



The Gospel of Matthew - Chapter Twenty Eight

Summary of Chapter Twenty Eight

The Gospel concludes with the resurrection of Jesus and the commissioning of the disciples. The Gospel is good news because it does not end with the Cross. Being a disciple demands everything that one is and has, but it offers a new and eternal life in return.

The narrative of the resurrection paves the way for the commissioning: the witness of the women contrasts starkly with the fearful falsehood of the guards and provides a positive model for the witness of the church.

On the Sunday morning, the women travelled to the tomb to tend to Jesus' body but they became frightened when they encountered an angel at the empty tomb. However, he allayed their fears and confirmed that Jesus is now the Risen Lord. The angel then instructed the women to return to the male disciples in order to inform them that they needed to go to Galilee to meet with Jesus, just as they had been instructed. The women then encountered Jesus himself who confirmed this message.

In an attempt to distort the reality of Jesus' resurrection, and therefore the proof that he is who he said he is, the priests and the elders conspired together as to how to handle the situation. They bribed the guards to lie about what had happened, giving a story that the disciples had come in the night to steal the body while the guards were sleeping. The priests promised to ensure that the guards would not face disciplinary action for their alleged sleeping on duty, which was a capital crime for Roman soldiers.

Jesus met with the disciples in Galilee on a mountainside, probably the same location where he gave the Sermon on the Mount. On this occasion, Jesus informed them that he now had all authority over God's Kingdom and that the disciples were to go out to evangelise all the nations, with Jesus issuing a command that has become known as the Great Commission.

XV. Matthew 28:1-20 - The Resurrection and Commission of the Messiah

Matthew's concluding chapter recounts Jesus' resurrection from the dead. His resurrection confirms his identity and that his accomplishment at the Cross was accepted by God the Father.

The Jewish authorities coerced the Roman guards to lie about what had occurred at the tomb, by claiming that the disciples had stolen the body during the night.

Jesus met with his disciples in Galilee and gave them their final great commission. Although Matthew does not record the ascension, elsewhere it is recorded that Jesus now lives at the right hand of the Father, acting as the faithful companion, intercessor, master and Lord of all those who respond to his great commission.

XV.a Matthew 28:1-10 - The Resurrection of Jesus

The female disciples of Jesus discovered the empty tomb (vv.1-4). After an angel announced Jesus' resurrection and instructed them to tell the other disciples (vv.5-7), they met the Risen Lord Jesus in person (vv.8-10).

The resurrection narratives in the four Gospels may differ in detail, but in all four the women become the first witnesses, and Mary Magdalene is explicitly named as one witness among them. One could harmonise the accounts, but as they stand they present strong evidence for the basic story, and two matters remain clear:

1. The differences in accounts demonstrate that the Gospel writers were aware of a variety of independent traditions.
2. These divergent traditions overlap significantly and hence independently corroborate the basic outlines of the story.

¹ **After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.**

Matthew 28:1

The first day of the week was dawning would be around 06:00 on the Sunday morning, i.e. after the Sabbath. This was the third day using the inclusive counting method, the most commonly practiced in that era, i.e. Friday evening when Jesus was buried would be day one, Saturday was day two and Sunday morning was day three. It was not just Jesus that had predicted his resurrection on the third day: <<*After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him*>> (Hosea 6:2).

Just like his Father, Jesus had completed his work on the sixth day: <<*When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit*>> (John 19:30), he had taken his Sabbath rest on the

seventh day in his tomb, and brought into being a new creation on the first day of a new week, a new dawn and a new world.

True to his word, Jesus had only gone for a short time, for he had told his disciples: *<<A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me>>* (John 16:16); something that the prophet had foreseen: *<<For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you>>* (Isaiah 54:7).

Was dawning. Jesus died when the sun was darkened, yet he burst forth from the tomb as the sun was once again shining, just like the morning star: *<<It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star>>* (Revelation 22:16).

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary probably refers to the mother of Jesus although it may have been the wife of Alphæus as discussed in comments made on Matthew 27:61. The women had remained courageously faithful, despite the men leaving Jesus the previous Thursday night as described in: *<<Then Jesus said to them, ‘You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered”>>* (Matthew 26:31).

The women went to see the tomb for the purpose of dressing the body with fresh spices in keeping with the custom as bodies decomposed quickly in the heat of Palestine, and it was common practice to both help preserve the body and to make it smell sweeter as it decomposed. The body of Jesus laying in the tomb must have been even worse for his disciples than had been the news of the Ark in Dagon’s temple that had caused so much dismay to their ancestors: *<<The messenger replied, ‘Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great slaughter among the troops; your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured.’ When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backwards from his seat by the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man, and heavy. He had judged Israel for forty years. Now his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant, about to give birth. When she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed and gave birth; for her labour pains overwhelmed her>>* (1 Samuel 4:17-19). However, it would be the opponents of Jesus who would feel the anguish of finding Dagon on his face before the Ark: *<<When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod; then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and placed it beside Dagon. When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord>>* (1 Samuel 5:1-3a).

² And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.

Matthew 28:2

Suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, came. The earthquake either occurred simultaneously with the appearance of the angel or it was the means the angel used to roll back the stone. There had been an earthquake at the time of Jesus' death: <<*Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'*>> (Matthew 27:54). It seems that now it was announcing his resurrection.

An angel of the Lord was sent to open the tomb, not to raise Jesus from death, for that was the work of God's Holy Spirit, nor was it to release Jesus from the tomb, for he had risen and gone. The purpose was to allow the people in to witness the empty tomb and to demonstrate that it was God's work that Jesus had been raised. That is the account the guards should have taken to the world, after first becoming disciples themselves.

Rolled back the stone and sat on it. That the angel sat on the stone is also a dramatic statement of supernatural triumph; since the stone was circular it would not naturally accommodate anyone sitting on it. Although the guards feared for their lives (v.4), it is clear the angel posed no threat to them for God had no intention of slaying them, despite their later treachery.

³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

⁴ For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.

Matthew 28:3-4

His appearance was like lightning. Frequently, appearances of angels and theophanies are startlingly bright and they are usually dressed in white linen: <<*I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the roar of a multitude*>> (Daniel 10:5-6), <<*While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them*>> (Acts 1:10), <<*and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, robed in pure bright linen, with golden sashes across their chests*>> (Revelation 15:6).

White as snow is reminiscent of the Father: <<*As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire*>> (Daniel 7:9), and of His Son as well: <<*His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters*>> (Revelation 1:14-15). Their appearance represents purity, joy and triumph.

For fear of him. The appearance of angels often produced fear: <<So Manoah took the kid with the grain-offering, and offered it on the rock to the Lord, to him who works wonders. When the flame went up towards heaven from the altar, the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar while Manoah and his wife looked on; and they fell on their faces to the ground>> (Judges 13:19-20), and: <<So he came near where I stood; and when he came, I became frightened and fell prostrate. But he said to me, 'Understand, O mortal, that the vision is for the time of the end'>> (Daniel 8:17).

The guards were probably battle-hardened soldiers, but they had never witnessed anything like this, nor were they collectively any match for such power; therefore, they shook and became like dead men. The Greek word for shook is *eseisthesan*, from *seismos* used for earthquake in v.2, showing just how afraid they were. Their fear had paralysed them.

⁵ But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

Matthew 28:5-6

Do not be afraid. When God or one of his angels appears to people they become fearful but that is often not the intention and God wants people to be reassured in his presence: <<After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great'>> (Genesis 15:1), <<do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand>> (Isaiah 41:10), and: <<But when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid'>> (Mark 6:49-50). On this occasion it was said only to the women and not to the guards.

He is not here; for he has been raised. The angel provided the first indication that Jesus is now the Risen Lord and that his body is no longer in the tomb. He then offered to take them into the tomb to prove what he was saying was true: come, see the place where he lay.

It is said that 'seeing is believing'. These women were permitted to see the empty tomb so that all disciples that have followed in their footsteps may believe through their eyes of faith.

⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." This is my message for you.' ⁸ So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Matthew 28:7-8

Go quickly and tell his disciples. This was Good News and needed to be shared as quickly as possible, just as the lepers came to realise: <<*Then they said to one another, 'What we are doing is wrong. This is a day of good news; if we are silent and wait until the morning light, we will be found guilty; therefore let us go and tell the king's household'*>> (2 Kings 7:9). In the culture of the day the testimony of a woman would have carried little weight: <<*Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened*>> (Luke 24:10-12), and this statement provides a clear marker by Jesus just how things were meant to change in his church.

Another point here that confounds the opponents that the empty tomb represents the resurrection of Christ is that no one making up such a story would ever have included the women as the first eye witnesses for it brings in the opportunity for dismissal. It would only be used by those who wanted to report the truth for what it was and all the Gospel writers wanted to preserve the truth of this first encounter, albeit reporting different aspects of it.

His disciples refers probably to the eleven apostles, although it could also refer to the wider group, who still remained faithful, even if their absence was noticeable over the past few days.

He has been raised from the dead. The angel is the bearer of the greatest news that is possible.

He is going ahead of you is a message for all disciples to note and to take courage, for they can have confidence that wherever they are taken on their journey of faith, God will be waiting for them and will indeed accompany them along the way.

Galilee was the central location of Jesus' earthly ministry and continued in importance during his post-resurrection instruction. It is likely that he could meet more openly with his disciples in Galilee rather than in Jerusalem. However, it is known that he met with the disciples in Jerusalem at least twice in the first week, refer to comments made on v.17, and again during the final week of the 40 days he remained on earth: <<*After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. 'This', he said, 'is what you have heard from me; for John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now'*>> (Acts 1:3-5). There was plenty of time for the disciples to walk to Galilee and back in that time.

This is my message for you. Another aspect that makes the resurrection account stand out from any visionary accounts that existed in the pagan traditions is that there was significant dialogue with Jesus during this period between resurrection and ascension almost six weeks later, and indeed Jesus would even eat with them, which is something a ghost could not have done: <<**While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence**>> (Luke 24:41-43).

They left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy. This may seem like a strange mix of emotions for these women. Their joy was evident because they had received the best possible news from the angel. Their fear, however, was not the paralysing fear the guards had experienced in v.4. It would have been healthy reverential fear at the discovery of God’s awesome power in raising Christ from the dead, with all the fulfilment of promises that held for mankind. David’s close relationship with God allowed him to understand such emotions. Thus David wrote: <<**Serve the Lord with fear, with trembling**>> (Psalm 2:11), yet he concluded the last verse: <<**Happy are all who take refuge in him**>> (Psalm 2:12b).

One of the primary reasons why they did not experience fear in the way the guards did is because of the mutual love they shared with their Lord, for: <<**There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love**>> (1 John 4:18).

That they ran to tell his disciples shows just how their emotions had gripped them. Yet things were to take a dramatic twist that would heighten their elation still further.

⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him.

Matthew 28:9

Greetings is the Greek word *chairete*, a positive salutation offering good health and wellbeing to the recipients. It is the equivalent of the Hebrew expression ‘peace be upon you all’.

Took hold of his feet shows that this is no mere vision or hallucination but a physical resurrection: <<**Scarcely had I passed them, when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go**>> (Song 3:4a). Here was Good News indeed: <<**Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace!**>> (Nahum 1:15a). By allowing this act of worship, here and in v.17, Jesus accepts the acknowledgment of his deity, as only God is to be worshipped. Further acceptance of his divine nature came with the statement: <<**Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’**>> (John 20:28), which Jesus did not refute.

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’

Matthew 28:10

My brothers again probably refers to the eleven apostles, although it could also be the wider group of disciples who had followed Jesus: <<*And pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother’*>> (Matthew 12:49-50), <<*And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me”*>> (Matthew 25:40). If so, this is the larger group of disciples who will see the Risen Lord: <<*Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died*>> (1 Corinthians 15:6).

Now that the Christ was declared in power to be the Son of God then all other children of God become his siblings: <<*it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him*>> (Romans 8:16-17).

Go to Galilee; there they will see me confirms the report given to them by the angel, for it is the Christ: <<*who confirms the word of his servant, and fulfils the prediction of his messengers; who says of Jerusalem, ‘It shall be inhabited’, and of the cities of Judah, ‘They shall be rebuilt’*>> (Isaiah 44:26).

XV.b Matthew 28:11-15 - The Report of the Guard

Faced with the reality of Jesus’ resurrection, the religious leaders were forced once again to conspire together in order to preserve their religious and political influence: <<*Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and they conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, ‘Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people’*>> (Matthew 26:3-5).

The soldiers faced probable execution for dereliction of guard duty, one of the most severe offenses while occupying foreign territory. In cooperating with the Jewish religious leaders, they at least had a chance to save themselves and were paid handsomely. However, had they told the truth and come to faith because of what they witnessed, their rewards would have been far greater.

¹¹ While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened.

Matthew 28:11

Some of the guard went into the city. The soldiers realised they were no match for the angel that had come to attend to Jesus and to speak to the women, so they

fled back to their masters and told the chief priests everything that had happened, as incredible as it may have seemed. Since the majority of the chief priests were Sadducees they did not even believe in the existence of angels: <<*The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, or angel, or spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge all three*>> (Acts 23:8), yet they did not seem to dispute the claims of the soldiers.

This is again important testimony, confirming the resurrection of Jesus on two key points, in that the guards were eye witnesses to the tomb being opened by the angel, demonstrating that it was now empty, and that they were in the employ of those who opposed Jesus and therefore had nothing to gain in making up the story.

Once again, Matthew offers a clear contrast. The women's testimony was one that would be received with the same joy they felt as they rushed away to tell the other disciples, whereas the news that reached the ears of the Jewish establishment would fill them with dread and should have caused them to feel great shame and remorse. The words of a former administrator in the city fit perfectly here: <<*And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem; for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God*>> (Nehemiah 6:16), although here it referred to the leaders of the nation within.

¹² After the priests had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, ¹³ telling them, 'You must say, "His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep."¹⁴ If this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.'¹⁵ So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story is still told among the Jews to this day.

Matthew 28:12-15

They devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers. Even faced with evidence of divine intervention in the death and resurrection of Jesus, these men were so blinded that all they could do was to think of another plan to deny the truth: <<*Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?'*>> (John 9:40). This would have been their opportunity to repent of their past sins but instead they heaped more guilt onto their own shoulders. Thus David wrote a plea to God concerning such men as these: <<*Add guilt to their guilt; may they have no acquittal from you*>> (Psalm 69:27).

A large sum of money was given to the soldiers to bribe them in order to perpetuate a lie. It had only cost them thirty pieces of silver to have Jesus given up into their hands; now it was costing them much more to try to hold on to the betrayal, and not just in financial terms, for any hope of salvation was gone.

You must say, “His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep”. The instructions given to the soldiers would bring them into danger, for falling asleep on duty was a capital crime for a Roman guard. Herod Antipas treated his soldiers in the same way for allowing Peter to escape: <<*When morning came, there was no small commotion among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. When Herod had searched for him and could not find him, he examined the guards and ordered them to be put to death. Then he went down from Judæa to Cæsarea and stayed there*>> (Acts 12:18-19).

This really was a pitiful story that would not hold up to scrutiny, for if they were asleep how would they have known who had come to take the body? If they had woken up as the disciples were taking the body, why did they not intervene, for fit soldiers would easily have overtaken men carrying a body wrapped in cloth with one hundred pounds of spices inside. Yet many Jews would believe the story, simply because it is what they wanted to believe.

Despite their promise if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble, it is doubtful these men could be trusted, yet the soldiers would have obeyed and kept to the story. Anyway, even if they managed to keep these men away from the punishment of the governor, they could not protect them from the justice to come when they would one day stand before the judgement seat of Christ.

The opponents of Jesus could not account for the absence of Jesus’ body and it is likely that the rumours of his resurrection would have started to spread around the city quite quickly, for the women had run back from the tomb to the disciples and, in response, Peter and John had run to the tomb to verify the account. That would have caught the attention of many who were going about their daily business. Therefore, it was important for the religious leaders to come up with a quick, if implausible story to counter the rumours.

The leaders’ story was not credible as they admitted the tomb was guarded and clearly the disciples or anyone else could not have rolled the stone away without awakening the guards. Therefore, in order for them to rob the tomb, they would have needed to incapacitate the guards, which would have been an act of extreme courage, totally opposite to their behaviour during Jesus’ arrest, trial and crucifixion.

They took the money and did as they were directed. Despite their corruption, the testimony of these guards was readily accepted by the Jews, whereas the truthful testimony of the women was initially challenged. Refer to comments made on vv.7-8.

Matthew lays these two reports, the true and the false, side by side, forcing his audience to declare their choice. The testimony of the women thus becomes a model for the disciples who will follow them.

This story is still told among the Jews to this day. Many Jews have come to recognise that Jesus is their Messiah and have come to faith in him. Many more

have continued to reject him and wait expectantly for the day when he will come. They fail to realise that the next time he will come in judgement on them for their unbelief and it will not be a good outcome for them: <<See, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation, and to destroy its sinners from it>> (Isaiah 13:9), <<That day is the day of the Lord God of hosts, a day of retribution, to gain vindication from his foes. The sword shall devour and be sated, and drink its fill of their blood. For the Lord God of hosts holds a sacrifice in the land of the north by the river Euphrates>> (Jeremiah 46:10), <<For a day is near, the day of the Lord is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations>> (Ezekiel 30:3), <<Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes>> (Joel 1:15), <<Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light>> (Amos 5:18), <<For the day of the Lord is near against all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head>> (Obadiah 15), and: <<Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is at hand; the Lord has prepared a sacrifice, he has consecrated his guests>> (Zephaniah 1:7). Yet for those who have come to believe and trust in Jesus as Lord, it will be a triumphant return: <<For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage one another with these words>> (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Although he does not mention the role of the women specifically, Paul's own retelling summarised what happened following the resurrection, adding to the authenticity to the account: <<For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me>> (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

Paul certainly had nothing to gain humanly speaking by becoming a bogus disciple of Jesus. He had been a highly influential Pharisee and chief persecutor of the church until Christ appeared to him on the Damascus Road, which changed everything for him and provides amazing credibility to the Gospel accounts.

The narrative's irony announces both God's power and human weakness. Guards who saw an angel were ready, like Judas, to betray the truth for money; and like Peter, they were ready to deny the truth to protect their lives. Yet the guards only pretended to have slept through the Messiah's deliverance, whereas when Jesus needed his disciples the most in the Garden, they slept

through his time of testing. Disciples and enemies alike proved weak, but Jesus' resurrection was an act of God's amazing power.

XV.c Matthew 28:16-20 - The Commissioning of the Disciples

As the resurrected Lord, Jesus calls upon his followers to make disciples of all people groups through the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

Matthew 28:16

The eleven disciples went to Galilee refers to the apostles. It is likely they set out from Jerusalem following Jesus' second Sunday appearance described in John 20:24-29, and it would have taken them up to seven days to walk to Capernaum. They could have spent two to three weeks in Galilee before returning to Jerusalem for Jesus' ascension. John supports at least seven of them being by the Sea of Galilee in the presence of Jesus: *<<After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples>>* (John 21:1-2).

The mountain to which Jesus had directed them was most likely the traditional site of the Sermon on the Mount and is above Tabgha, near Capernaum. Refer to comments made on Matthew 5:1.

¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.

Matthew 28:17

Some doubted probably refers to disciples other than the eleven apostles, i.e. the wider group of disciples discussed in v.10. However, it is known that Thomas had his doubts when he was absent the first time Jesus appeared to the other ten on the first Sunday night in Jerusalem: *<<When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you'>>* (John 20:19). This would be rectified when Jesus met with them the following Sunday: *<<A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you'>>* (John 20:26).

Some of the doubt may have arisen for there was clearly something different in Jesus' appearance following his resurrection. Those disciples on the Emmaus Road did not recognise him until he broke bread with them (Luke 24:13-35), and it was the same during the meeting by the Sea of Galilee: *<<Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus>>* (John 21:4), and: *<<Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.'*

Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord>> (John 21:12).

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'

Matthew 28:18

Jesus came and said to them. Just as Matthew makes no mention of the meetings in the upper room in Jerusalem before they travelled to Galilee, it seems that he has again moved forward topically, for what he would say next seems to fit better with the final instructions that Jesus would no doubt have given them on the Mount of Olives on the day of his ascension.

All authority, has been given to me. In his risen state, Jesus exercises absolute authority throughout heaven and earth which reveals his deity. His authority has been given by the Father, which indicates that he remains subject to the Father: <<*When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all*>> (1 Corinthians 15:28). Jesus is one with God the Father and equal to the Father in deity, yet functionally subordinate to him, and this verse shows that his subjection to the Father will continue for all eternity.

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

Matthew 28:19-20

The imperative make disciples, that is, call individuals to commit to Jesus as Master and Lord, explains the central focus of the Great Commission, while the Greek participles, translated go, baptising, and teaching in v.20, describe aspects of the process.

Go therefore could equally be read 'as you go', essentially 'on your way', showing that evangelisation is not just about the foreign mission fields; it is about the way disciples conduct their daily lives in their own communities, always seeking opportunities to share the good news of Christ.

Go therefore also gives the disciples to go in the authority of Christ. He has received all authority from the Father to do His will and now he delegates the relevant parts of that authority to those who are called to continue His work on earth as it is in heaven, i.e. to help the poor, heal the sick, comfort those who mourn and are in need and to spread the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Moses wrote of the eagle preparing her young to face the world: <<As an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young; as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions>> (Deuteronomy 32:11), so too Jesus

excites and encourages his disciples to embark upon a remarkable journey throughout history as the church spreads and grows. They were sent out with a promise and were fully prepared: *<<And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says the Lord: my spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouths of your children, or out of the mouths of your children's children, says the Lord, from now on and for ever>> (Isaiah 59:21).*

Make disciples of all nations was a break from cultural traditions, for Rabbis and Greek philosophers raised up disciples to become teachers, who would then raise up disciples to perpetuate the teaching. The Gospel is different for there is only ever one true teacher; the rest are all to be disciples, although some of them will receive the gift of teaching others. The Greek word *matheteusate* is used, which should be understood as 'admit them into discipleship', or 'go and disciple them', rather than simply travel to the nations to preach the Word. The church is about true partnership; one body under one head.

All nations confirms that Jesus' ministry in Israel was to be the beginning point of what would later be a proclamation of the Gospel to all the peoples of the earth, including not only Jews but also Gentiles: *<<But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judæa and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth>> (Acts 1:8).*

It is unlikely that when Matthew wrote down the words of Jesus he would have ever envisaged a Gentile church with a small minority of Jewish Christians. The church today has a duty to pray for and reach God's people through whom the Gospel was first brought to the nations, just as the early church had done: *<<At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do this, and indeed they owe it to them; for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things>> (Romans 15:25-27).*

Baptising them is an important aspect of discipleship as it is an outward expression of the inward transformation that occurs when a person accepts Jesus as Lord of their life. It is not just about immersion in water or sprinkling with water, it is about being in receipt of the Holy Spirit: *<<For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring>> (Isaiah 44:3), which is summed up by Paul: <<But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life>> (Titus 3:4-7).*

The name Greek *onoma* of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is singular, not plural and is therefore an early indication of the Trinitarian Godhead; an overt proclamation of Jesus' deity. Even though different words are used elsewhere: <<*Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'*>> (Acts 2:38), the meaning is the same because, in biblical usage, a person's name represents the person's character; that is, everything that is true about the person. The name, i.e. the character and attributes of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, is the same as the name, that is, the character and attributes of Jesus Christ. The fact that *onoma* is singular indicates that Father, Son and Holy Spirit share one name, i.e. one character and set of attributes.

Teaching is a means by which disciples of Jesus are continually transformed in order to become more like Christ: <<*A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!*>> (Matthew 10:24-25), <<*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family*>> (Romans 8:29), <<*And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit*>> (2 Corinthians 3:18). Whereas new converts are won when they hear the Gospel and are accepted under the Lordship of Christ through baptism, it is through the teaching that they will come to obey everything that Jesus has commanded.

It should be noted that Jesus demands disciples to obey everything that he has commanded; they are not to pick and choose which parts to follow, and which they can ignore.

Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Jesus concludes the commission, and Matthew his Gospel, with the crucial element of discipleship: the presence of the Master, who is Emmanuel: <<*God with us*>> (Matthew 1:23b), always remembering that: <<*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*>> (Psalm 46:1). This statement by the Christ is a clear reference to his omnipresence and therefore his deity, and that he will return when the church age comes to an end, i.e. the end of the age.

At times it may seem that God has hidden himself: <<*Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Saviour*>> (Isaiah 45:15), but he is never absent; he is always with us. Therefore, he commands his disciples to be always with him. Church is not a once a week activity on a Sunday, it is every minute of every day - for life.

This account comes to the conclusion that it is about truth and falsehood, faith and unbelief. All disciples are called to live by faith and proclaim the truth of

the Gospel at every opportunity, no matter what barriers are placed before them or how difficult the situations that arise from living a Gospel-driven life.

It also speaks profoundly of the character of Christ. He could have accepted Satan's early offer and avoided much pain and suffering. Yet by remaining faithful to the Father's call on his life and accepting the cup that was given to him, he was rewarded with much, much more than he had been offered by Satan or the world. The same is true for those in his church should they choose to follow his example in their path to His glory.