

Matthew, chapter 28
“Good News about the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ”

I | INTRODUCTION / CONNECTIONS / CONTEXT

1 / We come now to the conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel narrative—and also of our brief survey/summary of it. This is the blessed account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Not only is this the conclusion of the historical Gospel story—but it is also the grand and climactic Gospel plan that God has purposed from before the creation of the world [see **Revelation 7.9-17**]. EVERYTHING that God purposed and promised to do for us to save us from our sins was confirmed and assured for us when He raised Christ from the dead! And so, this is not only the end of this part of Jesus’ earthly mission story and Gospel ministry, but it is also the assurance of everything we hope to receive, have, and enjoy forever!

2 / **God has prophesied from the beginning of His Gospel revelation to us that our Messiah and Savior would not only die, but that He would be raised back to life!** [see **Isaiah 53.10**]. Jesus made this crystal-clear to His disciples as He discoursed with them enroute to Emmaus [**Luke 24.25-27**]. AND, every time our Lord foretold to His disciples what sufferings He would endure in Jerusalem when He would be crucified, He also told them **He would be raised from that death He would die** [**Matthew 16.21; 17.22-23; 20.17-19**]. So, as we know from our hindsight perspective—after it’s all said and done and recorded in history—they should have known this part of the Gospel story and waited with anticipation for it to be fulfilled. But, alas, just like we are many times, they were **“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!”** [**Luke 24.25**]. They were ‘a faith work in progress.’ So, now that we do know, and it is plainly recorded for us in the inerrant Scripture record, let’s prepare our hearts—not only to believe it, but also to live our daily lives in the truth and power of the resurrection!

3 / **There is no Gospel without the resurrection!** The resurrection of Christ was never considered by God apart from the death Christ died. Obviously, Christ couldn’t and wouldn’t have been resurrected if He had not died—He had to die to be resurrected from death. BUT, if Christ had died, but wasn’t resurrected, then His death would have been in vain. That is a vain hypothetical, but that is precisely the point Paul made in his magisterial commentary on the resurrection in **1 Corinthians 15.1-34**. **“...but in fact Christ has been raised from the dead...”** as he assures us in **v 20**.

4 / **Everything Christ died on His Cross to accomplish for our redemption is assured to us by His resurrection from that death!** That’s why this account is so indispensable to our faith—AND to the Gospel message Christ has sent us to proclaim to the world. And again, that’s why, especially in the Book of Acts, as the disciples and the churches obey Jesus Christ and went into all the world to proclaim this Gospel of salvation, they almost always proclaimed both **Christ’s death on the Cross and His resurrection from His death!** [for examples, **Acts 1.22; 2.31; 4.2, 33; 17.18, 32; 23.6; 24.15,21**]

5 / **Matthew is also an explosive ‘myth-buster’ here:** [1] *the first myth is that Jesus didn’t really die—He just passed out, or went comatose, or lapsed into a major swoon.* Of course, if He didn’t really die, then His ‘resurrection’ is not really a resurrection—He just revived. But Matthew goes to great lengths to demonstrate that Jesus died—He died and was buried; [2] and the second myth is that *He really didn’t resurrect or live again.* In fact, one version of this myth is included in this lesson text [see **vv 11-15**].

6 / Just one more thing before we get into the text itself: **Matthew is going to bring all the themes together that he has been emphasizing all throughout this Gospel narrative.** There are many threads to the Gospel theme, but they all are woven together here in this resurrection account—*Jesus Christ is the ‘all authority’ King of the Kingdom of Heaven, and His Gospel [Good News] is the “Good News about the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ!”* [from **Acts 8.12—the source of this lesson’s title**]. Jesus Christ exercised His omnipotent authority by the death He died and the way He died it—and also by His invincible resurrection from that death! He conquered all His enemies and foes—Satan, sin, and death—and He shares that Kingdom victory with us when we receive Him and believe His Gospel!

II | ch 28.1-10 | “He is not here, for He has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay.”

1 / v 1 | **Ch 28** is connected closely with the conclusion of **ch 27.57-66**. In fact, one way to look at those two concluding paragraphs of **ch 27** is to see how they serve as a transition or ‘hinge’ between the narratives of the crucifixion and the resurrection. They describe the concluding activities immediately following Jesus’ crucifixion—and at the same time, as **ch 27** concludes in those hurried activities on Friday evening, they are just the preparations and ‘preamble’ of the next momentous act—the resurrection. The last time we saw these godly and faithful women disciples was in **ch 27.55-56 & 61**. They followed at a distance as Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate to claim the body of Jesus for a proper burial. They watched closely as Joseph laid Jesus’ body in his own new sepulcher, and they visually marked it with plans to come back as quickly as the Sabbath had passed. Due to the rush to get Jesus’ body buried before the Sabbath [day of rest] began, Joseph had not had the time to anoint Jesus’ body. So the women planned to return as soon as the Sabbath had passed and properly prepare His body according to their custom [see **Luke 24.1**]. However, they anticipated a problem even to get into the tomb to minister to their beloved Lord’s corpse [they thought]—and they talked about it among themselves as they set out. **THE STONE!** “**And they were saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?’**” *BTW, as we shall see—and as we often say—the stone was rolled away NOT to allow Jesus to ‘escape’ and get out of the sepulcher ... but so the disciples could go into it to see that it was empty!*

2 / vv 2-4 | **HOWEVER**, God had already taken care of the stone! “**And behold [Look!], 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!**” This had already taken place earlier—before they got there. Jesus Christ did not resurrect through any human means or intervention. God needed no human hands or participation to raise Christ from the dead. **Jesus Christ was raised by the power of God, the power of the Holy Spirit, and by His own power of life!** And so, when they arrived at the open, empty sepulcher, there was the angel of the Lord **sitting on it**, waiting for them to arrive to deliver the Good News of the resurrection!

3 / The appearance of the angel displayed the Heavenly Glory that had done the work; and the angel’s appearance terrified the soldier guards so that they suffered physical meltdowns and seizures—and passed out from their terror! The soldiers had every reason to be afraid. They were pitting themselves against God—attempting to frustrate the Almighty’s eternal purposes to keep Christ from living again!

4 / vv 5-7 | The angel [messenger] had a four-fold message to deliver to the women...for them to pass on: [1] **‘Do not be afraid!’** The same terror that had paralyzed the guard soldiers was Good News to them! [2] **‘for I know you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay.’** So they were the first eye-witnesses of the empty tomb; [3] **‘Then go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead...’** The disciples are all cowering behind closed and locked doors—too fearful to be seen publicly and especially to the authorities who had crucified their Messiah. They would need to be told by the women. [4] **‘And behold, He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him. See, I have told you...’** Pay close attention to these instructions about this future arranged meeting in Galilee. They are not in Galilee now...they are in Jerusalem, in Judea. But, apparently Jesus had already told them, perhaps in their conversations during those last days of this Passion week, that He would be seeing them again back in Galilee. **NOTE:** if you scan down through the rest of this narrative, you will see ‘Galilee’ come up again three times: v 7 [by the angel], v 10 [by Jesus Himself], v 16 [where and when the disciples followed Jesus’ directions and did meet Him there].

5 / vv 8-10 | The faithful women did as they were told by the angel. **So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell His disciples.** This ‘fear’ is from the awesomeness and wonder of what they had just witnessed. And the ‘joy’ is what always accompanies the Gospel of the Kingdom, both in the hearing of it and the telling of it! Then, look who always meet us when we go with His Gospel witness! **And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!”** They did as we would expect them to do! They rushed to prostrate themselves and hugged His feet, hold onto Him—and **worshiped Him!** Oh, how they worshiped Him! He is their Lord—the very same Lord they know and love! And He

is alive!—after they had witnessed His crucifixion and burial! And He is here with them! [*Just as this same resurrected, risen Lord is with us, as He will promise in v 20!*] And He repeats to them again: “**Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers** [do you hear that? Jesus calls us, His disciples, His **brothers {and sisters}**] **to go to Galilee and there they will see me.**” [*see also Hebrews 2.9-12*]

III | ch 28.11-15 | “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole Him away...’”

1 / We need to connect this section with **ch 27.62-66**. In fact, we need to go back and re-read that scene ... and as we now say, “*How did that work out for you?*”

2 / This whole scene is so rich with irony, and I can do no better than to quote here from Daniel M. Doriani in ESV Expository Commentary:

“After the crucifixion, chief priests and Pharisees had gone to Pilate and reminded him that Jesus had foretold, “**After three days I will rise**” (27:63). They had urged Pilate to set a guard at the tomb until the third day, lest the disciples steal the body and proclaim that he arose (27:64).

The resurrection ruins their plans. Like the women, the guards from the tomb go and tell what has happened. But the high priests do everything possible to prevent the spread of the news.

We can observe the ironies. First Jesus’ foes remember his promise of resurrection better than the disciples do. But since the Jewish leaders assume that the disciples *would* remember, they plan to thwart any attempt at a faux resurrection. At their request, Pilate had secured the tomb (27:65–66). The authorities’ plan works after a fashion—no one steals the body. Nonetheless, the body does disappear—due to the resurrection. The guards then tell the chief priests “**all that had taken place**” (28:11). When the chief priests meet with the elders and devise a plan, they give the soldiers an ample sum of money, telling them to confess to dereliction of duty: “**His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep**” (vv. 12–13). If the report reaches the governor, the priests promise to protect the soldiers. The soldiers accept the money and do as instructed (vv. 11–15).

The futile effort of the authorities to seal and guard the tomb contrasts with the power of God to open it. Can puny soldiers thwart the almighty God? And God *does* what the leaders thought the disciples might *allege*. Israel’s priests and elders pay the soldiers to claim that the disciples stole the body, but nothing stops the spread of the story of Jesus’ resurrection.

There is further irony. The authorities try to cover up the resurrection by advancing the very story they had hoped to prevent. When the authorities tell the guards to say the disciples have stolen the body, they *spread* the story of the empty tomb. The authorities also demonstrate their depravity. They had demanded signs from Jesus so that they might believe (27:42). Jesus had said they would get no sign but the resurrection (12:38–40). Now they have the sign they demanded and the sign Jesus promised. But instead of believing, they attempt to destroy the evidence.

Matthew 28:11–15 is a portrait of depravity and abuse of power. The actions of the authorities would be laughable if they were not so wicked. If the soldiers were asleep, how could they know who stole the body? We see abuse of funds, lying, manipulation of the legal system, and more. The authorities called Jesus “**that imposter**” (27:63), but who is posing now?

The story reminds readers that a veil lies over the eyes of unbelievers. Some refuse to repent and believe. But the women show the way of faith. Their faith and love move them to stay with Jesus, to visit the tomb, to overcome their fears, to testify to Jesus, and to do it all with joy.”

IV | ch 28.16-20 | “All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...”

1 / v 16 | This is that Galilee rendezvous Jesus had appointed for them before His death and resurrection [see vv 7, 10]. [*The other ‘Great Commission’ accounts are in Mark 16.14-16; Luke 24.44-49; John 20.19-23; and Acts 1.1-8*]. [1] These were their most familiar environs—where they had spent the vast bulk of time together over the past 3+ years. This was their ‘home regions.’ They knew these parts well.

[2] And also, they could meet up in Galilee without attracting a lot of attention from the authorities in Jerusalem/Judea who had just a few days ago crucified Him. [3] This also was one of those ‘teaching times’ that Jesus shared with His disciples during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension back into Heaven. As Luke writes in **Acts 1.1-3: In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.** [NOTE the summary theme of Jesus’ continued teaching and instructions—*“the Kingdom of God.”*] This has also been one of Matthew’s primary ‘theme threads’ he has woven throughout his Gospel narrative. [4] ALSO, Jesus’ physical, bodily *appearances* to His disciples are an essential element of the Gospel and evidences of His resurrection [see **1 Corinthians 15.1-9**]. We have to wonder whether this Galilee meet-up is what Paul refers to by **“Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep [died].”**

2 / v 17 | **“And when they saw Him they worshiped Him, but some doubted.”** What could this possibly mean? Most likely, it doesn’t mean that even among His disciples, there was some skepticism whether this was really Jesus, and that He had really resurrected from His death. The word for ‘doubt’ that Matthew uses here is not the usual word for ‘questioning whether it is true,’ [*diakrino*]. It is the word *‘distadzo,’* which is used only two times in the NT, both of them in Matthew, the other use in **ch 14.31** when Peter ‘wavered’ or ‘doubted’ as he walked on the water to go to Jesus. It may be that they ‘doubted’ due to the overwhelming reality of all they were trying process all at once. As we sometimes say, *“I’m having trouble wrapping my head around all this...”* as we struggle to ‘take it all in’ and process it, put it in order in our thinking. Whatever the case, they knew they were in the Presence of Deity, and so **‘they worshiped Him.’** *Worship is the only response we should have any time we encounter the Living God in the Person of Jesus Christ [see v 9]. We worship Him because He is our King! And His Kingdom is a present and Heavenly reality even here on earth—as we eagerly anticipate its full revelation when He comes again!*

3 / vv 18-20 | Jesus then gives them His Great Commission. Again, we have noted repeatedly as we have followed Matthew’s theme-threads that he has developed throughout his Gospel narrative ... Matthew knew he would end up here, and so he has woven these themes from the beginning:

[1] Jesus declares His absolute, sovereign, omnipotent Lordship and Kingship over His Kingdom: **“All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me...”** Matthew introduced Him as such in **ch 1.1, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David...”** in fulfillment of **2 Samuel 7.11-14** and **Daniel 7.13-14**.

[2] The primary imperative verb that Jesus commands here is **“make disciples of all nations.”** And so, Matthew has been focused on *Jesus, the Supreme disciple-Maker*. *“Because/since I have this authority...”*

[3] We must **make disciples of all nations** because Jesus Christ’s Kingdom of disciples is not only from among the Jews, but also **from the Gentiles also**. And so, Matthew introduces Jesus also in **ch 1.1** as **“the son of Abraham”** because God has purposed from way back then **“...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”** [**Genesis 12.3; Galatians 3.7-9, 14, 16, 25-29; Romans 3.29; 9.23-26**]. And that’s why Jesus took up His primary ministry residence and ‘base of outreach in Capernaum in ‘Galilee of the Gentiles’ [Matthew 4.13-17]. **“From that time [and place] Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.’”** Now, He commands His disciples [and us] to go and **make disciples** of all the other nations of Gentiles.

[4] The means by which we accomplish this *disciple-making missionary mandate* is in the three participial phrases [also imperatives]: **“as you are going ... baptizing them in the [Triune God] Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”** NOTE all the ‘alls’... Matthew has recorded his account of ALL that Jesus taught and commanded them in the contents of this Gospel narrative—especially in the ‘five pillar teaching discourses.’

[5] The power and assurance of the effectiveness of our preaching, teaching of Jesus’ **Gospel of the Kingdom** is His very Presence: **“And behold, I AM with you always, to the end of the age.”** Amen!