

Today is a very special day. It is a very special day because we have been walking through the gospel of Matthew together for the last 2 years - and after 63 sermons, today (the 64th) will be our last. **And all through the first 27 chapters we have gone through, Matthew recorded the events in Jesus’ life that have been slowly revealing Jesus is not only the Christ, the promised Messiah but also the Sovereign King of the Kingdom of God, who rules and reigns over everything in the universe.** The apostle Paul wrote of what that means in Colossians 1:15-18: *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.”* **Jesus is our Sovereign King!**

Today is also a very special day - in that this is the day we celebrate the reality of what *that* means for us. Because Jesus Christ is the Sovereign King of the Kingdom of God, he rules and reigns over life and death – which means our lives are totally in the hands of God and we need not fear death. **Death is the greatest enemy that mankind faces.** Every man and woman will face this enemy and history as shown that even if we manage to win a round or two, we will always eventually lose. **We who are currently alive do not like the statistic that 100 out of 100 people will die, and so the great quest of mankind is to find a way to conquer death.** The various religions of the world strive to satisfy this quest by some means that will give peace to its followers as they face death. **Other religions have philosophies that deal with death by minimizing its importance.** Most religions, however, do offer the hope of some type of after-life. **For them, it’s about following rules to gain the favor of its god or gods, so they might get to some sort of paradise.** The problem there is that there is no standard by which ultimate favor is gained and also the after-life that it promises always remains shrouded in mystery.

There is one exception to that, and that’s Christianity, because Jesus sacrificed his life on a cross for our sins in our place so we might be forgiven, redeemed and restored back to God and then Jesus rose from the dead! The Christian faith is the only religious belief in which its prophet conquers death and proves its promise of eternal life is true. **The resurrection of the Jesus Christ from the dead is central to the gospel message of salvation.** It is central to our faith and to our hope in God for eternal life. **The resurrection of Jesus’ separates Christianity from every other religion.** The apostle Paul speaks of this also in Colossians 1:19-22: *“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.”* **Jesus Christ is our Savior, our Sovereign King of the Kingdom of God. He rules and reigns over life and death. If it is true that Jesus is the Sovereign King of the Kingdom of God, who rules and reigns over everything in the universe - and if it is true that Jesus is also the Savior who sacrificed his life on a cross for our sins in our place so we might be forgiven, redeemed and restored back to God – and if it is also true that Jesus then rose from the dead, conquering death, so that we might know the reality of eternal life after this life – then there should be nothing more important in our lives, nothing is more crucial, nothing more urgent, nothing more needful than believing that and becoming a follower of Jesus.**

Our text today opens in the context of after Jesus had presented himself to the Jewish leadership and the people in Jerusalem as their Messiah and King, the spiritual leadership of Israel accused him of the capital offense of blaspheming God. He was arrested, beaten, and mocked – and the Roman governor Pilate turned him over to the people who wanted him crucified. **And so Jesus was hung on a cross outside the city walls.** He died a few hours later, his body was taken down from the cross and placed in a borrowed tomb. **A large stone was rolled across the door of the tomb as the sun began to set, along with the hopes and dreams of his disciples, both men and women, as they began to be drowned in grief.**

The 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 impostor said, while he was still alive, After three days I will rise.’ 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 them, “You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.” So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

Now after the Sabbath, toward 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 women, “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, 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 have 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 eleven 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 have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” **Matthew 27:62-28:20**

In these last words written by Matthew in his gospel that document the events surrounding Jesus death and resurrection, we clearly see the reality that Jesus Christ as Savior and that he is our Sovereign King of the Kingdom of God, who rules and reigns over life and death. We clearly see these two truths in numerous ways in the two events recorded here –Jesus’ death by crucifixion and resurrection. These two are of foundational importance to our faith - in that there would have been no resurrection if not by the power of the authority of Jesus as Sovereign King - and there would no crucifixion and death and offer of salvation had not Jesus as Savior sacrificed his life on a cross for our sins in our place so we might be forgiven, redeemed and restored back to God. Jesus is our Savior and Sovereign King!

We see Jesus is our Savior because he was crucified and put to death. We know this to be true because the angel told the women: “Jesus . . . was crucified.” We also know this because the crucifixion was done openly in public. The gospels tell us crowds of people watched Jesus die and Matthew 27:39 tells us that: “those who passed by derided him.” We also know Jesus was crucified because his crucifixion was painful. This method of capital punishment was considered to be the worst of any in history. Scripture relates of the horrific pain Jesus suffered. It’s also true that crucifixion of Jesus was planned by God. The death of Jesus was not a historical fluke or accident or merely the effect of great injustice. Jesus himself told his disciples beforehand. In Matthew 17:22-23 he said to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day.’” Jesus was crucified by sovereign design, not by accident. Jesus’ crucifixion was punishment for sin, but not his own. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 we read: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Galatians 1:3-4: tells us our “Lord Jesus Christ . . . gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.” Romans 8:32 says God, “did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all.”

We also know Jesus was crucified and put to death because the crucifixion of Jesus is precious. We see this in 1 Peter 1:18-19 where God's Word tells us: "You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." A few verses later we read: "To you therefore who believe, he is precious" (1 Peter 2:7 NIV). We see Jesus is our Savior in that he was crucified and put to death because Jesus' crucifixion is precious to those who believe - because by Jesus' death, we are ransomed from sin and guilt and condemnation and punishment and hell, and then forgiven and given a new life.

We see that Jesus is our Sovereign King of the Kingdom of God, who rules and reigns over life and death, because he rose from the dead. Jesus could not be precious to us if he was dead. And so, he rose from the dead! In Matthew 28:6 we read that the angel told Mary and the others, "He is not here, for he has risen!" Now we don't have much detailed information about the resurrection of Jesus looked like, as it seemed to have happened when no one was present. But what we do know is that the resurrection of Jesus was powerful - powerful enough to bring a dead, bloody, tortured, crucified body back to life.

This is what Jesus meant when he said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." This is what Peter meant when he said Jesus had been "exalted at the right hand of God," (Acts 2:33). This is Stephen meant, as he cried out while he was being stoned to death, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). This is what Paul meant when said: "Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1) and what the writer of Hebrews when he said that Jesus "endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2). "The right hand of God" is the place of ultimate authority along with God the Father. Paul says Jesus is there "For God has put all things in subjection under his feet" (1 Cor 15:25).

The resurrection of Jesus restored Jesus to a place of triumphant, ultimate authority over all things – as Sovereign King of the Kingdom of God, who rules and reigns over life and death and everything in all of the universe. "ALL AUTHORITY in heaven and on earth has been given to me" means Jesus has authority over politics and governments and countries. He has authority over all armies and military might. He has authority over all industry and business and the stock markets. He has authority over science and education - all research and discoveries and universities and colleges and schools. He has authority over all technology and entertainment and media - radio, TV, magazines, newspapers, the Internet, computers, iPads, iPhones theaters, and the arts. He has authority over all sports – over every team and every player and every game. He has authority over all weather – sunshine and clouds and rain and floods and volcanoes and earthquakes and tornadoes and hurricanes and global warming. He has authority over all planets and moons and stars and light and energy and motion and time. He has authority over all of the spiritual forces in the universe and authority over our hearts. He also has authority over all of our lives - health and disease, success and failure, and life and death.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." In the midst of exercising the rule and reign of his authority in the realm of everywhere in the universe – Jesus also works out his saving purposes in all things. Praise God that his cause cannot fail. If you have all power and all authority and cannot die, your cause cannot fail. This is a great reason for following Jesus. He cannot fail. Sin and death and hell and evil and Satan cannot defeat his purposes. He will win. That's a good reason to trust him and follow him. It is suicide to oppose or ignore him. But to win us over, Jesus ends his time on this earth, and Matthew ends his gospel with a calling and very personal promise based on his resurrection.

"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. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20

Our text tells us that the context of Jesus' words here - is that his disciples had obeyed him, then worshiped Him, and then some doubted him. Their faith in him was growing each day, but when some of them saw him, they were uncertain about who he was and how he was going to establish his "Kingdom of God" on earth. Not long before this they had walked with thousands of cheering men, women, and children hailing him as their Messiah, - but now here they were men on the Pharisees' most wanted list, alone on a mountain with their risen Lord whom they had seen crucified, and no army behind him. But the first words Jesus said to them were said to diminish their doubts and fears: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Jesus was not asking them to move out into the fallen, demon-infested, and politically and socially corrupt world in their own strength and power. Rather, all authority had been released to him by his Father, and he was going to make sure that it was his power working in and through them that would enable them to carry out his calling - to build his church as they moved out into communities and eventually to the ends of the known world.

Jesus was speaking of taking his gospel to the world, but it would all begin in Jerusalem, then move beyond the walls of the Holy City, then go up into the hills of Judea and Samaria, and finally travel to the Gentiles around the known world. He used the apostles to set the model for each generation. And so this is our calling also - each one of us is given different communities, different work-places, different countries, different cultures, different families, and different spiritual gifts. But regardless of all those differences, our risen Lord wants us as his disciples to move out into the world---some right where we are, and some to different countries, either for a period of time or for the rest of our lives.

The reason that we are here today is because Jesus' disciples did exactly that. They went out and made disciples who were then baptized and learned to follow Jesus' commands. Those disciples in turn did the same with others and so on down through the generations to the present. We are called to strive to do the same thing - because Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead, proving his sacrifice for sin was sufficient and that His promise of eternal life to His followers is true. And because all authority in heaven and earth has been returned to our risen Lord and Savior, we as his disciples can now have the confidence and power to move out in obedience to his commands, just as the original disciples did.

Jesus had always had ultimate authority, or the freedom to act with absolute and unrestricted right and power over all creation and creatures. Yet he submitted to restriction in his humanity - but now as our risen Lord in the age of the Spirit, he has the power to build his church, the body of which he will be the head, which *"the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* (Matthew 16:17:18). It is through his church that he will now offer the gift of salvation and eternal life to all whom God the Father has given to him, Jew and Gentile. In 1 Corinthians 15:22 the apostle Paul tells us in that because of the power of Jesus' resurrection, all who are *"in Christ"* shall *"be made alive."* And then at the end, when his work on earth is finished, our Sovereign and Savior Jesus will deliver up the kingdom to God the Father.

After that - the end will come, when he will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, having destroyed every ruler and authority and power. For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet. And the last enemy to be destroyed is death. For the Scriptures say, "God has put all things under his authority." (Of course, when it says "all things are under his authority," that does not include God himself, who gave Christ his authority.) Then, when all things are under his authority, the Son will put himself under God's authority, so that God, who gave his Son authority over all things, will be utterly supreme over everything everywhere. .1 Corinthians 15:24-28 (NLT)

Matthew's record of Jesus' words reveals that while the resurrection of Jesus was powerful, it was also personal - as Jesus' last words were: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Know that this is not a promise only to the eleven apostles, because the promise is *"to the end of the age"* - this present age of the world in which we live. While there are followers of Jesus in this age in our world, Jesus' promise holds true for all of those who know him as Lord and Savior: "I am with you always."

What this means is that if Jesus is not all-powerful and not personally with us to the end - if we don't trust him as the most powerful authority who will always be with us forever - we will simply ignore the needs of others and live for our own private comfort. It's easy for us to do. All we need to do is to take the truth of King Jesus' ultimate authority over all things and turn it into a theological problem. Then you can ask the question: "If Jesus has ultimate authority over the world, why is it in such a mess?" Or: "If he has Jesus has ultimate power and authority over life and death, why did my child or my spouse or my best friend die?" But there is another way to respond to the ultimate power and authority of Jesus. We can see it as the power and authority to free us from sin and fear and greed and pride and selfishness and idolatry so that when we trust his promise to be with us - we are unstoppable in our love! If Jesus is with us to the end - and if he has ultimate power and authority in the universe - then we can love and give and forgive and serve and sacrifice - and never, ever lose.

This is why Jesus came. This is why he was crucified. This is why he rose from the dead with all authority and promised to be with us to the end of the age - to create a people whose sins are forgiven, and whose hearts are full of the love of God, and who are so emboldened by the triumphant Christ, that they spend their lives with risk and sacrifice and love to help others know and enjoy the greatness of Jesus Christ now and forever. Is this not what you and I and we and this church were created for?

Jesus is still with us each and every moment. And he wants to not only live within us but to express his love through us to each other and then to the lost and hurting world all around us - so they too can come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior, and Sovereign King of the Kingdom of God - and then receive the gift of eternal life through the person and power of the Holy Spirit. This is the call our crucified and risen Savior King is calling us to. We have been saved by Jesus so we might serve our resurrected Savior by sharing the gospel with those who do not know Jesus. We have also been saved by Jesus so we might serve our resurrected Savior using his power to help make "make disciples" of new believers, helping them to become spiritually mature and equipped to do the same.

Where are you at this moment in you walk with Jesus Christ? Do you know him today? If not, I pray you would open your heart and surrender your heart and life to him. When you confess your sins and give your life to Jesus, he will forgive you and give you a new life on earth and he will be with you each and every day of your life until you die, when you will then be powerfully transformed and taken to heaven to live with Jesus forever. Jesus has risen from the dead! He with us today and will be forever.

If it is true that Jesus is the Sovereign King of the Kingdom of God, who rules and reigns over everything in the universe - and if it is true that Jesus is also the Savior who sacrificed his life on a cross for our sins in our place so we might be forgiven, redeemed and restored back to God - and if it is also true that Jesus then rose from the dead, conquering death, so that we might know the reality of eternal life after this life - then there should nothing is more important in our lives, nothing is more crucial, nothing more urgent, nothing more needful than believing it and becoming a follower of Jesus. It is true! Jesus has risen from the dead! Jesus Christ is our Savior, our Sovereign King of the Kingdom of God. He rules and reigns over life and death. He is alive and he is always with us. Amen!

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