

Christ's Victory Over Death



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 27:62–66; John 10:17, 18; Matt. 27:51–53; John 20:11–29; 1 Cor. 15:5–8.*

Memory Text: “When I saw him, I fell down at his feet like a dead man. He put his right hand on me and said, ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the One who lives; I was dead, but look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys to death and to the place of the dead’ ” (*Rev. 1:17, 18, NCV*).

Central to the Christian faith is the resurrection of Jesus. Paul made this point very powerfully when he wrote: “For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (*1 Cor. 15:16–18, NKJV*). We will look at this in more detail next week.

Thus, no matter all the emphasis Paul put on Christ's death, and how important it was—“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (*1 Cor. 2:2, NKJV*)—it really does us no good apart from His resurrection. That's how crucial the resurrection of Jesus is to the entire Christian faith and the plan of salvation.

However, it's hard to understand why the resurrection of Christ and with it our resurrection are so important if, as many believe, the dead in Christ are already enjoying the bliss of heaven as they have “gone home to be with the Lord.”

All that aside, this week we will look at Christ's resurrection and all the convincing evidence He gave us to believe in it.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 12.

A Sealed Tomb

Christ's mission seemed to have ended (and even failed) with His death on the cross. Satan succeeded in instigating Judas to betray the Savior (*Luke 22:3, 4; John 13:26, 27*) and the chief priests and elders to demand His death (*Matt. 26:59, Matt. 27:20*). After Jesus was arrested, "all the disciples forsook Him and fled" (*Matt. 26:56, NKJV*), and Peter denied Him three times (*Matt. 26:69–75*). Now Jesus was lying in a tomb hewed out of a rock, closed with a large and sealed stone, protected by Roman guards (*Matt. 27:57–66*), and watched by invisible demonic powers. "If he could, he [Satan] would have held Christ locked in the tomb."—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 12, p. 412.

During His earthly ministry, Christ had foretold not only His death on the cross but also His resurrection. Using the Eastern inclusive language—in which a fraction of a day stands for a whole day—Jesus mentioned that " 'as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth' " (*Matt. 12:39, 40, NKJV*). On other occasions Jesus underscored that He would be killed but on the third day He would rise again (*Matt. 16:21; Matt. 17:22, 23; Matt. 20:17–19*). The chief priests and the Pharisees were aware of those statements and took measures that they hoped would prevent His resurrection.

Read Matthew 27:62–66. How did these actions only help provide the world later with more evidence for the resurrection of Jesus?

All security measures taken to keep Jesus locked in the tomb only made His victory over death and the hosts of evil even more noticeable because of all the precautions and measures that His enemies took to try to make sure it would never happen.

Also, these men surely had heard of the miracles of Jesus; they had seen some of them, too. And yet, they thought that a guard over the tomb could stop Him, the one who was able to do so many miracles, from being resurrected?

Also, they put a guard around the tomb in case of—what? That the disciples might steal the body and then claim that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead? When the people would ask, "Where is the risen Jesus?" They could say: "Just take our word for it."

If nothing else, their actions revealed just how afraid the chief priests were of Jesus, even after He died. Perhaps, deep down, they did fear that He just might be resurrected after all.

“ ‘He Is Risen!’ ”

The victory of Christ over Satan and his evil powers was secured on the cross and confirmed by the empty tomb. “When Jesus was laid in the grave, Satan triumphed. He dared to hope that the Saviour would not take up His life again. He claimed the Lord’s body, and set his guard about the tomb, seeking to hold Christ a prisoner. He was bitterly angry when his angels fled at the approach of the heavenly messenger. When he saw Christ come forth in triumph, he knew that his kingdom would have an end, and that he must finally die.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 782. And though Christ’s humanity died, His divinity did not die. In His divinity, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death.

Read Matthew 28:1–6; John 10:17, 18; and Romans 8:11. Who was directly involved in the resurrection of Jesus?

During His ministry in Samaria-Peraea, Jesus stated that He Himself had power to lay down His life and to take it again (*John 10:17, 18*). To Martha He said, “ ‘I am the resurrection, and the life’ ” (*John 11:25*). Other passages speak of His resurrection as an act of God (*Acts 2:24, Rom. 8:11, Gal. 1:1, Heb. 13:20*). Even a mighty angel of the Lord was involved in that glorious event (*Matt. 28:1, 2*).

Meanwhile, Matthew 28:11–15 reveals the futile and foolish efforts of the leaders to continue fighting against Jesus. The Roman guard told the leaders “all the things that had happened” (*Matt. 28:11, NKJV*). Implicit in this account is the idea that the guards saw the Resurrection. If not, what would their words mean? An angel came down from heaven, moved the stone, sat on it, and the guards fainted? The next thing that they knew the tomb was empty? Maybe, while the Romans were unconscious, the angel took away the body of Jesus? Maybe the disciples did? Or someone else stole it? Whatever happened, the body of Jesus was, obviously, gone.

An angel from heaven coming down, the men fainting from fear, and the tomb being empty would have been disconcerting enough to the religious leaders. But that they “gave a large sum of money to the soldiers” (*Matt. 28:12, NKJV*) to keep these men quiet implied that whatever the soldiers told them disturbed them deeply. And what they told of, of course, was the resurrection of Jesus.

Some scoff at the idea that the first people to see Christ resurrected were Romans. Why? In what ways is this truth symbolic of what was to come: the gospel going to the Gentiles, as well?

Many Arose With Him

“Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many” (*Matt. 27:51–53, NKJV*).

What does this incredible account teach us about the resurrection of Jesus and what it accomplished?

An earthquake marked the death of Jesus (*Matt. 27:50, 51*), and another one marked His resurrection (*Matt. 28:2*). At the moment Jesus died, “the earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people” (*Matt. 27:51–53, NIV*). These saints were raised glorified as witnesses of Christ’s own resurrection and as prototypes of those who will be raised at the final resurrection. Thus, right after the resurrection of Jesus, many of the Jewish people were given powerful evidence to believe in His resurrection and thus to accept Him as their Savior, which many did, including many priests (*see Acts 6:7*).

“During His ministry, Jesus had raised the dead to life. He had raised the son of the widow of Nain, and the ruler’s daughter and Lazarus. But these were not clothed with immortality. After they were raised, they were still subject to death. But those who came forth from the grave at Christ’s resurrection were raised to everlasting life. They ascended with Him as trophies of His victory over death and the grave. . . . These went into the city, and appeared unto many, declaring, Christ has risen from the dead, and we be risen with Him. Thus was immortalized the sacred truth of the resurrection.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 786.

Humanly speaking, the chief priests and elders had great advantages. They held the religious power of the nation and were even able to convince the Roman authorities and the crowds to help them with their schemes. But they forgot that “ ‘the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes’ ” (*Dan. 4:32, NASB*). Their lies were contradicted and invalidated by the existence of those resurrected saints.

No matter how bad things can get now, why can we trust in God’s ultimate victory for us as we still struggle in this fallen world?

Witnesses of the Risen Christ

Read John 20:11–29 and 1 Corinthians 15:5–8. How did the disciples react when they first met the risen Christ?

The two angels at the empty tomb told Mary Magdalene and some other women that Jesus had risen (*Matt. 28:1, 5–7; Mark 16:1–7; Luke 24:1–11*). But soon Jesus Himself appeared to them, and they worshiped Him (*Matt. 28:1, 9, 10; John 20:14–18*). He appeared also to Peter (*Luke 24:34, 1 Cor. 15:5*) and to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, whose hearts were burning while He was speaking to them (*Mark 16:12, Luke 24:13–35*). When Jesus came into the Upper Room, the disciples were initially terrified and frightened, but then they were filled with joy and marveled at what had happened (*Luke 24:33–49, John 20:19–23*). A week later, Jesus came again into the same room without opening the doors, and then even Thomas believed in His resurrection (*John 20:24–29*).

During the 40 days between His resurrection and His ascension, Jesus “was seen by over five hundred brethren at once” (*1 Cor. 15:6, NKJV*) and by James (*1 Cor. 15:7*). Jesus joined some disciples at the shore of the Sea of Galilee and had breakfast with them, followed by a talk with Peter (*John 21:1–23*). There might have been other appearances of Jesus (*Acts 1:3*) before the final one at His ascension (*Luke 24:50–53, Acts 1:1–11*). Paul also considered himself an eyewitness to the risen Christ, who appeared to him on the road to Damascus (*1 Cor. 15:8; compare with Acts 9:1–9*).

When the other disciples first told the absent Thomas they had seen the risen Lord, he reacted by saying, “ ‘Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe’ ” (*John 20:25, NKJV*). A week later, Jesus reappeared to the disciples, now with Thomas present, Jesus said to him, “ ‘Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing’ ” (*John 20:27, NKJV*).

Then Thomas confessed, “ ‘My Lord and my God!’ ”

And Jesus added, “ ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’ ” (*John 20:29, NKJV*).

**“ ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’ ”
Even if you have not seen for yourself the resurrected Christ, what other reasons do you have for your faith in Jesus?**

“The First Fruits of Those Who Have Died”

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20, in light of Deuteronomy 26:1–11. In what sense did Paul refer to the risen Christ as “the first fruits of those who have died” (NRSV)?

The offering of “the first fruits” was an ancient Israelite agricultural practice with deep religious significance. It was a sacred recognition of God as the gracious Provider, who had entrusted His stewards with the land where the crops grew and were ready to be harvested (see *Exod. 23:19, Exod. 34:26, Lev. 2:11–16, Deut. 26:1–11*). The first fruits indicated that the harvest was not only starting but also revealing the quality of its products.

According to Wayne Grudem, “in calling Christ ‘the first fruits’ (in Greek *aparchē*), Paul uses a metaphor from agriculture to indicate that we will be like Christ. Just as the ‘first fruits’ or the first taste of the ripening crop show what the rest of the harvest will be like for that crop, so Christ as the ‘first fruits’ shows what our resurrection bodies will be like when, in God’s final ‘harvest,’ he raises us from the dead and brings us into his presence.”—*Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), p. 615.

It is worth remembering that Jesus came out of the grave with a glorified human body, but He was still carrying the marks of His crucifixion (*John 20:20, 27*). Does this mean that the risen children of God will likewise bear the physical marks of their own sufferings? In the case of the apostle Paul, will he still carry in his glorified body the “thorn in the flesh” (*2 Cor. 12:7, NKJV*) and “the marks of the Lord Jesus” (*Gal. 6:17, NKJV*)?

Until his death, Paul “was ever to carry about with him in the body the marks of Christ’s glory, in his eyes, which had been blinded by the heavenly light [see *Acts 9:1–9*].”—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 275. But this does not mean that he or any other of the glorified redeemed will be raised with the marks of their own sufferings (compare with *1 Cor. 15:50–54*). In the case of Christ, “the marks of this cruelty He will ever bear. Every print of the nails will tell the story of man’s wonderful redemption and the dear price by which it was purchased.”—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 179. His marks are what guarantee us that all of ours will be forever gone.

Christ will forever bear the scars of His crucifixion. What does that reveal about God’s love for us and what it cost to save us? How does it show, too, how much the Godhead has invested in saving us?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “In Joseph’s Tomb,” pp. 769–778; “The Lord Is Risen,” pp. 779–787; “Why Weepest Thou?” pp. 788–794; “The Walk to Emmaus,” pp. 795–801; “Peace Be Unto You,” pp. 802–808, in *The Desire of Ages*.

Modern sentiment doesn’t allow for something like the resurrection of Jesus. However, the historical evidence is so strong that even those who can’t accept the reality of the Resurrection are forced to admit that many people *believed* that they had seen the resurrected Jesus. Thus, much of anti-resurrection apologetics is the attempt to explain what could have caused all these different people to believe that they had seen the risen Christ.

Some have argued that all the disciples hallucinated the resurrected Jesus; others that Jesus hadn’t really died but only had swooned and then come back to life after He had been brought down from the cross, and when He had reappeared, His followers thought that He had been raised from the dead. And (believe it or not) some have argued that Jesus had a twin brother whom the disciples mistook for the risen Christ. In other words, the historical evidence is so strong for Christ’s resurrection that these are the kinds of arguments people concoct in order to try to dismiss it. With the Resurrection itself so important, we should not be surprised by all the good reasons we have been given to believe it.

“The voice that cried from the cross, ‘It is finished,’ was heard among the dead. It pierced the walls of sepulchers, and summoned the sleepers to arise. Thus will it be when the voice of Christ shall be heard from heaven. That voice will penetrate the graves and unbar the tombs, and the dead in Christ shall arise. At the Saviour’s resurrection a few graves were opened, but at His second coming all the precious dead shall hear His voice, and shall come forth to glorious, immortal life. The same power that raised Christ from the dead will raise His church, and glorify it with Him, above all principalities, above all powers, above every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in the world to come.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 787.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 “‘It is finished’ ” (*John 19:30*) and “‘He is risen’ ” (*Matt. 28:6, NKJV*) are two of the most meaningful statements ever made. How do they complement each other within salvation history? What great hope is found in these words for us?
- 2 At first the religious leaders wanted guards at the tomb to keep the disciples from stealing the body of Jesus. Later they paid the guards to say that the disciples did steal the body. How does this account help to reveal the reality of Christ’s empty tomb, and why is that empty tomb so important to us as Christians?

Accepting the Word: Part 1

By ANDREW McCHESNEY

Eulalia Rashid ran out of beer and headed to the store to buy more in the Northern Mariana Islands, a U.S. commonwealth in the Pacific Ocean.

It was Christmas Eve. She was lonely and had no one with whom to celebrate the holiday. An alcoholic for 37 years, she had all but abandoned her four children and 13 grandchildren. She also was ill with colon cancer.

As Eulalia walked, a small wooden box caught her eye on the ground on the darkened street. She picked it up and shook it, thinking some money might be inside. Sure enough, a penny was inside, and she placed the box in her pocket. Minutes later, standing in the light of the store, she pulled out the box and saw words written on the top, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (*Psalm 119:105, NKJV*).

The next morning, on Christmas Day, Eulalia read and reread the words on the box. *What is this “word”?* she wondered. *What is this lamp that is to light my path?* Eulalia had always believed in Jesus, but she had never had a relationship with Him. Now she tried to translate Psalm 119:105 into her native Tomoro and Palau languages. She looked up the verse in several Bible translations. Still not understanding the words, she decided to read through the entire Bible. Maybe she would find an explanation somewhere.

One day, she read John 1:1, which says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (*NKJV*). Her eyes lit up with joy. She read on, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (*John 1:14, NKJV*). *Here is the answer!* she thought. *The Word is Jesus! Jesus is the Lamp that lights my path!*

By now she loved reading the Bible. She kept on reading, and she started to pray regularly. As she read and prayed, her life changed. She read that God had set aside the seventh day as Sabbath in Exodus 20, and she began to keep the Sabbath in her home. She read about clean and unclean foods in Leviticus 11 and modified her diet. When she saw that God gave Adam and Eve a plant-based diet, she cultivated a garden of sweet potatoes, spinach, string beans, eggplant, tomatoes, tapioca, papayas, mangoes, lemons, dragon fruit, soursop, mulberries, and coconuts.



Her family did not understand what was going on. They were astonished to see that she had stopped drinking. She told them that one day she had simply decided not to drink, and Jesus had taken away her desire for alcohol in the twinkling of an eye.

Eulalia didn’t know it, but she was already becoming a missionary to her family by her example.