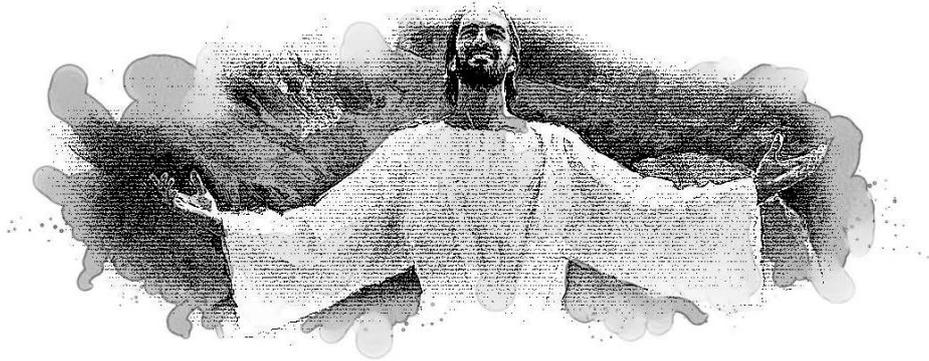


Crucified¹ and Risen



SABBATH—JUNE 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 27:11–26; John 3:19; Isaiah 59:2; Matthew 27:45, 46, 49–54; Hebrews 8:1–6; Matthew 28:1–20.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘All authority [power] 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 (give) his or her body to science. It said that scientists had been studying the mystery of mummies. And they were looking for a dying volunteer who would be willing to donate his or her body after death. The ad explained that these scientists believed that they had cracked open the secret of how the Egyptians turned a dead body into a mummy. They added that the body “would be protected from decay 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 do not need to worry about having our dead bodies mummified or protected from decay. God has promised us something much better than that based on two events. The first event was Jesus' death. The second event was His resurrection.² These events have opened the way for our dead bodies to have no need of being mummified. Instead, our bodies are to be changed into pure and healthy bodies that will live forever.

This week, we will study the final chapters in Matthew. We will learn about the ever-present truths of our Lord's death and resurrection, and the hope both events offer us.

DEFINITIONS

1. crucified—put to death on a cross.
2. resurrection—return to life from the dead.

JESUS OR BARABBAS (Matthew 27:11–26)

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

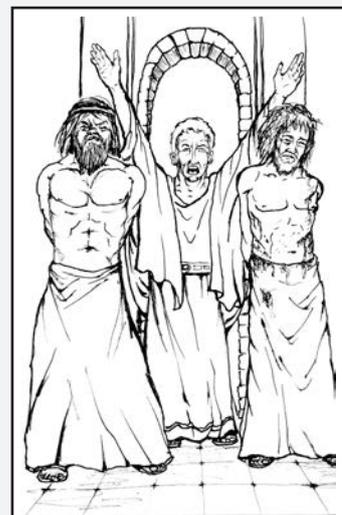
Barabbas is the murderer who is supposed to be crucified on the middle cross. The criminals on either side are possibly his assistants. Barabbas is not a first name but a last one. Bar means “son of,” just as Simon bar Jonah means “son of Jonah” or Bartholomew means “son of Tolomeo.” Barabbas means “son of abbas”—meaning “son of the father.” Many early writings show Barabbas’s first name as Yeshua (Jesus). Yeshua is a common name at this time, meaning “Yahweh [God] saves.” So, Barabbas’s name is along the lines of “Yahweh [God] saves, son of the father.”

What a strange fact this is when you think about the kind of man Barabbas really is!

“This man [Barabbas] had claimed to be the Messiah [Chosen One; the Christ]. He claimed he had the right to establish a different order of things, to set the world right. Under Satan’s influence, Barabbas claimed that whatever he could get by stealing or robbing belonged to him. Barabbas had done ‘wonderful’ things through Satan’s influence. He had gained followers among the people. And he excited them into rebelling [warring] against the Roman government. Under cover of religious enthusiasm, Barabbas was a hardened criminal. He was bent on rebellion [war] and cruelty. Pilate, the Roman governor, decided to give the people a choice between Barabbas and the innocent Saviour. Pilate thought the people would have a better sense of justice. He hoped to gain their sympathy for Jesus in opposition to the priests and rulers.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 733.

Pilate is wrong. If people are not led by the Holy Spirit, they will make the wrong spiritual choice, as the mob does here. In the end, we all have to choose between Barabbas or Christ. “ ‘Here is the judgment. Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light. They loved darkness because what they did was evil’ ” (John 3:19, NIV).

Why do people like darkness over light? How about you? Do you like darkness better? If so, what should that tell you about how real our sinful nature is? Even more important, what should this tell you about our need to surrender ourselves totally to the Lord?



In the end, we all will have to choose between Barabbas or Christ.

OUR CRUCIFIED SUBSTITUTE³ (Matthew 27:45, 46)

“From noon until three o’clock, the whole land was covered with darkness. About three o’clock, Jesus cried out in a loud voice. He said, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ This means ‘My God, my God, why have you deserted me?’ ” (Matthew 27:45, 46, NlrV). What is the meaning of this cry? How do we understand its meaning in connection with the plan of salvation?



The darkness that covered the land showed God’s judgment against sin.

Matthew writes down what has been called by Bible thinkers “the cry of dereliction.” Dereliction means being left alone and in need. In this case we can see Jesus’ sense of being left alone by the Father. The darkness that covers the land at this time shows God’s judgment against sin (Isaiah 13:9–16; Amos 5:18–20; Jeremiah 13:16). Jesus experiences in Himself the terrible results of sin. He feels the complete separation from the Father. For our sake, Jesus carries God’s punishment for, and judgment against, sin that should have been ours. “In the same way, Christ was offered up once. He took away the sins of many people. He also will come a second time. At that time, he will not suffer for sin. Instead, he will come to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:28, NlrV; read also 2 Corinthians 5:21). On the cross Jesus fulfills the language of Psalm 22:1 because in a very special way He is experiencing what humans experience. This experience is the separation from God due to sin. “But your sins have separated you from your God. They have caused him to turn his face away from you. So he won’t [will not] listen to you” (Isaiah 59:2, NlrV).

It is important to fully understand what happens here and what this means. Jesus accepts the full punishment of God against sin. The penalty for our sins falls upon Him. So, it fills His soul with great sadness and dread as He accepts the full weight of guilt, our guilt, upon Himself. Sin must be so bad in the sight of God that it takes one member of the Godhead to suffer its guilt and punishment in order that we might be forgiven for it!

But even amid this horror, Jesus could cry out, “My God, My God!” No matter what Jesus has gone through, He will stay faithful to the end! He does so no matter how much He experiences the sense of being left alone 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? Why must this claim come with repentance,⁴ confession, and a decision to stop sinning?

DEFINITIONS

3. substitute—a person taking the place of another; for example, Jesus took our place on the cross by dying for our sins.

4. repentance—turning away from sin and returning to God.

A TORN VEIL AND OPEN GRAVES (Matthew 27:49–54)

Each Gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) writer tells the story of Jesus from a different point of view. And all focus on His death. But Matthew alone writes about the open graves after the temple veil is torn.

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

Jesus dies right after the mob mocks Him about having Elijah come to save Him. Their action is another powerful but sad example of how Jesus has been misunderstood by many of His own people.

Matthew then shows that the curtain in the temple is torn from top to bottom. The meaning of this symbol is clear. A new period in salvation history has begun. The system of sacrifices, which points to Jesus, is no longer necessary. The old earthly sanctuary model is now replaced by something much better.

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

Matthew writes about the tearing of the veil, the rocks splitting, the graves opening, and some of the dead being raised. These events can happen only because of what Jesus does by dying as our Substitute for sin. So here in Matthew, we can see things happening that the old system itself could never have done. “It isn’t [is not] possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4, NIV). Of course, only Jesus can take away sins. And for us the great promise that Jesus will remove our sins can be fulfilled through the resurrection from death. Without that promise, we have nothing (read 1 Corinthians 15:13, 14, 19). In these early resurrections (we do not know how many), we can see the hope and promise of our resurrection at the end of this age.



After Christ died, the curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom.

THE RISEN CHRIST (Matthew 28:1–15)



The Christian faith centers on the Cross and the empty tomb.

The Christian faith centers both on the cross and on the empty tomb. The truth is that most people in the world, including non-Christians, do believe that a man named Jesus of Nazareth died on a cross. Not long after Jesus lived, we find historical reports such as this one from Tacitus, a Roman historian: “Nero . . . caused the most terrible suffering for a group hated for their disgusting beliefs. This group was called Christians . . . Christ, from whom the name had its beginning, suffered the heaviest punishment during the time that Tiberius ruled. This suffering took place at the hands of one of our governors, Pontius Pilatus.”—Adapted from Tacitus *Annals*, (<http://www.causeofjesusdeath.com/jesus-in-secular-history>).

There is little debate, then or now, about whether a historical figure named Jesus was punished and crucified.

The hard part is the Resurrection: the idea that Jesus of Nazareth, who dies on a Friday afternoon, becomes alive again on a Sunday morning. After all, a Jew crucified by the Romans in Judea was a common event. *But a Jew raised from the dead after being crucified?* That is another story.

But without this belief in a risen Jesus, we just do not have a Christian faith. Paul wrote: “And if Christ has not been raised, what we preach doesn’t [does not] mean anything. Your faith doesn’t [does not] mean anything either. . . . Do we have hope in Christ only for this life? Then people should pity us more than anyone else” (1 Corinthians 15:14, 19, NIV). Jesus’ death itself had to be followed by His resurrection. This is because in His resurrection we have the guaranteed promise of our own.

When we come to the story of the resurrection of Jesus, we have two choices. The first choice is to see this story as emotional (having to do with strong feelings) ideas written by a few lonely followers of Jesus to keep His memory alive. It is the way we try to keep the memory alive when a well-known figure dies today. The second choice when we come to the story of the Resurrection is to accept it as a true story of an outstanding (wonderful) event. This event is interpreted to have meaning for every human who ever lived.

Read Matthew 28:1–15. Why does Jesus tell the women (in Matthew 28:9) to “rejoice” (NKJV)? Of course, they can be glad that He has been resurrected, that their Master has come back. But what is the real reason for being joyful about the resurrection of Jesus?

THE GREAT COMMAND (Matthew 28:16–18)

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

Read Matthew 28:16–18. Compare⁵ Jesus' words, “ ‘All authority [power] has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’ ” (Matthew 28:18, NKJV) with Daniel 7:13, 14. How do these verses relate to each other?

Read Matthew 28:19, 20—the last verses of this Gospel. What does Jesus say? And how are we to make use of His words in our lives?

Ellen G. White suggests that nearly five hundred believers met together on a mountain in Galilee after the Resurrection when Jesus gave them the gospel command. (Read 1 Corinthians 15:6.) His gospel command was not just for the disciples but for all believers. “It is a very serious mistake,” she writes, “to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained⁶ minister [preacher]. All people to whom the Holy Spirit has come are to be given a work to do in taking the gospel to the world. All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men. For this work the church was organized. And all who accept upon themselves its holy promise, purpose, and work are to be coworkers with Christ.”—Adapted from *The Desire of Ages*, page 822.

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

DEFINITIONS

5. compare—show how two or more things are the same or different.

6. ordained—set apart for work for God by a laying on of hands.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: As all the other Gospel writers do, Matthew writes about the resurrection of Jesus. Also, as his fellow writers do, he writes little about what the meaning of the Resurrection itself is. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John picture the story of the Resurrection. But they give us no real explanation of it, even though it is very important to the Christian faith.

Paul's writings give the closest and most detailed explanation about the meaning of the Cross. "Because of Adam, all people die. So because of Christ, all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:20–22, NIV). Paul writes, "When you were baptized, you were buried together with him [Christ]. You were raised to life together with him by believing in God's power. God raised Jesus from the dead" (Colossians 2:12, NIV).

Peter, too, has something to say on this important topic: "The water of the flood is a picture of the baptism that now saves you also. The baptism I'm [I am] talking about has nothing to do with removing dirt from your body. Instead, it promises God that you will keep a clear sense of what is right and wrong" (1 Peter 3:21, NIV).

We do not know why the Gospel writers do not go into any detailed explanation. Some Bible thinkers have seen this as proof that the Gospel stories are true. After all, writing many years after the events, why do they not use this opportunity to give an explanation of what they want people to believe about the Resurrection? If it is false, why not take the opportunity to make it mean whatever they want it to mean? Instead, they simply tell the story. They do not try to make it look better with more explanations as to what it all is supposed to mean.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① At the time of Jesus' death, the temple curtain from the Old Covenant⁷ is torn from top to bottom, and a New Covenant is brought in, with a new High Priest, Jesus Christ. "Brothers and sisters, we are not afraid to enter the Most Holy Room. We enter boldly because of the blood of Jesus. His way is new because he lives. It has been opened for us through the curtain. I'm [I am] talking about his body. We also have a great priest over the house of God" (Hebrews 10:19–21, NIV). How does it make you feel to realize that Christ Himself now serves as our High Priest?

② Matthew's Gospel covers many subjects and many topics. What things impress you about how Jesus is presented here? How can studying this Gospel help you to better understand what it means to be a Christian and to follow the teachings of Jesus?

DEFINITIONS

7. covenant—agreement or promise between God and His people.

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