

# The Gospel According to Matthew

By

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## CHAPTER SEVENTY-TWO MATTHEW 27:57-28

MAN'S last and worst was done. The King was dead! From the moment of His dying, none but tender hands touched Him, and from the moment of His burial none but loving eyes saw Him.

Night is past; day is breaking! A new glory is on the whole creation. Long years, as men count time, must intervene ere the groaning cease, and the sob is hushed; but the deepest pain is past in His pain, and the wound of humanity is staunchd at its very center in His wounds.

Strange glories broke with the dawning of the first day of the new week. The King's followers, discouraged and scattered by the Cross, were gathered together again; a new affection manifested itself, and a new heroism possessed them. For a brief while, He tarried among them, and meeting them in Galilee, with the majesty of an authority, such as man had never known, He uttered His great commission, and declared His abiding presence among His own disciples.

Reverently then, and with meaning such as mortals never knew, there pass our lips in His presence, the presence of the risen King, words often uttered before, but never with such confidence and such courage, "Long live the King!" And in answer, we presently hear His own words spoken to a lonely man on an island of the sea, "**I am alive for evermore.**"

In this final study, then, we see the end of the beginning, and the beginning of the end. In order to dismiss the question of difficulty, or of harmony as between the Gospel narratives, let us still remember that Matthew wrote from the one standpoint, that of presenting the King of Israel; and therefore from the appearances after the resurrection, and from the different facts concerning Resurrection, he selected only those which are necessary for setting forth this one truth of the Kingship of Christ in its last manifestation in the earthly mission of Jesus, and in the ultimate intention and purpose of God.

Our study falls into three parts:

- First, the King resting;
- Secondly, the King risen;
- Finally, the King reigning.

*The King resting.*

For a little while He is out of our sight. Our attention therefore is fixed first upon the King's lovers, and then upon the King's foes, and upon how they acted after the death of the King.

His lovers are represented by Joseph and the Mary.

We are immediately arrested by the fact that the light of Resurrection had not yet broken upon the hearts of His disciples. Nevertheless, while as yet they had no understanding of the spiritual meaning of His mission, while as yet they were only simple souls who had learned to love Him, but had not come to understand Him; a secret disciple, and those avowedly His, were brought into a sacred and beautiful union in their ministry of love.

Not only is it true that secret and avowedly open disciples are brought together; it is also true that among these lovers of Jesus, fulfilling their last tender offices of love in the presence of His dead body, were those who represented the highest in the land, and those who represented the simple and lowly.

Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Sanhedrim, and Luke tells us that he was the minority in the hour of the trial (Luke 23:51).

He was the man who did not give his consent to the decision of the illegal gathering of these people at night, or to their decision to hand Jesus over to death. He had been a hidden loyalty, and yet a true one, and now in the presence of the ultimate catastrophe, in the presence of the death of his Lord, the secret disciple became the most courageous of them all; he begged the body of Jesus the Crucified, the One of Whom they had been so eager to rid themselves.

The secret discipleship flamed out into a great courage when Jesus was dead. He took his way to the Roman governor, and asked for the privilege of taking that body and laying it to rest; and for resting place he gave Him his own tomb.

What did he feel that day as he laid Christ to rest? Probably there was no hope in his heart, but there was love there. Perhaps he felt He had been wrong, as all the other disciples felt they had been wrong, in placing their confidence in the ability of Jesus to do the great things He said He was going to do. But he had not lost faith in Christ; for there is a distinct difference between faith in Christ's ability to do things, and faith in Christ for what He is in Himself.

Then there were the Marys; Mary of Magdala, and the other Mary.

Nothing is said of them save this, that they were sitting over against the sepulchre. If we arrange these stories chronologically, we find that these women watched even after Joseph of Arimathea had gone, that they watched and waited through all that first night.

Augustine said, "Oh that men in all time would learn the lesson of the Marys, and when they can do none other for the Christ, watch!"

It is a tragic picture, this of His lovers; but it is a beautiful picture.

Hopeless, disappointed, bereaved, heartbroken; but the love He had created in those hearts for Himself could not be quenched, even by His dying; could not be overcome, even though they were disappointed; could not be extinguished, even though the light of hope had gone out, and over the sea of their sorrow there was no sighing wind that told of the dawn.

His foes are next seen; the priests, with the Pharisees, and Pilate.

Priests and Pharisees were filled with a nameless and superstitious fear, "**We remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day.**" Side by side with this superstitious fear, a great and continued contempt for Him was revealed in the words "**that deceiver.**"

It is wonderful how men may set themselves in such resolute antagonism to a truth, that at last they are persuaded that their antagonism is the truth, and the truth itself a lie. These men had listened in the early days of our Lord's ministry with profound interest to Him, had been impressed by Him, impressed by the scholarly note in His preaching, "**How knoweth this Man letters, having never learned?**" impressed by the loftiness and beauty of His ethical ideal, impressed by His marvelous unveiling of the glory of God; yet because they were not able to account for Him, and were jealous of the power He exerted, they fought against Him until at last, when He was dead, they could only speak of Him as "**that deceiver.**"

Pilate responded to their request by saying; "**Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can.**"

With what emphasis shall we read that word?

- Was his the emphasis of doubt?
- Was there still in his heart the hatred of the priests which was manifest during the trial?
- Was there a sarcasm in the word, born of the consciousness that they were helpless in the presence of that dead Man?
- Or was there a lurking suspicion of fear?

Was he coming into sympathy with those priests in their desire to stamp out the Name?  
We do not know.

Most probably it was the language of weary indifference as though he had said, Let me be done with this thing; take the guard and get away, and do anything you like.

Whatever our interpretation may be, this we do know, that in the day of his vacillation he had chosen expedience rather than obedience, had sought to save himself, as his Prisoner had not done; and so had lost himself, while his Prisoner was saving Himself, and His Kingdom.

### *The King risen.*

The account of the earthquake, and the coming of the angel is interpolated to explain the presence of the angel who spoke to the women as they returned from their Sabbath observances.

Chronologically, therefore, these events stand first in the story, and we will so look at them.

- The risen King and the angel;
- The risen King and the women;
- The risen King and His enemies.

### *The risen King and the angel.*

When the King was coming angels announced the fact; and now an angel came again. He, did not come to roll away the stone, in order that Christ might come forth from the grave; but to roll away the stone, in order to show that Christ had left the grave. He had risen ere the angel came, He had left behind Him the linen cloths without displacing them, and the grave without the rolling away of the stone. He had emerged into that new, mysterious, and yet actual bodily life, which so baffles all our explanation as we read the story in the Gospel of John.

He had departed without flame or flash of glory upon which the eye of sense might look.

He had left His grave behind Him, not through a door opened by disciple fingers, or angel fingers, but without the opening of a door. So the Christ had risen, unseen by friend or foe in the mysterious and majestic act; and the angel mission was to show men, not the exit or exodus of the Christ from the grave, but the empty grave.

The effect of the angel's coming to the foes of Christ, was that of their absolute discomfiture. They became as dead men in the presence of the blinding glory of the angel visitor; but to the friends of Christ it was a strange and tender comfort. He said to the women, "**Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus.**"

But the place where they laid Him could not hold Him.

Their coming was the coming of love and fear, as we have already seen. Their coming was the agony of a mistaken intention, they brought “**spices, that they might come and anoint Him.**” They thought of Him, only as dead. How strange that seems, in the light of the fact that, as the evangelists record, He never spoke of His Cross in those last days, but that He also foretold His Resurrection. They seem never to have heard Him, or never to have understood Him.

They were so blinded by the blood of the tragedy, that they never saw the light shining beyond.

They loved Him with a great love; though He had failed, they loved Him, and would minister to Him dead. With what surprise they found the angel there, and listened to the message! First their fear was assuaged, “**Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus Which was crucified.**”

They were seeking Him in the wrong way; but they were seeking Him. Their knowledge was not perfect, but their love was strong, and that is ever the supreme thing. Then came the announcement, the great fact was declared, “**He is not here, He is risen,**” and that was accompanied by a gentle touch of rebuke, in the words, “**as He said.**”

The last words the angel spoke indicated the real meaning of His presence there: “**Come, see the place where the Lord lay.**”

The value of the actual bodily Resurrection of Jesus, both to the disciples and to disciples for all ages, was its demonstration that He had accomplished all He said He would accomplish, that His great announcements concerning Himself were not the dreamings of a disordered imagination, were not the hopes of a helpless, powerless man.

When He came out from the grave in bodily Resurrection, all He had said was verified, and all He had done began to be explained.

The ministry, of teaching, and of wonder working, the patient love of the three years, began to take a new color, and tone, and emphasis, as they looked at the empty grave and saw that the King Whom they loved was dead, and Whose body they would have embalmed, was beyond their reach; that He had broken the bands of death, and without the aid or assistance or intervention of disciples or of angels, had left the tomb, and left it forever.

*The risen King and the women.*

His first appearance was to them, that is to love at its finest, and fullest, and strongest. They were mistaken. In all probability when the angel gave them their commission, and had started to tell the disciples that Jesus would meet them in Galilee they dropped their spices.

He knew the business upon which they had come to the sepulchre, and He appeared to them in spite of their mistake, in spite of the fact that they had come to embalm Him dead. We are anxious that people should hold the absolute truth concerning Him; He is anxious that souls should love Him! We turn away from fellowship with those who do not hold all we hold to be true concerning Him, forgetting that we as well as they, they as well as we, may be incorrect or partial only, in our present conclusions concerning Him; He will give Himself first to love, even when love is so blind and foolish, that it desires to embalm Him dead, never having believed the great words concerning Resurrection.

He said to them “**All hail!**” This was the ordinary salutation of the marketplace, the highway, and the home. There is a glory in that fact. There is, as He says it, a Kingly tone in it, a majestic touch, that appeals to us; yet in the artlessness of it, in the simplicity of it, in the ordinariness of it, is the revelation of the perfect ease with which He had passed through the old life into the new, and the unveiling of the fact that He had brought into the new resurrection life all the old human tendernesses and natural human sympathies.

They were conscious of the change, and in a moment they were at His feet. Quickly He called them back from that attitude of adoring worship, and exultation, and sent them to their new work; “**Go tell My brethren that they go into Galilee.**”

Thus the risen Christ met His disciples, appearing first to love, which we do well to remember. When we meet Him let us know that He will speak to us in the ordinary and everyday language of our own life. While He values our adoring worship, He will always lift us from the attitude of prostration, and will send us about His business. To lie at His feet is a sacred and blessed thing; but to remain there is to miss the meaning of His Resurrection. It is a greater thing to tell some soul out of personal knowledge and conviction that Christ is risen, and that therefore there is hope for all men.

#### *The risen King and His enemies.*

This story is told in one brief paragraph. Their last weapon was a lie, and their last craft was folly. There we leave them, in order to follow Him.

#### *The King reigning.*

Our attention is first directed to the disciples. They kept the appointment with Him, in Galilee. They yielded wholly to Him, for they worshipped Him. Yet they were imperfect, for “**some doubted.**” Nevertheless everything He subsequently said was addressed to the whole of them, to the men who doubted as well as to those who worshipped.

The King was standing upon a mountain; the eleven men were round Him, and perhaps the five hundred brethren were round Him also. How He loved the mountains! It was upon a mountain that He uttered the ethic of His Kingdom; that He came to the perfecting of His Manhood in transfiguration glory; that He uttered His great prophecies, so imperfectly understood even unto this hour; that He wept over the doomed city He was to reject.

Again He gathered His disciples to a mountain.

There He uttered three things:

- His claim,
- His commands,
- His final declaration.

His claim:

**“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”**

These were the phrases of the prayer He taught them when He uttered the Manifesto of His Kingdom, **“Our Father Which art in the heavens, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth”** Now He claimed that His place in the economy of God is that of all authority in heaven and on earth.

His command:

**“Go ye therefore; and teach all nations.”**

He did not say, make disciples of, there is no substantive in the command except nations. This command includes a far larger enterprise than that of bringing individual souls to Himself. It is a command to influence all the nations toward His standards and His ideals. Disciple the nations, teach the nations.

Then He spoke of the individual work.

- **“Baptizing them;”** that is the work of bringing individual souls into relationship with God, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit.
- **“Teaching them;”** that is the work of insisting on the ethic of the Kingdom. It is a great and gracious and spacious commission.

Observe its relationship to His claim. He is put in the supreme place of the economy. **“All power (authority) is given unto Me.”**

Therefore His Church is to go forth to bring the whole world into recognition of the place of authority in which God has put Him, and into agreement therewith by submission.

His final word:

**“I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”**

Many years ago I was sitting by the side of an aged saint of God, an old woman of eighty-five. I had been reading this chapter to her, and when I finished I looked at her and said, That is a great promise.

She looked up and said sharply, with the light of sanctified humor in her eyes; That is not a promise at all, that is a fact. Oh if the Church of God could remember that fact!

There is no story of ascension here; the last matter is that the King takes the Divine name by which Israel had known Him, “**I am,**” and puts it into living association with His disciples as they go forward on His business; “**I am with you.**”

The ideal of ancient Israel is to be fulfilled in the Church, Emmanuel, God with us. “**All the days,**” days of sunshine, and of shadow; days of strength and days of weakness; days of battle, and days of victory; the longest day and the shortest day.

Have we really crowned this King? If we are only interested in Him, we sadly fail.

On His head are many diadems. He is waiting for the crown of our manhood, our womanhood. He cannot rest in us, until He have our love and our loyalty.

If we reply, Yes, He is our King, then are we obeying Him in His final command; “**Go ye therefore and teach all nations**”?

Are we helping to make our own nation like Him? Are we winning individual souls to Him? Is the highest passion of our life to weave another garland wherewith to deck His brow, to place another gem in His diadem?

If not; then to see such a King and not to obey Him is to add to our condemnation! But to see Him, and know Him, and crown Him; and to suffer with Him as we serve, is life indeed.

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