

WE'VE A STORY TO TELL!

BY DR. JERRY VINES

By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series
from **Jerry Vines Ministries**
2295 Towne Lake Parkway
Suite 116 #249
Woodstock, GA 30189

Let's Begin

Everybody loves a good story. That is a universal trait of being human, I guess. Reader's Digest made its way into millions of homes across America because it was good at telling stories. Talk shows on TV get high ratings when somebody comes on and tells their story—no matter how bizarre it may seem. Today's lesson on the final chapter of Matthew's Gospel is about telling the story of Jesus to the nations. That is the great task which Jesus gave the church as His parting words. As we focus on Matthew 28, we will follow the outline below:

- I. His Story (27:62 – 28:15)**
- II. His Sovereignty (vv. 16-18)**
- III. His Strategy (vv. 19-20a)**
- IV. His Surety (v. 20b)**

I. His Story (27:62 – 28:15)

We discovered that Jesus was placed in a borrowed tomb (27:60). A secret disciple offered this tomb to Jesus, three facts of which we want to observe.

First, this was a secure tomb (27:62-66). The leaders possessed great suspicion that the disciples would attempt to steal Jesus' body (v. 64). Of course, strange things *had* been occurring. There was the temple curtain torn in half, an earthquake, and one of their own Pharisees openly preparing the body for Jesus' burial. No wonder the religious leaders were on edge. They went before Pilate remembering some of the words of the "deceiver" (v. 63). Pilate's response was to accommodate their request (vv. 65-66). Thus, we can conclude the tomb was secure.

Second, note the shaken tomb (28:1-4). The "end of the Sabbath" finally came (v. 1). Before dawn, the women assembled and headed to Jesus' tomb. There is a powerful lesson for us here. The women headed for the *tomb* at Sabbath's end. The words Matthew records here point us no more to the temple but to the tomb. *And it is not just any tomb as we shall soon see; it's an empty tomb!* Jesus is alive! They went to anoint His body but eventually found themselves adoring the Lord!

As the women were journeying toward the tomb, the chief question on their minds was the large stone and how they would move it (Mark 16:3). They were unprepared for an earthquake to relieve them of their chief concern (vv. 2-4). Never underestimate God's power. He always has a way of moving stones that hinder us from serving Jesus. Trust Him and you will be glad you did! There is a special note about the angel's rolling the stone away (v. 2). *Moving the stone was not to let Jesus out, but rather to let the disciples in!* It is our duty to go to Jesus and God will always let us in. Compare the reactions to the angel's appearance and the earthquake. The guards shook for fear of the angel and fainted as dead men (v. 4). The women were fearful, but also filled with great joy (v. 8)! Only the followers of Jesus understand the ways of God. To others, His tomb stays shut and their eyes remained closed.

Third, the tomb was not only secure and shaken, it was also special (vv. 5-15).

Reflection Connection

The Gospel writers record how Jesus spoke plainly to the disciples about His death and resurrection. Still the women came to visit the tomb where they believed Jesus' body was still laying. What has Jesus spoken plainly to you personally, that you still have not completely believed by faith? What evidence will you require before you fully trust His word?



How so? The tomb was most special because when the disciples had sealed it three days earlier, the body of Jesus was there. Now, however, the tomb *is empty!* (vv. 5-10) The angel knew why the women had come. “I know that ye seek Jesus” (v. 5). God always knows our intent. We can never hide our heart from Him.

Then, the angel did what the angels had done at Jesus’ birth—made an announcement—this time: “He is not here; For He is risen” (v. 6). Before, the child was born in Bethlehem; now the Son of God had risen from the dead. The angel further reminded that Jesus was only doing “as he said” He would do. *Jesus always keeps His word. Every promise our Lord makes will always be kept.* Then the angel extended an invitation to “see where the Lord lay.”

The tomb is special foremost because the tomb is empty. It was also special because of its evidence (vv. 11-15). As the women departed the tomb in haste, Jesus met them on their way (v. 9). Falling before the Lord, they worshipped and adored Him (v. 10). Jesus sent them on their way to tell the others about Him (v. 10).

Now we have two groups running but with different purposes. The women were running because of victory! The soldiers ran because of defeat. Running away from their duty was a capital crime; they later met to cover their hides. As it turned out, they came out quite wealthy: “they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying “Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept” (vv. 12-13). How much does it cost to sell one’s soul? What is it worth?

Judas got thirty pieces of silver. The soldiers got a lot more than that. Would you sell what you knew about Jesus to the highest bidder? Satan is always looking to bargain for what people know about Jesus. According to Matthew, even up until the day he recorded Jesus’ gospel, which may be forty or fifty years later, the Jewish leaders were still circulating the rumor that Jesus’ body was stolen (v. 15).

What a story, His story! The way He lived; the way He died; the way He rose from the dead!

II. His Sovereignty (vv. 16-18)

Though we find from the other Gospels that Jesus stayed with the disciples several days, Matthew moves us right along to the place where Jesus departed into Heaven (v. 16). Yet He did not intend to leave them *without* specific instructions. Jesus never leaves us without a clear word. It may be we need to tarry a while (cp. Luke 24:49). Nonetheless, He *will* guide us.

The closing words of Matthew’s gospel are crucial. If we fail to understand these words, we will miss entirely the point of his Gospel—perhaps even the Christian faith! *They are that significant.* The church needs to consider these words afresh. This is our assignment until He returns.

In the first words of His parting assignment, Jesus proclaims His preeminent rule. “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (v. 18b). Total power, Jesus makes clear, belongs to Him. The power about which Jesus speaks is not *just* raw ability. Rather, Jesus is declaring His unlimited authority; His supreme rule.

Reflection Connection

In the Psalms, King David often talks about the “wicked” prospering. We see in this passage how the soldiers were able to gain wealth by lying about Jesus’ missing body. When have you seen the “wicked” prosper? How has your faith been challenged by this? What specific promises from God’s word have brought you peace about God’s faithfulness to the righteous?



Reflection Connection

Colossians 1:15-17 declares the supremacy of Christ. Take a moment to read these verses and meditate on Who Jesus is according to this passage. How does your life point to the Son of God? How does your life direct others to Jesus?

Reflection Connection

Word pictures or imagery are often helpful to grasp and describe an abstract concept, like "yielding to Jesus' authority." What does it look like to live under the authority of Jesus Christ? Develop a creative way to illustrate this important truth. Example: Jesus is in the driver's seat of a car, rather than yourself.

Jesus surely possessed an immeasurable authority during His ministry. People knew He taught with authority (v. 7: 29). He had authority to forgive sins (9:6). Now, however, in His glorified state authority is *unrestricted*. Through His death and resurrection, He "spoiled the principalities and powers" and reigns over all (cp. Romans 1:4; Colossians 2:15).

Note how Jesus makes this clear: "in heaven and in earth." This statement was either the statement of a lunatic or the Lord of the universe. All authority "in heaven?" Jesus was saying that the cherubim, seraphim, and every angel are at His disposal. *All authority in heaven!* That this was made by One who just conquered death demonstrates that the Lord of creation is here speaking!

In addition, not only did every angelic being bow at the feet of the Lord Jesus, but also Jesus held in check all the demonic powers of hell itself.

Jesus zooms in now on the disciples after giving them a cosmic interpretation of Who He was. His paramount authority is not only in the heavenly, invisible realm, but extends to the visible realm "in earth." The daily affairs of the disciples, the future of the church, and the affairs of nations would fall under the dominion of Jesus. *Even when it looks like He's not, know that Jesus is in charge.* This is a tremendous encouragement to us. Many times our lives seem so void that "bad things" appear the norm. Jesus has not relinquished His throne. The question all of us must answer is, do we live as if Jesus is in control?

As mysterious as it sounds, Jesus will allow you to live as if He is not in charge. Before moving on from here, the issue must be settled: do you live under the authority of Jesus or do you live as if He is not in charge? The only way to settle that is through yielding yourself fully, completely to Him. Will you do so right now?

III. His Strategy (28:19-20)

We have the story. The tomb is empty! Jesus is alive! We have the only authority necessary to carry out our task: the Lord of Lords is our authority and He promises us the necessary power to complete the task (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). Now we must ask, "Does the Sovereign Lord possess a strategy to tell His story?" *The answer is yes!* Jesus gives His disciples a strategic plan as He departs from them: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (vv. 19-20a). There are four steps to the strategy Jesus gives.

The first step is going: "Go ye therefore." There is no clearer step than the simple command to go. This little verb literally means, "having gone" or more properly, "as you are going." From Jesus' standpoint, it's not so much a command as it is an assumption. The grand assumption about every church is "as you are going." *It should never be a question whether a church is going and telling His story.* Some churches may go more places or possess resources to go into remote areas, but it cannot be that the church is not going at all. In fact, if the church is not going, the church is not the church!

Christ's first command is to come. He says, "Come to me all ye who are heavy laden and I will give you rest" (11:28). After coming, there is going. If you've



Reflection Connection

Paul was called to preach to the Gentiles, Jeremiah was called to preach to Judah, and Jonah was called to preach to Nineveh. How does a believer recognize the opportunity and people to whom they are called to go and tell? How does the local church determine a ministry-focus and people group to whom they will carry out the Great Commission of Christ?

answered the first—*coming to Jesus*—you’re now faced with the second—*going for Jesus*. Wherever Christians find themselves, they should consider themselves soul winners (cp. Acts 11:19-21). It’s time Christians get going!

The second step in Jesus’ strategy is winning: Jesus says, as we go—“teach all nations.” The Greek literally says, “make disciples.” Now a disciple is a pupil, or perhaps a better term is learner. To disciple a person is to lead them to place their trust in Christ and live life themselves as learners in obedience to Him.

The verb “teach” is imperative. That means Jesus is not making a *suggestion*; instead, He is giving a *command*. The Sovereign Lord of the universe is commanding the Christian to teach. We do not think about it, pray about it, nor surely do we vote on it in a business meeting! At this junction, it is safe to say we are either obedient to Jesus’ command or we are not.

A further observation is in order: “teach” is plural. That means that every Christian is involved. Pastors cannot be hired hands to run the ranch. Every member must see himself as obligated to teach all nations, for that is what Jesus said. *Our assignment is to win the lost, make disciples of them, and teach all what Jesus says.*

The third step in the strategy the Sovereign Lord makes is “baptizing.” New Testament evangelism is more than just winning the lost. It goes further. Jesus speaks of “baptizing them.” Baptism is the initial act of obedience after a person is saved. Baptism is an outward expression of an inward experience. What the Spirit of God does on the inside of our hearts, washing us and refreshing us through the new birth, the baptismal waters signify when we are submerged under the water and brought back out again.

The baptism is performed “in the name.” This term means that it embodies the fullness of the person, and all that the appellation signifies. When we are baptized, we’re saying, in a public declaration, we identify with all of who God is. *You are giving all you know of you to all you know of Him.*

In addition, this passage is one of the few texts where, even though the term “Trinity” is not mentioned, it is clear the Trinitarian nature of God is being expressed. God is Father, Son, Holy Ghost—three persons—yet He is One. Baptism is an especially significant time for believers. If you are a believer and have never been baptized, you need to ask yourself right now, “Why not?” Jesus commands the disciples to go and baptize. If baptism were not significant, Jesus surely would not have obligated the disciples to perform it.

The fourth step in the strategy is teaching. New Testament evangelism is not finished until the convert is baptized, in the church, and under the ministry of the Word of God. A significant part of evangelism is edification. Believers are to be encouraged, inspired, and gladdened. That is what teaching does: “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Note here that teaching the Bible is not just something to get people to believe. Rather, it is something to conform to, something to be “observed.” Bible teaching affects one’s behavior not just belief. It changes one’s life.

In abiding by His teachings, one is made a better spouse, parent, and worker. In addition, it children become better students, better athletes, and better friends. A church is not winning the lost unless they are also baptizing the lost *and* assimilating them into the life of the church.

Reflection Connection

Recall the time you were baptized. How did this step of obedience serve as a catalyst in your walk with the Lord? What encouragement would you give to the Christian who has not yet followed through in believer’s baptism? What passages in Scripture would you share in order to convince them of the importance of baptism?



Reflection Connection

Who has God used to teach you all that Christ commands? Which pastors, teachers, mentors, and devoted followers of Christ have been a part of Jesus' assignment in your own journey with the Lord? On the other hand, think of those people who you have been able to teach and disciple. How are you obeying the Great Commission right now? Who are you going to tell, disciple and teach?

Reflection Connection

As long as people have followed Christ, there has been persecution. Accounts of persecution are throughout scripture and readily available online covering modern day instances. Consider the peace that enveloped Stephen as he spoke to the religious leaders before they stoned him to death. How have you experienced this peace as you go and tell His story? Do you believe there is a unique peace for those who are in hostile locations?

IV. His Surety (v. 20b)

The story we have to tell we tell because the Sovereign Lord of the Universe sends us. He offers us a strategy and now we see He gives us His surety: “and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” If we accept His “go”, we can claim His “lo.” *His presence is His promise to us, His surety that we will not fail; He will not let us.*

We must observe two factors about His surety. *First, His presence is personal.* Jesus says, “I am with you.” Jesus is the great “I Am” (cp. 1:23). Jesus is God with us. What many believers do not understand is that we do not go alone. We have the promise of His personal presence as we go and fulfill our assignment. We must be careful at this point, however. The promise Jesus gives to us is “as we go” not if we stay. In fact, we have no right to expect His surety if we fail to go.

The Apostle Paul found this to be so (Acts 18:10). We will find it true as well. This gives us a great sense of assurance—especially if we are called on to witness in a hostile environment. Jesus says, “Lo, I am with you.” Jesus personally is with us.

Not only is His surety personal, it is also perpetual: “always even unto the end of the world.” The term translated “always” means literally, “all the days.” That is, day in and day out, Jesus is with us as we go. Our circumstances vary from day to day. Some days are smooth and some are difficult; some days are lonely and some are lively. But whatever the case, Jesus is with us; His presence is invariable.

Jesus used the phrase “end of the world.” Here He is speaking specifically about the church age to the end of the Great Tribulation (cp. 13:39-40; 49). The Lord Jesus has a plan for this entire age. And we’re to be a part!

Wrap Up

The Church is God’s idea of mission. She has a story to tell about the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In fact, the Sovereign Lord Himself assigns us the task of taking that story strategically into the entire world. His surety is He’s with us. The question to ponder today is “Are you with Him?”

Golden Greek Nugget

Jesus told His disciples that all “power” is given to Him in heaven and on earth (v. 18). The term translated “power” is not the word that means “strength” or “ability” as in, for example, the words of Jesus that the disciples would receive “power” when the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 1:18). Instead, the term in v. 18 means the power of rule, or in other words, “authority.” The entire cosmos recognized the absolute rule and reign of the Lord Jesus Christ.

