

14 The death and resurrection of the king (Matthew 27–28)

We've reached the pointy end of Matthew's Gospel where the whole life-giving story of God's reign comes into focus in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Christ.

But first, are there questions from previous chapters we need to address?

14.1 The king is crucified (Matthew 27)

Ever since Peter recognized Jesus as *the Christ*, Jesus has been explaining how he becomes king. No one expected God to deal with evil by shouldering it himself.

What is Jesus worth? (27:1-10)

The tragedy of Judas is the value he placed on Jesus. The chief priests set the price (26:15). For them, *thirty silver coins* was a small price to be rid of the prophetic voice that exposed them as actors (23:13-29), relying on death (23:27-32), leading the city to destruction (23:33-39).

Jesus was the heaven-appointed life-giving leader for the earth. Just as Adam had done, Judas traded Life for something else:



Matthew 27:1-5 (my translation)

¹ As morning arrived, all the chief priests and elders of the people colluded against Jesus to put him to death. ² They bound him, took him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

³ Then Judas—the one who handed him over—saw Jesus was condemned. With deep remorse, he turned the thirty silver coins over to the chief priests and elders ⁴ saying, “I did wrong by handing over an innocent life.”

They said, “Means nothing to us. Your problem.”

⁵ Tossing the coins into the temple, he left. Having gone away, he took his own life.

Whatever faith Judas had in the temple leaders evaporates as he sees them use their power to condemn the prophet who called them out. Even if he no longer believes Jesus is the Christ, Judas knows Jesus doesn't deserve death.

The temple leaders hear Judas' confession. They don't make atonement for him. They leave Judas in his remorse: “Your problem.”

Matthew 27:6-10

⁶ Taking the coins, the chief priests said, “We can't put these in the treasury since it's blood-money.” ⁷ The council used them to buy a field from the potter to bury foreigners. ⁸ That's why the field was called *Field of Blood*, a name it still has.

⁹ That's when the word spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, "They took the **thirty pieces of silver**—the value by which he was valued by Israel's descendants—¹⁰ and exchanged them for the potter's field, just as the Lord decreed."

With the clay removed, a potter's field can't grow anything. A graveyard for foreigners who died far from home—what an apt image for a world that rejected God as sovereign! That is how death entered God's world (Genesis 3:17-19). The *Field of Blood* is managed by those who use death for their ends (23:27-32; 27:1), even though they know death-money doesn't belong in God's house (27:6-7).

How can God let this happen? Didn't God appoint the Christ to free us from the reign of death, to reconnect earth with the source of our life, our Father?

Matthew turns to the prophets for the answer. After God's kingdom fell and they were under foreign rule, Zechariah explained the reason. His people didn't value their heavenly Shepherd, offering God a pittance as severance pay:

Zechariah 11:12-13 (NIV)

¹² I told them, "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it."
So they paid me thirty pieces of silver.

¹³ And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—the handsome price at which they valued me! So I took the **thirty pieces of silver** and **threw them to the potter** at the house of the LORD.

Thirty silver coins was the value of a slave (Exodus 21:32). This "handsome price" was an insult for a king.

The problem wasn't the foreign armies, as if God couldn't shepherd his people. The problem was God's flock devaluing their shepherd. Now the leaders repeat this mistake. They think this is what God's anointed is worth. A disciple agrees. No wonder God's world is sold into slavery, under the powers of evil and death.²³

"Are you king?" (27:11-14)

Pilate's question goes to the heart of the gospel:

Matthew 27:11

Jesus was placed before the governor and the governor questioned him, "You are the **king** of the Jews?"

Jesus responded, "Your words."

Pilate's question goes to the heart of Matthew's message. Matthew introduced us to Jesus as *the anointed, descendant of David* (1:1). This was Peter's dangerous confession (16:16, 21), and the reason his people condemned him to death (26:63).

To underscore the conflict between Jesus' authority and Rome's, Matthew tells us seven times that Pilate is *the governor* (27:2, 11, 14, 15, 21, 27). Claiming kingship would be sedition against Rome. Jesus doesn't. His response is, "You say" (*su lego*).

²³ It's not clear why Matthew refers to Jeremiah (32:8-9?) rather than Zechariah.

Jesus isn't claiming kingship from those who have it. He's waiting for God to give it. All Pilate has is hearsay—a poor basis for a trial. Unless God is revealing something more to Pilate? His wife received something like that (27:19).

Jesus says no more:

Matthew 27:12-14

¹² On the accusations brought against him by the high priests and elders, he said nothing. ¹³ Then Pilate says to him, “Don't you hear how much they testify against you?” ¹⁴ He answered him not a word, so the governor was astounded.

What can we learn from Jesus about the way we do evangelism? Something is happening whenever people ponder the question, *Are you the king of the Jews?*

Which Jesus do you want? (27:15-26)

The governor does not believe Jesus deserves death (verse 23). He tries to pacify the crowd with a prisoner release:

Matthew 27:15-18

¹⁵ It used to be a Feast tradition for the governor to release to the crowd one prisoner they wanted. ¹⁶ Back then, they had a well-known prisoner called **Jesus Barabbas**. ¹⁷ Having pulled the crowd together, Pilate addressed them, “Who do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or the **Jesus** they call **anointed leader**?”

¹⁸ For he'd realized it was through self-interest they handed him over.

Although some ancient manuscripts of Matthew omit this detail, it seems both men were named *Jesus*. It was a relatively common Hebrew name: *Joshua*, meaning *the Lord saves* (1:21).

So, which Jesus did they want?

- *Jesus, son of Abba (Bar-Abbas), or*
- *Jesus, called Christ (anointed leader)?*

The two Jesuses have radically different views on how to save God's people:

- **Jesus Barabbas** was like the Old Testament Joshua, fighting those who occupied the Land. He saw himself like the judges whom *the LORD raised up to save them out of the hand of those who plundered them* (Judges 2:16). While Barabbas saw himself as a saviour, the Romans saw him as a terrorist—a view shared by the Gospel writers (Mark 15:7 || Luke 23:19 || John 18:40).
- **Jesus the Christ** took a different approach to the kingdom of God. Departing from the tradition of Joshua, the judges and King David, Jesus the Christ insisted his citizens love their enemies, not kill them (5:44). Pilate could see the difference. He found Jesus' non-defensive posture astounding.

Which Jesus would you follow? The freedom-fighter, or the love-teacher?

Matthew 27:19-21

¹⁹ As he was seated on the judge's seat assigned to him, his wife said, "Do nothing to yourself and to that innocent person. For I suffered a great deal today in a dream on his account."

²⁰ But the high priests and elders persuaded the crowds that they should ask for Barabbas and do away with Jesus.

²¹ In reply, the governor said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?"

They said, "Barabbas!"

The trouble with the one called *the Christ* is that he doesn't match our expectations of saving us. Standing before the governor, the Christ looks more like a captive than a saviour: *handed over* by his own people (27:2, 18), *handed over* by his own disciple (27:3-4), *handed over to be crucified* (27:26). Love is a lofty ideal, but Jesus Barabbas makes more sense to the crowd.

That's still the case today. For many Jews, Jesus was not a messiah because he failed to save his people. For many Muslims, force is justified (Jihad). Jesus' approach is so counter-cultural that even many Christians believe in killing for self-defence or national defence. Some Liberation Theologians still follow Barabbas, teaching armed force as the way to save oppressed people.

Matthew 27:22-26

²² Pilate says to them, "What should I do with Jesus, the one they call anointed leader?"

²³ They all said, "Have him crucified."

²³ But he said, "What evil has he done?"

They shouted all the more, "Have him crucified!"

²⁴ When Pilate saw he would gain nothing but more rioting, he poured water and washed his hands in opposition to the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of his blood. See to it yourselves."

²⁵ All the people answered, "His blood be on us and our children."

²⁶ Then he released Barabbas to them. Jesus he flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Barabbas wins. The crowd get their hero, while God's anointed is handed over to be crucified. Barabbas walks away, a kind of anti-Christ—a killer in Christ's place. He cannot save his people, of course. They have more blood on their hands now (27:25).

What the mockery reveals (27:27-31)

Why give us the details of Jesus' kingship being mocked?

Matthew 27:27-31

²⁷ Then the governor's soldiers led Jesus to the official residence and assembled the whole cohort against him. ²⁸ They stripped him and put a red military cloak on him. ²⁹ They plaited a crown from thorns and set it on his head, with a cane in his right hand. They knelt before him in

mockery, “Your Majesty, King of the Jews.”³⁰ They spat on him and took a cane and kept striking him on his head.³¹ After they mocked him, they stripped the military cloak from him, dressed him in his own clothes, and led him away to crucify him.

The governor's guards faced real danger from insurrectionists like Barabbas and his gang. Jesus is so pitifully powerless that it disarms them. He wasn't even a threat to their sense of humour. Could they rile him into reacting? It would be dangerous to mock a real king.

Their comedic drama sends up the king and his people:



- **The set:** They led him to the *praetorium*, the governor's official residence with barracks for his guards. It was the nearest thing Jerusalem had to a palace. If the soldiers imagined this “king” had never seen inside a fortress, they were probably right.
- **The players:** Hundreds of soldiers (a *cohort* was officially 600) were present to protect the governor and enforce Rome's power over Jerusalem. Jesus had merely a dozen supporters, who had already fled or betrayed him.
- **The plot:** The mock enthronement began with a procession, leading the “king” to the “palace.” They enrobed this “head of state” in a military uniform, with a satirical sceptre in his hand, and a painful crown on his head. They performed his enthronement, the parody of a regal title bestowed on a powerless “king.”

The mockery highlights everything that's wrong with human based power in the world. In his suffering, Jesus is already bearing the sin of the world. This is what he has come to save us from: delivering us from the mockery of human kingship at the hands of evil, restoring earth to heaven's reign as the kingdom of God.

How Matthew presents the cross (27:32-44)

The cross is not unique to Jesus. Thousands were crucified, including two others this day. Jesus told his followers to expect to bear crosses too. Jesus is carrying in his own body what's wrong with the world. He expects us to bear the sin of the world in our bodies too. It's the only way to break the cycle of violence.

To illustrate that Jesus' cross is the same thing we bear, Matthew gives an example:

Matthew 27:32-44

³² As they made their way, they found a Cyrenean named Simon, pressing him into service to take up his cross.³³ Arriving at the place called Golgotha (literally, Skull Place)³⁴ they gave him a drink: wine mixed with gall. Tasting it, he did not want to drink it.³⁵ Crucifying him, they divided his clothes by throwing dice,³⁶ sitting as they guarded him there.³⁷ Over his head they placed his crime: “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.”³⁸ Next, they crucify with him two criminals, one on his right, one on his left.

³⁹ Those passing by were slandering him, shaking their heads and saying, ⁴⁰ “You’re the one demolishing the temple and building it in three days? Well, save yourself if you are the son of God; step down from the cross!”

⁴¹ The high priests joined in the derision, along with the Bible scholars and elders: ⁴² “He saved others; but he isn’t able to save himself. If he is the King of Israel, let him come down now from the cross and we’ll give him our allegiance. ⁴³ Since he’s been relying on God, let God rescue him now—if he wants him. For that’s what he claimed, ‘I am God’s son.’”

⁴⁴ In the same way, the criminals crucified with him were ridiculing him.

Four groups scorn Jesus’ kingship:

- **Soldiers:** King of the Jews (verse 37)
- **People:** Temple replacer, son of God (verse 40).
- **Authorities:** King of Israel, son of God (verses 42-43)
- **Criminals:** same ridicule (verse 44).

Two phrases are repeated: *king of Jews/Israel, son of God*. As we’ve explained, *son of God* was a kingship term. The Davidic king was the prince (son of the heavenly sovereign) reigning on earth with the authority of his Father in heaven (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7). They weren’t ridiculing Jesus for trinitarian claims.



All four groups focus on Jesus’ kingship:

- The **soldiers** have previously mocked his kingship (27:27-31). Now they commit it to writing (verse 37).
- The **people** had previously lauded the Davidic king as the one who would save them (21:9). Now they mock the king who cannot even save himself (verse 40).
- The Jerusalem **authorities** condemned him for his “blasphemous” claim to be God’s anointed (26:59-66). Now they deride him for believing God would raise him up as king (verses 42-43).
- The **criminals** were crucified beside him like mock attendants (verse 38). They find his royal status as ludicrous as everyone else (verse 44).

Jesus’ kingship is the single theme in Matthew’s description of the cross. That’s the meaning of the cross: the cross is the world disposing of its king.

Rejection of God’s anointed ruler unites their oppressors, the people of God’s nation, the leaders called to represent God, and the condemned criminals. **The cross is the rejection of divine kingship, i.e. God’s anointed.**

Abandoned by God? (27:45-54)

The cross means humanity rejected God's Messiah. But **did God reject him too?**

Matthew 27:45-49

⁴⁵ From noon, darkness came over the whole land for three hours.

⁴⁶ Around 3 pm, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabach-thani?*" (Translation: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?")

⁴⁷ Some of those standing there heard it and were saying, "He's calling Elijah." ⁴⁸ Instantly, one of them ran and got a sponge filled with cheap wine, holding it up on a stick for him to drink. ⁴⁹ But the others were saying, "Hold on; let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

How are we to understand his cry of dereliction? Was Jesus losing his faith, all his hopes dying with him? Or do we ignore his feelings and search for rational answers, arguing that God had to reject him because he was carrying the sin of the world?

Whatever your theology, don't miss the point that this experience was not unique to Jesus. Previous kings also felt abandoned by God:

Psalm 22:1-2 (NIV)

... *A psalm of David.*

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?

² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.

In this Psalm, the Davidic king had been defeated in battle. Many soldiers had died. His grieving people blamed him, mocking his expectation that God would rescue him (22:6-8). He felt surrounded by beasts that would tear him apart, pinned in the dust by his hands and feet, given up as dead (22:12-18).

Many anointed kings had known defeat. Eventually the whole kingdom fell, feeling abandoned by God as Babylon invaded. "Where is your former great love, which in your faithfulness you swore to David?" they asked (Psalm 89:49).

That's what Jesus was suffering: the defeat of God's people, the failure of the Davidic kingship once again. The king identified with the fall of his people, dying for them.

Bystanders who didn't speak Aramaic thought Jesus was calling for Elijah to save him. Elijah doesn't come. There's no reprieve. Death takes him.

The death that shook the world (27:50-54)

We need a moment to process this loss, to grieve the injustice, to experience the futility of a world where God's anointed falls. Matthew doesn't pause. He charges on with disjointed details from a turbulent timeline, confusing our grief:

Matthew 27:50-53

⁵⁰ Jesus again cried out in a loud voice, and released his spirit.

⁵¹ And look: the partitioning curtain of the temple was split from above, all the way down, into two pieces; and the earth was shaken, and the rocks were split, ⁵² and the graves were opened and many bodies of the

holy people who had fallen asleep were raised,⁵³ and having come out of the graves after his resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

Holy space exposed? Earth quaking? Solid rock shattering? “Undead” people standing up and entering the capital? What on earth is going on?

Some of this happened at the point of his death when the earth shook and the darkness receded (27:45). Other elements occurred *after his resurrection*. God has not acted to save his Son in the timeframe we would expect. But God is acting!

Whose action was it when the curtain *was split*, when the earth *was shaken*, when the rocks *were split*, when the graves *were opened*, when the holy people *were raised*?

In the face of the unimaginable evil of crucifixion of his Christ, God has not abandoned his Son, and God has not rejected his world.

That's why Matthew won't leave us stewing in our grief:

- **God opened the curtain.** God stepped out of the holy space devoted to his sovereignty, confronting the defiled world that crucified his son. In stepping out, God is overturning the power of death, bringing his life into his world.
- **God shook the earth.** God shakes the very foundations of the earth to mark the moment in history when the earth shifts back under heaven's reign.
- **God raises the dead,** commissioning them to embody the reality that death is not the end.

For those who fight wars and rely on death to give them power, the gospel is terrifying. For those who recognize Jesus as God's anointed ruler, the gospel of the kingdom is the hope of the world, the most liberating message earth has ever known:

Matthew 27: 54

⁵⁴ When the centurion and those guarding Jesus with him saw the earthquake and what had happened, they were extremely frightened, saying, “This really was the son of God.”

Burial (27:55-66)

In Jewish culture, the dead should be honoured with a burial as soon as possible:

Matthew 27:55-61

⁵⁵ There were many women watching from a distance. They followed Jesus from Galilee, serving him. ⁵⁶ In the group were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

⁵⁷ As evening came, a wealthy man from Arimathea arrived. His name was Joseph, and he was a follower of Jesus. ⁵⁸ Approaching Pilate, he asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate authorized the release.

⁵⁹ Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in clean linen ⁶⁰ and placed it in his new tomb that was cut into the rock. Rolling a great stone over the doorway, he left. ⁶¹ Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting across from the tomb.

The men are terrified that, as followers of Jesus, they'll receive the same fate. So it's the women who hang around, trying to figure out how to cope with grief like this.

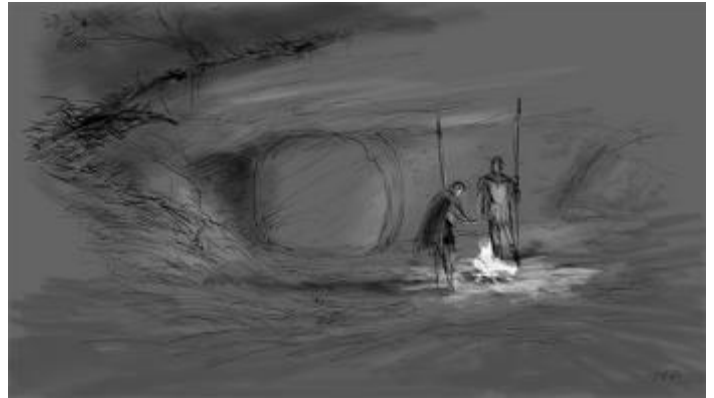
The Jewish leaders are aware of the rumours that Jesus still expected God to raise him up, even if they killed him. There's a deep irony in guarding the dead:

Matthew 27:62-66

⁶² The following day (i.e., after the Sabbath Preparation), the chief priests and Pharisees met together with Pilate. ⁶³ "Master, we recall that deceiver saying, 'I will yet be raised to life after three days.' ⁶⁴ Order the tomb to be secured until the third day, so his followers cannot come and steal him and tell the people he was raised from the dead. That deception would be worse than the previous one."

⁶⁵ Pilate told them, "You have your guard. Go and make it as secure as you know how."

⁶⁶ They went and secured the tomb, sealing the stone, posting the guard."



14.2 The king is raised up (Matthew 28)

I doubt Jesus' followers slept that night. Fearing for their lives, the men kept a low profile. Their best chance was to escape to Galilee by blending into the crowds leaving after the festival was over.

The women had watched from a distance (27:55). No doubt, those horror scenes haunted them. Sleepless in Jerusalem, they rose while darkness still enveloped the city. They went to the only thing they had left: a tomb.

Not a dead end (28:1-10)

Even the tomb had been disturbed! It was no longer Jesus' final resting place. Someone sat in the gaping mouth of the tomb.

He looked like an agent from another realm. His approach had shaken everything. The guards of death lay on the ground like dead soldiers in a conflict zone.

Matthew 28:1-7

¹ As the week faded and another one dawned, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

² And look! There was a great shaking, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, approached, rolled away the stone, and was sitting on it.

³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white like snow.

⁴ The guards were so shaken with fear that they became like the dead.

⁵ Speaking to the women, the angel said, "Don't be afraid. I know you're looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here. He was raised, just as he said. Here, see the place where he was laid to rest. ⁷ Go quickly and tell

his followers, “‘He was raised from the dead, and see: he’s leading you to Galilee where you will meet him.’ See, I gave you the message!”

This radiant messenger understood why they were there: to pay their respects to a crucified man. He seemed to know Jesus. He knew about the crucifixion. He was not on the killers’ side. He had a message. For them!

Heaven had overruled Jesus’ execution. Jesus had been raised up. Couldn’t they recall Jesus talking about this?

Heaven’s messenger invited them to see for themselves. He pointed out where Jesus’ corpse had been laid to rest. The slab was empty. The tomb was empty.

They’re not processing this. It’s terrifying. Confusing. Astounding. Beyond imagining. But the messenger is still talking, with urgency in his tone, insisting they carry his message to the others without delay.

He checks they’ve got it straight. Two points:

1. Jesus is raised from the dead.
2. Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee.

With that, the heavenly messenger says his work is done. The good news is now in the hands of earthly messengers.

Not dead. Raised to life. The Jewish leaders aligned with gentile forces had failed to get rid of God’s anointed. Heaven overruled his condemnation, and undid his execution. He’s back! Not with a vengeance, but with authority to lead the earth as a kingdom of heaven.



The Garden Tomb, Jerusalem. Photo: Allen Browne, 2014

Yes! Jesus had talked about this: ... *shepherd struck ... flock scattered, but after I have risen I will go ahead of you into Galilee* (26:31-32). He’s alive, leading like a shepherd.

Alive! Leading them! Their divinely raised up shepherd!

Terrified and elated, the Galilean women leave the empty tomb that holds nothing.

They are the first gospel messengers, carrying the good news that **Jesus is alive** and **Jesus is reigning** — raised from the dead, and leading as our Heaven-appointed shepherd (Lord). This is the gospel in the New Testament (e.g. Romans 10:9).

As they set off to fulfil their commission, they discover the Shepherd is with them:

Matthew 28:8-10

⁸ Leaving the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, they ran to give the message to his followers. ⁹ And look: **Jesus met them** and greeted them with joy. They went right up to him, took hold of his feet, and knelt before him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus says, “Don’t be afraid. Go tell my brothers to head off to Galilee and meet me there.”

What did they feel when they saw Jesus alive? They wanted to touch him, to know he was physically present. They wanted to honour him as the heaven-anointed leader,

raised from the tomb to the throne. Their feelings merged in a single action: kneeling before their Lord, reaching out to take hold of his feet.

Jesus affirmed them as his gospel messengers. The days are over when he sent only males to the twelve tribes of Israel (10:2-6). This is a new world under a resurrected king. Women and men together are his gospel messengers. The Lord gives his message to whoever is available.

Jesus affirms the message they are to carry, but with a new intimacy: *Go and tell my brothers to head off to Galilee and meet me there*. The resurrected king calls his people his *family*. He hinted at this previously (e.g. 12:50, where he explicitly includes sisters and brothers). But now, a whole new humanity is raised in the resurrected Lord, sharing a place in the family of the Father (John 20:17) through the leadership of our Lord (compare Hebrews 2:11-17).

Why Galilee? Jesus chose to minister in the region that went dark first: *On those living in the shadow of death, a light has dawned* (4:13-17).

Now those words have new meaning. The darkness tried to swallow him too. A new day has dawned for all the peoples of the earth.

Risen and reigning! This is the gospel that transforms earth into a kingdom of heaven.

His enemies are still here (28:11-15)

And now we interrupt this cosmic announcement to talk about a lie:

Matthew 28:11-15

¹¹ When the women had gone, some of the guards went into the city and told the chief priests all that had happened. ¹² Meeting with the elders, they colluded together and took enough money to pay the soldiers to tell this story: ¹³ “Say, ‘His followers came during the night and took the body while we were asleep.’ ¹⁴ If this story reaches the Governor, we’ll convince him so you won’t have to worry.” ¹⁵ They accepted the money, and did as instructed. This story has circulated widely among Jewish people, even today.

Earthly rulers like Herod or Caesar gain power through conquest, by destroying their enemies (as in 21:41). To establish his reign, God gave life to his Son, not death to his enemies. The enemies are still here, colluding against his reign.

Faced with the evidence that they were wrong about Jesus, his enemies wilfully refused to recognize that heaven had vindicated him. Their power lies in deception: misleading the people, deceiving the Governor if it goes to court, corrupting the soldiers with a bribe from temple funds. God’s house had become a den of bandits (21:13).

How do we fight the disinformation? How do we overpower our enemies?

We don’t. It’s not our fight.

Jesus confronted the temple leaders for rejecting him, but he never tried to take their power from them. Power is God-given, not taken. Jesus believed the Ancient of Days would give the kingship to the Son of Man. The human descendant did not fight the beasts for power.

Jesus' plan to overcome the world was simple: take a seat, and wait for the one who said, *Be seated on my right, until I place your enemies beneath your feet* (22:44).

His enemies spread propaganda against his authority, but Jesus does not commission us to fight them. The falsehood eventually falls under its own weight. His authority prevails. His enemies are brought under his feet.

What he calls us to do is announce and embody the good news of his kingship, as the family of his Father. He will reign until the last enemy is under his feet, death's dominion is gone, and earth is fully restored to his Father's reign (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

God's people are called to follow the Suffering Servant who faced crucifixion rather than fight his enemies, to be a suffering servant trusting Heaven to restore all things, to be a faithful witness to the character of God, suffering as his abused body.

The king commissions his servants (28:16-20)

This is all very confusing for the disciples. They kneel before their king, but some aren't sure what to make of someone coming back after his enemies killed him:

Matthew 28:16-17

¹⁶ His eleven followers went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus directed them. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they knelt in homage, though some were uncertain.

For the first time, Jesus tells them **he is now king**. God has raised him up, entrusting him with all authority in the earthly and heavenly realms. The two realms named in the opening statement of the Bible (Genesis 1:1) have been reunited in him. Earth is back under heaven's management. We are a kingdom of heaven, under his authority.

So what's our role?

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ As he came near, Jesus declared to them,
"All authority in heaven and on earth was entrusted to me.
¹⁹ So as you spread out, train all the nations by immersing them into the authority of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
²⁰ instructing them to obey everything I commanded you.
And look: I myself am with you the whole time,
until the era is fully realized."

We've often read this **Great Commission** as if Jesus said, "Go and convert the heathen to Christianity." That misses the point. The only time he spoke about trying to convert the heathen, he wasn't keen on it (23:15).

He said God had raised him up, entrusting the earth into his authority. But other rulers still claim to have power over the nations. Our commission is to train the nations regarding Jesus' kingship. His authority on earth is the reign of his Father in the heavens, exercised not through force but through the Holy Spirit.

Our commission is therefore to train the nations by plunging them into the leadership given by heaven for the earth: the authority of the Father, his Son, and Holy Spirit. Our role is to train the nations to live in obedience to their king.

Remember how Moses taught Pharaoh who was running the world? The LORD was present with Moses, instructing him in what to say, fulfilling what he declared, until Pharaoh finally yielded and the LORD liberated his people. Well, King Jesus says he is present in the people who represent his authority. His life animates us as his corporate presence (body), filling us with his life, his wisdom, his justice, until the full completion (*synteleia*)



of the era, when the rebellion against God's kingship is over, when every knee bows and every tongue confesses God's Christ as our Lord.

The Christ commissioned us:

- to embody his kingship,
- to demonstrate to the nations what life is like under divine kingship,
- to embody his Father's reign through the Spirit in the world,
- to instruct the peoples in how to live under the covenant with heaven as our king commands,
- to function as his corporate presence until what God decreed at the start is fulfilled in the end.

How do we do that? What does it look like? How do we embody this role as public servants of our king?

14.3 Pulling it all together

Four months ago, we embarked on a journey to understand Jesus better.

Do you remember how you described Jesus' identity and mission back then?

What has changed for you as we heard Matthew's Gospel? How would you describe Jesus' **identity** now? What would you focus on to describe **who he is**?

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What about his **mission**? In light of Matthew's Gospel, how would you describe what Jesus **came to do** for the world?

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How has this shaped the way you understand **our identity**? Who are we in relation to the Christ?

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And what is our **mission**? What is the Christ calling us to do in his world?

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You're probably still processing who we are and what he is calling us to do. That's something we learn over a lifetime. So, keep pursuing the quest to know Jesus better and serve him well.

There's nothing better we could devote our lives to than being the community that echoes and embodies the gospel, the good news that the Christ is our Lord, that the one appointed by heaven is reconciling the earth to himself as a kingdom of heaven.

May our Heavenly Father inspire us and empower us with his Spirit as we recognize and serve his Son together.

For more detail on Matthew 27–28, see:

- Mat 27:1-9 [Thirty pieces of silver \(Zechariah 11:12-13\)](#)
- Mat 27:1-10 [What is Christ worth? \(Matthew 27:1-10\)](#)
- Mat 27:11-14 [Are you the king of the Jews? \(Matthew 27:11–14\)](#)
- Mat 27:15-26 [Which Jesus do you want? \(Matthew 27:15–26\)](#)
- Mat 27:27-31 [What the mocking reveals \(Matthew 27:27–31\)](#)
- Mat 27:32-44 [The meaning of the cross \(Matthew 27:32–44\)](#)
- Mat 27:45-51 [Jesus' dying question: Why have you abandoned me? \(27:45–51\)](#)
- Mat 27:51-54 [The death that shook the world \(Matthew 27:51-54\)](#)
- Mat 27:55-66 [Guarding the dead \(Matthew 27:55–66\)](#)
- Mat 28:1-10 [Risen and reigning \(Matthew 28:1-10\)](#)
- Mat 28:11-15 [But his enemies are still here \(Matthew 28:11-15\)](#)
- Mat 28:16-20 [Our king's great commission \(Matthew 28:16–20\)](#)
- Mat 28:17-20 [The church's role: public servants](#)
- Mat 28:17-20 [Society on the couch](#)
- Mat 28:18-20 [Great authority for a great commission \(Matthew 28:18-20\)](#)

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