

28:1 *After the Sabbath*- AV "In the end of the Sabbath". This could be another hint that the ordinances of Judaism had now come to an end with the Lord's death; the Sabbath was now "past" (Mk. 16:1).

*Toward the dawn of the first day*- AV "as it began to dawn toward the first day". The language hints very much at a new creation beginning. And yet it began in darkness, not only literally, but also in the darkness of the disciples' disappointment, misunderstanding and weak faith. From all this, great light was to arise.

*The other Mary*- The Lord's mother. Inevitably there would have been jealousy between the two Marys, not least because Mary Magdalene apparently saw the Lord first and appears to have been closer to Him than His own other. This is perhaps reflected in the other records focusing on Mary Magdalene going to the tomb as if she went alone.

*To see the tomb*- The same word has just been used about the same women 'beholding' the crucified Christ (27:55). The impression presented [as so often] is that the Lord's followers fiercely and deeply loved Him, but with such little understanding. And perhaps that is the abiding impression we are left with of the body of Christ, despite all our strife over 'understanding correctly'.

28:2 *Great earthquake*- Two earthquakes happened, three days apart (27:54). A "great earthquake" is associated with the Lord's return (24:7; Rev. 6:12; 11:19; 16:18). And there is plenty of other language used about the second coming which also occurs here in the record of the Lord's resurrection. A descent from Heaven, an Angel [Angels will come with the Lord at His second coming], lightning, glistening white clothing, fear and great joy- this is all the language of the second coming and the resurrection from the dead. The connection is clearly because the Lord's resurrection is to be understood as the basis for the resurrection of all in Him- see on 27:52,53. The women went to the tomb in the immediate aftermath of a great earthquake; or perhaps it happened whilst they were on their way there. Their love of their Lord, purely as love for Him as a person, as they had little firm expectation of a resurrection, is amazing. The earthquake didn't faze them.

*Rolled away the stone*- The Angel descended and did this before the women arrived; for on the way, they had worried about how they would roll the stone away, but when they got there, they found it done already (Mk. 16:2,4). Women unable to roll away a stone recalls the scene when Rachel and her girls were unable to roll the stone away from the well until Jacob did it (Gen. 29:3,10). The idea would therefore be that the Lord's tomb was in fact a well of living water which would flow for God's people after and on account of His resurrection; and this idea is

elsewhere stated specifically by the Lord in John's Gospel.

*28:3 His appearance was as lightning and his garment white as snow-* This is the language used elsewhere about the Lord Jesus, especially at the transfiguration and later in Revelation. The similarities were intentional. The women were being shown that the Lord's representative Angel [perhaps Gabriel] was visible and active, and this was to encourage them to believe that He Himself was now alive.

*As lightning-* Of course Mary was scared. But note the contrast with the soldiers guarding the tomb. They were *so* scared by the sight of the Angel that they lost consciousness (Mt. 28:4). The women saw the same Angel, were scared, but not to the same extent. They looked at His face- for it was presumably they who told Matthew what the Angel's face looked like: "As lightning, and his raiment white as snow". Their love for their Lord, their searching for Him, the very deep, unarticulated, vague hope they had in Him... drove away the worst part of their fear, whereas the unbelieving soldiers simply passed out from fright. Indeed, it appears that Mary was so distracted by the deep grief that only comes from love, that she perhaps didn't even notice the Angel's glory, or at least, didn't pay too much attention to the two Angels sitting where the head and feet of the Lord had been. They ask her why she's crying, and she simply turns away from them, muttering 'Because they've taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they've put Him'. That was how deep her grief and distraction was; for that was how deeply she loved Him. Again and again one salutes the decision of the Father, in choosing Mary to be the first one of us to see His risen Son.

*28:4 The guards trembled-* They shook along with the earth, which shook at the earthquake. Their association with the earth is therefore made apparent.

*Became like dead men-* The women came to the tomb, therefore, to find the stone moved away, the Angel sitting upon it, and the soldiers laying on the ground like corpses. The women had come expecting to find the dead body of Jesus, slain as He had been by Roman soldiers. Instead they find the situation reversed; the soldiers are lying there dead, as corpses [*nekros*], and an Angel who is clearly representative of Jesus tells them that He has risen from the dead.

*28:5 The angel said-* AV "Answered and said". The fear of the women was not verbalized, but the Angel responded to it, just as God often responds to our unexpressed fears.

*Do not be fearful-* The idea is 'You do not need to be fearful, unlike these soldiers who are paralyzed by their own fears'. Their weakness is still apparent in the record, because :8 says that they left the scene "with fear...".

*I know you seek Jesus-* The women had come to anoint the Lord's dead body, with apparently no expectation that He would indeed rise the third day as He had predicted. And yet the Angel

generously counts this to them ('I know / perceive / accept / count it') as if they were actively looking for Jesus. Their obvious error- that they assumed Him to still be dead- is not rebuked because the good news is simply so much greater. The resurrection records are full of such imputed righteousness. Lk. 24:5 enquires why they are 'seeking the living amongst the dead'. They were not seeking the living- they had come to anoint a dead body. Yet they are graciously counted as seeking Jesus as if they were seeking for a living person. John's record has the Lord asking Mary *whom* she is 'seeking', and this is how John's Gospel opens, with the Lord enquiring of His followers *whom* they were seeking (Jn. 1:38; 20:15). This question as to the Lord's identity echoes down to us, for we too can feel a devotion and identity with the idea of 'Jesus' without perceiving that He really is alive and active. The Lord counted righteousness to them, they are commended by the Angels for 'seeking the Lord'- even though that seeking was deep in their subconscious. Yet the record notices that even incipient faith and understanding in those women, and counts it to them. Would that we would be so generous in our perception of others. The weeping, helpless standing afar off at the cross are described as still following the Lord Jesus and ministering to Him, as they did in the happier Galilee days (Mk. 15:41). Their essential spirit was understood and credited to them, even though their actions seemed to belie this. Likewise our essential desires are read as our prayers, even if the words we use seem quite different.

Mk. 16:6 adds: "Jesus of Nazareth", as if emphasizing the Lord's humanity and death as compared to the wonderful reality of His resurrection.

28:6 *Not here*- The idea may be 'Not here in a tomb, in a place for the dead', in the spirit of Lk. 24:5 "Why do you seek the living amongst the dead?".

*Come see the place where the Lord lay*- There is no hint that the women obeyed. They had arrived at the tomb and had gone in and found the body missing (Lk. 24:3,23), and then the Angel[s] appeared to them. Now the Angels are inviting them to go into the tomb again and behold the place where the Lord's body had lain- perhaps because now there were Angels sitting at the head and feet of where the Lord's body had lain (Jn. 20:12). Along with imputed faith and righteousness, the disobedience of the disciples is also emphasized by the records. They struggle to believe His clear predictions of resurrection, are disobedient to the various commands to witness about it, disbelieve the women, and still appear depressed and sceptical that it is really Him when He appears to them for the third time in Galilee. Or it could be that they did go and see the place where the Lord lay, and yet found the body missing and were confused (Lk. 24:3,23)- even with an Angel standing there telling them the Lord had risen as He had said!

28:7 *Go quickly and tell His disciples*- The urgency required was partly because the wonder of

the good news does itself impart an urgency to our presentation of it. And we need to analyze our own approach to witness and discern whether there is any sense of urgency to it; the record of baptisms in the early church was of immediate baptism, the very moment the person had believed, rather than waiting as many do today until a convenient time and place. But the urgency was also to tell the disciples before they totally lost their faith. The Lord was clearly concerned that they would lose faith entirely; and this explains His change of plans concerning revealing Himself to them in Galilee.

*He goes ahead of you into Galilee. There you shall see Him-* This addresses their obvious although unspoken question: 'Where's the body? When can we see Him?'. The answer was 'As He explained before, you must show your obedience to Him by going into Galilee and there you will see Him'. But this plan, explained by the Lord earlier and now repeated by the Angel, was cut short by the Lord Himself. For right after this, He appears to Mary and the women. Right there, and not in Galilee. And soon afterwards He appears to the eleven in Jerusalem; and when He does finally meet the disciples in Galilee, this was the third appearance He had made to them, the earlier two having been in Jerusalem (Jn. 21:14). This change of plan was perhaps partly quite simply from the excitement of love, emotions which are still possible even within Divine nature. But partly it may have been because of the very weak state of the disciples' faith, and the Lord's sense that He must act urgently so that they did not lose faith permanently; see on *Go quickly and tell...* The idea of the Lord going before them into Galilee is based upon the Lord's teaching in 26:31,32: "I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you into Galilee". The 'going ahead' is also a sheep and shepherd allusion; although the sheep would be scattered, the Lord would go ahead of them into Galilee and like sheep obedient to the shepherd's voice, they would follow Him there. But perhaps the Lord now realized that their faith and obedience was just not enough for them to do that, and so He appeared to them anyway. Indeed, according to John, the disciples appeared to have finally returned to Galilee in order to return to their fishing business, despite having met the risen Lord in Jerusalem. They were very slow to really grasp the reality of His resurrection. The Gospels are their own account of their preaching, and it's as if they are telling the world how slow they had been to believe and were urging the world to do better than them, and to believe more quickly.

*Look, I have told you-* This could be in order to encourage their obedience. But see my suggestions above, that the disciples simply failed to have that level of obedience. Angelic unity with the risen Lord Jesus is brought out by a comparison of the words spoken to the women after the resurrection. Mk. 16:7 has the Angels telling the women: "He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you". But Mt. 28:7 has the Angel saying: "He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I [the Angel] have told you". Perhaps what the Angel said was: "... as he told you... Lo, I have told you", thus bringing out the new unity between the risen Christ and the Angel who now appeared as Him and represented Him.

28:8 *They departed quickly... with fear and great joy*- In apparent obedience to the command to "quickly" tell the disciples (:7). But again the record is imputing righteousness to them, for Mk. 16:7,8 says that they fled in fear and said nothing to anyone: "Go tell His disciples, and Peter, that He goes ahead of you into Galilee. There shall you see Him, just as He told you. And they went out and ran from the tomb. Trembling and astonishment had come upon them, and they said nothing to anyone. For they were afraid". It was only later that they told the disciples, once their fear subsided and joy began to be their dominant emotion. We recall how the shepherds were told not to fear but to focus upon the joy of the Lord's birth (Lk. 2:10). Fear and joy do not remain coexistent for long, and to their credit, the women's joy became greater than their fear. See on :10 *Fear Not*. But putting meaning into words, what were they fearful about? Surely they now realized that they had so failed to believe the Lord's clear words about His resurrection; and they knew now that since He was alive, they must meet Him and explain. So their fear related to their own sense of unworthiness; and yet it was paradoxically mixed with the "great joy" of knowing His resurrection. And there is reason to understand that those women are typical of all those who are to fulfil the great commission.

The accounts of the Lord's resurrection and the imparting of that good news to others are studded with the idea of speedy response. "Go quickly and tell his disciples... and they departed quickly... and did run to bring his disciples word" (Mt. 28:7,8). The accounts show how Mary "quickly" told the disciples, the women did likewise, the two on the way to Emmaus ran back to town and urgently told the others that the Lord had risen... and then the record climaxes in bidding us take that very same good news of the resurrection to the whole world. But the implication from the context is that it is to be done with the same spirit of urgency. We are merely continuing in the spirit of those who first spread that good news.

*Ran to bring His disciples word*- Running and sharing God's word are associated to the point that running is almost a metaphor for preaching. Thus Paul writes of his preaching among the Gentiles as 'running' (Gal. 2:2; 1 Cor. 9:26; Phil. 2:16 s.w. cp. Dan. 12:2). The clearest example would be in 2 Thess. 3:1: "Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly" (s.w.). The running of the women with the fresh news of Christ's resurrection then becomes the pattern for all Christian preaching; we are continuing to run with the message. And the content of the message, 'the word of / about the Lord', is the word that He has risen. We should recall that this very first obedience to the great preaching commission was not met with success- but rather the words were mocked as madness and disbelieved.

28:9 The Lord, straight after His resurrection, repeats verbatim the Angels words to Mary: “Woman, why are you weeping?” (Jn. 20:13,15). Likewise, when He appears to the women in Mt. 28:9,10, He repeats the Angel’s words of Mt. 28:5,7. This indicates the unity which He felt with them especially after His resurrection.

*Held Him by the feet-* Is this to be connected with how Mt. 18:29 describes casting oneself down at another’s feet implying a desperate request for mercy? Or at least, a desperate request (Mk. 5:22; 7:25; Lk. 8:41), as Mary had made herself earlier (Jn. 11:32). Their experience of the death and resurrection of the Lord elicited within them a sense of their unworthiness. Or was it simply because they feared He would disappear, as in Jn. 20:17?

28:9 *Jesus met them-* Having changed His plan of meeting the women in Galilee, see on :7 *He goes ahead of you into Galilee.*

*Greetings!-* This is otherwise translated "Joy" or "Rejoice!". The last two times the Lord had heard it, it had been addressed to Him sarcastically by His abusers (26:49; 27:29). But it is the word also used of how the shepherd 'rejoices' on finding the lost sheep (18:13). This perhaps was the sense of the Lord's joy upon meeting them; the whole process of death and resurrection had been in order to seek and find the disciples. And surely the Lord was consciously aware of His prediction of Jn. 16:22: "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice" [s.w. "greetings!"]. But again it was as if He had to get them to rejoice, rather than them doing so on their own initiative; their weakness is so emphasized.

*And they came-* The Lord appeared to them from a slight distance and did not go up to them and initiate physical contact. Rather did He announce Himself and leave them to come to Him.

*Worshipped-* The same Greek words for falling down at the feet and worshipping are used about how Cornelius worshipped Peter (Acts 10:25) and how the believers at Philadelphia will be worshipped (Rev. 3:9). Trinitarians therefore display their Biblical ignorance and paucity of Biblical scholarship by making any claim that the fact Jesus was worshipped by the feet therefore means He was God. That is simply not the case.

28:10 *Fear not-* See on 28:8 *They departed quickly.* Their fear was wrong, the Angel had urged them not to fear, and yet they still feared.

*Go tell My brothers-* Mk. 16:7,8 says that initially their fear was so great that they were resolved not to tell anyone anything, i.e. to be disobedient to the commission to tell their brethren the good news. And so the Lord Himself intervenes to urge them to go tell their brethren. Note how

the Lord uses the term "My brothers". He was anxious to demonstrate that His resurrected, glorified status did not mean that His human brethren were not His brethren any longer; just as in Jn. 21 He addresses the disciples with a slang word, 'guys' [AV "children", *paidos*], to emphasize His humanity, urging them that His God and Father is theirs (Jn. 20:17,18). We note that it was fear which held them back from obeying the commission to preach, and it is fear which likewise stymies so much of our obedience to the great commission. Fear of consequence, of what others may think of us, of our own unworthiness, fear that we may have misunderstood... all these fears are what stop obedience to the clear, simple command to take the good news directly and personally to others.

*Go to Galilee and there they shall see Me-* The initial plan had been that the women also would need to go to Galilee before meeting the Lord (:7). The Lord changed that plan and appeared to the women immediately; but His plan was still that He would reveal Himself to His male disciples for the first time in Galilee. But He soon changed that plan too, for the other records make it clear that the Lord twice appeared to them in Jerusalem (Jn. 21:14).

28:10 Put together the following passages:

- The disciples' return to Galilee after the resurrection was a result of their lack of faith (Jn. 16:31,32)
- But the Lord went before them, as a shepherd goes before His sheep, into Galilee (Mt. 28:7). Even in their weakness of faith, He was still their shepherd, they were still His sheep, and He led them even then.
- The Lord told them to go to Galilee (Mt. 28:10). He accepted their lower level of faith. And He worked through that and led them through it.

The return to Galilee is seen in an even worse light once we reflect on the circumstances surrounding the first calling of the disciples, nearly four years earlier. John's Gospel implies that they were called at Bethany; whereas the other Gospels say they were called whilst fishing at the sea of Galilee. This is usually, and correctly, harmonized by concluding that they were called as John says in Bethany, but they then returned to their fishing in Galilee, and the Lord went there to call them again. So returning to their fishing in Galilee had already been shown to them as being a running away from the call of their Lord. And yet still they did it. And yet John's inspired record is so positive; he speaks as if the disciples were called at Bethany and unwaveringly responded immediately. The point that they actually lost their intensity and returned home is gently omitted from specific mention.

Mary Magdalene is always noted first in the appearance lists in the gospels. It is unusual that the first appearance would involve women as in that culture their role as witnesses would not be well accepted. It is a sign of the veracity of the account, because if an ancient were to create such a story he would never have it start with women. But inspiration disregards this. The Lord so wanted those women to be His leading witnesses. Joachim Jeremias quotes extensively from

Jewish sources to show that “a woman had no right to bear witness, because it was concluded from Gen. 18:15 that she was a liar”. And Josephus (*Antiquities Of The Jews* 4.219) concurs: “Let not the testimony of women be admitted because of the levity and boldness of their sex”. And so it should not surprise us that He chooses today the most unlikely of witnesses, indeed, those who somehow shock and arrest the attention of others.

28:10 *Go tell My brothers*- This is quoting from the LXX of Ps. 22:23, where in the context of predicting the Lord’s death and resurrection, we read that therefore “I will tell of Your name to my brothers”. The “I” is clearly Jesus Himself; and yet, as we have elsewhere shown at length, when His people preach in His Name, this is effectively Him preaching. And so the first preacher of the Lord was to be those women. They were to tell His brethren the good news of His resurrection, or, as Ps. 22 puts it, to declare the Name of Yahweh to them. For His resurrection was the declaration and glorification of that Name to the full. Thus Acts 4:10-12 definitely connect the Lord’s resurrection and the declaration of the Name. The “things concerning the name of Jesus Christ” would have been those things which concern His death and resurrection. “I will *declare* thy name unto my brethren” (Heb. 2:12) uses the same Greek words as in Mt. 28:10, where Mary is told to go tell her brethren of the resurrection. Rom. 15:8,9 speaks of how it is the Lord Jesus personally who was to fulfil those words through His death, which confirmed the promises of God: “Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for *his* mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name”. And yet these words are applied by the Lord to Mary! She was to be Him, in the fulfilment of the great commission to tell the world.

The women were told by the risen Lord to “tell My brethren...”. In Acts 12:17 the same Greek words are used by Peter: “Go show these things... to the brethren”. Peter felt that his deliverance from prison was like the Lord’s resurrection, and perhaps consciously he used the Lord’s words to Mary Magdalene. Peter then went “to another place” just as the Lord did on saying those words. He saw that his life was a living out of fellowship with the Lord’s mortal experiences, every bit as much as our lives are too. The same words occur also in 1 Jn. 1:2,3: “That which we have seen and heard [the teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus] declare we unto you”, our brethren. It’s as if John is acknowledging that the Lord’s commission to Mary was in fact binding upon us all; for we are represented by her.

28:11 *While they were going*- The impression is given of two parallel groups of people running back to Jerusalem from the Lord's grave. Both were fearful, both carried the news that the tomb was now empty. The one group went to tell the disciples, the other group went to the chief

priests; both groups of messengers were full of an urgent need to tell what had happened. One group were women, the other were men. The suggestion may be that they all carried the same message- Angels had appeared, the body was not there any more, the grave was now open. Something Divine, supernatural and unstoppable by men had happened. See on 28:15 *Did as they were told*.

28:12 *When they were assembled*- Again, as with every stage of the whole process, the Jews tried to take comfort in numbers, always meeting together in a vain attempt to spread the responsibility.

*Taken counsel*- Matthew especially notes this feature of the Lord's Jewish enemies (12:14; 22:15; 27:1,7- all using the same Greek word).

*Gave large money*- Circumstances repeat under the hand of Providence, but wicked men never learn. They had given money to Judas but he had made a huge mess of it- in that he had not provided the incontrovertible legal evidence they had hoped for, the Lord's trial had been an obvious farce, and then he had come out on the Lord's side and killed himself. But they still tried to use money to get around the problem. We note that the Jewish leadership did not seek to discredit the soldiers as liars nor did they produce a corpse and claim it was that of Jesus. Their policy had to take account of the simple fact that the body of Jesus was missing from the tomb, despite the seal, the soldiers, and every effort to ensure that something like this did in fact *not* happen.

28:13 *You are to say that His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we slept*- The desperation of the story is self-apparent; if the soldiers were really asleep then they would not know it was the disciples who had come, nor would they have any explanation as to how the corpse disappeared. Theft, after all, was only one possibility. The story shows every sign of having been thought up too quickly, and then those who wished to believe it were left to justify it for evermore. There was no recorded attempt to arrest or try the disciples for grave breaking or stealing a corpse- a serious offence under Roman law. There should at least have been a semblance of effort to do this if indeed the story were true.

28:14 *And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him*- The same word translated "persuade" in 27:20. They had persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and crucify Jesus, and they thought they could deal with Pilate in the same way. Their power over Pilate was assumed; it is doubtful whether they had that much power over a man who was consistently written into history as a conscienceless man- in every matter apart from that of the Lord Jesus.

28:15 *Did as they were told*- The Greek *didasko* means 'taught' [as AV], and is an unusual word choice here. Perhaps the idea is that they were taught an official explanation which they

memorized and were to trot out each time the issue of the empty tomb was raised. Early Christian converts had to memorize a Gospel record by heart- they were taught [*didasko*] the message of the empty tomb and repeated it. The same word is used just five verses later in :20, where the disciples are commanded to go and teach [*didasko* again] the good news of the empty tomb to the whole world. And the soldiers did the same, spreading the same reality [an empty tomb] but with a different explanation. This connects with the observations made on :11 *While they were going* that there were two groups of people telling the same message- the tomb was empty. But the Gospel preachers were paralleled, as it were, by another group of messengers whose message was identical but freighted with concern that it *not* be believed.

*This story has been spread among the Jews to this day-* This is another allusion to the great commission; see on *Did as they were told*. As the story [Gk. *logos*] of the empty tomb was spread by the soldiers "among the Jews", so was the Christian account of the empty tomb spread "among the Jews to this day". The Greek word for "spread" is only elsewhere used about the spreading of the *fame* of Jesus. This is perhaps an allusion to the spreading of Matthew's Gospel record amongst the Jews right up until the day when it was written down- "this day".

28:16 *The eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go-* This continues the theme of the resurrection accounts imputing righteousness to the disciples. The Lord's intention had been that they went into Galilee *before* they saw Him, in order to test their obedience to their Lord's words. But sensing their weakness of faith, the Lord dramatically changed plans and appeared to them whilst still in Jerusalem; see on :7 *He goes ahead of you into Galilee*. And according to John 21, they returned to Galilee to return to their fishing business, rather than out of obedience to the Lord. The disciples "went [away from Jerusalem] to the mountain [in Galilee]"; this may not mean that they actually went where He told them, but rather that they left Jerusalem in that direction. For the whole plan of meeting in Galilee was abandoned; the Lord appeared to them before then, in Jerusalem. And yet the record here speaks so positively of their obedience.

28:17 *When they saw Him-* His appearance to the disciples in Galilee was the third time He had appeared to them (Jn. 21:14). And even then, they doubted. The disciples were the ones preaching the Gospel records, and truly were they emphasizing their own fallibility and slowness to believe the very message which they urged people to *quickly* believe and accept in instant baptism.

*They worshipped him; but some doubted-* The idea may not be that some believed but others doubted. It may rather be that they worshipped him and yet doubted at the same time. 'Doubted' translates a word essentially implying to be double minded, wavering between the two positions. The Lord was either dead or alive, and amazingly, they still wondered whether His appearances

were tantamount to Him being alive. Even after the resurrection, they *all* saw Him and *all* worshipped Him; but some of them “doubted”. You can worship, see the evidence of the Lord with your own eyes, as Israel daily saw the manna, and yet still doubt. Despite having seen the risen Jesus before, they *still* doubted. We really have to reflect on this and be challenged by the weakness of our natures.

28:18 Mark and Luke suggest the great commission was given in Jerusalem or on the mount of Olives. So this verse 18 may now be talking about the Lord's next appearance to them in Jerusalem. Or it may be that He gave them the commission twice, and this was the first time He gave it to them. If this latter possibility is correct, then we would have the Lord's triple commission to Peter concerning feeding His sheep given at the same time as the great commission. This commission to Peter was therefore part of the commission to go and make disciples of all the world; with Peter taking special responsibility for the pastoral care of the converts.

*All power*- The Lord's promised presence with His preachers is capable of being backed up by "all power". The assurance is that insofar as we give our lives to follow the great commission, all power will be potentially available to us in order to help us achieve that work. This is the force of the "therefore" in :19; because the Lord has all power, we are therefore to go and teach all nations.

28:18 *All power*- It is commonly thought that even the Lord Jesus doesn't know the time of his return, only the Father does. During his mortality, the Lord said exactly this (Mk. 13:32)- at the time he was speaking to the disciples, he himself didn't know. But after his resurrection and glorification, the Lord made two statements to the disciples which he surely intended to be connected: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth... it is not for you (the inquisitive eleven standing on Olivet) to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Mt. 28:18; Acts 1:7,8). But *all* the Father's power has been given to His glorified Son, and this therefore includes knowledge of the "times and seasons" of the second coming. In the exalted Lord "are hid all the riches of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3); it is thereby inconceivable that the Father would still keep back some knowledge from the Son. The point of all this is that when the Lord Jesus said that "of that day and that hour knoweth (present tense) no man, no, not the angels... neither the Son" He was not laying down a general principle for all time. He was speaking of the situation at that time: 'You can't know now, indeed at the moment even I don't know; but these are the signs which will tell the believers when I'll come'. By implication He was saying 'You can't understand them, although I'm giving them to you, but in the future some will understand them, because these signs will accurately pinpoint my return'. This was exactly the spirit of what the Angel told Daniel when he too wished to know when

Messiah would come in glory; he was basically told 'It's not for you to understand, but in the last days understanding of these things will be increased among God's people; they will know the time, but you can't'.

The Lord gave a reason for His great preaching commission: "Go ye *therefore*". "*Therefore*". Because of what? Mt. 28:18 provides the answer: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye *therefore*". Because of this, we must spread the Gospel of Christ to the whole planet, because His authority is over the whole earth. He has that power just as much now as He did in the first century; and *therefore* the command to spread the Gospel world-wide still stands today. Indeed, His words here in Mt. 28 have evident reference to Dan. 7:14, where the Son of Man is given authority and power over all *so that* people of all nations, races and languages should serve Him. We must remind ourselves that out of the 5,000 or so languages in the world, only about half of them have the Bible in their own language. Peter preached in and about the name of Jesus- this is emphasized (Acts 2:31,38; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,17,18,30; 5:28,40,41; 10:43). The excellence of knowing Him and His character and the wonder of the exalted Name given on His ascension (Phil. 2:9; Rev. 3:12) lead Peter to witness. Because of His exaltation, we confess Jesus as Lord to men, as we later will to God at judgment (Phil. 2:9). According as we confess Him before men, so our judgment will reflect this. Lifting up Jesus as Lord is to be the basis of giving a witness to every man of the hope that lies within us (1 Pet. 3:15 RSV). The knowledge and experience of His exaltation can only be witnessed to; it can't be kept quiet. 3 Jn. 7 refers to how the great preaching commission was obeyed: "For his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing (material help) from the Gentiles" (Gentile believers). For the excellence of knowing His Name they went forth in witness, and moreover were generous spirited, not taking material help to enable this. The knowledge of the Name of itself should inspire to active service: for the sake of the Lord's Name the Ephesians laboured (Rev. 2:3). The great preaching commission is therefore not so much a commandment as an inevitable corollary of the Lord's exaltation. We will not be able to sit passively in the knowledge of the universal extent of His authority / power. We will have to spread the knowledge of it to all (note the way 1 Tim. 3:16 alludes to the preaching commission as having already been fulfilled the moment it was uttered, so strong is the imperative). There may be some similarity with the way in which the exaltation of Israel / God's people was so that all men would be witnessed to (Dt. 4:6).

The great preaching commission is therefore not so much a commandment as an inevitable corollary of the Lord's exaltation to having "all power". We will not be able to sit passively in the knowledge of the universal extent of His authority / power. We will have to spread the knowledge of it to all. There may be some similarity with the way in which the exaltation of Israel / God's people was so that all men would be witnessed to (Dt. 4:6). Jehu was exalted from amongst his brethren as was Christ (2 Kings 9:2 = Dt. 18:18; Ps. 45:7) and taken up into a chamber within a chamber (AVmg), cp. Heaven itself. There Jehu was anointed, made Lord and Christ, and then the people placed their garments underneath him (v. 13) and proclaimed him to

the world as King of Israel. This symbolic incident teaches a clear lesson- the exaltation of Jesus should lead us to be witnesses for Him. The wonder and joy of it alone, that one of us, one of our boys, a man like us... should be *so* exalted.

28:18,19 Rev. 14:6 describes the great latter fulfilment of the great preaching commission in terms of an Angel flying in Heaven with the Gospel of the Kingdom to be preached to all nations and languages. Surely the implication is that the latter day preachers of the Gospel are walking on earth in league with an Angelic system above them, empowering and enabling them. An Angel may be given a mission to preach somewhere, and success may be arranged by Him in prospect, but it is for us to put the work into practical effect, without which the converts will not be produced, despite the Angels preparatory work, although of course ultimately this is all foreknown by God Himself. Thus we read in Rev. 14:6 of an Angel being sent "having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth (same word as 'land'- i. e. the land of Israel), and to every nation, kindred and tongue and people "(i. e. the whole world as well). However, this actual work of preaching to the Jews and to the world will be done by the saints; thus they will work out in practice what was achieved by the Angel in God's plan. In this context it is worth considering how the great commission as recorded in Mt. 28:18,19 is set in the context of other references in Matthew to world-wide preaching. We are to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations; and yet it is the Angels who will gather the harvest from "the world" (Mt. 13:38), Angels who will "repay" us for our work at the last day (Mt. 16:27), Angels who gather the elect from "the four winds" (Mt. 24:31) and gather [converts from] "all nations" to judgment (Mt. 25:32). The implication surely is that in our preaching work, the Angels are with us and will gather in the converts which we have made.

28:19 *Go ye*- This evidently connects with the Lord's command in the parable: "*Go ye*" into the highways and "gather together *all*", as many as were found. And this in turn is an extension of an earlier parable, where the net of the Gospel is presented as *gathering* "every kind"- every *genos*, every "kindred / nation / stock / generation", as the word is elsewhere translated (Mt. 28:19; 22:9,10; 13:47). The work of the Gospel described in those earlier parables was now specifically delegated to the Lord's men. Through the work of the Lord's followers over the generations, there would in every nation and generation be some who were gathered in, of as many social classes as one finds walking along a street [highway / byway]. The net of Gospel preaching is filled (*pleroo*), and then pulled to shore for judgment. When the Gospel has been preached in all the world (with response), then the end will come. Elsewhere Paul uses the same word to describe how the Gospel is fulfilled by preaching it (Rom. 15:19; Col. 1:25). To have the Gospel is to have an imperative to preach it.

Matthew's record of the great commission draws on earlier themes and passages in his Gospel. The Lord told His men to go out and make disciples of men (Mt. 28:19 RV). In the immediate context, there are many references to the disciples (Mt. 27:64; 28:7,8,13,16). And the term "disciples" occurs more often (73 times) in Matthew than in any of the other Gospels (e.g. only 37 times in Luke). The Lord is telling His men: 'Go out and make men like you- disciples, stumbling 'learners', not experts'. Thus they were to witness from their own experience, to share this with others, to bring others to share the type of relationship which they had with the Lord. In this sense preaching is seen by Paul as a bringing forth of children in our own image. John likewise was "the beloved disciple", the *agapetos*. And yet this is the very term which he uses in his letters to describes his "beloved children" (1 Jn. 2:1; 4:11). He saw them as sharing the same relationship to his Lord as he had. The nature of our relationship with the Lord will be reflected in that of our converts. He tells His men to go to the lost sheep, and yet in that same context He calls them sheep, in the midst of wolves (Mt. 10:6,16). They were sheep sent to rescue sheep- to plead with men and women as men and women, to witness to humanity through their own humanity. Likewise the Lord spoke of how the extraordinary unity of His men would convince others that "thou didst send me" (Jn. 17:23), having just commented how they had surely believed "that thou didst send me" (:8).

The command to 'make disciples' of all men in Matthew is framed in such a way as to make '...baptising them...' a subordinate clause. Baptism is only part of the work of making disciples. In Mt. 28:19-20 *mathateusate* ("make disciples") is the main verb, while *poreuthentes* ("while going" or "when [you] go"), *baptizontes* ("baptizing"), and *didaskontes* ("teaching") are subsidiary participles. The focus clearly is upon making disciples- all the other things, the teaching, baptizing, our effort in travelling and preaching, are incidental to this main aim. This is why responsibility to those we may convert only begins at baptism; it's a beginning of a man or woman being fashioned into the image of Christ, not the end. This is why Paul often uses the language of preaching about his pastoral efforts with his brethren [e.g. his desire to 'preach the Gospel' to the believers at Rome to whom he was writing]. He sees himself as preaching Christ to them still, in so doing warning them, "that we may present every man perfect" (Col. 1:28). Thus Paul parallels being a minister of the world-wide preaching of the Gospel, and being a minister of the church (Col. 1:23, 25). He saw his continued work amongst his baptized readership as *fully preaching* the word of God (Col. 1:25 AVmg.). So Paul said in Gal. 4:19 "I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you". How do we see our responsibility to those to whom we have preached the gospel? We should continue to nurture and feed them well after the time of their baptism. It seems that this is not a general responsibility which falls on the shoulders of all of us. Rather we have a personal responsibility to those we have begotten through the gospel (1Cor. 4:15).

28:19 *Father... Son... Holy Spirit-* To love God and Christ is to love our neighbour as ourselves. This is because of the intense unity of God's Name. Because our brethren and sisters share God's Name, as we do, we must love them as ourselves, who also bear that same Name. And if we love

the Father, we must love the Son, who bears His Name, with a similar love. The letters of John state this explicitly. If we love God, we *must* love our brother; and if we love the Father, we *must* love the Son. This is why we must honour the Son as we honour the Father (Jn. 5:23); such is the unifying power of God's Name. So the Father, Son and church are inextricably connected. Baptism into the name of Christ is therefore baptism into the Name of the Father, and associates us with the "one Spirit" (Mt. 28:19; Eph. 4:4). In the same way as we cannot choose to live in isolation from the Father and Son, so we cannot separate ourselves from others who bear the same Name. The Scribe well understood all this: "There is one God... and to love him... and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mk. 12:32,33). Those whole offerings represented the whole body of Israel (Lev. 4:7-15). The Scribe understood that those offerings taught that all Israel were unified together on account of their bearing the same Name of Yahweh.

*All nations-* A reference to Gen. 18:18.

The Lord twice told the disciples: "Go ye... go ye" (Mk. 16:15 cp. Mt. 28:19 and contexts). He was encouraging them to do the natural corollary of what they had experienced.

The Lord commissioned us to go into all the world and make disciples of all; but He describes this in other terms as being witnesses of Him to the world (Mt. 28:19; Acts 1:8). Our witness must fundamentally, therefore, be Christ-centred.

*Make disciples-* The aim of our fulfilling the great commission is above all to "make disciples", to get more followers behind Jesus, more learners of Him, a greater bride for Him. Grammatically in Mt. 28:19-20, *mathateusate* ("make disciples") is the main verb, and *poreuthentes* ("while going"), *baptizontes* ("baptizing"), and *didaskontes* ("teaching") are subsidiary participles. In other words, the focus of our work must be upon making disciples for Christ, on thereby bringing about His glory. All the baptizing and teaching which we do is subsidiary to this aim, and they can therefore never be ends in themselves.

The victorious truth that "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" is purposefully juxtaposed against the next clause, which seems to contradict it: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations..." (Mt. 28:18,19). Through teaching and baptizing all nations, the extent of that universal power is made known. But it depends on the freewill obedience of the believers to this commission. The Lord had the Spirit without measure, and yet He "could not" do many miracles in Nazareth because of their unbelief.

If we say that we are *not* commanded to obey the command to go into all nations, then we must also conclude that we are not commanded to baptize people. And if these words about baptism don't apply to us today, then there is no command of the Lord Jesus to be baptized. The connection between the command to preach and the command to baptize is made clearer by the parallel record: "Go ye therefore, and teach (make disciples of, AVmg.) all nations, baptising them... and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Mt. 28:19,20), i.e. Christ will be with us in our preaching right to the ends of the world. The special closeness of the Lord in preaching work has been widely commented upon by preachers. The commission of Mt. 28:19,20 is alluded to in Acts 14:21 AVmg. concerning the work of Paul and Barnabas, neither of whom were among the twelve: "And when they had preached the Gospel to that city, and had made many disciples..." . This in itself disproves the idea that the great commission was intended only for the twelve.

28:20 *Unto the end of the age*- The Lord will support the work of the great preaching commission right up to the end of the age- which means that once the commission is completed, and the whole world has indeed been told the good news of the resurrection, then this age shall finish and the Lord shall return. He said the same very clearly in teaching that once the Gospel goes into all the world, then the end shall come. Matthew clearly saw his own Gospel record, the testament to his life's work, as playing a part in bringing about "the end". The further it could be distributed, the faster the end would come. And that challenge remains with us as with no other generation.

There are some definite links between the Greek text of Matthew's record of the commission, and the LXX of the end of Daniel 12:

**Matthew**

**Daniel 12:13 LXX**

Go ye into all the world (Mt. 28:20)

Go thou thy way

"...then shall the end come" (when the Gospel has been preached to all the world)

till the end

I am with you all the days (28:20)

for still there will be days

Gk.)

unto the end of the world

to the end of the world.

These connections suggest that the great commission to preach worldwide will be powerfully fulfilled in the last days- see on 24:14.

### **Digression 42: The Chronology of the Resurrection of Christ**

Not without some hesitation do I add to the various chronologies that have been worked out. I only do so because some important- in my view- devotional lessons arise from reflection upon what actually happened. And further, there are some simple Biblical facts which I find stubbornly refuse to fit into the existing chronologies which have been suggested:

- Mary Magdalene was the first person to see the risen Jesus (Mk. 16:9)

- Mary Magdalene went to the tomb, didn't find the body of Jesus, went to tell Peter, and then returned to the tomb and saw Jesus (Jn. 21)

Without wishing to expose the further difficulties of other chronologies, here is what I suggest:

#### **The Women**

Bought spices to anoint the body of Jesus (Mk. 16:1)

1. There is an earthquake and the Lord resurrects

2. Mary Magdalene is alerted by the earthquake and goes to the tomb alone "when it was yet dark" (Jn. 20:1), and finds the stone rolled away and the body missing.

#### **Mary Magdalene**

Bought spices to anoint the body of Jesus (Mk. 16:1)

3. The women go to the grave as the day breaks; they find there is no body there (Lk. 24:3)

3. Mary then goes to tell Peter and John (Jn. 20:2)

4. They are confused (Lk. 24:4)

5. Love's intuition leads them to go and have another look in the sepulchre; they then see Angels (Mt. 28:5; Mk. 16:5; Lk. 24:4)

4. Mary, Peter and John rush to the tomb (Jn. 20:3)

6. The Angels tell them that Jesus has risen, and they are told to quickly go away and tell the disciples (Mt. 28:7)

7. They run away, very fearful

Peter and John go into the tomb but see only the empty tomb; they return home (Jn. 20:10)

8. They leave, in obedience to the Angelic command to go and tell others. But they do not, initially, go and tell the disciples; they say nothing to anybody (Mk. 16:8). Presumably they stood or sat down somewhere along the way, overcome with fear.

Mary remains, meets two Angels, and then meets Jesus (Jn. 20:11-17)

9. Jesus meets them (Mt. 28:9)

10. They tell everything to the eleven "and all the rest" (Lk. 24:9)

Mary returns to Jerusalem and tells the apostles what had happened (Lk. 24:10; Jn. 20:18)

The only 'problem' with this chronology of the resurrection is that whilst it satisfactorily solves all the problems which the other chronologies leave outstanding, the resurrection records are introduced by passages which appear to state that all the women, including Mary Magdalene, came to the tomb and had their experiences *together*. I submit that this 'problem' arises because

we are not reading the records with Semitic eyes, nor with consideration as to how God's word records and presents facts and chronologies. The European linear view of time is simply not something which we find in Scripture. We expect to be given a clear timeline, with it made clear as to who did what. In both sciences and the written arts, this is how we Europeans (and our diaspora) have been trained to think, read literature and perceive life. But it's just not there in Scripture. Many of the difficulties Europeans face in interpreting the Biblical record are rooted in this fact. This is why, e.g., the Old Testament prophecies appear to 'jump around all over the place'; one moment they are speaking of events just before the Lord's return, then back to their own contemporary situation, then on to events after His return. And likewise, characters aren't clearly defined and introduced to us at the start of a narrative, in the way that we are accustomed to. The problem is we read in a linear fashion and process in a logical fashion, whereas the inspired authors tend to write in a chiasmic fashion, with the main point in the middle or X / 'chi'. The Gospel records in Matthew, Mark and John each speak as if only certain women were involved- John implies only Mary Magdalene, Matthew speaks of "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary", Mark speaks of Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome. But Luke tells us that "the women" were those "which came with him from Galilee". There's no absolute reason to think that "the women" all had their experience at the same time. Indeed, John's Gospel, written after the other three, appears to be perhaps correcting this impression by explaining in detail the unique experience of Mary Magdalene.

When you read some of the records, it would appear that the risen Lord appeared first to Peter (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5). Indeed, the record in 1 Corinthians 15 doesn't even mention the crucial appearances to the women. The appearances are listed there as firstly to Peter, then to the "twelve" [although there were only eleven- another example of a different use of language], then to 500 brethren, then James, then "the apostles", and finally to Paul (1 Cor. 15:5-8). Quite simply, we have to put all the records together, and realize that each of them gives only an aspect of the historical picture. But we believe that the records don't contradict each other, they were all inspired and are infallible. The structure of the Gospel accounts of the resurrection are similar, in that they all begin with some definition of the women involved, upon whom the writer wishes to place the spotlight. But there is no *ipse facto* reason to think that all the women had the same experiences together, at the same time- even though this is how a Western reader might read the records.

### **Practical Insights**

If the above chronology is in fact correct, we find a number of inspirational insights arising from what happened. Firstly, after a "great earthquake", most people are distraught, frightened, worried, fixated on the immediacy of what's happened, and tend to remain where they are or with others whom they know. But love of the Lord Jesus and an incipient belief and hope, however tiny, in His resurrection, led Mary to do what was counter-instinctive. In the night, in the darkest hours before Dawn, she ran through the rubble of houses and cracked streets to a tomb guarded by aggressive soldiers. This is what love of the Lord Jesus, even when we have

such little understanding of Him, inspires us to do. No wonder she was rewarded with the priceless honour of being the first human being to see the risen Lord. The woman who sought the Lord early, at night, picking her way through the rubble of an earthquake, breaking the Sabbath, casting away all her legalism, the worldview with which she'd grown up... found Him.

Of course she was scared. But note the contrast with the soldiers guarding the tomb. They were *so* scared by the sight of the Angel that they lost consciousness (Mt. 28:4). The women saw the same Angel, were scared, but not to the same extent. They looked at His face- for it was presumably they who told Matthew what the Angel's face looked like: "like lightning, and his raiment white as snow" (Mt. 28:3). Their love for their Lord, their searching for Him, the very deep, unarticulated, vague hope they had in Him... drove away the worst part of their fear, whereas the unbelieving soldiers simply passed out from fright. Indeed, it appears that Mary was so distracted by the deep grief that only comes from love, that she perhaps didn't even notice the Angel's glory, or at least, didn't pay too much attention to the two Angels sitting where the head and feet of the Lord had been. They ask her why she's crying, and she simply turns away from them, muttering 'Because they've taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they've put Him'. That was how deep her grief and distraction was; for that was how deeply she loved Him. Again and again one salutes the decision of the Father, in choosing Mary to be the first one of us to see His risen Son.

Mary comes over as not being anywhere near as fearful as the other women. Not once do we read of fear being her dominant emotion. Instead, we read of her love, her weeping, her eager, desperate clinging hold of the risen Lord. The other women and the disciples are characterized by fear; fear of the Angelic appearance, fear at the appearance of Jesus, fear stifling their sharing the good news with others. And it is fear, in all its multiple forms, which is the very antithesis of faith and love; it is fear which stifles our love for the Lord, the expression of joyful, uninhibited service. Fear of our own unworthiness, fear He may not accept us, fear we might say and do the wrong thing, fear we may look foolish or get ourselves in trouble in the eyes of others... But let Mary be our heroine, an example of how love in its maturity, in its ultimate end, casts out fear. For we, with all our fears, misunderstandings, doubts, uncertainties, confusions... have been given the very same commission to go tell others which those early men and women were. For the great witnessing commission given to us all follows on seamlessly from the command of both Angels and the Lord Himself to those early witnesses of the resurrection to spread the news to others. And it can only be fear that holds us back, locks us up within the complexes which are so easily part of our personhood, and stifles our witness to others.

We've given reasons elsewhere for thinking that Mark's Gospel record was actually the words of Peter transcribed by Mark. Significantly, it is Peter who makes the point that the Lord appeared *first* to Mary (Mk. 16:9). And yet according to Lk. 24:34 and 1 Cor. 15:5, Peter is framed as the first to see the Lord. Yet with characteristic humility, his version of the Gospel makes the point that actually, it was Mary. And he goes straight on in Mk. 16:14 to record how the Lord "upbraided" [a strong Greek word] the male disciples for not believing the women. The Lord

was mad about this. They had failed to believe the women, probably because they were in the first century mindset of not accepting the legal testimony of a woman. And so Peter tries to make that good by pointing out *en passant* that it was actually Mary, not him, who first saw the risen Lord. Like John in his Gospel, Peter is drawing out the supremacy of Mary over himself. And we should likewise respect her. And it is apparent from the chronology presented above that the other women didn't immediately fulfil the commission to go tell others about the Lord's resurrection. They initially don't tell anyone (Mk. 16:8); even though they were told to go and inform others "quickly". Indeed, the above chronology of events means that in order for Mary to have met the Lord alone, the women can't have stayed long at the grave. They went away quickly, but they delayed in telling others what had happened. In contrast, Mary doesn't delay. She goes straight away, according to John's account, and tells the others. And Mary is very convinced as to what she had witnessed; she goes and tells the others that she has actually seen the Lord in person, and that He spoke words to her which she was now telling them (Jn. 20:18). By contrast, the other women spoke in more abstract terms of having seen "a vision of Angels" (Lk. 24:23), rather than saying how they actually met Angels; and likewise the disciples understood the Lord's appearance to them as them having "seen a spirit" (Lk. 24:37). But Mary is far more concrete; she was immediately convinced of the actual, personal, bodily resurrection of the Lord. To 'spiritualize' is so often really an excuse for lack of faith. And so many, from ivory tower theologians to JWs, have fallen into this error. Faith in the end is about concrete, actual things which defy all the 'laws' of our worldviews. And it was this faith which Mary showed.