

# I Am With You Always

Matthew 28.11-20

April 17, 2022 (Easter Sunday)

*Now while they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened.<sup>12</sup> And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers,<sup>13</sup> and said, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.'<sup>14</sup> And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and <sup>[d]</sup>keep you out of trouble."<sup>15</sup> And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day.*

*<sup>16</sup>But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated.<sup>17</sup> When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful.<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.<sup>19</sup> <sup>[e]</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you <sup>[f]</sup>always, even to the end of the age."*

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks Be To God!**

We've been looking at Jesus Christ's best-known teaching called the *Sermon on the Mount* in this, Matthew's account of the Life of Jesus (CH 5-7). That sermon was apparently delivered in Galilee and now at the end we return to a mountain in Galilee as the risen Jesus tells His disciples to meet Him there.

Today I want to look at the closing paragraphs in this book; they record an event that has changed the world, changed the way we mark time (BC/AD or even if you call it the Common Era). I want to consider what the resurrection of Jesus changed...what difference does it really make if Easter is true or false?

And THINKING about the change in the way we mark time... I noticed that time is significant in this last bit of the book... so let's follow the lead of the historian, Matthew and look at:

**Let's look at: Middle of the NIGHT – Fear, Foolishness, Fact**

**End of the AGE – Adam, Authority, Awareness**

**Beginning of the DAY – Relief, Resolve, Resurrection**

Jesus Christ has been calling for, as we've seen (Sermon on the Mount) a return to the basic

teaching of the Hebrew Bible. The secular people HOPED He would eradicate the Law because they knew they weren't keeping God's Law. The religious people were AFRAID He would do away with the Law because they WERE keeping it so well (but actually they weren't even coming close!)

Instead, Jesus came to fill the Law with meaning, to show, for instance, that murder/lust begin in the heart and the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Commandments judge our hearts not just our outward actions. AND He came to DO the Law! In some sense He disappointed everyone, religious and secular alike...but they were all knocked out by His words and couldn't turn away.

And now, out of jealousy and fear, the religious people killed Him and used the state to DO it (a wonderful joint effort of church and state).

And as night falls (27.57) and congress prepares to take their Passover recess...people are scrambling to get work finished, Jesus is buried in the tomb of a wealthy but secret follower. Matthew writes (CH 7): *"On the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and said, 'Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' 'Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first.'"* (27.62-64)

The truth is: the disciples are NOT planning to take the Body... They really didn't think there'd be a Body... and they're too scared... Jesus warned them repeatedly but they were somehow able to dismiss His warnings as some sort of riddle, even though He said, "I will be killed..." (Mat 16.21, Mar 8.32 et al) And now the disciples are in the middle of the night – terrified, doubting, hiding!

So this foolish plot is hatched to guard the tomb with guards carrying swords and spears which may have been effective against the eleven disciples (had they been brave enough to attempt to steal the Body) but will NOT be effective to prevent an actual resurrection. Swords and spears, wouldn't work, even nuclear weapons would be like using a sandcastle to keep the tide from rising Ps 115.3).

And when the resurrection DOES occur – when the Crucified comes to life, the guards become like dead men, shaking with fear... and some of the guard go to the priests to report what happened (that a resurrection occurred!) So the clergymen (perfect Law-keepers that they were) decide to bribe the guards to lie ("so "that deceiver", Jesus, doesn't deceive anyone... they concoct a deception) and the guards took the money and stuck to their story "to this day."

Now obviously, that meant Matthew's day but sadly that story is STILL circulating in OUR day, and I want to talk about that for a moment. In fact, let me point out some details in this story of

fear and foolishness in the middle of the night and show how they help us doubt our doubts – fight doubt with FOUR FACTS.

First, the concocted story doesn't make sense. How was it that they were asleep and didn't hear this giant stone being moved? How was it that they were THAT soundly sleeping but somehow knew it was the disciples of Jesus who stole the Body?

Second, it's women who are THE WITNESSES and in that culture the testimony of women was suspect at best and inadmissible in court at worst. If the disciples of Jesus fabricated this story, it would be to their great disadvantage to have women as the first witnesses because so many people would dismiss it. It had to have happened this way – women witnessed the resurrection.

A third fact (amidst the fear and foolishness in the middle of the night) was how silly the disciples look. Why, if the disciples hoped to gain from this story somehow (like get a book deal or a speaking tour) why do they include the details like even when they literally saw that Jesus had risen, (16) "some doubted"? If they wanted to be heroes – WHY ADD THOSE FACTS? (Unless...they're actually facts!)

Last, IF the disciples DID steal the Body (and this is only one of the objections people still make who set out to disprove the Resurrection) they must have conspired among themselves... so that they would somehow benefit (get sex, power or money) but later when they were arrested, tortured, taken from their families and killed – they would retract...right? But none of them recanted – they held. Why? Why lose your life for what you know is a lie?

We move now from the middle of the night to the END of the AGE, where we find: Authority, Adam and Awareness.

Jesus Christ has all authority: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." (18) He came to fulfill the Law – to obey it from the heart – and that's exactly what He did. Moses gave the Law but only Jesus Christ fully carried it out.

And FOR that, the Father exalted Him and gave Him the Name above every name (Phil 2.9-10). He LIVED the life that I failed to live and died the death I deserved to die and His resurrection is the great, "YES!" of God – it's God saying, "Yes! His life of LOVE fulfilled the Law and His death to satisfy the JUSTICE that was due to My people (Isaiah 53.8) is acceptable and DEATH IS NOW UNDONE – the death of death is the death of Christ!

Jesus does this as a New Representative of a new race – He came, a Last Adam to reclaim the place the first Adam had forfeited by his disobedience. And now a HUMAN PERSON, a Man has regained that authority and will bring about a new world... it'll be fully realized at the end of the age when everyone who is represented by this Last Adam will share in His dominion over a new creation. "On earth as it is in heaven" – the core of His teaching will be fulfilled.

As the Old Adam was given a mandate to be fruitful and multiply the image of God all over His earth so the Last Adam, the Life-Giving Spirit, reiterates and yet revises that mandate here in the launch of the New Creation, "Go! Multiply! Make disciples of all the nations!" He's the New Adam.

But there's one more little truth we don't want to miss here. Who can say this?: "I am with you always even to the end of the age?" Who can say that?

One of the world's leading NT scholars, Richard B. Hays (has taught at Yale, Emory and now at Duke) has written a wonderful, short (!) book called, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Baylor Press, 2014). In that book he points out that THIS is the moment of highest awareness of the identity of Jesus Christ in Matthew's Gospel.

If the disciples wondered (as they DID!), Who IS this Man? Is He an angel? A god? A man? A prophet? God Himself? – this is the moment, at the very end of the book, when it's most clear.

Richard Hays, observes that the *Book of Matthew* begins with the charge to Joseph, "*they shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means, 'GOD WITH US.'*" (Mat 1.23) and the book ends with, Jesus Christ, the God-Man saying, "I am WITH YOU" – God with US!

Hays note the words: "*I am with you always*" are found in lots of passages in the Hebrew Bible that was translated into Greek and was widely used when Matthew lived (LXX)... often the exact same wording.

Then he chooses three of the many times where the same language is used (as what Mathew used) and where the OT circumstances typify or foreshadow this final passage of full awareness and in each (OT text), it's crystal clear that God Himself is speaking.

Remember Jacob, the Patriarch of Israel, saw that ladder coming down from heaven and the Voice of God saying, "*Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west ...east...north and ...south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed...Behold, I am with you*" (Gen 28.14-15) – Jacob heard the words of Jesus Christ.

Remember Jeremiah is commissioned by God with these words, "*Do not say, 'I am but a youth,' because everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you.*" (Jer 1.7-8) Jeremiah heard the words of Jesus Christ.

The Prophet Haggai urged the people to rebuild the Temple after the exile. Standing next to Haggai was Yeshua, the High Priest, "*Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke by the commission of the LORD to the people saying, 'I am with you,' declares the LORD.*" (1.13) Haggai

spoke the words of Jesus Christ who at the end of Matthew commissions the construction of a New Temple made up of human stones.

Then, the Baptismal Formula: “in the *NAME* (singular – NOT “names”!) of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” – Matthew ends with this big reveal: Jesus Christ is indeed GOD Himself!

The Resurrection as Matthew records it has Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, vindicated, His sacrifice accepted – the strife is o’er the battle won... The Perfect Man and King of Creation AND the incarnation of God – this is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob... who calls and commissions and who will reclaim the nations and the world. Jesus Christ is God and Man.

Last point – the Middle of the Night, the End of the Age and finally, the Beginning of the Day.

Anyone who trusts this resurrected Jesus (and sometimes, no amount of evidence will bring a person to trust – look at the guards!) but if you turn away from the idea that YOU CAN BE ENOUGH in your own efforts and performance, that you're good enough to pass God's entrance exam (I've decided that I can't even pass my OWN entrance exam!) but if you take the Gift God offers in Jesus Christ, you will know RELIEF, RESOLVE and RESURRECTION.

You will know that the guilt you have over real faults and sins you've committed – that objective guilt of a bad record has been transferred to Someone else. His record of spotless beauty and love that thrills the heart of God the Father (17.5) will be attributed to you. God now has nothing against you (“DO NOT BE AFRAID”) – atonement has been made – forgiveness and new life is yours – relief! So trust Him!

Second, there's resolve/purpose: you receive a commission and a promise – “go and join the people of the New Creation through the waters of new birth and baptism: multiply and fill the earth with the knowledge of God. Be/make disciples. Use your job and your family and neighborhood to enjoy God and point to Him by living in daily trust.

And lastly – because He IS resurrected... and He represents ME...I too will be resurrected. One day my body or ashes will be marvelously reconstituted... and yet different. I will be like Him: no longer subject to death and sickness, shame, fear, failure and loss ONLY JOY UNSPEAKABLE and full of glory – true significance like I've never even dreamed (1 Corinthian 2.9)...

Does it sound too good to be true?

I'd think so too... (sometimes I still do) except that I continue to believe Jesus Christ, risen from the dead has promised to all who trust Him: ***“I am with you always even to the end of the age.”***

