Easter

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0:00] Well done, Klukas family. Thank you so much for doing that. So we're going to spend a few minutes looking at that story from Matthew 28. So Matthew is one of four descriptions we have of Jesus' resurrection.

And what's fascinating about Matthew's description is that he doesn't seem to be interested in the mechanics of the resurrection, and he doesn't seem to try and present us with much in the way of evidence for the resurrection.
Matthew's focus is on the implications of the resurrection. So the implications for our life, the implications for the church.
So let's get into it. We're just going to walk through the story. So it starts with these two women, and they're the two Marys.
They're heading to the tomb, and clearly they'll be devastated, and they're going to the tomb to honour this man they loved. And there is an earthquake. There's an earthquake, sort of like the earthquake at the crucifixion.
[1:03] And an angel descends and rolls back the stone and sits on it. And I just, I love that detail. I love that detail. Think about what the stone represented.

The stone represented, you know, the closed door of death. And here's the angel. He has no respect for that stone.
For him, it's just a stool. It's brilliant. Now, I just want to remind you why the angel rolled back the stone. Remember, it's not to let Jesus out.
Jesus is gone. The stone was moved so the women could see in and see that Jesus was no longer there. Now, they're not the only people there.
There's guards there, and they witnessed this as well. And the passage says they became like dead men, which is another fantastic detail.
[1:59] The man who was dead is now alive, and those who are alive are like dead men. And it also says that they were on the ground, and they were trembling in verse 4.

So this word in the Greek, this word trembling, it's the Greek word for earthquake. It's the same word that they used when they talked about the earthquake when the angel descended.
Same as verse 2. So the women are just delighted to hear about Jesus, and the guards are on the ground having their own little, you know, private earthquake, I guess.
Okay, moving along. So the angel says, Jesus has risen, and the women, they run to tell the disciples, and they become the first ever proclaimers of the gospel.
And on the way, Jesus meets them and says, hello. And it's wonderful. It's the most casual of greetings in Greek. If this story had happened in New Zealand, Jesus would have said, g'day.
[2:59] Now, at this point in the story, it splits. So we get these two diverging stories now.

And what Matthew does is he presents us with two responses to the resurrection. So we have the story of people accepting it and understanding the implications for them, and we have a story of people rejecting it.
And the folks that rejected it, you'll see they just sort of fall deeper and deeper into this kind of web. It's a cliche, but like a web of deception and lies.
So let's start with the guards. Let's start with the story of people rejecting it. So the guards have just seen all the stuff that's happened, and you'd think that they would run back to the chief priests and say, we got it all wrong.
We got it all wrong. But what actually happens is this. They take off and they tell the chief priests and the chief priests, they chat amongst themselves, and they agree to cover up the resurrection.

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[4:03] They say to the guards, listen, you cannot tell anyone what happened. Just say you fell asleep and the disciples stole, you know, the body at night.

And say that and we'll pay you lots of money if you say that. And it's all, folks, I don't know if you see this, it's all so terribly ironic, isn't it? Because remember in the previous chapter, the religious leaders had gone to the authorities, had gone to Pilate, and had basically said, we're really worried about the disciples stealing the body.
Let's make sure that doesn't happen. Let's put a huge boulder and make sure we have guards watching it 24-7. They're so worried about that. Now, do you see the irony? They were so worried about someone stealing the body.
They had guards watching the tomb. And now they're so worried about the resurrection. They want everyone to think that the body was stolen. And it's just, it's such an awful, grubby deception, isn't it?
And what's worse, the worst thing about it, I think, is just the defiance. It's, you know, like despite the evidence, they were so resistant to Jesus.
[5:12] They were so convinced of their moral position, they were happy to do the immoral. They were happy to spend their way out of having to deal with the truth of Jesus.

So that's the story of rejection. Let's look at the story of acceptance and the implications of that. So Jesus arrives at Galilee and he's with his disciples. And Jesus says to them, let me tell you what's happened.
So big stuff has happened. And Jesus says three really big things. He says, in summary, he says, one, I have been given all authority in heaven and earth.
Two, go make disciples. Three, I will be with you. I've been given all authority. Go make disciples. I'll be with you. That's, I mean, those are, that's some huge things to say.
So let's look at all three of these things. First, the authority of Jesus. So since the resurrection, something about Jesus has changed. Since the resurrection, something about Jesus has changed.
[6:21] He meets his disciples and the first words are, all authority on earth and in heaven has been given to me. So what's changed? Well, I mean, Jesus already had authority in his earthly ministry, but he had these self-imposed limitations, didn't he?

But now he's told us that God has handed over the governance of the universe to him. All authority. Authority means the ability to do something and the right to do it. It's all been given to Jesus over the whole universe. Universal, unconditional authority. What does that mean?
It means there is no individual or group or organization who does not come under the authority of Jesus. So the subsistence farmer, the wealthy banker, the atheist, the agnostic, the new age person, the Muslim, the communist, the capitalist, whatever you think, whatever you believe. Jesus is Lord over you. That's the first thing Jesus says to them. All governance into the son's hands. Now the second point. So all authority given to him.
[7:37] And the first thing Jesus does with his authority. What does he do? He hands it over to us. He sends us out. All authority in heaven and earth is given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. Baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I've commanded. The first thing he does is he transfers his mission to us, to the church.
Now I know that the world, we have an uneasy relationship with authority. And it's understandable because we've seen it misused.
We've seen it misused with great regularity. And so we're suspicious of it. But here with Jesus, the second big thing he says, it's like he subverts our experience of authority.
He subverts our experience of authority. How? By giving it away. I mean, Jesus could have talked about what having all this authority meant for him. But no, the shock is he doesn't do that.
[8:43] Instead, he talks about the implications for us, the disciples, the church, and for us as just listeners here. It's very important we understand what he's saying here.

So let me just unpack a couple of the words in this second point. It's interesting to note that there's only one imperative right here. And the imperative is make disciples.
Isn't that interesting? Make disciples. It's not grow your church. It's not make converts. Those things are very important. It's make disciples. Jesus doesn't say reform society or transform culture. Should we be engaged in that? Of course we should. But here he says our primary role is to make disciples. And what's that going to look like?

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Well, look at this very important little word in verse 19 that we can skip over in there. Important little word is go. It's a great word, eh? Go, Jesus says. He says, go, go, go.
[9:43] Go and do this thing. What does that mean? What does go mean? It means intent, doesn't it? It also means inconvenience. It can mean Jesus is telling us to give real thought to structuring our life around what this means.

Jesus is saying give real thought about structuring your life around being a disciple and how to make disciples of others. Now, there's so much more to say about that.
We've got to keep moving here. We've heard the first two huge things that Jesus says. All authority has been given to me. Now go.
Now let's look at the last point. I mean, to be honest, that sounds quite overwhelming, doesn't it? I've been given the authority. I'm passing it over to you. Go make disciples. Go out into the world. It sounds like a completely overwhelming task. Except for the last thing Jesus says. The last word of this gospel. The last word after 28 chapters is this.
[10:53] He says to them, Behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. I am with you always to the end of the age.

Isn't that wonderful? Jesus sends reluctant and completely inadequate men and women out into the world to fulfill his great commission.
But he sends them out with the assurance that he's going to be with them. I'm with you always. Perhaps one of the most encouraging sentences in the whole Bible.
And you know what it does is it actually takes us right back to the start of the gospel. So in our church, we started studying Matthew in early 2018.
And right at the start in the very first chapter, Matthew chapter 1 verse 20. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.
[12:03] So the whole gospel is bookended with this incredible thought that Jesus is with us.

The gospel starts and it finishes with the promise. Of Christ's personal presence in our lives. His personal presence to his disciples, to us, all the time, every day, with no separation.
And folks, I hope that that is an immense comfort to you. As you journey in discipleship through failure and success and sorrow and joy and darkness and light.
That Jesus is with you. Amen.

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