

April 20, 2025

“Christ Dies and Rises to New Life”

Matt. 27:39-40, 45-54

Lesson 3

Intro

No story hits us like the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. It is the full range of human tragedies: betrayal, injustice, and courage. It calls us to sympathize deeply with its characters. It contrasts human power with God's power. It confronts death, our greatest enemy. As we experience it, we realize again how necessary the story's conclusion is.

Some Christians have known the Easter story their whole lives. Others who became Christians more recently still recall vividly their reaction to first hearing this story. During the Easter season, we get a chance to listen to the story again, as if for the 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.

Read Matthew 27:39-40

1. vs. 39: Jesus is on the cross here, with people insulting Him as they pass by
Their behavior tells us how far from understanding they are at this moment
2. vs. 40: They also mock Him
Jesus said in John 2:21 that He would raise the temple in 3 days after it was destroyed
He is referring to His body, the temple of the Holy Spirit in people today
The people who heard the original comment thought He meant the physical building
To Jews, speaking against the temple could bring the death penalty
They taunt him about saving Himself
“If you are the Son of God”...If that's who you are, you can save yourself
This is the same phrase Satan said to Jesus during His temptations
Both times, the goal is to get Jesus to do what Satan wants, not what God wants
For salvation to come about, Jesus must die on the cross
If He comes down before death, there is no forgiveness of sins for humanity
He had to die on the cross, taking our sins upon Himself, for us to be saved

Read Matthew 27:45-54

3. vs. 45: A darkness overtakes the land for three hours as Jesus is dying
Some critics claim this was just an eclipse, but the facts don't support this
Eclipses last about 15 minutes; this was three hours
This darkness has a supernatural, God origin
In the Bible, darkness frequently indicated God's displeasure
See Exodus 10:21-23
Since there is no natural explanation that fits, this must be supernatural
Perhaps God is showing displeasure with those who mocked Jesus
4. vs. 46: Jesus quotes the first lines of Ps. 22: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”
Jesus was enduring a separation from God here, as God cannot live in the presence of sin
Jesus is here taking on humanity's sins so that He could redeem us

5. vs. 47: People who heard Jesus thought He was calling on the prophet Elijah to help him
The first words of Ps. 22 in Hebrew are “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?”
Jesus is using a shortened version of God’s name, Elohim
This is the third misunderstanding regarding Elijah, joining Matt. 16:14 and 17:10-13
6. vs. 48: It’s unclear how to understand the actions of the person doing the action here
He gives Jesus a sponge soaked with wine vinegar (or sour wine in some translations)
Is this intended as an insult, or as an act of kindness?
Either seems possible
7. vs. 49: The rest of the people seem to be there for the spectacle, the “show”
They don’t want anything to delay the appearance of Elijah, who they think is coming
After the one action of vs. 48, they say “leave him alone”
8. vs. 50: Matthew says here that Jesus “cried out again in a loud voice” before dying (giving up his spirit)
Luke records Jesus here saying “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (23:46)
John 19:30 records Jesus saying “It is finished” as he died
All of these record Jesus as saying something before dying
This shows two important things
First, Jesus maintained enough physical strength to shout before dying
Second, Jesus remained in control of his life, knowing what His purpose was
“It is finished” means He has conquered sin and death to redeem humanity
9. vs. 51: As Jesus dies, the curtain in the temple is “torn in two from top to bottom”
The curtain separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place
Only priests could enter these places, and only the High Priest into the Most Holy Place
Even the High Priest could only go into the Most Holy Place once a year
God’s presence resided on top of the Ark of the Covenant, kept in the Most Holy Place
The veil being torn shows that there is now no separation between God and His people
All people now have access to God, without having to go through a priest first
The veil was torn from the top, indicating something supernatural
Somebody could possibly start tearing from the bottom
Who is able to start the tearing from the top? Only God
This supernatural event follows the supernatural darkness of 3 hours from vs. 45
The tearing is followed by earthquakes and rocks splitting
In the OT, earthquakes frequently signaled God’s presence, sometimes His judgment
A 1st Century crowd seeing these events would likely have made the connections
10. vs. 52-53: Another supernatural event is recorded here, by only Matthew’s gospel
Holy people who had died came out of their graves, alive again
These people went into the “holy city” (Jerusalem) and appeared to many people
This happened after Jesus’ resurrection, not at the moment that He died
11. vs. 54: The Roman centurion, the head of the crucifixion detail, is awed by what is happening
He says “surely he was the Son of God!”
All the supernatural events indicate that Jesus is no ordinary person

Read Matthew 28:1-10

12. vs. 1: The first day of the week to Jews was Sunday, the Sabbath the last day of the week
Jewish Sabbath day is from sundown Friday night to sundown Saturday night
The verse tells us Mary Magdalene didn't go to the tomb until the morning
The Sabbath was a day of rest, so they didn't go until the morning
They are going to properly prepare the body for burial, which they couldn't do before
Jesus was taken off the cross and put right into the tomb; it was almost sundown
They didn't want to violate the command not to work on the Sabbath day
13. vs. 2: There is another earthquake, showing the coming divine action we see here
An angel of God comes down and rolls the stone away
This isn't to let Jesus out, but to let His followers in
Jesus when resurrected doesn't need any help getting in or out of locked rooms
See John 20:10-20, and 20:26-27
The stone wasn't moved for Jesus' benefit
14. vs. 3: The angel doesn't look like a common person
His appearance was "like lightening" and his clothes were "white as snow"
Both descriptions are filled with brightness, typical of angels and the supernatural
15. vs. 4: There are Roman guards stationed in front of the tomb's opening
They were put there by Pilate at the request of the Jewish leaders
The Jews were afraid Jesus' body would be stolen away by His disciples
Jesus said He would rise again; the Jews didn't want this to happen by disciples
But the guards "shook and became like dead men"
This is a typical reaction for humans when seeing any divine presence
John had a similar reaction when he saw Jesus in Rev. 1:17
16. vs. 5-6: The angel tells the women not to be afraid, which they would be in an angel's presence
He knows what they are doing—they have come to prepare Jesus' body
But he knows what they don't; Jesus has risen and is not in the tomb anymore
He said He would rise again the third day, and He has done just what He said He would
The angel then invites them to see the empty tomb for themselves
The lack of a body establishes that Jesus' resurrection isn't just a spiritual one
17. vs. 7: The women are told to go tell the disciples what they have seen
The disciples had all (except John) abandoned Jesus at the cross
Jesus told them they would fail, but that He would see them again (Matt. 26:31-32)
Jesus' resurrection wasn't an invisible event, one only in the hearts and minds of people
It was a physical event that happened in space and time
Jesus was seen by many after His resurrection (see 1 Cor. 15:6)
18. vs. 8: The women leave to do exactly what they angel told them to do
They go to tell the disciples, and they *run* to get there
Running was an uncommon act for adults in this time

This running shows both their desire to obey, and their joy at the message

19. vs. 9: An unexpected thing occurs on their way to tell the disciples—the women meet Jesus!

Here's the first example of Jesus meeting people physically after rising from the dead

The women "clasping His feet" shows that He has a physical body

This act of worship on their part acknowledges Jesus as Lord, their worship to bow to Him

20. vs. 10: Finally, Jesus tells them not to be afraid, just like the angel had told them

He also repeats the angel's instruction to go to Galilee, and He will meet them there

Note that He calls the disciples His "brothers"—they are still a part of His family

Despite their failures, Jesus still desires to be in fellowship with them

Application: Daily life can bring us many things to do. We can live busy lives with many activities to accomplish, sometimes all at the same time. The danger for us is to allow the "urgent" (what seems to need to be done now) to take priority over the "important" (the things that has the greater long-term value). We Christians must continually remind ourselves of the importance of what Christ has done and what He has spoken to us. By repetition, we remember. In remembering, we can either restore or improve our spiritual eyes to their proper focus. Let us not let this story become so familiar that it loses its significance and importance. Let us keep the amazement of these events in our hearts daily, and forever.

Prayer: God of wonder, power, and love, we thank You that Jesus died and rose for us. We pray that His desires for our new life will also be our desire. In Jesus' name, Amen.