

Angels & Earthquakes

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[0:00] has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead. And behold, he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him. See, I've told you. So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, greetings. And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee and there they will see me. While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, tell people his disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep. And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble. So they took the money and did as they were directed.

And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day. Now, the 11 disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you.

And behold, I'm with you always to the end of the age. So last week, we ended our series in the Gospel of Mark and we began a new series on the resurrection of Jesus. And for the next few weeks in what the church has traditionally called Eastertide, this sort of series of weeks after Easter, we're going to look at each of the four gospel accounts and look at the narratives in those gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection.

Last week, we looked at Mark 16 and saw that the reality of the resurrection is something that actually makes us tremble. It makes our worldview tremble. It makes our view of Jesus tremble. And it even makes our view of ourselves tremble with that deep tremble of grace we saw last week. And tonight we come to the Gospel of Matthew. And having just read Matthew's account, I'm sure you already start to feel how Matthew has a different kind of feel than Mark, doesn't he? He has his own perspective to bring to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. It's the same Jesus, it's the same historical accounts that he's recounting, but both are speaking truthfully, but each bring out a particular aspect of Christ's life and significance. As we think about the relationship of the Gospels, you might think of it this way. Imagine two guys in the early 1920s sitting at a Yankees game.

One of them an engineer and another of them a writer. And they see Babe Ruth get up to bat and just crush a home run. Now imagine both of those guys, you know, they go to the pub afterwards and they start talking about the same event. And what do they start talking about? Well, what does the engineer start talking about? There's a couple engineers in the room. You start talking about the exact distance that that ball probably flew and the velocity with which it needed in order to clear, you know, the nosebleed seats in the West wing or whatever. And the statistical probability that Babe Ruth would hit a home run against such and such a pitcher on such and such a day with such and such a forecast.

[3:25] You know, great baseball statistics. But what's the writer talking about? He saw the home run. You know, he's probably thinking about how the crack of that bat sounded just like a tree trunk exploding. And he kind of caught the fact that none of the outfielders even tried to go catch the ball, but they just watched it sail over their heads. Well, you get the idea, right? The Gospels are a lot like that when it comes to the life of Jesus. Inspired narratives of the life, death, and resurrection that each tell us something important about the crucified and risen Christ.

Now, Matthew's Gospel in particular is known for being structured around five big blocks of Jesus's teaching. And we're actually going to look at one of those big blocks later this summer, the Sermon on the Mount, which is Matthew 5 through 7. And some commentators have seen in those sort of five blocks of Jesus's teaching in Matthew's Gospel an intentional parallel to the five books of Moses.

Now, I don't think we can actually push that sort of comparison too far, but I do think what Matthew is trying to show us is that in Jesus, God is renewing his covenant with his people. Because after all, the five books of Moses were the covenant document between God and Israel. And now in Jesus, Matthew wants us to see that God is bringing in a new covenant. And what will that covenant be like?

Well, Matthew actually sort of lays the groundwork for it in his opening chapter. In Matthew chapter 1, verses 1 through 18, Matthew begins his account of the life of Jesus with a genealogy. In fact, if you have your Bible open, turn back there. It's page 807 in the Pew Bible. If you end up in a book called Malachi, if you went too far, or Haggai, or other names that you can't pronounce, you're in the Old Testament, so come back forward. Matthew 1 through 8. Now, look, a genealogy does not seem like a very exciting way to start a gospel, right? We're talking about God entering into human history and changing the course of everyone's lives. How are we going to start this story? How about a list of names? Not exactly how we would probably begin things, right?

But for anyone familiar with the Old Testament narrative and God's history of redemption, this genealogy that Matthew is giving us is simply electric. Matthew highlights three key moments.

[5:43] You see it in the last few verses. Abraham, David, exile. Abraham, the one through whom God would bring his blessing to the nations, to the whole world. David, Israel's great king who would take God's saving plan forward. Exile, the great disaster where because of their sin, God ejected his people from the land and allowed the temple to be destroyed. And it's hard for us to imagine how much of a theological and spiritual crisis that event was, the exile, in every way, the exile put Israel's identity and purpose under deep question and doubt. If you go back into the Old Testament and read the book of Lamentations sometime, you see how utterly devastating that was to their own sense of purpose and identity and meaning and their relationship with God. And when God allows some of his people to return to the land in the sixth century, it becomes increasingly clear that that return wasn't really the return that they were looking for. This wasn't the sort of great return that the prophets had spoken of. So in the first century leading up to Jesus's birth and in the centuries leading up to Jesus's birth, most, perhaps, you know, many, perhaps even most of the Jews would have thought and would have considered themselves functionally, spiritually, to still be in exile, to still be separated from God, to still be living, not in some sense in the fullness of what God had in mind. Abraham, David, exile, Matthew says. But then, and this is why Matthew's even writing his gospel in the first place,

Christ, the long-awaited king, has arrived, Matthew says. And to make a point, he says that there were 14 generations from Abraham to David, and 14 generations from David to exile, and 14 generations from exile to the Christ. Now, 14 is not a very biblically significant number, right? If you sort of scour the Old Testament, you're not going to find a lot of talk about 14. And a lot of commentators will sort of scratch their heads wondering what Matthew is up to. But if a number 14 isn't very significant, you know what number is very significant? Seven. Seven is an incredibly significant number in the Bible.

It's a number of completion. It's a number of creation. It's a number that speaks of Sabbath, of a rest. And you see what Matthew is saying? 14, 14, 14. Six. Sevens, actually. And now, with Christ, the seventh seven has dawned. In other words, now is the time when God's going to act.

Now is the time of God's new creation, of God's kingdom coming to completion, of true Sabbath rest finally being opened up. Now, God's purpose is not just for Israel, but for the whole world are being brought to completion. And the rest of Matthew's gospel will continue to make good on that very claim, that in Jesus, the long-awaited Davidic Messiah has come, that this King Jesus is inaugurating God's new creation kingdom, and that at last, the exile is coming to an end. If you read a little further into Matthew chapter 1, Matthew says, an angel comes to Joseph and says to him, you'll call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. So when we finally get to Matthew 28, the whole book has just been buzzing with this kind of excitement. That the King is here, that God's new creation is being unleashed, that men and women are being invited in. But the cross seemingly derailed all of that.

How could this King die? How could the bringer of God's kingdom be crushed by the kings of this world? And yet, this, this, the cross, is how Jesus would actually save his people from their sins.

[10:00] As their representative, he undergoes the ultimate exile in their place, paying their penalty, being crushed for their iniquities, as Isaiah would say, being excluded on the cross, so that those in exile could come home. And on the first day of the week, when the Sabbath had passed, though the authorities had done everything to seal the tomb and guard it, Christ arose.

And Matthew has this great part about the angels. And the angels, you notice, didn't move the stone so that Jesus could get out, right? A lot of times we think that. Well, how else is Jesus going to get out of the tomb? He's got that big stone in the way. No, right? The angel moves the stone so that the women can go in and see that he's gone. And so that when they meet him in person, they would know that they're not just having a vision of their former rabbi, but that it's him raised bodily to life again.

So you see, in Christ's resurrection, God's new creation is breaking out into the world. Matthew is saying the king lives, the exile has ended, and the homecoming can begin.

And once we see all that, that Matthew is telling us, we can focus with fresh eyes on the end of Matthew 28, verses 16 through 20, in what's been called the Great Commission. And that's where I want to kind of land for a little bit of the time that we have left. These verses point us to three implication of Jesus' resurrection that aren't just true back then, but they're true for us today.

And these three things are first, the authority of the king, second, the mission of the king, and third, the presence of the king. It's a truth, it's a command, and it's a promise. And each one is punctuated by the word all. Authority, mission, presence. So let's look first at authority. Jesus says in verse 18, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Not some authority, authority, not even most authority, all authority, all of it has been given to him. In other words, there's no place where we can go where Jesus isn't absolutely in charge. The old Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper once said, there's no square inch of creation where Jesus doesn't look and say, mine.

[12:42] Of course, language of authority makes us feel a little uncomfortable today. We're used to seeing power abused, and we're used to people seeing, getting hurt through the use, improper use of authority. In fact, isn't our entire governmental system in the U.S. set up to ensure that no one person has too much authority? But Jesus, you see, is no ordinary person. After all, why do merely human leaders often end up abusing their authority and not using it rightly?

Because they either aren't wise enough or they aren't good enough. They're either too foolish or they're too selfish. And yet reading the gospel of Matthew and having read the gospel of Mark, what do we see? Here is one with wisdom unlike any we've ever seen, whose teaching seems to fit us like the key unlocking our very existence. And here is one with love unlike anything we've ever experienced. One who would pour out his life for his enemies, who would be willing to descend into the darkness of exile so that sinful people could be brought home. Jesus is the one who has perfect wisdom and perfect love. And this is the one who has all authority in heaven and on earth.

Isn't that good news? That the one who sits in the control room of the universe, who has rights over every square inch of creation, and every one of us sitting in this room tonight, is the one who is unquestionably good and just and wise and loving. And if there isn't Jesus does have all authority, as he says, don't you see, you can't just sort of bring Jesus into your life as a mere advisor, right? You can't just have Jesus as one of the many numbers in your spiritual cell phone that you happen to call when you run into a problem. No. If Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, then you have got to give him everything.

That he's got to be first and he's got to be without peer in your life. If he has all authority, then to bring him into your life is actually to bring your life under him. He's got to be Lord of the whole thing. So that's the first thing we learn here. Second, authority. Second, mission.

In verses 19 and 20, there is, and Jesus says, go therefore and make disciples of all nations. There's the second all of this passage. All nations. The heart of this command is to make disciples. That's the imperative in the sentence. Everything else hangs around it. Make disciples.

[15:36] And the church is to make disciples of all nations. You see, no one is excluded from this new creation kingdom by their race. And no one is excluded by their gender. And no one is excluded by their class.

And no one's excluded by their language or their culture or their ethnicity. No. Jesus is saying, this gospel, this kingdom is for all. It's for any and all who would turn from sin and trust in Christ.

And you see, God's saving plan was always a global plan. If you go back and read the Old Testament, Israel's very reason for existing begun in Abraham was to worship God truly and to bring God's blessing to the nations. And the prophets over and over again spoke of a day when the nations would stream to Israel's God and when they would submit to him as their Lord and forsake all of their false deities. And of course, as the story of the Old Testament continues, we learn that Israel too needs saving. That they're actually part of the problem as well. But even Israel's weakness was a part of God's plan. Part of God's plan to demonstrate not just his grace, but the fact that he alone must rescue.

So when Christ comes, he comes as Israel's true king. And he does what you and I in Israel could never do. He deals with our sins decisively on the cross. He ends our exile from God.

And he inaugurates the age to come, new creation. So you see, the great commission, this call for us to go and make disciples of all nations is the fulfillment of an incredibly ancient plan of God.

[17:36] His plan from almost the beginning of the work of redemption to bring blessing to everyone. No wonder Jesus said that the gates of hell won't prevail against the church.

Not only has the risen Jesus defeated death and hell, but how could the eternal plan of God ever be stopped? It's like me standing on a train track and trying to push against a train. It's not going to work, right? I should probably get out of the way. So as we think about this mission that the risen Jesus gives us, isn't it a wonderful privilege that you and I have, isn't it a great privilege to be included in God's own mission to reclaim his lost image bearers and to bring them home to their rightful place of worship to the one true God and to show them how in Jesus our sins can be forgiven and our humanity can be restored? Isn't this the adventure of a lifetime to be a part of this great work?

And you know the beauty of living in New Haven like we do? The world comes to us. Do you want to do something world-shaking with your life? Stay right here and be a disciple-making disciple of Jesus Christ. Of course, if God tells you to go, by all means go. If God tells you to go back home or if God tells you to go on the other side of the world, go, right? But if you don't have a strong call to go to another part of the world, stay and watch how God will use you, impact the world for Christ. And all this means that the Great Commission imbues, imbibes, fills our life with great purpose. We've got a part to play. Everyone in this room, you don't have to be in full-time ministry. You don't have to have gone to Bible college. By virtue of the fact that you've been redeemed, God has made you a disciple-maker. He's launched you out to be a part of his mission in the world. So be a disciple-maker right where you are, in your home, in your workplace, in your school, in your neighborhood, if you're thinking, I have no idea how to even begin doing that.

Pray. Start praying for the people around you. Get involved in this community and start building relationships where you can start doing good to one another spiritually, through word, through prayer.

Start just talking about Jesus to your people you interact with. That's how the gospel spread in the first century. They didn't have a lot of programs. They didn't have a big blimp that announced Jesus was king. People just went out, and their hearts were so full of joy because they knew that they had been brought home to God through the death and resurrection of Jesus that they couldn't stop talking about this one who was king. As everyone was sort of searching for God and searching for meaning and searching for truth, the Christians went out and said, he's found us. And then everyone was confused because they thought, well, you don't have a temple, and you don't make sacrifices, and you don't have priests. How can you even be a religion? And they're like, you don't understand. Jesus is our temple. He's where God meets us. He's our sacrifice. He's cleansed us. He's our priest. He brings us to God. We've got it all in him. And by the way, he has all authority. So repent and believe. Now, you don't have to go to the water cooler and say, repent and believe. I get it. That's not quite how you want to do it. But you talk about Jesus and the goodness that he is. And you can come talk to me afterwards if you're wondered about how to get started disciple-making and to be on this great mission that Christ has given us. I could point you to some resources. We could talk. We could pray. And of course, as we see in verses 11 through 15, kind of right before the Great Commission section, we know that this mission that we're on is going to be contested, right? As we move out into the world, there are going to be alternate ways of explaining who God is. And we're going to encounter alternate ways of explaining who Jesus is. And we're going to encounter alternate ways of explaining what happened on the first Easter morning. Don't be surprised. But you know, the job of the church is to be the church, to speak the truth in love, and then to actually love, sacrificially, because that's how Jesus has loved us.

[22:09] That was another reason why the church spread like wildfire in the first century, because they took care of people. Everyone that the upper-class Romans excluded, the Christians said, we'll love you. We're not afraid of loving people who are different than us. And people saw that, and they heard the message of Jesus, and it just changed people's hearts.

And we can be sure that false narratives will not prevail. The church has spread and will continue to spread. Isn't that why we're standing here? Well, I'm standing here. You're sitting here. Isn't that why we're here tonight? Because there's an unbroken chain of disciple-makers that started from those very first apostles? It's because those first disciples went out and made disciples, and then that generation went out and made disciples, and then that one went out and made disciples, that you and I are even sitting right here. An unbroken chain goes from them to us. And friends, that chain is going to continue from us until the kingdom is consummated. That we're a part of this story of God reclaiming his creation for his glory. Well, there's a lot more I could say about this second point. I want to talk all night about these next two verses. I haven't even talked about the Trinity, and I haven't talked about baptism, and all this other good stuff, but we're going to keep moving. So there's the second implication of Jesus' resurrection. Worldwide mission. He has all authority, therefore all nations are summoned into relationship with him as their Lord. Here's a third and last point. Presence. Jesus says in the last verse, I am with you always. Literally, the word is all days. Or the whole of every day. I'm with you. Can you imagine a greater promise that we have in all of scripture than that? This is how Jim Packer put it in his book, Knowing God. It's kind of a long quote, but I like it, so I'm going to read it for you. He says, when the New Testament tells us that Jesus

Christ is risen, one of the things it means is that the victim of Calvary is now, so to speak, loose and at large, so that anyone, anywhere can enjoy the same kind of relationship with him as the disciples had in the days of his flesh. He goes on, he says, the only differences are that his presence with the Christian is spiritual, not bodily, so invisible to our physical eyes. Christ is ascended. Second, the Christian building on the New Testament witness knows from the start those truths about the deity and atoning sacrifice of Jesus, which the original disciples grasped gradually over a period of years. And third, that Jesus' way of speaking to us now is not by uttering fresh words, but rather by applying to our consciences those words of his that are recorded in the gospels together with the rest of the biblical testimony itself. Now here's the punchline, but knowing Jesus Christ still remains as definite a relation of personal discipleship as it was for the 12 when he was on earth. The Jesus who walks through the gospel story walks with Christians now, and knowing him involves going with him now as then. So there's a lot there, but here's a summary. Because Jesus is risen, you and I can have a definite personal relationship with him right now. Isn't it kind of funny what we do in

Christianity? We walk around telling people to put their trust in someone who lived 2,000 years ago. Can you imagine how strange that is? If it doesn't feel strange, think about it, right? We never walk around saying, you should put your trust in Caesar Augustus. Dude's dead, lived 2,000 years ago. Why would I ever do that, right? And yet, it makes complete sense to put our trust in Jesus. Why? Because he's bodily risen, ascended to heaven, sits at the right hand of God, is risen and reigning, isn't bound by space or time, and you can speak to him, and he will listen. And you can believe in him, and he'll purify you from all sin and seal you with his spirit. And you can live each day in conscious dependence and communion with him. And the living reigning Christ will speak to you through the scriptures by his spirit, and you can speak to him in prayer. Right now, Jesus Christ is present by his spirit, beckoning us, speaking to us, calling us to himself.

In Revelation 3, the risen Jesus says, Isn't that an incredible picture of the fellowship that we have with Jesus? Because Jesus is risen, it means he's with us, and can be with us, and is with us, as he says, always, to the end of the age.

[27:31] And there's the promise, that there's no time when the risen Jesus is not with you. Even in your darkest day, when everyone else has left you, he has not left you.

And this mission that he's given us, it's not as if Jesus simply says, Okay, guys, here's the plan. Go everywhere and make disciples. Good luck with that. See you when I come back.

No, right? He says, I'm with you. There's our confidence in disciple-making, not our cleverness, or our intellect, or even our persistence, but his presence with us.

And friends, isn't that ultimately what your heart aches for? Isn't it the presence of God? To know that he's with you in grace and favor.

In the beginning of Matthew's gospel, in chapter 1, verse 23, Matthew, talking about Jesus, quotes Isaiah and says, And they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

[28:39] And here's Jesus saying, I'm with you always, even to the end of the age. And isn't that a perfect conclusion to the gospel?

Jesus is God with us. And here he's making that promise saying, I am with you to the end of the age. The king has come. The new creation has begun. The exile is over.

And God is with us. These are John Wesley's last words. The great 18th century evangelist and theologian. On his deathbed says, and best of all is, God is with us.

So amidst the angels and the earthquakes of Matthew 28, he leaves us with three things ringing in our ears.

Authority. Mission. Presence. All authority to all nations for all days. But I think the best of all is, God is with us.

[29:44] Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we acknowledge tonight that you have all authority. Lord, would you forgive us this evening for the way in which we've tried to live apart from that.

Lord, it's hard for us to trust. So we pray that by your spirit, you would grant us a fresh glimpse of your goodness and your wisdom. So that we might gladly embrace you as the authoritative one.

And Lord, thank you for this great promise that you are with us. Lord, how often we forget the fact that your presence is near. And that you're in our midst, even in us by your spirit.

So that your purposes might be carried out. God, help us to be disciple-making disciples of you. Lord, help us to overcome our fear. Help us to overcome our, Lord, seeming inadequacy.

And help us to be confident. Lord, that in your authority and in your presence, God, we are safe and loved. And that nothing can prevail against the goodness of the gospel.

[30:52] Lord, Jesus, that you've come to bring us home. Help us to see ways in which we might communicate that effectively to those who don't know you. Lord, and help us to know how we might be building one another up in the faith.

Lord, that we might truly be disciples who make disciples of others. God, we trust in your grace to see this out in our midst. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.