Fear Gives Way

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: The resurrection of Jesus Christ enables us to put fear behind us as we believe in Him and joyfully obey Him.

MAIN PASSAGES: Matthew 28:1-10

What are some things in life you cannot hear or experience enough? Why?

For many of us, the story of the resurrection of Jesus is quite familiar, perhaps even too familiar. However, our goal is not merely to understand the details of this story; it is for this story to change us. The resurrection of Jesus is at the heart of the gospel, a gospel that is designed to move us from death to life. The problem, then, is not that we have heard this story too much; if anything, this is a story we need to hear more often.
Group Time

Point 1: Fear gives way to belief because of the empty tomb (Matt. 28:1-6).

What are you afraid of?

1 Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went 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 and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. 5 But the angel 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 has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

Imagine yourself in an earthquake; that would be frightening enough. But then picture an angel coming down from heaven before your very eyes. The elite Roman soldiers did not attack, run back to Pilate, or call for backup. Instead, they were overcome by fear—angel-phobia—and they collapsed. The women likely would have collapsed as well but for the angel’s glorious message of victory, a message to calm their fears—Jesus is alive!

**Christ’s Humiliation:** God the Son came in the ___________ of sinful flesh, and He experienced a humiliating death on a cross by becoming sin for us so that in Him we might become the ________________ of God.

The depth of Christ’s humiliation followed by the emptiness of the tomb reminds us of the fullness of God’s power and the unstoppable nature of His plans. Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection is evidence enough to see God’s unflinching devotion to His glory and our good. So we believe, and it’s God’s faithful character that gives our faith its power. The *object*, not the *caliber*, of our faith casts aside our fears.

How should the resurrection of Jesus affect the way we live?
**Point 2: Fear gives way to joy because of the empty tomb (Matt. 28:7-8).**

7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.”

8 So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Moments before this encounter with the angel, the women had been heading to the tomb expecting to anoint a dead body and continue their grieving process. But their grief was short-circuited. The Lord was living again and moving. In an instant, their sorrow had turned into great joy.

**What is your daily response to Jesus’ resurrection?**

- Disbelief
- Apathy
- Curiosity
- Joy

The angel told the women not to fear, but then the women left with joy and fear. It seems they were not able to rid themselves of all their fear, although joy was beginning to overshadow it. But while the women were to cast aside their fear because of Jesus’ resurrection, in another sense, they were to increase in the healthy fear that is rooted in Christ’s work, and so should we. The proper fear of God is not a fear of what God could do to us to judge our sin but respect and honor for what He has done for us to forgive our sin in Christ Jesus. This joy and fear leads to faithful obedience.

**How would you describe your fear of the Lord?**

- No Fear
- Fear of God’s Judgment
- Healthy Fear

How can we grow in our joy and fear of the Lord?
Point 3: Fear gives way to obedience because of the empty tomb (Matt. 28:9-10).

9 And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

The two women didn’t get far before their meeting with the angel was eclipsed in wonder and splendor. The two women came face-to-face, which became face-to-foot, with the risen Christ. The empty tomb announced by the angel had been compelling evidence of the resurrection, but this brief encounter with Jesus was undeniable proof. Jesus was alive! But they weren’t to linger, so He repeated their mission to go and tell. We have been given the same orders: “Don’t be afraid. Go tell others about Me.”

Where is the risen Jesus calling you to obedience to tell someone else about Him?

When the two women left the empty tomb and encountered the resurrected Jesus, they couldn’t help but worship Him. It seems that instinctively, spurred on by something deep within themselves, they fell at the nail-scarred feet of Jesus and exalted Him. Worship is the only reasonable response when the risen Savior calls out to us. However, this worship did not cease the moment they rose from the ground and continued on their way to find the disciples. Completing the mission given to them by Christ was, in itself, an act of worship as well.

________________________ fueled by love
and gratitude for who Christ is and what He has done is _____________.
It ____________ the majesty of the resurrected Christ and ________________ His name.

What is the relationship between worship and obedience?

Voices from the Church

“To magnify Jesus Christ is not literally to make Him bigger. His influence is already felt in three worlds: heaven, earth, and hell. Heaven is His throne, and the earth is His footstool. He fills the universe with His power. Rather, to magnify Christ ... is to present Him in such a way that the hearers see Him in a more glorious, majestic, holy, sovereign, just, faithful, and mighty manner than they have ever seen Him before.”

—Robert Smith Jr.
My Mission

Because we trust Jesus rose from the dead to provide salvation, we put fear behind us and joyfully obey our calling to tell others about the resurrected Savior.

- How will you respond in faith to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ?
- What are some ways your group can help one another turn your fears into belief, joy, and obedience because of Jesus’ empty tomb?
- What are some opportunities you have this week to address the fear of death in the world with the good news of our resurrected Savior, and how will you do so?

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Daily Study

Day 1: Read Matthew 28:1-6

The resurrection of Jesus Christ should give us joy, exceeding joy. The resurrection gives us life and hope when we believe because Christ’s resurrection is the first but not the last. One day all those who have died in Christ will rise as well. But as joyous as this is, there’s even more joy traceable to the risen Christ than we might realize. Think of all of the things that exist because Jesus didn’t stay dead.

If it weren’t for the resurrected Jesus, the New Testament wouldn’t exist. If Easter didn’t happen, Jesus of Nazareth would have faded into the background with all of the other people Rome crucified. But we know the name of Jesus because He isn’t like anyone else who was crucified: He didn’t stay dead; He rose again.

If it weren’t for the raised Lord, we probably wouldn’t know most of the people in our churches; we wouldn’t have any Christian friendships. If it weren’t for the resurrection, some of us would not have met our spouses, and kids from these marriages would not exist. And if it weren’t for the resurrection, you would not be studying about the resurrection with your other group members.

When we stop and think about it, we realize that everything in the Christian life comes back to the risen Christ. “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory” (2 Cor. 1:20). All the promises of God are a mega-ton “Yes!” in Jesus!

Voices from the Church

“It’s no overstatement that if Jesus didn’t rise from the grave then there would be no Christianity. But again and again the apostles staked their lives on this crazy fact: their friend had been tortured, murdered, and buried, and then one day he showed up again in the flesh, complete with the scars to prove it.”

—Andrew Peterson

What are some of the joys in your life that you can connect back to the resurrection of Jesus?
**Day 2: Read Matthew 28:7-8**

Twice in these two verses we read the word “quickly.” The angel instructed the women to go *quickly* and then they departed *quickly*. The divine messenger had given the women good news—great news—to share, and their only proper response was to do as the angel instructed: to go in haste to tell others.

What about us? How quick are we to tell others of the good news we have received? Does the gospel continue to quicken the beating of our hearts as we consider how glorious God is for His forgiveness of us through Christ? And does that quickening of our hearts then quicken our feet? Let us never forget how beautiful the gospel is to us, and may we always be eager to share it with others. And at the same time, let us always remember that this is a message others around us are in desperate need of hearing. Let our love for God and our gratitude and joy for what He has done for us, as well as our love for those who have not trusted in Christ, move us to act *quickly* in service to our King.

❓ **With whom can you share the gospel this week?**

**Day 3: Read Matthew 28:9-10**

The women didn’t seem to get very far in their mission to tell the other disciples about the resurrected Jesus. They departed quickly from the empty tomb, but “just then” Jesus met them and their mission changed—at least for a moment. It was no longer time to go quickly and tell; it was time to stop and worship. And that was what the women did instinctively, it seems. They went to Jesus and took hold of His feet, meaning they fell on their faces to the ground in worship of the risen Savior.

In this moment, Mary and Mary Magdalene offer a compelling picture of worship, one we can strive to emulate. Their worship was genuine and spontaneous. It was a priority and unashamed. And it was given in humility and with great joy. This should be true of all of our worship, when we gather as a people and when we worship God on our own. May our worship continually be as if we are beholding the risen Christ for the first time.

❓ **What are some ways you can keep your worship vibrant and meaningful?**
Day 4: Read Matthew 28:11-15

These verses provide the origin of the stolen body theory, one of a handful of theories offered to explain away the resurrection of Jesus. The swoon theory suggests that Jesus did not die on the cross; He merely passed out to be revived later. The wrong-tomb theory states that the disciples indeed found an empty tomb because it was the wrong one; Jesus was still dead in another tomb. The hallucination theory holds that the resurrection appearances were just hallucinations.

The holes in each of these theories are not hard to find. If the disciples had conspired to steal Jesus’ body and claimed He rose again, would they have continued to lie even when most were tortured and executed for this claim? Could a severely beaten and crucified Jesus really have survived? Why didn’t the Jewish leaders present Jesus’ body to stop the resurrection claims? And is it possible for so many people to have the same hallucination, even large groups at the same time?

Each resurrection theory falls down on itself, but there is something we can learn from them: the hardness of the human heart. These theories remind us of how far people will go to deny and reject Christ Jesus. Absurd theories are preferred over the obvious truth: Jesus rose from the dead.

What are some ways you have seen people try to dismiss the gospel? How can you respond in a compelling way to each?

Day 5: Read Matthew 28:16-20

Take a step back and consider the narrative Matthew covers in the final chapter of his Gospel. In just twenty verses, with five of those detailing the leaders’ bribing of the soldiers to lie, we read of the women going to the tomb and then leaving to tell others (vv. 1-10), of the eleven disciples traveling to Galilee where they saw and worshiped Jesus (vv. 16-17), and then of Jesus commissioning them and sending them out to make disciples of all the nations (vv. 18-20). What we read is almost non-stop movement, starting at the empty tomb, the epicenter of the gospel, and moving out toward the ends of the earth. This is the purpose and the power of the resurrection; it compels action. We cannot experience the glorious resurrection of Christ and stand still. We must act; it is what our overjoyed hearts yearn to do, and it is what our Lord has called us to do.

What are some actions you can take this week to carry the gospel farther than you have before?
Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- Fear gives way to belief because of the empty tomb (Matt. 28:1-6).
- Fear gives way to joy because of the empty tomb (Matt. 28:7-8).
- Fear gives way to obedience because of the empty tomb (Matt. 28:9-10).

¿ How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?

¿ Why should believers see Jesus' resurrection as their ultimate basis for encouraging one another?

¿ What steps can you take to keep the good news of Jesus' resurrection fresh on your mind and always on the tip of your tongue?

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UNIT 7
SESSION 1
1. Tony Evans, Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2009) [eBook].

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

SESSION 4
1. Amy Carmichael, Thou Givest … They Gather (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 1958) [eBook].

UNIT 8
SESSION 1
1. Noël Piper, Treasuring God in our Traditions (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 64.

SESSION 2

SESSION 3
1. Betsie ten Boom, quoted in The Hiding Place, by Corrie ten Boom with Elizabeth and John Sherrill (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2006), 84.

EASTER SESSION

UNIT 9
SESSION 1
1. Andrew Murray, Abide in Christ, in The Essential Works of Andrew Murray, ed. Tracy M. Sumner (Barbour, 2008) [eBook].

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

SESSION 4

SESSION 5
In these sessions of The Gospel Project, we experience some of the most exciting narratives in Scripture. There are accounts here of sin and judgment, of moral decline and merciful intervention, and of rescuers who need rescue. Through it all, one thing is clear: God is with His people and He is faithful to His promise.

It’s important to keep that central theme in mind because many people read these stories about the conquest of the land and try to find examples for emulation. To be clear, we can learn a lot from these Old Testament heroes (see 1 Cor. 10), but we cannot implement their virtues apart from our connection to the Vine—Jesus Christ Himself, the One who bears fruit in us and through us.

As we walk through our present wilderness, struggling against sin and encountering sorrow, we know that the God who has gone before us is faithful. He is the One who prepares the way for us to be His ambassadors. He is the One who breaks the chains of our idolatry and lifts our gaze to His unchanging glory.