

All Authority is Given to Me
Matthew 28

Please turn to Matthew 28. Easter weekend is the most important three days in the Christian faith. The original Easter weekend, Good Friday to Easter Sunday, is the most important three days in human history.

Jesus' death accomplished it, the Lamb of God was slaughtered. The resurrection proves it, God raised him back to life. Without the resurrection, Christianity is just another world religion, like all the rest. By raising Jesus, God showed the world the one Person we may not reject or dismiss. We worship the Jesus that God raised, and the God who raised him. Ignore this at your peril.

Let's begin by reading the last five verses of Matthew, 28:16-20. These are not an epilogue, or an add-on. The whole chapter puts emphasis on these final words of Jesus.

In Matthew, these words explain the resurrection. What does it mean that God raised Jesus from the dead? It means what Jesus says at the end, especially the opening line: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*. This is what the resurrection means:

28:16-20 - Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Now we'll begin, with last two paragraphs of Matthew 27, and we'll read quite a bit of the story today, and comment just a little, until we get back to the Jesus' Great Commission.

The Friday Burial of Jesus (27:57) *As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.*

A rich man had become a disciple. Somewhere Jesus had spoken to this Joseph, and he had become one of Jesus's people. Joseph had had a family tomb cut out of the rock, and he put Jesus in the family burial spot. A new tomb. No one buried there before. The two Marys sat and watched. The important disciples were hiding, so the ordinary disciples took care of things.

The Tomb Sealed on the Sabbath (27:62-66) *The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. “Sir,” they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.” “Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.” So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.*

When Jesus predicted his death, which he did often, he always added, “and on the third day he will be raised.” But he only said these things to his followers. But it was not a secret, and his followers talked, in Jerusalem they talked, and all kinds of people heard about what Jesus said.

The deceiver. “While he was alive, that deceiver said ...” This was the position of the Jewish leaders all along, Jesus was a deceiver, and in their minds, Jesus being crucified proved that before God they were right. Jesus had been a deceiver, start to finish. On this dark Sabbath, the disciples had trouble disagreeing.

This is one big reason his followers were so overjoyed to hear that Jesus was raised. “Yes! We were right! He IS the Christ! You leaders were wrong! God raised him! He IS the Christ!” So, on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders asked Pilate to approve a guard and a seal; Pilate did so.

The Two Marys and the Angel and the Empty Tomb (28:1-7) *After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. And behold, 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.*

⁵ *The angel said to the women, “Don’t you be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and behold, he is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Behold, I have told you.”*

“His appearance was like lightning.” I love that line. Imagine a bolt of lightning, sitting on a big stone, resting between jobs.

He rolled back the stone and sat on it. The stone was not rolled away so Jesus could come out. Jesus was already out. The stone was rolled away, in front of the guards and women, so people could see that Jesus was gone, the tomb was empty. That’s why the angel rolled back the stone.

In Luke’s Gospel and John’s Gospel, Jesus passed right through the grave clothes. The clothes were lying there, as wrapped around Jesus, only he was not there, he had somehow come through them. In Matthew, Jesus came through the stone itself in the same way.

It is a real body, it has scars, in Luke 24(39) Jesus says, “*touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and blood as you see I have.*” In some ways his new body is a lot like his old body, and in other ways it is very different, and more than that I cannot say.

The angel said to the two Marys: *Come and see the place where he lay.* Look and see! He’s gone! And the guards and the two Marys have seen the angel roll the stone back. No one has gone in or out. Come and see; he’s not there.

If the early Christians had made up this story, someone would have seen Jesus come out of the tomb. It would have helped if someone had seen that. But no one did, and they did not invent it. Also, if early Christians had made up the story, women should not have been the first witnesses, because the ancient world had a very low of women’s memories under pressure.

It should have been men, preferably Peter or James or John, and they should have seen Jesus come out. But Christians did not make up the story, so this is what we have.

The angel had two jobs. One, roll away the stone so everyone can see that Jesus is already gone. Two, give an important message to the women: *Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and behold, he is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Behold, I have told you.*”

“He has risen, and behold (like putting exclamation marks at the beginning of the sentence), he’s going ahead of you to Galilee. He’ll be there waiting for you. You will see him there.” “Behold, I have told you.” I was to tell you women, says the angel, and I did it; now you tell the disciples.

Jesus meets the Two Marys (28:8-10) *So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”*

Jesus met them. This meeting was not a coincidence, from Jesus’ part. They grabbed his feet, real feet that could pass through thick stone, and worshipped him. Good for them!

“Go tell my brothers.” Kind words. All the disciples performed poorly at the end. But Jesus loved them, and he knew they loved him. In Luke 22, at the last supper, Jesus said to them, “you are the ones who have stood by me in my trials.” Which except for the last couple days was true.

What to tell his brothers? “*Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.*” This is the same message the angel gave the Marys. The angel said to tell his disciples, *he is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.*

Jesus says the same: *Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.*

There is something important here about Matthew 28, and I don't want you to miss it. The disciples do not get to meet the risen Jesus without hearing those words from him at the end. For the disciples, the meaning of the resurrection is tied to those words of Jesus at the end. **For the disciples, meeting the risen Jesus, and hearing those words, cannot be separated.**

Both Luke and John tell us that Jesus appeared to his disciples on that first Easter Sunday. I'm sure Matthew knows about that, and does not deny it. By telling it this way, Matthew makes clear to us that whatever happens when the disciples see Jesus in Galilee, that's what the resurrection really means.

The first line will be the most important: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* Jesus is NOT just a man God raised from the dead. That's impressive, to be sure, but not enough. When God raised him, God also gave him all authority in heaven and on earth. (But we have not gotten to the end of Matthew yet.)

The Guards and the Jewish Leaders and the Suitable Story (28:11-15) *While the women were on their way, behold, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.*

Behold, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the leaders everything that happened. In those days, if you failed on guard duty you were normally executed. That was standard practice. Execution was the only way to get rid of the influence of a large bribe.

So these guards were in big trouble, because the stone was rolled back and the body was gone. Some of them figured their best chance was to tell the whole story, and that turned out to be an excellent idea. They not only stayed alive, they made a lot of money.

People, there is always another story to explain the empty tomb. There was another story circulating by the end of that first Resurrection Sunday. Expect at all times several good ones around. Don't be alarmed if you wonder sometimes. Resurrection is a hard thing to believe. Let there be no doubts about THAT. It has always been hard to believe.

If you doubt, though, at least also doubt your doubts. If we will doubt the Scripture, we should also doubt our doubts and doubt the alternative stories, the other explanations.

The Galilee Resurrection Meeting (28:16-20) *Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the*

Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Please turn to Exodus 3. There are some important similarities between what Jesus said here and what God said to Moses at the burning bush. Remember that the burning bush was on a mountain, the mountain of God. In the OT, mountains are “God places.” Mike Thiesen preached a fine sermon on this a few years back.

For Matthew as well, mountains are God places. Why might the Sermon on the Mount be called that? Because Jesus taught those things from a hilltop. The transfiguration of Jesus, in Matt 17, also happened on a high mountain. So listen for “mountain” here, and think about Mt Sinai.

*Exodus 3:1-2a Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.
2 There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush.*

Ex 3:10-12 “So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

In the great commission at the end of Matthew, Jesus takes the role of the LORD, and he treats the Eleven like God treated Moses. God said to Moses, “I will be with you.” Jesus said to the Eleven “I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

God said to Moses, “I am sending you.” “This will be the sign that I have sent you” Jesus sent the Eleven: “Go and make disciples of all nations.”

God said to Moses: “You will worship God.” And Moses had worshipped, took off his shoes and hid his face. When the Eleven saw Jesus, they worshipped him. God said to Moses, you will worship God *on this mountain*. At the end of Matthew 28, this all happened on a mountain. Matt 28:16 – *they went to the mountain where Jesus told them to go.*

In some ways, the Eleven are having a burning bush experience. As God sent Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt, Jesus sent the Eleven to make disciples of all the nations.

And this is tied to the resurrection. Jesus is not just a person, alive from the dead. The resurrection means that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, therefore all the nations should be his disciples, and he is with us all the days, to the end of the age.

This connection to Exodus 3 may also explain the three-fold name of God. In Exodus, Moses' next question to God was, "If they ask what your name is, what should I say?" So God explained the name YHWH to Moses.

Jesus says, "Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." As God on the mountain, sending Moses, explained his Name to Moses, so Jesus on the mountain, sending the Eleven, gives the expanded name of God to the Eleven. (I was preaching this to Jana last night, and I got that nugget from her.)

This is what Matthew wants us all to see: Jesus is not just the One Person God raised from the dead. When God raised him, he gave him all authority in heaven and on earth. For the Eleven, Jesus is the new YHWH, and they are the new Moses, leading the nations into salvation. We are the nations who follow that Jesus, and the teaching of those apostles.

For us, the opening line and the last line are the most important. *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* That's why we call him "Lord," "Jesus the Lord." There is huge comfort in that line. This Jesus, who gave himself for us, who gives up his body and blood for us, has all authority in heaven and on earth.

And that means, it's going to be okay, it will all turn out very well. That does not take away the hard things and the questions, but it sure puts a different flavour on them. He's the manager of EVERYTHING, and he is heart and soul for us, he has already shown that.

And the last line is, "*I am with you all the days, to the end of the age.*" The beginning of Matthew calls Jesus "Emmanuel," "God with us." In the middle of Matthew, Jesus says, "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst." And here at the end he says, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." The one with all authority is with us.

God raised Jesus from the dead. At that point, God formally gave him all authority in heaven and on earth. And that Jesus is with us always, all the days, until the end of the age. Amen.