

Matthew 28A

- Our three-year study of Matthew is nearly complete, and out of the 1,071 verses found in this book, we are down to the final 20 verses
 - In these verses we study the third of three key truths that Paul said were the things of first importance for Christians
 - In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul said these things all Christians must know are that Jesus died, was buried and three days later rose again
 - That simple but profound three-part story is everything to our Christian faith; it defines our faith
 - To this point in our study, we have studied the first two of these three parts of Jesus' story: Jesus' death and His burial
 - Therefore, today in Chapter 28, we move to the third part: His resurrection, which is really the key to everything in the Bible
 - Do you realize that if Jesus wasn't raised from the dead, nothing else in this book would matter?
 - As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15, if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then our faith is useless because we have believed in a lie
 - So if Jesus' death was the end of Him (as death is for every other person), then Jesus was no different than anyone else
 - But by returning to life, Jesus proved He was something else
 - Only God has the power over death...human beings do not possess that power
 - So if someone can bring His own dead body back to life, He must have the power of God
 - And if so, then what that Person says about obtaining eternal life matters
 - And that's why we've studied this book in such detail for the better part of the last three years

- So now it's time to focus our attention on the resurrection moment as Matthew explains it, and that takes us to the beginning of Chapter 28 again
 - Last week we looked at just the first verse so we could understand conclusively what day of the week Jesus died
 - We learned that Jesus died on a Thursday, not on a Friday as tradition holds, and in the year 27 AD
 - All that was interesting, of course, but that is not the main point of this chapter, of course, nor even the main idea of verse 1
 - The point of v.1 – and the rest of this chapter – is that the impossible happened on that day
 - A dead body returned to life after three days, and walked out of the tomb alive again
 - As Jesus said, what is impossible for us is possible for God
 - So let's understand how that happened

Matt. 28:1 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.

Matt. 28:2 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.

Matt. 28:3 And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow.

Matt. 28:4 The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men.

- Repeating v.1 from last week, Matthew tells us that the two Mary's (Magdalene and Jesus' mother) came to the grave at daybreak on Sunday
 - Matthew names Mary of Magdalene specifically, because she will be critical to this part of the story
 - But notice how Matthew refers to Jesus' mother merely as the other Mary
 - In fact, John and Mark both refer to this Mary as the mother of James, not the mother of Jesus
 - These are just examples of how the Bible consistently downplays the significance of Mary as Jesus' earthly mother
 - Yes, Mary was a significant Bible character, no different than Elizabeth, John the Baptist, Peter or the Apostle Paul

- And yes, she had the high honor of being chosen to carry the Messiah in her womb
- But Mary's importance stops at that point...Mary was no more than those things in God's plan
 - Mary was just a sinner saved by grace and greatly honored by God's favor to have an important role in Messiah's first coming
 - But assigning Mary any greater theological significance than that is idolatry, and we can clearly see how the Bible avoids that here
- Moving on, these women have come early on Sunday morning to finish the burial preparations for Jesus
 - They waited until the daybreak to leave the city in safety, but they probably left at earliest twilight, maybe 4 AM
 - They brought the spices they purchased the night before in the city after the end of the Sabbath on Saturday night
 - We have to ask what was going through these women's minds... they saw the tomb sealed with the stone so they know it's closed
 - That stone would have been far too heavy for these women to move on their own, so how did they expect to gain access to Jesus' body?
 - Mark says that as they went, they wondered aloud who would move the stone away for them
 - Maybe they thought the Roman soldiers would unseal the tomb for them
 - It appears they go in blind faith hoping for a miracle of some sort
 - No one would have blamed these women if they had said it's not worth going, it's impossible, and then stayed home that day
 - Everyone would have understood and probably everyone would have agreed
 - In fact, I suspect some of the disciples may have tried to talk these women out of going to the grave that day
 - Maybe some thought "silly women" as they watched them running off to the tomb with spices before dawn

- So from a human perspective, there was no reason to bother going and no reason to expect the tomb to be open
 - But still they went anyway...early in the morning and eagerly expecting to see Jesus' body, though without a plan
 - And because they did go, they were privileged to become witnesses to the greatest miracle in history
- That is the payoff for walking by faith...you get a chance to witness God doing something amazing, something impossible, through your obedience
 - If we limit our service to God to situations where we can see the path to success in advance, then we're going to miss a lot of miracles
 - God tells you to start a ministry, but you say there's no money, there's no time, I don't have the expertise or the ability
 - Remember when Moses tried to use those same excuses in Exodus 4...then God told Moses, I will take care of those things
 - God says go pray with that stranger on the park bench, but you say they will think I'm strange or that's not going to help them
 - If we only pray for the things we think we can accomplish, then we never see what God might be prepared to accomplish
 - If we only go when the task seems doable, we'll never be used by God to do the unthinkable
 - If we only go when it makes sense to us, then we won't be there when God parts the Red Sea or feeds 5,000 or opens a tomb
 - And we'll miss the point in all this...God doesn't need us in the first place...He is inviting us to join in work He is going to do
 - God was going to raise Jesus on this day...with or without these women
 - So the only question was whether they were going to be there to see it happen
 - You may be the miracle for someone today, the one who showed up to join the work just as God did something no one expected
 - But you have to first be willing to walk in faith, to shut up that inner voice of reason, to ignore the critics

- We don't bring about miraculous outcomes merely by our involvement or even by wishing for God to do a miracle
- But when He calls us to a certain path, one that appears impossible, remind yourself there may be a miracle waiting
- These women didn't have a way to open that tomb, but they expected God to provide a way, and He did it in a most unexpected and miraculous way
 - In v.2 Matthew tells us that before the women arrived, an earthquake took place during the night when Jesus resurrected
 - There was also an earthquake at the moment of Jesus' death too
 - So God marked both Jesus' death and resurrection in this way
 - Next, an angel descended specifically to move the stone aside, and then the angel hung around for a while hosting an open house at the tomb
 - The angel's arrival scares the Roman guards nearly to death, and in fact they fall to the ground unconscious
 - So as the women arrive, they come upon this strange scene... tomb open, guards on the ground, angel waiting on the stone
 - At this point we need to consult the other Gospels for a better picture of what happened that morning, because Matthew has combined things
 - According to the other Gospels, the first person to visit the tomb was just Mary Magdalene who came by herself
 - When she arrived the tomb was already open, but she didn't investigate further...she just ran back to tell the apostles
 - She assumed that the body of Jesus had been stolen and she wanted to report it to the men
 - Then a short time later the other Mary and Salome arrive and these two are the first to enter the empty tomb
 - This is the encounter that Matthew writes about next

Matt. 28:5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified.

Matt. 28:6 "He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying.

[Matt. 28:7](#) “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.”

[Matt. 28:8](#) And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples.

- The angel greets these two women with the standard angelic greeting, “Do not be afraid...”
 - He then informs the women that the Lord wasn’t in the grave because He had risen from the dead just as He promised
 - Then angel invites them to inspect the tomb, where they see the empty stone bench in the cave and the linen wrappings
 - Finally, the angels tells the women to report to the disciples telling them Jesus is going to Galilee where He will meet them
 - Jesus wanted His disciples to leave Jerusalem immediately to flee the Romans and the prying eyes of the Pharisees
 - Once up in the Galilee, Jesus and His disciples could meet and talk in safety and without worry of interruption
 - So while Mary and Salome are conducting the open house with the angel, Mary Magdalene is back in Jerusalem with the disciples
 - She’s trying to convince the men that she saw Jesus’ tomb open
 - But the men won’t believe her and they refuse to go look for themselves
 - In that culture and in that day, men viewed women as unreliable witnesses and didn’t trust their reports
 - Then a short time later, the other Mary and Salome return to the disciples to report their encounter with the angel at the tomb
 - Now with a second report of an empty tomb, Peter and John decide to check out the women’s story by going to the tomb
 - When Peter and John get to the tomb, they find it empty, with the linen wrappings by themselves, but no angel anywhere
- So Peter and John return to the disciples’ hiding place in Jerusalem to confirm that the tomb was empty but still assuming Jesus was stolen

- Meanwhile, Mary Magdalene decides to go back to the tomb a second time and when she does, she sees not one but two angels in the tomb
 - And then almost immediately, Mary turns around to see Jesus alive outside the tomb
 - She's overjoyed to see Jesus alive and tries to embrace Him, but Jesus commands her not to touch Him
 - Instead, He tells her to report to the disciples and we assume He repeats His instructions for them to go to Galilee
- It's interesting that Mary Magdalene was the first person to see the risen Lord and that fact argues for the authenticity of the Gospel accounts
 - If you were inventing the story of Jesus' resurrection, you wouldn't make your first eye witness in your story to be a woman
 - Given the cultural bias against women eye witnesses, this detail would make your story less believable, not more believable
 - The only reason someone would say a woman was the first eye witness to something so remarkable would be if it's true
- Moreover, the Lord's choice to work through the women rather than the men is confirmation of something we saw last week
 - The women were a chain of custody proving the authenticity of Jesus' claims of death, burial and resurrection
 - In fact, since these women were the only ones present throughout Jesus' ordeal, they are the only ones who could testify
 - Because they stood by Jesus during His trials, they were now privileged to be present for His triumph as well
- It almost seems as if Jesus was mocking the lack of faith among His male disciples and their continued lack of faith would bear out that choice
 - Twice these men received reports by women who saw the Lord's tomb empty and who heard from angels
 - And now they've heard a report from a woman who saw and talked with Jesus alive
 - And if that weren't enough, these men even saw the empty tomb for themselves

- Yet still they wouldn't believe that Jesus was resurrected, and they certainly weren't heeding His instructions to go to Galilee
- Simply put, because they didn't believe in the resurrection, they weren't going to follow Jesus much less obey Him
- And on the one hand, we can sympathize with their response to these reports
 - If after three days you visited the grave of someone you buried and found it empty, what would you suppose?
 - Would you immediately suppose that the person returned to life and was walking around in perfect health, alive and well again?
 - Or would you would assume someone took the body?
- On the other hand, they had strong eye witness reports from the women who they knew and trusted
 - Clearly, the women didn't expect to find a resurrected Jesus either...they went carrying spices to embalm His body!
 - So they had no reason to lie, and the disciples had every reason to believe their reports and respond in faith
- But they just couldn't accept it, and I wonder if Jesus was training them for the future when they were sent out with the same message
 - One day these men would be the ones proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus to others...and dealing with doubters
 - Because the idea of a dead man returning to life is truly outside anyone's expectations
- And if you cannot accept the resurrection of Jesus, then you will not accept His commands...you will accept nothing at all
 - It just goes to show that resurrection is the key to the Gospel...if Jesus wasn't raised, nothing else matters
 - And that's what the Christian faith requires...at the heart of our faith is the belief in these testimonies
 - By faith in the word of God, we believe that Jesus' resurrection is true, that He returned to life as He promised He would

- And not only did Jesus resurrect...but we believe it's going to happen to every single human being who has ever lived
 - One day soon, resurrection will be our experience too, and eventually it will be everyone's experience
 - So let's understand just what was involved in Jesus' resurrection, that is, what happened to Jesus and to His physical body
- And to do that we must first define what life and death are, according to the Bible
 - A living person consists of two parts, according to Scripture: we have a physical body and a spirit (or soul)
 - God fashioned the body of the first human being, Adam, from the dirt of the ground, literally from earth
 - God gave Adam a physical body because Adam was intended to live in a physical world
 - But at first, Adam's physical body was lifeless...it was no more alive than the dirt from which it came
 - Before his body could be alive, he needed a spirit, so God breathed a living spirit/soul into Adam's body and Adam came to life
 - Adam's wife, Eve, came to life in a similar way...God made her body from Adam's body and then gave her a living spirit as well
 - Thereafter, every human being has come into existence through procreation between a man and woman...flesh creating flesh
 - But God still makes the spirit for each child conceived through that union...we each receive a living spirit from the Giver of life
- Death is just the opposite of that experience...it's the separation of the body and the spirit
 - At death, our spirit leaves the body lifeless and immediately the body begins to disintegrate
 - But our spirit lives on, and where our spirit lives next depends on what we believed while we were alive
 - If the person believes Jesus was their Savior, then God counts their faith as righteousness and He welcomes their spirit into Heaven

- A believer exists in Heaven as a spirit without a physical body while they await a future resurrection and the coming Kingdom
- On the other hand, if the person dies without faith in Jesus, they forever remain in their sins so they can never enter into the presence of God
 - The unbeliever's spirit descends into the heart of the earth away from God and held in a place of torment called Hades (Hell)
 - They too exist in spirit form only awaiting a future resurrection day and a judgment moment
- So life is a spirit in a body while death is the separation of the spirit from the body, and therefore resurrection is the reuniting of spirit and body
 - Resurrection is not a spirit returning to life or regaining consciousness as some imagine it
 - A person's spirit never ceases to exist and is always conscious
 - Resurrection returns a spirit to a body so that the person can live in the created world again
- That's what these women reported to the disciples...Jesus' body was alive again, and it's what the Bible says will happen to each of us
 - In fact, as Paul told us, the resurrection of Christ is of first importance because it's the basis for our own hope

1Cor. 15:16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised;

1Cor. 15:17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.

1Cor. 15:18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

1Cor. 15:19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

1Cor. 15:20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

1Cor. 15:21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead.

1Cor. 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

- So even as Jesus' resurrection was a miracle, He was just the first, and the hope of the Christian faith is that we will follow one day

- But there are some important differences between what Jesus experienced in death and at His resurrection and what we will experience
 - First, Jesus' Spirit took a different path in death than our spirit will take
 - In Matthew 12 Jesus told us where His Spirit would go:

[Matt. 12:40](#) for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

- When Jesus died, His Spirit would descend into the heart of the earth to a place called Sheol in the Old Testament
- Sheol is a literal, physical place in the center of the planet that God created to hold the spirits of the dead for a time
 - Until the time of Jesus' death, the spirit of every human being – whether believer or unbeliever – went down to Sheol at death
 - Even though believers and unbelievers went to the same place, there was a big difference in the quality of accommodations
 - Jesus tells us in Luke 16 that those spirits who were righteous by faith were held on one side of Sheol in a place of comfort
 - But those who died absent faith in Messiah were held on the other side of Sheol in torment (called Hades)
- It makes sense that unbelievers are held in Sheol, but why did Old Testament saints go to Sheol too? Why didn't they go to Heaven?
 - Even though Old Testament saints were saved by their faith, they couldn't enter Heaven until Jesus' blood sacrifice covered their sin
 - So until Jesus came, God held the spirits of Old Testament saints in the heart of the earth in comfort to await the Messiah's appearing
- So after He died, Jesus' Spirit descended into Sheol so Jesus could address both groups of humanity...both the unbelievers and believers
 - The Bible tells us that Jesus first presents Himself to the unbelieving spirits held in the side of torment

- In 1 Peter 3:19 we're told Jesus preached to the unbelieving spirits confirming the word of the prophets who foretold a Messiah
- Jesus' preaching was not intended to convert or to offer a second chance, but to convict them for their unbelief in God's promises
- Secondly, Paul says in Ephesians 4 Jesus then met with the Old Testament saints in Sheol introducing Himself as the Messiah they were expecting
 - They had died in faith not having received what was promised, but now they knew God's promises were being fulfilled
 - Finally, the Old Testament saints could put a face and name to the Messiah they had longed to see one day
- Then Paul says Jesus escorted the Old Testament saints into the Heavenly realm while leaving the unbelievers behind to suffer in Sheol

[Eph. 4:8](#) Therefore it says,

"WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH,
HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES,
AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."

[Eph. 4:9](#) (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?)

[Eph. 4:10](#) He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

- Obviously when we die, our experience will be different, primarily because Jesus has already paid the price for our sin and emptied Sheol
 - Therefore, there is no need for our spirit to spend time in a layover in Sheol after we die
 - Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 5 that the spirits of those born again by faith in Jesus Christ go immediately into God's presence at death
 - And in Luke 16 Jesus says our spirit will be escorted by angels into the presence of God when we die
 - So our spirit's experience of death is different than Jesus, and our dead body also goes through a different experience than Jesus' body did

- After our spirit leaves our body, our body becomes lifeless, and begins to decay because of sin
- God placed the human body and all Creation under a curse after Adam sinned, saying from dust we came so to dust we will return
 - But when Jesus' Spirit descended into Sheol, His body didn't decay

Psa. 16:10 For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol;

Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.

- The Bible testifies that Jesus' body, though bloodied and disfigured, did not decay...it simply remained lifeless
- Our body decays because of the curse, but since Jesus had no sin and wasn't under the curse, His body didn't decay
- And that difference also explains why our resurrection will be different from Jesus' resurrection
 - When Mary Magdalene visited the tomb for the second time, she reported seeing Jesus alive...the same Jesus she knew before
 - Jesus' Spirit returned to the same body Jesus had before He died
 - His Spirit re-entered the body in the tomb, Jesus' heart started beating, He took off His wrappings, stood up and walked out
 - Even the damage done to His body on the cross began to heal quickly, though not completely
 - That's how Jesus resurrected, but that's not how we resurrect...our spirit won't return to our old body nor would we want it to do so
 - Our current body is corrupted by sin and under the curse, which is why it decays and turns to dust
 - The curse is also the reason our body gets sick, experiences pain and weakness, gets old, deteriorates and ultimately dies
 - Those are things we don't want to experience after our resurrection, so we don't want to go back into this body...once it does, it's gone forever
 - When we resurrect, our Spirit will enter a new body, one created for eternity, one like Jesus' body

- The things we experience today in our present body won't be a part of our life in the new body
- We won't experience sickness, weakness, aging or death itself because those things end when our corrupt body dies
- So we join Jesus in resurrection though we receive a new body, and we will live with all resurrected saints in the promised Kingdom on earth
 - Imagine how different life will be for us in that coming time
 - Living in a world ruled by Jesus, so justice will be perfect
 - A world where our bodies are sinless and unable to die, so we live without fear of harm, violence, sickness, danger in any form
 - We will experience eternal peace and joy...it's literally unimaginable but it's real, and it's coming
 - And it's possible because Jesus went before us in death and in resurrection
 - And the same God Who brought Jesus' dead body back to life is the One Who has promised to resurrect you too
 - If He can do it for Himself, He can surely do it for you
 - Do you believe that Jesus resurrected back to life as He promised He would? Then by your faith, God will fulfill His promises to you as well
 - But if you don't believe these things, then the irony is you will still be resurrected one day
 - The Bible teaches that those who die without faith in Jesus are also resurrected in a future day
 - One day, the spirits of unbelievers are brought up from Hades, given new bodies, and then they stand for judgment
 - After judgment, they are convicted and thrown alive in the lake of fire to dwell in torment forever
 - So whether we believe in resurrection or not we will all one day experience it...the only difference is where we live for eternity
 - Better to believe in the promises of God than not

- Better to believe that Jesus returned to life so that when we do too, we will live eternally with Him