**The Astonishing Resurrection of Jesus**

***Matthew 27:57-28:20***

He is risen! “He is risen indeed!!” He is risen!! “He is risen indeed!!!!”

When you think of the resurrection of Jesus what words might you use to describe it?

Here are some of the adjectives that came to my mind this week as I let my mind linger over Jesus’ resurrection:

**Miraculous**. The resurrection of Jesus defies the laws of nature. A person does not naturally come out of the grave clothed in glory after being buried for three days.

**Promised.** Jesus promised his own death and resurrection on five separate occasions (Matthew 12:40; 16:21; 17:9, 23; 20:19; 26:32.) Even the enemies of Jesus heard Him promise that He would rise from the dead on the third day. That is why they asked for a guard to be stationed at His tomb.

**Surprising.** Though Jesus promised His own resurrection, the disciples were surprised when it happened.They were not ready for it.

**Public.** Jesus did not die in a corner, nor rise in private. He rose from a grave guarded by Roman soldiers and appeared as the risen Lord to hundreds and hundreds of people over the next 40 days. On one occasion He appeared to over 500 at one time.

**Resisted.** Jesus’ enemies did everything in their power to keep Jesus in the grave. They made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard. But they could not hold Him back!

**Destructive.** Jesus’ resurrection brings destruction upon the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil. (Hebrew 2:14). In Jesus’ resurrection, death itself dies and the curse is cancelled.

**Consoling.** Jesus’ resurrection comforted the disciples in their sorrow and confusion. The resurrection wipes our tears. The Master is not taken from us by death, but is glorified through death.

**Verifying.** Jesus’ resurrection proves that Jesus is who He says He is. He is the Son of God. He holds the keys of death and hell. He alone forgives sins. He alone provides a sacrifice that God accepts. He alone secures our future bodily resurrection. He alone is worthy. We are not fools to give our lives to Him!

**Life-giving.** Jesus’ resurrection guarantees His offer to give eternal life to all who believe in Him. His resurrected life becomes ours through faith. And we now live day by day in the power of His resurrection.

**Life-changing.** Jesus’ resurrection changes the focus and direction of every person who truly believes. No one truly encounters the resurrected Jesus and lives the same kind of life. When we meet the Jesus who emerges from the tomb and we are transformed by Him.

**Astonishing.** Jesus’ resurrection inspires us to worship Him.We stand in awe and wonder when we think of our resurrected Lord. We are stunned by His power. We are floored by His love. We are left speechless by His majesty. His resurrection makes His whole story . . . even the gory details of His crucifixion . . . a story of unequaled beauty.

**Main Idea: The Christian’s entire life rests upon the Jesus’ real bodily resurrection from the dead. What we learn from the Resurrection protects us in the spiritual battle and brings strength to our daily life.**

Today, we review the story of the bodily resurrection of Jesus and glean four lessons that help us in our every day life.

**Lesson #1: The Darkness of Unbelief – Unbelief refuses to submit to the truth even in the face of irrefutable evidence.**

*The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last fraud will be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.” So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.” (Matthew 27:62-66* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Matt._27:62)*)*

Remember that the religious leaders had just intimidated Pilate by saying, *“If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend.” (John 19:12).*

Pilate hates being threatened, but against his own desires, his relationship with Caesar is weak and in fear, he orders Jesus to be crucified . . . washing his hands of the matter. Now when the Pharisees come to Pilate asking for an imperial guard to watch over the grave, Pilate again in fear complies and sends a group of men to see that Jesus’ body stays in the tomb.

**Most historians tell us that a Roman guard was anywhere between 10 – 30 fighting men.** This is not a sleepy one or two guards that secure Jesus’ tomb. Further, a Romans soldier’s punishment for failing a post was death.

Yet the guard fails!

*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. 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. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.” (Matthew 28:1-4* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Matt._28:1)*)*

**The guards see with their own eyes an angel** of the Lord roll back the stone.

**They see this angel sitting on the stone**.

And in seeing, they tremble with such fear that they cannot speak or move.

They become like dead people.

**The guards hear with their own** ears the angel speaking to the two Marys. They hear the angel say,  *“Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 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.”” (Matthew 28:5-7* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Matt._28:5)*)*

The guards watch as the two women depart from the tomb in fear and in joy! They see all of this! Skip down to verse 11.

*“While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests* ***all that had taken place.***

The guards report EVERY DETAIL of their shared experience. Each of the guards tells the EXACT SAME STORY about their encounter with the supernatural and about the empty tomb.

*And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.” (Matthew 28:11–15 ESV)*

Remarkable what unbelief will do**!**

**Truth:** **When unbelief operates in the human heart, no amount of truth or facts will move our heart to faith.**

Two groups of unbelievers are before us.

**Group #1: The guards who witness the miracle of the empty tomb.** The guards after telling their story to the Pharisees decide to deliberately lie about Jesus and about their experience. Why? They lie in order to secure both money and to protect themselves from punishment by Pilate for their failure to keep the stone secured to Jesus’ grave.

**Group #2: The religious leaders KNOW that Jesus the miracle worker PROMISED to rise from the dead**. And they KNOW the testimony of a group of soldiers who ALL TELL THE EXACT SAME STORY! And upon hearing the story, they do not argue about the facts of the story. Instead, they start scheming to keep the truth suppressed . . . to hide the facts that took place that day.

It is important to note that **not even Jesus’ enemies attempted to DENY the empty tomb.** They tried to cover it up, but they could not deny it.

Remember these were the guys who just three days earlier said at the cross,

*“He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross,* ***and we will believe in him.”*** *(Matthew 27:41–42 ESV)*

But now Jesus had done something greater than come down from the cross. He rose from the dead and they still do not believe.

**Truth: Unbelief is the greatest danger to our eternal soul.**

Why did the guards and the Pharisees not believe? They had plenty of evidence.

**Truth: Unbelief is fueled by fear, by self-rule and by worldly lusts.**

The guards were afraid that if they believed and held to the truth, they would be punished or killed. The Pharisees were afraid that if they believed in the resurrected Jesus they would lose their religious power.

The guards lusted after the money that the religious leaders offered them. They could not believe in Jesus and keep the money so they chose the money. The Pharisees lusted after the praise of man. They could not believe in Jesus and receive the applause of people so they chose the favor of man over the favor of God.

**Principle: Spiritual darkness uses fear, our pride and lust to suppress any amount of evidence that God provides to prove that Jesus is the Messiah.**

**If we walk in the darkness, we will never see the proof that God is placing in front of us.** What sign might we expect to receive from God to confirm that Jesus is God’s Son and Savior?

*“Then some . . . Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.” (Matthew 12:38–41 ESV)*

Friend, if you do not have faith and you are wondering whether Jesus is truly the Savior worth following, turn from the darkness and look to the resurrection of Jesus! This is the sign that God promises you. And it is enough.

**Lesson #2: The Frailty of the Heart - *Even the best people are weak toward Jesus.***

*“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.” (Matthew 28:1* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Matt._28:1)*)*

*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.” So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.” (Matthew 28:7-8* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Matt._28:7)*)*

Five times Jesus plainly tells His disciples that He will die and then rise the third day. **The Pharisees remember Him saying it!** But the disciples seem to be without hope when the third day dawned. **They are not anticipating a resurrection.**

Remember that the disciples had already decided to follow Jesus. They gave the last three years of their lives to receiving His teaching. They had moments of spectacular confession and courage. **Yet in this time of intense trial, their faith is so weak.**

The two Mary’s come to the tomb on Sunday, not to witness the resurrection, but to put more burial spices on Jesus’ dead body.

**No disciple is EXPECTING Jesus to rise from the grave that morning.**

**Truth: Remember that that very best among us are frail in heart.**

Friend, if you do have faith, thank God for this gift! Faith is the greatest treasure that God grants a person.

I urge you to labor to nurture your faith and to protect your faith from the attacks the enemy will place upon it.

Beloved, this world is not a friend to the Good News about Jesus and His resurrection. Satan will bring trials to wrestle our faith from us. The devil will bring temptations that place us in darkness so as to blind us from seeing th light of Jesus. What will we do when our faith is under attack by trials or by temptations?

**The LORD urges us to fix our eyes upon the resurrection of Jesus. Here before the empty tomb our faith will be strengthened.**

Consider Peter’s story for a moment. He was the guy who in self-confidence tells Jesus that his faith and commitment will not fail under any circumstance! Jesus reminds him of the weakness of his heart. He said, *“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.””* (Luke 22:31-32 [ESV](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Luke_22:31))

Peter does not like to be told that his faith is so weak that it depends upon Jesus’ prayers for preservation. He answers back, *“““Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.”” (Luke 22:33* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Luke_22:33)*)*

You can see Jesus shaking his head as he replies, *“““I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.” (Luke 22:34* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Luke_22:34)*)*

**Question: What helps Peter to stand firm in faith and not waver through the rest of his life?** We do not have to guess because Peter tells us:

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy,* ***he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead****, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,.” (1 Peter 1:3–4 ESV)*

**The resurrection becomes the cornerstone of Peter’s faith.**  He and the other apostles keep going back to the resurrection of Jesus over and over and over to strengthen their own faith and to call people everywhere to faith.

*“And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.” (Acts 4:33* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Acts_4:33)*)*

**Friends, your faith in Jesus is your most precious possession.** Without faith we lose our communion with God and our vision of God. Without faith the blessings of God fall away from our lives.

Your faith is your most precious possession! Guard it! Fortify your faith by meditation upon the story of the resurrection. Feed your faith with the Word. Be bold to ask God to grant you stronger faith! God loves to give good gifts.

Illustration: Book by Howard Hendricks. He encouraged the readers to pray to ask God for strong faith. And I did. I believe God answers the righteous yearning of our souls.

What do you do with something precious? Watch over it. Care for it. Feed it. Protect it.

Illustration: Watch over your faith like a mother watches over her newborn baby. What does a modern mom do in the care of her baby? Monitor. Books. Wake up at cries. Doctor visits. Shots. Bath. Diapers. Baby-proofs the house in anticipation of the day the baby begins to crawl and walk. Constant care!!! **Why? Precious!!!**

**Lesson #3: The Power of God – *The resurrection of Jesus grants us power in the face of every hard trial.***

**What power is unleashed by God on the day of Jesus’ resurrection!**  It is a power that our greatest scientists cannot replicate. Science can bring us the power of nuclear weapons . . . a power able to destroy many lives in one short blast. But science is helpless at the sight of a dead body.

The scripture teaches us that death has great power over us. When a person is very ill, we still have hope for recovery. But when a person dies, we think, “Well, it is over now.”

**But Jesus’ resurrection introduces us to a power that is greater than the power of death.** Death loses its sting at the empty tomb. The power of death is vanquished.

**Every blessing that God offers us hangs upon the power of Jesus’ resurrection to secure it for us.** Let us think of four precious gifts that flow from the power of Jesus’ bodily resurrection:

**Precious Gift #1: Because Jesus rose from the grave all His promises are guaranteed.** Jesus often promised that He would die and rise from the dead (Six times in Matthew). If He did not deliver on this promise, we could not trust Him for any promises that He makes. BUT if He did fulfill this promise, what promise is too hard for Him? His resurrection proves that we can trust every one of His promises.

“For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.” (2 Corinthians 1:20 ESV)

**Reach deep into scripture and grab hold of any one of the 8,810 promises that God makes to His people. Stare into the impossibility of that promise being true and then gaze into the empty tomb!**

**Precious Gift #2: Because Jesus rose from the dead, all who are in Him will also rise from the dead.** We do not need to fear death. Death becomes a doorway into heaven for all who are in Jesus. Death is only a temporary interruption for our bodies . . . for we will one day receive a body that is far more glorious than the one we possess right now. Death has the power to produce tears of sorrow, but Jesus resurrection guarantees that our tears will one day cease and be replaced by joyful dancing.

Our Savior walked through death ahead of us and came out victorious over it. His victory is ours.

“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”” (John 11:25–26 ESV)

**Precious Gift #3: Because Jesus rose from the dead, we have a living Savior who intercedes for us before the Father.**

“Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” (Romans 8:34 ESV)

“but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”(Hebrews 7:24–25 ESV)

How wonderful to know that Jesus prays for us!

When we are discouraged, Jesus intercedes.

When we are weakened by sin, Jesus prays for us.

When we experience dark trials, Jesus prays for us.

When we face death, Jesus intercedes.

At all times, we have a high priest who ever lives to make intercession for our every need!!

**Precious Gift #4: Because Jesus rose from the dead, we have power to live a godly life.**

We do not have to live enslaved to sin and separate from God. We are enabled by Jesus’ resurrection to live a life of love, joy, peace and true righteousness. The power that raised Jesus from the dead is now at work in us to make us become more like Jesus. We do not have the power to transform ourselves. Sin and temptation is too strong for us to overcome. But our power to love God and live for Him comes from Jesus and His resurrection.

“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him . . . so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.” (Romans 6:4–6 ESV)

Friend, I do not know what sins wrap chains around your life to enslave you. Perhaps lusts, perhaps deceit, perhaps greed, perhaps fear, perhaps bitterness. You may feel as though your sinful habits are unbreakable. Friend, God gives you Good News. Jesus’ resurrection provides a power that will overcome any sin habit when you live by faith in Him.

The resurrection is the greenhouse for the Christian life. Friends, let us stop living “Saturday lives” and live Sunday lives. Saturday lives are chained to sin without spiritual freedom. **Saturday lives are lives that are troubled and depairing . . . lives without power, without joy, without peace.** Friends, Sunday is here! Let us live in the hope, strength and unspeakable joy of Jesus’ resurrection!

**Lesson #4: The Reward of Faith – Faith in the resurrection brings indescribable reward into our lives.**

**What comes to us through faith in His resurrection?**

*Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”” (John 11:25-27* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#John_11:25)*)*

**Jesus makes clear that we benefit from His death and resurrection, only if we believe. If we do not believe, we receive no benefit.**

**I ask you, “Do you believe?”**

Our life now and forever depends upon the resurrected Jesus. He alone is the source of all life. Where else can you go to receive victory over death? He alone holds the keys. So in faith, we hold on to Him. We do not let our griefs or our trials or this world’s pleasures or this world’s possession take faith away from our hearts.

To let go of Jesus would be like **the sky diver cutting loose from his parachute** because the straps grind into his/her shoulder.

To let go of Jesus is like the **foolish boy who trades a $1.000,000 baseball card** for some bubble gum because he thinks gum is worth more than the card.

To let go of Jesus is like the **deep sea diver cutting loose from his air tank** because he feels more free without it.

*Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.”” (Hebrews 10:35-38* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Heb._10:35)*)*

Let us hold fast to Jesus in faith and not let go!!

**Main Idea: The Christian’s entire life rests upon the Jesus’ real bodily resurrection from the dead. What we learn from the Resurrection protects us in the spiritual battle and brings strength to our daily life.**

Lesson #1: The Darkness of Unbelief

Lesson #2: The Frailty of the Heart

Lesson #3: The Power of God

Lesson #4: The Reward of Faith