

The Gospel of Matthew
Week 33
Matthew 27:62-28:20

Day One

62 The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 63 "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' 64 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."

v. 62 – Pilate was certainly accessible to the Jews. First, the leaders came to accuse Jesus and demand His execution. Then Joseph went to him to claim Jesus’ body. Finally the chief priests came to make the request described in these last verses. Pilate did not always reside in Jerusalem; he was only there for the holidays and the people were making the most of his presence.

v. 63 – Jesus’ words had a tremendous impact on everyone who heard them, whether or not they believed. The leaders remembered that Jesus said He would rise again. They also remembered that He would restore the “temple” in three days and that He was the Son of God. It seems that one cannot get away from Jesus’ words once they are heard; one must either accept or reject them, but one cannot escape their power or ability to penetrate the heart and mind.

The writer of Hebrews explained this phenomenon to us:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Hebrews 4:12-13).

I must give the leaders credit that they thought Jesus’ disciples would at least try to steal the body to make it appear that Jesus’ prediction were being fulfilled. Of course, the disciples were hiding out with no intention of doing anything about what Jesus had promised. They did not believe, so they were not acting in any way, shape or form. Faith without action is dead, so it is obvious they had no faith!

v. 64 – While they thought they were taking precautions that the body not be stolen, they were unwittingly playing an important role in God’s plan. Jesus was dead and His body wrapped in a tomb with a heavy stone across the entrance, protected by armed guards. Man did everything he knew to do to put Jesus away and keep Him in the grave. But as the famous hymn says, “Up from the grave He arose, with a mighty triumph o’er His

foes.” Those foes included death, the confining tomb, the Roman government, and the Jewish leaders.

Because nothing is impossible with God and because He showed Himself strong when He raised Jesus from the dead, we can rest in the words of Paul:

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,[m] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:37-39).

Day Two

65 "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." 66 So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard. 28:1 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

v. 65 – Pilate granted the Jews’ request and gave them the order to secure the tomb as best they knew how. That is the problem with any of man’s solutions to the problems he faces. We are limited in our understanding and awareness of what needs to be done and how to do it. I don’t want to walk in the knowledge that I have; I want to walk in the knowledge that God can provide for me. Yet I know that I must make myself open and available to that knowledge and prepare myself through courses and study while walking with and learning from the wise.

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, *growing in the knowledge of God*, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you[d] to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light (Colossians 1:10-12).

You stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you. So I will destroy your mother-my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. "Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children (Hosea 4:5-6).

Are you growing the knowledge of God that includes knowing more about God and also about how to do the work He has given you to do? Or are you doing it as best you know how? That may not be good enough, so I urge you to live a life that consistently helps you to grow and develop.

v. 66 – The leaders did what they knew: they posted a guard and put a seal over the tomb so that they would know if anyone broke the seal to enter the tomb. They never expected

any breakout to come from the inside; they were only taking precautions to deal with outsiders. Little did they know that there was nothing they could do to prevent what was about to happen from the inside the tomb.

God is always able to do the unexpected. He is often moved by our faith but He isn't limited by our faith, otherwise our faith would control God. Nothing can control God. So while it is important that we have faith in God to do the impossible, there still remains the impossible that we cannot even imagine or think of. God can still do those things. It doesn't seem like anyone had faith for the resurrection, yet God did it. So I can relax and know that God is in control and it all doesn't depend on what I know and see. I can do things "as best I know how" and trust God to do the rest.

When was the last time God surprised you by what He did on your behalf or in a situation close to you? Why do you think He doesn't act like that more often? Are you looking for God to do the unexpected?

28:1 – On the first day of the week, which would have been Sunday, the two Marys went to look at the tomb. I have to give these women credit. They were certainly courageous and in the forefront of the resurrection story. **Are you courageous in the things that God wants you to do? In your relationship with Him? How can you be even more courageous? In other words, what fears do you need to face?**

Day Three

2 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. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

v. 2 – This is the second earthquake associated with the events surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection. The first earthquake saw saints of old come to life. This particular earthquake saw Jesus come back to life! There is a definite connection between what happens in the heavens and on earth. The angel came from heaven and the earth shook.

The angel moved the stone that was in front of the tomb and then sat down on it, sort of like the victor sitting on the vanquished. God is able to do anything He chooses to do. If He doesn't do something, it is because He chooses not to do it, for which He has His reasons. **Is there something you want God to do but He isn't doing in your life circumstances right now? Can you find rest and peace that He isn't doing it not because He doesn't care or can't do it, but that He is doing it according to the purpose of His will? Can you believe in the midst of it that God has your best interests at heart?** If you can, then you are truly functioning in faith, trusting God not just for provision but for His guiding hand.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who[have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

v. 3 – The appearance of the angel was as one would expect, like a celestial being. He was radiant like lightning, which is hard on the eyes when one sees it. The angel had clothes on and the clothes were as white as snow. Forget the artist’s depictions of angels as cute little chubby children. Angels are impressive beings so much so that the guards at the tomb were terrified when they saw one.

We are always limited as we attempt to describe the things of God. The angel looked like lightning and was as white as snow. Those give us some ideas of what the angel was like in terms of what we can understand and relate to. I was recently in a seminar and one woman was confronted with here inability to describe how she was feeling. She would simply say, “That’s awesome!” She left the seminar saying to me, “I need to expand my vocabulary to describe what God is doing and how I am feeling.” Yet it is always a challenge to describe the things of God and the things that God does.

v. 4 – I don’t know if those particular guards had ever seen combat, but I would assume that they were fairly typical of any soldier who had seen his share of unusual things. This angel, however, did them all in, so to speak, for they trembled and then could not move. While we often pray for encounters with angels and other supernatural encounters, we see in Scripture that those who did have such encounters were terrified. Whether it was God’s voice in Exodus or the glorified Jesus in Revelation, those who were present when such encounters took place were undone. **Do you take the spiritual for granted or equate it with experiences that you have in everyday life?** If so, don’t, for God and the things of God are not to be taken lightly or sought for the sake of the experience itself.

Day Four

5 The angel said to the women, "Do not 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 is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." 8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

v. 5 – The angel was able to communicate with the women; he spoke their language. Angels are intelligent beings, with personality and knowledge. The angel knew that the women were afraid, which tells us that the angel knew mankind, was familiar with their emotions and behavior. He also knew why the women were at the tomb. It is interesting that Jesus was already raised and gone, even though the tombstone still covered the front. The guards didn’t know He was gone and the women didn’t either. Later Jesus showed His ability in His resurrected state to pass through locked doors into the presence of the disciples. He must have done the same thing here, for He was already gone when the

angel arrived. The angel just pushed back the stone so the people could see the empty tomb.

v. 6 --- The angel announced the good news: Jesus wasn't there. The angel reminded the women that Jesus had predicted this would occur and then invited them to observe the evidence. Keep in mind that they did all this with the guards still present, perhaps lying on the ground unconscious or terror-stricken. Or perhaps by now they had fled in fear, reporting to their superiors what had happened. My point is that the Romans were inconsequential when God acted. They could not stop God or the people of God. They were irrelevant. **Do you believe that there is no power or situation that can limit God?** If you do, you are well on your way to living the kind of life that God intended – functioning in His possibilities as opposed to man's limits and impossibilities.

v. 7 – I will not enter into a discussion of how and why the accounts of what happened vary so widely in the four gospels. Matthew reports nothing of Jesus' encounters with the disciples in Jerusalem. His story has the angel telling the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee. The disciples had to have faith that Jesus would be in Galilee, taking the women's word for it. I doubt if that would have happened, so Jesus probably did appear to the disciples behind closed doors where they were hiding before they went to Galilee. I have no problems with the sketchy nature of Matthew's account. He included what the Spirit led him to include.

v. 8 – The women were still afraid after their encounter with the angel, but they were also filled with joy. Jesus was alive! They ran to carry out the instructions of the angel, eager to let everyone else share in the good news that they had heard. Jesus was alive! **Are you eager to share this good news with others? Are you running to those who may be interested?** One must admire the courage of these women that enabled them to be in the position they were in to see the angel and go forth with the good news. As stated in earlier studies, courage is not the absence of fear. It is acting in the midst of fear. **Are you waiting for fear to subside before you act?** Then you may be waiting a long time! Learn to act with courage even if you are afraid.

Day Five

9 Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." 11 While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. 12 When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, 13 telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.'"

v. 9 – After the women had seen the angel and were on their way to the disciples, Jesus Himself appeared to them. He said' "Hello." That is so interesting. He just said, "Hello." The women came and held Jesus' feet as they bowed and worshiped Him. That tells us that Jesus had a real body that could be touched and held.

What is even more interesting is that the women worshiped Jesus and Jesus did not stop them from doing so. As I have stated many times in past studies, this has important ramifications for our faith. If Jesus was *only* a prophet as some say He was (and is), and received the worship of those women without stopping them, then He was a false prophet, for He took to Himself what belongs to God and only God. If He received worship and it was His due, then He was and is God.

Of course, we know that He was and is God, so what the women did was the correct response. When Jesus accepted their worship, He was also responding correctly for He was a Priest and Prophet for sure, but also the Son of God! Some people like and admire Jesus; others worship Him. The latter is the only proper response.

v. 10 – The angel told the women not to be afraid and Jesus repeated the admonition. He also repeated the command that they should go and tell the disciples that they should proceed to Galilee where Jesus would meet with them. It seems that it would have been easier for Jesus to conduct His meeting with the disciples in Jerusalem, but He wanted them to go back home for their final instructions. There is also a chance that it just wasn't safe in Jerusalem or that Jesus simply did not want to transact business in the city that had crucified Him and that would ultimately be destroyed for their lack of faith.

v. 11 – After the women left, the guards went and made their report to the chief priests. This tells me that these guards were under the authority of the chief priests and not the Roman government, so they could have been Temple guards. I can't see Pilate putting some of his troops under the control of the Jewish leaders. In any event, the guards made their report about the angel, the empty tomb and the stone that was rolled away.

vs. 12&13 – The chief priests then devised a plan and bribed the soldiers to alter their story to say that someone had stolen the body. These leaders were quite liberal with the Lord's money. First, they paid off Judas and then they paid off the guards, using the treasury's money. That is a telltale sign of an authoritarian leader; they believe that everything that they are managing is theirs. They believe they own it and can therefore do whatever it is that they want to do. The people gave this money, often making sacrifices to do so, but the leaders disposed of it as they chose to do.

Do you manage the things of God and His people, or do you believe that you own them? That includes your time, money, spiritual gifts and ministry opportunities. Those leaders were so set on saving their world that they resorted to bribes, lies, deception, conspiracy, manipulation and theft. They were truly a pack of snakes as John the Baptist had called them. I don't want to be the kind of leader who rules God's people instead of one who leads, guides and cares for them.

Day Six

14 If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." 15 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.¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

v. 14 – The leaders promised to cover any problem that the guards would encounter with Pilate, perhaps insinuating that they would also bribe him if need be. These truly were wicked men, who would stop at nothing to carry out their evil plans. I am glad that God is in control and watches all things that occur. I am once again reminded of the truths contained in the scenario described in Psalm 2:

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will proclaim the decree of the Lord; He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him (Psalm 2:1-12).

v. 15 – The leaders were successful in shrouding the truth in rumors and lies, thus casting confusion on the testimony that Jesus was alive. Instead of being heralds of the truth, the leaders worked to obfuscate the truth. These were not earnest men carrying out their honest convictions. They were evil men who were carrying out an agenda that allowed them to maintain power and money. Their leadership was shortsighted, however, for in 40 years, their world and position would be no more when Jerusalem was sacked and burned. If anyone should ever question whether or not Jerusalem's sentence was just, they should refer back to the leadership of these men.

v. 16 – **The disciples knew exactly where to go; perhaps it was where the transfiguration had taken place?** At any rate, Jesus was so confident that He was coming back that He had arranged a meeting place before He left. Once again, we see that the disciples had no excuse for not believing, but they didn't. **What has God showed you that you still don't believe? What report has someone given about God but you don't believe that it can happen to you and yours? Where is your wrong thinking keeping you from taking right action?**

v. 17 – Once again, we see that the response to Jesus was worship! That was the first knee-jerk reaction of many. They knew that He was God when they saw Him alive! **What is your response to Jesus when you see Him? Is it also worship?** There are many who will honor Jesus and say that He was a great teacher and prophet. If their reverence doesn't lead to worship, however, then they have missed the point.

It is of note that while some worshiped, some also doubted. They were looking at Jesus in His resurrected state, but they doubted. They saw but did not believe. There are some who say, "If only God would show me or speak to me, then I would believe." That's not always the case. An angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and told Gideon that he was a mighty warrior. Yet this is how Gideon responded:

The Lord turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" "But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family" (Judges 6:14-15).

Do you respond like the worshipers or doubters when God speaks to you? Don't answer too quickly.

Day Seven

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in[f] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

v. 18 – Jesus was not phased or hindered by the doubts of some; He proceeded with the "meeting" as planned for He had something important to tell them. First, He established that all authority had been given to Him. **How much authority is "all" authority?** It's all, everything, as much as there is. Jesus didn't receive *some* authority, along with others like Mohammed, Buddha and Sun Yung Moon. He received all authority and God will not share His authority with another. He won't give His "all" to one and then take some back to give to someone else. Jesus is the One who has the authority to save, to bless and to direct the affairs of the Church.

v. 19 – I have often said that Jesus brought the disciples all the way from Jerusalem to Galilee and then told them to "go." I often preach messages at missions conferences, one of which is entitled, "He's Got Us Coming and Going!" I also have one by the title, "When You Gotta Go, You Gotta Go!" And the final one is "What Part of *Go* Don't You Understand?"

Jesus told the disciples to go and they immediately went back to Jerusalem where they had to be evicted before they would heed Jesus' words. Jesus had given them their marching orders, but they weren't ready to go, ready in their minds, that is. They were still too tightly held by Jewish culture and custom, but over time they would go and take the gospel everywhere in the world.

Jesus was very clear what they were to do as well. They were not to meet social needs; they were to preach, teach and baptize, making disciples as they went. Jesus had taught the disciples and He then expected them to go and do the same. The focus for their

teaching was to be what Jesus had taught them; not philosophy or psychology. **Are you teaching what Jesus taught you through the apostles? How can you be more effective at doing so?**

Paul understood this and had a body of teaching that he imparted no matter where he went. He called it “my gospel.” Paul knew that he didn’t own it; he knew that it was his to preach, that no one else could do it because it was his purpose to go to the Gentiles.

This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares (Romans 2:16).

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:10-12).

v. 20 – Jesus promised that He would be with the disciples unto the end of the age, that He would be with them as they did the work that He was commissioning them to do. What a fantastic promise! As you go, God goes with you. It doesn’t get any better than that.

So we have reached the conclusion of our study of Matthew’s gospel. Matthew ends his gospel with Jesus telling His disciples to go forth and spread the good news about Him. That hasn’t changed in 2,000 years. Jesus has made you a missionary to wherever He sends you:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Where has Jesus sent you? He has sent me to Africa mostly, with some work here in the States. It doesn’t matter where you go and you cannot compare your assignment to anyone else’s. You have your own work to do. **Are you doing it?**

If there is one lingering impression from our study of Matthew, it is that Jesus knew who He was and repeatedly told people, although indirectly at times. Those who wanted to know who He was would know; those who did not would be confused or unenlightened. I pray that this study has enriched your life as it has mine and I hope you will continue to read, study and gain even more insight into the greatest story ever told – that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Amen.