

Crucified *and* Risen



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 27:11–26; John 3:19; Isa. 59:2; Matt. 27:45, 46, 49–54; Heb. 8:1–6; Matt. 28:1–20.*

Memory Text: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (*Matthew 28:18, NKJV*).

An ad in a British magazine asked if someone would donate his or her body to science. It said that scientists had been studying Egyptian mummification and were looking for a volunteer with a terminal illness who is prepared to donate their body after death. These scientists believed, the ad claimed, that they had cracked the secret of how the Egyptians did it, and that the body “would be preserved—potentially for hundreds or even thousands of years”—(<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/now-you-can-be-mummified-just-like-the-egyptians-1863896.html>).

As Christians, we don't need to worry about having our corpses preserved. God has promised us something so much better than that. The death of Jesus, where He paid in Himself the penalty for our sins, and then His resurrection, when He was the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (*1 Cor. 15:20, NKJV*)—have paved the way for our corpses, not to be “preserved” like some ancient pharaoh (besides, if you have ever seen some of those corpses, they aren't too pretty, anyway) but to be transformed into incorruptible bodies that will live forever.

This week, the final chapters in Matthew, we study the inexhaustible truths regarding our Lord's death and resurrection and the hope that these two events offer us.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 25.

Jesus or Barabbas

Read Matthew 27:11–26. What are some of the deeper implications of the choice given to the people and the choice that they made?

It was Barabbas the murderer who was supposed to be crucified on the middle cross. The criminals on either side were possibly his associates. Barabbas was not a first name but a last one. Bar means “son of,” just as Simon bar Jonah meant “son of Jonah” or Bartholomew meant “son of Tolomeo.” Barabbas meant “son of abbas”—meaning “son of the father.” Many early manuscripts record Barabbas’s first name as Yeshua (Jesus). Yeshua was a common name at the time, meaning “Yahweh saves.” So, Barabbas’s name was along the lines of “Yahweh saves, son of the father.”

Talk about a farce!

“This man had claimed to be the Messiah. He claimed authority to establish a different order of things, to set the world right. Under satanic delusion he claimed that whatever he could obtain by theft and robbery was his own. He had done wonderful things through satanic agencies, he had gained a following among the people, and had excited sedition against the Roman government. Under cover of religious enthusiasm he was a hardened and desperate villain, bent on rebellion and cruelty. By giving the people a choice between this man and the innocent Saviour, Pilate thought to arouse them to a sense of justice. He hoped to gain their sympathy for Jesus in opposition to the priests and rulers.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 733.

Pilate was wrong. Unless under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, people will inevitably make the wrong spiritual choice, as did the mob here. In the end, we all have to choose between Christ or Barabbas, Christ or the fallen corrupted world, between life or death. “ ‘And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.’ ” (*John 3:19, NKJV*).

Why do people tend to prefer darkness over light? How can you see even in yourself this inherent tendency? What should that tell you about the reality of our fallen nature and, even more important, about our need to surrender ourselves totally to the Lord?

Our Crucified Substitute

“Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ ” (Matt. 27:45, 46, NKJV). What is the meaning of this cry? How do we understand its implications in terms of the plan of salvation?

Matthew records what has been called by theologians “the cry of dereliction.” Dereliction brings in the idea of abandonment, of something to be left alone and in need. In this case we can see Jesus’ sense of abandonment by the Father. The darkness that surrounded the land at that time symbolized divine judgment (*Isa. 13:9–16, Amos 5:18–20, Jer. 13:16*); Jesus was experiencing in Himself the horrific consequences of sin, of the complete separation from the Father. In our behalf, He was bearing, in Himself, the divine judgment against sin that should have been ours. “So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (*Heb. 9:28, NKJV; see also 2 Cor. 5:21*). On the cross Jesus appropriates the language of Psalm 22:1 because in a unique way He was experiencing what humans experience, the separation from God due to sin. “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (*Isa. 59:2, NKJV*).

This wasn’t pretend. Jesus truly bore the wrath of God against sin; the penalty for our transgressions fell upon Him, and thus filled His soul with consternation and dread as He bore the weight of guilt, our guilt, upon Himself. How bad sin must be in the sight of God that it took one member of the Godhead to suffer the guilt and punishment of sin in order for us to be forgiven it!

And yet, even amid this horror, Jesus could cry out, “My God, My God!” Despite all that was happening to Him, His faith remained intact. He would stay faithful to the end, regardless of the suffering, regardless of the sense of being forsaken by the Father.

What is it like to feel separation from God due to sin? Why is claiming the righteousness of Christ our only way back, a claim accompanied by repentance, confession, and a resolve to forsake that sin?

Torn Veil and Rent Rocks

Each Gospel writer told the story of Jesus from various perspectives, but all focused on His death. Matthew alone, though, records the opening of graves after the temple veil was torn.

Read Matthew 27:49–54. What is the meaning of these events? What hope do they point to for us?

Jesus died right after the mob, in ignorance of Jesus’ real words, mocked Him about having Elijah come to save Him. Their mockery was another powerful but sad example of how Jesus has been misunderstood by many of His own people.

Matthew then records that the curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom. The symbolism is unmistakable: a new era in salvation history had begun. The sacrificial services, for so long pointing to Jesus, were no longer necessary. The old earthly type was now replaced by something so much better.

Read Hebrews 8:1–6. What do these texts say that help us to understand what happened to the earthly sanctuary system and what has replaced it?

Matthew records not only the tearing of the veil but the rocks splitting, the graves opening, and some of the dead being raised—events that could happen only because of what Jesus had accomplished by dying as our Substitute for sin. So here in Matthew, we can see things happening that the old system itself could never have caused. “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (*Heb. 10:4, NKJV*). Of course, only Jesus could take away sins, and for us the great result, the great promise, of Jesus’ taking away our sins is the resurrection from death. Without that promise, we have nothing (*see 1 Cor. 15:13, 14, 19*). In these early resurrections (we don’t know how many), we can see the hope and promise of our resurrection at the end of this age.

The Risen Christ

The Christian faith centers not only on the cross but on the empty tomb. The truth is, the majority of people in the world, including non-Christians, believe that a man named Jesus of Nazareth died on a cross. Not long after Jesus lived we find historical references such as this one from Tacitus, a Roman historian: “Nero . . . inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians . . . by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus.”—Tacitus, A.D. 57–117 (<http://www.causeofjesusdeath.com/jesus-in-secular-history>).

There’s little debate, then or now, about whether a historical figure named Jesus was condemned and crucified.

The hard part is the Resurrection: the idea that Jesus of Nazareth, who was dead on a Friday afternoon, became alive again on a Sunday morning. That is what many people struggle with. After all, a Jew crucified by the Romans in Judea was a fairly common occurrence. *But a Jew raised from the dead after being crucified?* That’s another matter entirely.

Yet, without this belief in a risen Jesus, we simply do not have a Christian faith. Paul wrote: “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. . . . If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (*1 Cor. 15:14, 19, NIV*). Jesus’ death itself had to be followed by His resurrection, because in His resurrection we have the surety of our own.

When we come to the story of the resurrection of Jesus, we have two options. The first option is to view this story as sentimental propaganda written by a few lonely followers of Jesus to keep His memory alive, the way we try to keep the memory alive when a well-known figure dies today. The second option when we come to the story of the Resurrection is to take it literally, a firsthand account of an extraordinary event, an event later interpreted to have implications for every human being who ever lived.

Read Matthew 28:1–15. Why does Jesus tell the women (in verse 9) to “rejoice” (*NKJV*)? Of course, they can be glad that He was resurrected, that their Master came back. But what is the real reason to rejoice at the resurrection of Jesus?

The Great Commission

For many people, one of the most hard-to-understand things Jesus did was to return to heaven and entrust the gospel ministry to humans. How often we disappoint Him and ourselves, and as the Gospels show, His early followers were no exception. Yet, it's by entrusting us with ministry that Christ shows His love for us and our need of Him.

Read Matthew 28:16–18. Compare Jesus' words, “ ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’ ” (*Matt. 28:18, NKJV*), with Daniel 7:13, 14. How do these texts relate to each other?

Read Matthew 28:19, 20—the final verses of this Gospel. What does Jesus say, and what is the relevance of His words to us?

Ellen G. White suggests that nearly 500 believers assembled on a mountain in Galilee after the Resurrection. (*See 1 Cor. 15:6.*) His gospel commission was not just for the disciples but for all believers. “It is a fatal mistake,” she writes, “to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained minister. All to whom the heavenly inspiration has come are put in trust with the gospel. All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men. For this work the church was established, and all who take upon themselves its sacred vows are thereby pledged to be co-workers with Christ.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 822.

Have you often thought of yourself as a coworker with Christ? In what specific ways can you be more active in taking the gospel to your world?

Further Thought: As did all the other Gospel writers, Matthew wrote about the resurrection of Jesus. Also, as did his fellow writers, he wrote next to nothing about what the meaning of the Resurrection itself was. Though they depicted the story of the Resurrection, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John gave us no real theological explanation of it, even though it's so central to the Christian faith. It's in Paul's writings that we get the most detailed explanation about the meaning of the Cross. "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (*1 Cor. 15:20–22, NKJV*). Paul also wrote that we have been "buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead" (*Col. 2:12, NKJV*). Peter, too, has something to say on this crucial topic: "There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (*1 Pet. 3:21, NKJV*). Though we don't know why the Gospel writers didn't go into any detailed explanation, some scholars have seen this as more evidence of the truthfulness of their accounts. After all, writing many years after the events, why didn't they use this opportunity to give a detailed explanation of what they wanted people to believe about the Resurrection? If it were a fraud or a con, why not take the opportunity to make it mean whatever they wanted it to mean? Instead, they simply tell the story, making no attempt to embellish it with any theological explanations as to what it all was supposed to mean.

Discussion Questions:

- ① At the moment of Jesus' death, the temple curtain from the old covenant was torn from top to bottom, and a new covenant was ushered in, presided over by a new High Priest, Jesus Christ. "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God" (*Heb. 10:19–21, NKJV*). How does it make you feel to realize that Christ Himself now serves as our High Priest?
- ② Matthew's Gospel covered so many subjects, so many topics. What things in particular struck you regarding how Jesus was presented here? How can studying this Gospel help you better to understand what it means to be a Christian and to follow the teachings of Jesus?

Try Jesus: Part 3

When Gayle saw how interested Neal and I were in what the children were learning, she gave us a video series to watch. The videos presented Bible truths such as the Sabbath in such a way that we did not feel threatened. As we watched the videos we realized that for the first time Christianity was making sense to us. Neal had never wanted to go to church before, but suddenly he was spending all his free time learning more about God. On the other hand, I had been trying for years to figure out what really happens to people when they die. Little by little we realized that Christianity held far more for us than we had ever thought. It was definitely not a dull religion filled with meaningless traditions. We found it to be a vibrant, living faith, a faith we could really hold onto!

Our new friends invited us to a series of Bible studies on the book of Revelation. We invited another family with whom we had become friends, and they enjoyed the studies as much as we did. Then Gayle invited us to an evangelistic series at her church. Our friends went with us to every meeting. Even our children found plenty to hold their attention. Every night after the meetings, we discussed what we had seen and heard. Some of our discussions lasted far into the night. When the speaker asked for those to stand who wanted to dedicate their lives to God, our whole family—and our friends—stood up together.

As I look back on what happened, I realize that God did, indeed, have a plan for our lives when we moved from South Africa to a new home in Australia. In just one year, we had moved from one continent to another, received an invitation to “Try Jesus,” and made the decision to follow Him and be baptized. What a life-changing year that was!

One day at church, we were introduced to two young boys, cousins, who, the pastor told us, had been responsible for putting the “Try Jesus” card into our letter box. We are so grateful to those two young people—as well as to Gayle—for the part they all played in leading us to the Lord. We are forever changed, and I continue to be overwhelmed when I think of how much God loves us—so much that He will bring together a series of miracles to lead us to Him.

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Jesus' mission and ministry depicted in Luke 4:16–21 portrays the whole “everlasting gospel” (*Rev. 14:6*) as more than preaching the truth of salvation by faith. Jesus shows us that preaching the gospel also means tangible expressions of love and compassion for the poor, hungry, sick, brokenhearted, oppressed, outcast, and imprisoned.

The third quarter 2016 guide, entitled *The Role of the Church in the Community* by Gaspar and May-Ellen Colón, will explore this wholistic version of the “everlasting gospel,” and will examine the role of the church in impacting its communities with this gospel. All ministries of the church exist to work together for serving the community as well as church members. The church is a community of people who do not exist for themselves but who are called out to live and to preach the everlasting gospel as expressed in the ministry of Jesus. This means not only preaching the gospel but living it in our lives by ministering to the needs of those in our local communities.

Lesson 1—“The Restoration of All Things”

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Image of God** (*Gen. 1:26, 27*)

MONDAY: **The Fall and Its Aftermath** (*Gen. 3:7*)

TUESDAY: **Enmity and Atonement** (*Gen. 3:14, 15*)

WEDNESDAY: **Restoration in Jesus** (*Gal. 4:19*)

THURSDAY: **The Restoring Role of the Church** (*Mark 2:1–12*)

Memory Text—*Genesis 1:27*

Sabbath Gem: Those who are in Christ are a new creation now (*2 Cor. 5:17*), and we are predestined to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus now (*Rom. 8:29*). He also calls and empowers His church so that we can work toward the restoration of others as well.

Lesson 2—Restoring Dominion

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Created for Dominion** (*Ps. 8:3–8*)

MONDAY: **The Privilege of Dominion** (*Gen. 1:26–28*)

TUESDAY: **Boundaries** (*Gen. 2:16, 17; Exod. 20:1–17*)

WEDNESDAY: **Care of the Earth** (*Gen. 2:15*)

THURSDAY: **Restoring Dominion** (*James 1:27, Isa. 58:7*)

Memory Text—*Genesis 1:26*

Sabbath Gem: After Creation, God gave man dominion over the earth. Sadly, this was lost after the Fall. The church has a role to play in helping people regain some of what was lost after the tragic fall of our first parents in Eden.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audio CD to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; e-mail: info@christianrecord.org; Web site: www.christianrecord.org.