

Christ Dies and Rises to New Life

Devotional Reading: Hebrews 2:1-13

Background Scripture: Matthew 27:24–28:10

Matthew 27:39-40, 45-54

³⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!”

⁴⁵ From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. ⁴⁶ About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

⁴⁷ When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.”

⁴⁸ Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. ⁴⁹ The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

⁵⁰ And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

⁵¹ At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split ⁵² and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³ They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

⁵⁴ When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake

and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”

Matthew 28:1-10

¹ After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Key Text

Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.

—Matthew 28:9

Introduction

A. Still the Most Amazing Story

No story hits us like the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. It has the full range of human tragedy: betrayal, injustice, and courage. It is filled with mystery and irony. It evokes deep sympathy for its characters. It contrasts the power of vested interests with the power of Almighty God. It confronts our greatest enemy, death. Its ending is astonishing. But as we experience it, we realize how necessary the story's conclusion is.

For some of us, we've known the Easter story for as long as we can remember. Others who became Christians more recently can still recall their vivid reaction when they first heard it. During the Easter season, we get a chance to listen to that story again as if it's our first time. It is a story that is ever new—the story of how God made new life available to a lost and sinful humanity.

B. Lesson Context

Following Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ (the Messiah), Jesus began to warn his disciples of his coming death and resurrection (Matthew 16:13-23; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). His disciples, however, failed to comprehend (John 20:9). In a series of trials featuring biased testimonies, Jesus was sentenced to death by crucifixion (Matthew 26:57-68; 27:11-26).

Crucifixion was a brutal form of execution. Roman authorities reserved it to make an example of the most notorious criminals, striking fear in the population. Those condemned to it were tied or nailed to a wood frame in a prominent public place. Left to the elements and loss of blood, the crucified person would die slowly of blood loss, respiratory failure, and exposure while being subjected to public ridicule. As today's lesson opens, that is the state in which we find Jesus.

I. The Death of the King

(Matthew 27:39-40, 45-54)

A. Forsaken by People (vv. 39-40)

39. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads

Costly Sacrifices

Unit 2: Christ's All-Sufficient Sacrifice

Lessons 6-9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize Matthew's account of the crucifixion and resurrection.
2. Identify and explain allusions to and quotes of the Old Testament in this account.
3. Sing with classmates a hymn or praise song that celebrates the resurrection.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Still the Most Amazing Story
- B. Lesson Context

I. The Death of the King

(Matthew 27:39-40, 45-54)

- A. Forsaken by People (vv. 39-40)
- B. Feeling Forsaken by God (vv. 45-50)
- C. Surrounded by Signs (vv. 51-54)

Phone Books, Curtains, and Hearts

II. The Resurrection of the King

(Matthew 28:1-10)

- A. The Grave Opened (vv. 1-4)
- B. The News Announced (vv. 5-7)
- C. The Lord Recognized (vv. 8-10)

34,000 Emotions?

Conclusion

- A. Retaining Amazement
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

The parallel account of Matthew 27:39-40 reads almost the same (Mark 15:29-30); the parallel in Luke 23:35 is more abbreviated. This verse is also similar to Psalm 22:7 (compare Psalm 109:25).

40a. and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself!

This mockery is based on Jesus’ prediction in John 2:19-20. Jesus was indeed on record as promising to raise *the temple . . . in three days* were it to be destroyed. But “the temple he had spoken of was his body” (John 2:21). Jesus is not recorded as saying that he would destroy the temple in Jerusalem. Thus, the accusation *you who are going to destroy the temple* came from the lips of false witnesses (Matthew 26:60-62; Mark 14:58). To speak against a temple in the ancient world was to invite a death penalty (Jeremiah 26:1-11).

What Do You Think?

What should you do when you come across a misinterpretation of Jesus’ teaching?

Digging Deeper

What are some contexts in which you would answer that question differently?

40b. “Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!”

The taunt *come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God* mirrors Satan’s words during Jesus’ temptation at the start of his ministry (Matthew 4:3). This challenge can be seen as the final effort by the tempter to thwart God’s plan.

Interestingly, the designation *the Son of God* was used by others to describe Jesus, but never from the lips of Jesus himself. Jesus was called Son of God by both demons and worshippers (Matthew 8:29; 14:33); a voice from Heaven was heard to say, “This is my Son, whom I love” (3:17). Jesus’ preferred self-designation was “Son of Man” (8:20; 9:6; etc.).

Jesus could indeed have *come down from the cross*, but he chose not to (compare Matthew 26:53). In choosing to stay there and die, he offered his life as the sacrifice of atonement (or propitiation; see last week’s lesson) as he diverted

the punishment for human sin onto himself, the sinless one (see 2 Corinthians 5:21).

B. Feeling Forsaken by God (vv. 45-50)

45. From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land.

Matthew 27:41-44 (not in today’s lesson) documents further ridicule aimed at Jesus. When we come to Matthew 27:45, the story shifts to a broader scene. Parallels to Matthew 27:45-50 are Mark 15:33-37; Luke 23:44-46; and John 19:28-30.

The *darkness* that *came over all the land* was likely not an eclipse of the sun, as we understand that to mean when the moon moves between the sun and the earth. This is for two reasons. First, a normal eclipse of the sun lasts no more than 15 minutes; this darkness lasted three hours. Second, a normal eclipse of the sun requires a new moon. However, Jesus was crucified during Passover at full moon (see Leviticus 23:5-6; Psalm 81:3).

This darkness, then, is of supernatural origin. The literal, physical darkness that occurred suggests a deeper application: in the Bible, the presence of darkness reveals God’s displeasure (example: Exodus 10:21-23). Since there is no natural explanation for the darkness, it can be considered a supernatural event orchestrated by God as a direct reaction to those who mocked the Messiah.

46. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

We come to one of the seven cries by Jesus from the cross, also recorded in Mark 15:34. The cry is in Aramaic, which is a later form of the Hebrew

How to Say It

Aramaic	<i>Air-uh-may-ik.</i>
Arimathea	<i>Air-uh-muh-thee-uh</i> (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Eli (Aramaic)	<i>Ee-lo-eye.</i>
lema (Aramaic)	<i>leh-muh.</i>
Magdala	<i>Mag-duh-luh.</i>
Magdalene	<i>Mag-duh-leen</i> or <i>Mag-duh-lee-nee.</i>
sabachthani (Aramaic)	<i>Suh-back-thuh-nee.</i>

language. The words come from the beginning of Psalm 22, previously noted. Having been surrounded by taunts and darkness for hours, Jesus was enduring a separation from the Father in order to bear the punishment for humanity's sins (Matthew 1:21; 20:28; 26:28).

What Do You Think?

Without giving direct advice, how would you counsel someone who feels forsaken by God?

Digging Deeper

What spiritual disciplines help you sustain faith in God during times when it feels like he is distant?

47. When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."

One of God's names in the ancient Hebrew language is *Elohim*. When this word occurs in a "construct" sense (that is, combined with another word), one or more letters on the end of *Elohim* may be dropped off in the process of attaching another word; two examples of this are Exodus 15:2 and Numbers 22:18. Psalm 22:1, which Jesus was quoting, is of course the most important example. Here is the root of the misunderstanding on the part of *some of those standing there*. They heard the Aramaic word *Eli* not as a cry to "my God" but as a calling on the name of the long-ago

prophet *Elijah*. There had been two previous misunderstandings regarding Elijah (Matthew 16:14; 17:10-13), and this is a third one.

48. Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink.

We don't know the motive behind the action that we read here (compare Psalm 69:21). If the *one* performing the action was hostile toward Jesus, then this act of giving him a *drink* was a continued mockery in some way. If the one performing the action was sympathetic, it may be intended as an act of kindness. *Wine vinegar* is mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament in Mark 15:36-37; Luke 23:36; John 19:29.

49. The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

The phrase *leave him alone* indicates some impatience on the part of the mocking bystanders. They don't want the action of satisfying Jesus' thirst to interfere with anything else Jesus had to say or to otherwise distract from the appearance of *Elijah*.

50. And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

The words *Jesus* cried out *in a loud voice* are recorded in Luke 23:46: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." John 19:30 further records Jesus as having said, "It is finished" as he died. This verse highlights two key aspects: first, Jesus maintained enough physical strength until his death to shout. Second, he remained in control of his life to the very end.

C. Surrounded by Signs (vv. 51-54)

51a. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

Though Jesus appeared to have been abandoned by God, Matthew offers signs establishing the opposite. *The curtain of the temple* separated the temple's Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Only the high priest could pass behind that curtain to enter the Most Holy Place—and that just once a year—to offer the sacrificial blood on the Day of Atonement (Exodus 26:31-34; 30:10; Leviticus 16:1-34; 23:27-28; Hebrews 9:3). As the three hours of darkness were supernatural in ori-



Visual for Lesson 8. Point to this visual and ask, "How will you live a 'fearless life' in light of the resurrection of Jesus?"

gin, so was this tearing of the temple curtain *from top to bottom* (also Luke 23:45).

The significance of this event is explained in the book of Hebrews (Hebrews 9:11-12, 24; 10:19-20).

Phone Books, Curtains, and Hearts

A strongman feat of yesteryear was to tear a thick phone book in half. There was a technique to doing so, but strength was still necessary. If you saw a thick phone book torn in half, you would automatically presume someone “with muscle” made it happen.

Jewish tradition holds that the curtains (veils) that marked off the Most Holy Place were from 3½ to 4 inches thick! Consequently, the veils were so heavy that it took 300 priests to hang them. To have seen one of these curtains ripped top to bottom would cause gasps and cause people to imagine the strength necessary to have done so. Only someone with superhuman strength could tear such a veil—God Almighty!

Our friends and family who have not embraced the gospel might need time to accept the gospel due to their reluctance or uncertainty. We can and must tell the story, but ultimately, it’s the Word of God, which is “sharper than any double-edged sword,” that will cut through the resistance (Hebrews 4:12). How did that happen for you? —R. L. N.

51b. The earth shook, the rocks split

The earthquake similarly points to divine action. God was clearly at work. In the Old Testament, earthquakes frequently signified God’s presence and sometimes divine judgment (examples: Judges 5:4-5; Psalm 114:7-8; Joel 3:16). Therefore, the first-century crowd witnessing the crucifixion would likely have understood this association.

52-53. 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.

Matthew alone tells us of this additional sign. As his description continues, we understand this sign occurred not immediately as Jesus died but a few days later, *after Jesus’ resurrection*. The designation *the holy city* refers to Jerusalem (Matthew 4:5).

54. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”

A *centurion* was a Roman soldier who commanded a unit known as a “century” in a legion of the Roman army; each “century” consisted of about 80 men. The centurion noted here was likely the one in charge of the crucifixion detail. Processing all he had experienced, the centurion sided against the mockers. His declaration, *Surely he was the Son of God*, stems from his fear-driven response to the supernatural occurrences around him. Jesus’ disciples had a similar response when Jesus walked on water and calmed the storm (Matthew 14:28-33).

What Do You Think?

What evidence for Christ do you find best to use when sharing the gospel?

Digging Deeper

How would you respond to a fellow Christian who believes a “testimony” approach to evangelism is better than an approach based on historical evidence?

II. The Resurrection of the King

(Matthew 28:1-10)

A. The Grave Opened (vv. 1-4)

1. After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

A long-held view is that the passage of days in the ancient Jewish calendar are marked from sunset to sunset (Leviticus 23:32). Therefore, most students recognize that *the Sabbath* would have ended at sunset on the day before the action we see here. The women don’t set out for their task until *the first day of the week* (Sunday) is in view. *Sabbath* was a day of rest (Luke 23:56).

Their designation as *Mary Magdalene and the other Mary* reveals their key roles in Matthew’s passion narrative. They were present at Jesus’ crucifixion and saw where he was buried (Matthew 27:55, 61). Mary Magdalene was a follower of Jesus from the early days of his ministry. Jesus

had delivered her from demon possession (Luke 8:2). We remind ourselves that “Magdalene” is not a surname in the modern sense. Rather, it designates this particular Mary as being from Magdala.

The “other” Mary was the mother of James and Joseph (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:47) and possibly the wife of Clopas (John 19:25). Though the other Gospels name additional women (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10), Matthew may have focused on these two because of their prominence among those of Jewish background who first read his Gospel.

By the evil initiative of the Jewish leaders and the compassion of Joseph of Arimathea, Jesus’ body was not left as long on the cross (Matthew 27:57-58; John 19:31). Joseph had provided *the tomb*, and the two women named Mary were eyewitnesses to the interment (Matthew 27:59-61). Because the Sabbath would begin a short time after Jesus’ death, his body could not be properly prepared for burial without violating the commandment not to work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11).

What Do You Think?

How would you react to a claim that early morning is the best time for connecting with God?

Digging Deeper

What biblical examples of connecting with God at other times of the day can you cite?

2. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.

Again, an earthquake signaled divine action, given the result we see here. The angel *rolled back the stone* not to let Jesus out but to let Jesus’ followers in. They needed to see the tomb empty. The resurrected Lord could enter or exit a locked room without opening the door (example: John 20:19-20, 26-27). He did not need the stone to be moved for his own benefit.

3. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.

There is no mistaking this angel for a human! His face and clothing are bright with light, suit-

able for supernatural encounters (Matthew 17:2; Luke 9:29; Acts 1:10).

4. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The Roman governor Pilate had agreed to set a guard at the tomb to prevent Jesus’ followers from removing his body and declaring he had been raised from the dead (Matthew 27:62-66). These are *the guards* noted here. The fact that they became *like dead men* is similar to John’s reaction to seeing the ascended Jesus in Revelation 1:17.

B. The News Announced (vv. 5-7)

5-6a. The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.

As *the angel* told Joseph at the beginning of Jesus’ story, “*do not be afraid*” (Matthew 1:20), this angel tells *the women* the same. The wondrous scene they witnessed fulfilled Jesus’ promise to be raised from the dead (16:21-28; 17:22-23; 20:19; etc.). Jesus’ mysterious promise to die and rise again is now more apparent. It happened not as anyone expected but precisely *as he said*.

6b. “Come and see the place where he lay.

The emphasis on the empty tomb counters any notion that Jesus’ followers were only experiencing a “spiritual” resurrection of Christ. Jesus’ physical resurrection involved the coming to life again of his physical body. *The place where he lay* was vacant!

7. “Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

The disciples, who had abandoned Jesus in the garden (Matthew 26:47-56), were to be the first whom the women were to *tell* of his resurrection. He had warned them they would fail, yet promised to meet them afterward in Galilee (26:31-32). The angel was saying nothing new but was reaffirming Jesus’ previous declarations. Key among these is the declaration *you will see him*. Jesus’ resurrection was not an invisible event in the minds and hearts of the disciples. It was a physical event in space and time: the resurrected Jesus seen by many (1 Corinthians 15:6).

C. The Lord Recognized (vv. 8-10)

8. So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

The women were filled with fear from such a close encounter with God and joy at what God had done. They obeyed the angel's words implicitly, running—an uncommon act for grown people in their time—to tell the other followers of Jesus.

34,000 Emotions?

Quick: How many emotions can you name in less than a minute? Most of us can list several, such as *happiness, anger, fear, sadness, joy, disgust,* and *surprise*. That was the list proposed by psychologist Paul Eckman in the 1970s. To this list of “basic six emotions” has been added many more over the subsequent decades. One researcher now proposes that there are 34,000 emotions or combinations of emotions!

Reaction to a situation can be unpredictable when two or more emotions are experienced at the same time. Experiencing joy and fear simultaneously, the reaction of the women at the tomb was to obey immediately as they were instructed to “go quickly and tell” (Matthew 28:7). Sometimes, powerful emotions can keep us from doing what we should. But the women were not paralyzed into inaction—quite the opposite! How often does fear keep you from talking about Jesus? —C. S.

9. Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.

The angel commanded the women to tell his disciples that Jesus was alive, and they were on their way to do so without having yet seen him alive for themselves! But it wasn't long before they

10. Then Jesus said to them, Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers and sisters; there they will see me alive as I did before.

Jesus repeats the angel's instructions regarding *Galilee*. Jesus' message is his enduring presence. Despite their fearful abandonment of him at his crucifixion and their absence from the tomb, he continued to refer to them as his brothers and sisters. This is nothing new; it's a reality Jesus said before his death (Matthew 28:10). The Gospels record the results of that gathering.

What Do You Think?

How do you determine when to act for action rather than inaction? Or vice versa?

Digging Deeper

How would you respond to the Christian life if you were a worshiper?

Conclusion

A. Retaining A

The grind of daily life can obscure the most profound truths—we lose sight of “the urgent” to take priority. That's why Christians must guard themselves of the importance of the things done. By repetition, we remember, we restore the eyesight and primary focus.

Against every expectation, every divine promise, Jesus died. Let's hold the glorious events in our hearts daily and