

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 39: The Resurrection and the Great Commission -- Matthew 28:1–20

It is still dark when the women set out, and their hearts are heavier than the spices they carry. Two days earlier they had watched the unthinkable: their Lord, beaten and crucified, dead, sealed in a borrowed tomb behind a massive stone and a Roman guard. Now they come only to grieve, to do the last sad service of love for a body. They are not expecting anything. The story, as far as they can tell, is over. And then the ground shakes.

An angel of the Lord descends, rolls back the stone, and sits on it, as casually as a man taking a seat, while the soldiers who were supposed to guard the dead fall down like dead men themselves. “Do not be afraid,” the angel says to the women, “for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said.” He is not here. Three words that split history in two. The tomb is empty. Death has lost. And the women run from that tomb with fear and great joy braided together, because nothing will ever be the same again.

Then Jesus Himself meets them on the road. They take hold of His feet, real feet, a real body, and worship Him. He is not a ghost or a vision or a fond memory; He is alive. Meanwhile, the guards are being paid to lie, and the religious leaders are scrambling to bury the truth they cannot deny. The contrast could not be sharper: those who met the risen Christ worship, and those who fight Him resort to bribes and cover-ups.

It all comes to a mountain in Galilee, where the risen Lord gives His followers their marching orders for every century to come. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” And then the promise that has carried His people through every hardship since: “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” The book that began with Immanuel, God with us, ends with the risen Christ promising to be with us still.

Group Discussion: Matthew ends his Gospel with the risen Jesus sending His followers to make disciples of all nations, and promising to be with them always. Why do you think the resurrection moves so naturally into a mission, and how should that connection shape the way the church lives today?

Personal Reflection: The women came to the tomb expecting only grief and met the risen Lord instead. Where in your life have you settled into a kind of grief, resignation, or hopelessness that the reality of the resurrection is meant to overturn?

Read Matthew 28:1–20

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?

7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 1 Corinthians 15:1–8, 17–22, the resurrection as the foundation of the gospel and our hope; Acts 2:36–41, the first response to the risen Christ in repentance and baptism; Romans 6:3–4, baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection to walk in newness of life; Galatians 3:26–27, becoming children of God through faith and being baptized into Christ; Mark 16:15–16, the gospel preached with the call to believe and be baptized.