

HE HAS RISEN!

Matthew 27:57-28:20

Key Verse: 28:6

“He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.”

Happy Easter! On this Easter Sunday, Christian churches all over the world are celebrating Christ’s resurrection. Among them, the Orthodox Church is impressive. Priests greet their congregations: “*Christos Voskrese!*” (“Christ is Risen!”) And the response is: “*Voistinnu Voskrese!*” (“Indeed He Is Risen!”) Christ’s resurrection is the key event in God’s salvation work. It is one main pillar of gospel truth. Apostle Paul says the gospel is, “...**that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...**” (1Co 15:3-4). Last Sunday we learned why Jesus died on the cross. It was for our sins. Today let’s consider the meaning of his burial and resurrection. The message of Christ’s burial and resurrection is what we really need. Why? Most of us are affected by the power of death more than we realize. The power of death causes meaninglessness, anxiety, despair, and fear. The power of death is real and causes unbearable pain—spiritually, emotionally and in every way. As a result, people have no peace, security or hope. This is not just an academic statement; it is reality. Christ’s burial and resurrection alone can save us from death. Let’s listen to this message.

First, the meaning of Jesus’ burial (27:57-61). Jesus died on a Friday afternoon. Now evening was approaching, which according to Jewish thought was the beginning of a new day. A rich man from Arimathea appears, named Joseph (57). Though he was a member of the Sanhedrin, he did not consent to their criminal behavior in condemning Jesus (Lk 23:51). He had been a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, because he feared the Jewish leaders (Jn 19:38). Yet, when he saw that Jesus died on the cross, something happened in his heart. His fear was gone. He boldly and courageously went to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate gave it to him (58). Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away (59-60). Mary Magdalene and another Mary witnessed Jesus’ burial as they sat there opposite the tomb (61).

What does it mean that Jesus was buried in this way? First of all, Jesus’ burial reveals God’s sovereign rule. As a crucified criminal, it was expected that Jesus’ body would be discarded in a mass grave without ceremony. However, through the intervention of Joseph, Jesus’ body was put into a rich man’s tomb and

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perfectly preserved for his resurrection. Centuries before Jesus' death, Isaiah had prophesied about the Messiah: **“He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death...”** (Isa 53:9). God made a perfect plan to preserve Jesus' body; he fulfilled his plan through Joseph.

Secondly, Jesus' burial tells us that he experienced the power of death. He did not just faint and later revive. He really died. The second century heresy of Docetism, and subsequently Islam, claim that Jesus did not really die. They say that he did not have a physical body as we do, but just appeared to be human. However, Jesus' burial proved that he had a human body that really died. This means that Jesus experienced the power of death as we do. Why is this so important? To us, death is a fearsome enemy. It is unnatural; it is the penalty for our sins; it is so painful and dreadful. The sting of death can poison us long before we die, through the death of a loved one or even a bitter failure. Then fear of death paralyzes our minds and hearts and makes us slaves. The devil works through it to plant meaninglessness, sorrow, anxiety, despair, and the like. Moreover, all kinds of fears are rooted in the fear of death, such as fear of flying, fear of heights, fear of marriage, fear of rejection, fear of failure, and others. Many talented people waste their lives as slaves of fear. Only Jesus can really set us free from this. Hebrews 2:14-15 explains well: **“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”** Jesus, by his death, broke the power of death. He sets us free from the fear of death so that we may live vibrant and dynamic lives. Risen Jesus says to us, **“Do not be afraid”** (28:10). Because of the Risen Jesus, who died as we do and rose again, there is no reason to fear death anymore. Thank you, Jesus!

Second, the truth of Jesus' resurrection (27:62-28:15). Matthew places the telling of Jesus' resurrection in between two accounts about the religious leaders, who try to suppress the truth with lies. They hatch one deceptive plot before his resurrection and another after. On the day after Preparation Day, the Sabbath (62a), the chief priests and Pharisees should have prepared wonderful Bible messages for God's people. However, they were haunted by Jesus' words that he would rise again. So they went to Pilate and persuaded him to seal Jesus' tomb so that no one could go in or out (62b-64). Pilate made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting guards (65-66). This made it very difficult for anyone to steal Jesus' body.

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In contrast to the religious leaders, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary kept the Sabbath sincerely. Then on the first day of the week, the third day since Jesus died, they went to look at the tomb (28:1). Before they arrived, there was a violent earthquake. An angel of the Lord came down from heaven! He rolled the stone away from the grave and sat on it (2). His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were as white as snow. This highlights the pure, brilliant, and glorious nature of Jesus' resurrection. The Roman guards shook and became like dead men. They were powerless. The seal and the guards could not keep Jesus in the grave.

The angel said to the women, **“Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay”** (5-6). The angel's main point is that Jesus, who was crucified, had risen from the dead. Wicked people had condemned and crucified innocent Jesus. He seemed to have been a helpless victim of terrible injustice. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death (Ac 2:24). He has risen! The angel supported his message in two ways. First, he reminded them that it happened, “just as he said.” Jesus foretold his suffering, death and resurrection five times in Matthew's gospel (16:21; 17:9,23; 20:19; 21:42). In fact, Jesus foretold these events so many times that the religious leaders remembered his words. In truth, Jesus' prophecy was based on the Scriptures (Lk 24:44,46). Jesus' resurrection was not a random event. It was God's will, plan and purpose. Jesus wants us to believe in him based on God's words in the Bible. We should pay close attention to God's words to experience the Risen Jesus. Especially in times of trial and struggle, we should remember what Jesus said. The second evidence was the empty tomb; Jesus' body was not there. Everyone dies and is buried or cremated. Somewhere we can find traces of their DNA. But Jesus left no DNA because his body was raised.

After telling the good news that Jesus had risen, the angel told the women, **“...go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you”** (7). The angel commissioned the women as the first resurrection witnesses and sent them to Jesus' disciples. The disciples were desperate; they were anxious and fearful; they were losing direction and even running away. It was because they were under the power of death. Jesus really wanted them to hear the good news. The women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples (8). The fact that the women were still afraid means that the angel's message was not fully persuasive. The angel was a heavenly messenger, but the women needed something more. Suddenly the Risen Jesus met them. **“Greetings,”** he said with a big smile and great joy (9a). His word **“Greetings”** means more

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than “hello;” it means, “Be glad! Be happy! Rejoice!” Upon hearing his voice true and complete joy filled their souls. They came to Jesus, clasped his feet and worshiped him (9b). Indeed, Jesus is worthy of worship. Then Jesus said to them, **“Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”** Though the disciples had abandoned him during his passion, Jesus was not sorry, nor begrudging. Rather, Jesus regarded them as brothers, and really wanted to see them. Jesus loved them dearly, forgave all their sins, and made them children of God—his family members. Jesus’ love is unconditional and unfathomable.

In contrast to the pure and truthful women, the religious leaders refused to believe Jesus’ resurrection and instead conspired to produce “fake news.” They paid the Roman guards a large sum of money and told them to say that Jesus’ disciples had come during the night and taken his body away (11-13). They also persuaded Pilate to participate in their conspiracy (14-15). They tried to suppress the truth for their own selfish purpose. This should not surprise us. Evil men still boldly lie to suppress the truth about Jesus’ resurrection.

By placing the resurrection account between the two fabricated lies of the religious leaders, Matthew emphasized that Jesus’ resurrection is true; it is a factual event that happened. Since it is the truth, it is self-evident. It is not a fable or myth or legend; it is the truth. It does not change according to situations or circumstances; it is the truth. It does it become “out of date;” it is the truth. This truth is a firm foundation that we can build our lives on. This truth always gives life to our souls. What are the implications of this truth to us today?

In the first place, Jesus’ resurrection proves that he is the Savior King sent by God. Matthew emphasizes that Jesus is the King of Israel and the Son of the living God (1:1; 2:2; 11:27; 16:16; 21:5; 25:31; 26:64; 27:11,54). In other words, he is the Savior King sent by God. However, his kingship was different than most people expected. He was not a political or military deliverer, but the Savior from sin and death (1:21). His kingship was not limited to this world. He is the eternal King who has all authority in heaven and on earth (28:18). He is the unique and only Savior designated by God. He alone can save people from sin and death. Acts 4:12 says, **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”** How was this proven? By Jesus’ resurrection from the dead (Ro 1:4). Through his resurrection, Jesus defeated the power of sin, death and the devil completely! He can rescue us from the dominion of darkness and bring us into his kingdom of love and peace (Col 1:13).

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In the second place, Jesus' resurrection confirms that he died for our sins. We believe that Jesus died for our sins in our place. How can we be sure that this is valid? If Jesus had not been raised, our faith would be futile—we would still be in our sins (1Co 15:17). But Jesus' resurrection proves that God accepted his sacrifice once and for all to atone for our sins. Our sins are forgiven: past, present and future. Jesus' blood cleanses our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God (Heb 9:14). Jesus' resurrection is our assurance of victory over the power of sin.

In the third place, Jesus' resurrection gives us eternal life and living hope in the kingdom of God. Jesus' resurrection is the firstfruit of all who believe (1Co 15:20). When we believe in Jesus we cross over from death to life (Jn 5:24). Eternal life begins the moment we believe in Jesus. But we still have the limitations of a sinful nature in our human body. We are vulnerable to temptation and we fail from time to time due to our weaknesses. Because of this, we groan inwardly (Ro 8:23). But we have a living hope! Risen Jesus has the power to transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body (Php 3:21). Our sinful nature will vanish, and we will share the character and attributes of our Lord Jesus. We will all genuinely be as humble, loving, holy and wise as our Lord Jesus. Our bodies will no longer be subject to disease or weakness. My lovely wife, who has had hardship all her life with physical disability, will be more agile and powerful than Wonder Woman. Mother Sarah Barry will be even more beautiful than she was in her debutante photo, and it will be forever. Joshua will see! Nick will be more brilliant than Einstein and a more dynamic speaker than Billy Graham. This foresight led C.S. Lewis to write: *"It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship...."*¹ Being like Jesus is our sure hope!

In the meantime, when we believe in Jesus, we are united with him now in his death and resurrection. Jesus' death is our death; Jesus' resurrection is our resurrection. Romans 8:11 tells us that the Holy Spirit, who raised Jesus from the dead, is living in us and will also give life to our mortal bodies. The Holy Spirit enables us to overcome all kinds of weaknesses, temptations, limits and hardships to live dynamic and powerful lives. With this new power of Jesus' resurrection in our lives, what should we do? Shall we enjoy all the blessings that Jesus gives? Sure! But we also need to listen to what Jesus really wants us to do.

¹ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/282593-it-is-a-serious-thing-to-live-in-a-society>

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Third, Jesus' Great Commission (28:16-20). Among the gospel writers, Matthew emphasizes that Jesus appeared to his disciples in Galilee, not Jerusalem. It is stated three times in Matthew that Jesus will rise again and go ahead of his disciples into Galilee to meet them there (26:32; 28:7,10). Sometime later, they went to Galilee, to the mountain Jesus had told them to go to (16). When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted (17). Worship is the proper response to the Risen Jesus. It was in the context of worship that the Great Commission was given (cf. Ac 13:2). With any commission, who the issuer is has deep significance. An envoy from a small country may be ignored. But a representative of a world power nation will be respected. Let's see who Jesus is. Jesus came to them and said, "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me**" (18). Jesus is the King, not just of one nation, but of all nations on earth. Jesus' authority is not limited to the earth but extends through heaven as well. Jesus' authority is not temporary or partial, but everlasting and complete. Jesus is the everlasting King and sovereign Ruler of all. This Jesus commissions us. We should take his commission very seriously; it is not a suggestion or recommendation, but a commission.

Let's read verses 19-20a. "**Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.**" The main verb in Greek, which is active imperative, is "**make disciples.**" The verb "**go**" is a passive participle. It can also be translated "as you are going." This means that wherever we go, we are to make disciples of Jesus. Making disciples is not an option, but an imperative for Jesus' people. All Christians should be actively involved in making disciples, not just a few special people. This is not a burden, but a great privilege and blessing. It is the task of saving perishing souls and raising them as God's people. What a glorious task! It is worth the investment of our time, money, energy and even our lives—especially our youth. So many people gave their youth to Jesus to make disciples and have no regrets. William Borden renounced a fortune to live as a servant of Christ. He died at the age of 25 in Cairo, Egypt as he prepared to be a missionary to China. Written in his Bible were the words, "No reserves, no retreat, no regrets." How should we make disciples? By baptizing them and teaching them. This means to help people confess Jesus as their Savior and King and to obey his words, so they can grow spiritually. It is not easy to make disciples across nations. But Jesus promised: "**And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age**" (20b). As we carry out Jesus' glorious commission, we will experience his love, grace, wisdom and power. Finally, he will reward us, "**Well done, good and faithful servant!**" Let's hold in our hearts

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the good news, “**He has risen.**” And let’s carry out Jesus’ Great Commission with resurrection faith.