

The Gospel of Matthew, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 39: The Resurrection and the Great Commission

Matthew 28:1-20

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This final lesson carries two truths of first importance, so teach it with both joy and care. The first is the bodily resurrection of Jesus, the foundation of the entire Christian faith. Matthew presents it as a real, physical, historical event: an empty tomb, an angelic announcement, the risen Lord met and touched and worshiped, and even the enemies' cover-up bearing unwitting witness to the empty grave. If Christ is not raised, our faith is futile and we are still in our sins (1 Corinthians 15:17); because He is raised, death is defeated and our hope is sure. Ground your students firmly in the factual reality of the resurrection.

The second great truth is the Great Commission, and here you must teach with particular doctrinal clarity. Jesus Himself defines what it means to make a disciple: going to all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all He commanded. Baptism is not an optional add-on or a mere symbol tacked on after salvation; the risen Lord placed it at the heart of disciple-making, between coming to faith and a life of obedience. This is fully consistent with the plan of salvation seen throughout the New Testament: hearing the gospel, believing in the risen Christ, repenting, confessing Him, and being baptized into Him for the forgiveness of sins, followed by a lifelong walk of obedient faith (Acts 2:36-41; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27; Mark 16:16). Teach plainly against the notion that we are saved by faith only, apart from repentance, confession, and baptism, while keeping the tone one of grateful wonder, not mere argument.

Beyond the doctrine, this lesson is the joyful climax of the whole study, and it aims at the heart and the hands. The risen Christ holds all authority, sends His people on mission, and promises His abiding presence to the end of the age. Matthew, which opened with Immanuel, God with us, closes with that same promise. Aim to send your students home anchored in the resurrection, clear about the way of salvation, and stirred to live as disciples who make disciples, confident that the risen Lord is with them always.

Question 1

Student Question:

The angel announces, "He is not here, for he has risen, as he said" (vv. 5-6). Why is the bodily resurrection of Jesus the foundation of the entire Christian faith, and what would be lost if it were not true?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin where Matthew begins, with the announcement that changes everything: “He is not here, for he has risen, as he said” (v. 6). Help students feel the historical concreteness of the account. There is an empty tomb, a rolled-away stone, terrified soldiers, an angelic announcement, and women who will shortly take hold of the risen Lord’s feet. This is presented as fact, not legend.

Establish why the resurrection is foundational. Paul stakes everything on it: if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is in vain, our faith is futile, we are still in our sins, and those who have died in Christ have perished (1 Corinthians 15:14–19). The resurrection is not one nice doctrine among many; it is the hinge on which the whole gospel turns.

Show what the resurrection accomplishes and proves. It vindicates Jesus’ claims, declaring Him to be the Son of God in power (Romans 1:4). It demonstrates that His sacrifice was accepted and our sins can be forgiven. It defeats death and guarantees the resurrection of all who are His (1 Corinthians 15:20–22). Without it, the cross is a tragedy; with it, the cross is victory.

Address the historical reasonableness. The empty tomb, the transformed disciples who died for their testimony, the witness of many, including women whose testimony the culture undervalued (an unlikely detail to invent), and the very cover-up by the authorities all point to a real resurrection. Give students confidence that their faith rests on solid ground, not wishful thinking.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The bodily, historical resurrection of Jesus as fact (vv. 5–6)
- The resurrection as the foundation of the entire faith (1 Corinthians 15:14–19)
- The resurrection vindicating Christ and proving His sacrifice accepted (Romans 1:4)
- The resurrection as the guarantee of the believer’s own resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20–22)

Discussion Prompts

- Why does everything in the Christian faith depend on the resurrection?
- What would be lost if Jesus had not truly risen?
- What evidence gives you confidence that the resurrection really happened?

Question 2

Student Question:

The women left the tomb “with fear and great joy” and ran to tell the others (v. 8). When the reality of the risen Christ truly grips you, how does it reorder your fears and your joys, and where do you need that to happen right now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Matthew captures the women's response in a striking phrase: they departed "with fear and great joy" (v. 8). Both at once. The reality of the risen Christ is too large for one emotion; it overwhelms and exhilarates at the same time. This is a self-examining question, so draw it close.

Help students see how the resurrection reorders the emotional landscape. Their old fear, that death had won and the story was over, is shattered. A new joy, that Jesus is alive and everything He said is true, floods in. And a holy fear, awe before the living God, takes the place of their despair.

Apply it to present fears and joys. Many believers live as though the tomb were still occupied, governed by fears the resurrection has already answered: fear of death, fear of the future, fear that their failures are final. The risen Christ confronts each of these.

Invite honest reflection. Ask where students most need the resurrection to reorder their fears and joys: a grief that needs hope, a dread that needs the assurance of a living Lord, a joyless faith that needs to be set ablaze again by the wonder of the empty tomb.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The resurrection reordering fear into awe and despair into joy (v. 8)
- The risen Christ as the answer to the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14–15)
- Hope replacing resignation in the believer's life
- Joy grounded in the living Lord, not in circumstances

Discussion Prompts

- How does the reality of the risen Christ reorder your fears?
- Where have you been living as though the tomb were still occupied?
- What joy does the resurrection want to restore to you right now?

Question 3

Student Question:

The guards report the truth to the chief priests, who pay them to spread a lie that the disciples stole the body (vv. 11–15). What does this cover-up reveal about how people respond to evidence they do not want to accept, and how does it actually testify to the empty tomb?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Matthew alone records the telling detail of the guards (vv. 11–15). The soldiers report to the chief priests what has happened. The leaders, rather than investigating the astonishing claim, pay the soldiers to spread a lie: that the disciples stole the body while they slept. Matthew notes this story was still circulating among the Jews when he wrote.

Draw out what this reveals about the human heart. The leaders did not dispute the empty tomb; they could not. Instead they manufactured an explanation to avoid its obvious meaning. People often respond to unwelcome truth not by weighing the evidence but by constructing a story that lets them keep their position.

Show how the cover-up actually supports the resurrection. The very fact that the authorities had to explain away an empty tomb confirms that the tomb was empty. Their lie is awkward on its face: if the soldiers were asleep, how would they know who took the body? The cover-up is unwitting testimony to the truth it tries to hide.

Make it personal. We can do the same with truth we find inconvenient, explaining away what God's word plainly says rather than submitting to it. Ask students where they may be tempted to construct comfortable explanations to avoid obeying a truth they would rather not face.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The enemies' cover-up as unwitting testimony to the empty tomb (vv. 11–15)
- The human tendency to explain away unwelcome truth
- The difference between weighing evidence and protecting one's position
- The call to submit to truth rather than evade it

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the cover-up actually point to the reality of the empty tomb?
- How do people today explain away truths they do not want to accept?
- Where are you tempted to avoid a truth rather than obey it?

Question 4

Student Question:

When the risen Jesus meets the women, they take hold of His feet and worship Him (v. 9). What does it mean to worship the risen Christ, and where is genuine worship being crowded out of your own life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When the risen Jesus meets the women, their response is immediate and right: "they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him" (v. 9). Note two things. First, they took hold of His feet, underscoring the bodily reality of the resurrection; this is no phantom. Second, they worshiped Him, and Jesus received their worship, which is fitting only for God.

Use this to teach the worthiness of the risen Christ to be worshiped. The disciples worship Him again on the mountain (v. 17). The resurrection vindicates His deity, and the only adequate response to the living Lord is worship, the glad bowing of the whole self before Him.

Make the question searching. Worship is not merely a Sunday activity; it is the orientation of a life around the worth of Christ. Ask students where genuine worship is being crowded out, by distraction, by busyness, by going through religious motions without the heart, by lesser things claiming the devotion that belongs to Him.

Point toward wholehearted worship. The women dropped everything to fall at His feet. Encourage students to consider what it would look like to worship the risen Christ not only with their lips on the Lord's Day but with their whole lives, and to remove what crowds Him out.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The risen Christ worshiped, confirming His deity (vv. 9, 17)
- The bodily reality of the resurrection (taking hold of His feet)
- Worship as the fitting response to the living Lord
- Worship as the orientation of the whole life, not only an event

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to truly worship the risen Christ?
- What tends to crowd genuine worship out of your life?
- How could you worship Him with your whole life this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jesus declares, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (v. 18). What does this universal authority of the risen Christ mean for how we live, whom we obey, and how we view every other power and pressure in our lives?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Great Commission opens not with a command but with a claim: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (v. 18). Everything that follows rests on this. The risen Christ is not merely a wise teacher offering advice; He is the universal Lord issuing orders, with the right to command every person and every nation.

Unpack the scope: all authority, in heaven and on earth. There is no realm outside His rule, no power above Him, no corner of life He does not govern. This is the present reign of Christ, enthroned at the right hand of God (Acts 2:36; Ephesians 1:20–22). He is King now.

Apply it to obedience and allegiance. Because He holds all authority, His commands are not optional suggestions to weigh against our preferences; they are the words of our rightful King. This also puts every other authority and pressure in its place: government, culture, employer, family expectations, our own desires, all stand under the authority of the risen Lord.

Help students feel both the demand and the comfort. The demand is total submission to Christ as Lord. The comfort is that the One who sends us into a hostile world, and who promises to be with us, is the One who holds all authority in heaven and on earth. We obey and we go under the protection of the highest power in existence.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The universal authority of the risen Christ (v. 18)
- The present reign of Christ at the right hand of God (Acts 2:36; Ephesians 1:20–22)
- Christ's commands as the binding words of our rightful King
- Every other authority subordinate to the risen Lord

Discussion Prompts

- How does Christ's universal authority change the weight of His commands?
- What other authorities or pressures compete for first place in your life?
- How is His authority both a demand and a comfort as He sends us out?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (v. 19). Disciple-making is given to the whole church, not a few professionals. Who has God placed in your life, and where is He calling you to take part in making disciples?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The central command of the Commission is "make disciples of all nations" (v. 19). This is the church's mission in one phrase. Help students see its scope (all nations, leaving no one outside the reach of the gospel) and its goal (not merely converts or admirers, but disciples, learners and followers of Jesus).

Stress that this is given to the whole church, not a special class of professionals. The Commission was given to the gathered disciples, and the New Testament shows ordinary Christians scattered by persecution going everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4). Disciple-making is the calling of every believer, in their own sphere.

Make it concrete and personal. Ask students to consider who God has actually placed in their lives: family members, neighbors, coworkers, friends, the next generation. Disciple-making usually happens through real relationships, not programs, and it often begins simply by living and speaking the gospel where we already are.

Address common hesitations gently. Many believers feel unqualified or fearful. Remind them that the command comes with both the authority of Christ (v. 18) and the presence of Christ (v.

20). We do not make disciples in our own strength but as those sent and accompanied by the risen Lord. Encourage one specific relationship in which each student could take a step.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Making disciples of all nations as the central mission of the church (v. 19)
- Disciple-making as the calling of every believer, not only leaders (Acts 8:4)
- The goal of true disciples, not merely converts or admirers
- Mission carried out under Christ's authority and presence (vv. 18, 20)

Discussion Prompts

- Who has God placed in your life as potential disciples?
- What keeps you from taking part in making disciples, and how does Jesus answer that?
- What is one relationship where you could take a step this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Jesus defines making disciples as “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (vv. 19–20). According to Jesus’ own words, what does the process of making a disciple actually include?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question lets Jesus define His own terms. Many people have their own ideas of what making a disciple means, but Jesus spells it out: going to the nations, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (vv. 19–20). Disciple-making, in Jesus’ own words, includes baptizing and teaching.

Walk through the structure. There is a going (taking the gospel to people), a baptizing (the point at which a person is brought into Christ), and a teaching to observe (a lifelong process of learning obedience). These are not competing options; they are the components of one mission. Jesus did not say make disciples and, optionally, baptize them if they wish; baptizing is woven into the very command.

Note the Trinitarian name. Baptism is into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a beautiful glimpse of the one God in three persons, and a sign that the baptized person now belongs wholly to God.

Set up the next question. Here, simply establish from Jesus’ own words that making a disciple includes baptism and ongoing teaching toward obedience. Question 9 will develop how this fits the whole New Testament pattern of salvation. Help students see that whatever else we add to evangelism, we must not subtract what Jesus Himself put at the center.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus' own definition of disciple-making: going, baptizing, and teaching to observe (vv. 19–20)
- Baptism woven into the command, not treated as optional
- Baptism into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (the Godhead)
- Teaching toward obedience as a lifelong component of discipleship

Discussion Prompts

- According to Jesus' own words, what does making a disciple include?
- Why is it significant that Jesus placed baptizing within the command itself?
- What does it mean to be baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jesus commands that disciples be taught “to observe all that I have commanded” (v. 20). Where in your own walk have you settled for knowing Jesus' commands without actually obeying them, and what would full obedience look like?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus says to teach disciples “to observe all that I have commanded you” (v. 20). Note the words observe (that is, obey, keep, do) and all. The goal of disciple-making is not merely informed believers but obedient ones, who put into practice everything Jesus taught. This is a self-examining question, so make it personal.

Confront the gap between knowing and doing. It is possible to accumulate a great deal of Bible knowledge while leaving much of it unobeyed. Jesus earlier warned that the wise man is the one who hears His words and does them, while the foolish man hears and does not (Matthew 7:24–27). Knowledge that does not become obedience builds on sand.

Help students locate their own unobeyed commands. Most of us have areas where we know exactly what Jesus asks and have simply not done it: a relationship to forgive, a habit to surrender, a generosity to practice, a witness to give, a service to offer. Invite honest, specific reflection.

Point to obedience as the path of love and joy, not mere duty. Jesus said, if you love me, you will keep my commandments (John 14:15), and that His commands are not burdensome (1 John 5:3). Obedience is how love for Christ becomes real. Encourage one specific command each student will move from knowing to doing this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The goal of disciple-making as obedience to all Christ commanded (v. 20)
- The gap between knowing and doing (Matthew 7:24–27)
- Obedience as the expression of love for Christ (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3)
- Lifelong growth in observing all that Jesus taught

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you settled for knowing a command without obeying it?
- What would full obedience look like in that area?
- How does loving Jesus turn obedience from duty into joy?

Question 9

Student Question:

Jesus places baptism at the very heart of the Great Commission, between coming to faith and a lifetime of obedience (vv. 19–20). How does the New Testament show a person responding to the risen Christ and being saved, and why does this stand against the idea that we are saved by faith only, apart from repentance, confession, and baptism?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question of the lesson and a fitting climax to the whole study, so teach it clearly, warmly, and with confidence. The risen Lord, holding all authority, places baptism at the very heart of the Great Commission, set between coming to faith and a lifetime of obedience (vv. 19–20). To understand what this means in practice, we watch the apostles carry out the Commission in the book of Acts.

Trace the pattern in Acts and the epistles. On the day of Pentecost, when convicted hearers asked what they must do, Peter answered, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38), and those who received the word were baptized that very day (Acts 2:41). This is the consistent pattern: people hear the gospel, believe in the risen Christ, repent of their sins, confess Him as Lord, and are baptized into Him. Paul says we are baptized into Christ’s death and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–4); that as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ and so are children of God through faith (Galatians 3:26–27); and Jesus Himself said, whoever believes and is baptized will be saved (Mark 16:16).

Now teach plainly against the popular error. Many today say a person is saved by faith only, apart from repentance, confession, and baptism, often by praying a prayer to receive Christ. But the New Testament never separates believing in Jesus from obeying the gospel He commanded. The same faith that trusts the risen Christ also turns from sin, confesses Him, and is buried with Him in baptism. Baptism is not a meritorious work by which we earn salvation; it is the God-appointed point at which a believing, repentant, confessing person is united with Christ in His

death and resurrection and receives the forgiveness of sins by grace. Faith only, which leaves out what Jesus and the apostles plainly taught, is not the faith of the New Testament.

Guard the balance of grace and obedience. Salvation is entirely by God's grace; we contribute nothing that earns it, and the cross alone provides it. Yet grace is received through an obedient faith. Baptism is the response of faith, not a payment for salvation, just as a drowning person is saved by the rescuer's grace yet must take hold of the outstretched hand. Keep students from both errors: the error of thinking baptism earns salvation, and the error of thinking faith may bypass baptism.

End in wonder and welcome, not mere argument. The point of getting this right is that people may actually come to the risen Christ in the way He appointed and be sure of their salvation. The book that opened with God coming to be with us closes with the way every person, in every nation, may be united with Him: hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized into Christ, then walking with Him in obedient faith to the end. That is good news worth carrying to all nations.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Baptism placed by the risen Lord at the heart of the Great Commission (vv. 19–20)
- The New Testament pattern of response: hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized (Acts 2:38, 41; Romans 10:9–10)
- Baptism into Christ's death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27; Mark 16:16)
- Rejection of salvation by faith only, apart from repentance, confession, and baptism
- Salvation by grace received through an obedient faith, with baptism as response, not meritorious work
- A lifelong walk of faithful obedience following baptism into Christ

Discussion Prompts

- How does the book of Acts show people responding to the risen Christ?
- Why does the New Testament never separate believing in Jesus from obeying the gospel?
- How do we hold together salvation by grace and the necessity of an obedient, baptized faith?

Question 10

Student Question:

Jesus' final promise is, "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (v. 20). Looking back over the whole Gospel of Matthew, name one specific way the risen, ever-present Christ is calling you to live differently as you finish this study.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use this capstone to close both the lesson and the entire study. Jesus' final words are a promise: "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (v. 20). Remind students that Matthew's Gospel opened by calling Jesus Immanuel, God with us (1:23), and now closes with the risen Christ promising to be with us still. The whole book is bracketed by the presence of God among His people.

Invite reflection across the whole study. Over thirty-nine lessons your class has walked from the manger to the empty tomb, from the genealogy to the Great Commission. Ask each student to look back and name one specific way the risen, ever-present Christ is calling them to live differently now.

Press for a concrete, forward-looking response. This is the end of the study, but not the end of discipleship. The right response is not to close the book and move on, but to go, as the Commission says: to live as a disciple who makes disciples, sustained by the presence of Christ.

Close in worship and confidence. We send our students out as the risen Lord sent His first followers: under His authority, on His mission, and with His promise. Lead your class to marvel that the crucified and risen Jesus is with them always, and to step into whatever He is calling them to next, unafraid, because He goes with them to the end of the age.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The abiding presence of the risen Christ with His people (v. 20)
- Matthew framed by Immanuel, God with us, from beginning to end (1:23; 28:20)
- Discipleship as an ongoing life of going, not a completed course
- Confidence and worship grounded in the presence of the risen Lord

Discussion Prompts

- Looking back over the whole study, how is Christ calling you to live differently?
- What is one specific next step in your discipleship as this study ends?
- How does the promise of His abiding presence give you courage to take it?