

JESUS HAS RISEN!

Matthew 28:1-20

Key Verse: 28:6

“He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.”

Today we want to study Matthew’s testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus died on the cross for our sins. He was put to death by sinful men. He did not ask God for 12 legions of angels to rescue him. He did not come down from the cross. He cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? But he did not come down. He endured the pain and sorrow, alienation and the loneliness until, with a loud cry, he gave up his spirit. “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” (Isa 53:5) But his death was not the end of the story. It was the beginning. God raised Jesus from the dead. God accepted Jesus’ blood as atonement for our sins. If there had been no resurrection, there would be no forgiveness of sin. The Bible says, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” (1Co 15:17) The resurrection of Jesus is the centerpiece of our Christian faith. It is the good news, the gospel. It was so essential for the disciples and followers of Jesus to know that Jesus rose from the dead that the risen Jesus spent 40 days, showing himself to his disciples. He planted resurrection faith in the hearts of the first believers. We do not have to understand the resurrection. We must believe it. We believe that Jesus died for our sins and that God raised him from the dead. If we do not believe the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are still in our sins. We are not Christians.

In Matthew 28 we meet the first witnesses to the resurrection. And we learn about the evidence that has convinced believers of every age that Jesus in fact rose from the dead. In this chapter, we also learn from the risen Jesus himself his agenda for world salvation, and what our part in his plan must be.

1. The empty tomb (1-15)

Dawn was just breaking on Sunday morning. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses (most likely, Jesus’ own mother [Mk 6:3]) made their way to the new tomb which Joseph of Arimathea had cut out of a rock. It was the tomb in which Jesus’ bloody, nail-scarred body, wrapped in a linen cloth had been placed. The Pharisees and chief priests had asked Pilate to secure the tomb, because they remembered that Jesus had said, “After three days I will rise again.” They wanted to make sure that no one went in and no one came out of the tomb. So a guard was posted and a seal was placed on the stone at the entrance.

The women were not afraid of those who had killed Jesus. Perfect love casts out fear (1Jn 4:18). These women were broken-hearted because of what had happened to the one they loved above all others. They wanted to be near him, even near his dead body. The other gospels say that they wanted to anoint his body with spices. Matthew says that they went to look at the tomb. They had witnessed the crucifixion; they had quietly watched Joseph wrap the body in linen burial cloths and place it in his new tomb. They went home and kept the Sabbath. Now early in the morning on the first day of the week they had come. As the women approached the tomb, suddenly the ground trembled. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven. He was a very strong angel, for he went to the tomb, rolled the heavy stone away from the entrance, and sat on it. He wanted them to see that the tomb was empty. He was unmistakably an angel. He shone like lightning and his clothes were as white as snow. He reminds us of the transfigured Jesus. The guards who were supposed to secure the tomb were terrified. They were so overcome by fear that they passed out. The Bible says that they became like dead men. Later, they reported the angel and the empty tomb to the chief priests and Pharisees and thus, in spite of themselves, they became witnesses to the resurrection.

The angel ignored the guards (who were evidently unconscious) and spoke to the women. What was his message? Read verses 5-7a. “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; 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 is going ahead of you into Galilee.’”

First, “Come and see.” The angel told the women the good news: “He is not here; he has risen. Come and see the place where he lay.” The tomb was empty. The empty tomb quietly proclaims Jesus’ bodily resurrection. They had

put a seal on the tomb to keep anyone from going in or coming out. But now it was empty. The women saw that the tomb was empty. This is the first evidence of the resurrection. Jesus' resurrection was not just a spiritual resurrection. It was a bodily resurrection. His body was gone. It had been transformed into a resurrection body. There was no lifeless, inert body lying there in the tomb. The tomb was empty. God raised Jesus from the dead.

Second, "Go and tell." The angel gave them a command. He told them what they must do about this great good news. "Go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee.'" Good news must be told. This was the best news in the world. It was the news that good conquered evil; life conquered death; love conquered hate. Jesus is risen! They must go and tell.

Once Jerusalem was suffering from a devastating siege. People were starving. Then, in the middle of the night God caused the soldiers, who were besieging the city, to hear the sound of a great army with chariots and horses. The besieging army fled, leaving everything behind them. No one knew about it. Then 4 lepers who were starving, decided to go into the enemy army camp and beg. They decided that if the enemy killed them they were dead and if they starved they were dead, so they went. When they reached the camp, they found it deserted, with abundant food left behind. So they started helping themselves to the food and clothes and other valuables. Then, they were conscience-stricken and said to each other, "We're not doing right. This is the day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us. Let's go at once and report this..." (2Ki 7:3-9)

We who have received the gospel and God's grace of forgiveness and God's love are like the starving lepers who found abundant food. We have found the answer to the deepest problems of all people. The answer is the good news that God loves us and Jesus died and rose to save us. How can we keep this good news to ourselves? We must share this good news with a dying world. The Apostle Paul said, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16) All of us are not preachers, but God gives each of us some opportunity to share the good news of Jesus, the good news of God's love with a dying world. The good news which the women learned is the news that Jesus is risen! He is alive. So, the angel's word to these women was, "Go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." These women became the first messengers of the resurrection of Jesus.

Third, Jesus met them (8-10). The women obeyed the angel. They were full of fear and joy—fear because they did not understand what had happened, and joy because they believed the good news anyway. They did not tarry. They went to tell the good news to the disciples. And on the way they received a great blessing. They met Jesus himself. Look at verse 9. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. They knew that he was the One worthy of their worship. They loved him. They wanted him to stay with them forever. God gave these women of faith and courage, these women who quietly loved Jesus, the privilege of being the first ones to see the Risen Jesus. They were the first witnesses and the first messengers of the resurrection.

Jesus' body was a resurrection body. Other people, such as Lazarus (Jn 11) and Jarius' daughter (Mk 5) had been raised from the dead, but they would die again someday. But Jesus was raised with a resurrection body. They could see the risen Jesus with their eyes and touch him with their hands. On occasion, he ate with them. But he could also appear and disappear in an instant. He could go through locked doors. He would ascend to heaven in his resurrection body. Paul describes the resurrection body as a spiritual body. Someday we will all be clothed with such a body. "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable...it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body...Just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man (Adam) so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven" (1Co 15:42-49). This is the resurrection body which we will have in heaven. We will know each other. Jesus recognized Moses and Elijah on the mount of Transfiguration. I will be glad to meet Dr. Lee in heaven—and my mother and father, as well. Sarah Lee will meet her sister Rebecca. Jeremiah will meet his father. And Joshua will meet his father. Chris will meet his mother.

The Risen Jesus repeated the message of the angel. Read verse 10. "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." The women continued on their way to meet the disciples and deliver Jesus' message.

Look at verses 11-15. In the meantime, the guards woke up, found the tomb empty and reported what had happened to the chief priests. They reported the earthquake and the angel and the empty tomb. The chief priests and elders had all the evidence they needed to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. But they decided not to believe. They

bribed the guards and promoted a lie that the disciples had stolen the body. Their actions could not cancel the good news. Rather, their efforts to cover up the fact of Jesus' resurrection became evidence of its truth. The evidence is all there. But the decision to believe must be ours. Even with all the evidence there, some people cannot make a decision. I accept Jesus who died for my sins and rose again. I accept him by faith. By faith I accept Jesus' promise to forgive my sins and come to live in my heart. To avoid making a decision to believe is to make a decision by default not to believe. To believe that God raised Jesus from the dead is to know that our sins are forgiven. It is to believe that Jesus is alive and with us. It is to become a witness to Jesus' death and resurrection. It is to become a part of gospel history.

2. The great commission (16-20)

Read verses 16-20. The disciples got the message. Three times they had been told to meet him in Galilee (26:32; 28:7,10) They went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. Jesus was there. They saw him. Matthew tells us that they worshiped him, but some doubted. Those who worshiped him, accepted his resurrection simply and joyfully, even though they didn't understand. They knew that he was God. They worshiped him. Those who doubted were thoughtful people who wanted to understand first. But all of them obeyed and went to the mountain in Galilee. Jesus didn't rebuke the doubters. He didn't distinguish between doubters and worshipers. He gave the same command and promise to all of them. Doubt would turn to faith when they obeyed him and claimed his promise.

First, Jesus' authority. Read verse 18. "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'" What does it mean that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth? He has the authority to forgive sins (Mk 2:10). He has the authority to judge (Jn 5:27). He has the authority to give eternal life (Jn 17:2). Revelation 5:12 says, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (Rev 5:12) Philippians 2:9-11 says, "... God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." To acknowledge Jesus' authority means that we must worship him and obey him. When we obey him and do what he tells us to do, his authority backs us up. Sometimes people say, "How can you teach the Bible? Where is your seminary degree?" The command of Jesus, who has all authority in heaven and on earth, is our authority. If we teach his word as it is, that is enough. We baptize those who ask for baptism by the authority of Jesus who commanded it.

Second, Jesus' command. Read verse 19. Jesus said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." Jesus wants people of every tribe and language and nation to belong to him and worship him. John's vision says of Jesus in heaven, "...you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." (Rev 5:9-10) God loves all the people of the world. Jesus died for all people of all nations. There are only two races of people in the world: those who know that God loves them and have accepted Jesus as their Savior, and those who do not know God or his Son Jesus and are still living in bondage to sin. God wants his gospel spread to all the nations of the world. People are waiting for this good news in every place, people of every tribe and tongue and nation.

Jesus commands his disciples to make disciples-not converts. This is his plan for reaching the whole world. This is how the good news must spread throughout the earth and down through history. Disciples make disciples who make disciples...

How do we make disciples? Jesus mentions two things. First he says, baptize them. Jesus said, "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." When I am baptized I declare to the world that I am a Christian. Baptism represents a commitment to Jesus and to a body of believers which the Bible calls his church. No one can grow without making a commitment. Baptism also represents repentance. John the Baptist baptized those who repented of sin. Repentance is confessing our sins and turning from them. Jesus forgives repentant sinners. When we repent, we die with Jesus and accept his forgiveness. Baptism symbolizes our union with Christ in his death. It symbolizes our union with him in his resurrection and the beginning of a new life. (Ro 6:3-7) We are baptized with water and we must be baptized by the Holy Spirit. Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit. It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that we are born into God's family. It is the Holy Spirit who works in us to change us into God's children. So Jesus said that we must baptize those who would be Jesus' disciples in the name of the Father,

Son and Holy Spirit. The Father is the Creator and Owner of all things. He loves the world. The Son Jesus purchased our salvation by his blood; the Holy Spirit is the one who works in us to give us new birth. He is the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead and he lives in us to give us life. (Ro 8:11)

The second thing that we must do to make disciples is teach them to obey. "Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." This means that we must study and teach the Bible and put it into practice ourselves. A disciple of Jesus is a learner. Bible study is not just done with the head. We must learn from God's word and we must obey with our hands and feet and hearts and minds. We must not only be born again, but also we must grow up in Jesus. Peter said, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation..." (1Pe 2:2) I must study the Bible and live by it; I must teach the Bible to others and help them to obey it. Jesus himself set the example. Although he was a son, Jesus learned obedience from what he suffered and he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. (Heb 5:8,9) A disciple is one who is in training. The word "disciple" comes from the same root as the word "discipline." No one likes discipline or training. "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Heb 12:11) Jesus did not tell us to make converts; he told us to make disciples. To do this we must be disciples.

Jesus not only gave us a command. He gave us a promise. Third, Jesus' promise. "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (20b) It is a promise fulfilled by the coming of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for those who obey his command. Jesus does not just give an impossible command then take off to heaven. He promised to be with us. When I got on a boat and went to Korea in 1955, I claimed Jesus' promise, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." David Livingstone obeyed Jesus' command and claimed his promise when he went as a missionary to Africa. A young woman named Darlene Deibler and her husband obeyed Jesus' command and went to New Guinea (Indonesia) to make disciples of Jesus. She spent 4 years in a Japanese prison camp during WWII. Her husband died in a prison camp. She claimed Jesus' promise and found that Jesus was alive and with her when she was beaten, starved, kept on death row waiting to be executed. She learned to trust him and found that he lovingly answered her prayers—even when she prayed for one banana. Because of his presence with her she survived. He healed her heart when she surrendered to him all of her bitterness and sorrow. She could return to serve God in the place of her great suffering because the risen Jesus was with her.

In John 14:23, Jesus promised, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." He promised to be with us, to share in our sorrow and joy, to guide us in our decisions, to give us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We are his disciples when we grow in his attitude and in his image. Jesus is alive. He is not dead. He knocks on the door of every heart. He does not force his way in. But if we open the door he comes in to dwell. May each of us welcome him to come in and dwell. Jesus is not dead. He is alive and he is at work in his world and in each of us.

In this message we have thought about the fact and the meaning of Jesus' resurrection. The fact of the resurrection is attested by the empty tomb, by the witnesses who met Jesus and through the lives changed by his living presence. We must invite him to come into our hearts and make his dwelling there. There is a hymn which says: "I serve a risen Savior. He's in the world today. I know that he is living, whatever men may say. I see his hand of mercy; I hear his voice of cheer; and just the time I need him, he's always near. He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today! He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way. He lives, he lives, salvation to impart! You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart."

Because God raised Jesus from the dead we know that our sins are forgiven. Jesus' bodily resurrection gives us hope that we also will be raised with a resurrection body to live with him forever in the heavenly kingdom. The Risen Jesus is alive. He is with us now. He has commanded us to make disciples of all nations. When we love and obey him, he has promised to be with us to the very end of the age.