

THE REIGNING KING (AFTER EASTER SUNDAY)

Matt 28:16-20; Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:1-11

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Today is Sunday, April 27, 2003. Does anyone remember what is special about today? Did anyone take a look at the calendar this morning and notice what it said? Anyone? . . . I dare say your calendar said the same thing mine did—absolutely nothing. As far as I now, there is nothing special about today.¹ I just wanted to have a little fun with all of you this morning.

Two weeks ago, April 13, was Palm Sunday, and we examined the story of Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. We witnessed the irony of the fact that the Jesus whom the crowds welcome and want is not the Jesus they get. Last week, April 20, was Easter, and we explored the history of Easter, observing how the time of a pagan celebration became a convenient time for the Christian commemoration of the Resurrection of Jesus. Then we turned our thoughts to the Lord's Table, and I suggested that the Lord's Supper is much more than a memorial—Jesus is really present in the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine.

Today, although it is only an ordinary Sunday, I want to treat it as special. Special in the sense that we have seen Jesus as the Royal King and the Risen King, and today I want us to see Jesus as the Reigning King. Today is "Easter—The Sequel." Jesus Christ is risen! Now what?

Turn with me, please, to the end of Matthew's Gospel. Let's begin reading at verse 16 of chapter 28.

¹⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted [though some hesitated]. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the

¹In the Greek Orthodox tradition, today is Easter. For the western church, today continues the Easter season until Pentecost, after which is the resumption of "ordinary" time.

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” (NRSV).

This scripture is commonly called the “Great Commission.” Its setting is after Jesus’ resurrection and some time before His ascension. The passage consists of three principal parts: (1) a declaration of Jesus’ exaltation and authority (v. 18b), (2) a missionary charge to go and make disciples (vv. 19-20a), and (3) a promise of Jesus’ abiding presence (v. 20b). Furthermore, this three-part passage brings together the major themes of Matthew’s Gospel: (1) Jesus is the Messiah and He is Lord, (2) Jesus’ church is made up those who have become His disciples and who, in turn, disciple others, and (3) Jesus is God with us—now and until the end of the age.²

The universal mission is founded on and flows from the universal authority of Jesus the Christ. The proclamation of the gospel is the proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ to the whole world. Jesus is lord of heaven and earth! And this must be preached to all of mankind. This universal perspective, both of Jesus’ lordship and of His commission, is expressed by the emphatic “therefore”³ that links verse 18 to verse 19, and is emphasized by the four-fold occurrence of the word “all”:⁴ “all authority,” “all nations,” “teaching . . . all I have commanded you,” and “I am with you all the days.”

The command of Jesus in verse 19 finds its center in “make disciples of all nations.” The stress is on “making disciples” while “baptizing” and “teaching” suggest the way by which disciples are made.⁵ Jesus calls upon His first disciples—themselves eyewitnesses—to bring new generations of earwitnesses. Those who have seen are to pass on the gospel to those who will hear. As disciples, we have the duty of helping others to become what we are, namely, disciples of Jesus. A disciple disciples. To fail to

²Royce Lee Dickinson, Jr., *Developing a High-Priority Attitude for Making Disciples* (D.Min. Thesis: Harding Graduate School of Religion, 1990), 32: “This tripartite schema brings together the major motifs of Matthew’s Gospel, namely, his messianic lordship Christology, his discipleship ecclesiology, and his inaugurated eschatology.”

³οὖν (*oun*).

⁴πᾶς (*pas*).

⁵Dickinson, D.Min. Thesis, 33: “*Mathēteusate* [μαθητεύσατε] (‘make disciples’), the primary verb, places the emphasis on discipling while the participles *baptizontes* [βαπτίζοντες] (‘baptizing’) and *didaskontes* [διδάσκοντες] (‘teaching’) characterize the way by which disciples are made. The participle *poreuthentes* [πορευθέντες] (‘go’) serves to underline the urgency and primacy of making disciples. ‘Go,’ though it is not the key ingredient of the Great Commission, is nevertheless indispensable for its fulfillment.”

make disciples is itself a failure of one's own discipleship. And do not overlook the fact that "making disciples" is not complete until those who are being disciplined are led into a life of obeying Jesus' commands.

So then, the Great Commission affirms that Jesus' authority is universal, His commission is worldwide, and His presence is permanent. Ultimately, it is Jesus' abiding presence with His disciples that "transforms an imperative into an inspiration."⁶ Through Jesus His Son, God is with us. That assurance marks the beginning of Matthew's Gospel—you shall name Him "Emmanuel," which means, 'God is with us'" (1:23b)—and it marks the ending of Matthew's Gospel—"I am with you always, to the end of the age'" (28:20b). Did I say "ending"? I need to correct that. In a sense, the Gospel of Matthew is not a closed book until the return of Jesus. From the time of the Great Commission until the time of the Great Consummation, the final chapter is being written in the mission and teaching of Jesus' disciples. For those of us who claim to be disciples of Jesus, it is our work and our witness that is writing the final chapter of the gospel story. The ending of Matthew's Gospel is really a new beginning until the time of the end shall come.

There is one more scripture I would like to read. Turn with me, please, to the beginning of the Book of Acts—verse 1 of chapter 1.

¹In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ²until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴While 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; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹They said, "Men of

⁶Max Warren, *The Christian Imperative* (Scribner, 1955), 114.

Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (NRSV).

The Ascension of Jesus—Luke, in his writings, refers to it three times (Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:2; Acts 1:9-11). Jesus as the ascended Lord is enveloped by a cloud⁷—the visible manifestation of God’s presence, glory, and approval. Here in the introduction to Acts, the New Testament book of church history, Luke’s primary point seems to be that the missionary activity of the early church rested not solely on the Great Commission, but also on Jesus’ living presence in heaven and the sure promise of His return. Furthermore, through the sending of the Holy Spirit we are empowered by Jesus to perform the work He has called us to do. The Ascension of Jesus acts as the enthronement of Jesus as King and Messiah, and sets the stage for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Luke wants us to realize that Jesus is active in our world today, although how He does His work has changed. He is no longer present in this world “in the flesh,” but He is present in this world “in His body”—His body being the church. It is the task of the church to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. We are to be Jesus to others. “Loving others as Jesus loves us”—that’s what being the church is all about.

In Eph 6:15, where the Apostle Paul describes the armor and weapons of the soldier of Christ, he uses the daring metaphor of having our feet “fitted with . . . the Gospel of peace.” The Gospel becomes our shoes! As Christians, we do not so much carry abroad the Gospel as we are carried abroad by the Gospel.⁸ The Gospel transforms us into something that we were not before. It makes us go forth, dare to preach, and boldly stand our ground. Shoes are both for standing firm and for going places. Once we have been touched and transformed by the Gospel, we are literally “carried away.” We become people who do not so much carry the Gospel to the world as we become people who are carried by the Gospel to the world. The Gospel demands preaching. We cannot be faithful to it by keeping it to ourselves.

⁷To be specific, likely the shekinah cloud.

⁸Markus Barth, *The Broken Wall: A Study of the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Judson Press, 1959), 176.

Carman, a Christian-rock musician (I realize for some of you, “Christian-rock” is an oxymoron.) masterfully and marvelously captures the scope and significance of Jesus Christ’s triumph over Satan in his song *The Champion*.⁹

In the vast expanse of a timeless place
where silence ruled the outer space,
ominously towering it stood—
the symbol of a spirit war
between the one named Lucifer
and the Morning Star, the ultimate of good.

Enveloped by a trillion planets,
clean as lightning and hard as granite,
a cosmic coliseum would host the end
of the war between the lord of sin and death
and the omnipotent creator of man’s first breath—
who will decide who forever would be
The Champion.

The audience for the fight of the ages
was assembled and in place,
the angels came in splendor from a star.
The saints that had gone before were there,
Jeremiah, Enoch, Job—
they were singing the song of Zion
on David’s harp.

The demons arrived, defensive and vile,
cursing and blaspheming God,
followed by their trophies dead and gone,
Hitler, Napoleon, Pharaoh, Capone—
tormented and vexed and grieved,
waiting for their judgment from the Throne.

Then a chill swept through the mammoth crowd
and the demons squealed with glee,
as a sordid, vulgar, repulsive essence was felt—
arrogantly prancing, hands held high, draped
in a sparkling shroud,
trolled by demons, Satan ascended from Hell.

Then Satan cringed, the sinners groaned,
the demons reeled in pain,
a swell of power like silent thunder roared—
with a surge of light beyond intense illuminating
the universe,

⁹Album, *Absolute Best* (1993).

in resplendent glory appeared
the Son of God!

Then a persona, yes extraordinaire, appeared
in center ring—

God the Father will oversee the duel.

Opening the Book of Life, each grandstand hushed in awe
as majestically He said, “Now here’s the rules:
He’ll be wounded for their transgressions,
bruised for iniquities.”

When He said, “By His stripes they’re healed”
the devil shook.

He said, “Sickness is my specialty—
I hate that healing junk.”

God said, “You shut your face—
I wrote the Book.”

Then the Father looked at His only Son and said,
“You know the rules—
your blood will cleanse their sin
and calm their fears.”

Then He pointed His finger at Satan and said,
“And I know you know the rules—
You’ve been twisting them to deceive My people
for years.”

Satan cried, “I’ll kill you, Christ,
you’ll never win this fight.”
The demons wheezed, “That’s right,
there ain’t no way.”

Satan jeered, “You’re dead meat Jesus,
I’m gonna bust you up tonight.”
Jesus said, “Go ahead, make My day.”

The bell, the crowd, the fight was on!—
the devil leaped in fury,
with all his evil tricks he came undone.
He threw his jabs of hate and lust,
a stab of pride and envy,
but the hands that knew no sin
blocked every one.

Forty days and nights they fought
and Satan couldn’t touch Him.
Now the final blow saved for the final round.
Prophetically Christ’s hands came down
and Satan struck in vengeance—
the blow of death felled Jesus to the ground.

The devils roared in victory,
the saints shocked and perplexed
as wounds appeared upon His hands and feet.
Then Satan kicked Him in His side
and blood and water flowed
and they waited for the ten count of defeat.

God the Father turned His head,
His tears announcing Christ was dead—
the ten count would proclaim the battle's end.
Then Satan trembled through his sweat
in unexpected horror yet
as God started to count by saying,

“...10...”

(“Hey, wait a minute, God!”)

“...9...”

(“Stop! You're counting wrong!”)

“...8...”

(“His eyes are moving!”)

“...7...”

(“His fingers are twitching!”)

“...6...”

(“Where's all this light coming from?”)

“...5...”

(“He's alive!”)

“...4...”

(“Oh noooo! . . .”)

“...3...”

“...2...”

Oh yessss!

He has won!

He has won!

He's alive forever more,

He is risen, He is Lord, He has won!

He has won!

He's alive forever more, He is risen,

He is Lord!

Proclaim the news in every tongue
through endless ages and beyond,
let it be voiced from mountains loud and strong—
captivity has been set free,

salvation bought for you and me,

'cause Satan is defeated

and Jesus is

The Champion!