

Sunday School Lesson for April 5, 2026
Matthew 28

He is risen! He is risen indeed! Many churches around the world will begin their worship services this Easter morning with these glorious words of joyous hope, and I hope you've already shouted those words in your own heart today. This is Sunday School on the go from the First Baptist Church in Tallahassee, and I'm Jim Glass, one of the teachers in the Pairs and Spares Class, and, on this Easter Sunday, we've been moving chapter-by-chapter through the gospel according to Matthew, with Pastor Trey preaching from the odd-numbered chapters and our Bible Fellowship lessons drawn from the even-numbered chapters. Following Trey's message from Matthew, chapter 27, where we read about the events immediately preceding the Lord's crucifixion, His death on the cross, and His interment in a borrowed tomb, Friday has come and gone, and the world is about to discover that Jesus is alive! In the last chapter of the record of the life of our Lord recorded for us by the reformed tax collector, Matthew--now a faithful follower of Jesus--, we find that wondrous story of just some of the remarkable events that obliterated His disciples' gloomy expectations and gave them a sense of mission and purpose for the future.

It's Sunday morning. All of Jesus' followers have spent the last two days and nights in unimaginable grief, horror, and fear as they've reeled at the totally unexpected and shocking events of the last two days. They had watched with great expectation as their great Teacher--the One they had hoped was going to redeem Israel--the One Whom they believed to be the promised Son of David--the Messiah--just as the ancient prophets had foretold--just a week before--had ridden into Jerusalem in glorious procession--riding on the colt of a donkey--clearly in fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy about the coming King.

They had hoped that he was the One Who would fulfill all the ancient prophecies about the Messiah Who would be the Wonderful Counselor,

Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace--that He would be the One Who would reign on David's throne and over His kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. But He had been arrested, tortured, found guilty in a mock trial, and crucified.

Matthew tells us that, after about six hours of excruciating pain, "When Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ... When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, 'Surely he was the Son of God!'"

To confirm His death, one of the soldiers thrust a spear through His side. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took His body and hastily wrapped it in cloth with spices according to the Jewish burial customs, and laid His body in Joseph's tomb. A large rock was rolled into place over the opening, and Pilate commissioned a squad of soldiers to stand guard lest any of Jesus' followers tried to steal the body. After all, the Pharisees had heard Jesus say that, after three days, He would rise from the dead, and, although such a thing had never happened before, they didn't want to take any chances.

As the fading light died away on that horrible Friday evening, the hopes and dreams of His followers died with it, and they cowered in fear of what would happen next.

For those of us who have heard this story so many times, it's hard to imagine the crushing disappointment, debilitating fear, and utter distress that transfixed the hearts of Jesus' followers on that first morning of a new week as some of the women went to the tomb to complete the burial preparations begun on Friday.

Matthew tells us in the opening verse of chapter 28, “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.” Mary Magdalene, of course, was the woman from whom Jesus had cast seven demons. Ever-grateful for His kindness and mercy, she was one of His most faithful followers. The “other Mary” was probably not the mother of Jesus but the mother of James and Mark.

Isn't it interesting that these two women and the other women that Luke doesn't name were the first to come to the tomb? As you may recall, Jewish culture in general had a rather low view of women. But Jesus changed all that. It was He who restored the proper place of women. He lifted them out of their forced subservience, reaffirmed their personhood, and restored their dignity to make believing women heirs and joint-heirs with Christ. So it's not surprising that the first confirmation of Jesus' resurrection came to women.

In his commentary, John Calvin writes, “He began with the women, and not only presented himself to be seen by them, but even gave them a commission to announce the gospel to the apostles, so as to become their instructors. This was intended, first, to chastise the indifference of the apostles, who were like persons half-dead with fear, while the women ran with alacrity to the sepulcher, and likewise obtained no ordinary reward. For though their design to anoint Christ, as if He were still dead, was not free from blame, still he forgave their weakness, and bestowed on them distinguished honor, by taking away from men the apostolic office, and committing it to them for a short time. In this manner also he exhibited an instance of what Paul tells us, that he chooses those things which are foolish and weak [to] the world to abase the loftiness of the flesh. And never shall we be duly prepared to learn this article of our faith in any other manner than by laying aside all pride, and submitting to receive the testimony of the women.”

In his gospel, Mark tells us the women wondered how they were going to get to Jesus' body / since the large, round stone that sealed the tomb would

have been impossible for them to move. If this tomb was typical of those of that day, it was a hollowed-out place that had been cut into the rock with one or more depressions cut into the side of the interior walls to hold a body. The opening to the central chamber was blocked by a large and heavy disc of stone that would roll along a groove in front of the chamber. When the stone was rolled into place, it rested in a small depression in the groove to keep it from rolling any farther.

One of the early accounts of the resurrection from a report not found in our Bibles says, “And when He was laid there, [Joseph] put against the tomb a stone which twenty men could not roll away.” This large stone was used to keep prowling animals and vandals out and to keep the spirits of the dead in-- or so they thought.

But really, the size of the stone is of little consequence other than to note that it was so large that the women were unable to move it, and they wondered who would move it when they got there.

But something had happened there at the tomb before they arrived. Matthew tells us in verse two: “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.”

In order to keep Jesus’ disciples from stealing the body, Pilate had commanded that the stone sealing the tomb be secured, so he ordered that guards be stationed at the tomb to make sure none of Jesus’ disciples took the body away during the night.

We could easily imagine the guards dozing on what they might have considered the easiest duty they had ever been assigned--watching a rock to make sure it didn’t move. As the day began to dawn, they could have been napping or stirring the fire to warm themselves, or wondering how long it would be / before the next shift showed up. When, all of a sudden, out of

nowhere and without warning, the ground is shaken by an earthquake--not unknown in that part of the world, but not something you want to happen in a cemetery. Matthew says they were struck with terror and “became like dead men.”

When the women arrived, the angel told them--verse five: “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.” Of all the things they never expected to see was an angel--and an angel who spoke to them--and an angel who spoke to them telling them Jesus was alive just like He said / and inviting them into the tomb to see for themselves.

Luke and John say there were two angels. Matthew and Mark tell us about only one angel, possibly because only one angel spoke. I really like what one Bible commentator from the mid-1700s had to say about those who tried then and still try to discredit the Bible because the gospel writers don't record the same number of angels: “Cold discrepancy-mongers, do ye not then see that the Evangelists do not count the angels? The whole grave, the whole region round about the grave, was invisibly swarming with angels. There were not only two angels, like a pair of grenadiers who are left behind in front of the quarters of the departed general; there were millions of them; they appeared not always one and the same, not always the same two; sometimes this one appeared, sometimes that; sometimes on this place, sometimes on that; sometimes alone, sometimes in company; sometimes they said this, sometimes they said that.”

By the very presence of the angels at the empty tomb, anyone could see that there was something happening that was far beyond the normal course of life. Matthew tells us that the angel spoke to the women, calming their fears and assuring them that he knew exactly why they were there: “I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.” But the angel had some amazing news for them: “He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said.”

How many times had Jesus told them how He would be arrested, killed, and would then rise from the dead? Once, when Jesus was talking with His disciples after He had fed the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish, He asked them who the people said He was, they told Him, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.” But when Jesus asked, “Who do you say that I am,” Peter said, “You are the Christ of God.” Luke writes in chapter nine that “Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. And he said, ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.’”

Even before that, in the second chapter of the gospel of John, just after the wedding in Cana, Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Passover. As he walked through the temple, he was angered with those He found “selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So,” / John writes, “he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, ‘Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!’ ... Then the Jews demanded of him, ‘What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.’” This probably sounded pretty confusing to the disciples and everyone else as well. But John goes on to say, “The temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.”

The angel told the women, “He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said.” A single verse captures the women’s response as Luke writes in chapter nineteen, verse eight, “Then they remembered his words.”

With that, the angel invited them into the tomb to see for themselves: “Come, see the place where he lay.” Once they had a chance to look, the

angel said, “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.”

The angel’s instructions are simple, quick, and precise. First, he reminds them of what the Lord had said time and time again about His death and resurrection. Then, he calmly invites them to witness for themselves the place where His body had been but was no longer. Luke provides more of what the angel said, reminding the women about what the Lord had said about His death and resurrection, but Matthew writes that the angel told them to “tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.”

During the Lord’s Supper, Jesus had predicted the disciples’ response to His crucifixion but assured them that they would see Him again soon. In chapter 26, verse 31, Matthew writes, “Then Jesus said to them, ‘You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.” But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.’” Now, the angel confirms the Lord’s instructions as he tells the women to let the others know what they had seen and heard so that, when they all gathered in Galilee, all His followers would be able to see and be absolutely convinced that He had indeed risen from the dead, just as He said.

Why did the Lord choose Galilee as the place where He would meet with them? Most likely because that had been His base of operations--the place where He first preached and where He had the greatest number of followers. Important for Matthew was the fact that Galilee was in the northern region of Palestine. “Leaving Nazareth,” Matthew tells us in chapter four, verse thirteen, “he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: ‘Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles--the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

This region that had been exposed to almost endless corruption and conquest from their pagan neighbors to the north in Isaiah's day had been humbled by the Assyrians, and their sin had brought upon them the darkness of punishment. Yet it was in that very place that our Lord began His ministry, and it was to this very place He returned after His resurrection to be the Great Light that Isaiah had spoken about seven hundred years before.

Also, in Galilee, they would be far from Jerusalem and the religious leaders there who had orchestrated the Lord's crucifixion.

Obedying the angel's instructions, Mary Magdalene--according to John--ran to tell John and Peter, then returned to the tomb with them, while the other women rushed to tell the other disciples. Somewhere along the way--after the Lord had appeared to Mary Magdalene--so Mark tells us--Whom should they meet, but Jesus Himself! Verse nine: "And behold, Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him." While some Bible translations simply say He greeted them, others are closer to the original language in translating the phrase as "He said, 'Greetings.'" But "greetings" is a word that means far more than "Hello." The word is translated in most other places in the New Testament as "Rejoice"--truly a fitting word used here by the risen Lord Jesus to greet these fearful yet excited women. And their natural response was one of praise and adoration: "they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him."

But our Lord and the women had work to do. Verse ten: "Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me.'" His instructions to them were simple: "Go and tell"--"Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee."

Weren't these the same worthless fellows who fell asleep when He had asked them to pray--not once, but three times? And wasn't one of them Peter--Peter who had denied the Lord three times when he had vowed he would never do such a thing. The same Peter who, according to Mark, had received

a personal invitation to meet the Lord in Galilee? Even now He calls them “my brothers.”

They were to tell the disciples to meet Him in Galilee. Later that day, He would appear to the eleven in Jerusalem and to other, small groups of believers as well--the two on the road to Emmaus that we read about in Luke’s gospel, for example. In Galilee, He would appear to the scattered flock of His disciples gathered together once again. Perhaps this was the appearance that Paul wrote about in First Corinthians, chapter fifteen, verse six, when he says, “After that,” that is, after His appearance in Jerusalem, “he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.”

The reality of the resurrection is the most important fact in Christianity, and Paul explains its importance in his first letter to the Christians in Corinth, chapter fifteen. Negatively, in verse fourteen, he says, “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith;” and, in verse seventeen, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” Positively, in verse twenty, he writes, “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive;” and, in verse 56, he concludes, “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” In telling the women that Jesus had risen from the dead, the angel proclaimed the greatest announcement ever made in all of human history, and there’s so much more we could add here to this most important news.

Not long after the earthquake and the tomb being opened by the angel, the guards returned to Jerusalem to make their report of what had happened--verse eleven--: “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.’”

In verses eleven through fifteen, Matthew exposes the great cover-up by the Jewish officials; but what could the guards do? They ran to the chief priests to tell them everything that had happened--there they were-, fearlessly standing watch over the gravesite when an earthquake struck and an otherworldly creature that blazed with the brightest light they had ever seen appeared, and this celestial being rolled the stone away from the tomb. Then some women showed up and the angel told them that Jesus wasn't there any more. And we checked it out, and His body was gone!

Frantic, the chief priests had to come up with some kind of an explanation. So they decided the guards were to tell everyone that Jesus' disciples came and stole the body while they were asleep. What a ludicrous plan! If any Roman guard were found sleeping while on duty, he would have been executed. And wouldn't the noise of rolling the stone away have awakened them if they were asleep? And if they were asleep and didn't see anything, how could they say they disciples had stolen the body? If they did wake up and saw the disciples leaving with the body, why didn't they go after them? And why did the disciples take the time to remove the graveclothes and leave them behind? In spite of the overwhelming impossibility that this could ever have happened as they claimed, the chief priests somehow bribed the guards to spread this lie, while promising to convince Pilate of their story if word ever got out. Matthew tells us in verse fifteen that, “this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.”

In verses sixteen through twenty, Matthew gives us a snapshot of what happened when Jesus met with His disciples in Galilee during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension and records for us our Lord's Great

Commission to His disciples then and His disciples now: “The eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”

In this final message of Matthew’s gospel, Jesus met with the disciples, perhaps on a mountain near the city of Capernaum where Jesus, walking near the shore, had first called Andrew and Peter to be fishers of men. Even though word had certainly spread quickly / and many /--believing--rejoiced at the news, some were still slow to believe. The fact that Matthew mentions their doubting shows that he presented an honest testimony to these events. As one commentator notes, “Their caution in examining the evidence; their slowness to believe; their firm conviction after all their doubts; and their willingness to show their conviction even by their ‘death,’ is most conclusive proof that they were ‘not’ deceived in regard to the fact of [the Lord’s] resurrection.”

In verse eighteen, Matthew provides us with the concluding directive of the Lord as He met with them there on the mountain. It’s a familiar command, one that all of us should not only have memorized but should be our marching orders for each and every day.

Matthew tells us that Jesus prefaced this great commission with the words, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” In declaring that all authority has been given to Him, Jesus both confirms His own Lordship and inspires the disciples as they set out on the mission He’s given them. All authority in heaven has been given to Him. There is no other source of power that we can appeal to for help in time of need. As we read in Acts, chapter four, verse eleven, Peter confirmed this himself when he proclaimed to all the

Jewish leaders that “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

He is also Lord of earth--all power has been given to Him on earth as well as in heaven. And rightly so, for it was He, as John tells us in his gospel, the first chapter and verse three, “by whom all things came into being,” and, not only was He the creator of all that is, but Paul tells us in Colossians, chapter one, verse seventeen, that it is by His power that all things now hold together.

When Jesus sent His first disciples into the countryside of Israel, He sent them with authority to cast out demons and to heal the sick. He didn't just send them out to do what they could in their own power. He assured them that it was He who had given them this authority. So when He gives this commission to the Church--to you and me--, He doesn't do it with a fond farewell, but tells them and us that as surely as we live out the gospel in our own lives and share the good news of Jesus Christ with others, He's in control; He's the one in whose Name we go into all the world; He's the one who has promised to be with us to work His will in and through us. We should never forget that the will of God will not take us where the grace of God cannot sustain us.

In commissioning the disciples to carry the gospel to the world, He was not suggesting that it was only up to those first followers whom He had called to evangelize the world, for once they had passed away, there would have been no one else to carry on the task. Nor was the commission given only to those who are pastors or full-time ministers in the church. The early church never had the distinction we have today between pastor and laity. Everyone in the church was and is a minister of the gospel, and this Great Commission is a calling--a command--incumbent upon each and every person who is an authentic follower of Jesus Christ.

The first word of this commission is simply the word “go.” Some scholars say this word is a command while others say that the word should be taken as

a participle with the meaning, “as you go.” This second meaning assumes that, since we are witnesses of His resurrection power, we have already accepted the command to go and we are now on our way to carrying out the gospel imperative. In other words, we might understand the first word of the Great Commission to mean, “As you go through this life,” or “As you live out your life.”

If we have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior and have given Him complete control of our lives, then we will, as the normal habit of our everyday lives, be making disciples wherever we go and whatever we do. In other words, as we “go” through life, we are not simply to “act” like a Christian, but we are to “be” the kind of Christian that others can see Christ in us so they will be drawn to the reality of Christ clearly reflected in our lives.

As we live the life of an authentic Christ-follower, what’s our primary objective? What’s the task that we’ve been assigned? We are to disciple people from every nation. Jesus’ plan for world evangelism was not limited to winning the lost to Christ and letting it go at that; instead, to make a disciple was first of all to win others to faith in Christ, and then train those new believers to grow in spiritual maturity so they may lead others to Christ. Jesus’ plan was not simply tent meeting revivals. It was an extended course of personal, relational instruction designed for the lost to come to know the Lord through sharing and accepting the gospel message and then for those new believers to be instructed in the ways of the Lord so that they would lead others to Christ.

The first part of making disciples from all the nations is bringing a person to faith in Christ and leading that person to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The ordinance of baptism as it has come down to us today is a very significant symbol of the death of that person to the former ways of life, and being raised to a new life in Christ. But true baptism isn’t just a dunking in water. To be immersed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit means that you submit yourself totally to the Lordship of

Christ--to place your total self in His possession. After all, it was He who died on the cross so that you could be raised to a new life, to follow Him wherever He would lead.

The second part of discipling the nations is that of teaching them to follow the commands of Christ--all those things that He instructed His disciples about / that we find in the four gospels. It may very well be that the greatest failure of churches today is the failure to disciple new believers. As a result, we have lots of church members who don't know how to share their faith with others / and are not prepared, as Peter says we should be, "to give a reason for the hope that is within us." Maturing in our own faith and teaching and discipling others is a necessary part of fulfilling the Lord's Great Commission. And there's so much more we could add here as well.

As we go, as we make and develop disciples, Jesus reminds us that He is with us always--even to the very end of the world. "Because all power is mine, and I will never leave you--go. I'll defend you; I'll protect you; I'll provide for you; I'll guide you. Even though you may encounter troubles and dangers, I will be there to defend you! I will never leave you."

Alexander MacLaren reminds us of the importance of this great promise as he writes, "Note that emphatic 'I am,' which does not only denote certainty, but is the speech of Him who is lifted above the lower regions where Time rolls and the succession of events occurs. That 'I am' covers all the varieties of / was, is, [and] will be. Notice the long vista of variously tinted days which opens here. Howsoever many they be, howsoever different their complexion, days of summer and days of winter, days of sunshine and days of storm, days of buoyant youth and days of stagnant, stereotyped old age, days of apparent failure and days of apparent prosperity, He is with us in them all. [The days] change, [but] 'He is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' Notice the illimitable extent of the promise--'even unto the end.' We are always tempted to think that long ago the earth was more full of God than it is today, and that ... in the future it will again be fuller, but ... this moment is comparatively

empty. The heavens touch the earth on the horizon in front and behind, and they are highest and remotest above us just where we stand. But no past day had more of Christ in it than today has, and that He has gone away is the condition of His coming. 'He therefore departed for a season, that we might receive Him for ever.'" Even now He is with us and will never leave us.

God does not send us where He will not attend us. God will not guide us where He will not also provide for us. Our Lord Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth, so, with this assurance, in this confidence, as you go wherever God has called you to go--whether it's to your neighbor next door or your neighbor on the other side of the world, He will be with you always. Crucified, dead, resurrected and living forevermore, He is with us until time is no more. Such is the assurance we have as we follow Him wherever He would lead us.

Thank you for being a part of our oh-so-brief glimpse into the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus as seen through Matthew's eyes as he leads us to understand Who Jesus is through His works and His words so that we might be the people of God He's calling us to be for such a time as this. Next week, we'll return to the first two of the four chapters we passed over. Following Pastor Trey's message from chapter 23 about the woes the Lord pronounced against the Pharisees, we'll hear the Lord Jesus answer the disciples' question about the timing of the destruction of Jerusalem and the signs of His coming in chapter 24.

As always, as it's still a good thing to do, keep calm, trust in the Lord, and wash your hands! God bless you!

The resources for this lesson include Notes on the Bible by Albert Barnes (1834), text courtesy of Internet Sacred Texts Archive; The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; The Expositor's Bible, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; The Expositor's Greek Testament -

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