

Matthew 28

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[0 : 00] Well, there are moments in history where often a single event can spark off a radical worldwide movement. So one thinks of Rosa Parks' simple refusal to move to the back of the bus and how that event sparked off a movement for racial harmony in America.

Or as David was talking about earlier, 500 years ago this year, when a rebellious young Catholic monk by the name of Martin Luther took his 95-point thesis and nailed it to the cathedral door in Wittenberg, how that simple act of defiance sparked off the movement of the Reformation which would shape Western Europe in years to come.

Great movements are often driven by great events. Well, there is no greater movement in human history than the one that we see happening right here in Matthew chapter 28.

This is a movement that was so profound that it was not confined to one era of time. It was not confined to one particular people group.

It was a movement of joy, a movement of worship that would unite people from vastly different backgrounds together as one around God.

[1 : 20] And this movement was driven by one great singular event, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave. What we are reading of here in Matthew 28 is the beginning of the church of Jesus.

Everything the church stands for and everything that the church is about was built upon this amazing truth that Jesus Christ has conquered death.

This here is the reason, this chapter is the reason why church planting is so important. This is the reason why evangelism and mission are so fundamental to our identity as a church here, as a wider denomination and as individuals.

This great movement that begins in Matthew chapter 28. Now, I want to just really focus in on the last four verses of this chapter as we look at it in detail. It's the last speech that Jesus gives to the disciples in Matthew's gospel.

It's what's commonly known as the Great Commission. And what we'll see is how the rest of the chapter feeds into that. And it really is the climax, not just of chapter 28, but if you were to sit through and read Matthew's gospel, which is a great thing to do, by the way, you'll see that it's all building towards these final four verses.

[2 : 44] This is, for Matthew, what it's all about. And in these final four verses, Matthew wants us to be very clear about what his three big implications are of the fact that Jesus has risen from the dead.

What are the three implications of the resurrection? Firstly, the resurrection proves that Jesus is the authoritative king of all the world. Secondly, the resurrection gives us a good news to proclaim to all the world.

And thirdly, the resurrection assures us that Jesus is with us until the end of the world. Firstly, then, it proves that Jesus is the authoritative king of all the world.

Have a read again of verse 16. Then the 11 disciples went to Galilee. That's very important, by the way. That's a Gentile region. So he's taking these Jewish disciples to a Gentile region.

We'll see why later. To the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

[3 : 53] You see, all throughout Matthew's gospel, Matthew has been trying to convince his readers that Jesus is this king that was promised long ago by God, who has been brought into the world to save the world.

That's what he's been trying to convince us. That's his big agenda. And the final proof, the ultimate sign, the coronation of Jesus is the resurrection.

I mean, you could not get more concrete evidence. But you know what's surprising about this in Matthew's gospel and in all the other gospels when you read them, is that no one, not even Jesus' closest followers, these 11 disciples, these foundation of the church, no one expected that this was going to happen.

Even though Jesus told them this is going to happen, no one expected it. That's why there's nobody hanging around his tomb here in Matthew 28. That's why even when the resurrected Christ appears, what does verse 17 tell us?

Some doubted. Now, why? Why on earth did Matthew put that in there? If you're trying to convince people that these guys, that the foundation of the church here, doubted this, why would you put that in there?

[5 : 14] You put it in because it happened. Because it's true. These guys took convincing. They did not believe any more than we do today that dead people come back to life.

But now here they are. And though some may have doubted to begin with, they all worship Jesus. It's actually pretty incredible because if there was one group in the ancient world that would not have worshipped a man as God, it would have been the Jews.

And yet right at the beginning of this radical worldwide movement that's happening here, almost overnight, you have hundreds of Jewish people bowing down to this man Jesus and saying that he is God.

Why? Because of the resurrection. It's the most compelling evidence. It's God's stamp of authenticity to the world. That Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the King of the nations, the Lord of all mankind.

Here we have God in the flesh. And that's why Jesus says, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

[6 : 26] Because I live, because I have defeated death, I want everyone here to know that I have complete authority over every single aspect of this universe.

Now that's an immense statement. That means that everything in creation is under the sovereign control of King Jesus.

He rules the wind and the waves. He governs everything from subatomic particles to nebulae and galaxies. He owns it all. He is in charge of it all.

He has authority over it all. As the old Dutch Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper said, there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, mine.

Every single ruler that we can think of, every president or king, pales into insignificance with this ruler. They are finite and frail as dust.

[7 : 33] But here we have in Matthew 28, the infinite, eternal, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-good, all-loving King of kings. He commands all the armies of heaven with a legion of angels at his call.

He is sovereign over everything. Matthew's been trying to show us that earlier. Matthew 28, he is sovereign over the storm. He is sovereign over evil. He is sovereign over sin. He is sovereign over even death itself.

Death has to answer to the death conqueror, Jesus. And so, therefore, this is what that simple statement in verse 18, this is what this means for us today.

The risen Christ is your king, and he has absolute authority over you and every single aspect of your life. Now, does that sound like good news?

Because for some of you here, that probably doesn't sound like good news. It's like a kind of an affront to my freedom. In fact, in Matthew 28, I want to read the whole chapter because there's two responses that Matthew records to us to the evidence of Jesus' resurrection.

[8 : 46] There's rejection or there's rejoicing. That's the two responses when it comes to Jesus' authority. Rejection or rejoicing. So, notice, first of all, that you have these religious leaders who in Matthew's gospel have constantly been opposed to Jesus.

Even after his death, which they think they've orchestrated, we saw at the end of chapter 27, they're afraid that people will say he has risen. It's interesting to note that these people who hate Jesus seem to remember Jesus saying that, where the disciples don't remember that.

But they remember it and they're worried that somehow people are going to say that Jesus is alive. So, they come up with this plan that they bring to Pilate of setting up a guard and putting a seal on the tomb so the disciples won't be able to come and steal the body and say, ah, he's alive.

As if that's going to stop God. Because notice what happens. The earthquake comes, the angel appears, and look at verse 4. By the way, Matthew's such a great writer. He's just uses, he's got a wonderful sense of irony that he uses in these last few chapters.

The guards who were alive become like one who is dead, and the one who is dead is alive. And so, they go and tell the religious leaders exactly what happens.

[10:04] What do the religious leaders say? Well, we got it wrong. Jesus is the Messiah. No, they pay the guards off. And they come up with this story, which Matthew tells us, was circulated to the very day that he wrote this gospel of the disciples stealing the body.

You see, even in the face of irrefutable fact, they would rather deny the authority of Jesus than accept it. Why? It's not about the facts.

It's not about evidence. It's about who I want to be in charge of me. You know, some of you here may need some more evidence, may like to look at the evidence for the resurrection.

That's great. I could point you, at the end of the service, I could point you in the direction of plenty of books that would help you in that. But I think this is the reason why a lot of us would reject Jesus. These guards don't like having someone who claims total authority over every aspect of their lives because the truth is they serve themselves.

Why do the guards not worship Jesus? They've seen an angel. Why do they not do it? Because they love money. Do you remember Jesus teaching earlier in Matthew 6, verse 24, no one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

[11:25] You cannot serve God in money. Claims of Jesus are not often rejected because people have looked at the evidence and found it lacking. They're rejected because it's hard.

G.K. Chesterton once said this, that the problem with the Christian ideal is not that it's been tried and found wanting, but it's been found difficult and left untried. The idea of worship, of submission to this king seems difficult to us because we view it as an affront to our freedom.

But here's the irony. We all worship, we all serve, we all love to worship things. As Bob Dylan sang, you're going to have to serve somebody. Yes, indeed, you're going to have to serve somebody. It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're going to have to serve somebody. And these guards would rather serve money than serve God. We might rather serve our own self-interests or our job or our family or our reputation.

You can reject Jesus' authority, but if you do, there's always going to be something that will be put in His place. And that is devastating. That is devastating for two reasons.

[12:37] Firstly, it's treason of the worst kind and the consequences of it are eternal. Jesus is the king whether we want Him to be or not. But secondly, you become enslaved to that thing that you worship.

And eventually, that only leads you to despair. You see, true joy and true freedom come from submitting to the only one who is truly joyful and truly free.

And that is the other response we see to Jesus in this passage. Look at the reaction that the resurrection inspires from these dear faithful women in verse 8. The woman hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell His disciples.

Suddenly, Jesus met them. Greetings, He said. They came to Him, clasped His feet and worshipped Him. Why? Why is there such happiness and joy and worship in worshiping the risen Lord Jesus?

Well, it's because that's who He is. He is the king. And when you worship Him, you're cutting with the grain of reality. Things make sense.

[13:51] That's the one who deserves my heart. That's the one who deserves my worship. You know, the whole purpose of Jesus' death in Matthew's gospel was to bring about the forgiveness of sins, to take the punishment that we deserve from God for all our wrongdoing.

And Jesus, as the only perfect king, has the authority to be punished in our place. He has the authority to lay down His life for us and therefore, He has the authority to forgive us of all our sin and to make us new.

He has the authority to bring us back to God for all eternity when we were lost. And see, when you know that, to know this king is to know the unyielding mercy and love of God.

To bow at His feet is not forceful submission to a tyrant. It's joyful worship to the only one who deserves our worship. This is the God that I am made for.

This is the freedom of knowing my life is in the hands of the one who rules and governs all things. This is the joy of knowing that I am eternally loved, eternally accepted, eternally forgiven, and not even death itself could separate me from Him.

[15:08] You see, the resurrection marks the solution that God Himself has provided to this broken world. It is the era of new beginnings. And at last, the gates of heaven have been opened to rebellious sinners like you and me because Jesus has died and risen.

And that leads to the second point. What's all this got to do with mission? What's all this got to do with evangelism and church planting? Everything.

Everything. Which is why Jesus begins verse 19 by saying, therefore. This is the second point. The resurrection gives us good news to proclaim to the world.

This is kind of preaching 101. You ask yourself, what is the therefore? Therefore, Jesus says, go, therefore. Therefore, this is what I want you to do. Because I have all the authority, because of who I am, therefore, go out and make disciples of all the nations.

The verb for make disciples there in the Greek is kind of the lead verb in that. And go to all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

[16:26] This is what Jesus does. Whenever Jesus calls you into himself, it's for one purpose, so he can send you out again. We see it kind of here.

There's like a mini mission here in Matthew 28 with the woman at the tomb, isn't there? They see the angel. The angel says, go and tell. They see Jesus and they're overwhelmed with joy and worship.

They just kind of want to cling on to him and hold on to him. And Jesus says, no, go and tell. Make disciples. That is the primary calling of the church and the primary calling, I would say as well, of every individual Christian.

How do we do that? Two ways. Baptizing and teaching. First then, baptizing. Now, we don't do this as individuals. If somebody makes a profession of faith, you don't just take them down to the local river by yourself and dunk them.

The local churches and church leaders are to baptize. But when Jesus speaks here of baptizing in the name of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he is referring to the first thing that someone should do when they respond to the gospel.

[17:35] When they understand the gospel, they are baptized to show people that they have been cleansed from sin, that they are now brought into God's covenant community. They are part of God's covenant family.

So, the command to go and baptize is primarily a command to go and tell people about Jesus so that they can be baptized, so they can be brought in.

And if everything we've been saying about who Jesus is, which, remember, feeds into this, then verse 19 makes perfect sense. Think about it. Salvation for the world, forgiveness of sins, the restoration of humanity.

That's what the king offers. Why on earth would we not tell people about that? Somebody said to me one time about Christianity, said to me, well, it's okay, you know, to believe what you want just as long as you don't try and tell others that they should believe it too.

I don't know if anyone's ever said that to you before. Do you see when someone says that, they're essentially saying that it's not okay for you to believe the gospel. Because if you believe the gospel, if you believe Jesus is the only way that humanity can be saved, of course you're going to tell people that.

[18:54] If I discovered a cure for cancer, what would I be like if I just kept that cure to myself? Because I was worried that maybe some people might find it offensive. I wouldn't keep that to myself no matter what people thought.

If it worked, I would not keep that to myself because that would be good news. Well, what we have in Jesus is infinitely greater than a cure for cancer.

Here is eternal salvation being offered to a world under the judgment of God. That's the first aspect, baptizing. Secondly, though, going and making disciples involves teaching.

Jesus says, teach them to observe everything I have commanded you. So this is after someone has been baptized and professed faith in the risen Lord. You don't just leave them. We don't do hit and run evangelism, tell them about Jesus and they've made a profession and then we walk away. You keep on teaching. Mission is not about getting people to make decisions. It's about getting people to become disciples. It's not decision making, it's disciple making.

[20 : 03] And so we must keep working with others to learn more about Jesus. I mean, he is an infinite treasure of wisdom and love and knowledge. So this is your calling here.

If you call yourself a Christian today, if people don't know Jesus, tell them about Jesus. If people do know Jesus, tell them about Jesus, teach them to obey Jesus.

In other words, there's never a person in this world that we cannot talk to about Jesus. And let's not miss the corporate nature of this. The word that is used for you in the Greek in verse 20 is a collective, it's a plural you.

We don't really have that in English. Unless you're from Dundee, we say use. Behold, I am with you. So this is a corporate thing that Jesus is saying here. It's the local church that baptizes. And the primary means by which God teaches His people is through the preaching of His word in churches. The Great Commission, therefore, is a call from the resurrected Lord to go and set up churches that will baptize and teach the nations.

[21 : 18] Look at the immensity of this commission. Let's not just stay here in Scotland. Look at what Jesus says to these guys. All the nations. So that means that churches that proclaim the resurrected Jesus are to be planted in 196 different countries to over 7,000 different languages to over 7 billion people.

We need to think bigger about mission. We so often just want to stay here. We want to feed our comforts to get the nice house, to get the family and the respectable career.

And there's nothing wrong with those things. Praise God if you have them. There's something profoundly wrong if as a Christian that's your main priority in life.

If we had a heart for the lost, for the nations, that we would sacrifice these meager comforts to let the nations know this King.

I pray that some of you will be involved in short-term missions. It's a great thing to do over the summer in a different country. But not all of us will go abroad. God has placed plenty of people in our lives here who don't know Jesus, people who do know Him but they need to learn how to obey Him.

[22 : 39] But if we aren't going to the nations, then we've got to pray for the nations. Pray for our mission partners that you guys have here in this church. Encourage them.

Send them emails saying you're praying for them. Pray for church planters. Pray for gospel leaders who can teach people how to live in obedience to Jesus. Why not?

Kyrie and I just got an app on our phone called the Joshua Project app. Great little app. Every day it shows you an unreached people group in the world.

Just use that in your quiet times. Just pray for them. The resurrection is huge. It's not about my own personal relationship with God. Well, it's that.

But it's not just that. It's about the world. It's about the nations being made into disciples. God's heart is for all the world. And if we follow him, then we must share that passion.

[23 : 38] Thirdly, finally, much more briefly, as we close, what do we see the third and final implication of the resurrection is? It assures us that Jesus is with us until the end of the world.

Verse 20b, Behold, I am with you always. Now, Jesus could have stopped there. But he wants to make it emphatic. And he wants us to know that it's not just these 11, but it's every Christian.

Behold, I am with you always, even to the very end of the age. My brothers and sisters, is there any sweeter promise given in the Bible? Let me ask you and me, I ask myself, if the message of the resurrected Christ is so big and so important, if it's the offer of salvation to a world that is heading to an eternity without God, why do we find it so hard and so difficult to tell and to teach others about Jesus?

You know, when we went to Charleston initially, I think my thought was not one of excitement or vision.

It was one of how ridiculous this is. These people are not going to be like, oh, fantastic, you want to tell us about Jesus.

[25 : 02] How are we going to do this? It seems so hopeless. It's a hostility. It just seems like a ridiculous task.

But then Matthew 28, Matthew 28 helped, I guess, show me my heart. You know, the reason we don't do evangelism or we doubt it, there's probably a few reasons, but I think the main reason is not because we think we're ill-equipped or because we like the gifts to speak well or articulately. That would be a good excuse. I think, for me, one of the main reasons is that we don't really trust Jesus. We don't really believe what Jesus has just said at the end of this gospel.

Look, every Christian will confirm this with their lips. Do we really believe Jesus is with us? Do we really believe that the world is dying without Christ?

Do we really believe that Jesus is this glorious King who brings joyful worship, that He is with us and that it's His mission and that He will help us?

[26 : 04] Mission is not Jesus saying to us, well, you know, I've done my part. Now, you go do yours. He's not saying to these 11 guys at the end of this gospel, well, I've achieved my bit on the cross.

Now, you guys go out to the nations and I'll see you when you get here. He won't leave. He can't. He will not leave. He will not leave. Because it's not our mission. It's His mission.

It's His mission and He will not leave. He will see His mission through to the end. The one who has all authority and He's not with us in the sense that if you were to read a letter from a loved one who's passed away, you kind of feel that they're still with you.

He's not with us in that sense because He's not dead. He's alive. He is here now by His Spirit. He is with us on our mission. The presence of Christ is always, always, always with you.

Always. How do we get that reality into our hearts? Read His Word. Listen to Him. Speak to Him. Spend time with His people. Matthew 18, where two or three are gathered, there I will be also.

[27 : 16] And do it. Just do it. Because He is with us, it will not fail. Look at Matthew 28.

Look at this mission. I mean, this is ridiculous. Eleven men? You eleven, mostly uneducated men from a backwater part of the Roman Empire. I want you to go out and I want you to change the world and bring them to follow and worship me.

It's ridiculous, humanly speaking. But did it work? Well, well, look around you.

Here we are, two thousand years later, thousands and thousands of miles away from where this initially took place. We worship the same King.

Millions of people, if not billions, across the world are doing it. Today. Today. Because Jesus' mission will work. And if you want to be part of this, just tell people and trust Jesus.

[28 : 20] Not everyone's going to respond with rejoicing. Remember the two responses? Some people will reject. But what does that matter? What does it matter when the news is so good that some people can have that joy?

Can know this King. These eleven men who started this movement, they all died for it. They knew it was worth dying for because they knew with certainty that their King conquered death.

And as the church has spread throughout history, as this movement has grown and expanded under the authority of King Jesus, it has always done so through rejection and persecution and hardship.

But it never stops it. You cannot stop the power of the risen Lord. Never. If His church is bombed in Egypt like it was this Easter, it will not stop His mission.

If His church is suffering the hurt of famine in East Africa, it will not stop His mission. If His church faces ridicule and humiliation in Western Europe, it will not stop this mission because this mission goes forth with all the power and all the authority of the King of Kings.

[29 : 33] And He is the one who holds our lives in His hands, who loves us infinitely, who will raise us to new life. And that is why Christians, through tears and hardship and persecution, when they proclaim Jesus and they face these trials, can say with the Apostle Paul in Romans 8, who can separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall famine or danger or nakedness or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. I am with you always, says Jesus.

Or if you're a Celtic or a Liverpool fan, you never walk alone, never, right up until the end of time itself. Nothing will stop the good news going to the ends of the earth.

And when we support and when we seek to plant churches, to do evangelism and to think evangelistically, we align ourselves with this radical world-changing movement. Let me pray. Father, thank you for this great commission that the Lord Jesus has given all of us here as individuals, as a church here at Bon Accord.

[30 : 43] It's a denomination. This is the commission. this is what Jesus wants of us. So, Father, we pray that you would challenge and help us, that you would help us to trust you, Jesus.

Jesus, it's so wonderful to know that you're King. I pray for some people here who maybe just feel cold and distant to the gospel and maybe things just feel ritualistic and they don't have joy.

Father, I pray that you would awaken their hearts by your Spirit. that they would see the greatness of Christ and they would joyfully worship him. Father, I pray that for those of us here who are struggling and we are trying to tell people about Jesus but it's difficult and it's hard, I pray that you would embolden us with the great truths of the gospel.

I pray, Father, you would give us a perspective on eternity so that we can go and tell, so that people can be baptized. Help us, Lord, to not just look at telling but teaching, to help teach others about how to live in obedience to Jesus.

And Father, help us to have a heart for the world, not just for our city or our nation, but for all the nations. May we pray for them and may you, Lord of the harvest, send out so many more labourers.

[32 : 06] The harvest fields are so plentiful, even as we think of the city here, so plentiful and the labourers are so few. Please, Almighty God, raise up more labourers. May your church spread, may it grow, and may the name of Jesus be honoured above all names.

Amen. Amen.