

JESUS HAS RISEN

DAY 1: WHY DID OUR SAVIOR DIE? (MATTHEW 28:1)

What are some of your favorite Easter memories? You probably go to church and participate in family gatherings and maybe egg hunts. Some churches offer Easter sunrise services in cemeteries to celebrate the resurrection. It seems morbid, but the scenery is intended to help us celebrate the eternal life Jesus' resurrection provides.

Read Matthew 28:1. Before we rush to the resurrection, we should remember that Christ had to die to be raised to life. We miss the full impact of the gift of eternal life if we do not acknowledge the gift of forgiveness that His ultimate sacrifice bought for us. His was the blood that was the perfect sacrifice for our sins; He purchased forgiveness for our sins once and for all. The women of our passage watched Jesus die, and they were heartbroken. They didn't understand why it had to happen, and they probably felt lost and defeated. In their grief, they probably forgot that He said that He would rise again.

What is our response to Jesus' death? In our humanness, we see our weaknesses. We know that we are flawed and unworthy of God's love and Jesus' sacrifice. That is not how God sees us, though. We are His greatest treasure. He gave His one and only Son WHILE we were sinners, not to condemn us, but so that through Jesus we might be saved from the eternal consequences of our sin. How should we respond to such a great love?

DAY 2: WHERE SHALL WE LAY HIM? (MATTHEW 28:1-2)

Joseph of Arimathea was an important member of the Sanhedrin. Matthew reveals that Joseph became a disciple of Jesus (Mt. 27:57-61). According to legend, Joseph went to Britain in 61 A.D. Supposedly, he took with him the cup that Jesus used at the Last Supper, which became known as the Holy Grail, legendary in Arthurian tales. The first church in Britain was established in Glastonbury and claims its heritage with Joseph.

Read Matthew 28:1-2. The fact that Jesus was laid in a tomb is significant. Most crucified men were criminals and, therefore, were not given the benefit of burial. Their bodies were thrown into open ravines where dogs and vultures completed the humiliation. Family burial sites were most often caves where bodies, wrapped in cloths, were laid on hollowed out stone. Scripture tells us that Joseph of Arimathea provided an unused tomb for Jesus' burial. Because Jesus died just before sundown on Friday, the beginning of the Sabbath, His body was not properly anointed. While Jesus' followers huddled together frightened and alone, wondering what to do next, the women gathered the spices and oils needed to care for their Lord's body.

The Bible didn't record that Joseph said anything when Jesus was being tried. Why? Given the same hostile circumstances, would you? Jesus' ministry transformed Joseph's life, and he was sold out to ministry in Jesus' name. What is your response to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus?

DAY 3: WHO WILL ROLL AWAY THE STONE? (MATTHEW 28:1-7)

Mary of Magdala was an interesting person in God's story. In Scripture (Lk. 8:2-3), she was described as a woman from whom Jesus cast out seven demons. Jesus set her free, and she loved Him with complete devotion. She was one of the women who followed Jesus and financially supported His ministry.

Read Matthew 28:1-7. The Bible records that Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James, came to Jesus' tomb at dawn the day after the Sabbath. It was fitting that they were privileged to see the resurrected Jesus first; after all, they courageously followed Him, they risked their lives to watch Him die on the cross, and they witnessed Him laid in the tomb. The women wanted to anoint Jesus' body. In their haste, they didn't think about how they would get into Jesus' tomb. Roman soldiers guarded it, and it was sealed with a large stone. God rolled away the stone to give the women first-hand knowledge of the resurrection of their Lord, not to provide a way out for Jesus for He was already gone.

The women wouldn't allow any obstacle to stand between them and their Lord. What stands between you and Jesus or keeps you from sharing your testimony about what the Lord is doing in your life? What can remove the barrier so you are free to share?

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DAY 4: HE'S ALIVE (MATTHEW 28:5-10)

In school, you have learned about several rules that govern physics, such as the law of gravity and Newton's Laws of Motion. We accept these laws as important, but they don't help us figure out how to live our lives. There are more important truths that we have to decide whether or not we believe.

Read Matthew 28:5-10. These verses contain the core of our Christian faith. The Bible records other people resuscitated from the dead, but none were resurrected. The difference? All of the others eventually died, their bodies marked by a grave. But Jesus was raised to a new, glorified body. Jesus then appeared to the disciples and some 500 people after His resurrection before He ascended to the Father. Why is His resurrection significant? If Jesus had not risen, His ministry would have ended in defeat. Because Jesus rose from the dead, we have proof that He is who He said He was—the Savior of the world, True God of True God, conqueror of death and the grave. We no longer have to be separated from God because of our sins; our victory comes through Christ's. Mohammed, Buddha, and Confucius are dead and buried. Only Christ lives, and because He lives, we have the promise of eternal life.

All but one apostle was killed because they would not deny the truth of Christ's resurrection. If Jesus' resurrection is a truth worth dying for, why are we scared to share it with our friends and family?

DAY 5: BECAUSE HE LIVES (MATTHEW 28:11-15)

Recall a time when you were truly afraid. How did you react to that situation? When we are afraid, we cannot think straight. We react and make decisions or we act uncharacteristically. Persons who live in constant fear are unable to live productive lives.

Read Matthew 28:11-15. Think about the two groups of people who were at the tomb that first Easter morning. The women and the soldiers were witnesses to the truth: Jesus was not in the grave. The soldiers responded with a fear that paralyzed them. The women were afraid, but the angel calmed them with the assurance that Jesus had risen just as He said. Both left with a mission. The women, after seeing the empty tomb, went to the disciples; the soldiers ran to the chief priests. On their way, Jesus met the women, comforted them, allowed them to worship, and sent them with a message to His "brothers." Upon hearing the news, the chief priests bribed the soldiers to spread a lie about what happened. The women's fear was soothed by their Savior's presence; the soldiers' and priests' fear could not be dispelled because they could not accept the truth.

Thirty-three times in the Bible we are commanded to "Fear not." When you feel overwhelmed by an uncertain future, you do not have to be afraid because you can believe that God is in control and Jesus is with you. There is no situation He cannot conquer. His victory over the grave is proof. Do you know someone who needs to know this truth today? Share the Good News!