



Study Series

Follow Me: Week Eight - Easter Sunday

The resurrection: Marc Rader

Bible

Matthew 28:1-20 (NIV)

Jesus Has Risen

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

2 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. **3** His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. **4** The guards were so afraid of him that they shook 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 was crucified. **6** He is not here;

he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. **7** 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."

8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. **9** Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.

10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

The Guards' Report

11 While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. **12** When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, **13** telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' **14** If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." **15** So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

The Great Commission

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. **17** When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. **18** Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Sermon Summary

After Jesus' predictions about his suffering and death came to pass it is a little surprising that his followers didn't consider the resurrection as a possibility! The women who go to the tomb do so to pay their respects, not to watch for the miraculous. Upon their arrival an angel appears, rolls away the stone, and tells them that Jesus is no longer there, but has risen and is going ahead of them to Galilee. As they hurry away to tell the disciples they are met by Jesus who also urges them to tell his disciples to meet him in Galilee. After a slight digression to explain and condemn the religious leaders for the "fake news" that they published about the resurrection, Matthew records Jesus' commission to tell the whole world the good news. And with that, the gospel concludes.

Given all that Matthew could have told us about the resurrection it is interesting to consider what he did tell us and the implications according to Matthew. First, it is worth noting that if Jesus was raised from the dead, it must have been by the power of God by whose will he had gone to his death. This makes the resurrection an act of vindication; the divine "I told you so".

Second, the women and the disciples worship Jesus and this is absolutely appropriate. Jesus shares in the divine in such a way that worship is natural. Matthew doesn't explore

the theology of either of these issues, leaving the wider reflections on the resurrection and divinity of Jesus to the rest of the New Testament.

There is, however, one other implication that is very clear in Matthew's account and that is that the resurrection needs to be shared. The angel tells the women to come and see the empty tomb and then go and tell the disciples. Jesus repeats this mission and then gives a broader command to all his disciples. The resurrection is to be talked about. This is the central implication of Easter Sunday according to Matthew.

It is also worth noting that the angel and Jesus still do not demand that his followers believe or get their act together. The women are conflicted with both fear and joy and at the mountain in Galilee there are those who worship and those who doubt. They are all told to "come and see" and "go and tell". Anyone can begin to follow Jesus and the crisis of decision is wrapped around the death and resurrection of Jesus, but it is not demanded immediately. This is remarkable and reminds us how important it is to continue to follow and not count ourselves (or others) out. The resurrection is a talking point; one that has changed our lives and our world. Who are you going to tell?

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation, their depth comes from a willingness to engage with the implications of our reflections for how we live our lives. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

Have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: What habits or traditions have you held throughout your life in regards to celebrating Easter Sunday? Consider the stories shared, songs sung, eggs consumed and services attended at this time of year. Which have been helpful to your faith? Which celebrations would you like to see continued in your family?
2. Read Matthew 28:1-20 aloud. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there are words or phrases that seemed to stand out. What are they? (Try to resist the urge to explain **why** they stood out – this is about creating space for often familiar passages to say something new to us, allowing God to show you something). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to a word or phrase, take time, and share what you've been lead to.

3. What strikes you as most interesting about Matthew's account of the gospel? Why? Does this point of interest hold a challenge for your own life?
4. Leading up to this point Jesus has predicted what would take place, and been proven correct. The pharisees and chief priests knew about Jesus predictions and had posted guards at the tomb. Though the disciples had seen Jesus' predictions eventuate they still aren't looking expectantly towards a resurrection. Where have you seen this behaviour/ thinking in your own life? Can you think of times that you've struggled to be expectant for God's answers despite his previous faithfulness to his promises?
5. Why do you think that Matthew included the 'fake news' of the religious establishment?
6. How are you challenged by the Great Commission (vv16-20)? Who are you going to tell? Or, what is the next faithful step you can take as a follower of Jesus?
7. The women and disciples worship Jesus. This is a big thing for Jews (as monotheists) to do. Matthew sees it as appropriate to worship Jesus, as sharing in the authority of God. If we worship (show honour, respect, reverent fear) what we believe controls our destiny then we could find ourselves worshipping money, status, or relationships. Everyone is a worshipper, it's what we worship that counts. Spend some time reflecting on your life and identify any areas that could easily become a focus of worship. If you feel comfortable to share you may want to discuss these as a group.

Prayer

In the light of your reflections on question 7, take some time to pray for each other, that we might give appropriate worship to Jesus and put all other areas of our lives in their rightful place. If you have discussed (in question 6) who you are going to tell about Jesus then pray for those people now, that they may have receptive and curious hearts.