

Long Live the King!

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[0 : 00] This is the fifth and final one in this short series, The King's Suffering and Glory. And we come to the end of Matthew's Gospel, and let's confess with a certain sense of relief.

The passages we've looked at have been dark, they've been somber, although very powerful. But now we come to the King's glory. Long live the King, as we are calling this.

And we're reading Matthew chapter 28, which is on page 835. I will read the last few verses of chapter 27, just to put this in context.

Jesus has been buried in the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Those who have been responsible for his execution are still panicky and still wondering what's going to happen.

So, Matthew chapter 27, verse 62. Next day, that is, after the day of preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, Sir, we remember how that imposter said while he was still alive, after three days I will rise.

[1 : 17] Therefore, order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people he has risen from the dead, and the last fraud will be worse than the first.

Pilate said to him, you have a guard of soldiers. You can sense Pilate's contempt for them. You have a guard of soldiers. Go and make it as secure as you can. So they went, and they made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

Now, after the Sabbath, towards the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.

His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him, the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the woman, Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.

He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead.

[2 : 36] And behold, he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him. See, I have told you. So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to tell the disciples.

Behold, Jesus met them and said greetings, and they came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped 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.

How 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, the elders had 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 this comes to the governor's ears.

We will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble. So they took the money, and they did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

[3 : 39] Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped 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 have commanded you.

Behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Now let's pray. Lo, Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb.

Lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom. Thine be the glory, risen, conquering song. Endless is the victory, thou or death hast won.

Father, we thank you that after Easter, it is always Easter. But the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ has thrown open the kingdom of heaven to all who believe and has begun an irreversible progress towards the new creation.

[4 : 55] As we look at these verses today over these moments, we pray that they will speak to us, they will encourage us, and they will strengthen us. And we ask this in his name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. It was a spring evening in Jerusalem, and two Roman soldiers were sitting enjoying a drink together in an open-air tavern.

One of them was a veteran who had been there for many, many years. The other was a newcomer. And they were obviously discussing current events.

And the newcomer said to the veteran, what's all this I'm hearing about this agitator called Jesus? And so the apocryphal story goes on.

The veteran says, yes, that's all the talk of the town. Jesus mixed up in four funerals and spoiled every one of them. That story, I think, captures something of the magic of resurrection.

[5 : 58] Hear the words of the psalmist, he who sits in the heavens laughs. As all the intrigues, all the violence, all the malevolence, all the hatred of the last few chapters have simply come to nothing.

As we've seen, Pilate and the Jewish leaders still hate each other. Pilate treats them with great contempt. And they spread this ridiculous story, which we'll come to in a moment.

Now, all the Gospels in their story of the resurrection focus on two things. First of all, the fact that the tomb was empty. That's a common factor in each of the Gospels, in each of the stories.

The tomb was empty. The tomb in which the body of Jesus had lain, the body was no longer there. And the other thing is they focus on the impact on his bewildered followers.

Each of the stories talk about different meetings, different encounters with the disciples, sometimes the intimate group, including the women who followed him, others on a much larger group, like the group at the end of this chapter.

[7 : 13] But each Gospel has its own focus. And Mark gives us three snapshots of the resurrection. Each of them have to do with words. Each of them have to do with the interpretation of this event.

What is this event about? What is the true story? So first of all, in verses 1 to 10, we have the words of the angel, the true story.

At the beginning of the Gospel, angels had appeared, both to guide Joseph and also to the wise men. Angels had appeared after the temptation in the desert.

They had appeared again in Gethsemane. And now an angel comes and says, I know this is puzzling. I know this is hard to credit. But this is what's actually happened.

And there are two things. First of all, as I mentioned, the tomb is empty. Now, notice the stone was not rolled away to let Jesus out.

[8 : 14] The stone was rolled away to show that he was no longer there. I think that's very important to realize. It's not a case of the stone rolled away.

Then Jesus is able to come out. He's gone. And the stone is rolled away. There was a great earthquake often associated in the Old Testament with the judgment of God, with the coming of God into the world.

And the place where he lay refers back to these verses we read. Now, nowhere do the Gospels or the letters describe the resurrection.

This is the way the Bible tends to talk about miracles. It tends to tell us they happened. It doesn't give us the mechanics. It doesn't give us the physics and the chemistry, the biology, and all the rest of it.

It simply says it happened. The tomb was empty. The Lord was no longer there. And the crucified Lord is now risen. The tomb is empty.

[9 : 16] And the grave clothes folded away, as some of the Gospels tell us. And by the way, don't quibble about the fact that some Gospels say it was two angels, and others say it was one angel.

One of them was clearly a spokesman for the others. But the second thing is the Lord has gone on ahead. He is going before you, verse 7, into Galilee.

Galilee was the place where the light dawned back in chapter 4, and was fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah, Galilee of the nations. And let the people that lived in darkness have seen a great light.

The light dawned in Galilee, and now the light is going to shine again in Galilee, as opposed to Jerusalem, where Jesus was rejected.

It's very clear the Gospels are not novels. If you were a novel writer, you could not resist the temptation at this point, could you, of having Jesus appear to Pilate, to Caiaphas, and to the others. [10:20] I mean, the temptation to do that would have been simply irresistible. But no more than it was possible for him to come down from the cross and save himself, as we saw last week.

So now, it's not possible for him at this moment to reveal his triumph, because this is the beginning of his message now.

Go tell his disciples he has risen from the dead, and he is going before you to Galilee, the literal place Galilee, but also the Galilee in which, in a sense, his followers have lived ever since.

He is going ahead of you into Galilee. Wherever our Galilee happens to be, that is where we will meet him. Lord Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb.

And Mark adds a beautiful little detail. Go tell his disciples and Peter. Peter, hurting Peter, terrified that he's blown it with his denial.

[11:27] Go tell his disciples and Peter. So the angel tells. The story is the tomb is empty. That story is over, but another story is beginning.

Then we have the second tale, verses 11 to 15. The enemy tells, and this is a false story. Here the tables are turned.

Instead of joy, instead of renewed faith, we have fear and deceit. They try to suppress the story. And if that's not possible, then to bribe Pilate.

And you see, this story leads nowhere. This story just peters out in self-deception. This story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

Not just spread among the Jews to this day, but spread among all sorts of unbelievers until this day. You see, without the resurrection, everything remains as it was.

[12:26] Without the resurrection, the cross has been a defeat. Without the resurrection, the Son of God is just another good man destroyed by the evil of the world.

Everything remains as it was. And the story, as I say, peters out. Rather than the way that the Da Vinci Code peters out. Those of you who have read the Da Vinci Code will know how that peters out in banalities in Rosalind Chapel.

If you read the Da Vinci Code simply as a thriller, it's quite good in the first parts anyway. But then the point is, there's no climax. It simply peters out. And all attempts to deny the resurrection simply peter out.

And the problem is, lies are sterile. It's not just there's no hope personally. There is no hope for the world. What hope is there for the world of the Brussels bombings if the resurrection didn't happen? What hope is there for the world in which these awful bombings took place on Easter Day in Pakistan? Destruction of children celebrating Easter Day.

[13:39] Difficult to read that without thinking of Herod and Matthew chapter 2, Slaughter of the Innocents. I came across a poem by an African poet which reminds us, of course, of how this story will end.

The poet says, every Herod dies and comes to stand alone before the Lamb who sits upon the throne. That is the, you see, the resurrection is the only answer to trustees like that.

It's the only answer to our own personal tragedies. When those we love die, when we face our own death. What comfort is there in this story? His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.

All the various modifications. It's not about Jesus' bodily rose. The rise of resurrection faith in the disciples. Now it's incomprehensible that these men who were terrified, who ran away, who denied, who wanted to distance themselves from Jesus, was totally incomprehensible that within a few weeks they would be standing, their spokesman Peter saying, God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

If it simply meant they suddenly started feeling better. No, another event had happened. He had risen from the dead. And because he had risen from the dead, everything was changed.

[15:07] So, you see, we've got the true version of the story. The tomb is empty. He's gone. He's gone ahead of here into Galilee. We've got the false story, the lies that lead nowhere.

And then, thirdly, we've got the continuing story, where Jesus himself tells us what is to happen now. And this is the so-called Great Commission, verses 16 to 20.

The eleven disciples, when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Very probably other people were there on this occasion as well, not just simply.

Paul talks about, in 1 Corinthians 15, how he appeared to a large number at once. And this may well be this situation here. Let's look at verse 17.

They worshipped, but some doubted. That's very important. Doubt is not unbelief. Doubt simply means that they could not...

[16:05] So what had happened was so overwhelming. What had happened had so turned their world upside down. What had happened was so amazing. They found it difficult to believe. And there are moments when all of us doubt.

There are moments when all of us fear. And that is why we need the event of the resurrection. That's why it can't depend on our feelings.

That's why it's not enough. I said already to sing, you ask me how I know he lives. He lives within my heart. Well, I do trust he lives within the heart of all of us.

But that's not enough. We need to know that he lives and reigns in earth and heaven. Jesus died. Jesus has risen. Jesus will come again. The last days have begun.

Jesus said, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Now in the last few chapters we saw how human authorities disowned him, despised him, put him to death.

[17:06] But now all authority has been given to him. And because all authority has been given to him, the message continues.

Go and make disciples. That's very important. Go and make disciples. Not go and gather members for your churches. Not even go and make converts.

Go and make disciples. Those who will follow in the path. Those who will learn. And those who will teach. And those who will teach others. And that remains our task now.

Matthew traditionally follows a passage like this with a block of teaching. He doesn't here, obviously, because that further teaching is going to be provided in the days to come by the apostles as the whole scripture comes together.

Now, notice, make disciples of all nations. The gospel began with Gentile wise men coming to meet the Jewish king.

[18:11] The king of the Jews is not just the king of the Jews. He is the king of the nations. Indeed, the king of heaven. Baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Teaching to observe all that I have commanded you. How are we going to do that? How is it going to continue? Behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

That doesn't mean once the end of the age comes, he'll say you're on your own. It means that the task will be finished then. And because the task is finished, then all his people will be gathered to meet him.

So you see Matthew's resurrection story, these three snapshots. We have a true story brought to us by an angel from heaven. We have a false story brought to us by prejudiced men on earth.

And finally, we have the continuing story. The words of Jesus telling us that he is with us. And because he is with us, there will never be a time, never be a place, never be a moment when we cannot call on him, when we cannot depend on him.

[19:20] And that's ultimately the importance of the resurrection. You see, just one final point.

When the disciples, when the apostles talk about the preaching of the cross, Paul says at Corinth, I came and determined to do nothing among you except Christ and him crucified.

Well, you probably read on in 1 Corinthians expecting an exposition of the cross, and you won't find one. What you do find is an exposition of the resurrection. Because it's never the cross without the resurrection.

It's never the death without the rising again. Far too often nowadays people talk about the vulnerable God, the God who comes down among us and shares our suffering.

That is wonderful. That is glorious. But we need a God also who can take away our suffering, who can remove our sins, who can stand with us in times of trouble.

Never the cross without the... And when you study the great sermons and the Acts of the Apostles, the sermons of the early church, the one thing that comes out over and over and over again is that Jesus is risen.

[20:33] Now, obviously, for him to rise again, there has to be a death. But never separate the two. Because if we separate the two, we don't have triumph.

We have failure. If we separate the two, we don't have a glorious risen Lord. We have a defeated Messiah. That is why the Gospels end with this triumphant proclamation.

Each of them end telling us to go and share that story. Because that story will change lives, change communities, and one day will change the entire universe.

Let's pray. Lord God, we praise you for the story of the resurrection. Not just the story, but the fact of the resurrection.

Praise you that because of the resurrection, the risen Lord, although unseen, is with us. And that one day, in the future, he will make himself visibly known to us.

[21 : 36] And Father, we pray that this message may continue to transform our own lives and transform the lives of all whom we meet. We ask this in his name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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