

*The Resurrection and Commission of Jesus Christ**Matthew 28**Jimmy Snowden**Introduction*

Turn with me to Matthew 28 as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is by far the most important event in the history of the world. There has never been nor will there ever be a more definitive event than the resurrection. All of God's redemptive work stands and falls upon the literal, historical, bodily resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, we would be without hope—we would still be in our sins. Paul makes this very point in 1 Corinthians 15:17, 19;

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins... If we have placed our hope in Christ for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone.

This morning we are going to look at Matthew's account of the resurrection of Jesus. It is my contention that there is a logical flow from 28:1 all the way to 28:20. And although it would be appropriate to preach more than one message on Matthew 28, there is such tight cohesion from verse one to end of the chapter that it would be a mistake to divorce any one verse from its part in the larger context. In other words, it would be a mistake to read the actual account of the resurrection (28:1-10) without considering its implications for our post-resurrection lives (Matthew 28:16-20), and it would be a mistake to read the Great Commission (28:16-20) divorced from an understanding of its ultimate foundation in the bodily resurrection of Christ (as described in 28:1-10). This morning I am going to first lay out the flow of the narrative in Matthew 28 and then I am going to suggest two ways in which the resurrection should impact our lives.

The Flow of the Narrative

Matthew's resurrection narrative is actually much shorter than that of the other Gospels (save, possibly, Mark). There are generally two ways of dealing with the Gospel accounts of the resurrection (or of any other account in the Gospels that is shared by more than one Gospel author). Preachers/teachers either seek to 1). gather the all of the data presented in each of the Gospels with an attempt to reconstruct with exact precision the chronology of the event(s) or 2) they focus on one Gospel writer and present the event(s) as that one Gospel writer presented it with an attempt at discovering the uniqueness of that one writer's emphasis. I am going to be taking the second approach this morning. In other words, this morning we will not be looking at all the different resurrection accounts in each of the four Gospels; rather, we will be looking at Matthew's account alone, seeking to discover the Spirit's unique resurrection emphasis through Matthew.

It must be said that no Gospel writer records everything that there was to record in regard to the resurrection. For example, although Matthew does not even mention Jesus' appearance to the disciples in the locked room as does Luke and John, Luke and John do not mention the earthquake that took place when the angels descended to the tomb; although Matthew neither mentions the appearance of Jesus to the two men on the road to Emmaus as Luke does nor the post-resurrection fishing miracle (and everything that follows) as does John, neither Luke nor

John recount the deal which was struck between those guarding the tomb and the chief priests to propagated a lie about what ‘really happened’ with the body of Jesus as does Matthew. Each of the Gospel writers share different parts of the same story. Although this may make some doubt the authenticity of the Gospel records, anyone seriously looking at the evidence will realize that there was simply too much to share to expect each of the Gospel writers to all share everything that took place. Consider what John says in John 21:25.

And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which, if they were written one by one, I suppose not even the world itself could contain the books that would be written.

There was simply too much to share. The Gospel writers had to be selective in what they did and did not share. When you take a look at Matthew’s Gospel, although it may be a large book to preach through, it is actually quite short according to modern day literature. Surely, Matthew is comprised of 28 chapters, but these chapters are not the standard length of a chapter in a modern day book. If you were to compile the contents of Matthew and arrange it into the format of a modern day book, it would be somewhere around 30-40 pages in length; roughly one to two chapters in a standard book. How were the disciples supposed to write exhaustively about the birth, life, teachings, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ in 30-40 pages? Imagine if one of President Obama’s chief advisors was given the assignment to write a 30-40 page account of the birth, life, political theory, and presidency of President Obama. He would respond, “I only get 30-40 pages? Do you realize how much has taken place in this first year of Obama’s term as President alone?” Well, this was the same sort of assignment that was given to the Gospel writers.

It also goes without saying that writing was not what it is today. Today we have no problem cranking out reams and reams and reams of paper. Big huge logs are sent from the forest to the factory and within a matter of hours thousands upon thousands of pages of paper are ready for cheap and accessible use. Not so in the ancient world; paper was not so easily accessible and neither was ink. Writing was a costly and labor-intensive project.¹

Many of the differences in content between the Gospel writers is simply answered in light of two factors; 1. writing was not what it is today—it was much more labor-intensive and costly and thus they had no choice but to limit what they could record and 2. there was so much to write about, which meant that the writers had to be extraordinarily selective in regard to what they shared and did not share. However, often times the writers of the Gospels had theological reasons for why they included certain seemingly less important data and/or omitted certain seemingly more important data.

So this leads us to the question; ‘Why does Matthew present the resurrection story the way that he does?’ We must be content with the fact that some of these sorts of questions are unanswerable to us given the data that we have to work with. However, I do believe that Matthew had a good reason to include what he included and to leave unsaid what he left unsaid. Matthew had a specific agenda in his retelling of the resurrection story. This does not mean that Matthew warped the actual account, but it does mean that Matthew retold the story in such a way to make a point.

¹ To learn more about writing in the ancient world see http://www.lib.umich.edu/papyrus_making/slides.html; <http://bible.org/seriespage/transmission>; http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jma/nts-mss_2_arlandson.pdf

Before we move on to actually discuss why Matthew told the resurrection story in the way that he did, we should first get a bird's eye view of his account—we first need to get a basic idea of what Matthew did decide to share. There are essential 6 main details which Matthew includes in his account. I will list them for you. 1. Women Come: Mary Magdalene and the other Mary come to the tomb (see 28:1). 2. Angel's Descend: Two angels descend to the tomb causing an earthquake, the stone to roll back, and the guards to be stunned (see 28:2-4). 3. Angels Announce and Command: The angels report to the women that Jesus had risen (the announcement) and then give them orders to tell the disciples to meet the risen Christ in Galilee (the command; see 28:5-7). 4. Jesus Appears and Commands: The women quickly leave to tell the disciples both the news about the risen Christ and the angel's instructions about meeting Jesus in Galilee—on their way the risen Christ meets them (His appearance) and reminds them to tell the disciples to meet Him in Galilee (His command; see 28:8-10). 5. Guards Propagate: The guards agree with the chief priests (of all people) to propagate a lie about the resurrected body of Jesus (see 28:11-15). 6. Jesus Appears and Commissions: The disciples meet with Jesus at Galilee (His appearance) where He gives them the Great Commission (His commission; see 28:16-20).

There are three observations that must be made about Matthew 28 on the whole. 1. Notice that there are only two appearances of the resurrected Christ in Matthew. He appears once to the women (28:9-10) and once to the disciples (28:16-20). 2. Notice the similarity between the words of the angels and the words of Christ. They both include a statement of comfort (do not be afraid) and a command (Get to Galilee). 3. Notice the emphasis on Galilee. The angels tell the women to tell the disciples to get to Galilee (28:7), Jesus reiterates the command to get to Galilee (28:10), and then in 28:16 we finally see the disciples getting to Galilee. It is quite clear that Matthew is doing everything he can to throw attention to Jesus' appearance in Galilee. Why else, when there was so much to comment on, would he make mention of Galilee, repeating the same command twice (vs. 7 and 10), if his purpose was not to put emphasis on the disciple's meeting with Jesus at Galilee?

Why do you suppose Matthew put such great emphasis on Galilee? There are three definite answers to this question. I am going to lay them all out, but I am only going to focus on the last one because it is, in my estimation, the most important. *First, the disciple's meeting with Jesus in Galilee was worthy of attention because their meeting with Jesus in Galilee was fulfillment of Jesus' own words in Matthew 26:31-32.*

³¹ Then Jesus said to them, "Tonight all of you will run away because of Me, for it is written: **I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.** ³² But after I have been resurrected, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."

Our text in Matthew 28:16-17 is clearly a fulfillment of this promise in 26:31-32. Jesus clearly prophesied that He would meet with His disciples in Galilee after He had risen from grave. *Second, although I am not going to explain the significance of Galilee from Matthew 4:12-16 as the fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1-2, it would be hard to miss the centrality of Galilee as the ministry headquarters of Jesus.* At this point all I will say is that the Matthew did not do backflips to force Christ into Isaiah 9:1-2. In fact, I believe that Matthew tying the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee to Isaiah 9:1-2 is one of the more significant pieces of prophetic furniture in Matthew's Gospel (and *especially* in light of the context of Isaiah 7-9).

Third, and most important of all, let me suggest to you that Matthew's emphasis on Galilee has less to do with Galilee itself and more to do with the message Jesus had to deliver the disciples at Galilee. So often we so emphasize the Great Commission as an entity in itself that we miss the fact that the Great Commission is a resurrection appearance of Christ. *It is my contention that Matthew's goal in chapter 28 is to sling shot his readers from the empty tomb to the commission so that the reader might see that the commission and the resurrection are intimately connected.* Remember now that Matthew only records two of the many post-resurrection appearances of Christ. Although Jesus does appear to the women on their way to tell the disciples to announce the resurrection of Jesus and to tell them to meet Jesus in Galilee (as the angels instructed), Matthew communicates that the purpose of this appearing was to put greater emphasis on the responsibility of the women to tell the disciples to get to Galilee. Jesus says very little to these women (at least in Matthew's account), stressing the importance of the disciples getting to Galilee. These two appearances (the one to the women which stressed getting the disciples to Galilee and the actual Galilee appearance where Jesus issued the Great Commission) are the only two appearances that Matthew relays to us. I do not think that this is a mistake on Matthew's part.

Matthew refrains from sharing many of the post-resurrection appearances that the other Gospel writers share. Why do you suppose this to be the case? Because his purpose is not to load the reader with proof after proof after proof that Jesus had risen, but rather to show that the resurrection and the commission are inherently tied together. There are two main reasons that we have a difficult time seeing this emphasis; 1. because we are so used to divorcing the Great Commission from its context, treating it as a self-existing behemoth, and 2. because the recounting of the making of the lie that the chief priests and tomb guards told sort of stunts the clear flow of the text (this is not to suggest that Matthew made a mistake by placing it where he did, but it certainly does make connecting the dots of the story much more difficult). In light of this second reason for not reading the Great Commission as the climax to the resurrection narrative in Matthew 28, I personally have found it helpful to, for the sake of connecting the dots, read Matthew 28 once or twice while skipping over verses 11-15 (not that these verse are not important—they certainly are!—but, as is often the case when it comes to reading Scripture we have the tendency to lose the flow of thought if the author digresses to a sub point for even one or two verses).

Matthew's goal is to slingshot his readers from the empty tomb to the Great Commission. I believe that this is why Matthew does not add all of the extra-resurrection appearances that Luke and John do. Even the first appearance by Jesus to the women on the road was really buttressed by Matthew to put greater emphasis on Jesus' future meeting with the disciples in Galilee. Why would he want to do this—why would Matthew want to put so much emphasis on the Great Commission resurrection appearance of Jesus? His goal was to show that the resurrection must never be divorced from the commission and that the commission must never stand alone. ***The commission is born out of the resurrection, and the resurrection is the foundation for the commission. To put it another way, the resurrection is the motor for mission. If Jesus had not risen from the grave, there would be no mission.*** Why would Jesus' disciples make disciples of a dead guy who claims to give eternal life to those who will follow Him?

It really is true, all of Christianity stands and falls upon the resurrection. If Jesus had not risen from the grave, there would be no hope; there would be no reason to 'go make disciples.' But, the fact is that Jesus has risen from the grave. And the second post-resurrection appearance

of Christ recorded by Matthew is His victory speech. Look at what He says to His disciples at Galilee.

Then Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

You can imagine the anticipation as ‘Jesus came near.’ I try to imagine what Jesus’ countenance would have been like when He commissioned His disciples. I cannot help but see the look of victory on His face. Really, this Great Commission is a victory speech. I cannot see a somber look on His face here. I cannot imagine the words recorded here by Matthew coming off the lips of Jesus in the tone of a Gregorian chant. What I imagine here is the happy tone of informal, ecstatic, and spontaneous celebration. You might imagine a basketball coach excitedly giving his victorious team a Hoorah speech after they won the title. The coach is not somber in his victory speech, he is beaming. Similarly, Jesus must have been beaming. He must have had a smirk of victory. He must have been doing fist pumps as He announced victory over sin, Satan, and the grave. In other words, Jesus here, in his post-resurrection state, announces to His disciples that He has risen victorious. He says, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” By virtue of the resurrection He has been given all authority. After reading Jesus’ victory speech in Matthew 28:18 you can understand where Paul got his material in Philippians 2:10-11. Notice how the words which communicate *universal* authority (words like “all” and “every” and “in heaven and on earth”) extend from the lips of Jesus to the lips of Paul.

“God also highly exalted Him and gave Him the name which is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

This is Jesus’ resurrection declaration; He has risen victoriously, having gained universal authority. Sin, Satan, and death have been defeated, the grave could not hold him, and He has, through His death, effectively redeemed sinners, reconciling them with the Father. As John in Revelation 5:9 says,

“And they sang a new song”—it is a song of victory—“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals; because you were slaughtered and You redeemed people for God by Your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

So Jesus has marshaled His disciples to Galilee to declare to them His triumph over sin, Satan, and death. Moving from Matthew 28:18 to 28:19 we see that the practical outworking of such victory is mission. We know this from the presence of the word “therefore” in 28:19.

Go, *therefore*, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.

We are to “go... and make disciples of **all** nations.” Why are Jesus’ disciples to go make disciples of **all** the nations? Because Jesus has been ‘given **all** authority.’ I cannot stress how important the word ‘therefore’ is in this context. Jesus has risen victorious, having been given **all** authority, and this is the logical foundation for the mission to make disciples of **all** the nations. The resurrection is the motor of the great commission and the great commission is the natural outworking of the resurrection. He then ends the commission with a promise that His **all** authoritative presence will be with his disciples as they ‘go’, thus ensuring success.

Resurrection Application

At this point I want to merely set forth two basic applications from Matthew 28.

We must ‘go’ victoriously, with the authority of the resurrected Christ.

We are on the winning team, as it were. The Great Commission was a victory speech; it was a ‘Where-do-we-go-from-here-now-that-You-have-defeated-sin-Satan-and-the-grave?’ speech. The battle is not over—all authority has been given to the Son and now He continues to reign in victory through His people. So many Christians have a downcast attitude about the advancement of the Kingdom of Christ. We must challenge ourselves to be more effective soul winners, but we must never become subject to a debilitating negative view of the advancement of Christ’s kingdom on this earth. This One who has risen in victory is still the ever-present Immanuel—empowering us to ‘make disciples of all the nations.’

On a similar note, we must go with an understanding of the One who has commissioned us. We have not been sent out in the name of Richard Simmons to call all men to repent; we have not been sent out in the name of Paris Hilton to make disciples of all the nations; we have been sent out in the name of the One who has defeated the grave; we have been sent out in the authority of the One who has been given ‘all authority’.

I am telling you right now that this is going to become an ever-increasingly important truth for us to cling to. We live in a postmodern culture. In our postmodern culture the only *real* sin is presuming that you know more than the next guy. The ultimate evil in postmodern culture is not rape or molestation or murder or anything of the sort, but rather the claim to know absolute truth, and worse, the assertion that your hold absolute truth has direct bearing on others. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard people repeat the same ol’ postmodern maxims; “What makes you think that your way to heaven is the only way?” “What makes you think that your God is the only god?” “What makes you think that you are right and I am wrong?” It is becoming increasingly less cool to claim that you know anything for sure, and much more demonic to suggest that someone might be wrong. For postmoderns the only truth that can be asserted is that there is no truth.

You will be made to feel like an arrogant bigot when you shamelessly proclaim the fact that there is salvation in no one other than Jesus. You will be labeled a breaker of the worst of sin—declaring yourself to be right and anyone who disagrees wrong. The thing to remember, however, is that you are not proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ because you made it up; you are proclaiming it because He proclaimed it. The One who has been given all authority by virtue of the fact that the grave could not hold Him is the One who first proclaimed it. Whenever a person rejects you they are not rejecting you, they are rejecting the One who has been given all authority, the one who has risen from the grave.

Love the people of this world—out serve them, out love them, out good them, but never ever apologize for or water down the universal authority of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If the Gospel message is not binding upon all, then it is not a true Gospel. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not a Gospel to be ashamed of. Proclaim it in love, but communicate it with the authority of Christ. Never water down the universal authority of Christ. When contested, stand upon His authority—after all, He is the one who has sent you out. Do not be afraid to appeal to His authority when you are chastised for being certain that Jesus is the only way. If He did not want you to appeal to His universal authority, He would not have sent you out in His universal authority. Don't be afraid to say something like this; 'Sir (or mam), I know that what I am saying sounds egotistic to your postmodern ears, but I want you to know that I didn't make this up. Jesus, the One who has been given all authority, commissioned me with this universally binding Gospel. I proclaim what I proclaim only because I know that the One who defeated the grave proclaimed it first and then sent me to follow suit.'

2. *All men are under His authority*

If you are reading this you need to know that you are under the authority of the risen Christ as well. Consider what Paul says to the Athenians in Acts 17:30-31 (notice, once again, how words which communicate *universal* authority extend from the lips of Jesus to the lips of Paul).

“God now commands *all people everywhere* to repent, because He has set a day on which He is going to judge *the world* in righteousness by the Man He has appointed. He has provided proof of this to *everyone* by raising Him from the dead.”

Notice that the Gospel which Paul preaches is universally binding upon all men. Notice Paul's emphasis on “all people everywhere” And notice that God “*commands* all men everywhere *to repent*.” If you do not repent by obeying the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you will be judged by Christ. Notice also that Paul emphasizes the fact that Jesus has been given authority to judge ‘the world’ (emphasizing His universal authority once again) by virtue of His resurrection. To not repent by receiving Christ as your Lord and Savior is to choose rebellion against God.

I urge you this morning to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Consider the implication of His resurrection for your life. If you continue in your rejection of Him, His resurrection is surety of your judgment, but if you receive Him His resurrection is the surety of your hope for eternal life. I pray that you might feel the weight of your need for His grace to cover your sins; for God has set a day when Jesus, the resurrected One who has been given all authority, will judge you. How will you fare on that day? Jesus' standard of judgment will be how you responded to Him and His offer of forgiveness. Will you receive Him now? Will you repent and believe?

Conclusion

Jesus' resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. If Jesus did not rise from the grave there would be no hope for us. But the Father did raise Him from the grave. Jesus rose victorious, having been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Jesus' resurrection authority is universal. It is the motor of our mission as the people of God, and it is a clarion call to all who do not know Christ to repent and believe. The resurrection ought to bring about a sense of urgency to the one who does not believe to “Seek the Lord while He may be found; call to Him while He

is near” (Isaiah 55:6). He has defeated the grave; He has risen victorious over sin, Satan, and death. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of our hope of eternal life, the engine of our universal mission, and the catalyst for urgently seeking Christ alone for salvation.