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October 13th: Psalm 107:23-43 & Matthew 27:57—28:20

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Psalm 107:23-43. The resurrection.

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Transcript

Psalm 107 verses 23 to 43. Psalm 107 verses 23 to 43. Psalm 107 verses 23 to 44.

Psalm 107 verses 24 to 44. Psalm 107 verses 24 to 45. Psalm 107 verses 24 to 45.

When it was evening there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him, and Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock.

And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. 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 imposter said, while he was still alive, After three days I will rise.

Therefore ordered the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Let the 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 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. 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 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. And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

We have reached the conclusion of the Gospel of Matthew, in which Jesus is buried, rises from the dead, appears to his disciples and gives them the great commission. Rather a lot of grand cover. Joseph of Arimathea comes at evening, asking for the body of Jesus.

And Arimathea seems to be the same place as Samuel came from, which we see in 1

Samuel 1 verse 1. Jesus is the Davidic king and it seems fitting that a figure associated with Samuel is burying him into the chamber from which he will come forth as the risen Lord. That Joseph of Arimathea is a rich man and a disciple is also an interesting detail of this narrative. Throughout Matthew's Gospel the theme of riches and money has often come up and here it comes up again.

But now, although the earlier rich man who wanted to become a disciple failed to do so, here is one that has. It's an encouraging note towards the end of the Gospel. The presence of two Josephs, remember earlier Mary is the mother of James and Joseph, and two Marys in the account of the burial of Jesus, brings our minds back to the beginning of the story of the Gospel.

Which also began with a Joseph and a Mary. Jesus is placed into a new tomb, a virgin tomb, and the connection between the womb and the tomb is important throughout Scripture. You can see this in places like Isaiah chapter 26 verses 16 to 19.

Just as the Gospel begins with the opening of the virgin womb, it will end with the opening of the virgin tomb. The sudden presence of Josephs and Marys should alert us to this association. Also the emphasis upon the presence of the women as weight to birth themes here.

The body is carefully taken care of by Joseph. He wraps the body in a clean linen shroud, like the clothes of the high priest on the Day of Atonement. And the presence of this rich man at this particular junction might also cast our minds back to Isaiah 53 verse 9. One of the passages that is often referred to in these stories of Christ's suffering.

In fulfilment of that prophecy, Christ has his grave made with a rich man. It's cut into the rock, like stones taken from a quarry. We can maybe think back to Isaiah chapter 51 verse 1. Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord.

Christ is the great stone that will become the chief cornerstone of the new temple. The great stones of the temple of Solomon are described in 1 Kings chapter 7 verse 9 following. A stone is placed over the mouth of the tomb.

It's a blocked up entrance that will have to be removed. And the women's presence at the burial and the tomb is noted by Matthew. They're present at the cross, they're present at the burial and they're present on the morning of resurrection.

They are the heart of the faithful community. While we can often focus upon the male apostles as the appointed leaders and guardians of the people of Christ. Christ himself wants us to attend to the women and the children at the heart of the community of faith.

As models of faith. And here we see them singled out once more as figures to pay attention to. The chief priests who were largely Sadducees and the Pharisees both joined together to ask Pilate to set a guard at the tomb and to seal it.

And it seems that having Jesus as a common enemy makes unlikely friends. The opposing sects of the Sadducees and the Pharisees and the Roman governor Pilate are all united in this. Also the guard on the tomb makes clear that the prophecy that Jesus would rise again on the third day was widely known even before Easter morning.

They knew that Jesus had said that he would rise again on the third day. This is not something that was said later on and placed back into the story. There was a guard present at the tomb because the resurrection was foretold by Christ right down to the day on which it would occur.

Furthermore the presence of a guard upon the tomb, which is a strange thing indeed to have a guard at a tomb to prevent its occupant from breaking out, also makes us think of the tomb as a prison and the resurrection as a great prison break. Christ is the one who's trapped in the bonds of death. And we'll see a number of stories of prison breaks in the book of Acts.

Stories that often take the resurrection as their pattern. Acts chapter 12 being a good example of that where Peter is delivered from prison by an angel of the Lord and then appears in a sort of resurrection appearance to the disciples. And appearing first to a woman who is not believed by the disciples but then appearing to them all.

Death and its servants hold Jesus in their custody but they are incapable of holding on to him and he breaks free of their clutches. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, probably Mary the mother of Jesus, come to the tomb on the first day of the week. It's the start of a new week and as we'll see the start of a new creation.

Once again as at the beginning of the gospel there is an appearance of an angel of the Lord and a descent from heaven reminding us both of the appearances of the angel of the Lord to Joseph and of the descent of the spirit in the form of a dove at Jesus' baptism. The description of the angel is also similar to the description of the transfigured Christ. The descent of the angel from heaven, the lightning of his countenance, the earthquake with which he comes are also features that pick up elements of Jesus' description of his coming and the day of his power in the Oribet discourse.

And perhaps we should see this as a foreshadowing of that, that there is a coming of Christ here in his return from the grave. The earthquake also connects with the earthquake described in the previous chapter. The presence of the angel of the Lord here might also invite us to think of the tomb of the risen Christ as the beachhead for heaven's invasion of earth.

The gods, the opposing forces, tremble and collapse like dead men. The angel of the Lord presents the empty tomb as evidence that Christ is no longer there to the women and then sends them to tell the disciples that he has risen from the dead and is going before them to Galilee. And as the women leave the tomb in great fear and joy, they are

met by Jesus himself and they take hold of his feet and they worship him.

Jesus then commissions them to tell his brothers to go to Galilee where they will see him. They are returning to the site where it all began. But as the women are bringing news to the disciples, there's another message being sent to the chief priests by the gods.

As the disciples will later be, the gods are entrusted with a message to spread, a false gospel of the authorities that is opposed to the message of Christ. It's important to consider that the chief priests and the elders have a first-hand report of the resurrection and choose to reject it because they know what it means. They have received a sort of gospel and their first concern is to pervert and undermine the message for the sake of their power and the exchange of money in order to buy the silence and the lies of the gods is also a reflection upon the character of their message and of their power and authority.

They had previously used money to get Judas to betray his lord and now they've used money to buy off their gods, to get them to tell lies. In all of these cases we're seeing something about the corrupting power of money again and the way in which both the love of money destroys the rich and also enables them to corrupt others. This warning about money should be taken very seriously.

The disciples worshipped Jesus in Galilee on a mountain to which they've been directed. Jesus' teaching began on a mountain and now it ends on a mountain. The Great Commission is like the calling of the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1, verse 8-9.

The disciples are being given a prophetic calling to go out into the world as a prophet and to declare the word of the Lord, the risen Christ. It's also like the final verse of the last book of the Old Testament in the typical Jewish ordering. In 2 Chronicles 36, verse 23 we read The Gospel of Matthew began with an allusion to the very beginning of the Old Testament Scriptures, the genesis of Jesus Christ, and to the story of Abraham, to the story of Joseph, and now it ends at the very end of the Old Testament story.

The Gospel of Matthew has been throughout telling the entire story of the Old Testament through, with Jesus fulfilling each step of it, from the dawn of creation to the return from exile. If Jesus on the cross was ruined Jerusalem, the Great Commission is the return from exile and the rebuilding of the Temple. Jesus is worshipped by the eleven here.

The eleven bow down to him. In this sense Jesus is a new Joseph. He's one delivered from the pit, the one who comes out of prison.

He's raised up to authority and his brothers bow down to him. Note that Jesus refers to them as his brothers in verse 10. He's the one that gives bread to the nations.

He's the dead brother betrayed to the Gentiles by a new Judah who has come back after they have forsaken him. We might also think of Deuteronomy chapter 31 verse 23. And

the Lord commissioned Joshua the son of Nun and said, Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the people of Israel into the land that I swore to give them.

I will be with you. The Great Commission comes at the beginning of a new conquest narrative. Not the conquest of the land, but the conquest of all the nations.

They are being sent out to speak to every one of the nations. Perhaps we might also see some connections with the original commission given to mankind, the Dominion Commission. Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it and exercise dominion over all its creatures.

This is a similar message of universal extent to go out into the world to baptise and to teach and to prepare people to be disciples of all the nations. This is a universal commission like the original commission given to humankind. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ.

All nations must be made disciples of. All that Christ has commanded must be taught and observed. Christ will be with them at all times.

Christ is the Lord of all. Every single part of the world comes under the rule of this new emperor, this new king of kings. As they make disciples, they are to baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

In baptism the name of the triune God is placed upon us. And notice the name. It's a unified name that is shared by Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

There's an identification and a unity of the triune persons. Here we see that Jesus is more than just a great teacher or a moral example or some other great deliverer. He's something more than that.

He's one who possesses all authority on heaven and on earth. An authority that only belongs to God. He calls them to baptise in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Placing himself in the midst of the Father and the Spirit as one to be worshipped and glorified. He is worshipped by his disciples at the beginning here just as he was worshipped earlier by the women. He declares that he will be with his disciples always to the end of the age.

He is the Alpha and the Omega. He's the one who never comes to an end. He is the one who's always present with his people.

He's the one that is not subject to the limitations of time and space as we are. And as the story of Matthew's Gospel comes to its close, it invites us, the reader, to join in this worship. To share with the disciples in this response to the risen Christ.

And in sharing that response, to be sent out with them in that great commission. A question to consider. At the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew we are told that Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us.

And this theme of God being with us in Jesus Christ returns at the very close of the Gospel. How can this key theme illumine the Gospel more generally?