

## Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Lecture 19, Matthew 27-28

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Matthew. This is session 19, Matthew 27- 28.

The soldiers had to draft a bystander, Simon of Cyrene, to carry Jesus' cross, at least this horizontal beam for him.

Now, Mark tells us that this was the father of Alexander and Rufus. So, this was somebody who was known to Mark's audience. And if Mark was writing to Rome, that would make sense, because a lot of people moved to Rome.

And actually, it wouldn't have been a lot of the Jewish believers in Jerusalem actually left at a certain point, according to the book of Acts, although then they had other believers, people becoming believers afterward. But the Romans drafted Simon of Cyrene to do this. Now, what was Simon of Cyrene's background? Cyrene was a very large city in Cyrenaica, in Libya, in North Africa.

And it was not entirely populated by people from the surrounding countryside. Maybe some scholars estimate it was about one-third indigenous Libyans, about one-third Greeks who settled there, and about one-third Jewish. It had a very large Jewish community until later on they were pretty much obliterated in a genocide.

But Simon of Cyrene, well, the name Simon is a Greek name, but it was a Greek name that was extremely popular among Jews. And the reason it was so popular among Jews is it was very similar to the patriarchal name Simeon.

And so, it was a common Jewish name. The fact that the guy is here for the Passover might suggest he's Jewish, he's come to observe the Passover. On the other hand, he may have settled in this area, but if he settled in the area, probably he settled in the area because he was Jewish.

I mean, it wouldn't be the friendliest area for you if you were a Gentile necessarily. Right around Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Maritima, that was different. But in Jerusalem and in the area around Jerusalem, he's coming in from the field.

But if he's Jewish, he's not coming in from the field because he's worked the field. This is Passover. You don't work the field during the Passover festival.

So, he's coming in from the field. Jerusalem was overpopulated during Passover. You could maybe stay in Bethany where Jesus had been staying part of the week, on the Mount of Olives.

You could stay in the outskirts of Jerusalem. But even though a lot of people were hospitable, some people just would have to set up tents. In any case, Simon of Cyrene is coming in.

And the Romans, remember, they're allowed to draft people into the service temporarily. They're allowed to take their donkeys or whatever if they need them. So, they get him to do it.

There's no reason to, they don't want to do it themselves, and Jesus apparently can't do it. So, it was customary to scourge people, but he was probably scourged a lot. Otherwise, they would have probably made him do it the whole way by himself.

So, Jesus is crucified. And unlike the nice pictures, he probably didn't have a loincloth on. Normally, people were executed naked as a matter of shame.

They would be stripped naked for the beating as well. And crucifixion was to be the most shameful form of execution. It was for revolutionaries and slaves.

The only thing that I know of that sounds almost as horrible as that that was used by the Romans is a very horrible punishment. It's one to which Jesus alludes. Jewish people weren't allowed to do this.

But when Jesus talks about, if you cause one of these little ones to stumble, it would be better to have a millstone hung about your neck and for you to be thrown into the midst of the sea. That's back in Matthew 18. Well, a millstone, the term that's used there, by the way, is not just a regular millstone that a woman would grind in a small mortar and pestle, just grinding with a millstone there.

This was a donkey millstone. It was a community millstone, the kind for a village where the donkey would walk around and turn a millstone and grinding grain that way. It was a huge millstone.

And what Romans would sometimes do, they would sometimes, this was especially in the case of somebody was guilty of murdering their father or their mother, they would sew them into a sack with a serpent, a scorpion, and a cat, tie it shut so the person would be being stung by the scorpion, and then they would throw it into the river Tiber or water so the person would drown. Probably wasn't very healthy for the cat either, but anyway, that's another story. So, in the case of crucifixion, this was meant to be death by slow torture.

Sometimes took people a few days to die. If they didn't want them to take that long to die, they could take a mallet and break their legs so they couldn't keep holding themselves up so that they could keep breathing. And with the Sabbath coming on, that's what's asked for in the Gospel of John.

But in any case, they would be crucified naked. It was the most shameful form of execution. It was death by slow torture.

You'd have all these wounds from the scourging, especially on your back. You'd probably have some on your front too. You couldn't swat the flies away from your wounds.

In terms of excreting waste, it would just come out in front of everybody. Highly humiliating, although that wasn't the worst part of it, I'm sure. If the person survived a blood loss, normally if a person was scourged very heavily or they were nailed to a cross, they could die fastest from blood loss, if not that, from dehydration, especially during the daylight.

The night could be cold, but during the daylight, especially many times of the year, you would die of dehydration. But if you survived all those things, ultimately you would die of asphyxiation. Because in the position on the cross, your diaphragm wouldn't be able to keep forcing the air into your lungs unless you could push yourself up on the cross.

So sometimes they would have a little pedestal for the feet at the bottom of the cross. Of course, Jesus' feet were nailed. But eventually, the person would die.

And even if they were taken down from the cross, they were often so weakened that they would die. People weren't normally taken down from the cross, but Josephus gets the Romans to take down three of his friends when they're crucified. He sees them and he says, oh, please take these ones down.

These are my friends. And he takes them down. Two of them die anyway, despite medical treatment, because they had been so damaged by the crucifixion.

Under Roman law, the execution squad got any of the prisoners' possessions that were still in his possession. A contubernium was a squad of eight soldiers. Those were the ones who shared a tent.

Normally just half of them would be sent for work details like this. So, it may just be four of them working on this work detail. And they can cast lots for his clothing, which of course, in Psalm 69, they cast lots.

You could cast lots for the clothing. And soldiers did things like that all the time. We actually know that they played with knuckle bones and things like that at the fortress Antonia to keep themselves entertained.

We found some of the things that they played. But the person would, something that Jesus had was a really nice garment, and dividing it would just, it wouldn't be as good. So, they cast lots for that, but the other things they could divide among themselves.

The titulus, the title, would list the *causa peni*. I have had Latin, but please forgive my pronunciation. I do not know how they pronounced it in the first century, and I don't know how Latin is properly pronounced now either.

But in any case, for those who still use it in certain circles. But in any case, the title often listed the cause of punishment. And in this case, it's the king of the Jews.

And so, they're dividing his garments. Their interest is in other things. There are other people in the other crosses who are being executed.

But then they offer him wine mixed with myrrh, according to Mark, or mixed with gall, according to Matthew. Now, myrrh, some scholars have argued that when wine was mixed with myrrh, it had a soporific effect. It was a kind of wine that would help deaden the pain.

I don't know if that's true or not. There's been a debate about it. But wine in general, Proverbs 31 talks about, you know, give it to somebody who's suffering.

It could be used to deaden the pain in general. In this case, Matthew says wine mixed with gall because he doesn't want you to miss the allusion to Psalm 69, one of the psalms of the righteous sufferer. Psalm 22, and Psalm 69, these psalms talk about a righteous sufferer who's unjustly suffering.

Well, if that could apply to a righteous sufferer in general, it applies par excellence to Jesus. And the Gospels sometimes highlight ways that this was, some of the details even of these psalms were fulfilled in Jesus' case. So they give him this, but Jesus refuses to drink the painkiller.

He came to embrace our pain, so he embraced it in full measure. For the very disciples who abandoned him, who denied him, even betrayed him, Jesus offered his life for us. How great is his love for us.

We do read later on in John's Gospel, Jesus says, I thirst, which may also fit one of these psalms. And they give him some sour wine. This was the kind of wine vinegar

that was popular among soldiers and among others that was like wine vinegar that was very cheap.

It was inexpensive, and so it was commonly used. And then he cried out, it is finished, in John's Gospel. Matthew is going to follow especially what Mark says, but first, we're going to talk about the other mockers.

There are people mocking Jesus. These people initially repeat Satan's temptation in chapter 4, verses 3 and 7, and especially the final temptation. The first two, if you're the son of God, do this.

And then the final temptation, well, you can be the king without the cross. The way that they speak of him, well, if this is really the son of God, let him do this. Let him prove it.

The way they speak of him evokes the Wisdom of Solomon 2:18. It was a Hellenistic Jewish work, probably from Alexandria, that had become widely circulated in the first century. For if the righteous person is a son of God, God will help him and deliver him from the hand of those who resist him. But in the Wisdom of Solomon, that's not the author speaking.

That's the wicked who want to condemn the righteous to death unjustly, who say that. And they say, well, we can let God deliver him because he claims to be a child of God and to have a good future. So, these people were condemned by their own words.

Remember what Matthew 12, verse 37 says. By your own words, you will be judged, even within the narrative. Their own words are judging them for people like people in Matthew's audience who would be familiar with these kinds of words.

And yet there's an irony in it. They say, ah, he said he could save others. Let him save himself.

They were right in a sense. He couldn't save himself if he were to save others, verse 42. They say you saw back in chapter 26, verses 39 and 42, that the father had a particular way for him.

Father, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done. If he would have come down from that cross, he would have gotten the people's allegiance.

They would have said, whoa, he really is the son of God. Sorry about all we did. We didn't really mean it.

But that wasn't the father's way for him. And these people, the ones in Jerusalem, who said his blood be on us and on our children, a generation later that judgment came when Jerusalem was destroyed. He didn't want that to happen.

How I wanted to gather you under my wings. We may love other people. We may want them to hear the truth.

We may want God to do some dramatic sign that will get their attention. And God does offer some signs. But ultimately, God is not manipulated.

And ultimately, sometimes we have to make the choice. We may love these people. We should love these people.

God loves these people. God wants us to love these people. But ultimately, submitting to the father's will is always to be our first choice.

Because he always knows best. And his plan was ultimately for the good news to go out to all peoples. Jesus models the kind of discipleship here that he tells us to follow.

Whoever wishes to save one's life will lose it. 10:39 and 16:25. Told the disciples and he followed it himself.

And finally, he cries out in the language of Psalm 22.1. It's not very likely that anybody would have invented this. This fits the criterion of embarrassment. Jesus crying out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? But it is interesting that Jesus would have known the context of the Psalm.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? But the Psalm ends on a note of deliverance. Jesus might be experiencing God-forsakenness. He might be experiencing this sense of abandonment.

The sense of alienation that he'd never had to experience before. But Jesus also would know that this cry belonged to a Psalm that ended with vindication. But the hearers who aren't followers of Jesus, don't get it.

They think he's calling Elijah. In Mark, it's Eloi, Eloi. He puts it in Aramaic.

Matthew, he's quoting it in Hebrew, Eli, Eli, my God, my God. Normally you're supposed to pray in Hebrew, certainly a Psalm in Hebrew. But Eli, well, that sounds like Eliyahu, Elijah.

And there was a strong Jewish tradition that Elijah would come to help rabbis in distress. He would come to deliver rabbis in distress. And so, they're laughing at him.

They're mocking him, saying, ha, he thinks he's a rabbi in distress. He thinks Elijah is going to help him now. It reinforces the picture of their folly.

You have something similar to that in Acts 17:18, where Paul is speaking to Stoic and Epicurean philosophers. These people are supposed to be so very smart. And Paul has been preaching to them about Jesus and the resurrection.

Jesus and Anastasios. It says that they thought that he was preaching to them foreign gods, foreign deities, plural, because Anastasios, resurrection, was also a woman's name in Greek. John Chrysostom, one of the early church fathers, pointed this out.

And it just reinforces for Luke's audience, that these people are supposed to be so smart. When it comes to what really matters, they don't have a clue. They don't understand it.

In the same way, these people, it's foolish. And the irony is, Jesus is not really calling Elijah. The irony is that Elijah was Jesus' forerunner in martyrdom.

Elijah had already come. The promised prophet, John the Baptist, had been martyred. Well, Jesus died around 3 p.m., which is close to the time of the evening offering in the temple in Jerusalem.

So close to the time when lambs were normally being sacrificed. In John's gospel, John tweaks some things in a few ways, especially in the passion narrative, where the passion narrative was really well-known. People would remember a lot of the details of it.

So, he tweaks it especially there so people will get bonus points as they think about what he says. But in John, Jesus is actually being crucified at the time of the major Passover lamb offering for the people in the temple. Of course, we have to be careful, because that's some later Jewish tradition about exactly when that was.

Obviously, they had to be offering Passover lambs all day long on the day before the Passover, because there were a lot of families who needed lambs. But anyway, you have signs of Jesus' death. Signs were expected at the death of the righteous.

Some of these signs are not in Mark. Some of them are in Mark. But if Mark didn't know the signs, or if Mark de-emphasized some of the signs due to the Messianic secret motif, Luke might have omitted them as well, because Luke is mainly following Mark at that point.

So just because you have something attested in only one place, if you have it multiply attested, well and good. But sometimes you have something attested only in one

place. I have a really good friend, whose name I won't mention at this point, but a really good friend, and he has argued that this is just an apocalyptic literary device.

The dead being raised here was just meant to be an apocalyptic symbol. My problem with that is, that I study Jewish apocalyptic. I make use of it when I'm looking at Matthew 24 and so on, but the genre of this text is not apocalyptic.

Much closer to this is the expected signs of the death of the righteous that we have, say, in rabbinic literature, in Jewish lore. When somebody righteous died, you'd expect some signs. Well, there were some signs already mentioned in Mark, and Matthew has some other ones.

Just because it's not in Mark, though, doesn't mean that Matthew didn't have sources for it. So, we can't really say Matthew didn't have sources. The darkness resembles a plague.

You have darkness often with judgments in the Old Testament, including the darkness in Egypt for a plague. Also, it was sometimes used for the end time as a judgment in Jewish texts. And also, I believe it's in Amos, it speaks of darkness at noon as a judgment.

So, you have this darkness for several hours. There is a Gentile writer named Thallus, who is cited by some Christian writers. Thallus was talking about this eclipse that happened and was trying to explain it naturalistically, saying it didn't have to do with Jesus' death.

Now, did Thallus know of an eclipse at that point? Because Luke's language can sound like it was an eclipse from the others. And even Luke, it doesn't have to be an eclipse. It could just be cloud cover.

But if it was an eclipse, does Thallus know that because Christians have told him that, or does he know it because he knows of an eclipse at that time? Well, there's no way to go back and check now. Thallus is long dead. Some things we can't corroborate because it's too many centuries later.

We don't have the evidence. But at least we have a clue, and that is that Thallus knew something about this as well. And he seems to be writing at a very early period.

So, this tradition seems to be very early. Also, we have some of the dead coming out of the tombs. That's the part that's most disputed.

It doesn't mean everybody got raised, but that some people got raised at Jesus' death. What that does show us, certainly theologically, I've just argued that there's no reason to dismiss it, but what that also shows us theologically is that it's Jesus'



death that's the basis for our new life. And of course, Jesus' resurrection will be that most.

You have an earthquake then; you're also going to have an earthquake with the empty tomb. And that also was sometimes associated with plagues, judgments, and with eschatology, or end-time things. The Gentile executioners end up being the first ones to acknowledge Jesus' identity after his death, and they acknowledge it even before his resurrection.

Well, moving on to verses 55 to 66, the guardians of Jesus' body. The male disciples are nowhere to be found. John says there was one, the beloved disciple, who followed to the cross.

But Mark is emphasizing the failure of the disciples, and the others go along pretty much with that, for the most part anyway. There were no male disciples there. The women were the ones who followed to the tomb.

Now, it's true that they risked less. Women were less likely to be executed than men, although it happened. They were less likely to be arrested and tortured than men, especially if people thought they were members of the family.

But they weren't considered normally a threat, but still, the women were taking a risk, and still, they were showing much more courage than the male disciples were at this point. Embarrassed to say he's a male, but in any case. Joseph of Arimathea is one of those rich people who made it through the eye of a needle.

Romans usually preferred to let criminals rot on the crosses, and let the birds pick the flesh off their bones, because if somebody was bad enough to be worth executing by crucifixion, then they were bad enough to refuse to let them be buried, even though in some Gentile tradition, somebody who wasn't buried couldn't enter the underworld. Or if they were mutilated, say the birds picked them apart, that's the way they entered the underworld. People who died at sea were considered a horrible thing because the ghost they thought would just hover above the water.

Jewish people didn't have all these views, but Judaism demanded burial. It's commanded in the Torah that you can hang somebody in a tree, but at nightfall, you take them down, you bury them. And so even Caesar one time had said that it was considered honorable to grant burial to your enemies.

He said I make war against the living, not against the dead. You can go ahead and take your dead and bury them. But Judaism demanded burial.

So, it's very unlikely that if Pilate had agreed to what the chief priests brought Jesus to him for, it's very unlikely that if he agreed to that, he wouldn't also agree to the

local convention where it's expected that the bodies should be buried. And Romans sometimes would grant the bodies to family members, especially if Pilate didn't have any stake in this. No pun intended on the crucifixion, but if Pilate didn't have any stake in this, Pilate didn't even believe that Jesus was a threat.

Pilate probably believed Jesus was just like a sage. You know, in John's gospel, that becomes even clearer, because in John's gospel, Jesus says, I came to bear witness of the truth. And Pilate says, what is truth? And then he goes out and says, I don't find any fault in him.

Well, Jesus claims to be a king, but he says, my kingdom is not of this world. I came to bear witness of the truth. Romans were aware of cynic philosophers who, like a lot of other philosophers, thought that they reigned as kings, but they didn't mean it politically.

They often meant that they were wiser than kings and they ought to reign politically, but everybody knew that cynics were harmless. They were all political. They talked big, but Romans usually laughed at them.

There was an exception for a cynic in Rome who made fun of the new baths that had just been dedicated that day. They put him in prison for a while. But usually, they regarded these philosophers as harmless.

They were just harmless sages. And so, he could have viewed Jesus in the same way. Oh, yeah, king, but this is a king of a different kind.

It's not a practical king. This is just a harmless sage. So, he would have reason to hand over the body, but Joseph of Arimathea wouldn't have reason yet to know that.

This was a scary thing for Joseph to ask for the body because he could be identifying himself with the condemned, and he himself could be charged with *les maestras*. That is, he could be charged with high treason against the majesty of the emperor. His status and his wealth would not protect him, contrary to what you might think, because Roman governors especially liked to execute people of high status who had a lot of wealth because then they could confiscate their property.

And Pilate could have done that to Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph courageously asks for the body, and while the male disciples who've seen Jesus' miracles, who've followed him for years, who've heard what Jesus said, that he was going to die and rise again. Well, yeah, we all believe that there's going to be a resurrection at the end of the age, right? That was a common Jewish belief.

His disciples believed that anyway, but his disciples didn't get it, and it was mixed with too many other things. So, they were very discouraged. Their faith was shattered.

They were in hiding. Joseph of Arimathea has to come forward at this point. Now, something interesting here is the tombs in this area belonged to people with substance.

The early Christians seem to have preserved the accurate site. This is not the – you read about Gordon's Calvary and the garden tomb and all that. That's not an accurate site.

That was made up in the 19th century by someone well-meaning, but using typology, trying to figure out, well, and also the shape of a skull. The place of a skull may have been named that not because it was shaped like a skull. It may have been named that because there were skulls there because people were executed there.

Also, the shape, the contour, and the terrain have changed a lot in Jerusalem since the first century. Not only is the place where we believe Jesus really was executed, there's a rock quarry there, but also a lot of the terrain of the city was changed as they were throwing down the temple, filling in a valley, and so on. But early Christians probably did preserve the accurate site.

Remember, there's a Jerusalem church that is there up until the year 70. There are Christians there, followers of Jesus there. And the site of the Holy Sepulcher, whether it's exactly that tomb, it's very close to that site.

The tradition was preserved from very early, and one of the considerations in support of that is that archaeology shows that although this was inside the city walls by the year 44, it was outside the walls by the year 30. People were to be executed and buried outside cities. That was certainly a Jewish custom, but Romans believed in it too.

Normally, you execute a person and bury them outside the city walls. Well, it's inside Jerusalem's city walls now. What does that mean? The walls of Jerusalem were expanded by Herod Agrippa I, and Herod Agrippa I died in the year 44.

So, this tradition, nobody's going to make up a tradition that this is the site of Jesus' burial inside the city walls, where everybody knew you died and buried outside the city walls, and it's even stated in the New Testament outside the city walls. Nobody's going to make up a tradition about being buried in a place that's known to be inside the city walls. So, this tradition has to go back before the year 44, which means it goes back to within 14 years of Jesus' death and resurrection.

This is some very early evidence. So whatever other sites, I mentioned earlier the gate that is the Needles Eye or something like that, whatever else may be later, the Holy Sepulcher probably preserves the right site, probably the Nativity Cave in Bethlehem and some other sites do as well, but this one is very, very strong evidence. Jesus' resurrection.

We don't have any valid parallels to it. There was no expectation of it. When Gentiles talked about dying and rising gods, which sometimes became more popular later, there were some ideas of dying and rising gods.

But what they were talking about was seasonal revivification, somebody coming back from the underworld every spring as fertility returned to the earth. That's usually what you have in the Gentile myths. You don't have the idea of somebody bodily coming back to life.

In fact, that was a horrid notion of the Greeks. They thought of a corpse coming back, a scary corpse coming back, if they thought of anybody coming back from the dead. They didn't like that idea.

But the idea of a bodily resurrection goes back to Daniel chapter 12 and verse 2, and it was a Jewish concept. Jewish people expected the resurrection of the body, different ideas about what that would look like, how the body would be transformed, and so on, but it was a corporeal existence. It wasn't just a spirit floating around.

The disciples never would have been persecuted for saying they saw a ghost. Lots of people believed in ghosts, especially Gentiles, so no persecution for that. But some Jewish people believed in it too, even though it was inconsistent with their beliefs.

We don't have this idea of bodily resurrection among Gentiles, and this, again, clearly originated in Jerusalem. It clearly originated with the first disciples. It clearly originated very early.

First Corinthians 15, Paul says, I pass on to you the tradition that I received about all these people who saw Jesus alive from the dead. It goes back very early. And as far as an empty tomb, well, when Jewish people spoke of a resurrection, it wasn't something that left a corpse behind.

So, Paul doesn't have to mention the empty tomb. He's mentioned the burial. You can figure out what happened.

So, Paul mentions hundreds of witnesses. He says there were 500 witnesses, most just alive to this day. You can check it out if you want to.

Sometimes you have multiple witnesses on one occasion. He talks about multiple times that Jesus appeared. This doesn't fit anything we know about psychological apparitions.

You don't have multiple people having the same vision at the same time, normally, if it's just a hallucination. You don't normally have hallucinations also with multiple senses. And the odds against this being just a hallucination are incredible.

But here we have all these people, the credibility, they were prepared to die for the testimony. I mean, you have something like the Book of Mormon. Some of the original witnesses to Joseph's plates for the revelation, golden plates, some of them later denied their faith.

You have Charles Coulson who was involved in a scandal, a Watergate scandal, here in the United States. He said, you know, we were all so loyal to Richard Nixon. We would have died for him, we thought.

But the moment one person accepted a plea bargain and said, no, I'll tell you what really happened, the rest of us, he said, we all scrambled to save our necks and get our own sentence down as little as possible. People don't ordinarily die for something that they know to be a lie, especially a lot of people in collusion who all claim to be witnesses to something. These people all claim to be witnesses, presumably because they were witnesses.

Also, the Gospels mention women as the first witnesses. And that is something that you wouldn't expect them to make up because, under Jewish law, the witness of a woman wasn't worth very much. And this is not my view, I'm just saying what the view was under the law.

Some even said the witness of a woman was equal to that of a thief. The witness of a hundred women was equal to that of one man. Although women's testimony could be accepted under certain circumstances, like if you didn't have any men available.

But here we have men available too. In Roman law also, the witness of a woman was not very highly regarded. Josephus says that the witness of a woman should not be accepted because of the levity and temerity of their gender.

And Greeks talked about women being unreliable, unstable, and so on. So, common prejudice against women in antiquity. Why would the Gospels report women as the first witnesses? Presumably, because that's who God shows.

And of course, that fits the way we've seen God working through the Gospels. God chooses the lowly. He chooses the ones that other people despise as his witnesses.

And this was unanimous from the start of the Christian movement. We've got a lot of different views in early Christianity. We have vigorous debates about whether Gentiles need to be circumcised.

We have debates about whether Gentiles need to keep kosher. We have debates about a lot of other issues in early Christianity. But we don't have debates about the status of Jesus among people who claim to be his followers.

And we don't have debates about whether he rose from the dead. In fact, even the Corinthians, where Paul is trying to convince them to believe in their own future resurrection, believed in Jesus' resurrection. He said that's how you were converted.

I mean, I preached this to you and you believed it. And that's why you're followers of Jesus now. How can you not believe in the resurrection? But it wasn't expected precisely because people were expecting, and Jewish people were expecting a future resurrection of all the righteous at once.

They weren't expecting somebody to rise from the dead ahead of that schedule. The kingdom for us, though, we recognize is already not yet. The future is broken into history.

Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15. Jesus is the firstborn from among the dead, the New Testament says. His resurrection is the guarantee of our eternal hope that we also will be resurrected.

We live because he lives. And this took it beyond the debate between the Pharisees and the Sadducees over the resurrection. Because the Sadducees didn't believe in one, they had to work together sometimes with the Pharisees.

The Pharisees believed it was heretical to not believe in the resurrection. But for the Pharisees, it was a theoretical hope for the future. But for Jesus' followers, it was a decisive act of history.

Something that's already happened. Something that's already broken into history. God has proved his faithfulness.

God has vindicated his son, Jesus. And our resurrection is guaranteed because the resurrection has already begun. And that's why in Acts 4.4, the Sadducees, they're really upset.

Because here's Peter and John preaching, you know, you executed the Messiah. But it says in Acts 4.4, they're also upset because they were preaching in Jesus, the resurrection from the dead. The resurrection was a certain fact.

Chapter 28. I already talked about the Great Commission at the very beginning. The climax pulls together many of the motifs.

But here in the narrative, we also see something very striking. We see three different reports in a sense. The Great Commission summons us to proclaim the good news that Jesus has risen.

But there are two examples given before. Positive example and a negative example. In Chapter 28, verses 1 through 10, the women at the tomb become the first witnesses of the resurrection.

In fact, they're commissioned twice. They get it from the angel, they get it from Jesus. They are to let the male disciples know the good news that Jesus has risen from the dead.

And then we have the report of the guards, 28, 11 through 15. Well, stationing guards at a tomb to make sure that the body isn't stolen, nothing happens, nothing goes wrong. The guards give a report that's not plausible.

They say, well, the body was stolen. How do you know the body was stolen? Well, we saw the body stolen. So, wait a minute, you're the guards.

You're supposed to keep the body from being stolen. But you're there watching as the body is stolen. None of you are injured.

You don't risk your lives to carry out your commission. So, your report really isn't plausible. And yet, that's probably the very report that the guards circulated.

Because Matthew has no reason to make up a report that wasn't in circulation and say, well, this is the alternative view. This is what people were saying. People were saying the disciples stole the body.

Why would the disciples steal the body and then lay down their lives for that claim, as many of them went on to do? So, it's not plausible, but it's what the guards said. And Matthew's explanation for why they said it is fear and greed. And so, we have a choice laid before us.

Are we going to follow the example of the women and let people know the saving message that Jesus is risen, that he is Lord of the universe, and that he offers life to all those who give their lives to him? Or will we be like the guards who speak falsehood and deny the truth of Jesus' resurrection out of fear of what others might do to us, out of greed because of bribes, or greed to get ahead in life? Matthew makes it very clear what he expects because he concludes his gospel with the Great

Commission. We must be not like the guards, but like the women. And we must make disciples not only of Matthew's own people but of all the nations.

By going, by baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to observe all things that our Lord Jesus has commanded us.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Matthew. This is session 19, Matthew 27- 28.