

Matthew 23-06-25a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 25th of June, 2023. This is a landmark occasion, it is the final and concluding episode in our long journey through the Gospel of Matthew.

I've enjoyed it very much, I've learned a great deal personally, and I hope it has been enjoyable and worthwhile for those of you that have been here from 1-1 all the way to 28-20. We will be looking at this closing section, verses 16 through 20 this morning. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our time of investigation here in this closing chapter of Matthew, and we'll begin.

Father, it is such a privilege to trace the words and the works of the Lord Jesus through any one of the four Gospels, and this Gospel of Matthew has been such a great blessing to us. We thank you for its preservation, we thank you for the wonderful ubiquity of translations and copies, and unlike so many in ages past, we have full and fulsome access to your word and so many resources that help us to understand it better. We believe that this is your provision for us in the closing stages of this age, and we are endeavoring to take full advantage of this wonderful provision.

We pray that as we look at this final section of the book together, that your Holy Spirit will give us understanding, illuminate our path and our hearts through its content, help us to draw closer to you through the Lord Jesus Christ, to more closely conform to His example and to be faithful stewards of what has been entrusted to us in the time that remains to us in this life. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen. Let's read our passage, beginning in verse 16 of Matthew chapter 28.

This is after the resurrection, after the story of the bribery of the guards to spread a false story to attack the veracity of the resurrection, because this is the central truth of our faith. Paul says in Corinthians, if the resurrection is not true, all of our faith is in vain, and we are of all men most miserable. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, and despite all of the attacks on that truth down through the centuries, it is still a central and foundational tenet of our belief and is the foundation stone of our hope, because Christ has been raised, we have been raised, we will be raised, our believing brethren, our loved ones, those who have gone before us, those who will come after us will also be raised in Christ to newness of life.

We experience that resurrection life even while we are alive. As Jesus said in John chapter 11, the one who lives and believes in me will never die, but it is a matter of faith. Do you believe this? He asks Lazarus' sisters.

So here after the account of the resurrection, beginning in verse 16, then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee. This is a critical piece of the context for what follows. Put an asterisk beside it, underline it.

It is extremely important and often overlooked. The eleven disciples went away into Galilee, we might put in parentheses, finally, after they had been reminded and told several times, he goeth before you into Galilee, he will see you in Galilee, tell my disciples to meet me in Galilee. He told them before he was ever arrested that he would meet them in Galilee.

So they finally make it to Galilee, and you remember in the Gospel of John, we have the account of an entire week's worth of delay. You could try to explain it in terms of the Feast of Unleavened Bread lasting after the Passover, but people traveled on those days. You could go a Sabbath day's journey.

Those days are not all Sabbaths. Only the day of Passover proper and the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was a high Sabbath. After that, there is continuing observance, but those days are not Sabbaths.

So there is no reason why the disciples could not have traveled to Galilee beginning on Sunday. Be that as it may, they finally arrived there, went away into Galilee to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. There was a specific place.

Once again, you remember that there are intervening appearances, there are intervening encounters. Peter and John and one or two other disciples in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus on the shore cooking breakfast, all of that is not detailed in Matthew. Matthew moves from, do not be afraid, go and tell my brethren in verse 10 to go to Galilee and there they will see me.

And after the interlude of the instructions for the sleeping soldiers, now they are in Galilee. And it is a reminder to us that just because something is not mentioned in scripture, such as a second blind man or a second demon possessed man, it does not exclude the veracity of an account in another gospel that does include those details. Under the influence and ministry of the Holy Spirit, authors selected the material that they presented to reinforce their theme.

And that's why it is so important to understand the aim of each of the four gospels and then to see how the Holy Spirit has made this material available to reinforce, to teach and to emphasize those thematic elements. What is the theme of the gospel of Matthew? Not a bad idea to review it here in our last session. It helps to remember all four gospels in order.

You have Mark emphasizing the suffering servant. You have Luke, Jesus the son of man. You have John, Jesus the son of God.

What is Matthew's emphasis? If Mark is the suffering servant, what is the flip side of that coin? He is the Messiah King of Israel, the conquering king. So you have the king and the servant. Jody Dillow, I thought, did a brilliant job in entitling his magnum opus

encyclopedic work on pretty much everything you might ever need to know, the reign of the servant kings.

And Jesus said, if anyone would be great among you, let him be your servant. And Jesus came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many, which he has just accomplished in our context. But Matthew is emphasizing Jesus as king.

What is the fundamental definitional attribute of a king? What has he got that nobody else has in the realm? It starts with an A and ends with a Y. Authority. Nobody tells the king what to do. If you ever saw Mel Brooks in one of his comedic romps, he had a repeated catchphrase, it's good to be the king.

I don't recommend that movie, by the way. Having seen it, I wouldn't watch it again. But it was memorable.

He would experience an advantage and say, it's good to be the king. Why? The king has all power, all authority. Nobody tells the king what to do.

He's the king, at least, unless you're British. The British monarchy gets shepherded around and told what they can and can't do all the time. But in the good old days of monarchy, the king had unrestricted authority.

Think Nebuchadnezzar. Think the Lord Jesus in the Millennial Kingdom. That is part of Matthew's theme.

And we're going to see it in this final section. Jesus told his disciples in verse 10, tell my brethren to go to Galilee. This is an imperative.

This is a command. And it is an example of something we're going to review and take special note of this morning in terms of what is the difference between what Jesus told his 11 disciples who become the apostles and then Saul becomes Paul and becomes number 12. But there is a difference between what Jesus told his disciples slash apostles and what pertains to us.

If you believe that every command that Jesus gave his disciples pertains to us as well, then where should we be headed? Get you a ticket to Israel, get you a bus fare from Tel Aviv and go to Galilee. Because Jesus told his disciples to go to Galilee. Obviously and clearly, not every imperative that Jesus gave his disciples pertains to every believer in the church age, right? Jesus told his disciples many things.

He said, go into the towns and villages of Israel and don't take any extra supplies, a single staff, single pair of sandals, go in and greet a household. And if they welcome you, stay there until you leave. If they don't welcome you, let your peace return to you, go to the outskirts, shake the dust off your sandals.

We don't do any of that. And yet those are explicit, imperative commands from Jesus to his disciples, both the 12 and the 72. So this is something we're going to explore this morning, which is how do you tell the difference? How do I know if something Jesus said to the disciples is something I should also do? Happily, God doesn't want us twisting slowly in the wind with that question in our minds.

And there is a very simple, elegant, and clear way to know the difference. And we'll see it in this passage. But this is our first clue.

Jesus says, tell my disciples to go to Galilee and there they will see me. I promise you, if you go to Galilee today, I had two piano customers in this past week, both of whom have been to Israel and went to Galilee and sat on what is believed to be the hillside where Jesus delivered the sermon and so on, saw the Sea of Galilee, traveled around to the sites. And one thing they did not see there was Jesus.

You can see locales, you can look at an excavated synagogue that is believed to be the one where Jesus taught. People have just wonderfully significant experiences in walking on the steps up into the synagogue that Jesus is believed to have trod. And it is certainly, I am sure, a very wonderful experience and probability or possibility.

But if you go to Galilee, you're not going to see Jesus. And yet here is a promise made to disciples, go to Galilee and you'll see me there. So what would you have to do if this was going to pertain to us? You would have to spiritualize it.

You would have to make it non-literal. And well, I saw Jesus spiritually. Do you need to go to Galilee to see Jesus spiritually? If I can see Jesus spiritually, then I can go to Galilee spiritually as well, right? Meaning those commands that I know pertain to me, I can diligently follow with alacrity and faithfulness.

So we're still reading our passage. Verse 16, the 11 disciples went away into Galilee to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. This is additional information that Matthew does not record.

Jesus telling them which mountain, but it is a mountain to which they were appointed. This could possibly be the same mountain that Jesus called them to when he initially named them as his disciples. Remember, he was with them.

They were going around. Jesus was teaching and preaching and healing. Then Jesus climbed a mountain and then called his disciples to him.

And you would think, well, why make them climb the mountain? And we covered that. This could be that same mountain. It could be the mount upon which he gave his earlier teaching in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. It just says it was an appointed mountain.

And it's probably just as well that it is not readily identifiable because there would be

shrines and medieval churches and plaques and gilding. And it would be so overbuilt that you would have to go into the basement of some edifice in order to see the purported place where Jesus met his disciples. It's not named and it's good.

Just like we don't have splinters from the cross. We don't have the shroud that Jesus was wrapped in. We don't have, you know, the finger bone of the Apostle John or any of the rest of that.

Not even sure where the tomb was that Joseph of Arimathea donated for Jesus' use for temporary residence. But the word I want to focus on here is had appointed for them. They were given an imperative in verse 10.

Now they are given an appointment in verse 16. This is in harmony with Matthew's emphasis on Jesus' authority. He is the master.

They are the disciples. He is the teacher. They are the students.

Verse 17, When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted. You've heard me opine on this in the past. There are many different ways that people explain this particular notation by Matthew that some doubted.

If you see the Lord Jesus in the flesh, why would you doubt? I have two or three observations to make about this. First of all, in the same way that when Mary Magdalene saw the risen Lord in the garden, she thought he was the gardener. They try to explain this with tears and so on.

You think about the times that you have cried, that you've either tears of anger or tears of sorrow or tears of frustration or whatever it might be. Tears as a result of childhood discipline, of which I had many. But it didn't blind me.

We can generally see through our tears. By the way, that wasn't all corporal punishment. Sometimes I was just angry with myself and disappointed at having disappointed my parents.

But tears don't typically blind us to the point that we can't recognize people, especially people that we know well. Mary followed the Lord Jesus for over three years. She would have no difficulty recognizing him, tears or not.

I wouldn't be surprised that there were other times she shed tears. Mary and Martha were crying at the death of their brother Lazarus. They had no difficulty identifying the Lord Jesus when he came.

I don't believe the blinding tears theory. I think there was and is something different about the resurrected Lord Jesus. Why is it that the disciples were not convinced it was him until he showed them his hands and his feet and his side? There was something

different.

The men on the road to Emmaus didn't recognize the Lord Jesus. Their hearts started burning within them as they heard him talk. You know these men, one of whom I think was Cleopas, or Clopas, whose wife was at the cross, knew Jesus well, knew the sound of his voice, had heard it for months and months and months, if not years.

And yet, why would Jesus purposely mask his identity? It's possible that he did. I think it's probably likely that he did. Why would he do that, by the way? This is in John rather than our Gospel, but why would Jesus not reveal his identity to these two men? What advantage did it confer for them that he didn't immediately say, well, hello there, I'm the risen Jesus? They would listen.

There are things that God hides from us in order that we can learn other, more important things. We will eventually catch up our understanding, but I think when we don't know how circumstances are going to turn out, when we don't know what the plan of God holds for us, when we don't know the unpredictable future, it is a blessing from God in that it gives us the opportunity to learn what we need to learn without distraction. We will eventually find out what the uncertain future holds.

We will eventually know even as we are known, but we see through a glass darkly, and that's not necessarily a bad thing. If we needed to see through a glass clearly, God would make it clear, and those things that we need to know are revealed. But we should be content with such things as we have.

We should be content with what God chooses to reveal to us and understand and trust God's wisdom in not letting us know everything. We're watching a program that's kind of a science fiction thing. There's a man who touches some magic rock and sees his fate in the future, and he's all twisted up and in a wheelchair and squinting out of one eye and looks like he's had some horrific experience, and then when he takes his finger off the rock, he remembers this prophetic future for himself, and they, I think, somewhat intelligently and usefully play with the idea how does knowing the future change what you do in the present? Knowing certain people who he also saw in this vision, well, is he going to appoint them to his crew? Is he going to what is he going to do? Because he's got this special piece of knowledge.

And it's good writing to cause us to reflect on what we know and what we don't know about the future, and I appreciate when there's more than just, not that I don't enjoy a good action film and things blowing up, but things that make you think are useful because we can then use them as parables to apply what we know from the Word of God. So, we should thank God for what He reveals to us, and we should thank Him for what He hides from us. What He chooses not to reveal.

The two men on the road to Emmaus were able to repeat, so that John could write down,

what Jesus said on the road. Because they weren't distracted by His identity, and when His identity is revealed at the prayer, at the table, and He vanishes from their sight, that is the signature that tells them that what they just heard was from the Lord Jesus, but it's all about timing, it's all about sequence, it's all about what we learn and what we remember. And what a tremendous blessing that Jesus didn't reveal Himself at the beginning, they wouldn't have remembered a word.

This way they do, and we know what He said. He opened the scriptures and revealed from all of the scriptures, things concerning Himself. So, when they saw Him, they worshipped Him, but some doubted.

A second point that occurs to me is what we think about in terms of those who are unbelievers, and they say I don't see enough evidence to believe in God. I think I can explain everything in the world around me by mechanistic physics and chemistry and the Big Bang and evolution and so on. I don't have any compelling evidence to believe in God.

God has not given a preponderance of evidence so that I could sit like a jury member in a court and say well, the weight of evidence favors this. And as we've reviewed many times, God isn't looking for people who can weigh evidence and decide that there is a preponderance and draw a logical conclusion that well, it is more likely to be true than not true. God is looking for people who have a seeking heart that loves and appreciates the kind of God that God is.

He reveals Himself as a God of symmetry, a God of design, the author of beauty, the author of wisdom, of grace, of love, of self-sacrifice, of integrity. What He says, He will do. How awful would it be if God made promises to us about resurrection and eternal life and then as it were, to use an anthropopathism, woke up one morning and said you know, I just think I'll wipe out this planet.

They can't do anything about it. All these people that now that I think about it, crucifying my son after my long suffering and self-sacrificial gift of eternal life, these ingrates, I'll just think a thought and whisk them all out of existence. Who's going to know? If the angels complain, I'll whisk them out of existence.

But God is a God of integrity. He's a God of truth. And there are some of us who fall in love with that Father in heaven, that beneficent, gracious God who are grateful that He exists, grateful that He created us, grateful that He is willing to include us in His plan and purpose and grant to us immortality and eternal life.

Other people, great and chafe under those ideas. And they start with God's authority. I don't want to be told how to live, that I'm wrong, that there's such a thing as sin, and I'm guilty of it, that I have fallen, that I need a Savior, that I fall short.

I believe in human glory, not God's glory, and I think I can attain human glory. I am self-satisfied. I am happy with my own plan and my own purpose.

I don't want to be subordinate and subjugated to a higher authority, certainly not a divine authority. And I choose to look down on and despise people who need a crutch and have an invisible friend and are afraid of death and want to fantasize about life after death. I count myself brave and courageous to look into the darkness of the universe and know that I'm going to turn into a piece of rotting meat at the end of my life.

And it's pride, it's hubris, it is a heart that does not want to believe there is a God. And that kind of heart will not be convinced by any amount of evidence. You can put those people on the painted yellow footprints in front of God's throne, and they will still, like Satan and like one-third of the angels, resist, rebel, reject, dislike.

They're not going to fall on their knees in appreciation and come around to the attitude and the gratitude that believers have. It is a choice. It is a decision.

It is a set of goals and values and priorities that exclude God. There is an echo of this same truth among believers. There are believers who do not find the plan and purpose of God interesting.

Don't find it something worth pursuing. They assent that there is a God. They believe that Jesus is His Son.

They are glad that they are not going to go to the lake of fire when they die. But as for this life, I'm going to live it for my own purposes. I've got my own value.

I've got my ticket to ride. I've got my ticket to heaven. And I'm not interested in being a disciple.

I'm not interested in having God an active part of my life. And there is a spectrum from apathy and indifference in some cases outright disobedience and rebellion by God's own people that is separate and distinct from unbelievers. These are those who will be raised in the Old Testament.

They'll be raised at the resurrection of Old Testament saints. In this age, they will be raised at the rapture, but they do not have the wedding garment of righteousness. They have not pursued righteousness by faith.

They manufactured a garment of their own, made of their own standard of righteousness, and it will be insufficient. And they will be separated. They will be bound hand and foot and cast into the darkness which is outside.

Their inheritance, all of the potential of blessing and opportunity and reward and access to truth, to Christ, to the throne of the Father, to the inner sanctum of the New Jerusalem

will be denied to them, and they will be weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth. Yes, they are saved. Yes, they have eternal life, but they have bartered away their birthright for a mess of pottage in this life.

Esau is a son of Isaac. He's quote-unquote saved. Esau will rise in the resurrection, but will he enjoy all of the blessings and opportunities that his younger brother Jacob sought after and was willing to lie and cheat to obtain? That's seeking a thing because you recognize its value, but you go about it in the wrong way, and that's a whole separate sermon.

I say all of that to say this. When these disciples of the Lord Jesus went to the mountain in accordance with His command, and kept the appointment in accordance with His word, they did in fact see Him as He promised, and yet some doubted. Whatever else you want to say about this, you can say confidently the seeing with the eyes and the hearing with the ears of the resurrected Christ was still not sufficient to convince them.

They doubted that He was Christ. They doubted that He was raised from the dead. How could that be? I would submit you have a lifetime of experience with people who are born, they live, they suffer an accident, they contract a disease, they reach old age, and then they die.

You don't see people coming back from the dead. Once people are dead, they're dead. These disciples are aware of the widow of Nain and her son coming out on the stretcher.

They are aware of Lazarus. They are aware of the girl in the upper room, Jairus' daughter, and so on. They know that Jesus could raise others from the dead.

They may have had doubts about that and said, maybe they weren't really dead. Maybe there are people that go into a coma and then emerge. Maybe they just looked dead.

Maybe they just seemed dead. I wonder what they did with the open graves just in the preceding few days, and those who exited those graves and went in and appeared to many. It's possible that those resuscitated saints from the Jerusalem graveyards did not appear to those for whom it would do no good.

It is an affirmation for those who believe in resurrection. It is a bad dream and something people have to explain away if you don't have faith. It doesn't matter how much you see.

People say, Oh Lord, I've got an unbelieving loved one. If you would send Jesus to the foot of their bed in the middle of the night to appear and to speak so that they would be saved. This is one of several passages you can go to.

It is not what people see and it is not what people hear. It is what people choose. It is a choice to believe and it is a choice to disbelieve.

Look at the Pharisees. Nobody knew the Old Testament Scriptures as well as them. Could they in the right frame of mind have delivered the sermon that Jesus gave to the two men on the road to Emmaus? They knew the Scriptures, but they did not mix the promises of God with faith.

They did not mix the content of the Word of God with faith. Faith is the key that unlocks that truth and unleashes its power in our souls. Observation alone, we come to Bible class, we look at the Word of God, we see wonderful things, wonderful words of life, and yet if it is not mixed with faith, you can be looking at the resurrected Lord in the mountain of His appointment in Galilee and still doubt.

Faith is a choice. It is not a compulsion. It is not, well, if I just had enough evidence, I could believe so much more easily.

Sorry, no. It is a faithless and adulterous and evil generation that seeks a sign. I need more evidence.

Jesus said, when the Son of Man returns to the earth, will He find faith? Will He find faith? Not will He find those who can parse enough visible evidence to decide that there is a preponderance and assent. Agree. When He returns, will He find faith? Faith is what He's looking for.

Faith is what we cultivate in ourselves, what we choose to have. If looking at the resurrected Lord on the mountain of His appointment in Galilee doesn't cement your faith, what does that tell you? It isn't a matter of how strong is the evidence. It's a matter of how strong is your desire, how great is your love, how closely have you been listening.

What kind of heart do you have? What kind of heart do you cultivate? What do you choose? It is a choice. The Word of God from Genesis to Revelation is about choice. Turn you at my reproof, Israel.

Why will you die? Because you do not choose to turn. It's all about choice. There is no stronger passage than this.

Jesus' eleven disciples go to the mountain and summed out. Did you ever wonder why there is no epistle of Thaddeus? There is no gospel of James the Less? There is no epistle of Bartholomew or Nathaniel? Why? God cannot use us when we haven't got faith. And there is a principle of one in four as we will see when we come back from the break.

But this context is so often ignored when you get to Matthew 28, 19 and 20. The quote-unquote Great Commission. This is the context.

This has to be cemented in our minds to properly understand, interpret and apply those last verses, 18 through 20. You can't understand them. And they are widely, almost universally misunderstood and misapplied.

And that's what we'll see when we come back from the break.