

## WHERE IS HE NOW

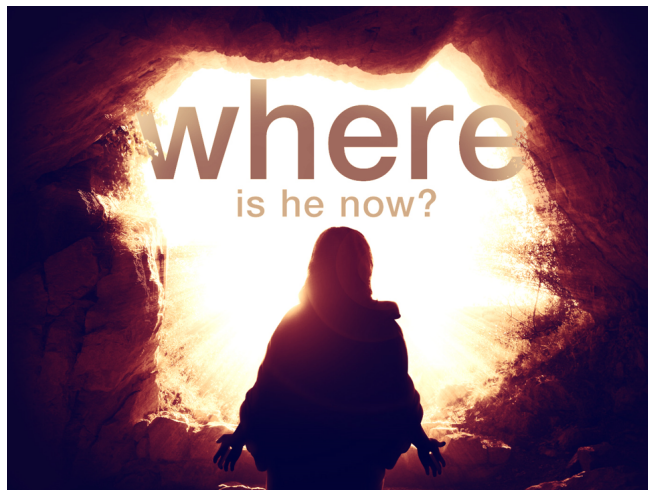
EASTER Sunday  
16th April 2017

Readings: Matthew 28:1-10; 16-20

In April 1961, the Russian Yuri Gagarin became the first person to travel in space. His spacecraft, 'Vostok 1', made a single orbit of earth in just under 2 hours at speeds of 27,000 km/hr

Safely returning, celebrations erupted across Russia. They were jubilant in their technology. Jubilant they'd beaten the Americans. Jubilant their atheistic state was leading the way.

Indeed Gagarin, with mocking tone, reported that though he'd looked hard he'd not seen God in the heavens. His mocking words were certainly well received by the communist state. However, a Russian priest would later say: "If you haven't seen God on earth, you will never see him in heaven."



Still for a number of people this was a challenge to their faith. How could modern people believe in God if he wasn't in the physical space above the earth? And if Jesus had risen from the dead, what about him? Where is he now? Is he with he with God in heaven - whatever that means - or are his bones languishing somewhere in Palestine? And of course it doesn't take a cosmonaut to raise such doubts. These questions have<sup>1</sup> been a stumbling block for many for decades, even centuries, well before the space race. So today, on this Easter Sunday, we're going to consider, "Where is Jesus now?" If Christ rose from the dead, as the Bible claims, then where is he?

### *Let's pray*

In our preaching series through the last three chapters of Matthew we've now come to our last sermon - one that deals with the resurrection. We've looked at the last supper, betrayal by Judas, prayer in Gethsemane, trial before the high priest, and the crucifixion. Today, on Easter Sunday, we'll explore the resurrection as found in Matthew 28. A chapter that can be divided into two: Where Jesus is not and where Jesus is. Chapter 28 starts with the account of the women at the tomb and the account of those who guarded the tomb. They show us where Jesus is not.

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<sup>1</sup> The second part of this sermon draws on a message by Tim Keller

After this, Jesus appears to his disciples and speaks words we know as the Great Commission. Now throughout this series I've stressed the importance of the words of Jesus - the sections in red if you have a red letter Bible. Why? Because this is where Jesus interprets the meaning of the cross. Not Matthew, not some theological professor nor a church denomination. No, Jesus himself. And so in chapter 28, apart from some practical arrangements in verse 10, the meaning of the resurrection is found in Christ's final words. Words that also show us where Jesus is.

## **I. Where Jesus is Not**

So let's start with the first of the two opening accounts – that of the women. Matthew 28:1. Because of Sabbath restrictions it wasn't until first light on Sunday that the women could get to tomb. There they're greeted by the stone being rolled away and an angel sitting on it. After reassuring the woman he tells them...

He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Matthew 28:6

They look and - behold! The tomb was empty. Filled with both fear and joy they hurry away with instructions for the disciples, when Jesus himself meets them.

"Greetings... Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." Matthew 28:9–10

So where is Jesus? Not in the tomb! Indeed the risen Jesus meets, speaks and is worshipped by the women.

Now if this first account shows how Jesus' friends discovered the tomb to be empty, what about his enemies? What's their experience? Well at the appearance of the angel verse 4 tells us

The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. Matthew 28:4

When they revived, they found the tomb empty and their lives forfeit. With their orders and the Roman seal on the door the empty tomb meant their death. Still they make their report to the chief priests. Perplexed and having to act swiftly, the chief priests pay a large sum of money to the guards to make a false claim...

You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' Matthew 28:13

The Bible tells us that this lie continues to this very day. Now what does this account show? Without a doubt both the guards and the religious leaders know the

tomb to be empty. Whereas the women react with amazement and joy his enemies react with angst and cover up. Why? Because the tomb was empty. No argument, no questions. If you were to ask Jesus' friends and his enemies where Jesus is today, both would say, "Not in the tomb". Indeed there is nowhere in Palestine where the bones of Jesus languish. No grave, no tomb, no scattered bones, no stone ossuary, contain the remains of Jesus.

## **II. Where Jesus is Now**

So let's assume for a moment you accept the empty tomb, where is Jesus now? Where he-is-not is helpful as far as it goes but where is he? Well, the answer is three fold and found in the words of the Great Commission. He's found in where?

- a. At the right hand of God
- b. In the ministry of the Gospel
- c. At the end of the age

### **a. At the right hand of God**

Let's look at each in turn. So, the disciples make their way to Galilee, to a mountain, a few day's journey from Jerusalem.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Matthew 28:19

Now in any kingdom all authority belongs to the king who sits on the royal throne. However it was not unusual for this authority to be delegated to a high official, like a prime minister. This person had the right to sit at the king's right hand and to exercise the same authority as the king himself. Joseph had this exact same authority from Pharaoh as recorded in Genesis.

So by saying "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" and coming this with the only words Jesus spoke in his trial before the high priest

But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven. Matthew 26:64

Jesus is claiming the right to sit at God's right hand as prophesied in Psalm 110<sup>2</sup>

The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. Psalm 110:1

The apostle Paul puts it like this

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<sup>2</sup> Jesus claimed that this verse referred to himself in Matthew 22:44

Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Romans 8:34

Jesus is at the right hand interceding for us<sup>3</sup>. While Satan attempts to accuse us before our heavenly Father Jesus prays for us.

This then is where Jesus is. But he is also with us in the...

## **b. In the ministry of the Gospel**

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always...Matthew 28:19–20

Not only does Jesus commission the apostles to make disciples but assures them he will be with them as they do? This discipling has two phases.

1. Evangelism - go to all nations and baptising
2. Discipleship - teaching them to obey the commands of Christ

Where is Jesus today? Jesus is with us when we are fulfilling the great commission. Here's a slide of our church's strategic plan. Where is Jesus? The top half of the funnel shows he's with us when we are going into the world with Mainly Music, kindy, marriage and parenting courses, events like rugby nights light parties and the light and when we are inviting people to Alpha. Wider than Glendowie we have GI community dinners, food appeal and housing support. Further we have mission trips to Fiji and China. Jesus is where the gospel is being shared

Where is Jesus today? Not just the going but making disciples - the bottom inverted fun. We make disciples by worshiping and fellowshiping together, by teaching Jesus commands in sermons and small groups, in our Kid's church and youth group. Jesus is where disciples are being made.

Are we on the right track? Yes. Can we do better. Yes? How? Let me ask a question. Do you want more of Jesus in your life? Do you want him to be more real, more active have greater impact? Then ask yourself this, "How am I involved in sharing my faith?" - because Jesus becomes alive in ways I never imagined when I do. And "How am I involved in making disciples - helping people grow in your faith?" - because Jesus comes alive in ways I never imagined when I do.

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<sup>3</sup> He (*God*) raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. Ephesians 1:20–21

Where is Jesus today? He is where his gospel is living and active - where disciples are being made - through evangelism and discipleship.

Now there's a logical question that comes out of this. If Jesus is in heaven how can he be here in Glendowie as we fulfil his great commission? In brief - by the Holy Spirit. Referring to the Holy Spirit as counsellor Jesus said in John 16:7-8

But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. John 16:7-8

Jesus went, so we all could be filled with his Spirit. In his physical body he was restricted to one geographical place at time but by his Spirit he is with every Christian as they fulfil the great commission.

This brings us to the third place where Jesus is.

### **c. At the end of the age**

Where is Jesus today? He's waiting for us at the end of the age.

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:20

There will come a time when the age we live in will end. That God's will is accomplished and Christ will leave the right of God, returning again in glory - on clouds of heaven. Now, what this looks like is beyond words, so both Old Testament prophets and the apostle John in the book of Revelation use all sorts of imagery and metaphor to describe his wonderful and glorious return. And as this age comes to an end, Revelation 21 tells us heaven and earth will combine. And from this time...

The dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. Revelation 21:3-4

What a wonderful hope we have. A hope certain, steadfast and sure. Jesus is waiting for you and I at the end of the age.

So, in summary, where is Jesus today? Though skeptics mock, declaring space travel shows Christian belief of where Jesus is to be wrong we stand firm. For both the women and the guards, his friends and enemies, tell us he's not in the tomb. His bones are not lying in Palestine, or Spain or anywhere else, waiting to be discovered. Not at all. For Christ is in three places. He's at the right hand of God, as advocate and friend, he's also where we minister the Gospel, when we witness and disciple, and finally he's waiting for us at the end of the age. Where, joy of joys, "He will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or

crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus, come.