

Glory in His Face: Risen Lord

Matthew 28:1-20

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September 15, 2013

Over the last five weeks we have been thinking about the glory of Christ in His person and in His work. We have considered the glory of the God-Man, the union of deity and humanity in the one person of Christ. We have considered the glory of our compassionate Savior. Jesus is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses. We have looked at Christ, the obedient servant. Where Adam's sin plunged humanity into an estate of sin and misery, so Christ the second Adam, by His obedience, provided the righteousness we need that we may be counted righteous in the sight of God for His sake. We looked last time at the Lord Jesus our sacrificial Lamb, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The crowning act of obedience by which our Savior secured our redemption was His death in our place as our substitute and our representative. Tonight we're coming to think about a fifth glory that shines to us and upon us in the face of Christ. I want us to think about the glory of Jesus, the risen Lord, the glory of His wonderful resurrection from the dead about which we have been singing this evening.

So would you take your Bibles and turn with me to Matthew's gospel, chapter 28. Matthew chapter 28. And then would you bow your heads with me as we turn to God in prayer. Let us all pray.

Our Father, we praise You that Jesus lives and that before us is His Word and He continues to speak to the church in it and by His Spirit bears His Word with power into our hearts, convicting us of sin, teaching us to trust Him, enabling in us faith, quickening us to new obedience. O how we pray for our Savior's ministry by His Spirit in this portion of Your holy and inerrant Word among us this evening. And we ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

Matthew chapter 28. We will read from verse 1:

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like

lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped 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."

While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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 all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Amen, and we praise God that He has spoken in His holy and inerrant Word. May He write its eternal truth upon all our hearts.

If the story of Jesus ended with the cross, it could not be called Good News. Jesus is dead means Jesus failed. Jesus is dead means Jesus lied. Jesus is dead means Jesus was a fraud. The gospel accounts, however, do not end with the lifeless body of Jesus laid to rest in an ancient tomb. He rose and it is the resurrection of Christ that makes the Gospel, Gospel. It's what makes the Good News good. The tomb is empty. The Lord has risen. His Word is true. His promises real. His death satisfactory. His atonement complete. His obedience perfect. His service acceptable. His victory total. Jesus lives, and because He lives we who believe on Him will also live. Jesus rose and because He rose we who believe on Him will also one day rise. The resurrection is the great necessity. It is the sine qua non of the Gospel. Because Jesus rose there is good news for the world; there is good news for you because Jesus rose.

We're going to think together about the message of the resurrection as it comes

to us in one of the gospel accounts, the passage we read together just a moment ago, Matthew 28, and I want you to notice as we consider it together the three great movements - fairly obvious in the way our passage is laid out - by which chapter 28 is constructed. In the first verses, 1 through 10, our attention is focused on the women who came early on the first day of the week to the tomb. It teaches us about the response of faith to the fact of the resurrection. The second, in 11 to 15, focuses by way of contrast on the response of fear and unbelief to the fact of the resurrection. While the third, in 16 to 20, turns our attention to Christ Himself and shows us the great calling that the fact of the resurrection places upon the church. In 1 to 10 we might say these are feet worth touching, in 11 to 15 lies worth telling, and in 16 to 20, commands worth keeping.

FEET WORTH TOUCHING

Let's look at 1 to 10 first of all please. It is just before dawn on Sunday morning and the two Mary's go to the place where Jesus has been entombed. A sudden earthquake signals the dissent of an angel who rolls back the stone that covered the entrance to the tomb. His appearance is so dazzling that his presence induces, perhaps unsurprisingly, the immediate loss of consciousness in the guards that have been sent to keep watch over the grave. They faint and become, we are told, "like dead men." You can't blame them really, after the long watch through the night. And earthquake followed by an angelic visitation would be enough I'm sure to render most of us senseless. And that's exactly what happened. Terrifying, though it must have been for the guards however, the message of the angel to the woman was not one of judgment but one of hope. "Do not be afraid for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He has risen as He said. Come and see where He lay then go quickly and tell the disciples that He's risen from the dead, that He's going before you to Galilee, and there you will see Him." So running to tell the disciples, full of joy and fear, they meet Jesus Himself.

Three things He says to them. I love the simplicity and duty of Matthew's reporting here. Look what happens as they meet Jesus. Verse 9 - "Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him." Here is Jesus Himself now, in the flesh, risen and alive, standing before them greeting them and they fall to the ground, not as the guards did - stupefied, senseless - but now full of awe and adoration they come up and take hold of His feet we are told. One imagines the moment as trembling hands reached towards Him. Can it be that this is the same Jesus whose flesh we saw ripped and torn and pierced. Could this be the same Christ whose lifeblood ebbed away till He breathed His last on the cross? Do we dare touch Him? Is He real? Isn't this perhaps some delusion, some grief-induced mirage? And so their hands reach for His feet. And as they make contact they realize this is no mirage. This is no hallucination. He is real. He lives. What a moment that must have been. What a moment. These are the feet that had walked the streets of

Palestine, the feet the sinful woman bathed with her tears of joy at having been forgiven, wiping them with her hair. The feet at which Martha had sat and learned from her Master. The feet that Mary had anointed with perfume just before He was betrayed. These are the feet the disciples thought beneath them to wash that night in the Upper Room. These are the feet that helped drag the cross along the Via Dolorosa. These are the feet through which Romans nails were driven, still bearing the scars.

You see, the radical message of the resurrection of Christ is that the humanity that Jesus took into union with Himself is a humanity He bears still. The body of Jesus, the same body in which he obeyed and bled and died, is the body now risen and glorified that sits on the throne of heaven. Again and again the gospels make exactly that point. When He stood among the disciples in the Upper Room after His resurrection, John 20 and verse 27, remember He showed doubting Thomas His hands and His feet and invited Thomas to place his hands into the wounds that were the abiding emblems of His crucifixion. Or again, Jesus meets the disciples at the Sea of Tiberius. When they arrive at the shore, they find that the risen Christ has built a fire for them and prepared breakfast - fish and bread - and they ate it together, John 21 and verse 9. Jesus rose is the point and He rose in all the solid physicality of a real human body, the same body in fact that was torn and emulated on the cross.

The Christian Gospel, you see, is not just good news for minds, good news for souls. It's not just good news in some vague spiritual sense. It's not an abstract philosophy that offers release, nirvana when at last we are set free from the prison of the flesh. The Christian Gospel declares actually that one day flesh and bones will be redeemed. One day, matter and energy will be made over. One day creation itself, defiled and broken since Adam, will become creation remade and renewed in Christ. The Christian Gospel declares that the physical world of real things, of hands and feet, of bricks and stone, will one day be swept up in a cosmic transformation. Our hope is of a day to come when the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God - Romans 8:20. The very stuff of creation itself will be released from bondage to decay. The chains that tie the world to inevitable entropy will one day be shattered and the fabric of the cosmos will be caught up into the freedom of the glory of the children of God that will be ours who believe in Jesus Christ.

And how can Paul be so very confident that that coming day is in fact coming at all? He can be sure because in a real sense the resurrection and renewal of all things has already begun. The new creation has broken in upon us ahead of time, as it were, into the middle of history in the resurrection of the body of Jesus Christ from the grave. He is, as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 15:20, "the first fruits from the dead," of those who have been raised from the dead. He is the beachhead. He is the anchor. He is the guarantee that if tonight you trust in Him you will live in a body made new one day and you will live ultimately in a new

heavens and a new earth an environment made suitable to your renewed and glorified humanity, a home of righteousness where you will dwell forever with the Lord. That is what the resurrection of Jesus signals to us and guarantees to us. And so they clasp His feet in worship. It's an act of profound significance. The object of their adoration, the object of our adoration as Christian people, is the still enfleshed Christ, the divine Son who lives today in an everlasting union with real humanity, risen and glorified. Here is the highest imaginable doctrine of Christ - they worship Him. And here is the only fitting answer of faith to the reality that Jesus lives.

What do you do with a Jesus like this? It's not enough to admit that He lives, to assent to the fact of it, to offer a grudging concession that the evidence probably means after all that Jesus rules. That is not enough. It will not do. What do you do with a Jesus who lives in the same body in which He died and is now exalted? There really is only one thing to do, isn't there? You must fall down and worship Him. Nothing else, nothing less will suffice. Again and again in Matthew's gospel Jesus had told His disciples, "Death will not hold Me." Matthew 12:40, Matthew 16:21, 17:9 and 23, 20:19, 26:32 - over and over. "On the third day I will rise." And as the angel told the two Mary's, "He has risen just as He has said." He has kept His words. Had Jesus died and remained dead, were His bones today to be found moldering somewhere in a Middle Eastern tomb, we shouldn't say that He was a good man or a moral teacher. If Jesus is still dead we should say He was either a liar or a lunatic as the now famous trope has it. It's right. If Jesus is still dead He was a liar or a lunatic. He was delusional and unreliable. But since He rose just as He promised, you can trust His every word. He rose just as He said.

Ask yourself this - if He can overcome the great barrier of death itself to keep His promises, then to which of His promises can I point that He does not also have power to fulfill? To which circumstance in my life can I point that might present an insurmountable barrier to the One who has overcome the grave itself to keep His words? Because Jesus lives you can trust His every word. This man who died and rose is neither a liar nor a lunatic but as the two Mary's clearly recognize here, He is Lord. He is Lord. The Lord of life and the master of death. He is the mighty conquer of the grave and the only Savior of sinners. And His resurrection, therefore, can never be a mere data point to be acknowledged and moved on from. It must be rather a devastating, world-altering, life-changing pivot upon which everything must change. Here is the great demonstration that the baby of Bethlehem and the broken wretched man of Calvary is in fact the Lord of glory to whom you must bring your praise. These are feet worth touching, worth reverencing and adoring.

LIES WORTH TELLING

Then look secondly at the response, not of faith, but of fear and unbelief. Look at verses 11 to 15 please. Here are lies worth telling. While the women have gone

to report to the disciples the good news that Jesus lives, the guards who had been rendered senseless by the angelic visitor now have a report of their own to make. They have to go tell the bad news to the Jewish authorities. They've been knocked out cold, they've seen nothing. When they came to the body was gone. So a council is called - the elders and the chief priests assemble. What to do? You see their dilemma of course. The guards had been posted in the first place to prevent a resurrection hoax. They were placed outside the tomb to make sure no one stole the body. But now the very guards who should have been an asset to them in preventing a hoax have become a liability requiring a hoax of their own invention. And so a plan is hastily devised - "Tell everyone you fell asleep and that the disciples stole the body after all. And if Pilate comes after you, you know, for your dereliction of duty that night falling asleep while on watch, well don't worry about that; we'll protect you. And here is a sufficient sum to sweeten the deal." You have to chuckle at Matthew's language - sufficient for what? One rather imagines that some poor soul commanded by the council to get his money bag out and to begin counting out coins into the outstretched hands of the guards - one after one after one. Every now and again there's a pause and a little hopeful glance of their faces while they beckon for more until a sufficient sum is arrived at that will enable them to suddenly remember what happened after all. It's amazing how a hefty bribe makes the idea of admitting to falling asleep on duty not merely so embarrassing after all.

It is, of course, a desperate lie and one that is self-evidently false. If the guards had been asleep, how did they know the disciples stole the body? And how did the disciples manage to move this huge stone that had been rolled across the gravesite without waking them from their slumber? And the other theories that have been suggested over the years as alternatives to a resurrection, actually they fare no better. Jesus did not swoon on the cross, later to be revived in the cool of the sepulcher. The Roman spear thrust into His heart made sure of that. That the women on this occasion visited the wrong tomb is hardly credible. And the idea of a mass hallucination is frankly absurd. As one commentator put it, "The resurrection of Jesus can be dismissed only by a presuppositional worldview considerations that rule out supernatural events." The resurrection of Jesus makes far better sense than any of the theories that attempt to explain it away.

So why do they lie and lie so badly? This is really the best that they can do. And why is it, as Matthew himself admits in our passage, why is it that such lies continue to persist today? Well they lie because they're afraid. They lie because they know if Jesus rose again then He is who He says He was all along and their life must now change forever. A risen Jesus is a threat. And that is so often, you know, what drives unbelief and a rejection of the Gospel, isn't it? It's not really honest intellectual scruple; it is moral aversion to the claims of Jesus Christ. "If He rose again then He is a threat to my moral independence. I want to be the final arbiter of what is right and good and acceptable in my world. But if Jesus lives, well then everything He said is true and I must listen to Him and frankly I'd

really rather not.” And so we find the lies are worth telling after all. They’ve certainly become terribly plausible in light of our prior commitment to rebellion. To defend my moral autonomy, my right to be king and lawmaker and god in my own world, I must keep Jesus in a tomb somewhere at all costs. These are convenient lies - lies worth telling. But I wonder if the Word of God isn’t beginning to unmask the lies for you nonetheless. If it is not revealing the real motives behind your terribly sophisticated arguments against the Gospel, I wonder if your problem with Jesus, with His life and His death and His resurrection, isn’t really intellectual after all, but is in fact deeply moral in its origins.

In his book, *Ends and Means*, philosopher Aldous Huxley makes a frank admission. He’s honest. Listen to this. He said, “I had motives for not wanting the world to have meaning. Consequently, I assumed it had none and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem of poor metaphysics. He is also concerned to prove there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do. For myself, as no doubt for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from a certain political and economic system, and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality,” listen, “because it interfered with our sexual freedom.” Did you catch that? He embraced the philosophy of meaninglessness because it got in the road of his personal, moral predilections. It interfered with his sexual freedom. It got in the way. It was terribly inconvenient. Moral rebellion is what so often stands behind intellectual doubts and philosophical unbelief.

From time to time I’m asked to meet with people who struggle with doubts and again and again and again after a few minutes of conversation what becomes apparent is that their spiritual and intellectual difficulties have arisen because of moral choices that they have made - trajectories of habit and behavior that they are pursuing. They are sleeping with their boyfriends, they are using pornography, they are having an affair, they are lying about their finances, they are hiding an addiction to prescription drugs. They have made moral choices that demand an intellectual and spiritual environment that will allow those choices to live and be plausible and be justifiable. And having Jesus as a risen Lord simply will not do that. Maybe, maybe tonight God is shining the light of His Word into the deeper layers of motivation that stand behind intellectual sounding arguments and He is inviting you, the Lord is inviting you, the risen Christ is inviting you, to give up what is in the end - nothing but sheer rebellion against His rule.

COMMANDS WORTH KEEPING

So verses 1 to 10 explain the way that faith should respond to Jesus’ resurrection - feet worth touching. A person worth adoring. And 11 to 15 explain the way

unbelief so often does respond to Jesus' resurrection - here are lies we do often find to be worth telling. Then 16 to 20, very briefly, explain the obligations that rest upon us in the life of Jesus' resurrection - here are commands worth keeping. Look at the passage with me. The scene shifts once again. The disciples are obeying the command of Jesus; they have gone ahead of Him to Galilee where they meet Him. And just like the woman at the tomb, they too worship Him. What we need to be sure not to miss, is that having just exposed the real moral drivers behind militant unbelief in verses 11 to 15, Matthew is quick to show us the tenderness of Christ towards those who do believe but who nevertheless have doubts. Some of the disciples, we are told, worshiped, but others doubted. They hang back; they are unsure, at least at first. There is uncertainty. And then look at this - there is no word of rebuke, is there? In fact it is upon this ragtag band of unsure, uncertain disciples that Jesus bestows His famous commission in verses 19 and 20 - "Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." Isn't that remarkable when you think about it? Here is the risen Christ and He is standing right before them and still they doubt! And yet He bestows upon such disciples a command to go in His name with the Gospel to the world.

It is not perfect faith, unalloyed with doubts and fears, it is not perfect faith that Jesus looks for in those whom He will use, but it is real faith. Let me say that again. It is not perfect faith, unalloyed with fears and doubts, that Jesus looks for in those whom He will use, but it is real faith. Even doubting disciples who are disciples nonetheless, are commanded to take the Gospel to every nation. Do not add to doubt, if you doubt, disobedience because you think that you need to understand everything, settle every question, silence every nagging query. When Christ calls you, obey, and you will find whereas unbelief finds its plausibility in an environment of rebellion, faith is fostered in the context of obedience to the commands of Christ. If you are struggling with doubt, obey, and in the environment of obedience you will find that your faith begins to prosper once again. Obedience is the best environment for assurance. "Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

And then notice finally the marvelous way the command of Christ is bracketed in our passage. Here are the implications of the resurrection - verse 18 - "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore, and make disciples." "Go, because all authority has been given to Me! Now that I have purchased the salvation of sinners by My death and have risen in victory, all authority in heaven and on earth is mine!" He is now Lord of Lords and King of Kings, therefore, go. And verse 20 - "Go make disciples, baptizing and teaching and behold I am with you always, all the days - day after day after day - to the very end of the age." The authority of Jesus is matched with the tender presence of Jesus who attends to the needs of His people and never leaves us alone. Donald Macleod said that is the comfort of a church charged with an impossible task - "Go, I am with you and I have all authority!"

Because Jesus lives, brothers and sisters, we have work to do. We have good news to tell. We have a world to reach with the glad tiding, "Sin has been paid for! Death has been undone! Hope and light and life have dawned for all and for any who will look to Jesus!" Because Jesus lives, we must go in obedience to the command of the One who possesses total authority. And because Jesus lives, we can go in the confidence that the One who has such authority has bound Himself never to leave us, never to forsake us, but will by His Spirit be with us always till the promised new creation, of which His own resurrection is the first fruit, dawns at last. The world must hear because He lives and we can tell them because the living Lord has all the authority and we will never, never stand alone when we open our mouths to speak for Him.

So let me ask you as we close, how will you respond to the glory of the risen Christ? Will you resist, throwing up argument after argument, actually only to protect your moral rebellion? Or will you bow down in worship with the two Mary's in our passage and then rise up and go and tell the world the good news with the disciples? Will you pray with me?

Our Father, we praise You that the tomb is empty, that Jesus lives. Would You have mercy on us for the ways in which we try to defend ourselves sometimes against the claims of Christ's absolute Lordship. We like our moral independence and we love our sin. Have mercy on us. Show us the bankruptcy of our rebellion and the grace of God in Jesus for us. And as we begin to see Him in His loveliness and sufficiency and suitability to save, give us hearts that worship and give us grace to go in obedience and make disciples of the ends of the earth. For we ask this in our Savior's name, amen.

Would you stand and receive God's benediction?

And now may grace, mercy, and peace from Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you all now and forevermore. Amen.

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