

The Resurrection of Christ

[John Calvin](#)

In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me. - Matthew 28:1-10

One may find it strange at first glance that our Lord Jesus wishing to give proof of His resurrection, appeared rather to women than to His disciples. But in that we have to consider that He wished to prove the humility of our faith. For we must not be grounded in human wisdom, but we must receive in absolute obedience what we know to proceed from Him. On the other hand, there is no doubt that He wished to punish the disciples, when He sent them women to instruct them, because the instruction which they had received from His mouth had been of no profit to them when it came to the test. For look how they are scattered. They desert their Master; they are confused by fear. And what good has it done them to be for more than three years in the school of the Son of God? Such cowardice, then, deserved great punishment, even that they might be entirely deprived of the knowledge which they had received before, inasmuch as they had, so to speak, trampled it under foot and buried it. Now our Lord Jesus did not wish to punish them severely, but to show them their fault by gentle correction He appointed women to be their teachers. They had been chosen beforehand to publish the Gospel to the whole world (they are really the first teachers of the Church), but since they were so cowardly as to be found thus bewildered, so much so that their faith was, as it were, deadened, it is entirely proper that they should know that they are not worthy to hear any teaching from the mouth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice, then, why they are sent back to women until they have better recognized their faults, and Jesus Christ has restored them to their position and privilege, but by grace. Besides (as I have said), all of us in general are urged to receive the testimony which is sent to us by God, even if the persons who speak are of little importance or if they have no credit or reputation in the eyes of the

world. As in fact, when a man is elected or appointed to be a notary public or a public officer what he does will be received as authentic. One would not say this or that to contradict him. For the office gives him respect among men. And will God have less preeminence than earthly princes, if He ordains only those whom He pleases to be His witnesses, from whom one receives whatever He should say without contradiction or reply? Certainly it must be so unless we want to be rebels even against God Himself. This, then, we have to remember in the first place.

Besides, let us note also, although our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to women and they held the first degree of honor, He Himself gave sufficient testimony to His resurrection, so that, if we do not close our eyes, stop up our ears and by certain malice will to be hardened and stupid, we have an abundant certainty of this article of faith, as also it is of great importance. For when St. Paul refutes the incredulity of those who still doubted if Jesus Christ was raised, he mentions not only the women, but he mentions Peter and James, then the twelve Apostles, then more than five hundred disciples to whom our Lord Jesus appeared. How, then, can we excuse our malice and rebellion if we do not give credit to more than five hundred witnesses who were chosen for that not on man's part but from the sovereign Majesty of God. And it was not only just once that our Lord Jesus declared to them that he was living but many times. Thus, what the Apostles have doubted and their incredulity ought to serve us for a greater confirmation. For, if at first appearance they had believed the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, one might allege that it would have been too simple. But they are so slow that Jesus Christ has to reproach them for being blockheaded people with no faith, for having minds so heavy and thick that they understand nothing. When, then, the Apostles were so unready to receive this article of faith, that ought to make us all the more certain. For that it was then brought to them as by force is good reason now for us to follow. As it is said, "You have seen, Thomas, and you have believed, but blessed are those who believe without seeing." Now, then, when it is thus spoken that our Lord Jesus appeared to two women, let us think of what is said from the other passage from Saint Paul that we may know that we need not stumble at those who speak to give credit to what they say according to the importance or condition of their persons, but rather we ought to raise our eyes and our senses on high to subject ourselves to God, who well deserves to have entire superiority over us and that we be captives under His Word. For if we are not teachable it is certain that we shall never profit from the teaching of the Gospel. And it ought not to be ascribed to foolishness when we receive what God declares and testifies to us. For when we shall have learned by obedience to profit in His school and in the faith, we shall know that the perfection of all wisdom is that we be thus obedient to Him.

Now let us come to this story which is here narrated. It is said that "Mary Magdalene with her companion came to the sepulcher the first day of the sabbaths," that is, the first day of the week. For the Jews keep Saturday, which

they call Sabbath, as the day of rest, as also the word signifies, and then they name the days following in all the week, first day after Sabbath, second day, etc. Now because they count the beginning of the day as at sundown, it is said that the Marys bought aromatic ointments after the sabbath was finished and made their preparations to come the next day to the sepulcher. And they were not only two. It is true that St. John names only Mary Magdalene. St. Matthew names two of them, and we see by St. Luke that there were a large number there. But all this agrees very well. For Mary Magdalene did the leading, and the other Mary is here named explicitly because she followed most closely. Meanwhile, several have come to anoint the body of our Lord Jesus, but notably it is here said that they have come to see the sepulcher to know if there would be access and entrance. That is why two are here specially marked.

St. Matthew adds that the angel appeared to them while the two were there. But because only one spoke the word, that is why he is thus specially named. Finally as they go away, they meet our Lord Jesus Who sends them to His disciples in order that all may be assembled in Galilee, wishing to show them there His resurrection, and this, because the city of Jerusalem had deprived itself by its wickedness from such a testimony. True it is that the Fountain of Life was still there, for out of it proceeded the Law and the Word of God, but meanwhile our Lord Jesus did not wish to reveal Himself to His disciples in that city, when the wickedness was still so recent there. On the other hand, He also wished to conform to their hardness of heart. For they were, as it were, seized with astonishment so that the sense of sight would not have been enough unless He had taken them apart, and had shown Himself in such a way that they would have been fully convinced.

Now we see again here how the women who are named are not yet permitted to worship our Lord Jesus Christ as their Master, although they were troubled by His death. Consequently, we can well judge that the Word of God was always implanted in their hearts. For although their faith was feeble, they seek our Lord Jesus at the sepulcher. There is also in them a certain ignorance which cannot be excused. For they should already have raised their spirits on high, waiting for the resurrection which had been promised them — to which the third day was especially assigned. They were, then, so occupied that they did not understand the principal thing — namely, that our Lord Jesus had to obtain victory over death to acquire for us life and salvation. I say that is the principal thing, because without it the Gospel would be nothing (as says St. Paul) and our faith would be entirely destroyed. Thus these poor women, however much they may know the Gospel which has been preached to them to be the pure truth, nevertheless, are so troubled and confused that they do not understand that He was to rise, and thus they come to the sepulcher with their aromatic ointments. There is, then, a fault which is to be condemned. But their service is none-the-less agreeable to God, for He excuses their astonishment until He has corrected them. In that let us see when our Lord approves what we do, still we must not put that to our

credit to say that we have merited it, while, altogether on the contrary, it is of His abundant grace if He acknowledges that which was not worthy to be offered to Him. For there will always be occasion to condemn our works when God examines them strictly, forasmuch as they will always be tainted with some spot. But God spares us and does not refuse what we come to offer Him, whatever weakness or fault there may be, seeing that all is purified by faith and we know that it is not without cause that we are acceptable to Him in Jesus Christ. This, then, we have to observe.

However, let us recognize also that there surely must have been another fragrance, much better, much stronger, in the sepulcher of our Lord Jesus Christ, than that of these ointments of which mention is made. We have already mentioned that the Jews were accustomed to anoint the body in order to be confirmed in the hope of the resurrection and of the heavenly life. It was to show that the bodies do not decay to such an extent that they cannot be preserved until the last day, and so that God may restore them. But the body of our Lord Jesus Christ had to be exempt from all such decay. Now the spices could not effect that, but, because it had been declared that God would not suffer that His Holy and Godly One should see corruption, that is why by a miracle our Lord Jesus has been preserved from all decay. Besides, because he has been exempt from corruption, we are now certain and assured of the glory of the resurrection, which has already appeared to us in His Person. We see, then, now, that the fragrance of the sepulcher and of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ has permeated even to us, so that we may become alive by it. Now what follows? That we may go no longer to look at the sepulcher as these women, by whose ignorance and weakness we are served, but that we may soar upward, since He calls us and invites us there, since He has shown us the way, and He has declared to us that He has entered into possession of His heavenly Kingdom to prepare us a room and a place there when by faith we shall find Him there.

But we must also note what St. Matthew adds: The angel, says he, appeared, who frightened the guards so that they became as dead men. The women were likewise frightened, but the angel after that administered the remedy. "As for you," said he, "Fear not, for you seek Jesus Who was crucified. He is risen, as He said." Here we see how God accepts the affection and the zeal of these women so that He corrects, however, what He does not approve of. I mean that He corrects it through the mouth of the angel who is there in His name. We have said that it is by singular kindness that God receives our service when it is imperfect although He might have it in abhorrence. He receives from us, then, what is of no value as a father will receive from his children what otherwise would be regarded as rubbish and jest. Behold, I say, how generous God is toward us. But, on the other hand, it is true that He does not wish men to take pleasure in and to make light of their faults. Therefore, the angel corrects this fault on the part of the women. Although their intention is good, still they are condemned for their particular fault. Therefore, St. Luke records that they have been more

harshly rebuked. *“Why seek ye the living among the dead?”* But here we have to observe that the guards, as men who are unbelieving and wicked, who had no fear of God or religion, were seized with fear, possibly even, as it were, with a spirit of frenzy. The women, to be sure, are afraid but they immediately receive consolation. Behold, then, how terrible the majesty of God is to those to whom it appears. That is why we feel our weakness when God declares Himself to us, and while at first we were puffed up with presumption and we were so bold that we no longer thought that we were mortal men, when God gives us any sign of His presence, we must necessarily be crushed, and know what our condition is, that is, that we are only dust and ashes, that all our virtues are only smoke that floats away and vanishes. This, then, is common to all, whether good or bad. Besides, when God has thus terrified unbelievers, He leaves them there as reprobate men, because they are not worthy of experiencing His goodness in any way. Therefore, also, they flee His presence, they are angry and gnash their teeth and are so enraged that they lose all sense and reason, becoming men entirely brutish. The faithful, after having been frightened, rise up and take courage, because God consoles them and gives them joy. This fear, then, which the faithful feel in the presence of the majesty of God is none other than a first step in humility in order that they may pay Him the homage which is His due, and that they may submit to Him, knowing that they are nothing, in order to seek all their good in Him alone.

This, then, is why the angel says, *“Fear not.”* This word is worthy of notice. For it is even as though he had said, “I leave this rabble in their confusion, for they are not worthy of any mercy, but now I turn to you and bring you a message of joy. Be, then, delivered from this fear, because you seek Jesus Christ.” Since that is true, let us learn to seek our Lord Jesus, not (as I have said) in such hardness of heart as these women of whom it is here spoken (as also there is no longer any occasion to go to search for Him at the sepulcher), let us come by faith straight to Him without pretense. And in so doing so let us be sure that this message belongs to us and is addressed to us. We must come boldly and without fear, but not without respect (for we must be touched with fear in order to adore the majesty of God). But, anyway, let us not be frightened as if we were altogether overcome with distrust. Let us know, then, that the Son of God will adapt Himself to our limitations when we come to Him in faith, and we shall even find in Him cause for consolation and joy, inasmuch as it is for our profit and salvation that He has acquired lordship and dominion of the heavenly life.

However, the women went away with great joy and great fear. Here again the weakness of their faith is shown. I have said that the purpose toward which they aspired was good, but they did not take the right road, as we learn from the fact that they are cowardly, and that they cannot make up their minds to believe or not to believe the Resurrection. Although they had heard it spoken of many times, still they cannot conquer their feelings to come to a final conclusion that it is no longer necessary to look for our Lord Jesus at the sepulcher. Note, then,

the origin of this fear. Thus we see that it is a mistaken sentiment. It is true (as I have suggested) that we must fear God to yield reverence toward His majesty, to obey Him and to be entirely abased, so that He may be exalted in His glory; to keep every mouth shut, so that He alone may be recognized righteous, wise, and allpowerful. But this fear mentioned here is, in the second place, evil and to be condemned, for it is caused by the confusion of these poor women. Still, though they may see and hear the angel speak, it seems to them almost like a dream. Now by that we are warned that God works in us so often when we do not perceive whether we have profited or not. For there is so much ignorance in us that, as it were, clouds prevent us from coming to perfect clearness, and we are entangled in many fancies. Briefly, it seems that all the teaching of God is almost useless. Nevertheless, we find some apprehension mixed with it which makes us feel that God has worked in our hearts. Even though we have only a little spark of grace, let us not lose courage. Rather, let us pray to God that He may add to this little which He has begun, and that He may make us to believe and that He may confirm us, until we are brought to perfection, from which we are still very far. Even though the fact that the women had been thus occupied by fear and joy were condemned as a fault, we see that God always governed them by His Holy Spirit and that this message which was borne to them by the angel was not entirely useless.

Now we have to pass on. Our Lord Jesus appeared to them on the road, and said to them, "Fear not, but go, tell My brothers to gather together in Galilee and there they will see Me." We see still better in this passage how the Son of God draws us by degrees to Himself until we are fully confirmed, as is needful for us. It was surely enough that the women heard the message by the mouth of the angel, for he bore marks that he was sent by God. His countenance was like lightning. It is true that the whiteness of a robe and like things do not express vividly the majesty of God. However, these women had a very sure testimony that this was not a mortal man who spoke, but a heavenly angel. This testimony, then, might well have been sufficient for them, but, even so, the certainty was so much greater when they saw our Lord Jesus, whom they first recognized to be the Son of God and His unchangeable truth. This, then, is to ratify more plainly what they had heard before from the mouth of the angel. And that is also how we grow into faith. For from the beginning we know neither what power nor efficacy there is in the Word of God. But if one teaches us, and well, we learn something, and yet it is almost nothing. But little by little it makes its impression on us by His Holy Spirit and in the end He shows us that it is He Who speaks. Then we are resolved so that not only do we have some knowledge, but we are persuaded in such a way that when the devil schemes everything he possibly can he is not able to shake our faith, inasmuch as we have this conviction: that the Son of God is our teacher and we lean upon Him, knowing that He has entire mastery over us and that He merits entire sovereign authority. We see that in these women. It is true, that God does not work in all the same way. Some from the very first will be so attracted that they will perceive that God has exerted an extraordinary

power on their behalf. But often we shall be taught in such a way that our rudeness and weakness will be plainly seen, so that by it we are so much more admonished to glorify God and to recognize that it is from Him that we have everything.

Let us now consider the word that we have quoted, *“Go, tell my brothers to meet me in Galilee.”* We see that the Son of God appeared here to Mary and her companion not only to reveal Himself to seven or eight, but He wished this message to be published to the Apostles, that it might now be communicated to us that we should share in it. In fact, without that, of what profit would this story of the Resurrection be to us? But when it is said that the Son of God has so manifested Himself, and that He wished the fruit of it to be communicated to all the world, that is how we gain so much better a conception. So, then, let us be assured that our Lord Jesus wished that we might be made certain of His resurrection, because in that also rests all hope of our salvation and of our righteousness, when we truly know that our Lord Jesus is risen. Not only has He purged us of all our filth by His death and passion, but He could not remain in such a state of weakness. He had to show the power of His Holy Spirit and He had to be declared Son of God by rising from the dead, as St. Paul says, both in the first chapter of Romans, and in other passages. Thus it is that we must now be assured that our Lord Jesus, being raised, wishes us to come to Him and that the road might be opened to us. And He does not wait for us to look for Him, but He has provided that we might be called by the preaching of the Gospel and that this message might be spoken by the mouths of His heralds whom He had chosen and elected. This being so, let us recognize that today we share in the righteousness which we have in our Lord Jesus Christ, to reach the heavenly glory, since He does not wish to be separated from us.

And that is why He calls His disciples His brothers. Surely this is an honorable title. And so it was reserved for those whom our Lord Jesus had engaged as His servants. And there is no doubt that He has used this word to show the brotherly relation which He wanted to sustain toward them. And so He is also united to us, as it is better declared by St. John. In fact, we are driven to what is said in Psalm 22, from which this passage is taken: I will declare Thy name to my brothers, which passage the Apostle, applying to the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, included not only the twelve Apostles in calling them brothers of Jesus Christ, but bestows the title on all of us in general who follow the Son of God, and He wishes that we share such an honor. That is why, also when our Lord Jesus says “I am going to My God and to your God, to My Father and to your Father,” it is not spoken for a small number of people, but it is addressed to the whole multitude of believers. Now our Lord Jesus, although He is our eternal God, does none-the-less in His capacity as Mediator abase Himself to be near us, and to have everything in common with us, that is with regard to His human nature. For, although He is by nature the Son of God and we are only adopted, and that by grace, still this fellowship is permanent, that He Who is the Father of our Lord

Jesus Christ, through Him is also ours, to be sure, in different aspects. For ,we need not be raised as high as our Head. There must not be any confusion here. If in a human body the head were not above all the members, it would be a freak, it would be a confused mass. It is reasonable also that our Lord Jesus should keep His sovereign position, since He is the only Son of God, that is, by nature. But this does not prevent our being joined to Him in brotherhood, so that we can call upon God boldly in full confidence of being answered by Him, since we have personal and familiar access to Him. We see, then, what this word means, when our Lord Jesus calls His disciples brothers, namely, that it was so that we have today this privilege in common with them, that is, by means of faith. And that does not take away from the power and majesty of the Son of God, when He unites Himself with creatures so miserable as we are, and He is willing to be, as it were, classed with us. For we should be all the more filled with joy, as we see what goodness He displays, as we see that in rising from the dead He has acquired for us the heavenly glory, to acquire which for us He also had abased Himself, yes, was even willing to become, as nothing. Now, since our Lord Jesus condescends to acknowledge us as His brothers so that we may have access to God, let us seek Him, and come to Him with full confidence, being so cordially invited. That is, as one might even say, He uses not only speech to draw us, but He adds also the visible Sacrament, so that we may be led as we are able to follow. And in fact, however weak and slow we may be, still we cannot excuse our slackness if we do not come to our Lord Jesus Christ. Here is the table which He has prepared for us. And to what purpose? It is not to satisfy our bodies and our bellies, although even in that God declares that He has a fatherly care for us, and our Lord Jesus Christ shows that truly He is the life of the world. If we take daily our rest and food, even in that our Lord Jesus declares to us His goodness. But He shows a special consideration in this table which is set for us here, for it is to show us that we are brothers of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is to say that as He united us to Himself (as He says in the 17th chapter of St. John) He has also united us to God His Father, and fully declares to us that He is our meat and drink, that we are fed with His own substance to have all our spiritual life in Him. And that is more than it would be if he called us His brothers a hundred times.

So then, let us realize the unity that we have with our Lord Jesus Christ, that is, He is willing to have a common life with us, and that what He has may be ours, even that He wishes to dwell in us, not in imagination, but in fact; not in an earthly, but in a spiritual manner; and in any case, that He so works by the power of His Holy Spirit that we are united to Him more than are the members of a body. And just as the root of a tree sends its substance and its power through all the branches, so we draw substance and life from our Lord Jesus Christ. And that is also why St. Paul says that our Paschal Lamb has been crucified and sacrificed, so nothing more now remains but that we keep the feast and that we take part in the sacrifice. And as in old time in the Law when the sacrifice was offered they ate, now also we must come and take our meat and spiritual food in this Sacrifice which has been offered for our redemption. It is true that we do not

devour Jesus Christ in His flesh, He does not enter us under our teeth, as the papists have imagined, but we receive bread as a sure and infallible token that our Lord Jesus feeds us spiritually with His body; we receive a drop of wine to show that we are spiritually sustained by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. But let us observe well what St. Paul adds, that just as under the figures of the Law it was not permitted to eat bread that was leavened and of which the dough was bitter, now that we are no longer under such shadows, we must put away the leaven of malice, of wickedness and of all our corruption's, and have bread or cake (says he) which has no bitterness in it. And how? In purity and sincerity. When, then, we come to approach this Holy Table, by which the Son of God shows us that He is our meat, that He gives Himself to us as our full and entire nourishment, and He wishes that now we participate in the sacrifice which He has once for all offered for our salvation, we must see to it that we do not bring to it our corruption's and pollution's to be mixed with it but that we renounce them, and seek only to be fully purified, so that our Lord Jesus may own us as members of His body, and that by this means also we may be partakers of His life. That is how today we must make use of this Holy Supper which is prepared for us. That is, that it may lead us to the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then to His resurrection, and that we may be so assured of life and salvation, as by the victory which He has obtained in rising from the dead righteousness is given to us, and the gate of paradise has been opened to us, so that we may boldly approach our God, and offer ourselves before Him, knowing that always He will receive us as His children.

Now we shall bow in humble reverence before the majesty of our God.

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