

Buried—But Risen!



SABBATH AFTERNOON

A TOMB UNIQUE: Some of the most famous structures on this earth are tombs. Consider the great pyramid of Egypt: 100,000 men are supposed to have worked for 20 years to build it. To this day we do not know how the 23 million massive stone blocks, weighing an average of two and one half tons, were set in place. But the great pyramid, like the others in its class, was built out of a concern for death. It provided burial chambers for the Pharaoh; it is a monument to death. So is the beautiful Taj Mahal of India, built by Shah Jahan for his favorite wife, Mumtaz. With its gleaming white marble, inlaid precious stones, gardens, and reflecting pools, the Taj Mahal indeed is a magnificent monument. Inside the Taj Mahal repose the bodies of Shah Jehan and Mumtaz. How different is the story that we celebrate in this week's lesson. The simple, rock-cut garden tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, the tomb where Jesus was laid, is more wonderful than the pyramid of Cheops or the Taj Mahal. And that's because—His tomb is empty!

The Week at a Glance: Why is it important to know that Jesus truly died on the cross? Who were the first ones to know that Christ had risen? What is the evidence that He rose from the dead? How do the arguments against the Resurrection used by skeptics fail?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 15:42–16:20.*

Memory Verse: “‘Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him' ” (*Mark 16:6, NIV*).

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

“He Was Buried” *(Mark 15:42-47).*

The Scriptures had predicted that God’s servant would make “his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death” (*Isa. 53:9, NIV*). Jesus was a poor man who owned only one item of value—the seamless tunic for which the Roman soldiers gambled (*John 19:23, 24*). It seemed highly unlikely that He would be buried in a rich person’s tomb, but so it turned out. Two members of the Sanhedrin, the highest council of the Jews, came forward after Jesus’ death to publicly identify themselves with Jesus. Mark mentions Joseph of Arimathea, but John’s Gospel tells us that Nicodemus—he who had secretly talked with Jesus under cover of night—accompanied Joseph (*John 19:38-42*).

In 1 Corinthians 15:3,4 Paul quotes an early formulation of the gospel. This statement includes the words “he was buried.” Why was it important to the first Christians to include this fact?

The New Testament throbs with the certainty that Jesus rose from the dead. Throughout the book of Acts the preaching of the apostles comes back to two ringing affirmations: Christ is risen, and He has poured out the Holy Spirit. So, the formulation of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3 ties together three facts: 1. Christ died for our sins. 2. He was buried. 3. He rose again.

Thus, the burial of Jesus is not a minor matter. It underlines the truth that He truly died—did not merely faint or swoon (as some critics and skeptics have suggested)—and thus makes the resurrection a glorious miracle. Only in the context of His death can we understand the importance of His resurrection.

Read the following texts. What common point are they all emphasizing, and is that important to our faith? *Lev. 17:11, Matt. 26:28, John 19:40, Rom. 5:6-8, 6:4, 1 Cor. 5:7.*

The Bible is clear: Christ died for our sins, and His death is a crucial component for the plan of salvation. Without it, there would be no atonement, no redemption, no eternal life for those who, otherwise, would be forever lost. That’s how crucial His death is to us and to our hope for the future. It’s His death that helps guarantee the final annulment of ours.

Key Text: *Mark 15:42-47*

Teachers Aims:

1. To emphasize the importance of Jesus' death.
2. To strengthen faith in the historical reality of Jesus' resurrection.
3. To stress the importance of the Resurrection and Christ's ministry in heaven.

Lesson Outline:

I. Burial (*Isa. 53:9, Mark 15:45*).

- A. Jesus' burial was prophesied in the Old Testament.
- B. That Jesus was buried proves the reality of His death.
- C. His death was necessary to complete the atonement.

II. The Empty Tomb (*Mark 16:1-8*).

- A. Women were the first to learn of the Resurrection, a fact the early Christians may not have been eager to admit because of society's low regard for women.
- B. The fact that women discovered the empty tomb confirms the truth of the accounts.
- C. It is important to note that Jesus ignored social prejudices in His resurrection as He did in His life.

III. He Is Risen (*Mark 16:9-18*).

- A. Mark and the other Gospels provide multiple instances of eyewitness testimony to the risen Christ.
- B. The different Gospel accounts of the risen Christ support and complement one another.
- C. The Resurrection assures us of Jesus' continuing care and concern for His people.

Summary: In order for Jesus to rise from the dead, He had to actually die. And so He did. He experienced everything death involves, including burial rites and embalming. All this is well verified. Also well verified is His resurrection. Because of the empty tomb, we know Jesus is alive and ministering on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary until His return.

COMMENTARY

Mark's final two chapters are full of powerful phrases, indicating a definitive progression: They "delivered Him to Pilate" (*Mark 15:1, NKJV*); "they crucified Him" (*vs. 24, NKJV*); Jesus "breathed His last" (*vs. 37, NKJV*); "the veil . . . was torn . . . from top to bottom" (*vs. 38, NKJV*); "he laid Him in a tomb" (*vs. 46, NKJV*); "He is risen" (*Mark 16:6, NKJV*); and "Go" (*vs. 7*). These expressions convey the following: (1) Jesus is real. Born while Caesar Augustus

He Is Risen! *(Mark 16:1-11).*

Who were the first people to be told that Jesus had risen from the dead? What effect did the empty tomb have on them? *(Mark 16:1-8).*

In Jesus' time women had a lower status in society, but not before God. Mark singles out the women who ministered to Jesus, first in Galilee and then in Jerusalem. They stood looking on the cross as He died; they were not ashamed to be identified with Him *(Mark 15:40, 41)*. Some of these women bought spices to anoint His body and came early on Sunday morning to the tomb for this purpose. These devoted followers became the first to hear the incredible news that Jesus had risen from the dead.

For many scholars the fact that women were the first to see Jesus helps affirm the authenticity of the accounts. If they wanted to make up the story, why have not some powerful religious or political leader in Palestine, as opposed to a few "lowly" and "unimportant" women of no real social class, first taken notice of the empty tomb? Would not that have been a more powerful way of making their point?

Note, too, how the effect on the women of the news of the resurrection of Jesus corresponded with the impression made by Jesus throughout the Gospel of Mark. Over and over we have seen how people were amazed at His miracles and teaching. Now came the crowning miracle, the supreme proof that He was what He claimed to be. Although the women did not yet understand fully, the sight of the empty tomb filled them with wonderment.

To whom did the risen Lord first appear? Again, how does this help affirm the authenticity of their accounts of Jesus? *(Mark 16:9-11, John 20:1-18).*

As women were the first to be informed of the Resurrection, so it was to a woman that Jesus first appeared. And what a woman! According to the views of many people, her past excluded her from polite company. But she who had been forgiven much loved much; thus it is not surprising that Mary Magdalene was first at the tomb that Sunday morning. And to her, Jesus chose to reveal Himself.

We are all, to some degree, impacted by the social prejudices against certain people. Which ones poison your soul? From what you've seen today (women of no great class being the first ones privileged with the news of a risen Savior), how do you think God views those prejudices, and what can you do through God's grace to be purged of this unholy and un-Christian attitude?

reigned in Rome (*Luke 2:1*), He suffered and died under Pontius Pilate. (2) He died condemned for our sins, and His body was laid in a tomb. (3) The rending of the temple veil signaled the end of the Old Testament sacrificial system, at which point Jesus' death became the ultimate sacrifice for sin, opening "a new and living way" to God (*Heb. 10:20, NKJV*). (4) He rose from the dead, victor over the grave. (5) The risen Jesus left a commission for His followers.

This week we deal with the reality of Christ's death, resurrection, and the urgency of His commission.

I. The Reality of Christ's Death.

Skeptics have theorized that Jesus really did not die. Such critics have maintained He merely fainted and became unconscious. Then, later in the tomb, He regained consciousness. Because of such skepticism and because the death of Jesus remains central to the Christian faith, it is necessary to affirm that Jesus died. Hence, the Gospels' account of the burial is important.

The burial was made possible by Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, a man of means, and a disciple at heart (*Mark 15:43*). The Sanhedrin's abandonment of judicial law in preference to lynching the innocent Jesus, combined with the events surrounding the Cross itself, must have weighed heavily on Joseph. Waiting was no longer sufficient; he must step forward in courage. Thus, he buried his newfound Lord in his own new tomb. A true disciple always will find ways to confess her or his faith, ways to say, Christ Jesus died for me.

II. The Reality of the Resurrection.

"'He is risen'" (*Mark 16:6, NKJV*). These are the three most powerful words ever uttered. Coming from heaven's special envoy, they proclaimed an empty tomb, a risen Lord, and God's victory in the cosmic conflict. Without the Resurrection, there is no gospel. And the gospel is that "Christ died for our sins . . . He was buried, and that He rose again the third day" (*1 Cor. 15:3, 4, NKJV*). Paul further argues that Christianity stands or falls with the truth of Christ's resurrection: "If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. . . . You are still in your sins" (*vss. 14-17, NKJV*).

Mark, as did the other Gospel writers, points out that several women were at the Crucifixion, burial, and Resurrection, including Mary Magdalene—the least reputable of them all. Indeed, women were the last to leave the cross, the first to see the risen Lord, and the first to be commissioned to go and tell the good news (*Mark 16:7*). At a time when women were held in least esteem and treated as outcasts, Heaven bestowed upon them the honor of sharing the Great Commission.

Appearances of the Risen Lord *(Mark 16:12-18)*.

Jesus appeared not only to people who feature prominently in the Gospel account but also to some about whom we would know nothing had He not chosen to reveal Himself to them. In this regard we see another instance of Jesus' interest in all His disciples, whether or not they were leaders or well known.

To whom did Jesus appear as they were walking along the road? *(Mark 16:12, 13)*. Study the extended story in **Luke 24:13-32**. What lessons can you learn from it?

To whom else did Jesus reveal Himself as the risen Lord? *(Matt. 28:16, 17; Mark 16:14; Luke 24:33-49; John 20:19-29; 21:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:4-8)*.

Each Gospel writer supplies information about the appearances of the risen Christ that the others do not. The four accounts, however, confirm that Jesus truly rose from the dead. Differences in some details are minor and consistent with what might be expected from eyewitness accounts. While we probably cannot be sure as to the exact order of events, we may be confident of the following list of appearances of the risen Lord:

1. To Mary Magdalene *(Mark 16:9, John 20:15-17)*.
2. To the other women after they had left the tomb *(Matt. 28:9, 10)*.
3. To Peter prior to the walk to Emmaus *(Luke 24:34, 1 Cor. 15:5)*.
4. To two disciples on the way to Emmaus *(Mark 16:12, Luke 24:13-32)*.
5. To the disciples in the upper room *(Mark 16:14, John 20:19-24)*. But Thomas was not present.
Additional appearances after the Resurrection day:
6. To the eleven, Thomas being present, in the upper room a week later *(John 20:26-29)*.
7. To seven of the disciples as they were fishing on Lake Galilee *(John 21:1-3)*.
8. To about five hundred *(1 Cor. 15:6)*.
9. To James *(1 Cor. 15:7)*.
10. To the eleven immediately prior to the Ascension *(Mark 16:19, 20; Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:4-12)*.

Notice the variety of the appearances of Jesus. What does this suggest about the certainty of His resurrection? What does this tell us about the evidence God has given to us for belief? How do these accounts help strengthen your faith in the whole plan of Salvation?

The women came to the tomb early Sunday morning, loaded with spices and perfume and wondering who would roll away the stone for them (*Mark 16:3*). Were they aware Jesus once said faith can move mountains (*Mark 11:23*)? The women did not lack faith. They went straight to their destination and found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. “ ‘It was not possible that He should be held by’” death (*Acts 2:24, NKJV*).

The empty tomb stands forever as the guarantee of our salvation. “The enemies of Jesus placed a guard before the tomb to see that none of His friends took Him from it. The friends of Jesus must ever stand before the empty tomb, armed with an informed and intelli-

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Mark 15:42–16:20, Luke 24:13–32, John 20:1–18*

- ❶ What significance do you see in the fact that Jesus was buried before sundown on the preparation day (Friday) and that He rested in the tomb over the hours of the Sabbath? What does this *coincidence* reveal about the role of the Sabbath?
- ❷ There’s always significance in what Jesus does. What is the significance of women being the first to tell others about the empty tomb? Are there lessons for us today that go beyond, say, gender roles in the church? If so, what are they?
- ❸ After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples several times, in various settings. He almost always appeared suddenly, without warning, and then vanished mysteriously. It’s almost as if He were saying, “You never know where you’ll see Me next.” And implied is the notion, “I’ll never be far away.” When are you most conscious of Jesus’ presence through the ministry of the Holy Spirit? How does it feel for you to experience His presence?
- ❹ Mark wrote: “The Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it” (*Mark 16:20, NIV*). What kind of “signs” would the people in your community find particularly persuasive?
- ❺ There have been countless attempts to contradict the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. But nothing gives it more credibility than the courage with which Christ’s disciples through the ages risked their lives to take to the world the message, “He is risen!” What are you doing to spread the word? How can our congregations be more effective in proclaiming “He is risen, indeed”?

The Crowning Miracle

What was the earliest attempt to refute the Resurrection? (*Matt. 28:11-15*). What answer would you give to those who bring it up today?

As we studied in last week's lesson, the religious leaders took steps to see that Jesus' disciples would not be able to steal the body. With Pilate's permission they sealed the tomb and posted a guard (*Matt. 27:62-66*).

How did this attempt to prevent the Resurrection only strengthen the evidence for it?

During the course of the centuries, other "explanations" have been advanced to explain the empty tomb, such as (1) Jesus did not die on the cross; He merely swooned and later revived in the coolness of the tomb; and (2) His "appearances" to the disciples did not actually happen—the disciples longed so badly for Him to rise again that they imagined they saw Him risen from the dead. This psychological explanation is a "wish-fulfillment" theory, because it argues that the disciples' wish led to fulfillment of their hopes.

What evidence of Scripture disproves the theory that Jesus did not really die? (*John 19:31-35*). How might you defend the Resurrection with someone who argues that the disciples only imagined that He came back to life? (*Acts 1:3, 4*).

The Gospel accounts of the Resurrection repeatedly emphasize that the disciples' frame of mind was just the opposite of that demanded by the "wish-fulfillment" theory. Jesus' followers did not expect Him to rise again, and they did not believe those who brought reports of His resurrection (see *Matt. 28:17; Mark 16:11, 13; Luke 24:11; John 20:24-29*).

Two great facts help refute all attempts to explain away the resurrection of Jesus. First, the body of Jesus disappeared; something happened to it, despite the tomb's being sealed and a guard in place. The easiest way for Jesus' enemies to debunk the new religion would have been to point to Jesus' corpse—but they could not. Second, after Calvary, the disciples were broken and dispirited. After His resurrection, they were filled with confidence and power and went out in the name of Jesus. What made the difference? They had seen the risen Lord.

Why is Christ's resurrection so important to you?

gent faith, to see that no enemy of Jesus ever again places Him back into it.”—Herschel H. Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 257.

III. The Commission of the Risen Lord.

Mark begins with a reference to the gospel of Christ and ends with Christ’s commission to His disciples to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. This was no ordinary commission. It dealt with the very heart of God—a heart full of love and grace manifested by

Witnessing

Many people have taken up the study of genealogy—delving deeply into their individual family histories, going back scores of years in order to trace the origins of their ancestors. As part of the process they visit cemeteries, looking for graves holding the remains of a family member who died long ago. It can be a long, tedious process, but it brings a sense of connection to many searching for that linkage to the past.

What an opportunity we have as Seventh-day Adventists to assist those around us with a unique genealogy search—the search for eternal life through Jesus Christ. With an empty tomb the outcome, how can we hold back on sharing with others the salvation story? If we’re not doing it already or are prepared to begin doing it immediately, what does that tell us about our “ties” with our Father and our full acceptance and belief in the story of redemption? When we’re really walking with Jesus, we can’t hold back on sharing His life story!

Jesus’ final resting place on earth is empty. Because it’s empty, we are able to live forever in heaven with Christ Jesus and God the Father.

I serve a risen Saviour, He’s in the world today;
I know that He is living, whatever men may say;
I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of cheer,
And just the time I need Him He’s always near.
He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life’s narrow way.
He Lives, He lives, salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know He lives?
He lives within my heart.

“He Lives,” A. H. Ackley, *Gospel Melodies* (Takoma Park, Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1944), p. 74.

He lives, so now we may live. Believe this with all your heart. When you do, others will *know* through your daily example what it means to “serve a risen Savior.”

The Commission *(Mark 16:15-20)*.

We have been referring to the “appearances” of the risen Lord, but that term is inadequate to describe what happened. Jesus not only was seen, He spoke, answered questions, even ate with the disciples. These were meetings with His followers rather than appearances.

Over how long a period did these meetings of the resurrected Jesus and His followers take place? *(Acts 1:3)*.

Think about how long that time is. How did this time help strengthen them for their mission?

According to Mark *(16:14)*, even after the Resurrection Jesus had to “upbraid” them for their unbelief and hardness of heart toward those who had first reported His resurrection. The Greek verb means more literally “to reproach” or “to disparage”; that is, He had to speak firmly to them for their doubts. How little humanity has changed! Probably every one of us could give accounts of how God has worked marvelously in our lives, only to have us a short time later manifesting “unbelief and hardness of heart.”

According to Mark, what commission did Jesus give to His disciples? How does that commission parallel what we as Adventists believe is our commission? *See Rev. 14:6*.

The last two verses of the book of Mark present an interesting contrast. Jesus has now ascended to the Father in heaven, sitting down at the “right hand of God,” a phrase that means His position of authority. And yet, at the same time, the texts talk about “the Lord” working with His church, “confirming the word with signs and wonders.” In other words, though up in heaven, through His power and authority Jesus is still close to His church, close to His people, giving them what they need, to do what He asks of them. Those words should have been a comfort to the early church, just as they should be to us now.

Notice the phrase “confirming the word.” How has God confirmed “the word” in your own life and experience? Share with the class how He has done that for you. It would be interesting to compare accounts. What can you learn from one another’s experiences?

His Son, who took our sins so we might be reconciled to God. Christ's resurrection provided the launching pad for the proclamation of this gospel.

The commission is for every disciple to witness to the gospel of the risen Lord and to make disciples from all nations (*see Matt. 28:19, 20*). Creating a global community without barriers, confessing one Lord and one faith, and anticipating one hope are the tasks before us today. The promise is that we are never alone in the fulfillment of this commission. The Lord, ascended to heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father, will work with us (*Mark 16:19, 20*). He who commands is also the One who enables.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: A Jewish soldier began attending Christian services and was impressed with the character and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. A bit confused, he went to his rabbi and said, "Rabbi, the Christians say that the Christ has already come and that He is Jesus. But you claim He is yet to come." "Yes," acknowledged the rabbi. "Well," asked the young soldier, "when our Christ comes, what more than Jesus Christ can we expect?"

Thought Questions:

- ① During His reign, Emperor Diocletian set up a stone pillar as a commemoration of total extermination of Christians from the world. What if Diocletian could see his monument today! Absolutely nothing can put an end to God's great plan. Identify the elements today that act as barriers to Christianity. What does God expect of us? To sit back and let things take their course, knowing that nothing will get in the way of God's plan? Or take responsibility as God's representatives? Explain.
- ② Consider the functions of Jesus in the sinner's life. Why is it important for us to accept Him completely and without reservation before we can maximize our potential?

Application Questions:

Nothing can top Jesus' death on Calvary. It is Jesus' sinless life, death, and resurrection that make the virgin birth and Jesus' identity as Son of God believable. In other words, His life was a testimony to who He was. In what ways can you do the same? Give specific examples. How can our lives stand as a testimony to who we are in Christ?

Further Study: Study again Mark 15:42–16:20, along with the parallel accounts in Matthew 27:57–28:20, Luke 23:50–24:52, and John 19:38–21:25. Read Ellen G. White’s, “In Joseph’s Tomb”; “The Lord Is Risen”; “Why Weepest Thou?”; “The Walk to Emmaus”; “Peace Be Unto You”; “By the Sea Once More”; “Go Teach All Nations”; and “To My Father and Your Father”; in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 769–835.

Discussion Questions:

- ① We’re given a great deal of evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, evidence that should strengthen our faith. What other evidence have we been given that helps “prove” the truth of Christianity? How much evidence do we ultimately need? If we have evidence, why then the need for faith? Discuss in class.
- ② Christianity would seem to have a most unpromising foundation for a world religion—a founder who died young and whose work was rejected by much of the prevailing religious establishment. Nevertheless, it is the world’s greatest religion, and Jesus is the most influential Person who has ever lived. Why?
- ③ Mark 16:19 talks about Jesus up in heaven. What other verses talk about Him there? What do they tell us that He’s doing in heaven, now that His earthly work is over?
- ④ How well is your church fulfilling the commission that Jesus gave at the end of Mark? What can you do, personally, or as a church, to be more involved in this divine commission?

Summary: What a close to this fast-moving, action-packed account. The greatest miracle, the most incredible act comes at the end of the story. His enemies crucify Jesus, and He is buried, but He comes back to life. As the risen Lord, He has all power and all authority, over all the earth, to the end of the age. And we, His followers, carry on His work as we eagerly await His return.