

“He is not here, for he has risen!”

Matthew 28

The resurrection (Matthew 28 v 1 to 10)

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to finish the preparation of Jesus' body, which had been cut short by the Sabbath (Luke 24 v 1 to 3). So on the first day of the week (Sunday) they came to the tomb, fully expecting to find Jesus' dead body. Matthew alone notes the earthquake – this did not cause the stone to be rolled away; if anything, the angelic rolling of the stone prompted the earthquake.

- Note the prominent place taken by the women in the account of the resurrection appearances – why do you think this was the case? See John 14 v 21.
- Put yourself in the women's shoes – why did they leave the tomb “with fear and great joy” (v 8)? What did the angel tell them to do?
- How did they respond to the risen Jesus, and what did he tell them to do?

In Israel you can visit many graves and tombs – on the Mount of Olives, and outside the eastern wall of the temple mount. You can see the tomb of Rebekah, the tomb of David, the tomb of Absalom – but you won't find the tomb of Jesus anywhere: “He is not here, for he has risen” (v 6)!

There are several examples in the Bible of people being brought back from death, such as the widow's son in the days of Elijah (1 Kings 17 v 17 to 24) and Lazarus (John 11 v 38 to 44). Each of these was 'resuscitated' from death, but none of them was 'resurrected'. Each was raised in the same body, to eventually die again.

Resurrection is not just living again; it is living again in a new body, perfectly suited for life in eternity. Jesus was not the first one brought back from the dead; he was the first one 'resurrected'.

The report of the guard (Matthew 28 v 11 to 15)

- How does the effect of the news of the resurrection on the disciples contrast with the response of Christ's enemies? How does this demonstrate the truth of Luke 16 v 30, 31?

This cover-up attempt shows the darkness of these priests. They knew the truth of the resurrection, yet they rejected that truth. Through the years, there have been many objections suggested to the resurrection of Jesus. Some say he didn't die at all, but just swooned or fainted on the cross and spontaneously revived in the tomb. Others say he really died, but his body was stolen. Still others suggest he really died, but his desperate followers 'fabricated' his resurrection.

A plain, simple understanding of the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus answers all of these theories, and shows they take far more faith to believe than the plain truth as recorded in the Bible...

[MORE OVER...]

The Great Commission (Matthew 28 v 16 to 20)

- Note the repetition of the word ‘all’ in Jesus’ final and ‘Great Commission’ (v 18 to 20). What threefold task is given to the eleven disciples, and thus to the Church?
- Are there disciples in “all nations” today?
- In what ways do you think Jesus’ words might have reassured and encouraged the ‘some who doubted’ (v 17)?
- Note (a) the scope and extent of Christ’s authority (v 18); and (b) the promise of his presence “always, to the end of the age” (v 20). In the light of these truths, to what extent are we obeying Jesus’ Great Commission?

Jesus sends his disciples with a mission to fulfil, but he does not send them alone. The promise of his constant presence, and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1 v 8), is more than enough to strengthen, encourage and guide the disciples as they obey Jesus in making disciples of all the nations of the world...

Prayer –

Lord Jesus, you died for our sins, and now you are risen indeed!

You are King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and we praise and worship you, for all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to you.

As you commanded the eleven disciples, so you command us to go and make disciples, turning people towards you in faith, and teaching them to walk in your ways.

Be with us, Lord, always, and fill us with your Holy Spirit.

Help us to obey your Great Commission, from this day onwards.

Amen.