



Matthew 28:5-7

Easter, April 20, 2025
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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."

It's been said that "advice is seldom welcome; and those who need it the most always like it the least." And that's true, isn't it? Most people enjoy flattery and compliments and approval. But people don't generally like to listen to advice, particularly if it tends to point to their own faults or failings. And, speaking from experience, the worse the failing, the less happy you are to hear advice about it.

It's human nature, and it's true of all of us. Good advice—advice you really need, because of your shortcomings—is hard to listen to and even harder to put into practice. But on this glorious Easter morning, our text presents us with a wonderful exception to that rule. In this passage we're given some advice. It's advice in which we can have the utmost confidence, because it's brought to us by an angel sent directly from God. And unlike most good advice, his words are not only *easy* to hear, but hearing them builds the very foundation of our Christian joy. Let's open our ears, then, and listen to some:

Good Advice from the Easter Angel

- I. "Don't be afraid."
- II. "Look at the evidence."
- III. "Go forth with the message."

It was early Sunday morning. The Sabbath day of rest was finally over, but it had been anything but restful for the women who were so devoted to Jesus. Just the day before, on Friday, merely hours before the Sabbath began, their Master had been captured and cruelly and undeservedly put to death. And now that it was Sunday morning, and they were allowed to work again, they wasted no time in preparing to carry out the only thing left that they could do for Jesus—to embalm His body with fragrant spices.

By the way, did you notice how men don't come out looking very good in the Passion accounts? Peter, James and John couldn't keep awake in the Garden during Jesus' hour of need. When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, all of the disciples ran for their lives. Peter followed Jesus to the judgment hall, and there he cursed and swore, denying that He even knew who Jesus was. At the cross, only John was there to see the end. But all the women were there: Mary, Jesus' mother, of course; but also Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, along with Johanna and Salome. They saw the Lord die. And they wanted to know where He would be laid afterwards, so they marked the tomb in which He had been buried. And now, just at the crack of dawn, they were already on their way to the tomb with heavy hearts, to perform their last acts of love.

A greater picture of sorrow and gloom could hardly be imagined. But—as so often is the case in the Christian life—things were not as they seemed. Because the Lord was working too. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb, and then we read from the verses just before our text: ***"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. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow."***

Just as an earthquake tolled the bell for Jesus' death, now an earthquake was the trumpet announcing His resurrection! An angel, a messenger from God, came down. And at the very sight of him, the soldiers guarding the tomb shook and became as dead men, we're told. Then the angel rolled back the great stone, not to let Jesus out, but to show people that the tomb was indeed empty. And what the angel had to say was significant—for those women at the tomb, and for those latest to arrive, you and me, some 2000 years later as we once again come to worship our Savior at His open tomb.

Today we're presented with some very **Good Advice from the Easter Angel**. And the first bit of advice will sound familiar to you, because every time an angel appears to someone in the Bible, this is the first thing out of the angel's mouth: "Don't be afraid." The angel said to the women, ***"Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said."***

Don't be afraid. Why do they always say that? Why do they *need* to say that? I think we could all imagine why; whenever sinful human beings are suddenly confronted with divine holiness, the reaction is always the same—absolute terror! And that's for good reason. God is pure righteousness, a burning and all-consuming holiness. He says that nothing unholy or unrighteous can stand for a second in his presence. And we sinners immediately sense our own deep unholiness and unrighteousness, especially when standing before holiness. We feel all too keenly the filthy thoughts that pass through our minds, the corrupt and hurtful words that have passed our lips, the dark and unclean deeds that our hands have done. And yet, the angel said to the Mary's, and likewise says to us, "Don't be afraid."

Dear friends, you will never get any advice that's easier to hear than that! ***"Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said."*** Jesus is alive! He was alive then, and He is alive right now. Do you understand what that means? It means you've been let off the hook! It means that God has declared you innocent! It means that Jesus' suffering and death on the cross *has been accepted* as the complete payment for all your sins. The book of Romans says, ***"Jesus our Lord was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."*** (Romans 4:25) He was raised, and God says that means that we will really be able to stand in the presence of Holy God as righteous in His eyes!

What a wonderful word from the Easter Angel! **Do not fear!** There's no room for fear anymore in our lives. And by the way, it's interesting to note that the form of the Greek word that the angel uses in this passage is very specific. He's not only saying, "Do not be afraid NOW." The way he's saying this could be thought of as, "Do not be afraid now, and you don't ever need to be afraid EVER AGAIN!"

Martin Luther put it this way: *"Do not fear! This is as much as to say, what foolish and simple little people you are that you should be terrified and fear. For Christ lives, and is risen from the dead. Therefore, the proper thing for you to do is be glad and never worry about anything. For that Christ lives He lives for your good, that you should enjoy Him, and by Him be protected and preserved from all misery. He means to tell us that the resurrection of Christ is to comfort us against the devil, sin and hell. For if these foes could continue to do damage, it would be impossible for us not to fear. This is the first command, not only to the women, but to all baptized and believing Christians who know and believe that Christ is risen, namely that they are not to fear."*

"Do not be afraid." That's good advice. But how do we know the resurrection really happened? How do we know that He wasn't really just stolen out of the tomb by the disciples, as the pharisees claimed? How do we know it isn't what so many modern skeptics say when they say this is a myth, a self-serving legend that was developed by Jesus' followers? Well, that brings us to the second piece of **Good Advice from the Easter Angel**. He says the same thing to us that he said to the women at the tomb: **"Look at the evidence."** ***"He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay."***

By the time the angel appeared, the resurrection had already happened. Silently, unseen by human eyes. **"Come and see for yourself,"** the angel said. Look at the evidence! You'll see the stone rolled away. You'll see the place where he used to lay. You'll even see the grave clothes lying neatly folded to one side. You'll see everything, except for the body of Jesus, because He is not here!

You know, the absence of Jesus' body from the tomb was and remains the most compelling evidence of all for the resurrection. Think about it—the enemies of Christ could easily have disproved His resurrection. All they had to do was simply produce the dead body! They did everything in their power to keep His body in the grave: putting a wax seal around the stone, placing several mighty soldiers in front of the tomb. But nothing they could do could keep His body in the grave or produce it afterwards. They couldn't do it then, and they can't do it now, because there is no dead body! Jesus is alive!

Other evidence for the resurrection is all over in Scripture. Did you know that over 300 verses in the Bible that speak directly about Jesus rising from the dead? For one thing, it was predicted throughout the Old Testament, like in Psalm 16 and Job 19. In the New Testament, Jesus frequently spoke beforehand about how He would die and how He would rise again. And then there were the eyewitnesses. The apostle Paul writes, ***"I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present."*** (1 Corinthians 15:3-6) And on the other side? How many witnesses claimed to have seen Jesus' dead body after Easter Sunday? Not even one.

But perhaps the greatest evidence of all is the evidence in the lives of believers down through the centuries, beginning with the apostles who based their entire life and work on the truth of the resurrection, holding onto that truth even as they were killed for holding to it. And we see it in the lives of every believer since then. In your own life, God has worked the miracle of faith in your heart so that you believe in your resurrected Lord Jesus, and trust in Him for forgiveness and everlasting life. Paul says, ***"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs-- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."*** (Romans 8:16-17) And you've seen that miraculous power at work in the hearts of others. Lives turned around. People who you thought would be the last to ever come to faith in Jesus, but who are now believers in the power of His resurrection.

So, you've taken the Easter angel's advice so far. You've seen that the message of the empty tomb leaves no room for fear. You've examined the evidence for the resurrection in the Bible and your own life. But it's not just about your life or mine, the Easter good news is for everyone. And that means you've got work to do. Listen to **Good Advice from the Easter Angel**: "Go spread the message."

The angel said, ***"Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead."*** The angel told them what to do, and he also told them what not to do, in a way. He says, "Go quickly and TELL." The resurrection wasn't supposed to be a secret. They were not to keep it to themselves, to simply go home and sit and ponder it in private. No, they were supposed to be active, to get the news out! They were to carry that wonderful message to others, first the disciples and then to all people.

He's given us the same job. He tells us also to make disciples of all nations by teaching them. To show your Easter joy by not being static, but by going and spreading the Word. By serving as Ambassadors for Christ in whatever your calling in life may be. And God's wonderful promise is that when we are carrying the joyous news of Christ, our work is not in vain. The apostle Paul says in the great resurrection chapter, 1st Corinthians 15: ***"But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."*** (1 Corinthians 15:57-58)

Christ's resurrection is the center of our lives. In fact, it's the central truth in the history of humanity. It will remain that way to the end of time, and no human opposition can ever change it, and many have tried. In the then Soviet city of Kiev in the early 1920s, there was an anti-Christian rally held by the Communists. Noted Communist Leader Nickolai Bukharin addressed the massive rally, speaking for an hour about the foolishness of Christianity. He criticized the Christian faith, pointed to the supposed errors and contradictions in the Bible, doing everything he could to dismantle the Christian faith in Russia.

The story goes that after an hour or so, he finally concluded, thinking he had clearly convinced the crowd of the impossibility of the Scriptures. At which point, an elderly Orthodox Christian priest stood up near the front of the assembly and cried out in Russian, "Christ is risen!" And immediately the massive crowd thundered forth the familiar response, "He is risen indeed!"

The logic of the Communists could not stand against the power of the resurrection, nor will the enemies of Christ prevail today. The Word of God will remain forever, including the **good advice from the Easter angel: don't be afraid, look at the evidence, go forth with the message.** Hearing this good advice, will we actually profit from it? If by profit, you mean to have peace with a holy God, to find full forgiveness for every sin, and to receive salvation and be eventually raised to eternal life along with Christ, then the answer is a resounding yes! In the words of the hymnist:

*He is arisen! Glorious word! Now reconciled is God, my Lord;
The gates of heaven are open. My Jesus did triumphant die,
And Satan's arrows broken lie, Destroyed hell's direst weapon.
Oh, hear, what cheer! Christ victorious riseth glorious, life He giveth--
He was dead, but see, He liveth! (TLH 189:1) Amen.*

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen. Christ is arisen!