

THE
KINGDOM
IS HERE

matthew

sermon series

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A NEW FUTURE: MATTHEW 28

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We have arrived at the summit of the book of Matthew; its final chapter: Matthew 28. This chapter begins with a somber and tragic tone. The king is dead, and the people's hope is gone. Yet, excitement and glory soon eclipse the tone of sobriety and tragedy. The king is not dead; he is alive. This fact is vitally important because it signifies that the cross was not a victory of Satan, but for God.

Let's remind ourselves of Holy Week in Matthew. The King is here, but the people are not ready. Instead of living on mission, they are distracted by various other earthly pursuits. As we read about these realities, we were challenged by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse not to be like his audience. Unlike them, we must be ready for the kingdom by living on mission. If not, we will not make it (Matthew 24-26).

This challenge can be quite discouraging. If Peter, James, and John were not ready for the mission, what chance do we have? They walked with him; talked with him; ate with him; saw his miracles. We didn't. We are thousands of years removed. What chance do we have? Matthew 28 provides the answer: the resurrection and Jesus' forever presence motivates us, God's people, to live on mission. The resurrection and Jesus' forever presence give us a new future. I say, new future because I've said several times that Jesus came to rewrite our history.

He does this to give us a new future: a future of purpose and mission.

As we discuss this theme today, I hope that we would renew our commitments again today to living our new future which is a life of mission for God's glory.

The Resurrection: Matthew 28:1-10

Matthew 27 ended with Jesus dead in a tomb guarded by soldiers (27:62-66), and Matthew 28 began with two women going to the tomb. With this in mind, let's point out a few important details.

First, the setting is darkness, but a darkness that is being peeled back by the light: it is dawn. As the light of the day dawns, the light of a new day begins to dawn. The darkness of the old creation has been crushed and a new age is appearing. Isaiah talks about salvation this way in Isaiah 8:20 and 58:8. The realities of Matthew 28 are new creation realities.

Second, the guards and the woman see the appearance of an angel and the shaking of the ground, and they are rightly terrified (28:4, see 1-5). This reaction might surprise us who equate angels with hallmark renditions of cupid. Angels are not cute babies with wings. They are the opposite. They are often described with warrior images. The term "hosts" refers to the idea of "armies." To call the Lord the Lord of hosts is to call him the Lord of armies. The same idea was present in the Garden of Gethsemane when Peter struck the high priest's servant's ear. Jesus said that he could call down twelve legions of angels. That comment makes no sense if angels are cute babies with wings.

Jesus had the potential to call down angels in a manner that would dwarf Peter's attempts at protecting Jesus. Finally, whenever people see angels in the Bible, they are terrified.

This was the reaction of the shepherds when the angels announced Jesus' birth (Luke 2:10). The soldiers are terrified and become as dead because the sight of an angel is terrifying (28:4). Notice also what the angels tell the women in verse 5, "Do not be afraid" (5). The guards and woman witness this miracle and are terrified.

Third, the mission must be accomplished despite fear (28:6-7). The women are terrified at the sight of the angels. They have announced the message of the kingdom: "Jesus is not in the tomb; he has risen just as he said!" Then, they tell them what to do with the message: "Come and see," and "Go and tell" (28:6-7), and this sight and this reality cultivated within the women joy, but also fear.

When we participate in our "new future" of living on mission, we often experience joy mixed with fear. We know that Jesus has done what we could never do – rise again from the dead – and that produces within us joy. However, isn't it also the case that we often experience fear. The thought of living our new creation futures too often produces within us a fear. Now to be clear, this fear is not godly fear since Jesus tells them in verse 10, not to fear (10). The proper response is joy without fear.

Fourth, Jesus' presence makes the women's fear go away (28:8-10). Let's read very carefully here. The angels told the woman to go, not to fear, and that Jesus would appear to them in Galilee (28:7). The woman go, but continue to fear, so what does Jesus do.

He meets them (9). This picture depicts to us the nature of our king. the women respond to the message of the kingdom – Jesus is not dead; he is alive – with fear and joy, so Jesus appears to them before they go to Galilee. Jesus looked at the women’s weakness – their fear despite the angel’s command – not as an opportunity to rebuke them, but as an opportunity to comfort them, and how does he comfort them? He comforts them with his presence. He says, “Hi” (9) and that they will all see him (9). Church family, it is so important that we think rightly of Jesus. Christians who love Jesus and think rightly about him experience their fear go away and be replaced by joyful worship. That’s what these women do because of Jesus; he came to them and announced “Greeting” even though they left in fear.

What motivates worship, church family? We are currently looking for a new music minister. We are looking for a person who will lead us in singing songs to our king. We all know how important music is. The word combination “sing” occurs 250 times in our English bibles. That doesn’t include the instances of the words “shout,” “praise,” “gives thanks,” and many other similar words. Did you know that when God saves his people, God’s people typically sing! As soon as God saved his people from Egypt, they sang a song (Exodus 15). After God promises to save his people from their sins in Isaiah 6-12, Isaiah says that they will sing a song (Isaiah 12). For eternity, we will sing to our great king (Revelation 7). Singing is the natural response to knowing and beholding the glory of our king. Thus, as we look for a new music minister, we want someone who is going to lead us in songs that help us think rightly of Jesus.

We want songs that capture this scene: the women leave the tomb in fear, so Jesus meets them to comfort them. He cares for them in their fear, and this is what we need our songs to remind us of.

The Lie: Matthew 28:11-15

On the one hand, the resurrection motivates worship as we just saw. On the other hand, it motivates deceit. Although the woman worshipped Jesus, some of the guards did not. Notice that I said some. Look at verse 11. Only some go and report the events to the religious elite and receive the payment for lying. Our imagination is left to wonder about the other guards. Regardless of what they did, the point is that the resurrection only motivates worship for some. We've discussed on many occasions that as we live on mission some will become disciples, but some will not. Some will refuse despite what they see, hear, and know to be true. Remember this. I must remember this. Only some worship.

The Mission: Matthew 28:16-20

So far in Matthew 28, we've read about the resurrection, the lie, and now we read about the mission. Let's point a few important details here.

First, the response of the disciples seeing Jesus can be described as perplexing. Matthew tells us in verse 17 that although they worship him, some doubt (28:17). We assess this response rightly as less than appropriate. The disciples are seeing Jesus resurrected from the dead, and yet some doubt, but notice how Jesus responds. He responds the same way he did to the women. The women replied in less than an appropriate way: they feared (28:10), and now, the disciples are responding similarly.

They worship but some do so amid doubt. Yet, again notice Jesus' reply. He commissions them, not some of them, all of them. The women were called to do mission amid their fear and the disciples are called to do the mission amid some doubts. Certainly, we will experience fear at times and doubts too, but these feelings do not give us an excuse not to do the mission. We must work on mission despite them.

Second, our mission is *to make disciples*. Jesus modeled this process to us throughout Matthew as we saw in Matthew 5-10. The process includes calling people to Jesus and kingdom work (Matt 10:1-4), instructing the called in kingdom work (10:5-15), warning the called of kingdom work (10:16-39), reminding them of the reward of kingdom work (10:40-42), and then duplicating kingdom work (11:1). Here in Matthew 28, Jesus describes the process more generally: baptizing them and teaching them Jesus' words. The mission is to make disciples.

Let's be clear here, by explaining what the mission is not. The mission is not merely to get people saved or baptized. That is only one step, the first step, in the mission. The mission is not to get more people to come to the church. Nowhere does Jesus describe the mission that way. As we discussed last week, whenever a crowd starts to form, Jesus begins to say difficult things. Our mission is to make disciples, not to attract crowds. The mission is not to get more people in Sunday School or to get more people serving or giving. Those are important steps in the mission, but that is not the mission. The mission is to make disciples, and we do it the way Jesus taught us to do it.

Because the mission is to make disciples, we want people to come to church and Sunday school. Let's be reminded of the goal. It is to make disciples.

Third, the mission has an aim. In other words, the mission is not just to make as many disciples as we can, but to make disciples of all nations (I heard David Platt make this point at a lecture at CBU). Thus, our efforts as the people of God must be directed to Upland and the end of the earth. Our participation in this mission necessitates praying for the nations, giving to nations, going to the nations, and partnering with those who go for longer periods of time.

Fourth, the people of God were not ready for Jesus' first coming. They were not living on mission. Even those who followed him, ate with him, and socialized with him were largely not ready. Things change after the resurrection, Because of the resurrection, the people of God will be ready because of Jesus' continual presence. The comfort to the disciples to live on mission is that Jesus promises to be with us to the end of the age.



Application

Church family, the thought of living on mission which means understanding our time in history and taking inventory of the resources God has entrusted to us might cultivate a level of fear. It did for the women at the tomb. It may cultivate a level of doubt as it did for some of the disciples. Regardless of the fear and the doubt, we are called to live on mission. In other words, we are called to live a new future given to us as a gift because Jesus has rewritten our past. Are we ready in this new year to live our new future? Let's commit 2022 to being a year defined by extending God's glory throughout our communities.

Prayer

God help us to live on mission in new ways this year. To give like never before, to go like never before, to pray like never before, and to care for those who go for longer periods of time. Cultivate our hearts in new ways to live on mission. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

