

The King Has Risen

Matthew 28:1-20

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He is risen! I am so glad you are here with us on Resurrection Sunday. What a special Sunday it is to worship Jesus and remember the day of His resurrection. We celebrate Jesus' resurrection every Sunday, but Easter is the annual remembrance of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Today is a very special celebration for the church.

This morning, we will be studying Matthew 28, where we will examine Jesus' resurrection and His commission to His disciples. We are also finishing up our sermon series in Matthew. We began this series on February 26, 2023. This is the 99th sermon in the series. I outlined this sermon series during my sabbatical in November of 2022 and planned for it to end today. Sometimes it works out when I plan for a sermon series to end on a specific date, but most of the time it doesn't. I don't have control over life and how things work out. This morning, as we celebrate Jesus' resurrection, we need to remember that Jesus does have control. He is Sovereign. He told us that after three days, He would rise from the dead — and He did. He set the date, and He did it.

Friends, the empty tomb is proof that we serve a risen Savior. His resurrection brought to completion the saving work He accomplished on the cross. Now, all who have repented of their sins and placed their faith in Jesus have hope/certainty of eternal life when they die. As the Apostle Paul says in Romans 4:22-25,

That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." ²³ But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised [from the dead] for our justification.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the justification for all who have faith in Him. All who trust in Him are counted as perfect before our Almighty, Holy God.

We will work straight through Matthew 28. We will examine Matthew's account of the resurrection, see how Jesus' enemies lied about it, and conclude with the King's commissioning of His disciples to follow Him in His disciple-making ministry.

The main point is: *The risen King has commissioned us to continue His disciple-making ministry in His authority throughout His world.*

Before we get into the text, I want to clarify something about Matthew's account of Jesus' resurrection. Only Mark's Gospel records a shorter account of the resurrection than Matthew. Luke's Gospel gives more details, and John's Gospel gives even more information.

We should think of each Gospel functioning kind of like a camera at a sporting event. You know those camera angles they use to show the replay of the action. Each one of the Gospels function like an instant replay camera, giving us a slightly different perspective on Jesus' resurrection. You will find some slightly different minor details in each resurrection account, but they all agree that Jesus rose from the dead after three days. Since I'm not preaching a harmony of the gospels, I will primarily focus on Matthew's account of Jesus' resurrection and the Great Commission.

I. The King's Tomb is Empty (vv. 1-7)

Friends, vv. 1-7, teach us that we serve a risen Savior. Look in v. 1:

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.

So, Mary Magdalene and “*the other Mary*” came to see the tomb early on Sunday morning. Remember, these ladies had witnessed Jesus' burial, so they knew where the tomb was located. They were devoted followers of Jesus who had stayed close even when the twelve had abandoned Him.

Friends, it is of significance that two women were the first to witness the empty tomb and learn that Jesus had risen from the dead. In the ancient world, women were marginalized and not trusted. Their testimony could not even be used in a court of law. Yet, they were the first ones to witness that He had risen from the dead. If the Gospel writers were fabricating this account, they would not have mentioned the women as witnesses in the resurrection narrative. Their presence at the tomb is one of the reasons we know this story is not made up.

Look in v. 2 and we will see what happened as they arrived at 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. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel 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 has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ 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. See, I have told you.”

The focus of these verses is on the angel of the Lord and the empty tomb. As the angel appeared, a great earthquake occurred, and his appearance was like lightning. It gives us the imagery of cosmic upheaval as the angel showed up in a flash of light as bright as lightning, with the ground quaking. Then he rolled back the stone that covered the mouth of the tomb and sat on it.

All of this was occurring simultaneously, so it must have been a terrifying sight. Remember, these people were very primitive. They were not accustomed to electric lights, movies with sound effects, and amplification. We sort of have a category for these things because we've seen things like this portrayed in movies. Here's the deal: If you saw all of this in real life, you would be terrified, and you have a better category in your mind than they did.

Verse 4 says the guards became like dead men. They were frozen in their tracks and most likely fell on their faces before the angel. Yet, the angel didn't even acknowledge them.

Instead, the angel turns to the women and gives them a threefold message: “*Fear not,*” “*come and see,*” and “*go and tell.*” First, he told them *not to be afraid*. Considering what they had just witnessed, they should have been petrified. He knew they were scared, so he spoke tenderly to them.

Then, he told them *to come and see* the empty tomb. They needed to see that Jesus was not there. He had rolled the stone away not to let Jesus out, but so they could see in the tomb and know that Jesus wasn't there. He had risen from the dead as He said He would.

Jesus had predicted His death and resurrection *six times* in Matthew's Gospel. Everything Jesus had said had come true in Matthew 24:35, Jesus said that,

Heaven and earth would pass away, but His words would not pass away.

Now, what Jesus said would happen had occurred. The tomb is empty, and He is alive.

Third, he told them in v. 7 *to go and tell* His disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. Not only that, he told them that Jesus was going to meet them in Galilee. These ladies were given the initial great commission to go and tell. So, they were sent off, most likely somewhat confused, fearful, and yet with the good news – Jesus is alive.

Sometimes, this is the way life isn't it? We are moving through life somewhat confused, somewhat fearful, and we don't know what's going to happen. We don't have all the answers, but you know and believe Jesus is alive. You know the tomb is empty, so this means He has the victory. Sometimes, in the midst of life's confusion,

all we need to know is that Jesus has conquered death, He is alive, and one day we will be with Him in Heaven. This gives us hope.

II. The King Appears to His Disciples (vv. 8-10)

Verse 8 says:

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

The angel shared the good news of Christ's resurrection with them, and the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy. The angel told them, "*Don't be afraid*," but they were afraid anyway. You and I would have been afraid, too.

Think about it: This angel had come from heaven fresh with the glory of God. His appearance was like lightning; his clothes were white as snow. It's no wonder the women were afraid.

They were also afraid because they didn't know what all of this meant. They had come to the tomb expecting to anoint Jesus' body as part of a proper Jewish burial. Now the angel appears in all of God's glory and tells them that Jesus is alive, and they are to go and tell His disciples that He will meet them in Galilee. So, the women hurried away from the tomb. They were afraid, yet they were also filled with joy.

They are filled with joy at the sight of the empty tomb; joy at the good news that Jesus is risen from the dead; joy that Jesus is going ahead of them into Galilee; joy that they will see their Lord again. Yet, they were fearful. The mixture of joy and fear is a strange combination.

Have you ever experienced joy mixed with fear? If you follow Jesus as His disciple, you will often have this experience. Think about it this way: For those who are not Christians, there are experiences in life that leave you only filled with anxiety, depression, and fear. However, if you belong to Jesus as His child, that same experience will leave you experiencing some fear and anxiety, but God's sovereign joy is underneath it and surrounding the experience because you trust in God and that He will take care of you. You know that even in the difficulty and pain, God has planned good for you. You know this because you know that after all that Jesus went through in His suffering and death, that He victoriously rose from the dead. With Jesus, you may fear the unknown, but it is sovereign joy because you know Jesus governs the unknown. You know He is alive. You know He is with you.

Well, let's keep going, look in vv. 9-10:

And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

So, the women were not only the first witnesses to view the empty tomb and the first to hear the good news that Jesus had risen. Now, they were also the first to see Jesus alive. When they saw Him, they fell at His feet, touched Him, and worshiped Him. He was no ghost. He was no metaphor. They did not have a vision of Jesus. They met the risen Christ.

Notice what Jesus said to them, "*Greetings*." He just gave a normal human greeting to the women. He didn't say, "*Tah dah!*" or "*I told you so*." Also, of all the places He could have gone: His disciples, Pilate, the religious leaders, or the top of the temple, He appears to the Marys. He honored these ladies for their faithful discipleship. He met them right where they were and dealt with them on a personal level.

Let's make some observations about this text. First, let's consider *two key doctrinal truths*. Truth #1: Jesus is God. He is worshipped, and He is to be worshipped. We see the divinity of Jesus in this text and the Gospel of Matthew.

Ten times in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus was worshipped. Jesus never stopped people from worshipping Him. However, in Scripture, when an angel appears and people attempt to worship them, the angel stops them.

Jesus never stopped people from worshipping Him because it was not a violation of the Ten Commandments to worship Him. He was and is God incarnate.

Second, Jesus' body was physically resurrected. The text says that the ladies took hold of Jesus' feet. This means He was not a vision or a ghost. He was not some entity floating around in a mist or something like that. He had a physical body that they could touch as they worshipped Him.

Third, Jesus dealt mercifully with wayward disciples. Earlier, the angel had told the women to go and tell Jesus' disciples that He had risen from the dead. Now, in v. 10, Jesus commissions them to go and tell His disciples. He said:

"Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."

Notice the affection and tenderness in His instructions: *"Go and tell My brothers."* Friends, these are the same disciples who ran away when Jesus was arrested. They abandoned Him when He was crucified. Now, He calls them *"brothers."*

I don't know about you, but I take great comfort in how Jesus speaks about His weak, unfaithful followers. Here we see Jesus' gracious love. This is resurrection mercy for all who fail. Jesus was not done with these guys, which is good news for us because even after we fail, Jesus is not done with us. So, if you have failed as one of Jesus' disciples, take heart. Jesus comes to you and, in His love and mercy, calls you back to Himself.

Perhaps you are here this morning, you know of all the ways you have failed Jesus, denied Him, abandoned Him, and simply rejected Him. You may be wondering how He could ever love you, but He does. He calls you to Himself this morning in the same way He called His unfaithful disciples to Himself. He comes to you in resurrected love and tenderness and calls you to come home. Like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, He is there waiting for you, with His arms open wide. Friends, we serve a risen Savior who deals with us tenderly and personally, right where we are.

III. The King's Enemies Lie Again (vv. 11-15)

Next, let's examine how the enemies of Jesus respond to His resurrection. Look at vv. 11-15:

While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place.¹² And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers¹³ and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.'¹⁴ And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble."¹⁵ So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

So, while the women were obeying, something diabolical was happening elsewhere. The guards rushed to the chief priests and reported everything that had happened. When the religious leaders heard the news, you'd think they would have fallen to their knees in grief and repentance. Instead, they hardened their hearts and conspired to cover up Jesus' resurrection. They paid the guards to lie:

"Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.'"

Now, we've got to think about this lie. If the guards were asleep, how would they know who took the body? It doesn't make sense, but lies don't need to make sense. They just need to be believed by enough people, right?

Here's the deal: When we carry out Jesus' ministry of disciple-making, we will have to deal with the enemy's lies about who Jesus is. This is a sad but true fact.

However, let's assume the disciples did steal Jesus' body so they could start a new religion. If this were the case, then they should have to come up with a better lie. This lie was just ridiculous.

Listen, I do not know where you are this morning regarding what you believe about the resurrection of the Son of God from the dead. Perhaps you are struggling with it; that is okay. Perhaps you haven't thought much about it; that's okay, too. Some people haven't given it much thought.

However, it may be that you have thought about it, but you just can't believe people come back from the dead. You may be thinking,

"Listen, I am a modern person. I don't believe Jesus rose from the dead. I think He was a historical figure. I think He was a good teacher and a good example, kind of like Gandhi or Buddha. But, I just can't believe He died on the cross for my sin and rose from the dead. In ancient times, people believed things like that, but that was 'back then,' and this is modern times. We have science, so we know better."

Believing Jesus rose from the dead has always been difficult. Even "back then," it was difficult to believe. It is not that they believed those kinds of things "back then," but in modern times, we know better. When the women got to the tomb, they didn't look in and think,

"Wow! Jesus rose from the dead just like He said He would. That makes sense. Isn't this wonderful!"

They didn't think that. The angel had to tell them what had happened, and when he did, they were amazed and filled with fear.

Listen, when these ladies told Jesus' disciples what the angel said, His disciples didn't say,

"Really! That's awesome! It's normal for people to come back from the dead. I thought this might happen because He did say He would rise again."

Nope, that didn't happen. Luke's Gospel tells us that the disciples thought the women were crazy! They called it idle talk. You see, Jesus rising from the dead was hard to believe even "back then."

Acts 17 tells us that when the Apostle Paul was preaching at the Areopagus in Athens, he was moving right along in his sermon, and the crowd was following along until he got to Jesus' resurrection from the dead, at which point they went nuts. They called him crazy and said no one rises from the dead. Friends, the resurrection of Jesus has always been difficult to believe.

So, as I said earlier, if you are going to start a new religion and try to get as many followers as you can to join your new religious movement, you don't begin with a crucified and resurrected Savior of the world.

In addition to the resurrection, you don't develop doctrines that cause people's minds to jam gears. You don't develop the doctrine of the *Trinity* where you have one God and yet three persons, and in that one God. You don't have one of those persons to be the Son of God, who came from heaven to earth to die on the cross for the sin of His people and then rise from the dead on the third day. You don't tell people He was fully God and also fully man. These are not components for a successful religious movement.

That is, unless they are true, and they are true. This is the only explanation for Christianity. It is the only explanation for the church 2000 years later. How can a religious movement with these doctrines be sustained? Unless it is true that Jesus rose from the dead, and He is God.

Here's another thing to consider. Many people want to say that Jesus' resurrection from the dead is a myth or legend. The Pharisees and the religious leaders denied and lied about Jesus' resurrection, but they could not produce a body.

Here's what happened: People began to talk about Jesus rising from the dead, and then lots of people saw Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15 tells us that after Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to over 500 at one time.

Friends, 1 Corinthians was written just 20 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. Additionally, the Gospels were written approximately 50 years after Jesus ascended back into Heaven. Here is my point: Myths and deceitful legends do not begin this quickly after the event. Do you know why? This is because there are still people alive who can debunk the myth or legend. So, if the story is true, they can verify the facts. However, if Jesus' resurrection were not true, someone could have gone back and sought out the people who claimed to have seen Jesus and disproved it.

This is what happened. People did try to disprove the resurrection by persecuting the eyewitnesses. Many of those who saw Jesus after He rose from the dead died in the defense of the truth.

Friends, people make up lies about lots of things, but people who call themselves eyewitnesses do not die for something they know to be a lie. They will recant when it comes to dying for the lie.

Well, we must keep going. Verse 15 tells us that the story the Pharisees made up was widely spread among the Jews. So, even in the face of the power of the resurrection, some chose to resist and reject the truth.

Why? Why would the religious leaders refuse to believe? It is because if Jesus really did rise from the dead, then that means He is Lord. And if He is Lord, that means they are not, and that's a truth too costly to accept.

Here is the bottom line: *There will always be those who resist the truth of resurrection, but the truth stands firm. Jesus is alive, and He calls you to believe it.*

IV. The King's Commission (vv. 16-20)

Now, we come to the King's Commission, also known as the Great Commission. You might be thinking that this text deserves its own sermon, and you are correct. It will not only get its own sermon, but it will get five more sermons.

The King's Commission is the title of the sermon series that will begin next Sunday. For five Sundays, Pastor Dean and I will examine our motivation for disciple-making and evangelism.

However, for this morning, let's wrap up Matthew 28 by briefly unpacking vv. 16-20. Verse 16 tells us that Jesus' disciples met Him on a mountain. Then v. 17 tells us something very interesting. Look at it:

And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.

So, at the top of the mountain, some worshipped Jesus and "*some doubted.*" We should let the last part of v. 17 encourage us. You see, even in the very presence of the risen Christ, some disciples still struggled.

The Greek word for "*doubt*" here is more accurately translated as "*hesitation.*" But I want you to notice that Jesus doesn't rebuke them for their *hesitation*. He commissions them anyway. I believe it is because His mission doesn't require perfect people—just willing ones. Disciples who are willing to take up their crosses and follow Jesus even when they are filled with both joy and fear.

Is Jesus calling you to follow Him this morning? Are you filled with the joy of knowing that He is calling you, but also fearful of what lies ahead? Is there some hesitation in you? It's okay to feel this way. Jesus is not asking you to be perfect. He is asking you to trust Him and follow Him.

Now, let's look at the King's Commission in vv. 18-20. When we read vv. 18-20, the word *all* is what jumps out at us. A form of the word "*all*" is used four times in these three verses. That's significant, but the call *to make disciples* is what dominates these three verses. It is an imperative that is surrounded by three participles: *Going, baptizing, and teaching.* So, let's work through vv. 18-20.

The King's Commission begins in v. 18 by telling us that Jesus has been given ALL AUTHORITY. He has not been given some authority or partial authority or temporary authority; He has all the authority of God because He is God. He has been given this authority because He has risen from the dead. If you look back through the Gospel, you will see that Jesus exercised authority over nature, demons, diseases, sin, and death. Now, the world knows He has all authority because He is alive.

Now, let's look at the heart of King's Commission in vv. 19-20a. Jesus tells His disciples to:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

The King's Commission begins with a broad *overarching call* to GO and make disciples of *all nations*. Then Jesus drills down into what specifically we are to do as we GO.

The call to "Go" is a participle that is best translated as "Going," or "As we are going... make disciples."

Where are we to go? He tells us to go to the nations. This means that some of us will make disciples as we go about our daily lives here, while others will intentionally leave to serve in other parts of the world.

When Jesus gave His disciples this commission, He needed them to understand that He came not only to save the Jews but also to save His people, who were scattered throughout the world. They were to go to the nations and proclaim the gospel.

For us, this means proclaiming the gospel to our neighbors, coworkers, or on campus. We are to share the good news of Jesus with them. We call them to turn from their sin and to trust in Christ. Others of us will be called to leave Ames and go to other parts of the world to teach the gospel. Some of our college students will leave in a few weeks to go to JAX and share the gospel there. Others will go to other parts of the world, sharing the gospel.

I was blessed this week to read Caleb and Alyssa Call's newsletter. They used to live here in the Midwest, but now they serve Jesus in Southeast Asia. In their newsletter, they told the story about a young man who trusted Jesus and shared the gospel with his entire family. He was persecuted for his faith, but he remained faithful to Christ. He just kept telling them about Jesus. However, not long ago, the young man died. Yet, even in his suffering and death, he never abandoned his faith in Christ.

Think about it this way: Caleb and Alyssa left the Midwest and went to Southeast Asia. They made a disciple in a young man named Sam. Sam then shared the gospel with this young man, who died recently. Before the young man died, he shared the gospel with his whole family. This is how you make disciples as you go.

Well, when we make disciples, what specifically are we to do? Jesus says baptize and teach. However, Jesus was not saying this is the order in which discipleship should be done. We don't baptize first and then tell people they are saved, and then begin to disciple them.

As I mentioned last Sunday, baptism doesn't save, nor does the New Testament teach that it does. The word "*baptize*" means to *immerse* in water and is an ordinance that the church practices to signify that a person has been saved.

The New Testament teaches that a person is to be baptized after they have professed faith in Jesus. This means that before a person is baptized, they need to learn about who Jesus is, what He came to do, and why He came to do it.

Finally, Jesus gave us an amazing promise as we go and make disciples. He promises that He will be with us as we carry out the King's Commission. Look at the end of v. 20:

And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

The completion of the King's Commission is not based on our ability but on the King's resurrected power. It is based on what He is able to do through our lives. Jesus is able to do more than what we can ask or think, according to His power that works within us.

This is an amazing promise. This is the King's Commission, and He promises to be with us as we share the gospel. We do not go in our own power but in the power and promise of our resurrected King. We have received the King's Commission, so let's carry it out.