



Greenwood Baptist Church

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Over or Under:
The Gospel According to Matthew
Matthew 28:1-6

We're celebrating as a church the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. There will always be those who try to downplay the Christian roots that were part of the foundation of our country. I'm not saying that all of them were sold-out disciples of Christ, but I can guarantee you they all believed in a Creator who created us, and they all signed that document. The things of God made their way into the foundations of our country.

I want to read you some of the statements from those who have led our nation throughout the years:

John Quincy Adams—he was John Adams' son, and is attributed with this quote: *"The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: It connected in one indissoluble bond, the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity."*

John Adams said, *"We recognize no sovereign but God and no king but Jesus."*

John Jay, the first chief justice of the Supreme Court, said, *"It is the duty as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian nation, to select and prefer Christians for our rulers."*

John Adams also said, *"Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other."*

Now I want to tell you about a minister who was part of a largely forgotten battle in the Revolutionary War. Four days ago marked the anniversary of the British's last serious push into New Jersey in 1780. They sent raiding parties through farms in Connecticut, and during one of these raids, a British soldier shot and killed a woman named Hannah Caldwell.

She was in the house with her children. The British were trying to break the colonists' morale and spirit in their resistance. But this incident did exactly the opposite. It lit a fire under people when the minister's wife was shot by a soldier.

On June 23rd, about five thousand British and Hessian troops—the Hessians were among the best troops the British had in the colonies at the time—were trying to break through to Washington's supply base in Morristown. They figured that if they could wipe out his supplies, they could end the resistance. Standing in their way were about fifteen hundred Continentals under Nathanael Greene and a few hundred local New Jersey militia. They were badly outnumbered, but they were defending their own homes.

Then came this moment, as colonists were at a place where they were holding against the British, but they were about to run out of paper. You might ask, "What did they need paper for? It's not like they were writing insults to each other on paper." But paper was used to load a musket. To load a musket, you put a measure of powder in. There was a certain amount that produced the maximum pressure and velocity for a musket ball. Then, a musket ball was wrapped in a piece of paper and stuffed down into the barrel with a metal rod. That's what kept the load together.

Otherwise, when you picked up the rifle, if there was no wadding (as they called it) or paper, the gunpowder and the ball would run out, and it would be pointless to shoot. So the minister—the husband of the woman who was killed just a few days before—ran into the church and grabbed a stack of hymnals by Isaac Watts, a famous hymn writer at the time. He came out and began to distribute these hymnals to the soldiers and said, "Give 'em Watts, boys; give 'em Watts!" So they tore out the paper from these hymnals and used it as wadding for their muskets.

They held the ground; the British retreated, and they never again penetrated as deeply into the colonies up there as they had before. The reason I tell you these things is because we should not be ashamed to celebrate our country, and we need to be strong in the foundations and roots on which our freedom rests. And that is the phrase from the Declaration of Independence:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, and that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

Our forefathers believed that freedom comes from God and is greater than any government or any people. That was the foundation of our country. We should celebrate that and be willing to fight for it. If we don't fight for it, we'll have nothing to pass down to those who come after us. And it is worth fighting for. I'm not talking about loading a musket and going out to start a war, but we've got to stand up for this nation, for the principles we were built on, and be true—be willing to stand on the side of the Lord as we do so.

We're going to be in Matthew 28:1-6 today. I'm going to speak on the three words—a little phrase—that you might be surprised by.

"Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb. Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint. Then the angel spoke to the women. 'Don't be afraid!' he

said. 'I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying.'"

The phrase we are going to focus on in this passage is: ***"He rolled aside the stone, and then he sat on it."*** I don't know how many times I've read that passage, but that phrase, "He sat on the stone," has never really jumped out at me. But there is no other record that I know of in Scripture where an angel comes and sits. You know, the angels come, and the angelic host appears to the shepherds, proclaiming, "Glory to God in the highest!" That's kind of an odd detail to include. He rolls the stone over, and then he just sits on it.

You're thinking, "Well, why wouldn't he stand over the tomb? He would probably be more impressive!" But he sits on the stone. So I started looking in the Scripture for the significance of sitting. There are many. It's a symbol of something being finished. When Jesus ascended into heaven, He sat down at the right hand of God. That was a sign that everything was finished.

There are times in the Old Testament when a king would take over a throne—it's throughout history, even—and he would take over a country. They would win a battle, and he would sit on the throne. It was symbolic of authority. When Jesus taught, He sat down. If some of you are wondering why I sit when I preach, there are a couple of reasons. Number one, I had really bad knees, and we were doing multiple services. I'd run out of pain pills before I got to the end of the service. It hurt! So sitting down was a lot easier. But that's also the way Jesus did it.

I know you're asking, "What are you talking about?" I'm going to read it to you and show you. Are you ready?

Luke 4:16-21:

"When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come.' He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. Then he began to speak to them."

That's how Jesus did it. That part is free—I wanted all of you to know why I did that. Back then, standing was a sign of authority and respect, and that was how Jesus, the rabbis, and the teachers of Israel taught. They would stand to honor the reading of God's Word, then sit down to teach. Most likely, even after I get my other knee done, which is going to be soon, I'm still going to sit down like this when I preach because I've gotten used to it, for one thing.

And I do believe there is a Scriptural basis for it. I'm not saying all the others are doing it wrong, but they're doing it wrong. I'm joking! They can stand on their heads if they want. I don't care, as long as they preach the gospel. So, here is what it says in Ephesians 2:4-6:

"But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus."

We have a seat in the heavenly realms with Christ because we are united with Him. When you all came in here, everyone picked a seat. You chose where you were going to sit. I want to ask you a question: how many of you—if you come regularly, whether it's a couple of times a month, every week, or whatever—sit in pretty much the exact place every time you come here?

That's kind of normal for us, isn't it? Sometimes people have been coming here for years, get a wild hair, and say, "Hey, let's sit on the other side." And I see them over there, and it just throws me completely off. Because I know where people sit. If I want to see Scott Jackson, I'm going to look back over here in this corner. There are certain people I know, "Okay, they're going to be over here." I know most of my cutting horse people sit on this side when they come to church. I know! Not all of them. Rodeo people are just scattered everywhere because they don't follow rules. You all know I'm joking!

But you have an idea, and you get to choose where you sit. What I want to talk about is that things will happen to us in life. I think it is symbolic that the angel is sitting on the stone. It was a sign that it was finished. He didn't come down here to bring messages like, "Hey, this is about to happen." He came to tell the women who had come to the tomb that it was done—it was already done. I think it is symbolic that he is sitting on the stone.

The picture we always have is a circular stone—it's like a disc. Archaeologists have found two or three of those. But most of the time, when they talk about rolling the stone away, it meant rolling something like a big box, or whatever shape the stone was in. Those stones were meant to be permanent when they were placed in front of a tomb. They were heavy, and just one person couldn't move them. The angel could do whatever God wanted him to do, so he moved it by himself. But it probably took several men to put that stone there in the first place.

In one of the accounts, the women were going to the tomb when they asked, "Well, who is going to help us? Who is going to roll the stone away?" It wasn't an easy thing. It's a large rock. If you think about it, if somebody is in a grave and has been brought back to life—at the time they didn't know that Jesus would be able to walk through walls or mountains, or whatever, to get out. The reason the stone was rolled away was not to let Jesus out; it was to let us know that Jesus was gone. The stone was what kept people from knowing that.

The stone was the hindrance. It wasn't the grave. The grave was there, but the way in to see it was blocked by the stone. So he rolls it out, and then he sits on it. "Hey, this thing is over. It's done. It's finished." And now, everything that was symbolically keeping Jesus in the grave, and everything that kept us from seeing that he wasn't there anymore, is gone. He is sitting on top of it.

So we have choices in life. There will be difficult things that happen to you. Sometimes it's because of your choices; sometimes it's because of other people's choices. There will be difficult

things. There will be things that aren't anyone's fault. Jesus promised us, "In this world, you will have trouble." Here is the key for us: are we going to sit on the things the Enemy wants to use to destroy us, or are we going to sit under them?

I'm going to show you an example in Scripture of someone who decided to sit under. That was Elijah. Elijah is one of the great figures in Scripture. He is almost mythical. He lived through some great moments in his life, even though they were spread over decades. He was a great servant of God. He was fearless. He told both King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, "You are against the things of God. You're perverting the Word of God. You are sinning, and you're going to be called to judgment." He had no fear at all!

He preached against the false religion his own people had adopted. He even challenged them to a great contest. Four hundred of them came out and met in front of all Israel. God's power was demonstrated, showing that those prophets and that religion were false and that the only true way is to follow Yahweh. There is no false god. So he wins this great battle. And after that, what does he do? He strikes down all the prophets of Baal. He utterly destroys them.

It was an incredible moment. There is nothing else quite like it in Scripture where one man stands up to all of these things and wins. Maybe you could say Samson, but he had superhuman strength. Elijah was a man—even though he was a prophet. So he has this amazing victory. It should have just—and I'm sure it did for a moment, anyway—left him amazed by the power of God.

Jezebel didn't like it because she sponsored the prophets of Baal. So she vowed that Elijah be put to death, and Ahab sent out the whole army to look for him. So now there's a manhunt underway. You're Elijah, and you've had this great victory. You would think they'd be throwing you ticker-tape parades down the street. But instead, you're running for your life because there's an army out there trying to kill you. The entire weight of the government—of the army—is out there trying to kill you—trying to murder you.

In 1 Kings 19:3-4, ***"Elijah was afraid, and he fled for his life."*** You know what? Sometimes we find ourselves in those moments. We have victories, but then something comes along that brings fear, causes us to doubt, and leaves us stuck. God didn't send Elijah on the journey he's on now; he goes on his own.

"He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. Then he went on alone into the wilderness..." He keeps getting farther and farther away. ***"He traveled all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree..."*** Let me tell you about this broom tree. If you find a broom tree—some versions call it a juniper tree—it's the same thing. Calling it a tree is a stretch. It's really just a big bush. It grows in the most desolate parts of the desert.

In one passage in Job, people are described clawing at the dry ground and growing gaunt from poverty and hunger. They become so desperate that they eat the roots of broom trees. That would be the worst thing you could imagine eating—the last resort. So Elijah reaches this broom tree, and here's what he does: ***"He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might***

die. 'I have had enough, Lord,' he said. 'Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died.'"

So what does he do? He ends up under this broom tree. Not only were the roots eaten by people when they were starving, but the strips of bark and the limbs from the tree were used to make rope—to bind things and to bind people. So he is under this tree. There is a lot of symbolism in the Bible about position and the things that we do. What does he do? He sits under this tree that is used to bind. He says, "I'm done. I've had enough. I don't want to do any more." And here's the deal: he chose to be in this place, and he chose to be under it. And now he has given himself over to it.

We're all going to have those moments, too. He could have rightly said, "Here I am! I've been serving God, and now the whole army is out to kill me. I've just been doing what God wants me to do. What do I do now?" Sometimes we're surprised. I'm just guessing—I don't know this, and the Bible doesn't say it. But I'm thinking if I were him and had experienced that kind of victory, I would think, "Okay, man, it's going to be better now. We've proven this god is false. The people of Israel have seen. They've said, "Hey, yeah, we're going to follow the Lord!"

So it ought to get better now—but it doesn't in this moment. It gets worse! We expect some battles and are willing to fight through them, but when unexpected battles come, we sometimes let them affect us, and sometimes we get under them. You probably know, just as I do, people who are still living under something that happened to them a year ago, or five, or ten, or twenty years ago. You meet them, and within the first ten minutes you know about what happened to them. In their minds, they're still living under that thing.

Their life didn't go the way they thought it would. And now they're living under the curse of what wrong thing happened to them, however many years ago. Or maybe it was something they chose. Maybe it was a sin they committed or a decision they made, and they're still living under its weight. Maybe it's something that happens now. Maybe they're living under fear or anxiety, or they don't feel like God can use them, or they doubt all the time whether they are really saved.

Here's the thing about that: when you choose to live under that, you're passing that inheritance on to your children. If you're living in fear, fear drives your decisions and your life, and you're handing that down to your kids. When you live in shame over something you've done, you're handing that down to your kids. Where do I get that? I'm going to tell you:

Deuteronomy 30:19-20:

"Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses."

That's the thing—God gives us a choice about where we're going to sit, how we're going to live, and how we're going to deal with what comes into our lives.

"Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! You can make this choice by loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life. And if you love and obey the Lord, you will live long in the land the Lord swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

He reminds them, "Listen. You're here, and this land is here for you because of your ancestors' faith and decisions." When God came to Abram and told him to move, he didn't say, "Oh, God, it's rough out there! I want to stay here. I've got a good life here." He chose to obey God. There were difficulties along the way, but he chose to obey God.

What you choose to do now will be an inheritance for those who come after you. It will affect them, just as those who came before you have affected your life. Some of us can look back on our lives and realize that our parents passed down their faith to us and showed us how to live. They weren't perfect, but we can be grateful for that. And then we strive to pass it on.

Some of us didn't have that. But here's something that is for you: you can choose to pass it down to your kids. You can change the course of your family tree by choosing to trust in God, choosing to live differently, and choosing not to be defined by mistakes or by what has happened to you in your life.

You see, God didn't just come to set us free from sin; He came to set us free from the guilt and shame of sin. He came so that we might become a new creation and walk in the good deeds He prepared for us beforehand. God has a whole life planned for you. The mistakes of your past can't erase that. The fears you might have about the future can't erase that if you'll set them aside and be willing to follow Him. But you have to choose what you're going to do, and your choices will affect those who come after you.

Psalms 103:17-18:

"But the love of the Lord remains forever with those who fear him. His salvation extends to the children's children of those who are faithful to his covenant, of those who obey his commandments!"

Psalms 112:1-2:

"Praise the Lord! How joyful are those who fear the Lord and delight in obeying his commands. Their children will be successful everywhere; an entire generation of godly people will be blessed."

You're the link. You might be the link between generations past who have followed the Lord, but you have to pass that link down and live it. Or maybe you didn't have that, and you're going to start a new chain. You're going to start a new inheritance and a new legacy for those who come after you. Either way, it is a blessing. It depends on what you choose to do with it. So how do you do it?

Hebrews 12:1-2:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up."

You'll hear people talk about generational curses. For the most part, that means that if your family lived under and were most influenced by the sins of those who raised you, those inclinations can be passed down. As a parent, you wish you could pass down only the things you want your kids to inherit, but they get it all. That's why, so often, parents who are addicted to something, struggle with something, or simply live a certain way often see the next generation follow the same pattern. It's what they know because it's what they've been shown.

When you choose to break that cycle, you choose to throw those things off—even the things that may have come down from your parents or grandparents, or whatever. Throw those things off, and you get to continue running the race.

"Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up."

Now, it does talk about the sin that so easily entraps us, but it can also be an attitude. Maybe you were told you weren't worth much because it was passed down. "You're not anything..." Throw that off! That's not of God. Maybe what has come down to you is shame over a sin you committed, because you think, "Well, God could never use me." But you're a new creation in Christ. Old things have passed away. All things have become new.

You're not in a grave that you can't get out of. The stone has been rolled away. You've been brought to life and seated in the heavenlies with Christ Jesus. You've been given the opportunity to move forward, to live, to serve, and to see what God can do in your life. But you've got to choose it. You've got to choose it.

"Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. Let us run with endurance the race God has set before us."

Each one of us is running toward God, but God has a race just for us. He has a will for your life and has a plan. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord." His plans for you are uniquely yours. So you've got to follow what God puts in front of you. There are boundaries—God says, "Don't do this," and we don't go that way. God says, "Don't serve other gods. Don't allow anything to come between you and me. Don't do this..." There are guardrails, and we are running together, yet we are also running our own race. You have your own race.

But it has to be run with endurance. That means you get up and keep going. It's a daily thing. ***"Let us run with endurance the race God has set before us."*** How do you do all that? You do it by this one simple thing: ***"We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus."***

When Jesus walked on the water toward the disciples, Peter watched and said, "I'd love to do that, but I know I can't do that on my own!" He knew. So he said to Jesus, "Command me to come to you," and Jesus did. Peter stepped out and began to walk on the water. In a moment, he was going to sink, and we'll get to that in a minute because it's important for the lesson. But people who say, "Well, Peter didn't have enough faith..." Peter was the only one who said, "You know what? I know I can walk on water if Jesus commands me to do it because He'll give me what I need to walk on the water." And he did it!

When we get to heaven, we're probably going to sit around and compare notes. "Hey, I did this, and I did this..." But Peter is going to walk by and say, "Walked on water! The only one..." He's the only one other than Jesus who walked on the water. Now, he gets out there and starts to sink. If you look at the passage, it says, "When he saw the size of the waves, he started to sink."

And that's what we do. We're following God, and something comes up that seems bigger than we can handle—and you're right! For a moment, Peter forgot he was walking on the water because God had commanded him and given him the power to do it. He did experience it. None of the others said, "Jesus, tell me to come out!" They were all like, "No, I'm good. I'm going to sit right here." They stayed right there on the boat. But Peter got overwhelmed. Peter had great faith. He had more faith than the rest of them in the boat because he was walking on the water!

But then something else happened. He saw huge waves and said, "Man, that's way bigger than I am." That's what happens to us sometimes. We're following God; we have faith. It's what happened to Elijah. Instead of looking at God and what He had just done, he started looking at his circumstances and at who was coming after him. They took their eyes off Jesus for a moment. The only way to get through these things is to put your eyes on Jesus.

It says, *"... the champion who initiates and perfects our faith."* Then it describes the example He set for us. *"Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne."*

He is seated—do you all see that word again? He is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Here's the example He set: He endured something really difficult because He knew there was something worth it on the other side. As difficult as things can be—and sometimes we can't see it in the moment—we've got to have faith that God is going to show us that something good will be on the other side of it.

You know, the doctor told me—and I didn't really believe him, but he was right. After my knee surgery, at first, before side effects like the blood clot and an infection set in, I thought, "This is not too bad. I'm doing good!" And then those things set in, and, dude, it was rough. During that time, I was like, "Yeah, I ain't doing this other one. That's it. I'm done." But then I got to the other side and realized, "Man, it was worth it! My knee doesn't hurt anymore; I can bend it; I can walk." It's worth it!

So now I'm anxious to get the other one done because I know what's on the other side. I know there will still be that week in there when, if my doctor showed up, I might choke him, but I know it's going to be worth it on the other side. What we've got to remember is to think about all the ways God has come through for you in the past. Think of the example of Jesus if you can't think of one yourself. But do you know what? Jesus had to suffer too. But He did it because of the joy that was awaiting Him on the other side. "He endured the cross, disregarding its shame."

The thing about crucifixion was that it wasn't just a physically brutal way to die. It was humiliating for those who died that way. He disregarded the shame. And now He is seated. He has a seat. And that's what we have to long for and look toward. Just keep our eyes on Jesus and realize that this world is not our home. This world is not the end.

It's always the unexpected things that most seek to overwhelm you. Most of the time, we go through life—unless you're Eeyore—"Oh, it's going to be terrible; Oh, it's going to be bad"—expecting good. And then things come that aren't good. That's the moment when you have to decide. It's easy to decide, "Hey, man, this is awesome! I'm going to trust God today. It's a beautiful day, and everything is going well. #blessedlife" or whatever.

But it's a whole other deal to still have that attitude, "I'm going to trust God. I'm going to follow God. I'm going to keep my eyes on Jesus," when there ain't no sunshine, the storms come, and you can't really see where you're going. And you don't know why you're in the middle of it, or if you're going to get out of it. That's when you've got to choose where you're going to sit. Are you going to keep moving and run the race? Or are you going to allow it to crush you?

We'll all have moments, but if you've had that moment, the choice you have now is to either sit in it or get up and move on. Choose to be over it. Choose to say, "There is going to be victory because I belong to Jesus." Here is what He said: "I will never leave you or forsake you." He will always be with you. He also said, "In this world you have trouble, but take heart, for I have overcome the world."

He said, "Look, it's going to bring its troubles—storms and things like that—but don't worry because you're with Me, and I've already beaten everything in this world that's going to come at you. So if you stick with Me, you're going to be a winner." And you're seated in the heavenly realms with Him right now.

So, where are you going to sit? What are you going to do? We all have to make a choice.