

**Matthew 28:1-20**  
**(Ecclesiastes 1:2-10; 2 Corinthians 5:14-6:2)**  
**“I Am with You Always”**

**Introduction**

I am always struck by Matthew’s description of Easter morning: *epiphoskouse* is the word he uses to describe the first glimmering light of day, breaking into the darkness of this world. This Easter morning, 2012, broke like every other. The world is a dark place, and it goes its way. People are born and people die, the rest struggle on – sometimes in joy, sometimes in sorrow. And from one perspective, as Solomon observed in the opening chapter of Ecclesiastes, everything is vanity. Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. There is nothing new under the sun.

But there is another perspective, one that takes into account God’s purposes in history and what God has done in order to bring those purposes to pass. It recognizes the light that began to shine into the darkness on that first Easter morning. It is a perspective, not of gloom and defeat, but of hope and victory. It does not avoid the tough things in life, but rather faces and triumphs over them.

We have tried to walk this past week with Jesus, God’s Son, as he entered Jerusalem to shouts of Hosanna and to joyful celebration, knowing that before the week was out the mood of the crowd would change and be replaced by an angry mob clamoring for his blood. Yet he did not hold back, he did not hide from his mission, but gave himself over to *his* enemies, so that we might be saved from *our* enemies. For this he came into the world, to live life as it was meant to be lived, and to offer that perfect life in place of our broken lives, so that we might know the power of his victory over sin and death. “I came,” Jesus said, “that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

What of you this morning? What do you know of his victory? I am not asking whether you know the Easter story. I am asking something much deeper: Do you know the Easter victory? Do you know the power of Christ’s victory in your life? Is his story increasingly becoming your story? Apart from that, apart from new life in Christ, you are left with the pessimistic perspective of Solomon: Everything is meaningless. There is nothing new under the sun. I am not asking whether you have gotten your life together, whether you have solved all your problems and answered all your questions. If you think you have, just wait awhile: there will be new sorrows and new questions. You may be sad today, and with good cause. You may be struggling with disappointment and anxiety. *I am asking whether you are facing these things from a perspective of defeat or victory, whether you face them with pessimism or with hope.*

Let’s be clear this morning that we understand the message of Easter, and its implications for our lives.

## Body

### 1. The Message (28:5-7): *He has risen.*

*Fear not.*

It is a frightening thing to meet the living God, even when the meeting is mediated through a messenger. Yet throughout the Scriptures, and throughout human history, whenever God comes to his people and finds them in an appropriate posture of fear and awe, he begins by saying, “Fear not!” Some of you have come here this morning, perhaps looking confident and strong to those around you – you’ve learned to play the game so well. But inside you are dying. You are just about to give up. Your life is hard, and you feel as though you cannot go much further. To you, God says again, “Fear not!”

There is a solid reason for God to say this: Christ has risen from the dead, and has opened for us the way to life. No matter what has broken your heart or health or family or dreams. Jesus Christ has opened the way to eternal life, and God has promised to wipe away your tears. If Christ has risen, then we who have trusted in him can say with the apostle Paul, “I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38,39).

*Come and see.*

The women are not told simply to believe without examining the evidence for the resurrection. Nor are we. The messenger invites them to come and see that the tomb is empty. Down through the ages, and even in our day, God has raised up people whose specialty is demonstrating the truth of the Scriptures. If you are plagued by doubts and would find such things helpful, call the pastors here at the church, and we can point you to excellent books that deal specifically with what it means at two thousand years remove to “come and see.”

But beyond such things, the greatest continuing evidence of the resurrection is the reality of the church of Jesus Christ, still spreading and filling the earth, still transforming people from those obsessed with themselves, paralyzed by self-love, to people who are willing to lay down their lives for those whom the Lord has entrusted to them. In a culture that is entertaining itself to death, those who have truly been born anew are increasingly marked by a rejection of the frivolous entertainments of the world around us. Where professing Christians live just like everyone else, either they are not the real thing, or the church of Christ is at a place of incredible weakness, desperately needing to be revived again by the same power that raised Jesus up from the dead.

*Go and tell.*

Those who have seen cannot help but go and tell others. We are made this way: discover a great restaurant and you can't wait to tell a friend; find a cure for baldness, and you have to let people like me know all about it. How much more the gift of everlasting life, freedom from bondage to futility and meaninglessness!

## **2. The Challenge (28:11-15): *He has not risen. It is all a lie.***

Of course, the moment that you try to go and tell someone about what the Lord has done for you, you are challenged by unbelief, and by stories that have been told, even from within the church itself, seeking to explain away the resurrection. Some, seeking to appeal to the self-appointed leaders of culture, will make of the resurrection a metaphor for life springing back up after a winter of death, or for the continuing influence of a teacher in the lives of those who he has taught. But the Scriptures are clear that if Christ did not literally and physically rise from the death, then our faith is futile (see 1 Corinthians 15:12f).

So, here at the very beginning, the religious leaders devise a lie, and a silly one at that. If the soldiers were awake, how could a group of easily frightened disciples overwhelm them and take the body? And if, as they claimed, the disciples came and stole his body while they were asleep, how did they know? I cannot tell you what happened in my bedroom while I was sound asleep!

*The point is this:* There will always be opposition to the message. Yet, the opposition is in vain. The truth will always finally win over the lie.

## **3. The Mission (28:16-20): *Make disciples!***

*By what authority are we to do this?*

King Jesus himself, the risen conquering Son of God, is the one who said, "All authority has been given unto me. Therefore, go make disciples." We need not be shy in a pluralist society. We serve the King, and one day "every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord" (Philippians 2:10,11).

*How are we to do it?*

**Baptizing:** You must be part of the Body of Christ. In baptism, we are welcomed into the family of God. God wants you to be attached organically to a local congregation that will help you grow into maturity in Christ.

**Teaching:** We grow by being taught. Just as a child must be taught by his parents, and just as the wise person remains a life-long student, so too the Christian must be taught, not just the rudiments of the faith, but the deep things of God. What of

you? Have you even mastered the rudiments? Are you going on to all that Jesus taught?

*What is the scope of this mission?*

All nations: The meaning here is “people groups” or ethnic groups, every tribe, every language, every people, every nation” (Revelation 5:9). We must not neglect our own family and community, nor may we stop there. The mission takes us to the ends of the earth.

All the days, to the end of the age: The mission is not over until human history is over. Jesus has promised to be with us to the end of the age, and he expects us to follow him on mission until the world acknowledges him as Lord, worshiping and serving him.

## **Conclusion**

So, I return to the opening question: Do you yet know the power and victory of the resurrection in your life? If not, why not? How long will you live merely from the depressing perspective of life under the sun. A greater Son has risen in human history. Even now the light is driving away darkness. Christ has risen! And nothing will ever be the same.

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