose countenance is like lightning.

Now, of all the ways you could describe a countenance, what does this suggest? A countenance like lightning. You could say, you know, Jesus' face is described as as bright as the as the sun. When you go to Revelation, you see this, his feet are like varnished

brass and his face is too bright to look upon.

That is not the description of this angel. His face is like lightning. I hope we get to see the replay and see what this looked like.

Lightning is very bright and momentary, right? Lightning doesn't persist for seconds or minutes. It flashes. Lightning flashes.

This is why you have thunder, because the atmosphere is momentarily parted and ionized, and then it collapses and you have this enormous sound that is generated by the passage of lightning. So this angel of the Lord descends from heaven. He came and rolled back the stone.

The ladies observe this. The guards observe this. If this is a watch of four soldiers and these two ladies are there, there are six witnesses, at least, who see this individual descend.

Picture this now. You're at the tomb. It's just getting light.

The sky is reddening. The sun is not even fully up. So it's still relatively dark.

You can see your hand in front of your face. You can see the tomb. You can see the soldiers.

They might have a small fire lit there for light or warmth. In this relative darkness, an individual, this angel from heaven, descends. It doesn't say he appeared.

It's not like the shepherds. But remember, the birth of the Lord Jesus is heralded by an angel. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is heralded by an angel.

He descends from heaven and he came. So he descends and alights on the earth at a short distance from the tomb. Then he comes over to the tomb.

You can imagine at this point with a face that is flashing like lightning and is difficult to look at and is lighting up the whole area. What does lightning do? It turns the darkness into day. It's like a flashbulb, right? And this angel's face illuminates the surrounding.

I think that's why it is described as lightning. It turns the darkness into light. And he comes to the tomb.

The guards, shaking and trembling, faint. They pass out. When you receive a shock of this magnitude, you can lose blood flow to your head and you pass out.

And so they became like the dead. This is so pregnant with meaning. Jesus has gone from death to life.

The guards go from life to death. They don't die, but they are like the dead. Just at the

appearance of the angel, it is a representation of the power of God, the walking embodiment of God's will being accomplished.

And the guards tremble and pass out. But the angel answered and said to the women, not to the guards, but to the women, do not be afraid. I know you seek Jesus who was crucified.

I know you are seeking Jesus. Now, think about that. Nobody stops at this verse.

You just kind of keep on going. Look at what the angel knows. He doesn't say, I know you have come to gaze upon the tomb.

I know that you have come to prepare the body further. I know that you have come to weep and mourn. What does the angel know about the two Marys? I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.

You are looking for Him. I find this very fascinating. I would love to know, are they looking because they are expecting Him to be alive, or are they expecting that the third day prophecy wasn't fulfilled after all? What would you guess? I think they can't wait to discover this is the earliest point in the third day that they can possibly come.

If Jesus' enemies remembered that He said He would rise on the third day, if these ladies were brave enough to stand at the foot of the cross and stay there all the way until sundown, and are the first to arrive back ahead of everybody, they're not afraid of the guards, they're not afraid of the darkness. What do you think they are seeking? They're seeking the living Lord, I think. You seek Jesus who was crucified.

He is not here. For He is risen as He said. And I don't think this is necessarily something they had forgotten.

I think He is affirming what they have remembered, what they discussed. I would love to hear the conversation between the two Marys as they're traveling rapidly in the darkness toward the tomb. What do you think they are saying to each other? It would be interesting to know.

Come see the place where the Lord lay. This is extremely significant. Why did this angel roll the stone away? It isn't to let the Lord Jesus out.

It is to let these ladies in. That's why He came. Jesus is not there.

He wasn't there when the stone got rolled away. Does the Lord Jesus need the stone to be removed so that He can come forth like Lazarus? He doesn't. When the Lord Jesus is raised, He can be where He wants to be.

He can move into the locked upper room. He can appear where and when He chooses. He is no longer physically limited so that He's drumming His fingers on the edge of the

shelf there waiting for the angel to roll away the stone so that He can come out.

Think of a different scene. Suppose the angel had come down, countenance like lightning, guards shake and faint. He rolls away the stone and Jesus emerges and walks out.

And they see Him that way. Why isn't the resurrection accomplished in that way? The stone is rolled away to expose an already empty tomb. Do you remember on the previous page when the previous earthquake took place? What happened? When those graves are opened, are they empty? There are bodies in them and they stay there for those two solid days.

Nobody can touch them. It's two Sabbaths in a row. The graves are opened, exposing dead bodies.

When this grave is opened, it's empty. What else happened on that preceding earthquake? The veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom. Almost all comments about that event say this was to demonstrate that there was a new way to access God, as you find in Hebrews, a new and living way so that we have access to the Father, come boldly to the throne of grace and so on.

I don't think so. Each of these earthquakes, some obstacle is removed to reveal that which is behind the stone, that which is behind the veil, is empty. When the veil was torn and the Holy of Holies was exposed, and you could, from the outside of the temple, look right through the door of the holy place, through where the veil had formerly stood, you could look straight in from the outside, didn't have to be a priest.

What did they see in the Holy of Holies when the veil was torn from top to bottom? Nothing there. There has not been an Ark of the Covenant with the cherubim for centuries. Not since Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem, carried everything away.

When they rebuilt the temple in the days of Haggai and Zechariah, in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, there was no Ark of the Covenant. That is why, when they completed the second temple, there was no Shekinah. There was no glory cloud that filled the temple as it was in the days of Solomon.

What was the difference? In the first temple, in Solomon's day, God was present. God dwelt at the mercy seat between the cherubim. The second temple, when it was completed, there is no Ark of the Covenant.

So, those instructions for the high priest once a year to go in and sprinkle the mercy seat, there's nothing to sprinkle. So, when that veil is torn, that perhaps well-kept secret is exposed. Why would God rip the temple and show an empty Holy of Holies? Rip the temple veil.

What has just happened on the cross? That is the final rejection beyond which there is no coming back. They crucified the Lord of Glory. He came into His own.

His own absolutely received Him not. The Israel program is kaput at this point. We're not doing anything else with Israel at this point.

God is well and truly gone. His glory departed. We've seen that in Ezekiel, going out to the nations.

And the glory will not return until it returns with the Lord Jesus Himself, who will come back in and reestablish God's presence in Jerusalem. But if there was any doubt that God has not forsaken the Lord Jesus on the cross, but He has well and truly left the building in terms of the temple, that torn veil exposes an empty Holy of Holies. The stone rolled away exposes an already empty tomb.

Something has already taken place. Now it is open to view. So do not be afraid.

I know you seek Jesus. He is not here. He is risen as He said, come see the place where the Lord lay.

Then verse seven, 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. Look, I have told you. Go tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead.

And indeed, He is going before you into Galilee. There you will see Him. Two points about this.

First, remember Acts 1.8. Remember Acts 1.8. You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem and Judea and in all Samaria until the end of the age. Remember that? Acts 1.8. You shall be my witnesses. Where are His witnesses at this point? During this event? Where are the witnesses? There is not a single disciple here.

Not a one. Who was forbidden from giving testimony in court and was not counted as a reliable witness by the Jewish legal system in Jesus' day? Who was dismissed as not trustworthy, not that their testimony didn't count? Women. So who are the ones who are to go and bear witness? The most unlikely, these women are going to go and be the first witnesses of the resurrection.

They will be the first to see the resurrected Lord here in just a couple of verses hence. Women, not the disciples. The Peter, James, and John who saw Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration in His glorified state aren't here for the most meaningful revelation in all of human history.

They're not present. It's these ladies. God has chosen the weak things of this world to confound the wise, to confound the strong, the foolish things.

Weak and foolish things. Women were considered weak and foolish, yet they are the ones who are present. They are the ones who get the word.

This angel doesn't testify to anybody but the two Marys. But I want to focus on a second thing here in our remaining few minutes. Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead and indeed He is going before you into Galilee.

There you will see Him. Behold, I have told you. I purposely read a verse in the first session.

Do you remember it? We've only gone one place this morning besides this passage and the Gospel of John. Do you remember earlier in Matthew, where did we go? Turn back again to Matthew 26, verse 31. This is in the upper room.

This is just a couple of days earlier, right? By my reckoning, this is Thursday night. I'm sorry. Wednesday night.

Wednesday night in the upper room. All of you will be made to stumble because of me this night, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. What's verse 32 say? But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.

The temple veil has been torn. God is finished with Jerusalem. Jesus says, when I'm raised, we're going to get together in Galilee, not in Jerusalem, not in Judea, not in Samaria, Galilee.

When I am raised, I will go before you into Galilee. Back to our passage. The angel says, go quickly and tell his disciples he has risen from the dead.

And indeed, he is going before you, disciples, into Galilee. That's twice. Where is Jesus going to go when he's raised from the dead? Galilee.

Galilee in 26, 32. Galilee in 28, 7. There you will see him. Behold, I have told you.

In case you missed it, remember what I've told you. Behold, I've told you. So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to bring his disciples word.

This is the means by which God chooses to inform the disciples of the resurrection. These ladies. As they went to tell his disciples.

Jesus met them. Now you can see that in the best text that that explanatory introduction isn't even there. They ran to bring his disciples word.

And behold, Jesus met them. Doesn't hurt anything. But that first clause is not in the best text.

So they ran to bring his disciples word. And Jesus met them saying, rejoice. So they came and held him by the feet and worshiped him.

Then Jesus said to them, do not be afraid. Go and tell my brethren what? Go to Galilee. And there they will see me.

Jesus told the disciples in the upper room. The angel tells the women to let them know. And Jesus himself tells the women again.

Tell the disciples to go to Galilee. When the women arrive and find the disciples. What are these women going to tell the disciples? We saw the angel.

This is what he said. We saw the Lord himself. And this is what he said.

Behold, I have told you. Be sure and tell them. Emphasize it.

Jesus told them. The ladies say the angel is telling them. The ladies say Jesus is telling them.

What? What is the message? What is their next thing to do? If you're a disciple, upon hearing the word of these women, what would you do? I would go to Galilee. It is early in the morning on the first day of the week. This for us would be like Monday morning.

There are no Sabbath restrictions. There's no obstructions. The dawn has just barely broken.

You've got the full day. If you make haste, you can get to Galilee in extremely short order. Even a caravan.

When Mary and Joseph and Jesus at the age of 12 were coming and going, you can get there in no more than two days. Right? They can get there if they leave now. Right? Turn with me to John chapter 19.

They laid Jesus in the tomb. In the last verse of John 19, because of the Jews' preparation, the tomb was nearby. Chapter 20.

On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early. The other Mary is with her. John doesn't mention it.

While it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. All of the intermediate detail that we just got from Matthew, John doesn't feel the need to repeat. John's gospel was written last very clearly, and he knows that if you want the details, you can read the other gospels or you can listen to them.

So, she saw the stone taken away from the tomb. She ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb. We do not know where they have laid him.

Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. They both ran together. The other disciple outran Peter, and came to the tomb first.

And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there, yet he did not go in. Now, I'm fascinated by this detail, and it is cited as a contradiction, where she tells Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved, who is John himself, obviously. She tells Peter and John, They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.

Two items here that seem to disagree with Matthew's account. They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb. We do not know where they have laid him.

Why would they say this if they saw the angel, saw the empty tomb, met the Lord Jesus on the way, and have instructions of what to tell the disciples? Well, this has been a great conundrum down through history. I will tell you my view of this. When Simon, Peter, and John hear the knock on the door, and these two women excitedly talking over each other, and trying to explain what has just happened, what they had seen, it was a scene that was enough to knock the guards out cold.

Angel with a face like lightning gives them a guided tour of the empty tomb. Jesus himself meets them on the way. They go back, and remember Matthew's description, that as they go with fear and great joy, they run to bring his disciples word.

Fear and great joy all mingled. They're fearful and they're joyful, all at the same time. And they go to bring the disciples word.

John picks up the story. When they find Simon, Peter, and John, John says, they said, they've taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him. I think if you saw the complete conversation, they come in and are gushing with the news of what they have seen.

Peter and John are saying, all they're grasping out of this is, the tomb is empty. What are you talking about light and fainted guards? What are you saying about the Lord Jesus? All they gathered from this is, they say, well, so the tomb is empty? Yes, yes. And then they start trying to tell the story.

Well, the body of the Lord is not there? No, the body of the Lord is not there. And what Peter and John take away from the, because they're not listening, because they are not giving credence. They're not taking their time to listen to these ladies.

John's recollection of what the lady said is, the tomb is empty and we don't know where

the body is. That's all they got out of the message. Selective hearing because of their predisposition that they're not ready to hear about the resurrection.

They're not expecting it. They're not primed for it. They're not prepared.

And when these ladies try to tell them what they saw, it doesn't enter through the ear gate. It doesn't travel through the understanding and arrive in the heart of John that there was an angel who rolled away the stone to demonstrate the empty tomb. He says, you all need to go to Galilee.

And we met the Lord Jesus and he said the same thing. It just falls on deaf ears, literally. And John, when he is thinking back to what he heard the women say, this is what he heard.

Matthew tells us what they said, what they were told to say. John tells us what actually came across. I promise you, when these ladies saw the resurrected Lord, there is no doubt in their mind that he is raised and nobody has laid his body anywhere.

So how does John come to this understanding? Well, when I was listening, here's what the ladies said. Even the apostle John, as wonderful and faithful as he was, is just in a state of shock and disbelief. And I think this is what he heard.

This is my resolution of the apparent conflict. However, I am more interested in what follows. Same day at evening.

Skip down to verse 19. I'll give you a coverage of the intermediate stuff in John. We covered it when we did the gospel of John, but we'll do it again shortly.

But I want to get to verse 19. That same day at evening. This is Sunday, the first day of the week.

Look at verse 19 of John 20. That same day at evening. This is Sunday night by the Jewish reckoning.

Monday is starting at sundown, the second day of the week. When the doors were shut, where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst and said, peace be with you. What double instruction, what triple instruction did they receive from Jesus himself in the upper room? And if they had listened to the ladies and understood the instruction from the angel and the instruction from the resurrected Lord Jesus himself, three different times, they were told to go to Galilee.

They've had all day to start that journey. Where are they at sundown at the end of Sunday and the beginning of Monday? Where are they? They're in the upper room in Jerusalem. Why? As I explained earlier in this chapter, I don't think they listened to the women.

They didn't find their testimony credible. All they gleaned from what the women told them in detail is that, well, the tomb's empty and we don't know where the body is. Can't make heads or tails.

These women are hysterical. We don't know what they saw. They could have hallucinated.

They're so emotional. We give them no credit. The chosen witnesses chosen by God himself are given the message and the disciples don't get it, don't hear it.

Even John himself can't record it accurately here. And so they're still in Jerusalem. They haven't left.

Why haven't they left? A, they forgot what Jesus told them in the upper room. B, they disbelieve that Jesus has been raised when the women tell them. And therefore they don't follow the instruction to go to Galilee, which is intrinsic to the testimony of the women.

Why weren't they at the tomb? The same reason they're not able to comprehend the message given to them by the women. This ought to be a caution to us. If we get emotional, if we let our presuppositions get in the way of hearing the word of the Lord, we will find ourselves in the dark, unprepared, in the wrong place, doing the wrong thing at the wrong time, in a state of fear.

They are fearful of circumstances. They are fearful of the Jews. So they're hiding in the upper room.

Instead of going to Galilee and having the fulfillment of the promise that Jesus will meet them there, Jesus has to come find them in their hiding place. Remember when God called out in the cool of the day in the garden, Adam, where are you? God has to go find Adam and Eve hiding because their failure has left them in the dark, poor and miserable and blind and naked. So Jesus comes and stands in their midst and says, peace be with you.

He shows them his hands on his side. The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them, peace to you.

Why does he have to say it again? They are still rattled. They haven't put together the fulfillment of what Jesus told them over and over again. He breathed on them and said to them, receive the Holy Spirit.

Skip verse 23 for now. Thomas doesn't believe. The other disciples said, we have seen the Lord in verse 25.

He says, unless I see the prince, I will not believe. Verse 26, after eight days, the

disciples were again inside. This is one of the most tragic verses in the Bible.

Where are the disciples eight days later? The same room. He goes before you to Galilee. You will see him there.

The angel emphasized it. Jesus emphasizes it twice. Eight days later, after the first appearance in the upper room, they are still in the upper room.

They have not obeyed the Lord Jesus. There again, inside, Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, stood in the midst and said to them, peace.

Look at the grace of the Lord Jesus. He speaks peace. He doesn't upbraid them for their faithlessness and hardness of heart.

Somebody put that in, the spurious ending of Mark. Reach your finger here, look at my hands, reach your hand in here, put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.

You've got to believe in the resurrection before you can obey the exhortation to go and meet the Lord Jesus in Galilee. He's got instructions for them in Galilee. He's got further experience and time to spend with them in Galilee.

He's not going to do it here. He comes to the upper room and he leaves. He comes back to the upper room and he leaves.

Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who not see and yet believe. Those who not having seen yet believe.

His disciples didn't believe. Couldn't even listen to the testimony of these ladies. Three times they are told and three times they fail to go to Galilee.

They will eventually get there. But what do they do when they get there? After these things, John 21, Jesus showed himself again to the disciples. Where? At the Sea of Tiberias, at the Sea of Galilee.

They finally go to Galilee. Where do they go? Simon, Thomas, Nathaniel, the sons of Zebedee, and two others were together. Where's the rest of the disciples? They're all supposed to go to Galilee.

Simon says, I'm going fishing. He doesn't go to the appointed mount as they should have. So it is just such a tragic failure.

I'm out of time for this morning. But when we fail to listen carefully, intently, calmly to the word of God, when we let emotions run away with us, when we let circumstances dictate our level of fear, our level of comprehension, we are inevitably going to fail. And this is why you hear nothing about most of the core of disciples in the book of Acts and afterward, because this lack of faith is tragically fatal to their service and function.

You have Peter and John, and we think James, that do something in the book of Acts. The rest of the disciples fade into obscurity. Why? Here's why.

We don't want to fade into obscurity. We want to be useful in the service of the master, useful in the service of our Lord and Savior. And failing to listen and failing to pay attention is a tragically fatal mistake to our spiritual productivity.

And Jesus has to appear time and again to get the disciples where they're supposed to be. Well, we're going to pick up at that point next time. Hopefully we are where we are supposed to be doing what we are supposed to do.

And it's a counterexample that encourages us to be faithful to our calling and to our opportunities. Father, thank you for the account that we have before us, these wonderful multiple views of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and those events that ensue. We pray that as we study these things, the Holy Spirit will not only help us to understand them, but to see their pertinence and application in our own lives.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.