

## Matthew 28:11-20

### "Now What?"

We left off last week at the reveal of the risen Christ... It was early Sunday morning; the Sabbath was past & the women who'd been at the tomb when Jesus was buried had purposed to be there as early as they could that they might properly prepare His body. Joseph of Arimathea & Nicodemus had done the best they could w/the time they had but to be honest it was a rush job because the Sabbath was upon them.

So these ladies wanted to finish the preparations properly that Jesus might "rest in peace" as it were. They weren't thinking, "He said He would rise again today!" They weren't thinking, "It's going to be incredible to see Him alive!" All they were worried about was getting that stone rolled back so they could finish the burial process.

But you recall the scene... The earth began to quake, an angel descended from heaven, rolled back the stone & simply had a seat; right there on the stone he'd just rolled away. The bible says his countenance was like lightning, his clothing white like snow. There was a purity & might that wasn't of this world there in his presence. **The guards shook for fear & fainted, fell to the ground as though dead & the angel looked at the ladies & said, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said, come see the place where the Lord lay."**

& As they peered into that tomb all they saw was the empty shell of grave clothes still wrapped (like a cocoon) in the shape of a body as though His body passed right through. & The cloth that covered His face had been folded & set neatly to the side. No sign of a struggle, no one or nothing tore Him out of those wraps. He'd simply passed through them & left them behind as evidence...He had risen.

The angel exhorted them to go quickly & tell His disciples that He'd risen from the dead & that He was going before them & would meet them in Galilee as He'd said, & there they would see Him.

As we might imagine they took off w/fear & great joy & to tell the disciples & lo & behold who did they run into? Jesus Himself... & They fell down at His feet & worshiped Him. Look at Vs 10 (read).

Here's what I want you to see: the absolute love, forgiveness & acceptance of Jesus for those who have it in their heart to follow Him. He says, "Go, & tell My brethren..." Ladies & Gentlemen; up to this point Jesus has *never* called His disciples, "brethren". He's called them friends, He's called them disciples... & now, just when we might think that He'd call them anything *but* brothers, He uses the most endearing term to date (family).

What grace is this? I think I could think of a few things I might call them after the way they all abandoned me... "Go & tell those losers...", "Go & tell those cowards, those unfaithful 'friends' of Mine who all abandoned Me in My greatest hour of need that we need to meet." But Jesus didn't do that... The message of the cross is one of grace & mercy, forgiveness & reconciliation. The past is left in the past, forgiveness finds you in J.C.

It's interesting though. Even still it would take the disciples a week or more to go to Galilee. They stayed under the radar, they were fearful to come out of hiding. When the ladies told them what had happened, Luke tells us that their words seemed like idle tales to them. They didn't believe them (again, the 1<sup>st</sup> skeptics of the resurrection were the faithful followers of Jesus)!

So Jesus appeared to them that very night. They all freaked out (& we sympathize completely w/that reaction)! But Thomas wasn't there & he still didn't believe even though they all told him that Jesus had appeared to them. & He said, *"Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."* 8 Days later Jesus shows up & says, "Thomas come here. Reach your finger here & look at My hands, reach your hand here, put it into My side... Don't be unbelieving but believing..." Thomas answered Him & said, "My Lord, & My God..." Ladies and Gentlemen; a personal encounter w/the risen Christ changes everything...

But isn't Jesus patient w/us? He'd been clear in what they were to do, they weren't doing it, so Jesus met them where they were at, & led them (encouraged their obedience) from there. What is it that the Lord has been leading you to do, instructing you to do, but you've yet to respond in obedience? Take the step of faith, don't be unbelieving, but believing...

But we need to rewind here. The ladies have just met the risen Lord. He's told them to go & tell His disciples...

### Vs 11-15

Remember those guards who freaked out & fainted for fear? Matthew tells us what happened when they came to, when they gathered their composure & was trying to figure out what to do. I'm gonna tell you that they were in a full-fledged panic! So we see 2 different groups of people going 2 different directions w/the same information. 1 seeking to spread the news, the other seeking to suppress & snuff out the news... Have you ever wondered why the soldiers went to the chief priests w/this info rather than Pilate?

They were Roman soldiers, why report to the chief priests? I'll tell you why, because they're fearing for their lives! Rome's response to a soldier who failed his given responsibility was *death*. We discover in Acts Ch 12 when Peter was placed in prison & an angel delivered him the night of his execution, the next day Herod examined the guards & Peter not being found the guards were put to death! In Acts 16 the prison guard thought Paul & Silas had escaped due to an earthquake & rather than be executed he drew his sword & was about to kill *himself* when Paul shouted to him that they were still there... That's when he called for a light, ran in & fell down before them & said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" To which Paul responded; "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.*"<sup>1</sup> So these soldiers are afraid that they're going to be put to death because Jesus (whom they were tasked to ensure stayed in that tomb) was gone.

But what's amazing about this is the reaction of the chief priests & the elders... You would think that they might stop for a minute & say, "Maybe we should re-think this through...What kind of Man has authority over death itself? What kind of Man rises from the dead, has angels announce the news of His resurrection & leaves His grave-clothes completely intact as evidence that He did exactly what He said He would do all the while claiming to be the Son of God before we murdered Him?"

The depths of the depravity of man can be overwhelming, can't it? The hardness of man's heart, the blindness of our eyes can be absolutely unbelievable... They should've been blown away, ready to repent & believe on J.C. seeing the fulfillment of scripture... But pride/envy had blinded them...

It reminded me of that event that takes place in the book of Numbers when Balak called for Balaam to curse the children of Israel... God told him not to go, not to do it. Eventually Balak made him an offer he couldn't refuse so he went anyway... On the way an angel of the Lord stood before Balaam's donkey so that the donkey stood still (Balaam couldn't see the angel). Balaam began to beat the donkey for standing there... It happened 3 different times... God had warned him, had sought to deter him even through circumstance, the behavior of his donkey. Finally (the 3<sup>rd</sup> time) as Balaam began to beat the donkey again, God opened the donkey's mouth so that it actually spoke to Balaam! It said, "Why have you beaten me these 3 times!" Now... ☺ If your pet suddenly started speaking to you, how do you think you would respond? You'd probably freak out!

Balaam just started talking back!

<sup>1</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [Ac 16:31]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Listen, you know something is off when you're so stubborn, so hard hearted & blind that God opens the mouth of your pet to rebuke you & rather than stop, step back & fall to your face, you argue back!

That's where these guys are at. What should be so obvious to them & should stir repentance in them isn't even putting a *dent* in them... They embark on a cover up! They used bribery & deceit to kill Him, & now they'll use bribery & deceit to cover up His resurrection... They're in the camp of, "Don't confuse me w/the facts, I've made up my mind." Listen, some people simply don't want to believe. They may have this excuse, or that seeming "contradiction", the simple fact is that they won't just openly/honestly examine the evidence. They're content to cover it up & be content w/a lie.

They give the soldiers a large sum of money (like enough to retire under a new identity under the witness protection program in Spain) & tell them to say, "His disciples stole His body away at night while we slept." & They tell them that if Pilate has a problem w/that they'll pay him off as well... So they take the money & run...

But you don't have to be a forensic investigator to find all kinds of problems in this story... First of all in order to believe this we have to believe that every soldier (who's life would literally be on the line if they were asleep at their post) altogether fell asleep. Somewhere between 4-16 soldiers, all just went to sleep... completely apathetic to the potential repercussions. (Not to mention how did they know it was His disciples that stole the body if they were all asleep?) We're also going to need to swallow the fact that not one soldier was awakened by His disciples working feverishly to get that stone rolled away, it wasn't something that could *even sort of* happen quietly or stealthily... Then they had to gently work the body of Jesus out of the grave clothes & take the time to reassemble them perfectly as though His body just passed through them & fold the face cloth neatly setting it in the corner, & tiptoe out of that tomb, carrying His body, all the while the soldiers are just snoozing away... Really? There's a whole heap of absurdities we're supposed to swallow here... Not to mention the record doesn't in anyway show brave disciples ready to recover the body of Jesus at any cost. They're all in hiding fearing the same fate!

All the evidence demands the resurrection... If His enemies stole His body, they could've simply produced it & shut the whole thing down. If His disciples *did* take it, what are the odds of every one of them being willing to die a horribly torturous death to propel a lie? How do you explain them going from cowards hiding in fear to boldly declaring His death & resurrection regardless of personal cost?

How do you explain Saul of Tarsus, set on putting an end to this sect of “Christians” but having an encounter on the road to Damascus that changed him from public enemy #1 of the gospel to its chief champion, writing 2/3’s of the NT all of which revolves around J.C. crucified & raised from the dead? You know him as Paul the apostle...

How do you explain over 500 eyewitnesses to the risen Christ at one time? Mass hallucination of the same exact thing? C’mon... What other fact in recorded history rests on over 500 witnesses attesting to it? A court of law will sentence you on the basis of 2 witnesses... The resurrected Christ had over 500... Yet people refuse to believe.

I don’t know why it is, but as people we so often gravitate toward the lie rather than simply believe the truth... Mark Twain once wrote that a lie can go around the world while truth is still lacing up her boots. There is something in human nature that makes it easy for people to believe lies. Satan sought to destroy Jesus while He was on the earth, now he seeks to deceive mankind regarding the reality of His resurrection...

So these religious leaders fabricate this lie & the soldiers did as they were told...

**Vs 16-17**

As I mentioned earlier, this wasn’t their 1<sup>st</sup> encounter w/the risen Christ. However Matt wants to make sure that we understand that Jesus fulfilled His promise to meet w/them in Galilee, & this is where they received their apostolic commission.

Now when we read that when they saw Him, the worshiped Him; but some doubted, there are a couple things that may be happening here. I think that this same testimony stands true around the risen Lord today, some 2,000 yrs later. Some worship, some doubt & every one of us is in 1 of those 2 categories. Having said that there’s a measure of transparency & honesty here that I find commendable.

Listen, the *natural* reaction to encountering the risen Jesus is worship; but I also think a measure of uncertainty & hesitancy could only be expected. There may’ve been a sense of, “this is too good to be true” or perhaps a lingering sense of shame from having forsaken Jesus during His suffering.

I think we should expect a conflict of emotions in a scenario like this; it’s much more genuine than a “& they all lived happily ever after” kind of situation. This is just reality. Listen, it could be as simple as exhibiting understandable confusion regarding how to behave in the presence of a supernaturally manifested, exalted, and holy Being whom you saw dead just a week or so earlier! I mean, can we allow a little grace for that? ☺

It's also completely plausible that the 11 worshiped, but there were other disciples there who doubted. Some believe this is where the occurrence took place where the more than 500 eye witnesses saw Jesus at once (1 Cor 15:6). Some were worshiping, some were lacking in certainty... that's just reality. Look at Vs 18.

### Vs 18-20

Wow... I have no doubt that we cannot comprehend the magnitude of Vs 18. Jesus says, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven & on earth." Think about that... & It's in the light of that authority that He sends His disciples (namely you & me) out into the world w/the message of the gospel that people might be saved & set apart to Him. Think of how blasphemous this would be if Jesus wasn't God in the flesh. He's saying, "I have *all authority in heaven & on earth.*" He doesn't need to consult w/any greater authority before He commissions us to do His will. He is the authority, therefore He can send *whoever He wants* to do *whatever* He pleases... & Because all authority is His, we need not fear. He has authority over life, over death, over whatever circumstances may befall us, He's defeated all things demonic &/or satanic, He is in control. All authority is His.

& Just note in passing the all encompassing nature of Vs 18-20. He has all authority, therefore we're to make disciples of all nations (not just Jews, Gentiles as well). We're to teach them to observe all things that He has commanded & He is w/us always, even to the end of the age.

So Christianity by its nature is a *missionary faith*. The very nature of God demands it, God is love, God's not willing that any should perish, the cross of J.C. was for the whole world, therefore if Christ be in you & in me we'll by nature want to share & see people saved... That's what Jesus is saying when He says, "Go therefore..." The verb "Go" is actually a present participle. It assumes you're going. We might even understand Jesus to be saying, "& as you're on your way" make disciples of everyone you can.

You don't have to go to foreign shores to fulfill this commission. Wherever you're going; be it to Wal-Mart, or the grocery store, it could be school or the breakroom at work, you might be at the gym or at the park...wherever you are, whatever you're doing let God use your life to share & show J.C.

"Well Jeff, I'm no preacher, I'm not perfect, I've got my own problems..." Do you realize who Jesus was talking to here? A band of imperfect people at best; rash, hot headed, reluctant, doubtful, skeptical... fit in any of those categories? It's not about the power & ability that resides in you, because you have none (nor do I).

It's about the power & authority that resides in Him, & He has it all! And He is w/you always, therefore don't worry about it, just let Him do the work through you.

& Notice the goal isn't simply converts, we're to make disciples. Learners, followers of Christ. The goal isn't simply to see people saved, but learning God's word, obeying God's word, passing God's word on to others themselves... We're not to simply teach facts *about* Jesus, but obedience *to* Jesus.

Baptizing them in the name of the Father, & of the Son, & of the Holy Spirit. More accurately "into" the name... & Not "names", but "name". 1 God, 3 Persons. Time forbids delving into talk of the Trinity here but you need to see it. When Jesus was baptized, the Father spoke from Heaven, the Son was present there in the water, the Holy Spirit fell upon Him. **Now as we baptize people we baptize them into the name of the Triune God (The Father, the Son, & the Holy Spirit). It's not a tag per se, but an identity *with* & an allegiance *to* all that God is, both for him & in him.**

But salvation isn't where it ends, baptism isn't the finish line, it's the starting line. "Teaching them." Disciples aren't spontaneously created at conversion, they must be *taught* the word & ways of God (all things I have commanded). & As he/she grow, they then go out & make disciples of others. **This is the N.T. pattern. In large part people today expect their pastor to do all this for them... that was not what Jesus had in mind at all! Each of us should be doing this, how quickly would the church grow, how much stronger/joyful would the church be if each of us were discipling another? As a church we shouldn't be growing by addition, we should be multiplying as we obey this commission!**

& He is w/us... Again, He has all power & He's promised His presence. Not just now & then, or when we really need it, there's never a time that Jesus isn't w/you... Even to the end of the age. There's an end? Yes. Jesus has a plan, & until it winds down & wraps up He will be right there with you.

But this is what we're to do. Christ is risen, now what? Now, win someone *to* Jesus, disciple them *in* Jesus & send them *for* Jesus. Family, it's not the great suggestion... It's the great commission, these are your marching orders. One day we will enter into His rest, meanwhile, let's be faithful till the end... Amen? Amen.

**Prayer Points:**

Father we thank You for Your word to us, the things You've taught us, affirmed for us or revealed *to* us through the book of Matthew. May we be doers of Your word, increase our faith & be glorified in our lives.

Jesus is alive, & He loves you. He's given Himself *for* you, believe on Him today. Don't live a lie, receive the truth. J.C. crucified for our sin, raised for our justification, turn from your sin & trust in Him...