

Book of Matthew Chapter 28

In this chapter, we shall read of Matthew's description of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. As one might expect, Matthew gives us a very distinctive Jewish view point on the events that took place. There are a number of things in this chapter which are unique to Matthew, and a couple of things which are included by only Matthew and Mark. These details are :

By Matthew only:

- The great earthquake
- The angel of the Lord
- The soldiers at the tomb
- The women hold Him by the feet

By Matthew and Mark only

- The Sabbath was past
- The re-union in Galilee

Omitted by Matthew only:

- Any mention of the ascension.

We shall look at these details as we progress through the chapter.

Verse 1 begins with:

In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

Only Mark of the other three writers mentions the fact that the Sabbath was past. It is surely highly symbolical, as it suggests the end of an era. The Sabbath was the hallmark of Judaism. The Sabbath was part of the covenant that God had made with Israel. The Sabbath marked the Jew as being different from all around. But now the Sabbath is ended. It is finished with from now on. It began to dawn towards the first day of the week. A new era is about to dawn, replacing the old covenant. The new day, typifies the church age, which is soon to commence on the day of Pentecost.

Matthew describes the arrival at the tomb of two women, Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary". The other Mary is identified in chapter 27, verse 56, as Mary the mother of James and Joses. These two women were part of a little band of women who followed Him from Galilee and ministered unto Him of their substance. They were marked by devotion and perseverance. They had good reason for being so. Many of these women, when they first met the Lord Jesus, had been possessed of demons. Mary Magdalene had been a particularly bad case. She had been possessed by seven demons. Her whole life had been dominated by the power of Satan. I believe that out of all the followers of the Lord Jesus, including even the twelve disciples, there was no-one loved Him more than Mary Magdalene. He chose her to be the first to see Him in resurrection. Her love exceeded even that of Peter and John. John 20:10 is significant. The disciples went away again to their own home – but Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping. So what happened when they reached the sepulchre?

2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

Only Matthew records the fact that there was a great earthquake, just as he is the only writer to tell us about the earthquake that happened when the Lord died upon the cross. That resurrection and the other events that happened when He cried with a loud voice in

Matthew 27, underline the truth of the words of Ecclesiastes chapter 8 – where the word of a king is, there is power. The Lord's death and resurrection are the two greatest events in the history of mankind – they are the essential ingredients of the gospel of the grace of God being preached today. Paul outlines his gospel in I Corinthians chapter 15:

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.

It is most significant that in the book of Acts, on all 8 occasions when we read of the apostles preaching, the Lord's death and resurrection are always mentioned. They preached about a once dead, but now risen, Saviour.

Only Matthew mentions the appearance of the angel of the Lord. Who is this mysterious angel? It is obviously not Michael or Gabriel for they would have identified themselves as in Daniel and Luke. Nor can it be as some have suggested the Lord Jesus, for here in this chapter, the angel is distinct from Him. The angel of the Lord is mentioned many times in the Old Testament with particular reference to the patriarchs and to Israel. He is also mentioned in Matthew and in Luke, then finally in Acts chapter 12, where he brings about the death of Herod the king. This angel is surely God Himself for no other could do what He has done throughout the scriptures. And what was the appearance of this angel?

3 His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

Lightning would speak of the swiftness of judgment, and "His raiment white as snow" would speak of His holiness. Such was His appearance, that four big brave Roman soldiers shook with fear.

4 And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

The appearance of angels usually produced fear in the eyes of the beholders. Thus in Luke chapter 1, Gabriel had to say to Zacharias, "Fear not", and the same words again to Mary. Likewise, the angel said to the shepherds in Luke chapter 2, "Fear not". There is only one exception to this rule and that was Mary Magdalene in John chapter 20. Two angels appeared to Mary but there is no mention of her being afraid of them. Indeed John records the fact that she turned her back on them. She had come looking for the Lord Jesus to anoint His body, and thus angels held no fear for her, neither had she any interest in them. Mary is the epitome of that verse in I John chapter 4:

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear:

The angel has nothing to say to the soldiers but He speaks to the women:

5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which 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, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

The angel knew why they were there – "Ye seek Jesus". The Lord did not appear to the soldiers or indeed to any of His enemies, after He rose from the dead. One might have thought that now would have been the perfect time to vindicate Himself before men, but He appeared only to His own. The Lord made this distinction in John's gospel. In chapter 7, He is speaking to a crowd of unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem and He tells them:

34 Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come.

The Lord will be seen of His enemies in a coming day but that awaits the day of His appearing in glory. But He is speaking to His own in the upper room in chapter 13 so He tells them, "Ye shall seek Me" – but there is no addition of the phrase "and shall not find Me".

Joh 13:33 Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you.

These seeking women are about to meet the risen Christ. The angel first reminds them of the Saviour's own promise.

he is risen, as he said.

The Lord had spoken not only about His death but also of His resurrection. As early as John chapter 2, He spoke about both events.

Joh 2:19 Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

He had given them the sign of the prophet Jonah adding that He would be three days and three nights in the bowels of the earth. In Matthew 16, He revealed to His disciples that He would be killed and be raised again the third day.

The angel of the Lord in Matthew 28 has rolled away the stone. In Mark's account, we get some idea of its size and weight. There were several women at the tomb but they had a problem, "Who shall roll away the stone for us. For it was very great". The problem is overcome by the angel, who now invites the women to view the empty tomb. "Come see the place where the Lord lay".

In verse 7, the women are given a message to pass on to the disciples:

7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

A meeting place is given to them – Galilee. The meeting is accomplished later, as we read of in verse 16. The same message about Galilee is given in Mark's account. There is one point however that is noticeable about Matthew – he makes no mention at all about the Lord's ascension. If we only had Matthew's gospel, we might be left thinking that the Lord was still here on earth, somewhere in Galilee. But in many respects, this is typical of Matthew – the gospel of the king and the kingdom. The Jewish hope is that their Messiah will come to this earth and establish His kingdom, and give Israel their place in this kingdom. Hence in Matthew, the Lord is never described as leaving this earth.

How did the women respond to the angelic message? They ran with fear and great joy. That joy was soon greatly enhanced when they met the Lord.

9 And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

The expression "All hail" is simply the word for "Rejoice". It was a time for rejoicing. The women responded to Him by coming to Him, holding Him by the feet, and worshipping Him. They held Him by the feet, proving that this body was not a spirit as some have stated but a real tangible body. The women would see the nail marks of Calvary in those feet.

Luke is the gospel of the man – a real man in every respect. In Luke 24, the chapter in which Luke tells us of the resurrection, the writer goes to great pains to underline the physical tangible body of the Lord when He rose again.

39 Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.

40 And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet.

41 And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat?

42 And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb.

43 And he took it, and did eat before them

The Lord had no need to eat, but He did so to show the tangible nature of His body. He took bread also in the house in Emmaus, and in John 20, He invites Thomas to touch His hands and to thrust his hand into His side.

We will have a resurrection body just like His – a body tangible, recognisable, but without limitations.

But why is it that these women in Matthew 28 are allowed to hold Him by the feet while in John 20, the Lord says to Mary Magdalene, "Touch Me not". Mary was not to touch Him or indeed to hold on to Him, for He was about to ascend to the Father. In John's account, the Lord is on His way to heaven via the ascension. In Matthew, the Lord repeats the angel's command, "Go into Galilee".

We are not left wholly on Jewish ground, however. The Lord says to the women, "Go tell My brethren". Prior to His resurrection, He had never used the word "brother" to describe His disciples. They were His friends, His little children, but now they were His brethren. He had brought them into the family of God, they were God's children, so He could rightly call them His brethren. Because of His experiences here in this world, sharing in humanity, He is not ashamed to call them brethren. Hebrews 2 says:

Heb 2:11 For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren,

From verses 11 to 15, we learn of the response of the soldiers after they have recovered from the appearance of the angel. They went and told the chief priests what had happened. How did these religious rulers react? Did they fall down and acknowledge that God was at work? This would have been to acknowledge their own guilt at rejecting this Jesus, so they attempt rather a cover-up. They bribe the soldiers to tell the lie, that as they slept, His disciples came and stole away the body. This lie, says Matthew, is believed among the Jews to this day. By accepting the bribe, the soldiers were putting their own lives at risk, for to admit that they had slept on duty and lost the body they were supposed to be guarding was a capital offence for a soldier or a jailor. In Acts 12, when Peter was loosened out of the prison, Herod commanded that the guard should be killed. In Acts 16, the Philippian jailor was about to kill himself when he thought all the prisoners had escaped.

The lie told by the soldiers was an unbelievable one. Is it possible that all four soldiers could have fallen asleep at the same time? Is it credible that all four would have slept so soundly that they would not have heard the disciples coming to roll away the stone – a stone so great it would have taken several men to shift it.

"The governor's ears" are mentioned in verse 14:

14 And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.

Pilate is called the governor on no less than nine occasions in Matthew 27 and 28.

Knowing what he did about Jesus of Nazareth, and probably having had some sleepless nights since the trial, I don't think Pilate would have needed too much persuading of the truth of an empty tomb.

In verse 16, we read of how the disciples obeyed the Lord's command and "went away into Galilee".

17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.

We presume that this encounter with the Lord must have taken place at least 7 days after His resurrection. It is difficult then to understand the comment, "But some doubted". Is it possible that He met here with not just the 12 but with the company of over 500 that Paul writes about in I Corinthians? It is impossible to be specific.

There they met the Lord on a mountain. Matthew is the gospel of the mountains. In chapters 5 to 7, we have the sermon on the mount. In chapter 17, we have the mount of transfiguration. In chapters 24 and 25, we have the prophetic ministry on Mount Olivet. Mountains speak of kingdoms, and the commission given to the disciples is the gospel of the kingdom.

There were various elements to it.

They were to teach (make disciples) of all nations They were to baptize them They were to teach them His commandments

This gospel of the kingdom will be preached again during the Tribulation period. The Jews will make disciples of nations. Men will be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But how were they going to achieve this? They were assured of two things:

His power - all power is given unto Me His presence - I am with you all the days, even to the completion of the age.