

# Matthew 28:1-10

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Our New Testament reading and the passage I want us to think about this morning is Matthew 28. Matthew 28. We're going to read from the beginning to the verse marked 10. I should have probably started the reading in the previous chapter. I'll refer to it later on. Matthew 28.

After the Sabbath at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and going to the tomb rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, do not be afraid for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.

Then go quickly and tell his disciples. He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him. Now I have told you. So the women hurried away from the tomb yet 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. Then Jesus said to them, do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee and there they will see me.

You might wonder why I am going to be focusing on the resurrection when it's almost Christmas. It doesn't seem like the right time, does it? After all, this is the kind of theme that you would expect at Easter time rather than in the middle of winter. Well, there is never a bad time to think about the resurrection. In fact, there's a sense in which every Lord's Day should be a celebration and it should be a reflection on Jesus rising from the dead. That's why we meet on the first day of the week because it was the first day of the week when Jesus rose from the dead. So whatever time of year it is, we are going to look and we're going to rejoice together and we're going to read and reflect for a few moments on the resurrection of Jesus and particularly the account that's given to us in this chapter, Matthew 28. And I want us to stand at the empty tomb this morning and listen and listen to five voices, five voices at the tomb. That's going to be the title of what we're going to be looking at, five voices. And these voices are not just going to be coming from people, they're going to be coming from things. The scene that we see, we're going to listen to the message of these five voices.

[ 2 : 5 9 ] When Jesus' lifeless body was lifted down from the cross after him having suffered the indescribable agony, there were two reactions. Amongst Jesus' enemies, it was party time, a time to celebrate, a moment of relief and gladness. Now at last, after three long years of having to put up with this menace, Jesus of Nazareth, the religious leaders who had plotted to put him to death, they could get back to normal. They could return to their place of unchallenged authority. There would be no more awkward conversations about who is my neighbor. There'd be no more suggestions that I should love my enemies.

There'd be no more allowing women caught in adultery to walk free. There'd be no more having to wrestle with the question of Jesus' miraculous powers, now to explain them. There'd be no more humiliating questions which showed up their ignorance and worse still, showed up their hypocrisy. The religious leaders were now celebrities again, respected and followed by the masses. They could return to their business of selling animals at exorbitant prices in the temple precincts so as to become rich by selling God's grace. They could return to their prosperity gospel which said all you have to do is buy our products and do what we say and well we hope you'll be right with God. The more you spend, the more grace that you will get.

And what's more, they could return to their homes breathing a sigh of relief. After all, this was the proof that they longed for that Jesus was a passing phase. He's gone the same way as every other new message. They could return to the people and say, well the real message is the old one, the one that we represent as Jewish leaders. Whatever hopes you placed in this phenomenon, Jesus of Nazareth as possible Messiah. And we have to concede that there were some things that are inexplicable like his walking on the water and his feeding of the five thousand and raising the dead. We don't pretend to understand what these things were or how he was able to do these things. But whatever hopes you had in him as Messiah, all you have to do is watch his lifeless body being taken down from the cross and placed in the grave and that is the end of the story. Which is why of course those who followed Jesus were absolutely heartbroken. Their world had fallen apart. They were shattered and confused and utterly distraught. Not just because someone they knew and loved had died, but this was Jesus of Nazareth whom they had come to believe as the Son of God. So now their problem was an intellectual one, a theological one.

How can God die? How can God hang on a cross? How can this body that we believe belong to, the man who we believed is the Son of God, Messiah, it's now dead and it's been lifted helplessly off the cross and wrapped up in linen and placed in a cave.

How can this be God? That's not only an important question, it is central.

[ 7 : 08 ] Not just in the minds of the disciples, but it's central to the gospel. Because at the very heart of the good news is precisely this message.

That Jesus, the Son of God, God himself in the flesh, suffered and died on the cross.

And his death was real. And he was, his body was taken down and placed in a cave. I know the way it looks, it just doesn't make sense, does it?

It didn't make sense to the disciples. But I hope that if it doesn't make sense to you, that that may be the starting point of your journey, which will eventually lead you to faith in Jesus.

Because much as it looks as if this is the end of the story, it wasn't. Three days later, the tomb that Jesus' body was placed in was found to be empty.

[ 8 : 17 ] What's more, the living Jesus was met by his followers. And he was witnessed by 500 people.

That was not, this was not the end of the story. So today I want us to focus on this account.

Hopefully to arouse interest. If you're not a Christian this morning, then I hope that the central feature of the gospel, the starting point of the gospel, will become so embedded in your consciousness that you will not rest until you get to the heart of this great message and come to know this living Jesus for yourself.

And the way we come to know it is by listening to the Bible, and particularly the account that's given here in Matthew 28. Let's look together then at some of the voices that we hear.

The first one is the voice of Pilate. Pilate was the Roman governor who had originally condemned Jesus. Having questioned him, having tried him, having listened to the accusations, he had eventually given in to the will of the crowd, the baying mob, and he had turned him over to be crucified.

- [ 9 : 40 ] He had done this dozens of times. You would think that a man like Pilate, with all his experience, he would think nothing of just sending another man to this awful death.
- He had done it before. He was well used to it. It may have bothered him the first few times. But you get used to these things, don't you? Especially if you're a hardened Roman soldier, used to watching people being put to death.
- And yet for all the acquaintance that he had with his position, this one was different. This man was different. There was something about Jesus that really bothered him.
- What's more, he knew that he hadn't gone with his first instincts. He knew that this man had not done anything that was worthy of death.
- But instead, when faced with, on the one hand, whether to do the right thing and set him free, or to listen to the crowd who called out for his execution, he had listened to the crowd.

- [ 10 : 43 ] And that must have bothered him because it must have left him with a question, who's in charge here? You see, his authority is at stake.
- Who really was in charge? He had given in to political expediency rather than doing the right thing. And so it's not surprising to me that there are one or two things that he says as an attempt to compensate for what he has done and the wrong that he has committed.

In the first place, you remember when he wrote, this is Jesus, the king of the Jews, and that really angered the Jewish ruling leaders. That really got under their skin. They told him not to write that.

And he said, I'm going to write it. What I have written, I have written. It was really quite a pathetic attempt to try and compensate for what he had done. The second thing he did was that he told his servants or his soldiers to roll the stone in front of the cave where the body of Jesus had been placed.

And then the third thing he said was that they were to put a seal on the stone because there was just something about this Jesus.

- [ 12 : 01 ] He said that it was just in case the disciples came by night and stole the body. Well, that's again listening to the people who were trying to persuade him to go in a certain direction. But the real strange thing is that Pilate allowed the body of Jesus to be placed in this particular tomb.

The historians tell me that there was a common grave outside Jerusalem into which the bodies of all common criminals were thrown. But this was different.

Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate specifically and he asked for the body of Jesus and Pilate gave permission. Now, he didn't need to do that. I wonder if that was yet another attempt at solving his own conscience that must have been giving him grief at having sent this man.

Not only was he an innocent man, but the word was that he was the Son of God. He was Messiah. He was divine. And with that consciousness that every human being has of the reality of God, and don't make any mistake, all of us possess that consciousness.

Could it be that for a moment the fear of God gripped him? The problem is when the fear of God grips us, what do we do with it?

- [ 13 : 35 ] Do we listen to the voice of God? As Pilate could have done, he had every opportunity to ask Jesus who he was and why he had come into the world. He had every opportunity to believe in Jesus.

Other Romans had. You remember the centurion who came to believe in Jesus? And yet Pilate chose not to believe. He chose to go down another road.

And that's always our choice, isn't it? When we're confronted with Jesus. Why did Pilate not just do the logical thing and ask the right questions?

I don't understand. Why do you not ask the right questions? Why do you choose to ignore Jesus? Instead of asking the right questions, which will lead you to a real understanding of who Jesus was and is.

And that's what the gospel is, an invitation to you to look, to come and see, and to discover for yourself. Will you do that this morning?

[ 14 : 37 ] Will you do that? Will you come and discover the most wonderful message in the world? Don't be like Pilate, who appeared to elevate his own authority.

Actually, it was a pathetic attempt, wasn't it? Because actually, he ended up being manipulated by the crowd, rather than do the right thing. And you can't help thinking as well, isn't it, that he's just making every attempt to try to make sure that the grave is secure for his own sense of ease, to solve his own conscience.

But that's as far as he could go. All he could do, there's a limit to every authority in the world. Even the greatest authority, as it was represented by Pilate, the Roman Empire.

If you know anything about the Roman Empire, it's so fascinating, isn't it? It appeared to be an invincible force at one time. It was unstoppable. And yet it was full of corruption.

And it crumbled. And today, it's only a memory of the past. It's the stuff of historians and universities. It is no more. There's no more threat.

[ 15 : 50 ] There's no more fear. There are no more soldiers. There are no more armies. There are no more centurions. They were all there in the past. And thousands of people died because this force was so invincible.

And yet now, it is forgotten because authority, human authority, is limited. It only lasts for a while. And today, the gospel of Jesus Christ continues to be discovered all over the world.

So that's the first voice. The voice of Pilate and what he tried to do to stop the threat of the disciples stealing the body or so he thought.

What's the second voice? The second voice is the message of the stone. I know I'm being a little bit creative here. That's okay.

But I can't help thinking that the stone has its own message. I don't know if anything was written on the seal that Pilate ordered to be put on the stone, but I can't help listening in the silence to the stone as it represents death.

[ 17 : 04 ] It's a grave. It's a one-way passage. I can't help listening to that message that says no one gets out of here.

all who are on this side are dead. There is no coming back. There is no returning. There is something deeply final about death, not just 2,000 years ago, but today.

That's what makes it so sad. That is what it, the loss of people that we knew in this world, people who we lived with in this world and people who meant so much to us.

That's why the disciples were so heartbroken because for them the ministry of Jesus had come to an end. All that he had meant to them, their lives were completely different now from what they were three years ago and now he was gone.

They fully expected this to continue and develop into a kingdom where he would be the king and so he ought to have been in their view. But now he was gone.

[ 18 : 19 ] He was dead. His lifeless body had been wrapped in linen and placed in the tomb and the great stone stood permanently outside of the grave.

So the message of the stone is this, everything in here belongs to me. No one can get past me.

I am final. Until, of course, God stepped in. God came into the tomb triumphantly and breathed life into the stone to be rolled away in order for him to get in.

God came into the tomb triumphantly and breathed life into the body of Jesus.

The cold, lifeless body of Jesus that had lain there for three days and now became warm and now stood up. The grave clothes dropping to the floor in a heap is what John tells us.

[ 19 : 48 ] He then took the headdress off of whatever they wrapped around his head and he placed it, he folded it by itself. That's again what John tells us and then he was on his way passed through the stone and into the resurrected triumphant life of Jesus.

He had risen from the grave actually, historically, physically. What we're looking at here is not only a miracle but it lies at the very heart of everything that we stand for.

We believe that Jesus who was dead rose again on the third day. I love the way this is put in verse 2.

There was a violent earthquake. We'll come on to that in a moment. That's the next voice we're going to look at. For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and going to the tomb rolled back the stone you ever noticed the next couple of words and sat on it.

The angel of the Lord he wasn't responsible for raising Jesus it was God that was responsible the angel is just the agent he's just the servant so he comes down and his job is to make way for the disciples to discover the resurrection so he rolls back the stone and he sat on it so the throne that appeared to be sovereign death appears to be in command it now becomes a throne where the angel of God sits because God is on the throne God is sovereign he is triumphant over death death there's almost this this amusing little little phrase here he sat on it just to show in case there was any doubt whatsoever Pilate may think he is in command no he is not God is in command third voice is the voice of the third of the first day the first day notice how this passage passage begins after the sabbath at dawn on the first day of the week

[ 22 : 18 ] I think these words are full of significance because they're not just they're not just chronological it's not just a chronological account this is what happened on which day Matthew is saying a lot more than that he is saying that one era is passing and another one is coming to light the era that is passing is the old testament and is represented by the sabbath you remember I'm sure most of you will know this but the sabbath was a very special day in the weekly calendar of Israel it was the seventh day of the week and it goes all the way back to the creation account in Genesis chapter 1 Genesis 1 tells us that God created the heavens and the earth in six days and on the seventh day he rested and that day of rest was to become an emblem it was to become a mark it was to become a pattern of rest for

God's people Israel so one of the ten commandments the fourth commandment was remember the sabbath day to keep it holy and on that day the people of God were to do no work because God was concerned that they would rest God doesn't want us to work 24 seven he knows that our bodies our minds need a day of rest so he made that provision he made that that he gave us what one theologian calls the first human rights bill in the ten commandments which was to command that that servants should be given a day of rest that you should be given a day of rest but it was much more than what you were or weren't allowed to do on the seventh day if you were an Israelite who lived by faith the seventh day was a mark of joy it was a time of celebration God himself we read in

Exodus he he was refreshed on the Sabbath day Exodus chapter 31 God tells us this you shall keep the Sabbath because it's holy for you it's a sign between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and on the seventh he rested and was refreshed refreshed you ever noticed that before and was refreshed what does that mean how can God be refreshed well let me tell you what I believe it means it believes that God took utter delight in everything that he had done he rejoiced do you think it's strange that I'm talking about God rejoicing why should I why should that be strange to any one of us of course God rejoices God is the source of joy and here having looked at everything that he had made at the very beginning he rejoiced in everything actually those of us

I hope who believe that the first day of the week is the equivalent to the Sabbath that should be what should mark the way we keep the Lord's day it's a day of joy it's a day of worship it's a day of celebration it's a day when we when we are when we give ourselves if we can I know that people have duties elsewhere but if we can that we focus our attention that we discipline ourselves to rejoice in God that's why we come to church that's why I hope that we spend the day differently allowing our bodies and our minds to rest we can't keep going all the time and so that we get this opportunity of reflecting over what God has done that's the way to keep the Lord's day it's not about oh am I allowed to do this or am I allowed to do that or it's not about that but we just become nervous wrecks if that's all we think about but it's about the way in which God fills our hearts and the way in which we give ourselves so the Sabbath day was a day when it looked forward to what

God was going to do not just what God had done but what God was going to do and this was a moment this was I believe the moment that the Sabbath day looked forward to the day when God rose when he accomplished his own work of salvation by raising Jesus from the dead as God's way of saying to the world salvation is now complete my son has risen from the dead time is going on let's talk about number four voice number four the voice of the earth there was a great earthquake a violent earthquake verse number two a violent earthquake earthquake what does the earth have to tell us well do you know I believe that this is tied up I mean you can if you disagree with me by the by awake come come to afterwards we'll talk about it afterwards and that's why I was going to read on the previous chapter remember previous chapter in verse 51 when Jesus died on the cross verse 51 this is so fascinating have you ever thought about this at that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom the earth shook and the rocks split look at what you see there verse 52 the tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people that's God's people who had died were raised to life they came out of the tombs and after

[ 28 : 20 ] Jesus after Jesus resurrection this is what ties it up with Matthew 28 after Jesus resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people now somehow I don't know how this all chronologically happened I don't think it really matters but somehow the earth shook and the graves were open or at least some graves were open and some believers who had died I don't know how long they had been dead doesn't matter maybe a hundred years I don't know two hundred years doesn't matter they rose again when Jesus rose again can you imagine that can you imagine how freaked out you'd be if you saw them I would be that's what happened it raises all kinds of questions doesn't it it's like well what happened to these people afterwards did they just did they live in houses or did they have work to do or what did they just kind of life as usual no

I don't believe that for a moment I believe this was a momentary a momentary event that God made to happen to mark the significance of Jesus resurrection as the forerunner of what's one day going to happen when Jesus comes again the Bible tells us that one day Jesus will come again the trumpet will sound and the command will be given by Jesus himself to those who were in the graves to rise with new bodies I don't know what kind of bodies these people had I don't know there's so many questions did they have heavenly bodies was this for them the resurrection is there going to be for them another resurrection I don't know did they disappear and go off to be probably yes but what it does do is one more certainty that God is true to his word and what he has promised will come to pass I know how impossible it is for the dead to be raised we all know how impossible the disciples knew impossible you don't need to be a scientist to know how impossible it is for someone who's who has died to be raised to life again but God is the God of the impossible and this is what he did now he this is what he's doing to show to demonstrate to the world that he has the universe in his hands and he will do as he has promised and so when we announce the death of people we loved and people we knew in this world we do so in sadness and yet we do not sorrow as those who have no hope what hope do we have this is it the Jesus who rose from the dead is the Jesus who promised I am the resurrection and the life he who believes in me though he were dead yet shall he live and he who lives and believes in me will never die the voice of the earth he is not here he is risen that's the greatest message in all the world isn't it he is not here he is risen and he's going ahead of you to Galilee the place where they lived every day there you will meet him they said there you will see him sure enough when they went back there they met him alive standing talking eating drinking among them at least for a while until he was taken back up to heaven to demonstrate the reality the living proof that the Jesus who had given himself on the cross is the

Jesus who rose again triumphant over the grave and the Jesus who promised to meet the disciples at their normal place of residence is the Jesus who promises to meet with us at our normal place of residence in our work our places of work in our families in our homes that is where we are accompanied by the living Lord Jesus every day lo I am with you always he says even to the end of the world Galilee was a place that needed the light of the gospel Aberdeen is a place that needs the light of the gospel the gospel begins here Jesus is risen the place where they where they laid his body is empty he is not here he's the living Jesus Christ who is able to transform the most hopeless individual because he's done it already to many of you many of you who are watching he's met with us he has shown us how much we need him he has transformed our lives he has rescued us from death itself and will raise us one day from the grave and promises that we will go forever to be with the Lord our father we want to rest in that promise afresh that hope that assurance that we have that you are God that you are victorious over sin over death over the grave we ask Lord that as we reflect on this great truth this central truth that it might be a strength to us as we make our way through such difficult challenges such unbelief and as we seek to be the light of the world in

Jesus name Amen you you you you you you you you you you you