

STUDY 9 - MATTHEW 28:1-20

Note: Matthew 28:16-20 will be examined more deeply in a separate study, part one of a new short series on world mission. I'll send out those notes shortly.

Vs 1-10

The chapter begins with the two Mary's going to see the tomb at the start of the day after the Sabbath. This is further evidence of their devotion to Jesus (remember 27:56 and 27:61). Although they are identified in verse 1, they say nothing in this passage - all the speech comes from the angel, and from Jesus himself.

There had been a second great earthquake (remember 27:51), and an angel had descended and rolled back the stone. This had happened before the women had arrived (the ESV translation is confusing here, but look at Mark 16:4, Luke 24:2 and John 20:1). The stone needed to be rolled back, not so that Jesus could get out, but so that people could see in. The angel's appearance was heavenly - notice that Matthew could only describe him using similes, not exactly (verse 3). He was terrifying (verse 4) - the guards were afraid of him, not just of losing their jobs and lives because Jesus was gone.

The angel spoke words of comfort to the women (verse 5). Although they are afraid to, they had no reason to be. They were seeking the crucified Jesus, but he is not in the tomb. To prove this the angel invited the women to look inside. The angels give an explanation for the empty tomb - Jesus has done what he said he would do (verse 6, see Matthew 16:21, 17:9, 23, 20:19 and 26:32). The word the angels use for "risen" is a technical term, called a divine passive - signifying only something that God has done. God the Father has raised Jesus from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is significant, given that Jesus died under the wrath of God (remember 27:46).

The angels tell the women to pass a message on to the disciples : Jesus is risen from the dead. This is more than simply "Jesus is alive again", but an announcement of great victory. Jesus has triumphed over death! The truth of these words would soon be underlined by a visible sighting of Jesus himself (verse 7). As the leader of his sheep, Jesus went before them into Galilee, as he had promised (see Matthew 26:32). He will gather up his sheep again.

The women departed with a mixture of fear and joy (verse 8). Life will never be the same again for them, and the news they have heard is far better than they could ever have imagined. As they went, they met Jesus himself. He only had to utter one word and the women recognised him (verse 9). Although his body has been transformed, he is recognisable. The women respond in a more intense version of their feelings of verse 8. The joy and fear combine together into worship as they recognise Jesus' deity.

Jesus gave them two commands. The first is to stop being afraid. There is nothing to fear about this brand new world of resurrection hope and relationship with the living Christ, as unbelievable as it may have appeared to the women. He also underlines the command the angel gave to them, to go and tell the disciples in Galilee. We should not rush over the wonder of Jesus' statement in verse 10. He is talking about men who scattered and denied him, yet he calls them "my brothers". This is not just an affectionate term, but points to what Jesus has just achieved. Because of his death, his people are united to him, co heirs with him, part of his family, redeemed, forgiven and in an intimate relationship with him.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

How have we seen the women's devotion to Jesus so far in these chapters in Matthew?
How do we see it now?

What had happened before the women arrived at the tomb (vs 2)? Why had the stone been rolled away?

Why were the guards afraid (verse 3 and 4)?

What message does the angel bring to the women? What words of comfort do they utter and why? What do they say about what has happened and why? What command do they give the women?

What is the reaction of the women (verse 8)? Why?

When the women meet Jesus, what is their response to him (vs 9)?

Why is what Jesus says about his disciples so wonderful, given what has happened in chapters 26-28? What does it tell us about what his crucifixion has achieved?

Vs 11-20

The attention shifts back to the religious leaders in verses 11-15. Matthew again points out the deep tragic irony of how they react. They are told a report of the angel and Jesus' resurrection. Despite the fact that they were determined that the disciples would not steal Jesus' body and put precautions in place so they could not (look back to 27:62-66), they command that the story of a theft is spread around the people. To some degree this story is successful (vs 15).

However the gospel ends with Jesus commanding his disciples to spread the true story of who he is and what he has achieved. Assembled in Galilee, Jesus told his disciples about his authority, their commission and he promised to be with them for ever. We'll look at these verses more thoroughly next, but it is worth for now just noticing the climactic way Matthew ends his gospel, and the contrast these verses are to the lies of the authorities.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Compare verses 11-15 with 27:62-66. Where's the irony in what happens?

What is the true message that Jesus commissions his disciples to go and tell?