

The risen King Jesus shakes the world's kingdoms: some crumble in fear and denial, but others crumble in jubilant worship. Only by giving up your small-kingdom dreams and answering the call to partner in building God's kingdom will you discover a mission that won't finally crumble but is destined for glory.

Introduction – Reading the epitaphs engraved on tombstones can be a surprisingly accurate way of learning a person's life mission and their best guess at destiny.

I. Seeking a Mission

A. Religious devotion to Jesus (vv. 1-3, 5-10)

Two ways of seeking a life mission are in this story. The first is common among religious folks, and here we have a beautiful example in the story of the first people to see Jesus after he was laid in the tomb. I want to draw your attention to the commendable religious devotion these women showed for their crucified king. After their Sabbath day rest, at the very first opportunity to visit the tomb, just before sunrise, two of Jesus' disciples named Mary were there. It's clear they came in sorrow, humility, and a sense of devotion to make the best of a terrible turn of events. What is remarkable is how unremarkable their response is to the angel and to Jesus—at least for religious folks who are devoted to Jesus.

B. Secular dedication to vocation (v. 4, 11, 15)

Seeking a mission in your career calling is another common attempt to live for something bigger than yourself. Until we get to the second part of the story, the tomb guards are actually sympathetic characters. Remember the reason why they are stationed at the tomb on Sunday morning—to prevent anyone from getting in or out the tomb of a polarizing religious/political figure. It was an important job for which only the best soldiers would have been selected to keep watch. These were men dedicated to their job as Roman soldiers, under authority, serving the world's Empire to keep the Roman peace. Such courageous dedication to not yield before an angel of the Lord may have actually caused them to pass out cold—scared motionless and unconscious. When they finally regained consciousness they knew they had to tell someone what happened on the job. It would have been suicide to report to their commanding officer because the truth would have got them executed for sleeping at their assigned post. But the Jewish religious authorities, they could plausibly help them since what the soldiers witnessed had religious significance.

II. Protecting my Mission

A. A conspiracy motivated by denials and lies (vv. 12-15)

Knowing the Jewish leaders were just as willing to cover up what happened, they made straight for those whom they calculated would be willing accomplices in a cover-up conspiracy. Facing the reality of Jesus' resurrection, once again (cf. Mt 26:3-5), after taking counsel, the Jewish religious leaders were forced to conspire together in order to preserve their religious and political influence. And so the leaders decided to bribe the soldiers with a large sum of money (silver coins). In exchange for the money, they instructed the soldiers to spread a lie about what happened at the tomb. If by chance the Roman governor should hear the story, the Jewish leaders promised to persuade him to protect the soldiers, no doubt with another very large bribe. “Jesus' disciples stole the body while the guards slept” was the best story they could make up. The elders and chief priests had no other explanation for the empty tomb because they were so deep in denial that they didn't want to believe the best explanation—that Jesus rose from the dead!

B. A hesitation driven by fears and doubts (v. 17)

This is a difficult verse to interpret. The Greek word for “doubt” is rare, and probably means something like “uncertain about what to think.” The same word appears in Matthew 14:31 with Jesus rescuing Peter walking on and sinking into the water. Also, remember the disciple Thomas who doubted (Jn 20:24-29)? From these examples we may conclude that worship coupled with disbelieving astonishment is an understandable (even typical) response for disciples who are still trying to come to grips with the amazing spectacle unfolding before their eyes: Jesus risen from the dead (Lk 24:10-11). On the mountain in Galilee, were some disciples perplexed about the unprecedented event of resurrection, and hesitating in their hearts as their minds tried to figure out what it meant that Jesus is risen from the dead? Yes, and Jesus is about to address their fears and doubts about giving up their personal mission of protecting their small crumbling kingdoms.

III. Obeying His Mission

A. The resurrection authority of King Jesus (v. 18)

Dan 7:13-14; 2 Chr 36:22-23; Josh 1:5-9; Gen 1:26-28. Do you hear much louder how the last chapter of Matthew’s gospel is the dawning of the new creation? Do you hear more clearly how in the Great Commission the New Adam declares he has all authority in heaven and on earth? Are you more inspired by his calling us—the Church—to join him in his reign from Zion the beautiful City of God? The mission of God is the building of the kingdom of God, not the kingdom of Man (Gen 11:1-9). And the mission of the Church is to go in Jesus’ authority, with his message to make disciples, and with the comfort that he will be with us.

B. The resurrection mission of King Jesus (vv. 19-20a)

The Great Commission must be lived out on earth by the Church until Jesus returns. Every Christian must “go” and make disciples, whether it is next door or to another country. What is a disciple of Jesus? A person who repents of sin, trusts in Jesus for salvation, and obeys his teachings. Making disciples means calling people to submit and commit to Jesus as Master and Lord. Think of how Jesus made disciples. He taught and trained them as a side-by-side teacher. He was the master and his disciples were apprentices. He made disciples by spending lots of time with them—teaching, training with hands-on assignments, and sending to try out his teaching. What are the characteristics of a disciple? In the Bible and during the period of the early church, being a disciple of a particular teacher was a total life commitment.

C. The resurrection promise of King Jesus (v. 20b)

But this commission does not have to be daunting, because Jesus promises he will be spiritually present with his disciples every step of the way. In other words, Jesus’ Spirit will empower his disciples for this great mission. Even in our most discouraging moments and seasons, we have the word of Christ that he will not desert us. Jesus will be with us until the end of the age, which is the end of human history when Christ returns again to consummate his kingdom and bring the new age in its fullness (Mt 24-25). Mission accomplished!

Conclusion – Missiology always involves three things: (1) evangelism, (2) discipleship, and (3) institution building. We need to take seriously our citizenship in Zion, the kingdom of God (Eph 2:11-22). The biblical/Christian “politics” of the Christian polis is about loving each other. So sacrifice yourself for the life of the world and the good of your neighbor. Pray that God would let us see and be a part of just a little bit of his

kingdom come from heaven to earth. Are you hesitant, doubtful, or afraid? Good. We all are. But so was that small congregation of disciples on the mountain in Galilee. And God used them to accomplish his gospel mission to change the world.