

Matthew 28:1-8

How to Fear Without Being Afraid

Main idea: We ought to always be in awe of who Jesus is and what He's done, as we rest in His love for us.

This is the day in which we celebrate not only that Jesus came, not only that He died for our sins, but that He lives. And because Jesus lives, we have joyful, abundant, eternal life in Him.

There are so many things in life that attempt to steal our joy. The darkness of this world can sometimes seem to be so overwhelming, and sometimes we can be so scared to death about life that we take our eyes off Jesus, which is sin.

But the resurrection of Jesus reminds us of God's power over sin, death, and all darkness. And if we believe in the resurrection of Jesus, it casts out all fear of these things as we rejoice not only in what God did through Jesus, but in what God is doing in us by His power and grace.

I used to be really afraid of spiders. Anybody else here afraid of spiders? I really didn't like the idea of spiders in our house. Did you know that the average home actually contains about 61 spiders?¹ That freaked me out for a long time.

But then I also learned how much spiders are actually good for our homes. They eat a lot of the other bugs and insects that we might not want in our homes. Most spiders are completely harmless, and they usually don't even want to bother us at all. Generally, if we leave them alone, they'll leave us alone, too, and we find that when it comes to most spiders, we really have nothing to be afraid of.

¹ <https://riotfest.org/2017/03/28/spiders-found-100-homes-eat-us/>

A lot of people are afraid of death.² For many unbelievers, and even some believers, the thought that life eventually just ends seems so final. They're scared to death of death. But the resurrection of Jesus gives us the sure hope that death is not the end. In Jesus, we find that when it comes to death, we really have nothing to be afraid of. Because in Jesus, we have new life!

So, of course, that starts with Jesus Himself.

Matthew 28:1-8

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to view the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and approached the tomb. He rolled back the stone and was sitting on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. The guards were so shaken by fear of him that they became like dead men. The angel told the women, "Don't be afraid, because I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. For he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has risen from the dead and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there.' Listen, I have told you." So, departing quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, they ran to tell his disciples the news. (Matthew 28:1-8)

Father, we confess that we're often afraid. We're afraid of what the future may hold for us, our families, or our nation. So help us to fear men less, and teach us to have a godly fear, and reverent awe of You. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Life is full of bittersweet moments. When your kids grow up, move out, and get married, it's bittersweet. You're so happy for them, and yet miss them

² <https://www.verywellmind.com/scared-to-death-of-death-1132501>

like crazy. Nostalgia is bittersweet. You miss the moments you experienced when you were younger, yet you love the experiences you had. And growing older itself is bittersweet. The longer we walk with Jesus, even as our bodies wear out, we also grow in wisdom and learn to appreciate the life God has given us more.

I think the first Easter must have been bittersweet to the disciples of Jesus. At least at first.

Easter, of course, follows just two days after Good Friday, the day that Jesus was crucified on the cross. And, of course, we know today that Jesus dying on the cross means that we're forgiven of our sins, but the original Good Friday didn't seem very good. It was very bitter. All of Jesus's friends and followers were sad and afraid. They were sad because Jesus had died, and they were afraid because both the Romans and the Jews didn't like Jesus, and didn't like them by association.

And yet, what would come next would be incredibly sweet.

Verse 1.

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to view the tomb. (Matthew 28:1)

Can you imagine having your name recorded in the Bible, only to be called "the other Mary"? It would be like if I was talking to Leroy over here, and said, "Ronald and Tina Hill are at church today, and so are the other Hills." Or are you guys the other Hills? The thing is, Mary was such a common name at that time, that we read about several women in the Bible named Mary, and it can sometimes get confusing to keep them all straight.

We can learn more about these two Mary's, however, just by backing up a few verses to Matthew 27:55-56, when Jesus was on the cross. It says:

Many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and looked after him were there, watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons. (Matthew 27:55-56)

So this “other Mary” was actually Mary the mother of James and Joseph, James being one of the twelve disciples, and Joseph also likely being a follower of Jesus.³ Mark's account of all this mentions that Salome was also there. She was the wife of Zebedee, and therefore the mother of James and John, two more of Jesus's disciples, and followed Jesus for much of His ministry as well.

I share all this about these women because it would be easy for us to just skim over these details, and these details actually help us to believe in the resurrection not just as wishful thinking, but as history and a sure hope.

These are women who knew Jesus extremely well. Mary Magdalene was a follower of Jesus ever since He cast out demons from her. So she was extremely devoted to Jesus. And Salome and the “other Mary” spent a lot of time with Jesus during His ministry, both as they helped to fund His ministry, and also as they wanted to be with their sons who were disciples of Jesus. So these women were obviously in mourning over His death. So when they came to the tomb early that Sunday morning, they were greatly upset over the events of the previous Friday, which we call “Good Friday,” but to them would have been a very bitter Friday.

But I think God allows us to have bitter times in our lives so that the sweet moments will be that much more sweet. Verse 2.

³ John's account of this event notes that “Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.” (John 19:25) So unless there were even more Mary's at the cross, this “other Mary” was also identified as being the wife of Clopas, and depending on how you read this text, she may also have been Jesus's aunt, being either the sister of Jesus's mother, who was also named Mary, or more likely, the sister of Mary's husband, Joseph, and therefore Mary's sister-in-law. Either way, that's a lot of Mary's!

There was a violent earthquake, because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and approached the tomb. He rolled back the stone and was sitting on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. The guards were so shaken by fear of him that they became like dead men. (Matthew 28:2-4)

So you have three women greatly upset, wondering how they're going to roll the stone aside in order to anoint Jesus's body with burial spices, worried that Jesus's body would already smell from decay, probably worried about how they're going to deal with the guards at the tomb who didn't want anyone coming and messing with Jesus's body. And then there's an earthquake, and they see an angel, and the stone is rolled aside for them, and the guards just become paralyzed with fear, probably turning pale and maybe even lose consciousness from feeling lightheaded from the supernatural circumstances and the appearance of the angel.

And so the two Mary's and Salome were certainly also greatly afraid. Apparently, they weren't as afraid as the guards, maybe because of their Jewish faith, but they were afraid. So the angel says to them, starting in verse 5:

"Don't be afraid, because I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. For he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has risen from the dead and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there.' Listen, I have told you." So, departing quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, they ran to tell his disciples the news. (Matthew 28:5-8)

So many things in life attempt to steal our joy by instilling fear in us. We fear for our children. We fear the future. We might even fear death. But the resurrection of Jesus reminds us of God's power over sin, death, and all darkness. And when we believe in the resurrection of Jesus, it casts out all

fear of those things because perfect love casts out fear, and God is perfect love.

So the angel told the women at the tomb, “Don’t be afraid.” And yet, they still feared. That’s what it says in verse 8. They departed from the tomb with fear. But I don’t think it was a bad fear. I think it was a very good fear, because it also says that they had great joy. They had fear without being afraid.

You know, the Bible says that we should fear God. But the Bible also says that God loves us, and that we should love God.

The Bible tells us at least dozens if not hundreds of times to “fear not.” Here are just a few. God told Joshua when he was about to lead Israel into the Promised Land:

Haven’t I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:9)

And God spoke through Isaiah to the Israelites, but I think by extension to everyone who believes in Him, saying:

Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)

And also:

For I am the Lord your God, who holds your right hand, who says to you, “Do not fear, I will help you. (Isaiah 41:13)

And Jesus said to His disciples:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. (John 14:27, ESV)

Some preachers have said that “fear not” or some variation of the phrase is found exactly 365 times in the Bible, although that number may be inflated a bit. It’s at least over 100 times, and maybe even 200. But it’s clear just from just these that God doesn’t want us to be afraid. In fact, Jesus also said this about it:

Don’t fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)

So God is the only One whom we should fear. But Jesus went on.

Aren’t two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father’s consent. But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:29-31)

God is the only One whom we should fear, and because God loves us, we have nothing to fear. 1 John says it like this:

There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears is not complete in love. We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:18-19)

Because Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again, our sins have been forgiven by God, and we are alive in Him. And because fear has to do with punishment, those who trust in Jesus have nothing to fear.

And yet, the Bible is clear that we are to fear God, but not because we fear He might punish us. When we realize that God loves us, and we rest in His

grace through faith in Jesus, there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ. So how should we fear God?

Well, I think the same way the women at the tomb feared God. They feared with great joy. They had a reverent awe of God. They had great joy about what God had done, and they were expectant about what God was about to do. And they didn't even yet know what God was about to do, but they rejoiced in knowing that whatever it was, that Jesus was alive and they had good news to share.

We ought to always be in awe of who Jesus is and what He's done, as we rest in His love for us.