

Date:

*The resurrection of Jesus*

**PRAY** Lord Jesus, I want to come and see for myself what happened in that tomb. Please give me new insights into the truth about your resurrection.

**READ** Matthew 28

**REFLECT**

I love good spy novels and thrillers; I read them in bed at night or when I'm pedalling on the exercise bike at the YMCA gym. One of the things that appeals to me about these books is that often they intertwine several separate plotlines in short chapters that all come together in the end. That's exactly how Matthew constructed his account of the resurrection of Jesus.

*Plot 1 – the basic report, told with dramatic detail (28:1–7)* Note that the earthquake was violent; no wonder the guards were scared stiff. The angel had a dazzling appearance but assumed a casual position, sitting on the stone. It's as if he was saying, 'What's the big deal; Jesus told you this would happen, right?'

*Plot 2 – the reaction of the two Marys (28:8–10)* They are overwhelmed with conflicting emotions of fear and joy. Even so, the angel gives them a threefold command: don't be afraid, come and see, go and tell – good marching orders for any follower of Jesus. For the two Marys it led to a life-changing encounter with Christ.

*Plot 3 – the 'bad guys' (28:11–15)* The religious leaders, aware of the disastrous PR implications if word got out that Jesus actually did rise from the dead, paid the guards to spread disinformation about what happened.

*Plot 4 – the motivational conclusion (28:16–20)* These verses are often called the great commission because in them Jesus empowered his followers to share the gospel with the whole world. But the most inspirational aspect is not a vision of worldwide evangelism. Rather, it's the reality that Jesus will be with his followers for ever.

**APPLY** Do you ever feel that Jesus is really with you? When?

**PRAY** Father, I'm so thankful for the empty tomb. Help me to overcome my fears so I can tell others about your Son, Jesus.

Date:

*The resurrection of Jesus*

**PRAY** Heavenly Father, 'I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection' (Philippians 3:10). Show me how that's possible today as I read your Word.

**READ** Mark 16

**REFLECT**

Perhaps your Bible includes a note indicating that most early manuscripts don't include Mark 16:9–20. What's that all about? Over the years, scholars have offered different explanations but the most likely is that either Mark died just before he finished his Gospel account, or the last section of his scroll was somehow destroyed and, as a result, someone close to Mark filled in the last section. We'll never know for sure but over the centuries the Church has agreed on this: these verses are still part of the inspired Word of God.

So what do we learn from this account of the resurrection? First, we note the many similarities to other Gospel accounts, a fact that enhances the credibility of this passage. Mark reports that the resurrection was discovered by the women close to Jesus, early on the Sabbath, and that an angel (described as a young man) was present to explain things. And note the angel's message is virtually the same as we read in Matthew (compare Matthew 28:5–7 with Mark 16:6,7). Everyone has the same basic story. But our reading today gives us two unique insights into this momentous day:

*There are consequences of our choices about the gospel.* In this version of the great commission (16:15,16), Jesus' words are not just a motivational challenge but are linked to another of his 'hard sayings': our response to the good news determines whether we're 'saved' or 'condemned' (16:16). We must be very careful not to scare or manipulate people with these words. But, on the other hand, it's important to know there are consequences to anyone's decision about Jesus.

*There is power in the message of the gospel.* You may not feel comfortable with all the examples of power listed here (16:17,18); personally, I'm not a big fan of snakes! Again, we must be careful with these verses; we shouldn't sensationalise them or attempt dangerous things without clear direction from the Lord. But the fact remains: Jesus said we would do 'even greater things' after his death and resurrection (John 14:12). That's a powerful message.

**APPLY** For you, what is the most powerful thing about the resurrection of Jesus? Why?

**PRAY** Spend a few minutes asking God to show you how you could respond to the Great Commission in your world.