

“Jesus’ Resurrection”

April 21, 2024

Matthew 28:1-15

I. Introduction:

In the 1st twenty chapters of his Gospel, Matthew described the thirty-some years of Jesus’ life—His teachings and His miracles, all proofs that Jesus was the Son of God. Then, in the next 7 chapters, Matthew slowed the pace to walk with Jesus through all the events of Passion Week, including His crucifixion and burial. At the end, when Jesus gave up His spirit on the cross and died, His followers were devastated and the religious leaders heaved a sigh of relief. The story of Jesus seemed to have come to its end. But then, in one short chapter, Matthew recorded the awesome, life changing resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Although the different Gospel writers are in harmony regarding the same basic truths, each of them presented the resurrection from different perspectives. Matthew doesn’t approach the resurrection from a scholarly, historical, or analytical point of view, instead he focused on the simple truths of the resurrection as he recorded the actions of a group of unsuspecting women who loved Jesus and desperate leaders who hated Him.

II. The Unsuspecting Women

A. They came with compassion. Matthew wrote that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, two of those who had remained at the cross as Jesus died ([Matthew 27:56](#)), came very early Sunday morning to the tomb bringing spices so that they might anoint Jesus’ body. Mark and Luke record that Salome, the wife of Zebedee, and Joanna were also part of the group ([Mark 16:1](#); [Luke 24:10](#)). These unsuspecting women came with compassion. Sabbath restrictions had limited the women’s travel and their ability to purchase the necessary materials. So, it wasn’t until after the sundown which marked the end of the Sabbath and the shops opened, that they were able to purchase the materials needed. So “[after the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week](#)” they came to the tomb. [John 20:1](#) adds that “[it was still dark.](#)”

The Jews didn’t have names for the days of the week but simply numbered them in relation to the Sabbath. Sabbath means “seventh” and, although it was at the end of the week, because it was the central

day to their lives, all other days were numbered from it. This particular “first day of the week,” which we call Sunday was not only the beginning of a new day and a new week, but it was also the beginning of a new way to God established by a New Covenant in Jesus’ blood (1 Corinthians 11:25). It is because of Jesus’ resurrection “on the first day of the week” that Christians worship on Sunday rather than on the Sabbath.

The women obviously thought Jesus was dead. As they walked along, Mark 16:3 says that they wondered “who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?” Although they lacked understanding and faith in Jesus’ promise to rise on the third day, they came to the tomb out of a courageous devotion and deep compassion for their Lord.

B. They were filled with fear and wonder. As the women were on their way to the tomb there was another earthquake—the 1st one, on Good Friday, had emphasized Jesus’ death. This 2nd earthquake occurred when an “angel of the Lord came down from heaven.” It announced Jesus’ resurrection. The angel had come to open the sealed grave, and when he arrived, he “rolled back the stone and sat on it.” The angel didn’t move the stone in order to let Jesus out of the tomb. As Jesus would demonstrate during several times after His resurrection, He was no longer bound by the limitations of the physical world (Luke 24:31; John 20:26). In His glorified body, Jesus could escape a closed grave just as easily as He could enter a closed room. The angel moved the stone not to let Jesus out—He was already gone. The angel moved the stone to let the women and, eventually, the apostles in to see that the tomb was empty.

Matthew wrote that the appearance of the angel sitting on the stone terrified the guards. Initially they shook with fear and then “became like dead men.” These battle-hardened soldiers were so traumatized by what they saw that they most likely passed out. The women were filled with fear and wonder as well, but the angel sought to calm them by saying, “Do not be afraid.” They hadn’t come expecting Jesus to be raised from the dead or to see an angel, but God in His mercy and love overlooked their weak faith and lack of understanding. He responded to their great love for His Son by allowing women to be the first witnesses of the empty tomb. The angel said, “I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.”

The women had come seeking Jesus as the one who was crucified, but He was not there as the Crucified One. “He has risen.” The angel reminded the women that Jesus’ resurrection shouldn’t surprise them, because it happened “just as He said.” The angel then invited them to “Come and see the place where He lay.” So, the women went into the tomb and saw that it really was empty. The angel followed them in. Because what they were seeing was so amazing, Mark wrote in Mark 16:6 that the angel said again, “Don’t be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.”

The women would have seen the same thing Peter and John would see later when they came to the tomb. Turn to John 20:3-7. The grave clothes were lying on the stone shelf, perhaps they were still wrapped in the shape of the body. There was no sign of any chaos caused by robbers. Even the cloth which had been wrapped around Jesus’ face was folded carefully and in a place by itself. While the women were in the tomb, another angel joined them. Luke recorded a third time that one of the angels told the women the amazing truth—turn to Luke 24:1-8.

Matthew wrote that one of the angels said, “Go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead.’” Their fear and wonder at what they were seeing had to change. They must not keep this miracle a secret, they needed to go tell the rest of the disciples. In His mercy, God sent the women to tell the disciples as soon as possible what they had seen. God’s messenger didn’t rebuke the women for their lack of faith but sent them as messengers themselves with words of comfort and hope. In addition to telling the disciples the good news about the risen Lord, they were to tell them that they would see Jesus in Galilee.

C. They were filled with joy. The women obeyed the angel’s command and “hurried away from the tomb.” Although they had been filled with fear, now they were also filled with “great joy”—the Greek says, “Mega joy (cara/j mega,lhj).” All that they had hoped for in Jesus was beginning to come true—beginning with His resurrection. Compassion, fear & wonder, joy, and finally . . .

D. They saw and worshipped the Savior. As they “ran to tell His disciples, suddenly Jesus met them. ‘Greetings,’ he said. They came to him, clasped his feet, and worshiped him.” Now they knew with

certainty that He truly was the risen Messiah, the divine Son of God. The only proper response to His presence was adoration, praise, and worship. They did what every person, unbeliever and believer will do when Jesus comes again. **Turn to Philippians 2:5-11.** They had heard the angel's proclamation of Jesus' resurrection. They had seen the empty tomb. Now they saw and touched the glorified body of their risen Lord. They could do nothing less than to adore and worship Him.

III. The Desperate Leaders

A. The guards reported to the chief priests. While the women were encountering angels, “some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests.” Since they hadn't been relieved of guard duty, some of the guards stayed at the tomb. If they had all left, Pilate would immediately have had them arrested and executed for leaving their post. Because they were in temporary service to the Jewish religious leaders, the soldiers wisely “reported to the chief priests everything that happened.” They knew that the chief priests would be as anxious to cover up this miracle as they were. Their report would include everything that happened until they fainted away—the earthquake, the stone being rolled back, the blazing angel sitting on the stone, the empty tomb. As elite soldiers, they wouldn't try to explain what they had seen, but reported it as best they could. This was irrefutable evidence from men with no ulterior motive. They knew that they had failed their orders to secure the tomb—the tomb was empty, and they were looking for a way out.

B. The chief priests and the elders came together. Despite the firsthand, unprejudiced testimony from the guards, the chief priests showed no interest in verifying the guards' story. Who Jesus was and what He did didn't matter to them at all. As Abraham told the rich man in Jesus' story in **Luke 16:19-31**, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” The chief priests were so evil, self-willed, and spiritually blind that they shut their eyes and hearts to all the evidence verifying Jesus' claims. Instead, as soon as the chief priests heard the guards' report, the chief priests and elders came together for an immediate attempt at damage control. They didn't try to deny the resurrection itself. Their concern was to keep the news from their fellow Jews. They were afraid that if

many would accept Jesus as the Messiah, they would lose their influence, power, and wealth. They had to explain the missing body—they needed a plan, and they needed it soon.

C. The Sanhedrin came up with a plan. So, the Sanhedrin came up with a plan but to make it work, they needed to use eyewitnesses. The soldiers needed to be bribed to say that “His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.” The guards may have demanded a large price for their participation—they had the Sanhedrin over a barrel and, most likely, they took advantage of it. But there was another problem, the soldiers’ lives were at stake. If their superiors heard that they had failed, they could be executed. So, the Sanhedrin agreed that “if this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.”

The soldiers gladly took the money. Instead of being punished for dereliction of duty, they would be rewarded. They were more than willing to do the Sanhedrin’s dirty work and “did as they were instructed.” Writing 30 years later, Matthew wrote, “This story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.” The tomb guards were the first ones to spread this lie, but the Sanhedrin would continue to spread it among the Jews by any way they could. A hundred years later, the Sanhedrin’s lie was still common among the Jews. A Christian leader named Justin Martyr who lived from 103 AD to 165 AD wrote about the “*theft theory*” in one of his books. This same false theory is still taught today by some people.

The desperation of both the religious leaders and the guards resulted in a pathetic rumor that lasted until Matthew’s day and beyond. If Matthew or anyone else had stolen Jesus’ body to perpetuate a myth about Jesus’ resurrection, all the religious leaders had to do was to produce Jesus’ body. And if they could have, they would have because the belief in Jesus’ resurrection caused chaos throughout Palestine and the known world. But the empty tomb continued to be a thorn in their side. Their only hope was that some people would be foolish enough to believe their rumor over the truth of Jesus’ resurrection.

IV. Conclusion

Matthew’s account shows that any explanation, but the actual bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ contradicts the facts and insults any rational person. The truth of the resurrection is so absolute that even the

lie of the Sanhedrin helps prove it. Whether the testimony is from Jesus' followers or His enemies, the same conclusion is inevitable—"He is not here; he has risen, just as he said" (Matthew 28:6).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. No one can deny it and be a true Christian. Without the resurrection, there is no Christian faith, no salvation, no hope. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:17, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." **The resurrection proves that Jesus is God's Son.** In John 10:18 Jesus said, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again." No one is able to resuscitate a person who has been dead for 3 days, only God can do that. In John 10:30 Jesus said, "I and the Father are one." Jesus' resurrection proves that Jesus is the Son of God. He is God incarnate.

The resurrection validates the truth of Scripture. In the Old Testament (Psalm 16:10; 110:1) and in the New Testament---especially in His own teachings like Matthew 12:40; 16:21; 17:9, 23, Jesus' resurrection is taught. If Jesus had not come out of the tomb, then these Scriptures and for that matter all Scripture would not be true. **The resurrection assures our own future resurrection.** Turn to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. In John 14:19 Jesus said, "Because I live, you also will live." Because Jesus died and rose again, we will one day be raised to be like Him. Without His resurrection, we have no such hope.

We aren't only going to be resurrected, but because Jesus Christ is alive, we have a glorious future. **The resurrection guarantees our future inheritance.** Turn to 1 Peter 1:3-4. Finally, **the resurrection is proof of a future judgment.** In John 5:22 Jesus said, "The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son." Acts 17:31 says, "For he, i.e., God, has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

Since the Son is risen and alive and since His judgment is certain, we need to share the Gospel before it is too late—John 3:36 says, "Whoever believes in the son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." We need to tell the world that the Savior has come.