

The Church of the Servant King

Mid-Week Bible Study

The Gospel of Matthew

(Mid Week_Matt 28)

He Is Risen (28:1-8)

¹ Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. ² And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. ³ And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. ⁴ The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. ⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. ⁶ "He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. ⁷ "Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you." ⁸ And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. (Matt 28:1-8)

This Sabbath is the regular, weekly Sabbath that falls on Saturday. So, the two Mary's who came to the tomb would be the first to witness the vacant tomb in evidence of His resurrection. As we noted in the last lesson, women weren't subject to crucifixion; however, the disciples as men could have been crucified like their leader.

For three days after the burial, the Jews had the custom of visiting the sepulcher to see if the soul – which, by popular tradition hovered about the sepulcher – had returned to the body. But the apostles wisely avoided visiting the tomb of Jesus and uselessly exposing themselves to the suspicion and fury of the determined and triumphant rulers of the Jews, who would be glad to do to them what they had done to Jesus.¹

Another earthquake occurred and an angel moved the stone so that everyone could see inside the tomb and know that Jesus was not there. When the account of this morning's events as presented in all the Gospel writers' narratives is examined, we see that there were other women who visited the tomb that morning. The sequence of events perhaps occurred as follows:

- The earthquake and the opening of the tomb by an angel.
- The resurrection and the descent of the angel.
- A group of women (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10) including the two Mary's (Matt 28:1) make their way to the tomb prior to the sunrise (John 20:1). They came to anoint the body of Jesus (Mark 16:3) and were pondering how to roll away the stone (Mark 16:3).
- Mary Magdalene arrived first and immediately ran to tell Peter and John (Jn 20:1).
- At least a part of the group of women arrive as the sun began to rise (Mark 16:2).
- An angel appeared to them and gave them a message to relay to the disciples (Matt 28:5; Mark 16:5ff).
- Some of the group of women arrive a little later and see "two young men" dressed in white at the tomb, and receive words of comfort and instruction (Lk 24:4).
- Next, Peter and John arrive with John in the lead (John 20:3-10).

¹ J.W. Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1946), 611 in J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, A Study of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 495.

- Mary Magdalene arrives again to see two angels (John 20:11-13).
- The other women had returned to bear the message to the other apostles (Luke 24:10).
- Jesus revealed Himself to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:14-18; Mk 16:9).
- Later, Jesus appeared to the rest of the women who were returning to the tomb (Matt 28:9).
- Also later, Jesus appeared to Peter (Lk 24:34; 1 Co 15:5) and to Cleopas and the other disciple on the road to Emmaus (Matt 28:12-13; Lu 24:13-35).
- Even later that evening, Jesus appeared to the eleven and others in the room with barred doors (Mk 16:14; Lk 24:36ff; Jn 20:19ff).

Galilee was the appointed location for Jesus' reunion with His disciples (see 26:32) and was the setting for the Great Commission (28:18-20). Most likely, Jesus chose to minister to His disciples in Galilee for at least a couple of reasons. First, all of them were from Galilee and second, He wanted a place where they could be free of the opposition while He instructed them.

The Soldiers Are Bribed (28:11-15)

¹¹ Now while they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. ¹² And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, ¹³ and said, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' ¹⁴ "And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble." ¹⁵ And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day.

The religious leaders bribed the soldiers of the guard; however, the excuse that the soldiers were provided would not hold up under close scrutiny. First, no Roman soldier would admit to sleeping while on duty since this was an offense punishable by death (see Acts 12:19; 16:27-28; 27:42). Second, if they had been asleep, how did they know who stole the body. Finally, Jesus Himself appeared to many people after His resurrection, thereby providing even more witnesses to His resurrection. Some other points in support of the authenticity of the resurrection account include:

- Jesus' tomb was shut with the Roman seal; to break the seal brought serious penalty (death), yet that penalty was entirely ignored.
- A two-ton stone slab was removed from the entrance to the tomb while under direct vigil by the highly disciplined Roman military guard.
- Both Jews and Romans admitted that the tomb was empty.
- Rather than execute the Roman guard for failing their task, they were ordered to lie concerning what really happened. The bribery is evidence that they knew the truth.
- The wrappings of cloth were apparently in tact, but without the corpse.
- Later Jesus appeared to numerous witnesses, at one time more than 500. (Psychologists insist that hallucination is a phenomenon that occurs only individually; it is virtually impossible for two persons to see the same hallucination, much less at the same time).
- Given the Jewish disconsideration (or rejection) of women as trustworthy witnesses, it makes no sense that the disciples would have conjured a story in which two women are the first witnesses to the resurrection.
- After their having fled and hidden during the crucifixion, to suggest the disciples stole the body makes no sense. It makes even less sense to say that, having allegedly stolen the body, they were then disposed to suffer and die for their feigned belief that Jesus had risen from the grave.
- No evidence whatsoever was ever offered to refute the Christian claim of Christ's resurrection in the first decades and centuries of the early church. The Church was built on the fact of the resurrection.

- Given the implausibility of other arguments which do not explain all the data, the most likely conclusion is that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead.

The Great Commission (28:16-20)

¹⁶ But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. ¹⁷ When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. ¹⁸ And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

When the eleven disciples went away into Galilee they were probably accompanied by many more people. This may be the appearance to more than five hundred people mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:6.

In verse 18, Jesus makes an interesting statement. He says that all authority had been given to Him in heaven and on earth. This authority was delegated authority from the Father. Jesus was most likely recalling the prophecy of Daniel 7:13-14 that was Messianic in character.

¹³"I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented before Him.
¹⁴"And to Him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,
That all the peoples, nations and men of every language
Might serve Him
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
Which will not pass away;
And His kingdom is one
Which will not be destroyed. (Dan 7:13-14)

Of course, Jesus' exercise of this authority over the earth in a Messianic manner was contingent upon Israel's repentance and acceptance of Him as the resurrected Son of God and Messiah (see Acts 3:19). Of course, we know that the required acceptance en masse never occurred; therefore, the establishment of the kingdom and Jesus' exercise of the authority granted to Him to the fullest extent never occurred.

As recorded by Matthew, Jesus' command seems to imply that the disciples were to immediately (even prior to Pentecost) begin making disciples and baptizing them. However, when the parallel accounts are examined, we can see that Jesus expected the disciples to tarry for a period. In Luke 24:49, Jesus commands His disciples to "tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."

The bottom line – I believe that the "Great Commission" in these verses was given to the disciples in anticipation of the extension of the offer of the kingdom through His disciples after Jesus' resurrection. This is the subject of the early chapters of the book of Acts. Therefore, the "Great Commission" is not directed to the Church (as in the body of Christ and Church Age), but is directed to Jews and Gentiles of the transition period of opportunity prior to the beginning of the Church Age. This is a technical point and doesn't diminish our responsibility as Church Age believers to evangelize the world and be witnesses.