

⁵⁷ Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸ This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. ⁵⁹ When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, ⁶⁰ and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed. ⁶¹ And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb. ⁶² On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, ⁶³ saying, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.' ⁶⁴ Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first." ⁶⁵ Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how." ⁶⁶ So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.

Now after the Sabbath, as the first *day* of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. ² And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. ³ His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. ⁴ And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. ⁷ And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you." ⁸ So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word. ⁹ And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me." ¹¹ Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. ¹² When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, ¹³ saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' ¹⁴ And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure." ¹⁵ So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day. ¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. ¹⁷ When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen.

Introduction

If you have been attending this Church over the last 5 weeks you will know that we have been following Matthew's account of the Easter story.

We now come to the final section.

In this section Matthew concentrates upon three things. These are;

1. The burial of the body of Jesus.
2. The resurrection of the body of Jesus.
3. The commission by Jesus to make disciples of all nations.

1. The Burial of the body of Jesus – Chapter 27: v. 57-66.

The burial of the body of Jesus is often passed over by many preachers and teachers of the Bible as not being interesting or significant.

However, Matthew is clear that he wants to teach us something about this event that we must not miss.

Before we come to this passage I would like you to understand that the God of the Bible rules this world in two ways.

God rules this world through “Miracles” and through His “Sovereign Providence”.

In order for God to accomplish His purposes in this world, He sometimes supernaturally interrupts the natural processes that He has ordained and ordered Himself.

He overrules what we sometimes commonly call natural law, like the law of gravity etc.

When God does this, it can't be explained scientifically and therefore it is called a “Miracle”.

God is able to produce “miracles” in order to fulfil His purposes.

There are many examples in the Bible of God producing “Miracles” in order to accomplish His purposes.

God rescued 3 million Jews from slavery in Egypt through “miracle” plagues and the parting of the “Red Sea”.

God fed 3 million people in the desert for 40 years, without anywhere to buy food or clothing.

We are told that not even their shoes wore out.

God caused the sun to stand still for Joshua in order for him to win a battle and to accomplish God's purposes.

God opened up the ground in order to swallow “Korah” and his rebellious followers.

God provided “Samson” with extraordinary physical strength and even enabled him to kill 1,000 people single handed.

God even made an axe head float on water, a donkey to speak, and a chariot of fire to carry Elijah to heaven without dying.

God closed the mouths of hungry lions and provided a great fish to swallow Jonah.

God kept Jonah alive in the belly of the fish for 3 days without causing Jonah any harm.

Yes, God is able to carry out His purposes through “Miracles”.

The second way that God carries out His purposes is by His “Divine Providence”

The first thing we need to discover is the meaning of “Divine Providence”.

What exactly is the “Providence of God?”

This is where God is working His purposes out through normal events, both good and bad.

It is probably best explained through an example from the Bible.

Joseph was one of 12 brothers born to Jacob in fulfilment of God's covenant promise to Abraham.

Because of the jealous hatred of his brothers, Joseph was sold into slavery and ended up in Egypt.

Joseph was falsely accused of seducing his employer's wife and put in prison.

Through interpreting the King's dreams, Joseph was put in a very high position and was enabled to rescue his own family from famine.

This happened without an apparent miracle.

God didn't seem to be working in this situation.

However, God sovereignly, by his providence, directed every moment of Joseph's life.

In the end Joseph realised this amazing truth when he said;

“But as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.” (Genesis 50: v. 20)

The wisdom writers in the Old Testament said ;

“A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs His steps.” (Prov.16:9)

Paul says in Philippians Chapter 2: v.13;

“For it is God who works in you, both to will, and to do, for His good pleasure”

It is in the burial of Jesus that we see God's amazing providence working through events.

The focal point in Matthew's account of the burial of Jesus relates to the fulfilment of two key prophecies.

One of these prophecies was by Isaiah and the other by Jesus Himself.

Let us to turn to Isaiah Chapter 53: v.9

⁹ And they made His grave with the wicked—
But with the rich at His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor *was any* deceit in His mouth.

When this prophecy was made by Isaiah approximately 700 years before this event, it would have been impossible to work out what this prophecy meant until the burial of Jesus actually happened. We now understand that the Holy Spirit revealed it to Isaiah.

The enemies of Jesus Christ had intended to bury Him with common criminals, but it was God's plan that this would not happen.

It was God's plan that Jesus would be buried in the tomb of a wealthy man.

Through God's providence, this happened.

At exactly the right moment in time, God moved in the heart of a godly rich man to go to Pilate and ask for the body of Jesus.

Dead bodies were normally given to family only in order to be buried.

It was very unusual for a person who was not related to be given a body to be buried.

However, Pilate commanded the body of Jesus to be given to Joseph who came from Arimathea.

The only thing that we know about this person is that he was rich, a secret follower of Jesus (John 19: v.38) and it was likely that he witnessed miracles by Jesus and heard His teaching.

We also learn from the way in which he was personally involved in the burial of Jesus, that this man was very humble and devoted to Jesus.

Together with Nicodemus they embalmed the body of Jesus.

(John 19: v. 38-42)

The second prophecy which was fulfilled in Jesus's burial was His own prophecy.

Turn with me to Matthew Chapter 12: v.40

⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

In order for this prophecy to be fulfilled Jesus must only be buried for 3 days.

The three -day burial of Jesus happened through the providence of God, working out His purposes through people and circumstances.

Everything fitted in with the Jewish Law at the time.

When we read the events in the Bible, we don't see God's hand behind it, but in order for prophecy to be fulfilled, exactly as God has said, then God must be controlling the events that are happening, without people really being aware that God is working his purposes out.

Application

We need to be encouraged today that the same God who worked his purposes out concerning the burial of Jesus, is the same God who will work His purposes out in our lives too.

The older we become, the more we can look back on our lives and see the hand of God guiding and directing our lives.

There is a Poem by Mary Stevenson that picks up this point quite clearly. There are many different versions, but I will read one to you.

It is called "Footprints in the Sand"

One night I had a dream
I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.
Across the sky flashed scenes from my life.
For each scene I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,
One belonging to me and the other to the Lord.
When the last scene of my life flashed before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
I noticed that many times along the path of my life

There was only one set of footprints.
I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest
And saddest times of my life.
This really bothered me,
And I questioned the Lord about it.
“Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you,
you’d walk with me all the way.
But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of
footprints.
I don’t understand why, when I need you most you would leave me.”

The Lord replied; “My precious child, I love you and would never leave you.
During your times of trial and suffering when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I
carried you.”

Before we close this section, we need to note verses 62-65.

Matthew tells us that the following day, the Chief Priests and the Pharisees, who were normally not friendly, went to see Pilate, the Roman Governor. They were concerned about a prophecy that Jesus made earlier about rising from the dead after three days. They didn’t believe that Jesus would rise from the dead. However, they thought that the disciples would steal his body from the tomb and lie about His resurrection. Pilate gave permission for the tomb to be guarded by Roman Soldiers. This complaint to Pilate by the Jewish Religious leaders actually worked in favour of proving the “resurrection of Jesus” The Law of that day said that if a Roman soldier was guarding somebody and the prisoner escaped, then the Roman Soldier would die. So now we know that the tomb was fully guarded and the disciples could not steal the body of Jesus.

2. The Resurrection of the body of Jesus- Chapter 28: v. 1-10

The central theme of the Easter story is the resurrection of the body of Jesus.

It is the greatest event in the history of the world.

Without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there can be no Christian Faith, no salvation, and no hope for the future.

Paul says in his letter to the Church at Corinth that “if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” (1 Cor. 15: v.19)

Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the first sermon preached after the Holy Spirit empowered Peter on the day of Pentecost was focused upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The great Apostle Paul focused his preaching on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

All of our Christian hope for the future rests upon the words of Jesus in John Chapter 11: v. 25.

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

John 14: v.19.

¹⁹ “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also.

Every gospel writer focuses upon the resurrection of Jesus in a different way.

Matthew doesn’t approach the resurrection from a scholarly, historical or even analytical angle.

He concentrates his efforts upon the emotional reaction of a group of women who loved Jesus deeply.

So let us now go to the text and see what Matthew has to teach us about the resurrection of Jesus.

I am going to divide up v. 1-10 into 5 small sections which tell us what was going on in the heart of these women.

- a) Compassion – v. 1. We are told that early in the morning, just before dawn Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, came to see the tomb where Jesus was laid. Although there were other women too, Matthew only focuses upon the two Marys. Mary Magdalene is mentioned 14 times in the gospels and 8 of those 14 times she is mentioned in connection with other women. She seems to have been a leader amongst the women who supported Jesus. Although Luke mentions that this Mary had 7 demons cast out from her, there is no evidence in the Bible to connect this Mary with prostitution as some writers have done in the past. Mary Magdalene was definitely a leading lady who had a deep compassion and love for Jesus. The “other” Mary was the mother of James and Joseph and the wife of Clopas. (Matt.27: v.56, John 19: v.25)

Q. What was the purpose of their visit to the tomb?

Well Luke tells us in Luke 24: v.1 that they had come with spices to anoint the body of Jesus. It is clear that the women didn't have much confidence in the resurrection of Jesus, but they had plenty of compassion for Jesus.

It may be that they had been influenced by Jewish tradition which believed that the spirit of a dead person left the body four days after death, we don't know.

If these two ladies' first reaction was one of compassion, then their second experience was of terror.

- b) Terror – v. 2-7. - In v. 2-7 Matthew records the experience that the women went through. Firstly, there was a great earthquake. This must have been quite frightening. I know that in Japan earthquakes are quite common, but the first time you experience one, it can be very frightening. Suddenly an Angel came from Heaven and rolled back the stone which was sealing the tomb. His appearance must have shocked the women. The Angel's appearance was like lightning and his clothing was as white as snow. The soldiers were so shocked that they became paralyzed with fear. It appears that these soldiers became emotionally frozen. They were completely traumatized by what they saw. Although the women were afraid the Angel comforted them with encouraging words.

The Angel said....

“ Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell his disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee, there you will see Him. Behold I have told you.”

The next experience of these women was joy.

- c) Joy – v. 8 - As the women left the tomb in obedience to the command of the Angel, they left with great “Joy” in their hearts.
- d) Worship - v. 9 - In v. 9 we are told that the women met Jesus on the way to tell the other disciples. The women held Jesus by the feet and worshipped Him.
- e) Hope - v. 10 - Jesus repeated the words of the Angels. This gave the women great hope for the future. Jesus promised that he would meet them later in Galilee. Now the women could really believe in His words.

Q. What is Matthew trying to tell us by focusing only upon the experiences of the women concerning the resurrection of Jesus?

This is quite a difficult question to answer.

Matthew wrote his gospel with the Jewish people in mind, so we need to notice the unusual focus upon women from a Jewish perspective.

What we do know is that the male disciples deserted Jesus after He was arrested, but the female disciples stayed supportive of Jesus right to the end. Jesus rewarded the loyalty of the women by giving them the first resurrection appearance. So perhaps Matthew is teaching us that “Loyalty” to Jesus no matter what we have to suffer, will have its reward, when one day we see Jesus, face to face.

The great hope for all believers in Jesus is that one day we will see Jesus, face to face. However difficult living the Christian life for you is at present, the great reward for the future will be the resurrection of our own bodies and meeting Jesus face to face.

Before we close this section we need to note v.11-15.

After the earthquake and the rolling away of the stone that covered the entrance to the tomb, the soldiers having recovered from the shock of these events, discovered that somehow Jesus had disappeared from the guarded tomb.

The soldiers had to be honest about the situation, otherwise they could have been killed for neglect of duty.

They told their story to the religious leaders.

The Religious leaders gave the soldiers a large sum of money to lie.

The soldiers were told to say that the disciples of Jesus came at night while they slept and stole the body of Jesus.

It is this lie that adds proof of the resurrection of Jesus.

In v.15 when Matthew wrote this gospel, the lie that was told about the body of Jesus being stolen was still common knowledge over 30 years later.

3. The Commission by Jesus to make disciples of all nations. – v. 16-20.

If you understand the whole of Matthew’s Gospel and fail to grasp these last few verses, then you will have missed the point of the entire gospel.

Many Christians, throughout the world, fail to fully understand what their mission is in this world.

They concentrate more upon having their needs met than upon serving Jesus and obeying His commission as taught here by Matthew.

If a survey was done with every evangelical church in the world today with one question about their honest involvement in the Church, I expect that the great commission to make disciples of all nations would come at the bottom of the list.

I am not sure why so many Christians put the most important mission of the Church at the bottom of their priority list.

Perhaps looking closely at these verses will tell us why.

Matthew challenges us with 5 things.

First – The disciples were available to meet with Jesus – v.16.

The eleven disciples were available to meet with Jesus.

Jesus is more interested in our availability than He is interested in our ability.

The first key of being a disciple maker is to be fully available for Jesus.

If you are willing to meet with Jesus in prayer and by reading His word, He will direct you.

Many people today are not willing to be available for Jesus. The question is, are you available for Jesus?

Second – The worship of Jesus – v. 17.

The first thing that the disciples did when they saw the resurrected Jesus was that they worshipped Him. The complete focus was upon Jesus Christ.

That is the meaning of true worship.

Understanding the worth of Jesus in His death and resurrection, makes us want to be a disciple maker.

We understand the true worth of Jesus and we want others to understand this too.

Third – Submission to Jesus –v. 18.

Before Jesus tells His disciples what He wants them to do, He teaches them about His authority.

He tells His disciples that He has “All Authority in Heaven and on earth”

Jesus wants His disciples to humbly submit to His authority.

Jesus doesn’t want people to come under the authority of anybody else.

If you desire to be a disciple, or make a disciple then the authority to perform this task is from Jesus only.

Fourth - Obedience – v. 19-20

If we have understood the first three elements, then obedience is the next step. Jesus commanded His disciples to “Go” and “make” “disciples”.

In other words, Jesus was looking for instruments to work through.

His disciples had been eye witnesses to the resurrection and had spent 3 years under his teaching.

Now was the time to “Go” and make more disciples for Jesus.

Fifth - Power – v. 20.

There was one last element in the great commission by Jesus. This was “Power” from the Holy Spirit.

Jesus promised to be with His disciples wherever they went. He could not do this in person. However, through the power of His Holy Spirit, the disciples could be empowered to make disciples.

The message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is very important.

We all need power from the Holy Spirit in order to proclaim this.

Let us pray and ask Him for that today.