

Matthew 28:16-20
I Am With You Always

Main idea: The resurrection of Jesus means that He never leaves us.

(after taking the Lord's Supper together)

Lord Jesus, thank You for going to the cross to pay the price for our sins. And thank You for the new life that we have because of Your body broken and blood shed. Help us to rest in You and proclaim You to all the world. In Your precious name we pray, Amen.

So that's what happened on Thursday, the day before Good Friday. The day before Jesus was crucified, He told His disciples it would happen. Then that very night, Judas betrayed Jesus, Jesus was arrested for no reason, and they mocked Him, and they beat Him. Friday, He was nailed to the cross. And then on Saturday, Jesus was in the grave.

But that isn't the end of the story. We read earlier this morning how some women came to Jesus's tomb early on Sunday morning, and they were greeted by an angel who told them that Jesus had risen. They thought that Jesus had left them, but now they were being told that Jesus had returned, and that they should then go and share this news with the disciples. Luke records what happened next:

Returning from the tomb, they reported all these things to the Eleven and to all the rest. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them were telling the apostles these things. But these words seemed like nonsense to them, and they did not believe the women. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. When he stooped to look in, he saw only the

linen cloths. So he went away, amazed at what had happened.
(Luke 24:9-12)

At this point, most preachers, and I have often said something like, “Imagine you were there. Imagine you heard this news from the women, that Jesus’s body wasn’t in the tomb, and that an angel was there, and that the angel told them that Jesus had risen from the grave. Imagine that!”

But I’m not sure we really can imagine that. Not even the disciples could imagine that. It says that the words seemed like nonsense to them! And they had seen Jesus do amazing things! They had seen Jesus heal the sick, and turn water into wine, and cast out demons, and even raise people from the dead. But when they heard the news that Jesus Himself had risen from the dead, they thought it was nonsense.

In their minds, Jesus had left them, and He was never coming back. But Peter was intrigued enough to run to the tomb himself, and he was also amazed that Jesus wasn’t there, just as the women had told him.

Now, several other things happened that day and for the next forty days after Jesus rose from the grave. Really briefly, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene first, then to the other women, and then two of the disciples walking along the road to Emmaus. Jesus then showed Himself to the disciples, and then to Thomas who doubted at first. Then Jesus even appeared to over 500 people at one time, so that it would be clearly established that it wasn’t just a rumor, but that Jesus really had risen from the grave. And then, of course, Jesus ascended to heaven.

But, interestingly, Matthew’s account of the gospel includes almost none of these details about Jesus’s post-resurrection appearances.

Instead, Matthew ends his book immediately with this in Matthew 28:16-20.

The eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted. Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 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 everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:16-20)

It's so very easy to feel alone in this world, isn't it? And there appear to be many different reasons for why people feel alone. People are extremely divisive today, and we alienate one another based on our opinions, and we can even do this to ourselves to some extent when we might have a martyr's complex or even just because of our own insecurities. If we're honest, we find that a lot of our loneliness comes out of our self-centeredness. We find ourselves alone because others aren't treating us the way we think they ought to treat us. But no matter why we might feel alone, and almost everyone does at times, the answer is Jesus.

Because Jesus died and rose again, He promised to never again leave us. He invites us all to know Him and be with Him forever.

In fact, when Jesus first rose, He told His disciples to meet Him at a certain place. That's what we saw in verse 16.

The eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted. (Matthew 28:16-17)

So, the women were told by the angel to tell the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee, so they all went to Galilee, where they saw Him, and worshiped Him.

And I would think so, right? After all they had seen, and all that had happened, you would think that they would all be 100% convinced by now that Jesus was and is who He said He was and is, right?

And yet, some still doubted. You know, Thomas got the nickname Doubting Thomas because He wouldn't believe the news that Jesus had risen from the grave until he saw it with his own eyes. But once he saw the resurrected Jesus with his own eyes, Thomas believed. But some of these other disciples even saw Jesus and still doubted.

What that tells me is that no amount of evidence will be enough for some people. You can't convince people to believe and follow Jesus. Certainly we're called to share the gospel, and we're to invite people to place their faith in Jesus, but we can't believe for them. Each person must come to faith in Jesus in their own time.

The Bible says that it's by grace through faith that you're saved.¹ Faith in Jesus is absolutely necessary for your salvation. Whenever anyone asks a believer in the New Testament how to be saved, the answer is always the same. Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you'll be saved.² By His death and resurrection, Jesus has proven Himself to be the Son of God, so we must each come to faith in Him as our Savior and Lord, because He is the Savior and Lord.

Verse 18.

¹ Ephesians 2:8-9

² John 1:12, John 3:16, John 3:36, John 20:31, Acts 2:38, Acts 4:12, Acts 16:31, Acts 22:16, Romans 10:9, Romans 10:13, 1 John 5:13

Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." (Matthew 28:18)

And this has always been a mystery to me, and yet it's true. Jesus, being God in the flesh, has always been God. He didn't become divine. He didn't achieve divinity. And as God, Jesus has always had all authority. And yet, because of our sin, there has been a rebellion against God and His authority since almost the very beginning of this world, so much that Satan is called the ruler of this world. And even now, we still continue to see this rebellion both in our hearts and in the powers and principalities of this present darkness, so it's certainly true that Satan is the ruler of this world.

And yet, because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, Jesus really has all authority. We may not always see it or recognize it, but Jesus has already conquered Satan and even all sin. And Jesus invites us to rest and rejoice in His kingdom, where we celebrate that Jesus is King. I think that's what the end of the book of Matthew is all about. Jesus said in verse 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 everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)

This is what we call the Great Commission, in which Jesus commanded His disciples then, and even us today to share the gospel of His kingdom.

Sadly, many Christians who have shared the gospel for much of the last 2,000 years have treated it like a weapon, as if it's bad news. "Believe the good news, or else burn in hell forever! Turn or burn, baby!" To an unbeliever, that sounds more like a threat than good news. But when Jesus was born, the angels were clear that it was good news of great joy that shall be for all the people.³ It's not bad news, but very good news. Jesus has all authority, and He's with us forever.

You see, the gospel is not a threat. It's a proclamation. Jesus came to seek and save the lost.⁴ He came to set captives free.⁵ He came to rescue us from certain destruction because of our sin, but it's not God who condemned us. We condemned ourselves because of our sin.⁶

It's the difference between God being a ruthless bully who demands strict obedience, even though we're incapable of it, versus God being the Father who loves us, and will always leave the ninety-nine to rescue the one lost sheep.⁷

The resurrection of Jesus means that He never leaves us.⁸ The Holy Spirit is always with us to guide us, strengthen us, and even call us to follow Jesus more closely. The resurrection of Jesus also means that we have a mission. Our mission is to share this gospel, the good news, with the whole world, all the nations, inviting them to follow Jesus.

Jesus earlier told His disciples:

³ Luke 2:10

⁴ Luke 19:10

⁵ Luke 4:18

⁶ John 3:18

⁷ Matthew 18:12

⁸ Hebrews 13:5-6

Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth. It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don't go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you. (John 16:7)

It's interesting, if you study the idea of loneliness in the Bible, you find that it didn't take long for people to start feeling lonely and disconnected from God. After God created Adam and Eve, He walked and talked with them in the garden. But then they sinned, and they hid from God, and were cast out of the garden. And then after the story of Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve had a son who they named Seth, and we read this:

A son was born to Seth also, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of the Lord. (Genesis 4:26)

You see, Adam and Eve's children and grandchildren never had that experience of walking and talking with God. They felt disconnected from God, alienated from Him, so they began to call on His name, longing for a personal relationship with their Creator. But because of their sin, because of our sin, they always felt, and we always felt unworthy of that relationship.

That's why Jesus died and rose again. To make us worthy of a relationship with God.⁹

In talking about the birth of Jesus, John wrote this:

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who

⁹ 1 Peter 3:18, 1 John 1:9

believe in his name, who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:9-13)

Because Jesus died and rose again, when we receive Him as our Savior and Lord, we become children of God. And when you become a child of God, you have new life in Jesus! Just as Jesus rose from the dead, we rise out of the deadness of our sin, out of the loneliness of our self-centeredness, and we have the promise that He is with us always, even to the end of the age.