

CRUCIFIED AND RISEN

Matthew 28:1-10

The Resurrection of Our Lord (Series A)

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The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to Matthew*, chapter 28, verses 1 through 10. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Matthew 28, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." ⁸ So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and said, "**Greetings!**" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "**Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.**"

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

This is the most marvelous good news. Your Savior, Jesus Christ, rose from the dead. He is the king of heaven and earth, and he lives. It is the greatest news ever.

We are going to consider two basic questions. First, *how do we know this is true?* And second, *what difference does it make?*

First, *how do we know this is true?* This is a really fundamental question. Before we consider anything else about Jesus' resurrection, and before we even consider anything else in Christianity, we should first consider whether or not Jesus actually rose from the dead. We might believe that Jesus rose from the dead, but unless he actually did, it does us no good.

Sometimes we use the word "believe" to distinguish something from what we actually know. For example, you might ask someone, "Is there Sunday school next week?" What does it mean if they say, "I believe so"? It probably means that they think there is, but they don't really know for sure. If they know there is Sunday school, they would just say, "Yes."

Now suppose someone asks you, "Did Jesus rise from the dead?" What would you say? Would you say, "Yes," or would you say, "I believe he did"? A "yes" answer is pretty straightforward, and also quite confident. But what does an "I believe" answer mean? In this case, since the person asked you a "yes" or "no" question, an "I believe" answer might mean that

you don't really know. It would sound like you think he did, and you're hoping he did, but you don't really know for sure. It might also imply that you believe this, but someone else might not, and that's okay. But a belief doesn't count for anything unless it's actually true.

In this way, we often use the word "believe" to mean something less than actual knowledge. But the way the Bible uses the word, and this is also true for the creeds, believing means more than mere knowledge. It means that we know a thing and we trust in it. So in the creed, when we confess, "I believe in God the Father Almighty ... And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord," and, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," that does not mean that we think or wish this is who God is. It means that we know this is God and we trust in him. This is the older, classical meaning of the words "faith" and "believe." The modern meaning is closer to that of "thinking," "wishing," or even "pretending." But the classical meaning is to know something and to trust in it.

Now, we should not abandon the word "believe." It is a biblical word, and we should try to recover it. But since this is the way it has come to be used, there are many instances when we should just skip it, and we should be careful to not use it the way an unbelieving world does. If someone asks us, "Did Jesus rise from the dead?" we should simply say, "Yes." Because this is not something that we merely, think, wish, or pretend to be true. It is simply true, regardless of what our confidence level is.

But maybe you're not 100% confident in Jesus' resurrection. Maybe it is one of those things that you think is true, or you hope is true, but you don't really know for sure. So you might feel that your faith is not strong enough. But here's the beauty of reality: a thing is either true or false, regardless of how confident we are in it. Even if you waver in your faith, and you probably do, it doesn't change the fact that Jesus rose from the dead.

So how do we know this? Because the eyewitnesses saw Jesus after his resurrection, they proclaimed it to everyone around them, they wrote it down for us to read, and they were willing to die for this truth. That's the short answer. I'll say a little more, but not nearly as much as could be said, and I would be very happy to discuss it with anyone, especially if you have doubts. But we'll keep it simple for now.

One of the most significant aspects of this is that it is falsifiable. That does not mean it is false; quite the opposite. Falsifiable means that if something is false, it can be demonstrated to be false. With many things, before we even consider whether or not something is true, we should first consider whether or not it can be tested. Is there, at least theoretically, a way to prove it false. In the case of Jesus' resurrection, it's pretty simple: find the body of Jesus. You do that, and the entire Christian religion crumbles. Now, just because no one has ever found the body of Jesus does not automatically prove that our religion is true. But what this does is put Christianity into the category of historical study. It is very much different than other religions, where we're simply asked to believe something that we cannot verify. Christianity, at the very start, opens itself up to being challenged. So we can investigate Christianity the same way we would investigate any other historical claims.

Eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection reported it publicly. And it wasn't just a matter of one or two eyewitnesses, but hundreds of them. That's a lot more difficult to discredit than just a few. And we have, passed down to us even today, specific names of about two dozen of these eyewitnesses. We have personal details of them, such as what cities they were from or even who their relatives were. All of this is written down for us. Furthermore, we have ancient manuscripts of these texts, and we can trace the transmission of the text to verify that what we have today is the same as what was written two thousand years ago. It's not as if someone could change the

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story long after the witnesses had died. The reports we have today are the same as what they were two thousand years ago.

But what if everyone was just lying? People have been known to make up stories before. So we ask, *What did they have to gain by lying?* Inventing religions has brought certain people fame and fortune. But Jesus' disciples gained no fortune. I suppose they became famous, but they're most famous for the silly things they said and did in the gospels. But there was no fortune, and their ultimate payment from this world was death. From the very day of Jesus' resurrection, they were persecuted, and nearly all of them were executed for their testimony. Many people might die for their religion, but no one dies for a religion they know to be false. Their testimony, therefore, is credible.

There is a lot more that could be said concerning each of these points, and I would be more than happy to talk through it with anyone. But this is the skeleton of the historical case: many eyewitnesses saw Jesus after his resurrection, they reported it publicly, they wrote it down, and they willingly went to their deaths for this testimony.

Let's move on to the "so what?" What difference does this make for us? I'll give you three main benefits of Jesus' resurrection.

The first one is that we know our sins are forgiven. The resurrection of Jesus proves that his sacrifice for our sins was sufficient. It was enough to pay our redemption price. On the cross, Jesus suffered and died for the sins of the whole world. And that, of course, includes your sin. The payment for sin was completed at the cross. But what if Jesus' crucifixion is all we had? What if he just died, and then ... nothing. What if he stayed dead? Well, since Jesus prophesied that he would rise from the dead on the third day (Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19), if he stayed dead, we would conclude that he was either a liar or a lunatic, but certainly not the Lord of heaven and earth.

Furthermore, we would have to conclude that our sins are not forgiven. And that's not just because Jesus would be discredited, but also because life is the natural result of the atonement. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). It's the whole reason we die. If we did not have sin, we would not die. In 1 Corinthians 15 (v. 56), St. Paul says, "The sting of death is sin." Sin is the reason we die, and it is the reason we stay dead. Death has a right to take us and hold because we have sin. But where sin is removed, death loses its sting. So it's only natural that after Jesus makes atonement for sin, he would rise from the dead. Think of death as a prison. A prison rightly holds guilty people. But what if the person in the prison is exonerated? That is, they're not guilty. Then the prison no longer has a right to hold them, and it has to let them go. Or what if the prisoner has served his sentence? He's paid what he owes. Then the prison has to let him go. Death is a prison. Jesus took our sins upon himself. He had them. That's why there was darkness over the whole land in the middle of the day while he was on the cross (Matt. 27:45). That's why he cried out, "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**" (Matt. 27:46). He had all of our sins in his body. If Jesus dies with our sins, but his sacrifice isn't enough to cover them, then he would remain in death's prison. Our sins would hold him there. But his resurrection from the dead proves that his sacrifice was sufficient to pay for our sins. It means they are completely paid for. This is the theological relationship between Jesus' death and resurrection.

This week I heard a theologian say that Jesus' resurrection undoes his crucifixion. I had to hit rewind to make sure I heard him correctly. That almost sounds right, because life is the opposite of death, but it's completely wrong. Jesus' resurrection does not undo his crucifixion. It does not

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undo his death. Instead, it is the logical result of his crucifixion. He rose from the dead because his crucifixion made complete atonement for sins. That means that his crucifixion stands forever as the once-for-all sacrifice for sins.

We rejoice in Jesus' resurrection, not simply because Jesus is alive again, but because he has been crucified and is now alive forever. We always rejoice when someone cheats death. If someone is terminally ill, or maybe their heart even stops, but then they are revived or miraculously recover, we rejoice. We rejoice, because we get something back that we thought we had lost. But Jesus' resurrection is so much more than that. It's not merely that Jesus is alive again; it's that he was crucified and is alive again forever. So we don't just get someone back that we thought we had lost, but we get something that we never had before: forgiveness of our sins. Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that his sacrifice was sufficient, and we are completely forgiven. That's the first benefit of Jesus' resurrection.

The second benefit is that we have new life now. We heard this in the epistle lesson from Colossians 3, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (v. 1-3). We have a foretaste or a sample of Jesus' resurrection now. We have died with Jesus. Here, Paul is recalling our Baptisms (Col. 2:11-12). That's where we died with Jesus. And if we have died with him, then we have also been raised with him. We experience this now in a mystical way. You are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). You have received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). We still have a sinful nature, so we do not fully experience this, but we have new spiritual life through Jesus' resurrection. So we have renewed spiritual desires. We want to love and obey God. I'm not talking about perfection yet, but you have the righteousness of Jesus, and you have the Holy Spirit. You have a new spiritual life.

The third benefit is that we have certainty that we will be raised like Jesus. Now I am talking about perfection. Jesus swallowed up death by his death, so death could not hold him. Neither can it hold those who depend on Christ. St. Paul also made this promise in the epistle lesson: "When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4).

This ties back to the first benefit, regarding the forgiveness of sins. If your sins are forgiven, and they are by the blood of Jesus, then death cannot hold you either. When Jesus appears again, you will be raised to life, and all who trust in him will be perfected after his image. It is not merely that you will be alive again. Your life will not be the way it is now. We will not be plagued by sin. We will not suffer the effects of sin. But we will be raised just as Christ was, without any hint of death. There will be no pain, no suffering, and no loss. You will be finally perfect, and you will live forever with God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and all the saints in the perfect new creation.

You have this, all of this, because Jesus died and rose again. His crucifixion made full atonement for sins, so he rose from the dead, proving that you have forgiveness for all your sins, you have new life now, and you will experience perfect life in the resurrection of the dead. Amen.

"He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with [you] all. Amen" (Rev. 22:20-21).