

Dr. David Turner, Matthew

Lecture 12B – Matthew 28: The Resurrection of Jesus and the Mission of the Church

Welcome to Matthew lecture 12b. This is David Turner. Thank you for persevering through this class and coming to this final lecture.

It's my prayer that God will use all that we've done here in a way that will begin to equip you for further study in this book and that God will bless your ministry as you continue to preach and teach this book and study it more carefully. Our study of Matthew 28 has three main sections. First, we'll look at 28.1-10, the resurrection of Jesus.

Second, the report of the guards to the leading Jewish officials about that resurrection in 28:11-15. And then finally, we'll dwell quite a bit on the Great Commission in 28:16-20. First, the account of our Lord's resurrection in 28:1-10. The resurrection of Jesus is announced, not explained. The central focus of 28.1-10 is the empty tomb revealed by an angel, whose rolling away of the stone caused an earthquake. Then the angel showed the two women that their crucified master was no longer entombed where they had seen him buried on Friday evening, according to 27:61. The significance of the glorious angel and the empty tomb for the guards is so overwhelming that they faint.

For the faithful women, the significance is that Jesus is indeed the Messiah and that they no longer need to mourn him, but now they need to tell his disciples that he is risen. There are actually eight witnesses to the resurrection in this passage. The first is the Father, whose miraculous activity is the presupposition of everything else and who is the implied agent of all the passive verbs which state that Jesus will be raised up from 16:22 onward.

The second witness is the earthquake, which portends an apocryphal event, 28.2. The third witness is the glorious angel who actually makes the announcement in 28:6. The fourth witness is the empty tomb itself, which says nothing but signifies everything, 28:6b. The fifth witness is the faithful woman who hurried to announce the resurrection to the disciples in 28.8. The sixth witness is Jesus himself, who meets the women on their way and reiterates that he will meet the disciples in Galilee. The seventh witness is the guards who regain consciousness and tell the leading priests what has happened, 28:11. And then, finally, the eighth witness is the religious leaders whose conspiracy to deny the resurrection is ironically an indirect testimony that it's true. What of the theology of the resurrection? Although often relegated to Easter Sunday, the resurrection of Jesus is the heart of the Christian gospel.

Without the resurrection, the ministry of Jesus ends on a sad and pathetic note, but everything changes if he isn't here. He is risen from the dead, just like he said would happen, 28:6. The resurrection then is not only the climax of Matthew's passion narrative, but it's the heart of redemption itself. It may be helpful to remember that the resurrection of Jesus is the necessary prerequisite, the *sine qua non*, of several themes of Matthew's theology.

Without the resurrection of Jesus, there would be no Savior, since Jesus would have been a deluded liar instead of an exalted Lord. He had predicted several times that he would rise from the dead. If he didn't, he would be worthy only of pity, not faith and obedience.

Without the resurrection of Jesus, there would be no salvation, for Jesus' mission to save his people from their sins would have come to an ignominious end of a cursed person who hung upon a tree, Deuteronomy 21:22, and 23, and Galatians 3:13. Jesus would not drink the new wine that represented his redeeming blood in the Father's kingdom with his disciples. The blood of the new covenant would have been shed in vain, 26:27, through 29. Without the resurrection of Jesus, there would have been no apostolic foundation for the church, for it was the resurrection of Jesus that turned the deserters back into disciples, in 26:31, and 32.

What could have brought the scattered disciples back into the fold except the unbelievable yet true message brought to them by the two women, in 28, 7, and 10? What would Jesus have built his church upon if Peter and his fellow disciples had remained deserters and deniers? Without the resurrection of Jesus, there would have been no model of sacrificial living instead of selfish living. Jesus taught his disciples the oxymoron of a crucified life, convincing them that the truly abundant life is the life dead to self-interest, and that the truly miserable life is the life lived for self-interest. But this model is incomplete if Jesus' suffering does not end in glory, and if his cross is never replaced with the crown.

Going back in his teaching here to 10:38, and 39, 16:24, to 26, 20:26, to 28, 23:12, and let's toss in Paul in Romans 6: 1 through 11 for good measure. Without the resurrection of Jesus, there would have been no rectification of all the wrongs done on earth since the fall of humanity in Genesis 3. The blood of the martyrs would cry out for all eternity without vindication, 23:35. Compare Revelation 6:9 through 11.

Those who did evil and violence to their fellow humans would never give an account, and there would be no such thing as justice, 13:37 to 42, Daniel 12:2. The resurrection guarantees the final judgment of all mankind, 13:37 to 42, 16:27, 25:31, and compare with that Daniel 12:2, and Acts 17:31. Without the resurrection, Satan would win. Without the resurrection of Jesus, there would be no resurrection and reward of his people, 27:51 to 53.

At the heart of Jesus' ethical teaching is the eschatological promise of the coming kingdom, 4:17. That kingdom becomes the focus of the disciples' hope and values, 6:10 and 6:33. But how could the kingdom ever come to earth if it threw or remained in the grave? If Jesus remained in the grave, he could not be exalted to sit on his throne, and with his throne unoccupied, what would become of the twelve thrones promised to his apostles, and of the rewards he promised to all who left what this world has to offer for the sake of his name? Look at 6:19 through 21, 13:43, 19:27 to 29, and compare Daniel 12:3, Revelation 2:26, 27, and 3:21.

Well, to sum it up, without the resurrection of Jesus, there would be nothing. Therefore, those who wish to communicate the good news of Jesus the Messiah must make sure that they stress the resurrection of Jesus as the essential explanation of the significance of his death. Attempts to communicate the gospel in ways that gain the attention and understanding of the lost are laudable, but not if such encapsulation amounts to truncation.

Any so-called gospel that does not include a focus on the resurrection of Jesus is not the authentic message of Jesus and the apostles. Now the report of the guards in 28:11 through 15. In this passage, the soldiers who were guarding Jesus' tomb become evangelists of Jesus' resurrection.

What a turn of events! Previously, the leaders purported to need guards for fear that a resurrection hoax might occur. But those very guards report that a genuine resurrection has occurred. The leaders have outsmarted themselves, since the very guards they secured to prevent a potential problem can now testify to an actual problem.

Now, a hoax must be concocted, and money must change hands to ensure that everyone has the story straight. The minds of the Jewish leaders are already made up about Jesus, and they do not wish to be confused by the fact of his resurrection. This intensifies their guilt.

Perhaps they really believed that the disciples had used the occasion of an earthquake to steal the body, but most likely they made up the story with full knowledge that it was a lie. They had accused Jesus of being a deceiver in 27:63, and 64, but now they are the ones who willfully deceive people about Jesus. They had refused to believe Jesus as the ultimate interpreter of Moses and the prophets, and now they will not be persuaded when one is raised from the dead.

16:31, of Luke. However, one must never be pessimistic about the life-changing power of the gospel of Christ. Acts speaks of thousands of converts in Jerusalem, 24:1 and 44, many of whom were priests, according to Acts 6:7. Who knows? Perhaps the minds of these people were to change in the future about Jesus.

None of the alternative explanations of the resurrection of Jesus satisfactorily explain what is recorded here. The explanation that the disciples stole the body is patently false, and other theories fare no better. Some have theorized that the women visited the wrong tomb, or that Jesus on the cross had merely swooned and later revived, or that there was so much wishful thinking on the part of the disciples that they had a collective hallucination, and they all thought that they saw Jesus.

Only by an a priori worldview consideration, which rules out supernatural events up front, can one dismiss this account of Jesus' resurrection outright. It makes far better sense than any of these alternatives. Finally, to conclude our discussion of Matthew, the treatment of the Great Commission of Jesus.

First, let's talk about 28:16, and 17 and how they set the scene for the Great Commission. These verses set the scene for the Great Commission by explaining the meeting in Galilee that Jesus was to have with his disciples. This meeting is fitting since the disciples are native Galileans and would normally return home to Galilee after the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Given the previous association of Galilee with the Gentiles, look at 4:14 through 16, it is fitting that a mandate for mission to all the nations is given here. The disciples, only 11 in number now, obey the Lord's instruction and travel to a previously unmentioned nameless mountain which Jesus had evidently designated at some point, 28:10. The name of the mountain is unimportant, but the fact that Jesus meets them on a mountain reminds the reader of the giving of the Torah from Mount Sinai, as well as the previous mountain experiences in Matthew.

In 28:17, the preparation for the commission continues. When the disciples first see Jesus, like the two faithful women, they worship him; however, there is doubt. The word translated as "doubted" here occurs previously in 14:31 to describe the little faith of Peter in doubting as he walked on the water and saw the wind.

The word can be translated hesitated or wavered, and Blomberg, for example, argues that it doesn't refer to unbelief so much as to lack of spontaneous worship. But this is far from clear since the only other time the word is used in Matthew in 14:31, it is closely related to this familiar theme of little faith. Whether one thinks of the disciples' response as hesitant or doubting, it is surprising.

Now we come to the power of Jesus explained in 28:18. The Great Commission is the climax of the Gospel of Matthew. The discipleship mandate of 28:19 through 20a is sandwiched between two Christological assertions which have already been anticipated by Matthew.

The first Christological assertion is the statement that Jesus has been given all authority in 28:18. The second is that Jesus will be with the disciples all the days as they obey his mandate until the end of the age in 28:20b. God's bestowal of authority or power on Jesus echoes Daniel 17:13, and 14, 18:22, and 27. It also anticipates Paul's teaching on the glory of the exalted Jesus in a passage like Ephesians 1:20 to 23, Philippians 2:6 through 11, Colossians 1:15 to 20, and 1 Peter 3:18 through 22. There are many similarities between Matthew 28:18 and Daniel 7. In Daniel 7, the authority of the Son of Man passes from him to his community, and so it is in Matthew.

Jesus is given authority just as the Son of Man was. Jesus' mission for his disciples is a matter of him expressing his dominion over all nations and all people, just like that of the Son of Man. Matthew has stressed repeatedly that Jesus is the King who has the authority to forgive sins and to save his people.

Jesus now demonstrates this authority by word and deed. Hagner helpfully points out that the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus result in a sort of permanent transfiguration. The glory which the disciples saw briefly at the transfiguration is now the permanent mode of Jesus' life as the exalted Son of Man.

Now we move to Jesus' program in 28:19. It's crucial to note that this verse begins with therefore. The point is that Jesus, having been exalted, is now in a position to send his disciples forth in mission.

Their mission is possible because Jesus is potent. Jesus had already commissioned his disciples to take the message of the kingdom to Israel alone in 10, 5, and 6, compare 15:24, but now he commands them to take it to all the nations, perhaps echoing the promise of God to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, that his descendants would be a blessing to all the nations. Some take the term all the nations as all the Gentiles, and they exclude the Jews from this commission, but this is a mistake.

No doubt the priority is on Gentiles, but the mission to them is supplemental to the mission to Israel, not a substitute for it. Ongoing mission to Israel is assumed by 10:23. It is clear from the book of Acts that the practice of the apostolic church was to continue the mission to the Jews.

Universal lordship means universal mission, so say Davies and Allison. The central responsibility of the disciples is to reproduce themselves, to make more disciples. The other activities, such as go, baptize, and teach, essentially describe how a disciple is made.

A disciple is literally one who follows an itinerant master, as Jesus' disciples have done. But now Jesus is about to depart this world, and the term disciple takes on a

more metaphorical meaning. One now follows Jesus by understanding and obeying his teaching.

If the message of Jesus is to reach all the nations, the disciples will obviously have to go to them. Baptism will be the early step of new disciples, which initiates the church. Their baptism is distinct from Jewish ritual washings because it is a single act, not something repeated.

It differs from John's baptism because it is done with the triadic formula, which invokes the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Those who are baptized will need to be taught to obey Jesus' commands, 2820. All this implies the central role of the church as God's primary agency for mission.

Only in the church can disciples be baptized and taught to observe all that Jesus has commanded. According to 2820a, the mission mandate also involves teaching new disciples to obey all that Jesus commanded. One would expect that the major discourses of Jesus and Matthew would form the core of this teaching.

Walvard certainly errs in his 1981 commentary by excluding Jesus' interpretation of the law of Moses from what is taught and by restricting the word commands to the new commandment of John 13. This is nothing less than a bizarre interpretation. Since Jesus was a teacher, indeed the ultimate and definitive teacher of the Torah, it's not surprising that his disciples are to continue in this vein.

This teaching is not merely to convey information, but to change lives from disobedient to obedient behavior, in keeping with 5:17-20 and 7:21-27. The Great Commission, which began with Jesus' announcement that he had received all authority in 28:18, now concludes with Jesus' promise to be with his disciples constantly until the end of the age, the promise of his presence in 2820b. The disciples' responsibilities are indeed daunting, but they have amazing resources. They will need to drink deeply of both the power and presence of Jesus if they are to fulfill his program.

Jesus has already been called Emmanuel, God's presence on earth, God with us, 1:23. Compare Isaiah 7:14. Thus the promise he makes here to be with the disciples echoes his promise to be with them in the discipline process in Matthew 18 and forms an inclusio, that is to say, sort of bookends on the whole Gospel of Matthew around the theme of the presence of Jesus. By the virgin conception and birth, he becomes God's presence on earth in 1:23, and by the Spirit whom he sends to the church, he maintains his presence with God's people as they fulfill his program until the end of the age. Jesus' ministry demonstrated God's presence as the spirit enabled him to be God's servant in compassionately serving the scattered sheep of Israel 9:36 and those oppressed by Satan in 12:17-29. But now the disciples will

experience Jesus' presence in a new way, evidently through the same spirit which enabled him while he was ministering on earth.

Even during the difficult times of dispute and discipline, they may be assured that Jesus' presence and authority will guide their decisions 18:18-20. This presence is permanent, lasting until the end of the age. The expression end of the age has already been used previously in 13:39-40, 13:49, and 24:3. It clearly refers to the time of eschatological judgment at the conclusion of the present order. Here it is clear that this commission is not merely for the original disciples, but for the disciples of the disciples, and so on, in perpetuity until Jesus returns.

All during this time, there will never be a day when the presence of Jesus will not be with his disciples as they are busy about his business. According to Luke and John, after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples in Jerusalem. Luke 24:13-53, Acts 1:11, John 20:19-21:23. Of course, Matthew does not mention this Jerusalem appearance, and it is perhaps a bit difficult to iron all that out in terms of harmonizing the Gospels.

But according to Matthew 28, and Matthew's stress, of course, is upon the meeting of the disciples in their native Galilee to charge them with a mission which will endure throughout the age. They worship him when they meet him there, although some still doubt. 14:31. The remedy for this doubt will be found in the disciples' growing realization of Jesus' power and presence, truths which bracket the responsibilities of the mission program.

One is immediately struck by the repetition of the word all in this passage. Jesus has been given all authority. Disciples are to be made of all the nations.

Disciples are to obey all that Jesus commanded. And fourth, Jesus will be with the disciples always, which literally means all the days. The universality of Jesus' power and the perpetuity of his presence provide the dynamic for the universal discipleship mandate program.

The disciples will be able to disciple all the nations only as they recognize that Jesus has been given all authority and that he will be with them all the days until the end. The disciples can adequately address their present responsibilities of universal mission only if they reflect on the past empowerment and ongoing presence of their Lord. The universal task is daunting, but it can be done because of the power and presence of Jesus.

Let's just get real for a moment here. When you think about the weakness of the people of God and all the mistakes they make and the inadequacy of their resources, the command that Jesus gives us to take the gospel to all the nations and to teach all the nations all that Jesus commanded seems like something that can never be

accomplished. Who is sufficient for these things, as Paul put it in a different context? But, thank God, we are sufficient for this, not in ourselves, but in the power of Jesus, who, as Daniel's son of man in 7.13 and following, has been given all authority.

And his presence with us all the days until the end of the age comforts us and reminds us that we're not on our own. He is with us. So if we keep in mind the equipment that we have, we can win the battle that we've been assigned to.

Well, let's close our tapes on Matthew with a few comments on theology coming out of the Great Commission. Matthew's story of Jesus concludes with a short chapter, which describes the resurrection of Jesus, 28:1-10, the cover-up perpetuated by the Jewish leaders, 28:11-15, and the mandate of Jesus for discipling all the nations. The chapter covers the resurrection and post-resurrection appearances rather concisely, and lays stress upon the Jewish leaders' opposition to the resurrection and upon the mission mandate of the exalted Messiah.

Both these themes, the former negative and the latter positive, are by now familiar to the attentive reader of Matthew. There may be no better way to summarize the theology of Matthew than by following up on the themes found in the Great Commission. The setting of the Commission finds the restored disciples worshipping Jesus, but not wholeheartedly.

Throughout his gospel, Matthew has presented the weakness of the disciples. But all the same, Jesus still promises to build his church on their foundational ministries. The lesson that we must learn from this is that God's power can overcome our infirmities.

God can always use us in spite of ourselves. We're no different than the disciples were then. But in spite of that, with God's power and presence with us through Jesus and his Spirit, we can do the job.

Another reminder is that the Commission is based in Christology, as Jesus describes his kingly authority in terms taken from Daniel 7.13 and following. Here is Matthew's theology of the kingdom in a nutshell. This kingdom has both realized and unrealized elements.

Jesus has now been resurrected and exalted, and he appears on earth from God's right hand. So, the kingdom's presence has now been inaugurated even more fully than by Jesus' previous earthly ministry. But the disciples are yet to do their job while praying and longing for the full manifestation of the kingdom on the earth.

Matthew chapter 19 promises rewards along those lines at the end of that chapter. The Great Commission is also concerned with making true disciples who obey Jesus, not just casual hangers-on who may listen to his message without doing it.

Remember in Matthew 7, Jesus spoke of the false prophets, and he spoke of those who build their house on the sand, so to speak, which is a picture of those who hear his word but do not obey it.

That theme echoes throughout Matthew, and here it is at the end. Disciples that are to be made by the disciples are to be, you know, those who will continue to do what Jesus says. They will be taught to obey all of his commandments.

And these disciples are to be made not only from Israel but from the nations, where eager converts reminiscent of many people in Matthew's narrative will be found. Here it becomes more clear why Matthew's narrative stressed the Gentile women in Jesus' genealogy, and why the wise men come out of nowhere to worship Jesus, and why the Roman officer in chapter 8 has this remarkable faith which is unlike any Jesus has found in Israel, and how the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15 somehow, miraculously almost, seems to know who Jesus is and believes in his power, and how even the Roman soldiers who crucified Jesus are forced to admit that in some sense Jesus was truly the Son of God. All of these and other hints which Matthew has dropped in his narrative previously now come to a head here in Matthew 28, verse 18 and following, where the commission stresses that the gospel is to be taken to all the nations.

If the church does not believe that all the nations will believe in the gospel, then all these hints that Matthew has dropped about openness of certain Gentiles to Jesus will certainly make that mission mandate one that we are more enthusiastic to go after. We also note that the universal mission of Jesus has cosmic implications. That is to say when people from all nations are discipled, a new humanity begins to be formed, a new community of believers in Jesus which goes way beyond ethnic things which divide us, the black or white or yellow or whatever, or social distinctions which divide us, such as Marx envisioned in his proletariat working class versus the bourgeois landowners, or even sexual difficulties which we face today with chauvinism versus feminism and no way to reconcile it.

The way that we will all be reconciled as a new humanity will be as we learn to follow together all the teachings of Jesus. In this way, obedience to the mission mandate turns out to fulfill as a byproduct the original creation mandate which God gave to humanity's first parents in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were to be stewards of God's earth, and now through Christ we as their ultimate descendants by natural birth and God's descendants by spiritual birth can begin to make that happen in view of the ultimate new heavens and new earth.

As the disciples take Jesus' message to all the nations and make disciples of them, they will experience the faithful Immanuel presence of Jesus. Through the Spirit Jesus will tell them what to say when they are under duress from outsiders, as in chapter 10, and he will be in their midst when they ask for wisdom in dealing with

internal problems, as in chapter 18. This presence of Jesus will end only when the age ends at his return.

At that time, the disciples' enemies will be judged and their sacrificial service will be rewarded Matthew 19:27 and following. This will lead to nothing other than a regeneration of the world itself, and obedience to Jesus the exalted Messiah will no longer be partial. God's will finally be done on earth as it is in heaven.

May God bless you as you continue to serve him and think about this great book, the Gospel of Matthew. Sola Deo Gloria. To God alone be glory.