

A Look at the Resurrection of Christ

Matthew 28:1 ESV Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. **2** And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. **3** His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. **4** And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. **5** But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. **6** He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. **7** Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.” **8** So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. **9** And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. **10** Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

- I. This is Matthew’s account of *historical fact* of the resurrection. He knew what he was speaking about, because he was a first hand witness of these things.
 - A. He wrote this to his own people, the Jews, proclaiming that Jesus Christ was not just a Jewish peasant who became a populist teacher and miracle worker, but that he was the Son of God, and thus was fully God himself.
 - B. But for proof of this claim, his story does not culminate with references to, or defense of, his teachings or miracles.
 1. Many had already acknowledged his significance and power of his teachings, as well as his miraculous works.
 2. How many times did Jesus silence those who thought they could trap him through clever riddles and false accusations? How many people did he heal? How many were delivered from demonic oppression? Didn’t He even raise the dead?
 - C. Yet Matthew, the other Gospel writers, and the Apostles who wrote the rest of the New Testament do not look to these accounts as their primary defense of the Lordship of Jesus Christ! Instead, they look to the fact of his resurrection!
- II. What Matthew proclaimed about the resurrection was affirmed by the other gospel writers: Mark, Luke and John.
 - A. They all added their own perspective, but they all perfectly agree on the facts. On Friday, Jesus was tried, beaten, mocked and humiliated, and was finally nailed to a cross.
 - B. They testify that he hung there from about 9AM until about 3PM, until he eventually cried out, “It is finished! Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit!”. He then breathed his last, and died. They tell us that a Roman soldier thrust a spear deep into his side to confirm that he was dead.
 - C. We are told that his body was removed from the cross, wrapped, and placed in a tomb borrowed from a wealthy follower named Joseph.
 - D. But the climax of the plot is what happens on Sunday morning, as a group of women who loved Christ arrive at the tomb to prepare his body for burial, since they were legally prohibited from doing so on the Sabbath (the day before).

1. Their initial findings are that someone has rolled away the heavy stone that was placed there to keep people from getting in. It was gone now, because God the Father wasn't concerned about someone getting in, but had determined that Someone was coming out!
 2. As they enter the tomb, they find that the body they have come to embalm is no longer in need of their services, because he is gone!
- E. As they stand there all slack-jawed, dumbfounded and confused, messengers from the throne room of God himself show up to clarify the situation: **Luke 24:5b ESV** "Why do you seek the living among the dead? **6 He is not here, but has risen.** Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, **7** that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise."
- F. Over the next several hours, the risen Christ appears to these women, to his disciples, and to two other followers traveling on the road to Emmaus, showing himself to be alive! Luke gives us a glimpse into that day...
1. **Luke 24:36 ESV** As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" **37** But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. **38** And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? **39** See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." **40** And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. **41** And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" **42** They gave him a piece of broiled fish, **43** and he took it and ate before them.
 2. Jesus speaks with them, eats with them, and encourages them to touch him so they will know he's not just some ghost!
- G. Adding to this, the Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians about the staggering number of witnesses to his resurrection after these appearances.
1. **1 Corinthians 15:6 ESV** Then he appeared to **more than five hundred brothers** at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.
 2. 500 hundred people **at one time** saw the risen Christ! Most of these people were alive and able to be cross-examined at the time Paul wrote this!
- H. **Acts 1:3 ESV** He presented himself alive to them after his suffering **by many proofs**, appearing to them during **forty days** and speaking about the kingdom of God.
- I. The resurrection of Jesus do not happen behind closed doors! It did not happen in a closet, or a dark alley at night.
1. The testimony of the Bible is that over 500 people saw him, heard him and touched him and He presented many proofs over 40 days!
 2. If you were going to trial, wouldn't you want 500 eyewitnesses testifying that they saw what you say happened? Wouldn't you like it if you had 40 days to make your case?

- J. The gospel is not about secrets and mysteries, except those that have been made known in Christ! Christ is risen, he made himself available and visible, and that he did so to open a way for mankind to be reconciled to God!
- K. The books of Acts tells us that, propelled by the reality of the resurrected Jesus, the disciples (now called Apostles) and others with them prayed in an upper room in Jerusalem for ten days with a group numbering about 120.
- L. Christ had told them to go there and wait for the promise of the Father.
 - 1. They did not go to memorialize Christ, because his resurrection made that unnecessary. They went because they had been commissioned by Him, and soon they would be empowered by his Holy Spirit to fulfill that commission.
 - 2. And empower them he did! The Holy Spirit descended upon them on the Day of Pentecost and they were NEVER the same!
- M. From Peter's initial sermon (where he said in **Acts 2:32 ESV** This Jesus God raised up, **and of that we all are witnesses.**), until they drew their final breath, these men made the proclamation of the **resurrection** of Christ central to everything else!
- N. They dug their heels in, never backing off this message, no matter the cost.
 - 1. Stephen was stoned to death because he proclaimed Jesus to the Jews.
 - 2. Andrew (the brother of Peter) was tied to a cross (instead of nailed) so he would die a slower, more painful death. He hung there, preaching the gospel to all who passed by until he expired two days later.
 - 3. James, the brother of John was put to death by Herod.
 - 4. Peter was imprisoned in Rome for nine months, and while there led 49 people to Christ including two captains of Nero's guard. When the emperor condemned him to be crucified. He asked to be crucified upside down because he did not consider himself worthy of the same death as the Lord.
 - 5. Paul was beheaded, also by order of Nero.
 - 6. Mark was dragged through the streets of Alexandria with a rope around his neck for two consecutive days; the second day ending with his death.
 - 7. Thomas was impaled with a lance.
 - 8. James, the son of Alphaeus, was thrown down from the temple, then stoned, and then had his brains beat out with a club.
 - 9. John lived to be almost 100 years old, but only after miraculously escaping injury and death when the empire attempted to boil him in oil. Because they couldn't kill him, they exiled him to the Island of Patmos to do slave labor in the mines; but there he had visions and wrote the book of Revelation.
- O. What was it that made these men so committed to go to the end of their lives, and never go into hiding? It was the fact that they were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ. They knew that there was nothing more valuable than what they had gained because of that!
- P. They knew that the resurrection, and the reality of it, made the message of Christ in the gospel superior to any other teaching the world had ever heard or ever would hear.
 - 1. The resurrection makes the gospel far superior to Old Covenant Judaism! Why? Because through the resurrection, all that the Old Covenant tried and failed to do was accomplished.

- a) Because of the **death** of Christ we can be declared as positionally righteous; meaning God sees us as righteous though we still struggle with sin. We call this justification. The Law could never do that!
 - b) But because of the **resurrection** we can be made completely new (actually and in reality)!
 - c) First, it is because of Christ's resurrection (not just his death) that we are being made progressively more like Christ. We call this sanctification.
 - (1) Because of the resurrection, the New Testament teaches that it's not mere pardon that we've received, but re-creation... a brand new life!
 - (2) **Romans 6:1 ESV** What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? **2** By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? **3** Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **4** We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, ***in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.***
 - (3) Any progress you are making in holiness is only because of resurrection power, applied by the Holy Spirit.
2. Oh but it gets better! Because of the resurrection of Christ, we have the promise that one day we will be made new, not just in an internal, spiritual manner; but our physical bodies will one day be completely transformed to be like the prototype; which is Jesus' resurrection body, the one he occupies forever!
- a) **Philippians 3:20 ESV** But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ***21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body,*** by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.
 - b) If you think you're going to spend eternity floating around like Casper the friendly ghost, think again! Paul spends the entirety of 1 Corinthians chapter 15 on this topic. Listen to some of what he says...
 - (1) He calls Christ the "first fruits" of a resurrection reality that we all will one day enjoy! He goes on to say...
 - (2) **1 Corinthians 15:42 ESV** So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. **43** It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. **44** It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. **45** Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. **46** But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. **47** The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. **48** As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. **49** Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

- (3) “Perishable”, “dishonor”, “weakness”, “natural”; all these describe a body that is subject to weakness, aging, sin and death.
- (4) “Imperishable”, “glory”, “power”, “spiritual”; these all speak of a body that is made perfect, with a brand new kind of life, and able to live eternally.
 - (a) The word translated “spiritual” (where it speaks of a “spiritual body”) is “Pneumatikos” (pnyoo-mat-ik-os’).
 - (b) According to Wayne Grudem in his Systematic Theology, the word rarely means “nonphysical” when used by the Apostle Paul, but rather “consistent with the character and activity of the Holy Spirit”.
 - i) Your natural body is now living by the characteristics and desires of this age and is governed by its own sinful will.
 - ii) But when it is raised, your new body will be fully governed by the character and activity of the Holy Spirit! It will not be influenced or in any way subject to sin and corruption!

III. The resurrection is everything in the gospel. Do not be deceived! You cannot even be a follower of Jesus Christ if you don’t believe in the resurrection of Christ!

A. There are many voices in the culture claiming to be “Christian” and “Spiritual”, but if they deny the historical and bodily resurrection of Christ they are not giving you “new light”, but “old lies”! Belief in a risen Lord is basic Christianity!

B. **Romans 10:9 ESV** because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and ***believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.***

C. Paul confronted people like that in Corinth:

1. **1 Corinthians 15:12 ESV** Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? **13** But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. **14 *And if Christ has not been raised,*** then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. **15** We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. **16** For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. **17 *And if Christ has not been raised,*** your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. **18** Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. **19** If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

2. Paul says three things are true if Christ is not raised:

- a) First, the message of the Gospel is a vain misrepresentation of God! He can’t be interested in forgiving your sins or declaring you righteous, if Christ is still in the tomb! In fact, Christ himself is a fraud because he told his disciples over and over that he would rise from the dead!
- b) Second, you are just as dead in your sins as you ever were! That means you are still under the judgement, wrath and condemnation of a Holy God, with a one-way ticket to eternal damnation in hell!
- c) Lastly, all those who have died, Christian or not, are dead and gone for good! No hope of eternal life, a future resurrection or a glorified body. They’re just worm food...if Christ is not raised!

- D. But praise God, he lives! The Pharisees, the Roman Empire, the false religions, the communists, the secularists, the post-modernists, the atheists, and a host of other movements and ideologies have tried to silence the declaration of Christ from the book of Revelation:
- E. **Revelation 1:17b ESV** “Fear not, I am the first and the last, **18** and *the living one*. I died, and behold *I am alive forevermore*, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.
- IV. Simon Greenleaf was a Professor at Harvard Law school in the early to middle 1800’s. He was well respected and was retained as chief counsel in cases argued before the supreme court. He was a brilliant legal mind and an expert in the field of evidence, even writing books on the subject.
- A. Simon Greenleaf was also an agnostic who scoffed at the idea of both the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ as concocted fables fashioned by uneducated religious zealots with an agenda.
1. One day a student challenged Professor Greenleaf to “consider the evidence” for the resurrection.
 2. Greenleaf, seizing an opportunity to teach this young man a lesson, began to apply all of the courtroom rules of evidence to the Bible’s account of the resurrection.
 - a) He examined the reliability of the texts and the testimony of the witnesses contained therein with meticulous and merciless detail.
 - b) After lengthy consideration, he concluded that the admissible evidence presented by the Gospel writers was sufficient to prove in any fair court of law that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was indeed fact—not hoax, myth or fiction.
 3. As a result Simon Greenleaf surrendered his life fully to the risen Lord Jesus! He committed himself to the field of Christian apologetics (the methods of defending the truth of scripture), writing books that are still influencing people today.
- B. It may seem unfortunate to us that we cannot see him physically or touch him , confirming that he is alive like the first disciples.
1. But this is why we have been given consistent, credible testimony in the scripture! John says as much in the introduction to 1 John:
 2. **1 John 1:3 ESV** that which we have seen and heard *we proclaim also to you, so that* you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.
- C. Knowing that we would not have that benefit, Jesus gave us the testimony of his witnesses, and he bestowed a blessing that is *specific to us*.
1. When Jesus removed Thomas’ doubts by letting him touch the prints in his hands, and the place where the spear pierced his side, he told him...
 2. **John 20:29b ESV** “Have you believed because you have seen me? *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*”
- D. The blessing for 21st century believers who have never seen the Lord with physical eyes, or touched him with our hands remains! We may not have witnessed an empty tomb or heard his voice 2,000 years ago, but you can see the power of his resurrection every day in a surrendered life!