

The Easter Earthquake!

Matthew 28:1-10

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It happen seven years ago, April 4th, 2010. The 89-second quake was widely felt throughout the Western United States, some southern states, and northwest Mexico. It was the strongest to rock Southern California in at least 18 years. The 2010 Baja California earthquake. Also known as The Easter earthquake.

Early Sunday morning, as soon as the Sabbath restrictions were lifted and they could in good conscience travel distances, the women left Bethany for Jerusalem. Midway around the northern rise of the Mount of Olives, Mary Magdalene stopped and looked at the others. "Did you feel that?" she said. "Did the earth tremble?"

Each woman was carrying cloths and a jar in her arms, myrrh in one, frankincense, nard. They meant to anoint the corpse of the Lord with spices, their final honor to him whom they loved. "It seemed that the ground moved under my feet." "It *did* move," said Joanna. (Walter Wangerin Jr.)

People were shaken out of their beds. It was early Sunday morning. Still dark outside. There's nothing more frightening than an earthquake at night. This was the second earthquake in less than 48 hours.

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:50)

The curtain, the barrier between God and man was not removed by the earthquake tearing the Temple's veil, but by His Son being offered as "the Lamb of God" for the sin of the world. For *your* sin. "That God was on the scene the Gospel declares with two earthquakes: Calvary earthquake and Easter earthquake." (Norman Nagel)

The Holy Land is a region where earthquakes occur frequently. Devastating quakes have been documented during thousands of years. And earthquakes bring what? Death and destruction to dozens, hundreds, even thousands! But there was one exception. The Earthquake of A.D. 33. The earthquake that brought life. That brings life, still today.

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. 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. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

In the insurance industry, it's known as "an act of God". But most seem to be simple acts of nature. The natural order of our broken, sinful world. Not this one. It was truly an act of God! The purpose of the stone being rolled away was not to permit the resurrected body of Jesus to exit. The purpose was to allow people to see what? That the tomb was empty! The earthquake announced the Good News, "He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 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."

This day is all about announcing Good News. Come and see! Go and tell!

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air But God, being rich in mercy ... made us alive together with Christ ... so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2)

The earthquake said, "Come and see!" Jesus says, "Go and tell!"

The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a

guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can." So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard. (Mt 27:62-66)

A huge stone was rolled in front of the entrance to the tomb. A guard of Roman soldiers was assigned to guard the tomb. Human fighting machines. Gladiators - trained to kill. In addition, a tamper-proof seal was placed on the stone in order to detect any foul play. In spite of all these precautions – the stone, the soldiers, the seal – the tomb was empty! They had the tomb guarded so that Jesus' disciples wouldn't mess with it and steal His body. But they forgot to guard it against God.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, 'Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' (Mt. 28:11-13)

The chief priests don't for a moment attempt to question the facts. They don't have the soldiers search for the body. They don't discipline them for falling asleep. It's undeniable. They know what happened. All they can do is try to cover up what really happened. Tell a lie and offer a bribe. That's all they've got. What else are they going to do? It's either, try their best to cover up the truth, or repent and believe.

How to explain the empty tomb without admitting Jesus' resurrection? That's been the dilemma for all who've tried to get rid of the resurrection. Only falsehood can do it, and the falsehood is always so apparent, so obvious to everyone, that it defeats its purpose. (Lenski) Nobody could produce Jesus' body. Why? Because He was no longer dead. He had risen to life!

And even though Jesus had predicted that He would rise from the dead, it's obvious, from their behavior, nobody was expecting it. ... *the women found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ... they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ... But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.* (Luke 24:1-12)

The earthquake revealed the Good News, "*He is not here. He has risen, just as He said!*"

And then, He Himself appeared. To a woman in the cemetery. To His frightened disciples huddled in a locked room. To two men as they made their way down a road. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.*" (1 Cor 15:3-6)

After Jesus was put to death, the disciples did what? They scattered. They went into hiding, afraid they might be next. Later, where do we find them, but gathered secretly in a locked room. Scared to death! Yet, later, we hear how they became some of the best evangelists the world has ever know, going out and telling the world about the resurrection!

And what did they get for all their efforts? They often went without food. They slept exposed to the elements. They were ridiculed. They were beaten. They were thrown in prison. And finally, most of them were tortured and executed. From frightened followers to bold evangelists. What happened? What changed? Not only had the earthquake revealed that the tomb was empty, but they were convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that they had seen Jesus alive from the dead. (Lee Strobel - "The Case for Christ")

The empty tomb. The eye witnesses. Radically changed lives. The resurrection! The Good News! The earthquake felt around the world. Felt even today. Even after 2,000 years Jesus hasn't been forgotten. He's as alive today as He's ever been!

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. (1 Cor 15:19-23)

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 15:55-57)

This was all in accordance with the Scriptures. Predicted and spoken of in the Old Testament. The resurrections of the dead foreshadowed this. The sign of Jonah pointed to this. The Psalms and Isaiah and other prophets spoke of this. Jesus Himself told His disciples that He would die and rise again (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34). This was God's plan all along, now, finally, accomplished. Sin, death, grave, satan, and hell all now lay defeated. *For Christ is risen!*

Jesus' resurrection shook the earth to its foundations. It rattled everything we know about biology and medicine. When the women came to the tomb early that morning they were expecting to find a sealed tomb and guards and a corpse. They'd forgotten what Jesus had told them, that He would be crucified and on the third day raised to life again.

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

And then they saw Jesus who meets them on the road, what does He say? "Greetings!" He uses the usual street greeting. "Hi!" As if to say, "What did you expect? I told you I would rise on the third day. Here I am." They took hold of His feet and worshipped Him. You might worship a hallucination, but you can't grab his feet. And instantly their fear gives way to unbridled joy.

That God was on the scene the Gospel declares with two earthquakes. Calvary earthquake and Easter earthquake. One, declaring that the Lamb of God was slain – for you. The other, that the Lamb of God has risen from the dead – for you. Sins buried with Christ. Bodies raised with Christ.

Do you fear death? Then fear no longer. Christ has conquered. Do you dread the grave? Then dread no longer. Christ has made the grave a place of Sabbath rest. Do you grieve the death of someone you love? Then grieve in hope. He is risen, and those believing in Him will rise again. Are you suffering and despairing in this life? Then rejoice, even in your suffering. Christ is risen. Rejoice in Him. Suffering gives way to joy! (William Cwirla)

Jesus lives, and reigns supreme, and, his kingdom still remaining. I shall also be with Him, ever living, ever reigning. God has promised - be it must. Jesus is my Hope and Trust. (song "Jesus Lives, and So Shall I")

The Earthquake of A.D. 33. The Easter Earthquake. The resurrection of Christ. Jesus, our Hope and Trust. The earthquake felt around the world. The earthquake that brought life. That brings life, still today. Come and see. Go and tell.