



Matthew 27:57–28:20—Commentary Notes*

A. Introduction

The Lord Jesus hung on the cross for the sins of the world and endured unbearable pain, suffering, and humiliation. He accomplished His earthly work of salvation and let out a victorious cry at His final moment: “It is finished!” His body was taken by Joseph and Nicodemus, two members of the Sanhedrin, who were secretly the disciples of Jesus. They wrapped Him in linen cloth with spices and placed Him in the tomb of the rich man, Joseph (27:57-60). Then, all was quiet. The Lord’s disciples must have been depressed and disheartened. They had hoped that the Messiah would establish His kingdom and deliver them from the Roman regime. But their hopes had amounted to nothing. Their faith that once declared the Lord to be the Messiah and the Son of God was greatly shaken. Even though they had heard the Lord say that He would resurrect on the third day (Matt 20:19), they did not seem to believe anymore. When all hope was gone and the disciples intended on returning to their professions, the Lord did not forget His promise and rose on the third day! His resurrection was a proclamation to the world that God accepted Jesus’s atoning work and exalted Him to the highest place and brought Him to life (Eph 1:20; Phil 2:9)! Through His death, the Lord Jesus broke “the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil” (Heb 2:14). Henceforth, those who trust in Him will no longer fear death but be filled with the hope and power of His resurrection. The Lord appeared to the women, disciples, and five hundred other brothers after His resurrection (1 Cor 15:6). He reassured their hearts and gave them the Great Commission, with the promise to be with them always until the very end of the age (Matt 28:18-20).¹

B. Outline

- I. 27:57-66 Jesus died and was buried, and the soldiers kept close watch over His tomb. 28:1-15 Jesus rose on the third day and appeared to the women; the chief priests distorted the truth of Jesus’s resurrection.
- III. 28:16-20 Jesus met the disciples at Galilee and gave them the Great Commission with a promise.

C. Content

- I. **27:57-66 Jesus died and was buried, and the soldiers kept close watch over His tomb (Mark 15:43-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42).**

After our Lord breathed His last on the cross, as people gradually left the scene and the bodies of the rebels crucified with Him were taken down, and the executioners prepared to bury the bodies, God was in control of the aftermath. He protected Jesus’s body from His enemies and sent two disciples to collect His body and prepare it for burial.

27:57-61 – Joseph was a rich man from Arimathea (Mark 15:43), who was kind and righteous. He was among the few who opposed Jesus’s execution (Luke 23:50-51). He risked being expelled by the Council and asked Pilate for Jesus’s body. Pilate must have been surprised by Joseph’s request

* Translator Note: These Commentary Notes were originally compiled in Chinese and translated into English for use by Chinese Christian Fellowship International’s (CCF International’s) English classes. All sources listed in the table (only listed in English when applicable) at the end of these notes were used and consulted in the original Chinese compilation. Please refer to the table for the references of each numbered annotation. For more information on the sources consulted, please contact CCF International. All biblical references are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV® Copyright © 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

because he was one of the Jewish leaders—the very people who had just shouted fiercely six hours ago to crucify Jesus. Perhaps Pilate wanted to ease his guilty conscience, so he gave the Lord's body to Joseph without hesitation. Because of Joseph, the Lord was buried in a wealthy man's tomb, fulfilling the words of the prophet Isaiah (Isa 53:9).² With Joseph was another man, Nicodemus, who shared a similar background as Joseph (John 19:39-40). He was also wealthy and a member of the Council. They took Jesus's body and prepared it according to Jewish burial customs. They anointed His body with about seventy-five pounds of a mixture of myrrh and aloes that Nicodemus brought, and then wrapped it with a clean linen cloth. This procedure had to be completed by dusk before the Sabbath began. Joseph then placed Jesus's wrapped body in his new tomb, hewn out of rock, in a place near Jesus's crucifixion.³ In a very short time and amidst hatred and danger, they buried the Lord Jesus. They placed Jesus's body in the tomb, rolled a large stone over its entrance, and left (27:60). A few faithful women who loved the Lord accompanied them to the very end of the burial (27:61).

Joseph and Nicodemus became Jesus's disciples in secret (John 19:38) because they were afraid to confess the Lord's name openly, but they made their relationship with the Lord plain for His burial. Even though they did not serve the Lord while He was alive, they offered up spices and a tomb after His death. Their heart for Jesus was precious, and God did not take it lightly. Joseph's tomb became the place where the angel proclaimed and testified to the Lord's resurrection. It was from there that the Lord Jesus rose from the dead!⁴

27:62-66 – What is amazing is that those who opposed the Lord remembered Jesus's own words of prophecy concerning His resurrection in three days while His own disciples seemed to have forgotten them. The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the next day to see Pilate. Even though they did not believe that the Lord would rise again (they referred to Him as the deceiver in 27:63), they were afraid that His disciples would come and steal His body and make up a lie about His resurrection. However, the disciples were in so much grief and disappointment that no one had the energy to spare and do such a thing. The leaders demanded that the tomb be guarded until the third day. Pilate agreed to their request and sent soldiers to seal the tomb with Rome's official seal and guard it.⁵ By doing so, any slightest movement of the tombstone would be recognized. However, the chief priests' most careful and detailed plan and the guard's best efforts in guarding the Lord's tomb amounted to nothing but powerful evidence for the Lord's resurrection. "The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them" (Ps 2:4).⁶

The Lord Jesus's burial carries tremendous spiritual significance for those who believe Him (Rom 6:4-5; Col 2:12). When we choose by faith to be buried with Christ, we choose to bury our past with Him, meaning to entirely do away with our old and incorrect thinking, emotions, and attitudes towards God, others, and self. By doing so, we are no longer bound by the past and can live out the free and resurrected life of the Lord (2 Cor 5:17). Our burial also means putting an end to our lust and relationship with the world and to have newness of life (Rom 6:1-4; Gal 2:20; 6:14).⁷ Are there any sins or things of the past that you are willing to crucify with the Lord now? Are you ready to look to Christ's help in the future to live out His resurrected life?

II. 28:1-15 Jesus rose on the third day and appeared to the women; the chief priests distorted the truth of Jesus's resurrection.

After the Lord Jesus died, the disciples must have felt hopeless, confused, and puzzled. Afraid of being seen by other Jews, the eleven disciples remained indoors and did not dare to even visit not the tomb where the Lord was buried. The physical resurrection of Jesus was far beyond what they expected to take place.

To give us a clearer and more holistic understanding of the events surrounding Jesus's resurrection, the following is a chronological account according to the four Gospels.⁸

On the morning of the Lord's day:

- Before dawn, an angel rolled back the stone at the entrance of the tomb (Matt 28:2-4).
- The women who followed Jesus came to see His tomb and discovered that He was not there (Mark 16:1-4; Luke 24:1-3; John 20:1).
- Mary Magdalene left the tomb and ran to tell Peter and John (John 20:1-2).
- The rest of the women who remained at the tomb saw two angels, who proclaimed to them that Jesus had risen (Matt 28:5-7; Mark 16:5-7; Luke 24:4-8).
- Peter and John came to see Jesus's tomb (Luke 24:12; John 20:3-10).
- Mary Magdalene returned to the garden tomb, and Jesus appeared to her (Mark 16:9-10; John 20:11-18).
- Jesus appeared to the rest of the women—Mary the mother of James, Salome, and Joanne (Matt 28:8-10; Luke 24:10; Mark 15:40).
- The soldiers who guarded Jesus's tomb went into the city and reported to the religious leaders that an angel had rolled away the tombstone of Jesus. They were later bribed to tell a fabricated version of the event (Matt 28:11-15).
- Jesus appeared to Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5).

In the afternoon on the Lord's day:

- Jesus appeared to two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-32).

At dusk on the Lord's day:

- These two disciples told the others that they had seen Jesus (Luke 24:33-35).
- Jesus appeared to all the disciples in an upper room. Only Thomas was not present (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-25).

The day after the Lord's day:

- Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples, and Thomas saw the resurrected Lord (John 20:26-28).

For the remaining days before His ascension:

- Jesus appeared to seven disciples by the Sea of Galilee and performed the miraculous catch of fish (John 21:1-14).
- Jesus appeared to five hundred disciples in addition to the eleven apostles (Matt 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-18; 1 Cor 15:6).
- Jesus appeared to His brother, James (1 Cor 15:7).
- Jesus appeared once again to all the disciples in Jerusalem (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:3-8).
- The disciples witnessed Jesus's ascension on the Mount of Olives (Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9-12).

The four Gospels record the witnesses of Jesus's resurrection:

1. The soldiers who guarded the tomb (28:2-4). Even with His tomb sealed by his murderer and carefully guarded by soldiers, the Lord rose on the third day as He had said He would. It was after the Jewish Sabbath, on the first day of the week. At dawn, a violent earthquake broke out, an angel of the Lord, with the appearance like lightning and clothes white as snow, came down from heaven and rolled back the tombstone. The soldiers guarding the tomb were so afraid of the angel that they shook and became like dead men. They were sent to guard the tomb but became eyewitnesses of the Lord's resurrection.⁸ The angel did not come to "help" bring Jesus to life. Rather, he was sent to give the good news of the Lord's resurrection similar to what the angels did at the Lord's birth in Luke 2:8-14. He rolled back the Lord's tombstone not to make way for the Lord to come out of the tomb but give access to the Lord's disciples for them to enter the tomb and examine the truth surrounding Jesus's resurrection. Jesus did not need an open door because no physical substance could restrict His resurrected body.⁹ This also resolved the concern of the women who came in the morning of the resurrection; they no longer needed to remove the stone themselves (Mark 16:3).

2. Mary Magdalene and the other women (28:1, 5-10) witnessed three events:
 - 1) The tombstone was removed. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James, along with other women, came to the tomb to anoint Jesus's body, but they shockingly found that the stone had been removed. They thought that someone had taken Jesus's body. Without entering the tomb, Mary Magdalene ran in haste to find Peter and John and told them what had happened.
 - 2) The angels appeared. Meanwhile, the rest of the women entered the tomb to look for Jesus's body but instead saw two angels suddenly appear and were afraid. The angels said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen!" (Matt 28:6; Luke 24:5-6). The angels instructed them to go and tell this news to Jesus's disciples and to Peter (Mark 16:7). The Lord was going ahead of them into Galilee.¹⁰ These women's initial shock and fear turned into joy! They heeded the angel's instruction and ran to tell the disciples.
 - 3) Jesus appeared. As the women were on their way to tell the disciples, Jesus appeared to them. They heard His greeting and immediately recognized Him. They went up to Jesus and clasped His feet and worshiped Him.
3. Peter and John (Luke 24:12; John 20:3-10). Peter and John decided to go to the tomb and see what had happened for themselves. John outran Peter and arrived at the tomb first but remained outside because he was afraid or overcome by emotions. He looked inside the tomb and saw the strips of linen used to wrap Jesus's body lying there in their place, as if His body had "evaporated." The cloth that wrapped Jesus's head was also there, separated from the linen. John later entered the tomb and pondered all the evidence he saw. The glorious truth then dawned on him that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God, and John believed. John saw and believed because of his intimate relationship with Jesus (John 21:7). The disciples did not connect Jesus's resurrection with the Old Testament prophecies, nor did they understand it until the Lord Jesus explained it to them and when the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost. Consequently, they boldly declared the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Messiah (Acts 2:25-31; 13:34-35). As for Peter, even though he entered the empty tomb and saw evidence that proved the Lord's resurrection, he did not perceive the significance of it all. Evidently, Jesus appeared to Peter that day (Luke 24:34) to perfect his faith.
4. Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9-10; John 20:11-18). After the Lord resurrected, the first person He appeared to was Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons.¹¹ Mary represented all who genuinely seek God. She remained at the tomb and wept even after John and Peter left. She bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels sitting where Jesus's body had lain. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" She replied, "They have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have put Him." She turned around and saw someone and thought that He was the gardener. She did not recognize Jesus. Perhaps it was because she was grieving, and her tears had blurred her vision. She did not sense anything out of the ordinary.¹³ It was at that moment the Lord called her name. She recognized her Shepherd's voice right away (the Lord calls those who belong to Him one by one, John 10:3-4). She was overcome with exceeding joy that she wanted to take hold of the Lord, but the Lord said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father" (John 20:17). Mary was brought into a new relationship that was not by sight or by touch but by faith. Soon, after His ascension, Jesus will establish an even deeper relationship with all believers (the church) through the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:13). He will soon forever abide in every believer through the Holy Spirit (John 14:17; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:3). It is a new and deeper union between the church and Christ (Gal 2:20).

This new relationship brought new-found responsibilities. The Lord commanded Mary to tell His brothers of the glory of His resurrection. Mary must testify that the Lord has risen (John 20:17).

5. The two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-35). The Lord appeared to two disciples, one of which was Cleopas. They were on their way to Emmaus (about seven miles) from Jerusalem when the Lord appeared. Journeying together, the Lord gave them His first sermon after His resurrection, systematically and holistically explaining all the prophecies and revelations in the Old Testament concerning the Christ from Moses to the prophets. The Lord invested much time in these two disciples on that Lord's day. He not only appeared to them, but He also traveled and dined with them. Finally, these two men, who were shown the Lord's favor, finally recognized their risen Lord. They immediately went to Jerusalem and joyfully testified to the eleven concerning the resurrection of the Lord.¹²
6. Thomas and the rest of the apostles (John 20:19-23, 26-29). When the Lord appeared to the apostles on the first night, Thomas was not among them. Therefore, he did not believe that Jesus had risen. Later, the Lord appeared to them again for Thomas's sake and asked him to touch His hands and feel the piercing wound on His side. At this, Thomas fell and worshipped the Lord, saying, "My Lord and my God!"

28:11-15 – The chief priests fabricated lies and rejected Jesus's resurrection. As the women left and told the disciples about the Lord's resurrection, another group of people were working hard to resist the truth. The soldiers guarding the tomb went into the city and reported what had happened to the chief priests. They then drew up a plan with the elders to deny and cover-up the truth. They bribed the soldiers with a large sum of money and instructed them to render a false report to their commanding officers, saying that Jesus's disciples came in the night when they were sleeping and took Jesus's body. However, taking a nap while on guard was a dereliction of duty for which the soldiers could be sentenced to death (Acts 12:19). The Jewish leaders were fully aware of such consequences, so they promised the soldiers that they would explain the situation to the governor on their behalf in order to keep them from trouble. The soldiers did as they were told and accepted the bribe money.¹³ Judging from the soldiers' words, it seems that they actually believed that Jesus had risen. On the other hand, the chief priests refused to believe and did not repent nor fear God. Instead, they conspired to negate the fact that Christ had risen. It became apparent that even though they were Aaron's descendants, they were not children of God through the Spirit. They were of the devil (John 8:44-45; Rev 2:9). They did not oppose Jesus out of ignorance. Rather, they deliberately chose to become enemies of Christ.¹⁴ As a result, their fabricated story circulated widely among the Jews. However, their account could easily be unraveled. How could the soldiers know that the disciples had taken Jesus's body if they were sleeping? Furthermore, the disciples were too afraid to have done such a thing. We see that people tend to find it difficult to accept the truth but readily believe in lies instead.¹⁵

In addition to the accounts of the Lord's appearance to the women and His disciples, other books of the Bible also record His appearance to others.

1. Jesus appeared to more than five hundred brothers at the same time. Most of them were still living when Paul wrote his epistles to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:6). This appearance might have taken place on a hill in Galilee when the disciples gathered to meet the Lord and received His Great Commission.
2. Jesus appeared to His own brother, James. James later became a leader of the church, particularly the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; Gal 2:9). He was also the author of the book of James.
3. Jesus appeared to the Apostle Paul. Paul met the risen Lord (Acts 9:3-8). The other disciples saw the risen Lord before His ascension, but Paul encountered the risen and ascended Jesus.

The resurrection of Christ is the central doctrine to the Christian faith (1 Cor 15:14). Because He has risen, we can believe that He will accomplish all that He has promised. Jesus's bodily resurrection is proof that He transcended death and that He is God. He is the ruler of the eternal kingdom. Because Jesus is risen, we can be confident that we, too, will be raised in the flesh (1 Thess 4:16-17). Death is not the end for believers. The truth of Jesus's resurrection is the foundation for the church's testimony to the world.¹⁶

The message of Jesus's resurrection continues to shake our hearts today. We have only two choices: (1) believe that Jesus is risen, or (2) cover-up, deny, ignore, or find excuses to turn from this truth. If we choose to believe the risen Lord, like the women, we will also be compelled to tell others the good news of Jesus's resurrection.¹⁷

III. 28:16-20 Jesus met the disciples at Galilee and gave them the Great Commission with a promise.

28:16-17 – The Lord Jesus repeatedly reminded His disciples before His death and after His resurrection to meet Him on the mountain of Galilee (Matt 26:32; 28:7, 10). John's Gospel records the Lord's appearance to a few disciples by the Sea of Galilee, after they tried to catch fish all night.¹⁸ As for on which mountain they should meet, Matthew did not specify. It could be the same one where Jesus delivered His sermon on the mount (Matt 5:1). When Jesus appeared, the disciples worshipped Him, even though some continued to doubt. But the Lord did not reject those who doubted, those whose faith in His resurrection was weak and not steadfast. Instead, He reaffirmed them,¹⁹ and told them that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to Him, and He gave them the Great Commission.

28:18 – “Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’” The disciples had hoped that the Lord would be the king of the Jews, but the declaration of the risen Jesus surpassed even their expectations. He is now the King of Kings to whom was given “all authority in heaven and on earth.” He manifested and exercised His authority during His earthly ministry, through speaking, performing wonders and signs, forgiving sins, giving His life, and taking it back. After He suffered on the cross, God exalted Him to the highest place (Phil 2:6-11). Not only was all authority given to Him, His position with God was also restored (John 1:1-4). (Note: Jesus was always equal with God. He has and never will be anything less. When He became human, He emptied Himself (Phil 2) and took on the limitations of humanity, but he was never lower than God. He was always fully divine and an equal member of the Trinity.)

28:19-20a – Because all authority was given to the Lord Jesus as a result of His obedience, He sent His disciples to the field for the gospel. It was now no longer limited to only the people of Israel but includes all nations and every corner of the world. There is only one verb in the Great Commission—“make disciples of all nations,” but there are three modifying participles in the Greek that further clarify the action—“go,” “baptizing,” and “teaching.”²⁰

1. “Go and make disciples of all nations” for the Lord (28:19). This first part of the command is what we refer to as “preaching the gospel.” It means to lead others to the Lord, to trust in Christ and be born again and saved. “Faith comes from hearing the message” (Rom 10:17). Therefore, before anyone can believe in the Lord, they need the children of God to share the gospel or preach God's Word to them. The Lord gives this command to all Christians in different roles and capacities. To make disciples of all nations does not mean to bring people to join a church and become mere believers who regularly participate in church activities. Rather, it means to help them become vibrant Christians who are genuinely born again and saved.²¹
2. “Baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” (The “name” is singular, signifying the Trinity is the one and only God.) “Baptism” is two-fold—the internal experience (the baptism of the Holy Spirit) and the external testimony (the baptism of water). When someone accepts Christ as Savior and Lord, the Holy Spirit indwells him or her as the seal of

salvation (Eph 1:13), testifying that he or she is a child of God (Rom 8:16). In addition to this baptism of the Spirit, there is also the outward testimony of water baptism, through which believers openly testify or declare that they belong to Jesus Christ and that they are willing for Christ to take control of their lives.

In His command to baptize, Jesus mentioned the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, which clearly communicates that the three Persons of the Trinity all take part in accomplishing salvation.²² Even though the term “Trinity” never occurs in the Bible (it was coined in the second century by the theologian, Tertullian), the doctrine is taught throughout Scripture. We are limited in our understanding and cannot fully comprehend the concept of the Trinity. We can only receive the truth and doctrine by faith. Let us briefly explain how the three Persons of the Trinity participate in the baptism of the Holy Spirit and of water.

- 1) In the name of the Father – The Father dwells in the hearts of believers through the Holy Spirit (John 14:23; 1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:22). Believers are the temple of God. God is in us, and we are in God.
 - 2) In the name of the Son – We are baptized into the body of Christ (the church) and become members of God’s household.
 - 3) In the name of the Holy Spirit – The Holy Spirit renews our lives and sanctifies us. He is also our Guide and Teacher of truth, our Counselor and Comforter (John 14:16, 26).
3. “Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” A new Christian is like a newborn who needs to be taught and nurtured to reach maturity, to the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:11-13). Only when we both preach the gospel and teach and nurture people to obey God’s Word do we truly accomplish the Lord’s Great Commission. If we only emphasize preaching the gospel but neglect to teach people to obey all that the Lord has commanded, we only accomplish half of the task. This is unfortunately a common phenomenon in the church today. We need to follow the Lord’s command to not only rejoice in the number of people choosing salvation and being baptized but also teach them to live by the truth and commit themselves to be a witness for Christ.²³

28:20b – The promise that comes with the Great Commission. The Lord gave a great and precious promise to those who are willing to obey His command. “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Those who adhere to the Lord’s command will experience God’s tangible power that enables them to complete their commission. Kingship and authority have been given to the Messiah. The Lord promises His presence, which is His power and the Holy Spirit’s indwelling. Even though those who obey God’s command on earth will experience loneliness and helplessness in preaching the gospel, the Lord promises to be with them always. He will never forsake them. Furthermore, He will be their very present help to the end of the world. This promise reveals that the command to make disciples of all nations and to teach them to obey all that the Lord has commanded must continue until the end of the time. The Lord gives the command and promise not only to the disciples and apostles then but also to all believers and churches to come, unto the end of the age.²⁴

D. Conclusion

The Lord Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose on the third day just as He said. Women, apostles, and five hundred brothers were eyewitnesses of His resurrection. Because of the Lord Jesus’s humility and obedience, the Father gave Him the name above all names and all authority in heaven and on earth (Phil 2:8-10). Before His departure and ascension, the Lord Jesus commissioned the message of the heavenly kingdom to His apostles and all who will believe Him in the future. He also promised the precious presence of the Holy Spirit’s power to all believers until the end of time. “I am coming soon!” (Rev 22:2, 12, 20). Let us be watchful and pray as we wait for the Lord’s return. Let us be faithful to the Lord’s Great Commission at home, work, and everywhere.

Let us be messengers for the gospel and teachers of the truth. Let us offer eternal praise and glory to Jesus Christ, who loved us, died for us, and was risen for us. Amen!

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