



This Week in the Word

Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Ps 119:89.



Called to Proclaim the Resurrection

Study Scripture: Matthew 28:1-15

Lesson 7, April 20, 2019

Key Verse

Then Jesus said to them, Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me. Matthew 28: 10

As we look at the Study Scripture let us bear in mind that we love life deeply and we really hate death. We feel this way because we know that death threatens our lives, the lives of those we love, our wives, our children and grandchildren, our husbands, as well as our friends and neighbors. When we go to a funeral and listen to the service and stand at the graveside we get a sense of the frailty of our own lives. We resent the power of death but it does remind us and sobers us to the realities of our present life. We are in grief, helpless, often shocked, often broken-hearted, and questioning the weakness of our humanity. We often begin to ask questions about who we are, what is going on, and why it is we have to suffer so much.

But no matter what we do and no matter the questions that we ask we are left with a feeling of helplessness. We realize by this powerful reminder of death that even though we hate death we cannot eliminate its power over us.

Our life and the life manifested by those around us is full of beauty, activity, creativity, hope, but above all it is full of noise. Life is not a silent thing, but a vibrant, multifaceted reflection of something real.

Our Lesson today is important for it makes us understand in a pointed fashion that the silence of death has been taken away, and the life that we crave has been presented to us because of something monumental that happened in one single moment in history, some two thousand years ago.

We are reminded in an amazing fashion that life cannot be found in a cemetery. An amazing event in a small cemetery outside the walls of Jerusalem is testimony to that.

The key person at that event was abused by the Jewish and Roman leadership and their minions. He was mocked, scourged and brutalized before He laid down His life as a sacrifice for the sins of both Jews and Gentiles.

He was accused by the Sanhedrin and their colleagues as a false messiah. The soldiers of Pilate, the Roman overlord, abused Him as a false King, even though ironically they were charging Him with being exactly what He was. The incident showed the desperately wicked heart of men and that all of this wickedness was enthusiastically poured out on Jesus.

Jesus was battered but He was able to carry the crossbeams of His cross till He passed through the gates of the city of Jerusalem on His way to the place outside the city wall where crucifixions took place. He was too weak by this time and the Romans had to force a man called Simon to carry the cross to Golgotha, a place whose exact location is unknown.

Attempts were made to give Jesus some wine with myrrh, an additive to decrease pain but Jesus refused to have it, for He apparently chose to remain fully conscious as He endured the agony of the cross.

One writer tells us that the Romans reserved crucifixion for the worst criminals from the lowest classes of society and that Roman citizens were exempt from crucifixion, unless the emperor himself granted an exemption. He describes what happened at crucifixion as follows:

“The Romans normally tied or nailed the victim to the cross beams of his cross. In Jesus' case they did the latter. They would then hoist the crossbeam and the prisoner up on to the upright member of the cross. Next they would then fasten the crucified person's feet to the upright by tying or nailing them. The Romans constructed crosses in various shapes: an X, or T, or, as in Jesus' case, the traditional T with the upright extending above the crossbeam (verse 37). Sometimes the victim was only a few inches off the ground, but Jesus appears to have been a few feet higher (verse 48; John 19: 29).

Normally the Romans crucified their victims naked. The executioners took the criminal's clothes for themselves. In Jesus' case they cast lots for his robes fulfilling Psalm 22: 18”. Another writer tells us: “Crucifixion was unspeakably painful and degrading. Whether tied or nailed to the cross, the victim endured countless paroxysms as he pulled with his arms and pushed with his legs to keep his chest cavity open for breathing and then collapsed in exhaustion until the demand for oxygen demanded renewed paroxysms. The scourging, the loss of blood, the shock from the pain, all produced agony that could go on for days, ending at last by suffocation, cardiac arrest, or loss of blood. When there was reason to hasten death, the execution squad would smash the victim's legs. Death followed almost immediately, either from shock or from collapse that cut off breathing”.

Jesus spoke seven times while hanging on the cross, but finally forsaken by the Father and by everyone else, in agony He cried out, and then finally, after His sixth utterance said Father, into your hands I commit my spirit (Luke 23: 46) and then shortly after this He dismissed His spirit, as the Greek phrase of two words in Matthew 27: 50 and John 19: 30 indicated, showing that he did not commit suicide but laid down His life in sacrifice for the sins of men.

It is to be noted carefully that the behavior of the Jewish leaders showed that they believed that Jesus had finally died on the Cross. They remembered that Jesus predicted that He would be resurrected and though they did not believe that He would really rise from the

dead, they wanted to guard against the disciples putting together some plot and taking Jesus' body away and saying that He had arisen from the dead. So they went to Pilate and asked him to guard the tomb (Matthew 27:62-64) but some interpret what happened as Pilate refusing to use his own troops to guard the tomb of Jesus but instead gave them permission to use their Temple guards to protect the tomb. Some however interpret the language to mean that Roman soldiers were used to guard the tomb. The Jews went and did just that and made sure that the guards were posted and as a wax seal put on the stone door to indicate that no one should enter this tomb.

Jesus did in fact die on the Cross. Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin

(Luke 23:50) who was also a disciple of Jesus, went to Pilate and begged for the body of Jesus, to give it an honourable funeral.

By Jewish custom the body of a criminal would have been burnt, or buried in a common place set aside for executed criminals. Pilate agreed and handed over the body. We can be sure that this act of Pilate would have made the Jewish rulers very unhappy.

Joseph laid the body in his own new never before used tomb, after wrapping it in linen and one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39, 40). The tomb's entrance was closed with a huge stone.

Now that the body was in the hands of someone outside their immediate circle of plotters, the Chief Priests and Pharisees took the precaution of having the tomb sealed, and guards placed at the door. The circumstances and the actions by the Pharisees and Chief Priests unwittingly made the resurrection of Jesus a fact very hard to disprove. The sealing of the tomb and the presence of guards would make it impossible for the absence of Jesus' body to be attributed to anything else but a resurrection.

Many saw Christ die. The tomb was sealed and guards put in place. Precautions were taken so that a resurrection could not occur.

It is most important that we understand that the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus is peculiar to Christianity and that if we do not believe in the bodily resurrection we should not even speak about the resurrection at all.

It is only in Christianity that we have doctrine of the resurrection. The father of Judaism Abraham died about 1900 B.C. was buried and his body was carefully preserved in Hebron for about 4000 years and archaeologists believe that that site which they think is a genuine site is now believed to be covered by a Mohammed mosque.

In Islam their prophet Mohammed died on June 8, 632 in Medina and today many people visit that shrine where they think the tomb of the prophet lay but they certainly do not claim a bodily resurrection for Mohammed.

Even in Buddhism there is no claim of any resurrection for their ancient accounts of the death of Buddha said that he died with a passing away so that nothing ever remained behind.

The doctrine of the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus therefore is a unique and essential doctrine to Christianity, and if in fact we do not have any faith in a risen Saviour you really do not have any real biblical God approved faith at all. The Holy Spirit testifies within our hearts of the risen Saviour and so we should feel it inside us as an essential part of our experience. In addition, certainty comes by the truths of the word of God. One writer reminds us:

“Remember that the New Testament is composed of the testimonies not only of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but of also of the testimonies of each of the individuals who had acquaintance with the risen Christ. And remember, too, that our gospel circulated separately over a lengthy period of time. These were separate testimonies, and individual testimonies were singular and separate to as well”.

THE TEXT

Verse 1. The term in verse one "late in the Sabbath", or "toward the end of the Sabbath", is normally translated to mean the closing period near the end, but still during the Sabbath. "Late on the Sabbath Day" is the only natural and well supported meaning. The Jewish Sabbath ended at sunset. The other expression "As it began to dawn" refers to the beginning of the new day after sunset, as it does in Luke 23:54, Mk.15:42.

Many insist that the plain natural meaning of the text should be followed. Authorities such as Fritzche, Grimm, Gadet and others hold this, but there are others who try to impose our non-Jewish reckoning of time, to support the idea of a resurrection on the first day of the week. The intent is to say that Jesus arose on a Sunday, an idea which of course they used to support the unbiblical theory that God changed the worship day from the seventh day of the week namely Saturday to Sunday.

The group of women came to see the sepulchre (literally to behold a spectacle). This is a quite distinct visit from the visit of the early morning (Mk.16:1-2).

Matthew mentions Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (likely the mother of James and Joses, Matt. 27:56) as coming. Other gospels mention Salome (Mk 16:1) and Salome is mentioned by Luke (24:10). Others are also mentioned. There seems to have been two different parties (Meillon & Wescolt on John Ederstein). There is also disagreement over when the groups actually came to the tomb.

These differences are considered important, because some try to prove the time of Jesus resurrection on the basis of the time of the women's visit. But this is a hopeless attempt for when the women went to the tomb it was empty. There is no indication of the time Jesus was resurrected. It could, in a technical sense, be on or during the Sabbath day, or immediately after the Sabbath Day ended. There is thus no proof of a "Sunday" resurrection. If however it can be shown that one group of women went to the tomb, immediately after the Sabbath ended, and the tomb was empty, one might suspect that Jesus was raised on the Jewish Sabbath.

The thought of this has been greeted with horror by many commentators, who have been brought up on the idea that a "Sunday" resurrection is the basis for Sunday worship or so-called Lord's Day worship.

It is indicated in Matthew that the women came to see the sepulchre, to visit the tomb. The account in Luke focuses on the women who were bringing spices and ointments. Mark has the visit "very early on the first day of the week... when the sun was risen. Luke says "at early dawn". John says, "while it was yet dark".

Note that despite everything the prophets predicted about Messiah's life, death, and resurrection, and the very many teachings of Jesus about these events, these faithful and

loyal women did not understand these teachings, and so when they went to the tomb they were stricken with grief. They did not realize that the resurrection was central to the gospel and was in fact an essential component of the good news of Christ.

It is interesting to note that the writers of the gospels did not examine in great detail the theological implications of the resurrection but simply gave us the facts about the resurrection. They left it to the Apostle Paul to write extensively on this matter and the greatness of the event. We can see these writings in Romans 4: 24-25; 6: 4; 8: 34; 10: 9; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10,15; Philippians 3: 10-11; Colossians 2:12-13; 3:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 4:14.

It is most important as we study this lesson for us to remember that there is no life in an empty tomb and that there is life only in the risen Lord Jesus. Jesus was buried and was resurrected and we should proclaim that doctrine.

Verse 2-3. Matthew spoke of an especially wondrous event. There was a great earthquake. This seemed to be connected to the appearance of the angel of the Lord from Heaven. Matthew's words appear to indicate this was a special messenger. He rolled away the stone covering the door to the tomb and sat on it. Sometime during the Sabbath day apparently there was a second earthquake, the first being the one that had torn the veil of the Temple in two.

There is some discussion as to why Jesus did not roll the stone away by His own power. It is thought that an angel was sent to do it, to signify that He had not broken out of prison, but Heaven by this act here, legally discharged Him.

Others hold however that the stone might have been rolled away for the sake of the women and the disciples, who would see the empty tomb and see that Jesus was indeed resurrected as predicted.

The angel was so glorious; it was as if lighting erupted from him and his clothing shimmered, white as snow. The guards were terrified, and shook with fear, totally helpless (verse 4).

Verse 4. The resurrection and the appearance of the angel was sheer terror for Jesus' enemies, but was made a consolation for the women. Clearly, the guards felt the earthquake and observed the angel who appeared as a young man, According to Mark 16:5 it was obviously the presence of the angel that so terrified them that they shook in fright and were so fearful that Matthew describes them as becoming like dead men.

The question must then be asked again as to who these guards were and why they were guarding a dead man named Jesus. These military men, these Temple guards were themselves enemies of Christ and as well they represented the chief enemies of Christ.

They were and chose to be the tools of Satan. So we recall Psalm 2:1-3 –

“Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?

The Kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed saying,

Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision”.

In this case it appeared that the guards were so terrified and shaken that they fainted. The power and strength of mere men cannot face the power of even an angel much less the power of the risen Christ.

So we have nothing to fear from Satan and the men of the world that he controls. They have lost.

Note also that the presence of these guards and their reaction to the presence of the glorious angel was an indication of the real resurrection, and a proclamation of what had happened. God had set it up this way to make the wrath of men praise God. These guards would be able to go to the chief Priests and tell them what had happened and about the miraculous and supernatural events that they saw

Verse 5-6. The two women were obviously amazed, perplexed, and fearful but the angel calmed them. He knew they came to seek Jesus, they needed not to fear. Jesus the crucified was risen, as He told them He would (Verse 6) and had already left. The angel offered proof of the resurrection, inviting them to inspect the tomb, to verify that it was indeed empty. This is the only true explanation of the empty tomb.

The angel invited the women to come inside the tomb and see the place where Jesus laid. He rolled away the stone from the front of the tomb, so that the woman could go inside and look and then go and tell the other disciples that He was no longer in the tomb and that He was risen.

Can you imagine the feeling of these women! We all have been at gravesides, either when people were interred, or when we afterwards visited the location to remember who these persons were to us. Many thousands wish then that these people in the grave would return to life and continue in fellowship with us. But sadly that is not to be. But in this case it was to be and there was joy.

In verse 7 the angel instructed the two women to go quickly and tell the disciples the Master was alive again. Jesus had warned about everything that would happen in Luke 18:31-34. They would be able to tell all the disciples, not just the eleven, that they had seen the empty tomb, with the grave clothes neatly arranged. They would testify that His disappearance was not the work of grave robbers, but was indeed the resurrection testified to by a glorious angel that was present.

Jesus promised the disciples He would meet them in Galilee (26:32) and the angel told the women to remind His disciples of the promise. Evidently, Jesus had previously advised the disciples of a great meeting to be held on a mountain in Galilee, where He would give them a great commission. "Lo I have told you," stressed the formal nature of the angel's declaration.

With "fear", produced by their meeting with this powerful angel, trembling and filled with astonishment (Mark 16:8) and "great joy" at the great unexpected news of the resurrection of Jesus, they hurried quietly to tell the disciples.

It is interesting to note that in the culture of the day no one regarded the testimony of women very highly. If they did not have an eyewitness account that was even worse. The fact however is that if the writers of the gospel were fabricating this resurrection story it would not be logical for them to say that the women witnessed the resurrection first, but they would say that it was the men who first saw the empty tomb and first saw the risen Christ.

Note carefully that after the meeting with the angel despair had gone, and though the women had not yet physically seen the Risen Christ they believed He was resurrected and they took off in faith to find the disciples.

Verse 9. All the Gospels however tell us that the women were the first people to see Jesus alive.

The women who had shown such great concern and affection for Him, having gone to see His tomb at the earliest possible opportunity were rewarded. Jesus met them (verse 9) with a greeting. They responded by worshipping Him, grasping Him by the feet in a scene of great humility and veneration. Fear again showed itself amidst their other emotions. This fear was perfectly understandable in the face of this stupendous event.

There was no doubt that they were in the presence of the Living God. This fact alone would overwhelm them with fear and wonder. Obviously Jesus was now in His new resurrection body just like the one He displayed on the Mount of Transfiguration, and He stood before them alive and beautiful.

They were in shock as one would have expected and so Jesus calmed them, and again gave instructions to remind the disciples of the Galilee meeting. Note that Jesus repeated instructions that the angel had first given.

It is important to note that Jesus greeted the women with words of comfort and they responded quite naturally by falling to their knees in what one writer calls "wonderment and joy" and taking hold of His feet.

The angel was certainly right for He was alive and they were now with Him, touching Him, and He was speaking to them. He was real and solid and was not a ghost, for they could feel Him, and hold Him. One writer points out that: "Grasping someone's feet was a recognized act of supplication and homage (Mark 5: 22; 7:25; Luke 17:16)".

Verse 10. Jesus now called the disciples 'brethren', a new name. This would reassure them that their flight and infidelity at His arrest was understood and forgiven. One writer describes why Jesus gave instructions for the disciples to meet Him in Galilee:

"Why, then, Matthew's record of a resurrection appearance in Galilee? The answer surely lies in the combination of two themes that have permeated the entire Gospel. First, the Messiah emerges from a despised area.... and first sheds his light on a despised people;... for the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit (5:3). For this reason too, the risen Jesus first appears to women whose value as witnesses among Jews was worthless..

Second, 'Galilee of the Gentiles' (4:15) is compatible with the growing theme of Gentile mission in this Gospel.... and prepares for the Great Commission (28:18-20)".

Verses 11-15. When the guards that had been left for dead awoke from their stupor, they left the empty tomb and went to the chief priests reporting everything that happened.

These were Jewish temple guards and not Roman guards for if they had been Roman guards the Roman commanders would have killed them for falling asleep on duty.

The Sanhedrin Council promised that if Jesus came down from the cross or was resurrected they would believe in Him, but now that they were confronted with the facts of the resurrection they forgot all of those promises and in their normal hypocritical fashion devised a silly story to protect their own reputation and to give their conscience a pretty weak reason for their disbelief.

This story they came up with had a lot of holes and no sensible person would accept that explanation. Obviously, if the guards fell asleep they would not have known that the body of Jesus was stolen by the disciples. In addition, if even one of them was awake he could have sounded the alarm.

It was quite a stretch to believe that the rather fearful male disciples that denied Jesus and ran away at the first sign of trouble would have been brave enough to confront the Temple guards and open the guarded tomb.

In any case if the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus, given the fact that molesting graves was punishable by death, the Sanhedrin would have used any credible evidence from the Temple guards to prosecute the disciples. Obviously they did not have any credible evidence to back up their story, and they could not come up with any such proof of body theft.

So the Sanhedrin met and decided to bribe the Temple guards to say that the disciples stole the body while they were asleep. They had to pay them for the Temple guards were taking a big risk, for if Pilate heard he would certainly call them before him to answer for their incompetence. So the Sanhedrin members reassured the Temple Guards and said that if the Roman authorities heard that story they would find a way of persuading him not to bother them. This was a very cynical bunch of leaders.

Justin an early Christian writer reports on the importance of this Sanhedrin explanation and one writer tells us:

“Justin, Dial (logos), 108, tells us that this charge was still being actively propagated in the middle of the second century; it was an obvious countermove to Christian claims of Jesus' resurrection”.

The death and resurrection of Jesus is most important. His death was atonement for our sins. His resurrection marked the completion of this work, and showed His Father's divine approval for His work. In addition the resurrection was proof of Jesus' person and was to the nation of Israel the sign of the prophet Jonah attesting to the fact that Jesus was the Messiah. (Matthew 12: 38-39). Note also that the resurrection of Jesus proved that the prophecies of Christ about His rising from the dead were totally accurate and truthful.

It, the resurrection, proved Jesus was Messiah. As Messiah, everything that He taught about the nature of the kingdom, His offer of the kingdom to Israel, and the withdrawal of His offer, are therefore intimately involved in the resurrection. The resurrection proved the truthfulness of everything about which Christ ever spoke. So the resurrection is critically important for many things for Israel and for Gentiles, for the authenticity of His words was

proved and His action validated, being based on the resurrection. Jesus now was shown to be not a false messiah but a true Messiah.

Note on Jesus' Appearances

There are ten recorded appearances of Jesus between the resurrection and His ascension. First, to the women, second to Mary Magdalene (in John and Mark), third to Peter, fourth to the two disciples going to Emmaus, fifth, to the apostles except Thomas, sixth, to the apostles including Thomas at Jerusalem, seventh, to seven disciples at the Sea of Galilee (in John), eighth, to the Apostles, probably also to five hundred brethren on a mountain in Galilee (in Matthew and Mark), ninth, to James and tenth, to the apostles just before the ascension.

These appearances were in different circumstances, different times and to different numbers of people. No one could thus dispute the fact He was indeed alive. He went to great pains to show He had a real flesh and blood body, and was not just a 'spirit'. He showed the marks of the crucifixion.

Note He seemed to have appeared only to His disciples, and they only saw Him ten times in forty days and we are not told how long He remained at each appearance. His body was very different however, from our normal body, and He could appear in a room that had the doors closed (John 20:26). Sometimes He was not even recognized at first when He appeared (Luke 24:16, John 21:4).

It was clear that the resurrection of Jesus did not answer all the questions that remained in the minds of the disciples about Him. Their minds were probably still fixed on the old nationalistic Jewish themes about Messiah and what He would do when He came. Since Jesus was not apparently about to begin His reign over Rome and the Gentile nations it is likely that there would be unanswered questions that they were important to nationalistic Jews.

Matthew seemed to indicate that some of the eleven doubted. Some however hold that at this meeting, the five hundred brethren who saw Him on one occasion were also there and it is among them, that there were doubters. Some have suggested that Jesus' body was changing in appearance between the time of His resurrection and the time of His ascension, and this accounted for the uncertainty. Jesus drew closer to them however, probably to have the doubters make up their minds, that He was really their old Master.

CONCLUSION

Let us remember and proclaim that the resurrection is a fact because it is written in the word of God and in addition many testified to this bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

It is proof that death has been defeated and it is proof that our sins have been forgiven. It is proof that God the Father accepted the work of the Son and that the work of the Son bought for us the forgiveness of sins. The work of atonement has been accepted by God.

One writer reassures us that besides that:

“It is also a principle and a pattern of a joyous life with one who can still the storms, who can release the demons, who can bind up the wounds, who can open the graves, who can cancel guilt, and who can comfort aching hearts and who can convey peace”.

The resurrection is really a pledge of the judgment to come for we know that one day God will judge the world in righteousness by the Lord Jesus Christ who He has ordained for that purpose.

The resurrection life is to flood the life of the believer for it takes a believer out of the conditions of the old life in which he was before and placed him in a situation where he can grow, be transformed, and abound in physical and spiritual growth. The resurrection life is really the eternal life that we possess through the resurrected Christ. As we share this with Him we will enjoy the principle and the pattern of the joyous life.

We should also remember that Christ is infinitely powerful. He has a magnificent purpose. Along with that He is infinitely kind and we can see that by the way He treated the women that fell down at His feet to worship Him. He could've brushed these sinful humans aside so that they would not negatively affect His now divine body, but instead He treated them kindly and with understanding.

So we see infinite power, amazing kindness, and total dedication to His purpose to save and to restore. He wanted these women to tell His disciples that He would meet them and that they should not despair. So Jesus calls on these women to believe, urged them to share their knowledge, and He urged them to rejoice.

You too should believe, you too should share your knowledge of Him, and you too should rejoice.

REMEMBER THEREFORE THAT THIS POWER AND ATTITUDE AND PURPOSE IS AVAILABLE FOR YOU TODAY.

We note that some are indifferent to the claims of Christ and some even shake their fists at Him. But your task is to bring the gospel of salvation to them so that they will stop refusing to bow before Him. So show them and proclaim the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the only way for them to have real life.

All are assured that He had all authority in Heaven and in earth. This was universal authority, given Him by the Father (John 13:3, I Corinthians 15:24-28).

He is now seated at the right hand of the Father in Heaven. On the basis of that authority, He is sending us to bring the knowledge of truth to men. The disciples and all believers were to preach the gospel, bring non-Christians to a full willingness to become Christians, through repentance and faith.

All Nations must be taught to keep His commandments. Christianity must of necessity be a missionary religion, and must be spread. Jesus has all authority and power, and has a perfect right to be believed and obeyed. There was to be no limit to this missionary work. All nations were to be discipled, brought into a relation of pupil to teacher, instructed, and baptized.

Jesus' resurrection assured the disciples of His continued presence; Always, or all the days through weakness, failure, sorrow, old age, death, as well as through the days of strength, joy and success.

This is assurance of His personal presence in the fullest sense. His presence abides every day, and through to the consummation of the age at His Second Coming. Then His invisible, but just as real presence will be exchanged for His visible and eternal presence.