

Thank you to Humble House for coming to share... a few years back I was able to tour the housing facility and I have truly never seen anything like it- it was so warm and welcoming.

It is amazing to see the power of the gospel in the way that this ministry restores the humanity of the people involved... something we've been seeing Jesus do a lot in our study in the book of Matthew.

Today we will be reading Matthew 28:16-20 in the NLT translation if you want to turn there in your Bible..

Something I've learned while studying the Bible is how the writers of scripture have thought out their writings in a way that I will never fully grasp.

I used to think that because the gospels weren't always told in chronological order that it was because the writers were primitive in their way of thinking...

but my studies have humbled me quite a bit and I feel foolish for thinking the way that I used to.

One thing that I find fascinating about the Bible is the symbolism that can get lost on us because of how far we are removed from the original writings. We are separated in time, space, and culture.

For example, did you know that mountains in the Bible are symbolic for the place where Heaven and Earth meet?

The Bible Project says that, “***Mountains in the Hebrew Bible often become a space where Heaven and Earth overlap and human beings must choose between self-preservation or surrender and trust in God***”

Matthew's gospel is known for referencing mountains more than any other gospel writer. He brought this imagery into the story on seven different occasions.

Consider the most famous sermon of all time- the Sermon on the what? (mount)...

Jesus miraculously feeds thousands with small portions of food on the mountainside (he does this twice)...

When Jesus is tempted by the Satan it happens on a mountain... When Elijah and

Moses & Elijah show up (on what is known as the transfiguration) and its *(we can probably guess at this point)* on a mountain...

The mount of Olives where Jesus warns his disciples about what to come...

So, does anyone want to guess where today's verses will be located? (*A mountain*)

Yes, that's such a good guess! Which hopefully has us asking *why* though?

We can understand that mountains represent the overlap of heaven and earth...

But why is Matthew making such a point to bring us back to this imagery over and over and over?

When Adam and Eve succumbed to temptation, they were separated from God's Kingdom of the skies- imagine their exit from Eden being like them falling, tumbling down, from the mountain top...

and year after year people would try to climb and claw back up that mountain...

but year after year their failures prevented them from getting anywhere close.

Sometimes people took things into their own hands to make their own version of a mountain, but it faded away, it couldn't last... it was all just dust compared to this mountaintop.

So looking up at this mountaintop, where heaven and earth overlap, where humanity once lived in harmony with God... the writers of the Bible point back to that with imagery and ask *“How can we ever return to the top of this mountain? Will there ever be a way that brings us back into harmony with God like we were before the fall?”*

And time goes on, years pass, cities rise and cities fall, and then one day...

**Immanuel, God with us,
is born in a manger and Matthew
writes down His story for us to read.**

And in Matthew's story, he wants us to see where Jesus can easily reach- the mountain top where heaven and earth overlap.

And the question is poised for us like it was with Adam and Eve in the garden-

Will we choose self preservation, or will we choose trust in God?

Today is our last Sunday in the book of Matthew. We've followed the course of Jesus' ministry – how he came announcing that God's kingdom was at hand – and how he demonstrated what that means – by healing and forgiving and teaching.

We saw the turn of events that happened in his arrest and trial and crucifixion – and we learned that God took what seemed to be *abject defeat* and turned it into the greatest victory the world has ever known.

There at the cross, the full consequence of our sin was carried away – and through that cross we now are reconciled with God.

Then last week, we read about the wildly unexpected twist in the story, where Jesus rose from the dead... which has never been short of controversy. From the moment that it happened, people began debating if it was true or not... which I get because it's not a normal thing to happen.

Accepting that is true means questioning our reality and it expands our definitions of the word impossible and possible... which can be a scary thing.

So, let's pick up where we left off and we will be reading the last 5 verses of the book of Matthew.

Vs. 16-17

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted!

I want to stop there for just a second because I love how Matthew sort of slips that last bit in there...and there's a lot to consider in that one sentence. *[Art slide]*

The remaining 11 disciples (minus Judas now) meet Jesus on a mountain – The fact that Jesus is risen from the dead is huge...their minds are fully blown, as ours would be. And their response to this event is to WORSHIP Jesus.

This becomes a crystal clear indicator of Jesus' divinity. Because, if Jesus was not God and he allowed that to happen, he wouldn't be good.

Now...the way this reads in the NLT it looks as though some of the people are worshiping and some are doubting...there are different theories on this.

One theory is that there are other people besides the 11 remaining disciples and they are the ones that doubted... However, there is also a strong argument from Greek scholars that say the word “some” isn’t in that phrase in the original text.

They say it should read “*They worshiped him AND they doubted*”...and while that may sound strange – I find that idea incredibly relieving... like “*Oh there’s an option for both?? Because yeah that’s definitely me...*”

They’re standing in the presence of the one they saw DIE...they KNEW he was dead...but now he’s alive, talking to them.

(Acting out worship songs and tense smiles while mouthing to the other disciples “Umm...what is going on right now?!”)

That is such a real and honest response to this event that Matthew slips in there.

Something I think we can learn from this is that
(Point 1)

Believing that Jesus is God means following his example

It does *not* mean that we never doubt or struggle with understanding.

There have been many times in my journey of following Jesus where I am completely dedicated to Him, but at the same time, I really don't understand what's going on...where I can honestly say I love him, I know I cannot live my life without him,

AND I'm wondering if he's really there.

Does anyone relate to that?

I don't think we need to feel shame for that- we are human. Faith does NOT mean CERTAINTY.

We often have the mistaken idea that *faith is the absence of doubt*....but that's not right.

Faith is the willingness to endure and hold on even in the PRESENCE of our doubts.

Faith doesn't rest on our CERTAINTY...if that were true then it wouldn't BE FAITH! Faith holds on even in the face of questions we can't answer.

And let's consider this doubt that is referenced... Does Jesus rebuke them? Does Jesus separate them from his true followers or make them stand to the side while he gives instructions to everyone else?

We have to remember that even in times of doubt, we can still follow the example that Jesus has set before us. Because while yes, sometimes I still doubt (I am not sure I will ever grow out of that)... I NEVER allow that doubt to DEFINE me or GUIDE me in my life.

I am defined as a child of God, someone that Jesus died to save, and my life is built around HIS life and his example.

That is something we can be intentional about living out on our greatest days of faith *and* on our greatest days of doubt.

Lets keep reading Vs. 18-20

¹⁸ Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations,^[a] baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

In Matthew 4, Jesus is in the wilderness and he is tempted by the devil. In vs. 8 of ch. 4 it says, “*8 Next the devil took [Jesus] to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 “I will give it all to you,” he said, “if you will kneel down and worship me.”*”

We see that continuation of the mountain top imagery and the choice that we are all asked like Adam and Eve at the garden- will we choose self preservation or surrender and trust in God?

Jesus modeled how Adam and Eve should have responded back in the garden... Instead of us following their negative example of what went wrong, he gave us a positive example that we can follow.

Jesus did not give into the temptation, and when we come back to the verses we read today, we see how the story of trusting in God ends- In Vs. 18 “*Jesus has been given all authority in Heaven and Earth*” on this mountaintop, and now the disciples have access to this place where Heaven and Earth overlap because of their connection to Jesus.

But this place is not meant to stay a secret... This place on the mountaintop where heaven and Earth overlap is not meant to be a club for the select few...

This is what is known as the Great Commission where Jesus commands those standing there to go and make disciples of *all* nations. (*Point 2*)

We follow Jesus' commands by inviting anyone into his kingdom

This was groundbreaking because at that time the Israelites knew they were set apart by God, and they felt that the best way to maintain that distinction was to keep everyone else out.

They saw themselves as the greatest nation and in order to preserve that, walls were built, structures within their religion were set up, barriers were put in place to keep the true, pure, followers of God inside, and everyone else OUT there.

It was a complete misunderstanding of what they were meant to do. God had always intended for them to be a shining light for other nations to follow, but instead they mirrored the other nations instead of God and withdrew instead of shared.

So this call from Jesus, goes beyond tearing the temple curtain that was torn on the day that he was crucified... It breaks down ALL barriers that are between us and other people.

This isn't just for us to say, look at how the Israelites messed up... scripture is for us to hold up as a mirror and make sure we are not following those same patterns. We want to make sure that our participation is not with the religious leaders who built the barriers, but with Jesus who tore them down.

Jesus has torn down the walls. The floodgates have been opened, and the gospel is now poured out from this mountainside and spread into the entire world... and the best part is, WE get to be a part of that!

Which is VERY exciting, but also... maybe a little intimidating, because I don't know about you, but I really don't feel like I do any of this very well.

And sometimes I've heard teachings that really lay on the guilt with these verses like –
“Are you doing this? Are you GOING...have you witnessed to anyone today?”

For someone of my personality type...this gets pretty rough. The GC becomes the introverts nightmare.

Especially because I panic and I just fill the empty space in conversations... One time I was trying to live this out and I ended up talking about hunting squirrels and asking someone if they ever eat squirrel meat... Something I've never done...something I have never talked about before or after that moment... and I was like “Oh my gosh, I can't do this!”

What do we do when it feels like this is on our shoulders and it could all fall apart with another wrong move from me?

Well, that's when we want to remember in vs. 20 when it says [SLIDE] *“And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

Always Jesus? Even when I don't do this well?
Always.

Always, Jesus? Even when I'm doubting?
Always.

Immanuel, means God is with us... it's the revelation that started this entire book of Matthew when Jesus was born, and it's the revelation that completes it: God is WITH US.

There is nowhere that we could go that He will not be with us.

This is not dependent on us doing this perfectly. We're humans, we can't. We could never reach the top of that mountain without Jesus.

We only get there by following HIS path, his example set before us that leads to the mountain top, the place where Heaven and Earth overlap.

And that's what we want to consider as we live out each day, as we leave this room and consider the purpose that God has for us in our life.

We all have that desire to have meaning in our lives... And that desire to make a difference does not get fulfilled in the SM videos & 24 hour news that gets us angry and scared about everything that is going wrong in the world.

Our purpose, our true meaning is found in following Jesus' example. What did Jesus spend his life doing? Who did Jesus reach out to?

In the book of Matthew we saw Jesus spend his ministry reaching out to those who needed it most. [Slide]

**He didn't stand at a distance and point out what was wrong with everyone else- [Slide]
Actually when he pointed, it was to cast out demons and heal the afflicted.**

Jesus reached out to those who needed help. [Slide] He ignored the rules of the religion that had set up boundaries that said, "we need to keep this person out" [Woman reaching Slide]

The boundaries of separation crumbled under his love and care[Children Slide]

Those who were suffering were healed [Boy]

**Those who would have been ignored, were
tended to [Girl]**

He calmed every storm... [Storm Slide]

**He knocked every barrier down [Surfing Slide]
and showed there are NO LIMITS [Slide]
when it comes to those He wants to save.**

**But there is someone else that Jesus reached out
to that is missing from these pictures- and that is
you.**

**...and if you don't know it, or if you doubt it, I
get that, but that doesn't make it any less true.**

**MY purpose is to tell you today that I choose to
believe with my whole heart- Jesus knows you,
and Jesus loves you.**

He is reaching for you and longs to care for you in the same way he reached for everyone we read about in Matthew.

And we could say, yes but now what? *[Slide with empty tomb]* What does this mean?

Where is Jesus now? The tomb is empty, where is he now?... and the answer is in the word found at the beginning and the end...

Immanuel... Jesus is with US...He is with us in this room today.

And when we leave this room today, he will still be with us. When we visit with our family, go to the beach, or go to work... he is with us.

So, we have the choice to decide what we do with that information. We can hear it and continue living as if we didn't know.

Or we can hear it and we can pray and let Jesus know what we believe. We can say,

“Jesus, I *believe* that you are with me. Please meet me in any doubts that still linger. Please show me how to live and love like you do.”

[Title Screen]

And that’s it... that’s the gospel. It’s a belief in Jesus, it’s following his example, and it’s an invitation that is *open to everyone*.

Matthew’s gospel seems to have an abbreviated text after Jesus’ resurrection, but I wonder if it’s because we are meant to continue this story.

So let’s continue this story.

Let’s open ourselves up to the ways that Jesus wants to use US to reveal his true nature of love

and redemption to every single person in this world.

And let's remember and hold on tight to immanuel... God is with us.

Right on?