

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ, Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 28:1–7

Code: 2401

INTRODUCTION

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Everything we are, have, and ever hope to be is predicated on the reality of the resurrection. There would be no Christianity without it (1 Cor. 15:14). Conversely, because Jesus Christ rose from the dead, all elements of our faith are affirmed as true.

A. The Reactions to the Resurrection

There are many possible reactions to the resurrection.

1. Rationalism

Some reject the resurrection because it does not fit into human reason. This humanistic view assumes that only what can be observed and explained in naturalistic terms can be true. Rationalism rejects the resurrection as it does all other miraculous elements of redemptive history.

2. Unbelief

Unbelievers don't reason away the reality of the resurrection; they just refuse to believe the truth. Simple unbelief is a denial of what is fact. And the resurrection is perhaps the most indisputable fact in all ancient history, based on reliable evidence and testimony from many witnesses.

3. Doubt

Doubters question the resurrection. There is honest doubt, exhibited by a true seeker desiring to have his questions about the resurrection resolved. Then there is hypocritical doubt, reflected by the person who continues to question long after the available evidence is made clear.

4. Indifference

The indifferent person doesn't care if the resurrection is true or not. He can't see that it makes any claim on his life, and it isn't on his list of priorities. He is simply not interested.

5. Ignorance

Some people are not familiar with the facts of the resurrection. They may not even know about it.

6. Hostility

Some respond out of hostility to the resurrection. They make a vociferous effort to discredit it. A few even see it as their duty to write against the resurrection.

7. Faith

Sadly, all those reactions are wrong and unnecessary. The proper response is faith, belief, affirmation, and application of the reality of the resurrection to one's life.

B. The Role of the Resurrection

1. In the gospels

The four gospels are a response of faith to the resurrection. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They weren't forced to believe; they believed because they were overwhelmed with the evidence, as were all who became a part of the believing community. It is the response of faith that we will see in our study of Matthew 28:1-10.

Some people are under the illusion that the Bible is a miscellaneous collection of spiritual truths. But every book in the Bible has a specifically designed beginning and ending. In the case of Matthew's gospel, the ending the glory of the resurrection--the greatest event of all time.

2. In Acts

The first sermon ever preached by the early church was the resurrection (Acts 2). The reality of the resurrection became the theme of all apostolic preaching. Peter again preached on the resurrection in Acts 4 and 10. Stephen preached the resurrection in chapter 7. Philip preached the resurrection in chapter 8. Paul preached the resurrection many times throughout the rest of the book.

3. In the epistles

The theme of the epistles is the resurrection.

a) Romans 6:4--"Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father." b) 1 Corinthians 15:4--"He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." c) 2 Corinthians 4:15--"He who raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also." d) Galatians 1:1--"By Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." e) Ephesians 1:20--"Which He [God] wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead." f) Philippians 3:10--Paul said, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection." g) Colossians 2:12--"God ... raised him from the dead." h) 1 Thessalonians 1:10--"His Son ... he [God] raised from the dead." i) 1 Peter 1:3--"[God] hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

The book of Revelation affirms that Christ has right to the earth because He was once dead and is now alive forevermore (1:18). The theme of the New Testament is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here is the foundation of all our hope: Jesus said, "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). Jesus also said, "I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26). The resurrection is the core of all we believe.

Each of the four gospel writers presented the resurrection in a unique way, picking out certain elements of the event to reinforce certain spiritual truths in the minds of the readers. As we study Matthew's account of the resurrection, we will draw from Mark, Luke, and John to enrich and fill out the scene so that we may appreciate all its great truth.

Mark, Luke, and John take different approaches, yet all four describe the same historical truth. There is no contradiction--all the facts are in perfect harmony.

Matthew describes the resurrection from the viewpoint of a group of women and the emotions that their actions revealed. That is a wonderful and refreshing way to view the resurrection. We will not coldly analyze the resurrection, but I pray we will feel it (For an apologetic, reasoned discourse on the resurrection, see chapter 5).

LESSON

I. THE TIME OF THE RESURRECTION (v. 1a)

"In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week."

A. The Day After the Sabbath

The phrase translated "in the end of the Sabbath" is a unique construction in the Greek text (opse de sabbaton). The best way to translate it is "after the Sabbath." And it would be consistent with the context to translate it "long after the Sabbath." It expresses the idea that a certain interval of time had passed since the Sabbath. The Sabbath ended Saturday at sundown. The next phrase tells us how much time had passed since then: "as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week." The Greek phrase again uses the word sabbaton (sabbath). The Greek text is literally translated: "at day one with reference to the sabbath." The Jewish people did not give each day a separate name, such as Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and so on. They named the days numerically with reference to the Sabbath, such as day one after the Sabbath, day two after the Sabbath, day three after the Sabbath, and so on through the week. It was Sunday morning near dawn, and perhaps as many as ten hours passed since the Sabbath.

B. The Third Day

This was the third day the Lord had been in the grave. He was put in the tomb on Friday, was there all day Saturday, and was there a short time on Sunday. Mark 16:2 says, "Very early in the morning

of the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulcher at the rising of the sun." Luke 24:1 also says, "Very early in the morning." John 20:1 says, "While it was yet dark."

The stage was set because it was the third day. Many times Jesus said He would rise from the grave on the third day (Matt. 12:40; 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Mark 9:31; 10:34; Luke 9:22; 18:33; John 2:19-22). And He repeated the prophecy throughout the latter days of His ministry.

Ending an Era of Sabbaths

The Sabbath had been the special day of rest for centuries following creation. But the Sabbath Jesus spent in the grave was the last authorized Sabbath. It was the end of an era of Sabbaths, and the beginning of a new day of worship--the Lord's Day. Nineteenth century English preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon had a wonderful way of explaining the transition. It went something like this: We gather together on the first rather than upon the seventh day of the week because redemption is even a greater work than creation. Like the apostles, we meet on the first day of the week, and hope that Jesus may stand in our midst, and say, "Peace be unto you." Our Lord lifted the Sabbath from the old and rusted hinges whereon the law had placed it long before, and set it on the new golden hinges that his love had fashioned. Instead of placing our day of rest at the end of a week of toil, He placed it at the beginning of the rest that "remaineth ... to the people of God" (Heb. 4:9). Every first day of the week we were to meditate upon the rising of our Lord, and seek to enter into fellowship with Him in His risen life. That's why we meet on Sunday, not on the Sabbath.

II. THE EMOTIONS OF THE WOMEN (vv. 1b-10)

A. Sympathy (v. 1b)

"Mary Magdalene and the other Mary [came] to see the sepulcher."

Women have a tremendous capacity to love. Those women loved the Lord Jesus Christ more than anyone. They had ministered with Jesus in Galilee, and attended to His needs. They provided food, hospitality, and even money and resources for Him and His disciples as they carried on the Galilean ministry (Luke 8:1-3). They journeyed to Jerusalem for the Passover with Jesus and His disciples. They had been with Him at the cross (Matt. 27:56) and when He was buried (27:61). Now they returned on the morning of the third day. They were loyal, devoted, and sympathetic.

1. The identity of the women

Matthew 28:1 identifies Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, and the wife of Clopas or Alphaeus (cf., Matt. 27:56; John 19:25). But they were not alone. Matthew focuses on just those two women. Mark 16:1 adds that Salome, the mother of James and John and the wife of Zebedee was there (Matt. 27:55). Luke 24:10 says that Joanna, the wife of Chuza, who was a steward of Herod (Luke 8:3), was there. John mentioned only Mary Magdalene, but he used the plural pronoun translated "we" in John 20:2.

2. The intention of the women

a) Their purpose Matthew 28:1 tells us they came to see the grave, not the risen Lord. As many times as Jesus had promised the resurrection, their faith could not accept it. Mark 16:1 says, "When the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him." It is possible that the previous night, when the Sabbath ended, some shops might open, and the women would be able to purchase spices. Their purpose was not to see a resurrection, but to anoint a corpse. John 19:39-40 tells us He had already been anointed with in excess of 70 pounds of myrrh and aloes, and then wrapped in linen brought by Joseph of Arimathea. The Jewish people held to a tradition that might explain the women's desire to anoint Christ's body again. They believed that on the fourth day after death, the spirit left the body permanently because the body was so decayed. That tradition is seen in Martha's response to the Lord when He wanted her brother Lazarus's tomb opened. She said, "Lord, by this time he stinketh; for he hath been dead four days" (John 11:39). She believed it was too late for Jesus to do anything.

Perhaps the four women came on the third day to Jesus' grave because they realized they had only one more day to anoint Him before His body decayed. One last time they wanted to reach out in love and sympathy to the One they adored. Even though He was dead, they wanted to preserve His body for those last remaining hours. b) Their problem Mark 16:3 tells us that as the women walked to the tomb, "they said among themselves, Who shall roll away the stone for us from the door of the sepulcher?" What's more, they had no idea the tomb was being guarded by the Romans, or that it was sealed and couldn't be opened. They anticipated arriving in an empty garden and needing the help of someone to roll the stone from the front of the tomb.

B. Terror (vv. 2-7)

1. The angel's descent (vv. 2-4)

a) The revelation of the angel (v. 2a-b) (1) The earthquake (v. 2a) "Behold, there was a great earthquake." That was the second earthquake in Jerusalem in three days. When Christ died, an earthquake split rocks open and opened graves (Matt. 27:51-52). In this second earthquake God again demonstrated His presence. But that's nothing new. There was an earthquake in Exodus 19:18 when God gave Moses the law. In 1 Kings 19:11 God caused an earthquake as He spoke to the prophet Elijah. In the future an earthquake will mark the coming of the Lord (Joel 2:10). Revelation 6, 8, and 11 describe earthquakes related to His return. In His Olivet Discourse, Jesus referred to the earthquakes that will precede His return (Matt. 24:7). (2) The angel (v. 2b) "For an angel of the Lord descended from heaven." What caused the earthquake? Most people conclude that Christ's resurrection did. But Matthew tells us that the earthquake occurred because "an angel of the Lord descended from heaven." When the angel touched down on the garden, it created seismic shock waves. The Greek word translated "earthquake" is seismos, from which we derive the English word seismograph. No doubt the women felt it as they approached the tomb. b) The role of the angel (vv. 2c-3) (1) To move the stone (v. 2c) "[He] came and rolled back the stone from the door." Notice that Matthew doesn't say the angel let Jesus out of the tomb. Since Jesus had the power to raise Himself from the dead, He certainly didn't have to wait in the tomb until an angel moved the stone so He could get out! No one actually saw the resurrection take place. The women experienced the seismic ramifications of the angel's descent and the other phenomena that accompanied the resurrection. But the resurrection itself was invisible because no one was in the tomb to see it. Christ came out of that grave on His own. The angel didn't move the stone to let the Lord out; he moved it to let the women in so they could see that Jesus was already gone. How did Jesus get out of the tomb? In the same way He entered the room where the disciples were meeting eight days later: "Then came Jesus, the door being shut, and stood in the midst" (John 20:26). The same way He came through a wall into the upper room is the same way He passed through the rock of His grave. It wasn't a problem for Him since He was in His glorified form. And the angel opened the door to the grave not just to let the women in, but to allow the whole world to see that Jesus wasn't there. When the women arrived, they went in and saw He wasn't there (Luke 24:3). When Peter and John arrived, they went in and saw the linen wrappings undisturbed and the head napkin in a separate place (John 20:6-7). There was no turmoil--no evidence that someone hurriedly unwrapped the body and threw the wrappings on the floor. The wrappings lay just as they had been wrapped about Christ's body--only His body was gone. (2) To attest to the resurrection (v. 2d) "[He] sat upon it." After the angel moved the stone, he sat on it to act as the heavenly witness to what had happened. You can imagine the Jewish leaders felt secure that Jesus was dead and buried, and His body held captive in a tomb. But little did they know that all their efforts only served to validate His resurrection. As the women arrived in the garden, they saw that the tomb was open and the stone rolled back. At this point we need to look at John's gospel to see how Mary Magdalene responded to what she saw. We can't be dogmatic, but it seems that John's narrative fits best in this chronology. John 20:1-2 says, "The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulcher, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulcher. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the

other disciple, whom Jesus loved [John], and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him." All Mary saw was that the grave was open. She apparently didn't notice the angel. As we return to Matthew's narrative, Mary Magdalene left to tell Peter and John that the body had been stolen. The other women remained and had the wonderful experience of encountering an angel. (3) To represent God (v. 3) "His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow." That his face was like lightning represents the essence, deity, and brilliance of the character of God. You might compare it to the Shekinah of God as it was transmitted to Moses, whose face radiated the glory of God (Ex. 34:29-35). Matthew also says the angel's garment was white as snow, which represents God's purity and holiness. This holy angel bore the imprimatur of God. He is described in a way that distinguishes him from a man or a demon. He is identified as the agent of God, and was a living witness to the risen Christ. c) The reaction to the angel (v. 4) "For fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men." Matthew used the same Greek root for "shake" as he did for "earthquake" in verse 2. So the earth quaked and the guards shook! They not only shook, but also became as dead men. They lapsed into a temporary coma out of sheer terror. Fear can paralyze people to the point where they become unconscious. The guards saw something they were unable to comprehend. The women also were afraid, but were sustained by the angel.

2. The angel's explanation (vv. 5-6b)

a) Offered (v. 5a) "The angel answered and said unto the women." A better way to translate that is "the angel explained and said." Some things need explaining even when someone isn't asking questions. This situation definitely needed one: Where was Christ and what was the angel doing there? b) Examined (vv. 5b-6b) (1) He calmed the women's fears (v. 5b) "Fear not." The soldiers had reason to fear when the angel appeared. But those who loved Christ had no reason to fear. (2) He knew the women's objective (v. 5c) "For I know that ye seek Jesus, who was crucified." The angel knew why the women came to the grave. That had to be a comfort to them. They came to find a corpse, not to see a resurrection. They came out of devotion to anoint a dead body. God didn't rebuke them for their weak faith--He was gracious. They loved the Lord Jesus Christ. In spite of their doubt and despair, God recognized their love and responded in grace. (3) He confirmed Christ's resurrection (v. 6a) "He is not here; for he is risen." The literal translation of the Greek text is "he was raised." The Greek word indicates that it was a resurrection from the dead. There's no question that Christ had died. That's why at the crucifixion the Roman soldiers, who were experts at death, didn't break His legs. They thrust a spear into His side to be sure He was dead. These same women, along with Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, observed His body closely when they wrapped it with spices. They knew He was dead. The Greek verb in Matthew 28:6 is an aorist passive, indicating that Jesus was raised. The Bible emphasizes that He was raised by the power of the Father (Rom. 6:4; Gal. 1:1; 1 Peter 1:3). Jesus also was raised by His own power. In John 10:18 He says, "I have power to lay [My life] down, and I have power to take it again." And Romans 8:11 says He was raised by the power of the Spirit. The entire Trinity is responsible for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (4) He recalled Christ's prophecy (v. 6b) "As he said." The angel reminded the women that Jesus said He would rise on the third day.

3. The angel's invitation (v. 6c)

"Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

Luke 24:3 says they went into the tomb. The angel appeared in the tomb and gave them the same speech: "He is risen; he is not here" (Mark 16:6). It was a difficult message to believe the first time, so the angel repeated it to emphasize the incredible reality that so stunned the minds of the women. Luke 24:4 and John 20:12 tell us a second angel accompanied the first angel--one was at the head of where the body once laid, and one was at the feet. That beautiful picture is reminiscent of the Ark of the Covenant. On the top of the Ark of the Covenant was the Mercy Seat, where atonement was made for sin. Angels were positioned on both sides of the mercy seat. In the tomb the angels were

positioned on either side of the absent body of Christ--the same body that was offered as the satisfaction for the sins of the world.

Luke 24:5-7 says that the two angels gave the women an additional message: "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how he spoke unto you when He was yet in Galilee, saying, 'The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.'" Verse 8 tells us that the women finally remembered Jesus' words.

4. The angel's command (v. 7)

a) To exhort the disciples (v. 7a)"Go quickly, and tell his disciples that He is risen from the dead."I might have been tempted not to tell the disciples. After all, they weren't at the tomb. The disciples were vacillating and weak. They denied and abandoned the Savior. Yet God didn't want them to know a moment's anguish or misery. He wanted the women to tell them as soon as possible that Christ was raised from dead. So we see God extend His grace to the disciples.

CONCLUSION

Why were the women the first to see the angel and the risen Christ? First Corinthians 1:27 says that God chooses the weak to confound the strong. It is also true that He rewards the faithful. Since the women had unselfishly served the Lord in the past, they were to be specially rewarded. It has been said that supreme love deserves supreme privilege. But the main point is that they saw the angel and the living Christ because they were there. If anyone else had been at the tomb, they would have seen the angel and Christ, too.

It's good to be present when the Lord does wonderful things. The closer you stay to the Lord and what He's doing, the more you're going to enjoy what He's doing. I would rather experience it myself than hear about it from someone. I praise God for people who are where the Lord is working. They're with His people when they gather together to worship Him. They're present when His Word is taught. They're ready to get on their knees before Him. They're using their gifts in the Lord's service. As a result, they experience firsthand the active power of God.

I hope you will be like those women. What you lack in faith, may you make up for in devotion. What you lack in understanding, may you make up for in loyalty. God will confirm your weakness and turn it into strength because you're faithful and loyal enough to be where He is when He's working.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What are some of the possible reactions to the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Explain each one.
2. To what end does Matthew build his gospel?
3. What was the topic of the early church's first sermon?
4. What is the theme of the New Testament epistles?
5. What makes Matthew's approach to the resurrection unique?
6. How many days had Christ been in the grave at the time Matthew 28:1 identifies?
7. Name the women who went to visit Jesus' tomb on Sunday morning.
8. Why did the women go to the grave (Mark 16:1)?
9. What does the earthquake in Matthew 28:2 symbolize? Explain.
10. What caused the earthquake?
11. Why did the angel roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?
12. Describe the reaction of Mary Magdalene upon seeing the tomb was empty (John 20:1-2).
13. Describe the appearance of the angel. What does his description represent (Matt. 28:3)?
14. How did the guards react when they saw the angel (Matt. 28:4)?
15. According to Matthew 28:5-6 and Luke 24:5-7, what did the angel tell the women?
16. Who is responsible for the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Explain.

Pondering the Principles

1. The women who visited the grave of Jesus Christ on the third day came because they were motivated by one thing: their love for Him. Look up the following verses: Deuteronomy 6:5; 10:12; Psalm 97:10; 1 John 3:17-18; 4:19-21. Based on those verses, what does love for Jesus Christ mean? Give some examples of how you have manifested your love for Jesus Christ. If there are times your love for Him has fallen short of what it should be, confess that right now. Ask God to help you manifest your love for Christ by loving others and obeying His Word.
2. Read Philippians 3:10. What did Paul want to know or experience about the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Read John 14:19, Romans 4:25, and Romans 8:11. What do those verses tell us about the effect of the resurrection on our past, present, and future? Ask God to give you the knowledge that Paul sought.

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