

**The Four Great Arrows of the Resurrection**<sup>1</sup>

Matthew 28:16-20

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We've just come through the Easter season. How would you describe this past Easter for yourself, if you could only use punctuation marks like, a comma, a period, a question mark or an exclamation mark. Joe Lamusio,<sup>2</sup> in his book "If I should die before I live," writes about how some might experience Easter as a comma. It makes you stop, pause, think and listen. But that's all it does for you. Nothing changes. Others might view Easter as a big bold period. That is you thought you'd feel excited about it, but Easter felt empty. Some might view it as a question mark. You're not sure about Easter or where you stand with Christ. Still others might have experienced this past Easter as an exclamation point. You experienced renewal and excitement as you once again enjoyed and embraced the gift of the cross and resurrection.

LoMusio then points out how the disciples moved through the punctuation marks that Easter weekend. When Jesus died on the cross, on Good Friday, Easter became a period for them. Everything they dreamed and hoped for appeared to come to a dead stop. They spent the rest of Friday and Saturday bewildered and grieving at the sudden end of what they thought was their life purpose. But then came Sunday and the period changed to a question mark. They heard the women speak of seeing Jesus' alive. Some of them went into the empty tomb. Later that day, the question mark became an exclamation point. They encountered the risen Christ!

But the exclamation point of Easter wasn't the end of the story. Jesus told them to go to Galilee and they would see Him there. And in these concluding verses of the Gospel of Matthew, we see Jesus send the disciples on their way with what is now famously known as the Great Commission.

Today, we're not going to talk about the punctuation marks as we are going through these final verses of the resurrection but the four different arrows from the resurrection on the back of your

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<sup>1</sup> This idea comes from Douglas Sean O'Donnell; 89 – Immanuel's Mission, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*; Preaching the Word Series, Edited by R. Kent Hughes, (Wheaton, Illinois, Crossway, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Joe LoMusio, *If I Should Die Before I Live* (Chino, CA: R. C Law & Co., 1989).

bulletin. For believers or Christians here today, I pray that God will use these arrows to move you towards maybe an exclamation point response to Jesus' resurrection or maybe this will move you beyond a period if stalled in your Christian life. If you're not a Christian, I pray God will work in our time together to perhaps answer some of your questions and reveal more about Himself to you.

### **Matthew 28:16-20 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup>Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup>And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. <sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>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, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The first great arrow of Jesus' resurrection is the **INWARD** arrow pointing into our hearts. **Jesus' resurrection points inward to our hearts calling for worshipful allegiance to Christ.** This comes from verses 16-17. They talk about the disciple's heart response to Jesus. There is so much heart and emotion in these verses. Notice that for the first time, Matthew calls the disciples "the 11." 11 is a pretty odd number. It's not a number of perfection. It doesn't divide evenly and neatly in an egg carton. It can indicate incompleteness. Judas, the missing number 12, is dead not because of an accident but because of his betrayal. He allowed his heart to be swayed by something other than Christ – maybe money; maybe disappointment; maybe political maneuvering. But he's gone. The 11 travel maybe with a little heaviness in their hearts about their lost brother.

They go back to Galilee, the central region for Jesus public ministry. Way back in Matthew 4, Jesus begins his ministry in Capernaum by the sea in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali. These were two northern tribes of Israel that made up the region of Galilee. It was there that the prophet prophesied that the people walking in darkness would see a great light and for those dwelling in this region and the shadow of death, on them a light had dawned." Galilee bordered Gentile lands. It was not like the

mostly Jewish Jerusalem. So it was a place from which the light of the world could actually reach people from all nations.

We don't know the specific mountain they went to. But when they arrive they see Jesus. When they see him they worshipped Him. They are now convinced in their minds that He is in fact divine. He is worthy of worship. Jesus' resurrection points inward to our hearts calling for worshipful allegiance to Him.

But then comes a jolt. "But some doubted." Why would Matthew include such a disturbing phrase in the closing words of His Gospel? It raises all sorts of questions. Who doubted? How many doubted? Was it 2 or 4 or 6 or 9? What did they doubt?

Much has been written about this. Some argue that there were more than the 11 there. Since Jesus had earlier said to the women "tell my brother's to meet me in Galilee" He meant every believer in Jerusalem should meet him there. So the 11 worshipped and others doubted.

But I think that's stretching it. Matthew refers to the 11 who worshipped yet some doubted. Is it possible to worship the resurrected Christ and still doubt? Well, look at your own worship of the Lord. Might there be times you have worshipped Him corporately or on your own and you've still had doubts about Him or a situation or the way you thought He'd respond?

Several good possibilities have been put forward as to the nature of their doubts. Maybe they doubted Jesus would really forgive them for their recent disloyalty. Maybe they were unsure how to behave in the presence of a supernaturally manifested exalted holy being. Maybe they were uncertain about the appropriateness of worshipping, Jesus, a man. They have been raised their entire lives to worship the one true God. Now they worship a man who is somehow also God. These seem to be pretty good grounds for doubt of some sort.

But commentators also point out that the word used for doubt is not the doubt of unbelief. It is the doubt of hesitation, indecision or uncertainty. So it's not that they had doubts about Jesus' identity or

doubts about the fact that He was resurrected. They seemed to be uncertain or hesitant about how to respond to Him. Matthew does not give us anymore clarity to this situation. Nor does he resolve it for us. He leaves it there maybe to emphasize that the walk with Jesus involves worship and faith. There are times we don't get everything that's happening. There are times when Jesus responds differently than we expect. Yet, we continue to grow in trusting Him and turning to Him. This fluctuation between worship and indecision is part of every worshipper's experience. Yet that's the power of Jesus' resurrection. It points inward into our lives because it speaks to the ongoing transformation of those who have become disciples of Jesus.

But from there, Jesus' resurrection points **UPWARD**. **The resurrection points upward to Jesus' universal power/authority**. Notice Jesus' merciful and compassionate help for His disciples in verse 18. Jesus came to them. There was some sort of separation between them. But He bridges the gap. He draws near to them in their uncertainty. Then he declares something that might have taken their breath away. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." The resurrection points upward to Jesus' universal power and authority. Jesus is the supreme Lord over the universe. His words remind us of Daniel 7:13-14 in the Old Testament. I believe Daniel was given a vision of the moment Jesus arrived in heaven after He died on the cross. Daniel writes "I saw in the night visions, and behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man." (Jesus used this title of Himself throughout His ministry). And he came to the Ancient of Days (God the Father) and was presented before him. And to him (the Son of Man) was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

Now Jesus reveals to the disciples that Daniel 7:13-14 has happened. Jesus is given all authority in heaven. He is over all the angels and the millions of servants of God. He has all authority over those spiritual beings in rebellion against Him like the devil, demons and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly

realms. But He also has been given authority over all on earth. He has authority over The Media; The Prime Minister; The Premier; Vladimir Putin; the Dictator in North Korea; Donald Trump; The Internet; the US military; Wall Street; the world economy; ISIS; Life and death; the end of history although somehow He doesn't know the date. He has all authority over our society with its changing morality and further abandonment of God. Rejection of Christ does not diminish His authority. We simply see a widespread rebellion against authority.

Throughout this Gospel, Matthew has talked about Jesus' authority and has been preparing us for this. In 7:29, at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew writes "for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes." Jesus demonstrated His authority over nature by calming the winds and waves during a storm. He displayed His authority over disease by healing many. He demonstrates His authority over demons by casting them out of people and commanding where they could go. He cleared out the temple by His own authority but wouldn't tell the chief priests and elders where he got it because he exposed of those in authority. Now Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth.

When we think and ponder and soak in that truth for a while, our doubts can begin to lessen. When we realize that Jesus has authority over the situation we're in or the disease we face or the difficult person in our life, we can experience more peace and less doubt. When we turn away from our doubts and turn upward to the risen and exalted Lord, our focus changes.

This leads us to the third arrow pointed to by the resurrection. **OUTWARD.** Verse 19 – Therefore, in view of the fact that I've been given all authority in heaven and on earth, Go. People all over the world need to hear the Good News and become disciples of Jesus. Their souls depend on it. So go out of your holy huddle and look around to the people who He places in your path. **The resurrection points outward for us to make disciples of all nations**

Make disciples. Not just make converts. Conversion is the first step of discipleship. Coming to Christ is a necessity before we grow in Christ. But we don't stop at evangelism. When a person comes to Christ, their journey with Him has just begun. So Jesus commands us to make disciples.

Of whom? All nations. Not all nation states divided up by borders on a map. But of all people groups throughout the world. This includes people from every continent. I think we have people from almost every continent in the world here today. How many of you were born in North and Central America? How about South America? How about Europe? How about Africa? What about Asia? Any from Australia? Is anyone from Antarctica? But look at how God has brought disciples from all nations' right in our church family.

But how do we make disciples? By baptizing them. That's the next step after a person becomes a Christian. An unbaptized Christian was a totally foreign concept in the New Testament. So if you are a Christian and have not been baptized, why is that? What is holding you back from this important step in your discipleship?

When we baptize, Jesus commands us to do it in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Notice, it is not the names of the Father, Son and Spirit. Somehow, the unity and diversity of the Trinity are contained within this one phrase. So when someone is baptized into this name, it means they are brought into an existence that is ruled by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But baptism is only the initiation ceremony. We grow as disciples and make disciples by teaching them to obey all that Jesus' commanded. Jesus transfers His teaching ministry to the disciples. They have transferred that to us. We are to teach what Jesus commanded and then obey it. Matthew has given us 5 long sections of Jesus' teaching. But it's not only Jesus teaching we learn from. His life and the way He interacted with people teaches us. His suffering, crucifixion and death teach us about our own spiritual journey. So we need to teach and practice all that Jesus taught and lived out.

Notice what happens to disabling doubt? We move from our inward doubts to an upward look at Jesus with all authority in heaven and on earth. From there we move outward to both grow as Disciples of Christ and disciple others. Then we're not thinking as much about our doubts anymore. We're invested in His mission while He works on our doubts.

Yet, it's not easy. The great commission is a very difficult and high calling. So the final arrow helps us in persevering. **The resurrection points DOWNWARD to us on Earth.** Verse 20: "And surely I am with you always, to the end of the age." Jesus promises to be spiritually present with us at all times until He returns. He is present through our doubts and in our worship of Him. He is present as we go out and make disciples. He is present at baptism and teaching to obey. He promises to be with us.

The resurrection points downward from heaven to Jesus' constant presence with us on earth. Jesus is with us. Does that remind you of anything from the beginning of this Gospel? Remember when the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in Matthew 1. He tells Joseph to take Mary as his wife even though she is with child because that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. Then Matthew writes "All this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet: "Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which means God with us." That baby grew up and said "Surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Jesus' resurrection points **inward** to our hearts calling for worship allegiance.

It points **upward** to the universal reign and Lordship of Christ.

It points **outward** calling us to go out and make disciples.

It points **downward** from heaven with the assurance of Jesus with us

One commentator writes - Only the ongoing reality of these facts can continue to equip the church for its mission—a mission that will continue until the end of the age. The great commission like the whole Gospel is one of the priceless treasures of the church, providing comfort, strength, and hope until the final dawning of the end.

How does this effect you my friends, brothers and sisters? Will it change your punctuation mark towards Christ? What is Jesus calling of you and from you as the next step in your discipleship? Is He calling you to Himself for the very first time? Has He opened your eyes to the truth of His identity? Now He calls you to believe and give your life to Him? Christian – is Jesus' calling you to go ahead with baptism; to grow in knowing His teaching? Or maybe you know His teaching but you're struggling to obey it. Is He calling you to confess that wrong you've been doing and start doing right by His power? Or maybe He's calling you to go overseas or across the street to spread the good news of Christ. Will you say yes and go? What about us as a church? What does this reminder of the Great commission call forth from us now as we seek to discern next steps for this body? Elders, Deacons, Staff, Congregation – what do you sense Jesus is calling from us in the days ahead? May we say yes to whatever and however He calls.