

Matthew 28 Commentary-C H Spurgeon

PREVIOUS

NEXT

MATTHEW 28:1-7 THE EMPTY SEPULCHER

Matthew 28:1. IN the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher

While the Jewish Sabbath lasted, they paid to it due respect. They did not even go to the sepulcher to perform the kindly offices of embalment; but when the old Sabbath was dying away, and the new and better Sabbath began to dawn, these holy women found their way back to their Lord's tomb. Woman must be first at the sepulcher as she was last at the cross.

We may well forget that she was first in the transgression; the honor which Christ put upon her took away that shame. Who but Mary Magdalene should be the first at the tomb? Out of her Christ had cast seven devils, and now she acts as if into her he had sent seven angels. She had received so much grace that she was full of love to her Lord.

Matthew 28:2. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

Death was being upheaved, and all the bars of the sepulcher were beginning to burst. When the King awoke from the sleep of death, he shook the world; the bed-chamber in which he rested for a little while trembled as the heavenly Hero arose from his couch: Behold, there was a great earth quake. Nor was the King unattended in his rising: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven. It was not merely one of the angelic host, but some mighty presence-angel, "the angel of the Lord", who came to minister to him on that resurrection morn. Jesus was put in the prison of the tomb as a hostage for his people; therefore he must not break out by himself, but the angelic sheriff's officer must bring the warrant for his deliverance, and set the captive at liberty. When the angel had rolled back the stone from the door, he sat upon it, as if to defy earth and hell ever to roll it back again. That great stone seems to represent the sin of all Christ's people, which shut them up in prison; it can never be laid again over the mouth of the sepulcher of any child of God. Christ has risen, and all his saints must rise, too.

Matthew 28:3, 4. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

It took a great deal to alarm Roman soldiers; they were inured to all manner of terrors, but this angel's dashing countenance and snow-white raiment paralyzed them with fright, until they swooned away, and became as dead men. He does not appear to have drawn a flaming sword, nor even to have spoken to the keepers; but the presence of perfect purity overawed these rough legionaries. What terror will strike through the ungodly when all the hosts of angels shall descend, and surround the throne of the reigning Christ on the last great day!

Matthew 28:5. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

Let the soldiers tremble, let them lie as if dead through fright, but, "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified." "Those who seek Jesus need not fear. These women were mistaken in seeking the living among the dead, yet their seeking ended in finding. They did fear, although the angel said, "Fear not." Only Jesus can silence the fears of trembling hearts.

Matthew 28:6, 7. He is not here: for he is risen as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have

told you.

Jesus always keeps his word: "He is risen, as he said." He said he would rise from the dead, and he did; he says that his people also shall rise, and they shall. "Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly," the angel would not let the women stay long looking into the sepulcher, for there was work for them to do. In this world, we cannot afford to spend all our time in contemplation, however heavenly it may be. Notice the angel's words: first "See," and then "Go." Make sure about the fact for yourselves, and then let others know of it. What you know, tell; and do it "quickly."

Swift be your feet; such good news as you have to carry should not be long on the road. "The King's business required haste." "Tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him." Matthew wrote THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM, yet in his writings there is much about that despised region called "Galilee of the Gentiles", that border-land which touches us as well as the chosen seed of Abraham. There, in Galilee, is the place where Jesus will hold the first general assembly of his church after his resurrection.

MATTHEW 28:8-10 THE RISEN KING

Matthew 28:8. And they departed quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

That seems a strange mixture, fear and great joy, awe and delight, doubt and faith; yet the joy was greater than the fear. It was not joy and great fear, but "fear and great joy." Have we never had that mixture — drops of grief, like April showers, and peace and joy, like sunlight from heaven, making a glorious rainbow reminding us of God's covenant of peace? A holy fear, mingled with great joy, is one of the sweetest compounds we can bring to God's altar; such were the spices these holy women took away from Christ's sepulcher. Fear and joy would both make them run to bring his disciples word. Either of these emotions gives speed to the feet; but when "fear and great joy" are combined, running is the only pace that records with the messengers' feelings.

Matthew 28:9, 10. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

Saints running in the way of obedience are likely to be met by Jesus. Some Christians travel to heaven so slowly that they are overtaken by follies or by faults, by slumber or by Satan; but he who is Christ's running footman shall meet his Master while he is speeding on his way. And they came and held, him by the foot, and worshipped him. These holy women were not Unitarians; knowing that Jesus was the Son of God, they had no hesitation in worshipping him. There must have been a new attraction about Christ after he had risen from the dead, something more sweet about the tones of his voice, something more charming about the countenance that had been so marred at Gethsemane, and Gabbatha, and Golgotha. Perhaps these timid souls clung to their Lord through fear that he might be again taken for them, so "they held him by the feet, and worshipped him," fear and faith striving within them for the mastery.

Jesus perceived the palpitation of these poor women's hearts, so he repeated the angel's message, "Be not afraid." He also confirmed the angel's information about "Galilee", only he spoke of his disciples as "My brethren." When Christ's servants, angelic or human, speak what he has bidden them, he will endorse what they say.

MATTHEW 28:11-15 FALSEHOOD AND BRIBERY

Matthew 28:11 Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.

While good people were active, bad people were active, too. Some of the watch, having recovered from their fright, came into the city to report the startling scenes they had witnessed. It is noteworthy that they did not go to Pilate; they had been placed at the disposal of the chief priests, and therefore, while some of them remained on guard at the sepulcher, others of the soldiers went to their ecclesiastical employers, and showed unto them all the things that were done, so far as they knew the particulars. A startling story they had to tell; and one that brought fresh terror to the priests, and led to further sin on their part.

Matthew 28:12-15. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

For money Christ was betrayed, and for money the truth about his resurrection was kept back as far as it could be: They gave large money unto the soldiers. Money has had a hardening effect on some of the highest servants of God, and all who have to touch the filthy lucre have need to pray for grace to keep them from being harmed by being brought into contact with it.

The lie put into the soldiers' mouths was so palpable that no one ought to have been deceived by it: "Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept." A Roman soldier would have committed suicide sooner than confess that he had slept at his post of duty. If they were asleep, how did they know what happened? The chief priests and elders were not afraid of Pilate hearing of their lie; or if he did, they knew that golden arguments would be as convincing with him as with the common soldiers: "If this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you." The soldiers acted just as many men have continued to do from their day to ours: They took the money, and did as they were taught. "What makes a doctrine straight and clear?

About five hundred pounds a year," is an "old saw "that can be "reset "today. How much even of religious teaching can be accounted for by the fact that "they took the money"!

There are many who make high professions of godliness, who would soon give them up if they did not pay. May none of us ever be affected by considerations of profit and loss in matters of doctrine, matters of duty, and matters of right and wrong! And this saying is commonly reported among the Jesus unto this day. This lie, which had not a leg to stand upon, lived on till Matthew wrote his Gospel, and long afterwards. Nothing lives so long as a lie, except the truth; we cannot kill either the truth or a lie, therefore let us beware of ever starting a falsehood on its terrible career. Let us never teach even the least error to a little child, for it may live on and become a great heresy long after we are dead.

The modern philosophy, which is thrust forward to cast a slur upon the great truths of revelation, is no more worthy of credence than this lie put into the mouths of the soldiers; yet common report gives it currency, and amongst a certain clique it pays.

Matthew 28:16, 17. Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.

Notice those words, the eleven disciples. There were twelve; but Judas, one of the twelve, had gone to his own place; and Peter, who had denied his Lord, had been restored to his place among the apostles. The eleven went away into Galilee, to the trysting-place their Lord had fixed: into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. Jesus always keeps his appointments, so he met the company that assembled at the selected spot: and when they saw him, they worshipped him. Seeing their Lord, they began to adore him, and to render divine honors to him, for to them he was God: but some doubted. Where will not Mr. Doubting and other members of his troublesome family be found? We can never expect to be quite free from doubters in the Church, since even in the presence of the newly risen Christ "some doubted." Yet the Lord revealed himself to the assembled company, although he knew that some among them would doubt that it was really their Lord who was risen from the dead.

Probably this was the occasion referred to by Paul, when the risen Savior "was seen of above five hundred brethren at once." It was evidently a meeting for which he had made a special appointment, and his own words to the women, following those of the angel, seem to point this out as the one general assembly of his Church on earth before he ascended to his Father. Those who gathered were, therefore, a representative company; and the words addressed to them were spoken to the one Church of Jesus Christ throughout all time.

18-20. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

What a truly royal speech our King made to his loyal subjects! What a contrast was this scene in Galilee to the groans in Gethsemane and the gloom of Golgotha! Jesus claimed omnipotence and universal sovereignty: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." This is part of the reward of his humiliation (Philippians 2:6-10). On the cross he was proclaimed King of the Jews; but when John saw him, in his apocalyptic vision, "on his head were many crowns," and on his vesture and on his thigh he had a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

By virtue of his kingly authority, he issued this last great command to His disciples: "Go ye therefore, and teach " or, "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. " This is our commission as well as theirs. From it we learn that our first business is to make disciples of all nations, and we can only do that by teaching them the truth as it is revealed in the Scriptures, and seeking the power of the Holy Spirit to make our teaching effective in those we try to instruct in divine things. Next, those who by faith in Christ become his disciples are to be baptized into the name of the Triune Jehovah; and after baptism they are still to be taught all that Christ commanded. We are not to invent anything new; nor to change anything to suit the current of the age; but to teach the baptized believers to observe "all things whatsoever" our Divine Thing has commanded.

This is the perpetual commission of the Church of Christ; and the great seal of the Kingdom attached to it, giving the power to execute it, and guaranteeing its success, is the King's assurance of his continual presence with his faithful followers: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. " May all of us realize his presence with us until he Call us to be with him, "for ever with the Lord"! Amen.