

# The CITYGATES C H U R C H

## Matthew 28 The Power of the Resurrection

Summary: Jesus Christ has risen from the dead – we need to know this, share it, and receive the good news personally.

We have spent the past year and a half working our way through the gospel of Matthew, one of four biographies of Jesus found in the Bible. We started with the miracles and promises surrounding His birth, then we saw His baptism and temptation by the devil, heard the famous Sermon on the Mount including the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer, saw Him choose the Twelve disciples, and examined the various miracles and teachings of His public ministry. We have seen highs and lows, and now it all comes to this: His death, burial, and resurrection as the Lamb of God, sacrificed for our sins.

When we left off last week, Jesus had been executed on the cross, His body placed in a tomb carved out of rock – a common thing in those days.

But the process had been rushed, and now some of those who knew and loved Him are prepared to go back and tidy things up a bit and give His body the proper burial treatment.

**Matthew 28:1** Now after the Sabbath, as the first *day* of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.



**2** And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it.

This happened before the women arrived, and it wasn't to let Jesus out, it was so others could see in.

**3** His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. **4** And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead *men*.

**5** But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. **6** He is not here; for He is risen, as He said.

Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

**7** And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there



you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.”

8 So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word.

9 And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, “Rejoice!” So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go *and* tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.”

11 Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. 12 When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, 13 saying, “Tell them, ‘His disciples came at night and stole Him *away* while we slept.’ 14 And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will appease him and make you secure.” 15 So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

Notice they tried to explain the empty tomb, but not deny it. Historically, almost everyone has agreed on Jesus’ death, Christians and non-Christians agree that He died. What they *disagree* about is what else happened or why. Not everyone believes in the resurrection. From the very beginning there have been attempts to explain it away and this one example.

Of course, there are a LOT of significant problems with it. First of all, you have to believe the soldiers all fell asleep, even though they’re on guard duty and this is part of their normal job. They know what to do and how to do it. And even in our modern military, falling asleep on post is punishable by death.

You also have to believe the disciples were some kind of super covert special operations ninjas who were able to sneak up while the guards were sleeping, open the tomb by rolling this massive stone out of the way, grab the body and leave some sort of devious calling card to prove they were the ones who did it so the guards would know who to blame.

It sounds almost as miraculous as just accepting that Jesus rose from the dead and an angel rolled away the stone.

There is no doubt, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a unique event, but you can have absolute trust and confidence – it really happened, with real people and real rocks, in a real location just outside the modern city of Jerusalem. No, we don’t have any photos or video of it. No one took a selfie with Resurrection Jesus, but we don’t have photos or videos of anything or anyone from ancient history. It’s easy to forget, but the iPhone itself is only 12 years old – it was launched on January 9, 2007.

So, how do we know the Resurrection happened? The same way we know anything in the ancient world happened – we have writings, we have eyewitness accounts, and we have archeological evidence. In fact, if you apply the same standards by which we know

anything from the ancient world, you discover the resurrection of Jesus can be known with as much certainty as any other historical event.

Now, after the resurrection, the various gospels tell us Jesus made several appearances in Jerusalem and other places including conversations He had with people and things He did to demonstrate He was who He said. Matthew doesn't tell us about any of that, but instead moves on to tell us how we should live in light of the resurrection.

**Matthew 28:16** Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. **17** When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.

Some people had a hard time processing everything they saw and heard; it was too good to be true. Maybe you resonate with that – maybe you're not 100% certain. My friend, that's OK, there is nothing wrong with doubt or uncertainty.

Ask God to prove Himself to you and if you ask with a sincere heart, not a hostile heart, He *will* move in your life. God wants to be known by you, He doesn't want to hide. And He knows you have questions. It's OK. Most of your questions have answers, you just need to seek them out – and if you need help with that, contact us and let us know because Jesus has a plan and purpose for you as He announced to the disciples that day:

**18** And Jesus came 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 of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age.*" Amen.

I want to make three points for you this morning: it is important to know about the resurrection, to share the news of the resurrection, and it is important to receive the news of the resurrection – so, knowing, sharing, and receiving.

First – it is important to know about the resurrection.

The Apostle Paul wrote in a letter to early Christians living in Greece:

**1 Cor 15:17** if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins!

Without the resurrection Jesus is just another good, but dead man, that people wrote a few books about. History gives us numerous examples of heroism where one man or woman laid down their life for someone else. But none of those heroes ever returned from the dead. Jesus' death on the cross was not simply an act of bravery or courage, it was atonement – a payment for our sins – He died in our place and satisfied the wrath of God toward our sin.

But why? Why was that necessary? Because, God is both merciful and just.

We all know we have done wrong things, bad things, things we're not proud of. And we all know there are times when we have let ourselves and others down, when we haven't been the man or woman we hoped to be no matter how good our intentions or efforts. The Bible calls all of those shortcomings, failures, indulgences, and outbursts sin. They break God's rules for living. We want God to overlook them, wipe them away, downplay them. It would seem merciful and kind, but it would not be just.

If we really have done wrong, action is required. If you break the rules in sports you face penalties, if you have break the rules in school you face detention or other options, if you break the laws of the city, the state or the federal government you face fines, imprisonment or both. What happens when you break God's rules? If even the library fines you for keeping books too long or losing them, why shouldn't God be able to fine us for our sins?

Well, He does. Our sins lead to death and ultimately, eternal separation from God in Hell. And there is no way out. There's no way for us to pay the fines ourselves - the fees are too high. So, He sent His own Son to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. He lived a perfect life, always obedient to God, never broke a single rule, never owed anything to the Father or offended Him in any way, and yet He took on our debt and paid it in full through His suffering on the cross and through a time of separation from God - you remember last week we heard Him cry out from the cross, "[My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?](#)"

The cross was the payment of our sins, and the resurrection is the receipt - it is proof God accepted what Christ has done. And now, to those that will receive it, He shows us both His justice and His mercy in Christ. Justice because our sins really are paid for, not just wiped away or ignored, and mercy because we were not the ones who paid.

My friends, *you need to know the resurrection has occurred* and what it means for you.

The resurrection is tangible proof your sins are worse than you ever cared to admit - only the death of the Son of God could pay for them, but it is also simultaneously proof that you are loved more than you ever dared to believe because the Son of God was willing to lay down His life for you.

The resurrection is also tangible proof that you can face life with joy and not fear. For no matter what you go through, no matter what you endure, you can see and know that God can and will, ultimately resurrect everyone who is in Christ.

Finally, the resurrection gives Christians the knowledge, confidence, and assurance that God is with you. Listen to what He says, these are the very words of God - this is what God Himself wants you to know: "[I am with you always, even to the end of the age.](#)"

Matthew opens his gospel with the promise that Jesus is coming and His name shall be Immanuel, God with us. He ends his gospel with the promise that Jesus has come and will

never leave us, He is with us **always, even to the end of the age**, to sanctify and strengthen us, daily defend us and keep us, lead us and guide us. He is with us in green pastures by still waters, and with us in the valley of the Shadow of death, we are never without at least one true friend. We are never, ever, completely alone. He is not risen and gone, He is risen and here.

It is important for you to know the truth of the resurrection. But it is also important to share this news. During His life and ministry, people tried to silence Jesus, they encouraged one of His disciples to betray Him, subjected Him to a mock trial, pressured Pilate to convict Him, and then bribed people to lie about what happened, but the message still got out and has come to us today.

Along the way it has resonated in the souls of men and women from the South Pacific Islands to downtown New York, from inner-city Chicago to the inner-jungles of South America, from Beijing, China to Bucksnot, Tennessee (it's a real place), and everywhere in-between.



Christianity is not an American religion, it is not a white religion, it is not a European religion. Christianity began in the Middle East, in North Africa, Southwest Asia, and Southern Europe. From there it has spread around the world because God is drawing people from every tribe, every nation, and every language to His throne and He is doing it through people who already know Him. People reach other people with the gospel because people know and love other people in their lives.

And this is what God wants to happen – Jesus says He has received **all authority in heaven and on earth**, and now, with that authority His first priority is to get the message out. At the empty tomb, the angels tell the ladies what has happened and to *share the message*. As they go, Jesus intercepts them and tells them to *share the message*. And his final instruction to the disciples was – go and tell others. *Share the message*.

There's a problem here though, isn't there? We live at a unique moment in history when some people feel it's rude to share about your personal faith, to tell other people what you believe. It's strange because you can say what you think or feel about just about any other topic, you post it all over Instagram and YouTube, wear T-shirts and slap stickers on your car, laptop, or water bottle about anything except religion.

It's a troublesome trend because we're talking about the most important issue in all of life – what do you build your life on and what happens when your life is over? Our faith is a source of guidance, instruction, inspiration, hope, comfort, strength, community and truth and yet some people want you to feel like you need to keep all that to yourself.

But, if I keep it to myself, I disappoint and disobey my Lord. It seems like somebody is going to be upset no matter what happens – either I keep my faith to myself and I offend God or I mention my faith and risk offending some one else.

I want to argue that in light of the fact that all authority [in heaven and on earth](#) has been given to Jesus, I should go with what He says, and offer the good news of the God who loves me to anyone who will listen, because, and here's my third point – receiving this important.

Once again, Jesus has [all authority](#) and as a result He mobilizes the church, *He says*, “Go, tell.” *He wants* people to know what He has done for them.

But notice, the command is to make disciples *of Jesus*, not of our church, not of our pastor, and certainly not ourselves – disciples *of Jesus* - [teaching them to observe \[everything\] He commanded](#). Brothers and sisters, be known as a Christian, not an evangelical, a charismatic or reformed, a Baptist, or any other name - be a disciple of Christ.

This is how you avoid a cult – a cult wants to make you a disciple of their doctrine and brand. This is also how you deal with disappointments when some ministry leader falls into sin or some church hurts you – be a disciple of Jesus who is perfect and will never fail or fail.

Also notice, becoming a disciple of Jesus involves hearing and doing.

Jesus says teach them how to *observe* all that I commanded. When you receive Christ, you are not just receiving forgiveness of your sins; you're receiving instruction on how to live.

Don't miss that second part. You can come to God just as the hot mess you are and roll the raging dumpster fire that is your life right up to the foot of His throne. He will forgive you, heal you, help you. But He's also going to demand to repair you, renew you, and recalibrate you.

You can come just as you are, but you can't stay that way. You need to learn His commands and learn how to live them out by His grace and with His strength. You're going to learn how to lean on God through all the trials of life, you're going to learn to [observe all that He commanded](#).

One of those commands is that we are to be [baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit](#). We're supposed to act on the good news we have received.

Now, it is possible to receive Christ, to be born-again, and not be baptized. Perhaps there was no real opportunity after your conversion, or for some reason you just didn't feel ready, and now it feels like too much time has passed.

That was my experience, God had gripped my soul, I had a very real relationship with Him, I prayed, read my Bible, attended church and Bible studies, but I was never baptized. I didn't really have a reason, I didn't have anything against it, except that at some point I began to feel awkward, I didn't want to go to the baptism and have people say, “You haven't been baptized?” So one summer when our church was having a baptism I swallowed my

pride, came forward and said, I need to be baptized too.

Now, being baptized doesn't make you a super-Christian, it doesn't get you into the FastPass lane for Heaven, but it is an act of obedience, a public identification with Christ, an outward testimony to the inner change. Yes, people will look at you as you do it – that's the point – you're pointing them to Christ and what He has done in you. And you're doing it because He has commanded it and you are His disciple.

If that is true for you and you have not been baptized, then let us know. Fill out a contact card in the seat pocket in front of you, or grab one by the offering boxes on your way out or at the welcome table and tell us you want to be baptized, we'll get you some information to you to look over, you can meet with one of the pastors and share your testimony, and we'll have a baptism and potluck dinner on Sunday night May 5<sup>th</sup> at 6 o'clock and you can worship God by obeying His command.

My friends, the things we have seen this morning require a response. You must have an opinion about them. You must receive Jesus and His resurrection as true or reject it as a myth, but the claims He makes are just too staggering to be ambivalent about. The implications are too profound. The issue is too serious. Either Jesus really did die for your sins on the cross and resurrect again to new life, or He did not and Christians are the most gullible, pitiable people alive.



Last weekend my wife wasn't here. She was in Colorado attending the memorial service of a dear friend of ours. Becky Conzelman and her husband Jim attended church with us for several years. She was a top level Crossfit athlete, sponsored by Reebok and others, and a former nation-level cyclist. And, Becky loved Jesus.

Together we formed Faith Rx'd a ministry to reach out to the Crossfit exercise community. But three weeks ago she was visiting Florida with her daughter and felt sick, so she went to the Emergency room and never checked out – she had suffered a brain aneurism and died a few days later. Becky was 46 and prime physical condition.



Now, you can ask all kinds of questions about why? And there are a lot of us doing that right now. Why her God? Why now God? What about her family? But one question that none of us are grappling with is: where is she now?



We know where she is: she is with Christ, her resurrected Lord. The One who died for Her and then conquered death and the grave has received her into His everlasting arms.

Now, either that's true, or it's not.

There is no middle ground. Either her husband, her children, her family and friends have the hope of seeing her again because of the resurrection of Christ, or we're delusional, naïve, fools.

My friends this isn't just some stories from an old book that we hear on Sunday, this is real life. It's about you, and it's about the people around you, people who are here today and gone in a moment.

The message is universal – it's supposed to go out to all tribes, tongues, and nations, but it's also personal – you have to respond to it. You cannot inherit the Christianity of your family or friends.

You have heard the message, you've been told. But are a disciple? Have you been baptized? Are you learning to walk according to Jesus' commands?

If God has been working in your life and you are ready to become a Christian, then simply tell Him that right now. Right there, in your seat, tell Him you believe all of this, you believe you have sinned, you believe you have done wrong, and you want Him to forgive you. Not only that, you want Him to teach you a new way to live – you want to learn all that He has commanded and with His guidance and help you will change.

There are no special words, there is no formula, just tell Him the truth of what is in your heart. He will hear and understand.

If you want to be baptized, fill out a contact card at the welcome table.

My friends, this Resurrection Sunday I want you to know God is for you, He has given Himself to you, and He promises to be with you unto the very end of the age. He is our Savior, Shepherd, brother and friend. He died for sins. But He is risen. He is Risen indeed, and so shall all of those who put their trust in Him.

Let's pray.