

The Risen King

Text: MATTHEW 27:57-28:20

Pastor Andrew B. Pigott

[Chinese Christian Church of New Jersey](#)

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The Gospel of Matthew begins with a record of Christ's genealogy, tracing Him back in such a way as to prove Jesus is the Messiah, the promised King of the Jews. And then, proceeding from the genealogy to the end of the Gospel, it is easy to see that the author does not give up on His main purpose of presenting Jesus as King. He constantly quotes Old Testament promises that make reference to the coming King. There are over fifty quotes in all from almost every book in the Old Testament, but mostly from Isaiah. In the Gospel of Matthew, the mission of Jesus Christ is clearly presented as the mission of a King who has come to win back His kingdom.

During the course of His lifetime, Jesus had convinced many people that He had the power to perform miracles. He also convinced people that He was the One that God had anointed as King of the Jews. And then, finally, He convinced some people to go even a step further. He convinced some people to become His obedient subjects. He convinced them to obey His commands. And the greatest command He gave them was to take the good news of salvation and share it with other people. There is no better way to love people.

I would like to share with you a personal observation. I have noticed that it is relatively easy for people to become convinced that Jesus can perform miracles. It is a bit more difficult for people to become convinced that Jesus is God who became man, and that He is the One anointed by God to reign as King over all creation. And perhaps the most difficult thing of all is for people to become convinced that their main duty in this life is to obey the commands of their King; and, in particular, to obey the greatest command of the King which is to share the good news about Jesus with other people, even to people who belong to other ethnic groups.

Now, in the short message I will deliver before the baptism, I want you to pay attention to the fact that people fluctuate in their levels of being convinced.

Some people who appear very convinced one day will be much less convinced another day. This is especially true when we are talking about being convinced that Jesus Christ has power to perform great miracles. Even in my own experience I have found myself very confident on some days and much less confident on other days when I am facing adverse circumstances. When it comes to our confidence in Christ's power to do great things, we (as human beings) tend to fluctuate in our level of confidence.

But as our confidence changes from believing that Jesus has power to do great things to believing that He is the King of the Universe, the amount of fluctuation decreases. This is also true of people who have become convinced that their main purpose in life is to obey the commands of the King. I believe the saying "easy come, easy go" can be applied when we are talking about our ability to hold on to what we believe about God. The things about Jesus that we easily accept to be true are also the things that we tend to easily let go of when things are not going our way.

How often do you think about God? Do you think about Him all the time, or none of the time? Or is it somewhere in between? And if it is somewhere in between, then how do you think about Him when you do think about Him? Do you mostly think about His power to do great things? Many people confess that the only time they think about God or pray to God is when they are facing some crisis and need God's help to get through? Is that where you are at most of the time? Or do you mostly think about God as the King of the universe? People who really think about God in that way often feel like worshipping Him. And what percent of your thinking about God focuses on His commands? When you think about God, do you see yourself as an obedient subject to the One you claim to be King of the universe?

As we look at the Easter story from the Gospel of

Matthew this morning, it will be helpful for us to think about these questions. It will help make the story relevant to us.

I will divide the story into three parts. The first part will cover the period of time between Christ the King's death on the cross and the morning of the third day after the crucifixion. The second part will deal with the drama that took place on Resurrection morning. And the third part will cover what took place just before the King ascended into heaven.

First of all, consider the hours immediately following Christ's death. Read MATTHEW 27:57-66.

⁵⁷As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. ⁵⁹Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, ⁶⁰and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. ⁶¹Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

⁶²The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. ⁶³"Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' ⁶⁴So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."

⁶⁵"Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." ⁶⁶So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard. ⁵⁷As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸Going to Pilate, he asked for

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In this section of the Gospel of Matthew, nothing at all is mentioned about the activity of the King during those hours. The focus is entirely on a few of His subjects, the chief priests and Pharisees, and Pilot. And when we focus on these people, we see some things that are disappointing, but we also see something that is very encouraging. With the possible exception of Pilot, most of the people in this section of scripture had already become convinced that Jesus was a person with unusual power. The gospel stories tell us that everyone, including the chief priests and Pharisees, marveled at Christ's ability to teach as one who had authority. In JOHN 7:15 they are quoted as saying, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?" And we know that the chief priests and the Pharisees were very aware of the fact that Jesus was driving out demons and healing people and raising people from the dead. Even though they were not convinced that Jesus was King of the universe, they certainly were convinced that He possessed special power.

Now the sad and disappointing thing about this part

of the story is that everyone seems to have either forgotten about all that power or had begun to seriously doubt that the power still existed after Christ's death. Despite the fact that Jesus had repeatedly promised that He would be raised up in power on the third day after His death, no one in this part of the story seems to have been expecting that to happen. Because Jesus was dead—because they could no longer see Him and hear Him speak—they lost faith in His ability to do great things. That is the disappointing thing that we notice.

The encouraging thing that we notice has to do with the Marys and Joseph of Arimathea. Even though these people seem to have become unconvinced of their King's ongoing power to do miracles, they were still very convinced that He was King. Even though there was no hope left in their hearts, their love remained. Even though they were confused, they still believed that Jesus was Messiah.

The love that the Marys had for their King did not die with the crucifixion. Even after the stone was rolled in front of the tomb and everyone had gone, the Marys remained sitting opposite of the tomb.

And, Joseph also demonstrated a similar kind of loyalty. According to the Gospel of Luke (LUKE 23:51) Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Sanhedrin. He was the only descending voice when the Council decided to put Jesus to death. This secret disciple of Jesus became braver than all the rest when the danger was the greatest. He made his way to the Roman governor and asked for the privilege of taking the body of the crucified Christ and laying it to rest in his own tomb. In all probability, he (like the Marys) had also lost hope, but His love for Christ remained.

In contrast to this kind of loyalty, we see the enemies of Christ. During our Lord's life upon this earth these people had expressed amazement at Christ's ability to do great things. They were impressed with His knowledge. They were jealous of His power and wondered at His ability to perform miracles. But they never were able to believe Him for who He was. And so their final conclusion about the person of Christ is revealed when they referred to Him as "that deceiver" (MATT. 27:63).

So now we move on to Resurrection Morning. Matthew first records the appearing of an angel who is accompanied by a violent earthquake. The angel goes up to the tomb, rolls the stone back, then sits on top of the stone. The whole purpose of this was not to open the door so that Christ could come out; rather, it was to allow the women and others to enter in to see the empty tomb and the undisturbed grave clothes. Christ had already risen and left the tomb even before the stone was rolled away.

The affect of the angel on the soldiers guarding the tomb was absolute terror. They became like dead men in the presence of the angel's blinding light. But the same blinding light had a totally different affect on the Marys. They were also afraid, but it was a fear that was mixed with joy as their hope returned. I can picture them dropping their spices when the angel told them that Jesus was risen. The fact that they were carrying the spices indicates that they had lost their hope of seeing a resurrected King. The angel's announcement should not have surprised them. The angel said, "He (Jesus) is not here; He is risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay." The words "just as He said" almost sound like a rebuke. It's as if the angel had said, 'You shouldn't be so surprised, because He told you so.'

And then, the next thing we see is the women meeting Jesus and falling at His feet to worship Him only to have Jesus interrupt their worship with a command. "Go," He said, "and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see Me. And do not be afraid."

The impact the Resurrection had on those who were already convinced that Jesus was King was to cause them to become even more convinced to crown Jesus as King and obey His commands. Those who were not convinced that Jesus was King in the first place could not accept the fact of the Resurrection, and so they used lies to explain it away.

The final scene takes place right before the King ascends to heaven to be seated at the right hand of the Father. Those who had been impacted by the Resurrection were there, and they were worshiping Jesus. The worshiper were at different levels of being convinced. Some still had doubts. But Jesus

interrupts their worship with a command. He tells them to go and share the good news with other people.

I hope this brief survey of the story of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ has helped you to better understand the struggle that goes on in the hearts of people. The purpose of the Resurrection was not to defeat death. That was done on the cross. The cause of death is sin, and Jesus defeated sin on the cross. The purpose of the Resurrection is to convince people that Jesus did defeat sin and still has the power to defeat sin and that He is King of the universe and that He is deserving of all our obedience.

There is not one person hearing these words this morning who doesn't need to become more convinced than he already is. This is true of everyone hear, including those who will soon be baptized and

including the preacher. We can all do more to believe in the power of our Lord to do great thing in our lives. We can all spend more time crowning Jesus as King. And I think it is quite evident that most of us need to spend more time working to add jewels to the crown. To do that we must be willing to leave our worship CDs and go out into our world to share the good news about Jesus with others around us.

Just as God used the Resurrection of Jesus Christ over 2000 years ago to persuade people to become more convinced than they were, so He continues to use the fact of the Resurrection today to do the same thing. May God use our celebration of our Lord's Resurrection today to bolster our confidence, so that we will become stronger in our belief that Jesus still has the power to save us and that He is King of the Universe and that He is deserving of all our obedience.