



Our Task

BECAUSE JESUS ROSE FROM THE GRAVE, WE ARE
TO TAKE THE GOSPEL TO ALL PEOPLE.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 28:1-10,16-20 **Memory Verse: Matthew 28:19-20**

Friday was a horrible day! Jesus, the one His followers believed was the Messiah sent by God to deliver Israel and establish His kingdom, had been arrested. He had been informally questioned before Annas, the patriarch of the high priestly family, along with the high priest Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high council. He was sent to Pilate on a trumped-up political charge and shuffled on to Herod Antipas for interrogation. Eventually, He was sent back to Pilate for sentencing.

The death sentence sent Jesus to the cross and to six hours of intense physical and spiritual suffering as the One who “bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24). After a hasty burial, a great stone sealed the tomb. By Saturday, the Sabbath, all hope seemed to be lost. But Sunday morning made all the difference!

As you study this familiar passage, ask God to restore your awe and gratitude for the risen Savior. Challenge your group to remember that this is not just a story told once a year. It is a turning point—in history and in our lives as believers. Whatever we face, Jesus is alive, and He is with us each step of the way.



Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

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Most of us often remember the details of the moments we received bad news. We probably remember where we were and what we were doing on September 11, 2001. Interestingly, sometimes we don't remember details when we receive good news. The joy of the news overshadows the specifics of how and when the news was received. This was not the case for the eyewitnesses to Jesus's resurrection. They could look back on the greatest news of all and remember vividly. (PSG, p. 54)

Why do you think we are selective in what we remember and what we forget?



Understand the Context (Matthew 28:1-20)

April 5 is Easter, bringing a glorious end to Passion Week and the start of a new week. A more appropriate name for Easter is Resurrection Sunday, which is how Christians in many places refer to it. Because Easter falls in the middle of this series in Matthew's Gospel, we have jumped ahead from chapter 18 to chapter 28.

Chapter 18 ended Jesus's extensive ministry in Galilee, while chapter 19 represents the beginning of His journey toward Jerusalem and the cross. By chapter 28 Jesus had not only completed His trip south to Judea, but He also had experienced arrest, trials, crucifixion, and burial. In the coming sessions, we will go back and pick up on Matthew's specific details of Jesus's move from Galilee to Judea. We'll even close with a study of Matthew's account of Jesus's crucifixion in chapter 27. But this week, we focus on the power of the empty tomb!

The immediate context for Matthew 28 relates to everything that happened after Jesus died on the cross (Matt. 27:33-56). All four Gospels record the story of Joseph of Arimathea going to Pilate and requesting that Jesus's body be released to him for burial (Matt. 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-54; John 19:38-42). John added that Nicodemus was also involved in the burial of Jesus's body (John 19:39-42).

All three Synoptic Gospels record that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus held vigil at both the cross and the tomb, although

Luke refers to them as "the women" rather than by their names (Matt. 27:56,61; Mark 15:40,47; Luke 23:49,55). All of those involved in Jesus's burial had to leave before the job of preparing His body was finished because the Sabbath was set to begin at sunset.

However, Sabbath restrictions did not stop Jesus's religious enemies from going to Pilate "the next day," an episode only Matthew records (Matt. 27:62-66). The reason for their meeting with the Roman governor involved a request that he place soldiers at the tomb to guard it. They wanted to make it as secure as possible, in case Jesus's disciples might think about stealing His body and claiming He had risen from the dead.

They needn't have worried. Honestly, it was Jesus's opponents, not His followers, who took His prediction about rising after three days seriously (27:63). From the Gospel accounts, it appears none of Jesus's genuine followers had a resurrection on their radars. Instead, they spent their time in hiding, fearing that the Jewish leaders would come after them next.

Pilate granted the request and sent soldiers to the tomb. They placed a seal on the stone and stood guard. This action on Saturday prepares us for the next act in the narrative as Matthew 28 opens.

Read Matthew 28:1-10,16-20 and note the reactions of those who encountered the risen Savior. (PSG, p. 55)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: On a focal wall, display **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28) and **Pack Item 4** (Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 28:19-20a).

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 54 of the PSG. Highlight September 11, 2001, and allow adults to share where they were on that day. Encourage the group to identify other significant cultural events people might remember in the same way. (*Examples: a celebrity dying, a space shuttle disaster, a hurricane or tornado strike*)

ASK:

Why do you think we are selective in what we remember and what we forget? (PSG, p. 54)

EXPLAIN:

Direct attention to **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28), explaining that the group temporarily is skipping to the end of Matthew to study Jesus’s resurrection.

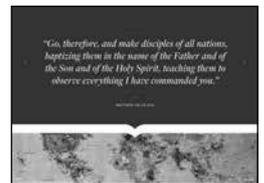
CONTEXT:

To set the context for this session, share this information from Understand the Context:

The resurrection is crucial to the gospel message of salvation through Jesus. If Jesus had not risen, nothing would have been accomplished by His death. The resurrection is God’s stamp of approval on all that Jesus did on the cross. The resurrection is also factual. One of the most powerful testimonies in court is the word of eyewitnesses. Each of the Gospel writers in their own way highlighted the role of eyewitnesses to Jesus’s resurrection. Matthew . . . chose to emphasize the eyewitness account of two women: Mary Magdalene and another woman named Mary. (PSG, p. 55)

TRANSITION:

We know that Easter is a special day for Christians. Today, we’ll consider how the resurrection should change our lives each and every day.



Group Activity Option

Music

Provide hymnals and direct adults to “Christ Arose” (or “Low in the Grave He Lay”) (*Baptist Hymnal 2008*, No. 273). Review the lyrics and encourage adults to share what words and phrases help them focus on the resurrection of Jesus. Invite them to suggest other favorite hymns or songs that highlight the importance of Jesus’s resurrection.

Believe (Matt. 28:1-7)

1 After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to view the tomb. **2** There was a violent earthquake, because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and approached the tomb. He rolled back the stone and was sitting on it. **3** His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. **4** The guards were so shaken by fear of him that they became like dead men. **5** The angel told the women, “Don’t be afraid, because I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. **6** He is not here. For he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. **7** Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there.’ Listen, I have told you.”

(v. 1) *After the Sabbath* was not meant to be understood as immediately after the Sabbath ended on Saturday evening, thus Matthew added *as the first day of the week was dawning*.

The two women, *Mary Magdalene and the other Mary*, are identified at Jesus’s crucifixion and burial (Matt. 27:56,61), as well as the empty tomb. Luke recorded that Jesus had cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene, and she began to follow Him and His disciples (Luke 8:2). The “other Mary” was the mother of James and Joseph (see Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40,47; 16:1; Luke 24:10) and also was among the women who accompanied Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem. Aside from the crucifixion/resurrection accounts, we have no additional information about her.

The women left early that Sunday morning *to view the tomb*, thus continuing their vigil of Matthew 27:61. Mark added that they brought spices to anoint Jesus’s body (Mark 16:1).

(vv. 2-4) This is the second *earthquake* associated with Jesus’s death and resurrection. The first was on Friday afternoon when Jesus gave up His spirit (Matt. 27:51-54). Only Matthew mentioned this one, and he labeled it as *violent*. Matthew made it clear that this was no natural event. Instead, the source was *an angel of the Lord*. The angel, not the earthquake, *rolled back the stone* that had sealed the tomb. To further emphasize God’s work in the matter, he took his place *sitting on it* as he waited for the women to arrive.

Matthew compared the angel’s appearance to *lightning*, while his raiment was *white as snow*. These indicate power and purity. When the guards saw the angel they were *shaken*. Fear is the typical reaction to an appearance of an angel. *Shaken* (*seio*) shares a linguistic root with

“earthquake” in verse 2 (*seismos*, from which we get our word “seismology”). Like the earth, the soldiers also quaked and became *like dead men*.

(vv. 5-6) The angel encouraged the women to not *be afraid*. Again, fear was a typical response for those who encountered angels. Jesus also used similar wording in Matthew 14:27 and 17:7 (see also 28:10). The angel affirmed that the women had come *looking for Jesus who was crucified*, but he quickly let them know that *he is not here* because *he has risen* and is alive.

Just as he said points back to Jesus’s words to the apostles. On numerous occasions, Jesus had said that He would die and that He would be raised from the dead (12:40; 16:21; 17:9,23; 20:19; 26:32). Now, that prediction had come true. As always, Jesus is faithful to His promises.

In addition to providing information, the angel provided an invitation: *see the place where he lay*. Some suggest the women arrived at the wrong tomb, either because of the darkness or because of their grief. The angel’s words made it clear that they were at the correct tomb and that Jesus’s resurrection was physical, as well as spiritual.

(v. 7) Information and invitation were followed by instructions. The angel commissioned the women to *tell his disciples* two items: *He has risen* and *he is going ahead of you to Galilee*. The command to *go quickly* stresses the urgency of their task. Going to Galilee recalls Jesus’s promise of Matthew 26:32. Much of Jesus’s ministry, teaching, and miracles took place in Galilee (Matt. 4:12-19:1). The words did not preclude Jesus from meeting them in other places, but He would spend time with His disciples in Galilee, as verses 16-20 and John 21:1-23 verify.



APPLICATION POINT: We can trust that Jesus is risen because the tomb was empty.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 28:1-7 aloud as adults highlight words that describe the sights, sounds, and emotions.

RECAP:

Encourage adults to share what they know about Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. Provide additional background:

In Matthew's Gospel, the eyewitnesses to the resurrection included the angels, the soldiers, and a group of women. Specifically, Matthew identified two of the women as Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. These two women plus several others were at the crucifixion and had witnessed the burial of the body (see Matt. 27:61). Mary Magdalene was the one whom Jesus delivered from demon possession (Luke 8:2). The other Mary is identified in Mark's Gospel as the mother of the disciple James, known as James the younger to set him apart from James the brother of John (Mark 16:1). . . . These women had prepared spices to anoint the body of Jesus. (PSG, p. 56)

EXAMINE:

Group adults into three teams with the assignments below. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share what they discussed in their teams.

- *Team 1: Identify the information provided by the angel in verses 5-6 and why it's important.*
- *Team 2: Identify the invitation extended by the angel in verse 6 and why it's important.*
- *Team 3: Identify the instructions given by the angel in verse 7 and why they are important.*

TRANSITION:

The encounter with the angel was shocking for the women. But it was only a prelude to a more amazing encounter to come.

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Proof of Identity

Bring an example of personal identification to the session: driver's license, name badge for work, passport, and so forth. Allow adults to suggest what the item proves about you. Briefly discuss other forms of identification and why they are important. Point out that Jesus's empty tomb proved His identity as God's Son and Messiah. Challenge adults to reflect on what they can learn from the empty tomb.

Worship (Matt. 28:8-10)

8 So, departing quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, they ran to tell his disciples the news. **9** Just then Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” They came up, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. **10** Then Jesus told them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there.”

(v. 8) As commanded by the angel, the two Marys departed **quickly from the tomb**. In fact, Matthew wrote that the women **ran** to fulfill their new task. This is the second use of the word *quickly* (see v. 7), and it stresses their haste and obedience. Two emotions characterized the women as they left the tomb—**fear and great joy**. To this point, fear has dominated the narrative. In verse 4, the guards succumbed to fear, which says a lot considering the experiences of Roman soldiers. In verse 5 the angel urged the women not to fear. Here in verse 8, they ran from the tomb in fear.

Matthew doesn't specify the source of their fear. Perhaps they were afraid that the disciples wouldn't believe the magnificent story of the resurrection and would accuse them of being hysterical women. Luke 24:10-11 points out that the apostles initially thought the women's report was “nonsense.” Perhaps, they were still stunned from their angelic encounter. Whatever the cause, they demonstrated obedience to the command and moved forward despite their fear.

The second emotion attributed to the women was great joy. Matthew made significant use of the Greek word *me-gas* (translated here as “great”) across his passion narrative. In Matthew 27:46 Jesus “cried out with a loud (*me-gas*) voice.” In Matthew 27:60 “a great (*me-gas*) stone” sealed the entrance to the tomb. And in Matthew 28:2 he recorded a “violent (*me-gas*) earthquake” to mark the angel's arrival at the grave. Now, in 28:8, the women experienced great joy on hearing that Jesus was alive.

(v. 9) While the women were running to the disciples, **Jesus met them**. Matthew alone records this event. These women were the last at the cross (27:56), the last at the burial (27:61), but the first at the tomb (28:1). Now they were the first to see the risen Lord. This is the only appearance in Matthew's Gospel of the risen Lord in Jerusalem.

From the angel's message the women would not have expected to see the risen Lord until

they were back up in Galilee, so this encounter came suddenly and as a total surprise. Jesus's **Greetings!** was a common way to say “Hello” in first-century Jewish culture (see 26:49).

Apparently even while the women were still a little distance from Jesus, they recognized Him. So, when **they came up** to Him they **took hold of his feet, and worshiped him**. These two actions were significant, especially when taken together. For the women to grasp Jesus's feet, they needed to bow before Him. So the words not only emphasize an act of homage, but they also affirm that Jesus was physically present. Despite arguments to the contrary, He was not merely a spirit or hallucination.

Second, *worshiped him* shows they recognized the risen Lord's deity. During the wilderness temptation in Matthew 4:9-10, Jesus had told Satan that only God deserves worship. That Jesus accepted their worship affirmed He is God, just as the Father and the Spirit are God.

(v. 10) Once again the women were told **do not be afraid**. They had received this encouragement earlier from the angel (v. 5), but this time the risen Savior Himself was calming their fears. Jesus's words **leave for •Galilee** and **see me there** repeat the angel's instructions in verse 7, as well as Jesus's own promise in Matthew 26:32. However, here Jesus referred to the disciples as **my brothers**. This is the only time in Matthew's Gospel that Jesus identified the apostles with this intimate relational term (see John 20:17). While Jesus did have biological brothers (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3), He obviously meant the disciples, His spiritual family (Matt. 12:46-50; 23:8; 25:40; see also Ps. 22:22).

Galilee was where Jesus spent most of His ministry and where He taught His disciples the most. Neither Jesus nor the angel specified where in that large area of Galilee they would see Him, and neither the women nor the disciples asked for further details about the location.



APPLICATION POINT: Our appropriate response to Jesus’s resurrection is worship.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 28:8-10 aloud as adults consider carefully what worship looked like in this moment.

ASK:

What emotions did the women experience as they went to tell the disciples about Jesus’s resurrection? How did they respond to Jesus’s appearing?

ENGAGE:

Point out the phrases “quickly,” “with fear and great joy,” and “ran” in verse 8. Note that these terms reveal the women’s mixed emotions even as they obeyed the angel’s directions.

ASK:

How would you have responded to such an unexpected encounter with Jesus?

RECAP:

Discuss responses, adding the following insights regarding the women’s worship:

Imagine the scene. Suddenly, here is Jesus and He is saying to you, “Hello!” No wonder the immediate response of the women was to take hold of his feet in worship. . . . Jesus knew of both the fear and joy of the women. He told them “do not be afraid.” This was not a time for fear but joy. The joyful news of Jesus’s resurrection must be shared. That is why Jesus repeated the instructions of the angel to the women, “Go and tell the disciples.” (PSG, pp. 58-59)

BIBLE SKILL:

Encourage adults to complete the Bible Skill activity on page 61 of the PSG. Direct them to the resurrection accounts given in each Gospel: Matthew 28:1-15; Mark 16:1-20; Luke 24:1-52; and John 20:1-22 Encourage them to reflect on and respond to these questions: **What similarities do you see in these passages? What are some differences that help you get a more complete picture of the events surrounding the resurrection?** After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share what they discovered as they dug into the other resurrection stories.

SHARE:

Highlight the term “brothers” in verse 10. Point out that this is the first time in Matthew’s Gospel that Jesus used this familial term for His disciples. Note that everything was changing in light of the resurrection, including the way Jesus’s followers would know Him and relate to Him.

Share (Matt. 28:16-20)

16 The eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. **17** When they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted. **18** Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. **19** Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

(v. 16) Both Luke (Luke 24:13-53) and John (John 20:19-29) reported other post-resurrection appearances in Jerusalem. But Matthew went directly to the journey of **the eleven disciples** to Galilee. The number *eleven* provides a subtle reminder of Judas’s betrayal. The **mountain** is unidentified, but the disciples knew where to go because **Jesus had directed them** to it. Also, no timing is mentioned for this meeting.

(v. 17) Matthew recorded two responses **when they saw** Jesus. Appropriately, **they worshiped** Jesus. However, a group also **doubted**. The worship response recalls the two Marys in verse 9 and emphasizes Jesus’s deity.

The fact that some doubted raises two issues. First, readers might wonder who doubted. Were they some of the eleven or were others present?

The second difficulty concerns what **doubted** means. Does it refer to unbelief or to a degree of hesitation and uncertainty? The word carries both meanings. Grammatically, the same Greek word is used in Matthew 14:31 of Peter’s hesitation when walking on the water. Thus, it might indicate some were not certain it was Jesus they were seeing and may have hesitated until He came closer to them. They also may have hesitated because they didn’t know how to respond to Jesus in this new situation (see Luke 24:38,41; John 20:24-29). Whatever the situation, Jesus did not take any specific steps to alleviate any doubts (contrary to Luke 24:36-43; John 20:26-28).

Key Doctrine

Evangelism and Missions

The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. (See Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8.)

(vv. 18-20) The concept of **all** dominates the Great Commission. It refers to the **authority** Jesus provides and the **nations** believers are called to reach. Christians are expected to **observe everything** that Jesus commanded and to trust that His presence is **always** with them (literally, “all the days”).

Authority includes power and position. The Father **has . . . given** (a divine passive, see Matt. 11:27) Jesus this authority both **in heaven and on earth**. His authority is universal and all encompassing, and He makes that power available to those who follow Him.

On that basis disciples are commissioned to **go . . . make disciples of all nations . . . baptizing them . . . teaching them**. *Go* expands the mission beyond Galilee and Judea. *Make disciples* is the main verb and thus the emphasis of the commission. What’s more, the commission carries a universal focus, fulfilling the promise God made to Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 17:5; 18:18; 22:18).

Baptizing and teaching are the means by which disciples are made. Baptizing is the initial step of obedience performed **in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**.

The teaching is to ground new believers in their discipleship through Jesus’s own teaching. But this is no mere intellectual exercise. It requires obedience to all of Jesus’s commands.

The commission also emphasizes Jesus’s omnipresence. **I am with you** is emphatic and promises that the risen Lord will walk with His people in any situation **to the end of the age**.

Jesus’s Great Commission was not intended only for the eleven apostles, but for all disciples until He comes back. The resurrection signaled that Jesus’s earthly ministry was moving toward an end. But the responsibility of sharing the gospel and growing the kingdom was just getting started. We should be working at that task faithfully today—and every day until He returns.



APPLICATION POINT: Believers are to share the gospel with people of all nations.

READ:

Direct adults to read **Matthew 28:16-20** silently and to note what they see as the themes in the verses. After a few minutes, discuss responses. Note that these verses are known as Jesus’s Great Commission to His followers.

EXPLAIN:

Direct adults to **Pack item 4** (Poster: Key Verse: *Matthew 28:19-20a*). Summarize this content from pages 60-61 of the PSG to highlight the message of the Great Commission:

“The training of the disciples was now complete. The time had arrived for them to carry on the work Jesus had begun. Based on Jesus’s kingdom authority, the disciples were to draw more of God’s chosen ones into the kingdom. They were to ‘make disciples’. . . . These disciples were to come from ‘all nations.’ This term *nations* speaks of all people groups everywhere. . . . Making disciples involved two actions. First, they were to ‘mark’ these disciples by ‘baptizing them.’ Baptism was an outward declaration that one belonged to Jesus Christ by faith in His atoning work. . . . Second, making disciples involved ‘teaching them to observe’ all that Jesus taught and commanded. Bringing the nations to faith was only part of the job. They would need to be nurtured in the teachings of Jesus.”



ASK:

What does this passage teach us about our role in Christ’s mission? (PSG, p. 61)

SHARE:

This is a huge task. But we don’t carry it out on our own. In addition to our brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus promised His power (v. 18) and His presence (v. 20). He has provided all we need to carry out His work until “the end of the age.”

Group Activity Option

Key Words

On the board, write the following key words from Matthew 28:19-20: *Go, make disciples, baptizing, teaching, with you*. Share that every believer has come to Christ because other believers fulfilled this Great Commission. Ask: **How can we know if our lives are aligned with the Great Commission of Jesus? Who can we tell?**

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 62 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *We can trust that Jesus is risen because the tomb was empty.*
- *Our appropriate response to Jesus's resurrection is worship.*
- *Believers are to share the gospel with people of all nations.*

CHALLENGE:

Challenge adults to consider how each of these points should be a foundational element of our faith, not only at Easter but as we walk through life.

DISCUSS:

Invite a volunteer to read aloud the first set of questions on page 62 of the PSG. Provide your own responses and allow volunteers to share their answers. Record ideas for sharing the gospel with others on the board and challenge adults to follow up on one of these ideas with someone they know this week.

REFLECT:

Draw attention back to **Pack Item 4** (Poster: Key Verse: *Matthew 28:19-20a*). Remind adults that the power of Jesus's resurrection is the power that equips us to share the gospel with others. Challenge them to ask God to reveal His power through them this week.

PRAY:

Briefly share the second set of questions on page 62 of the PSG. Emphasize the power of a transformed life. Allow adults a few minutes to talk with God quietly about how they can live out His resurrection each day. Close the session in prayer.

AFTER THE SESSION

During the week, reach out to the group with an email or text. Encourage them to take time to notice “empty” things this week: an empty bird's nest, an empty school bus, or even an empty house. Invite them to take a photo of what they see and to share it with your group. Challenge adults to use these spaces to help them focus on Jesus's empty tomb.

LEADER BLOG



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EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.

Why We Can Trust the Resurrection

Bob Bunn

Within hours, myths surrounding the resurrection of Jesus began circulating on the first Easter morning. In his Gospel, Matthew explained that the religious leaders in Jerusalem—the nation’s spiritual guides—made a deal with the Romans to cover up the truth of the empty tomb. As a result, the story of a stolen body began gaining traction among resurrection skeptics (Matt. 28:11-15).

A MAJOR MYTH

More than two thousand years later, doubters still embrace this myth, even though simple logic states that no one had a good reason to steal the body of Jesus. Few Romans would have wanted to nurture a story about Jesus’s resurrection. If anything, they would have tamped down any messianic fervor a resurrection story could ignite. Likewise, the Jewish leaders understood that Jesus’s resurrection would threaten their authority and their own messianic interpretations.

Of course, the disciples were blamed for the stolen body, but even they didn’t have a good reason for robbing Jesus’s grave. None of them were plugged into the idea of a resurrected Savior. In some ways, they seemed more surprised than anyone by early reports of an empty tomb, even though Jesus had explained it to them on multiple occasions.

Plus, the Bible makes it clear that they spent the hours following the crucifixion hidden away in a locked room. It’s difficult to believe that any of them would have risked their lives trying to overpower trained Roman soldiers at the gravesite.

OTHER MYTHS

So, the “stolen body” theory really holds no water. In fact, none of the so-called “arguments” against the resurrection stand up to scrutiny. While trying to paint the Easter story as a myth, these “explanations” become myths in themselves:

- **The Swoon Theory:** This theory states that Jesus didn’t really die. He just passed out on the cross and revived in the cool air of the tomb. Of course, this completely ignores the soldier who thrust his spear into Jesus’s side to ensure He was dead. Romans were experts at crucifixion, and they were not about to be fooled by a “fainter.” The theory also fails to explain how a man recovering from incredible torture and a botched crucifixion managed to roll away a stone that would have taken several men to move. Honestly, connecting enough points to hold this theory together is more difficult than believing Jesus rose!
- **The Hypnosis Theory:** This theory basically assumes everyone who saw Jesus after the resurrection was the victim of some kind of mass hallucination—possibly a hypnotic suggestion planted by Jesus Himself before His death. But, again, the facts don’t support the claim. One would need to believe that literally hundreds of people would have fallen under the same spell across the course of six weeks. And then they’d have to explain how Saul of Tarsus (who likely would not have been around to experience a hypnotic suggestion) saw and spoke to the risen Christ years after the Lord returned to heaven.

- **The Wrong Tomb Theory:** On the surface, this is probably the most feasible argument against the resurrection. In their grief and confusion, before the sun came up on Easter morning, the women simply visited the wrong tomb. But this idea has two major problems. First, John and Peter ran to the tomb *after* sunrise and found it exactly as the ladies had described it. With the benefit of daylight, the chance that they made the same geographic blunder is unlikely. Even more, it would have been easy enough for the Romans to point people to the correct tomb—the one with Jesus’s body still tucked away inside. That never happened, so this argument ends up supporting a resurrection rather than debunking it.

BETTER EVIDENCE

In contrast to the explanations that don’t make sense, two very important realities provide solid arguments in favor of Jesus’s resurrection. The first is the abundance of eyewitness accounts. This began with the women’s arrival at the empty tomb on Easter morning. Since Jewish law discounted the testimony of women, no group trying to perpetuate a hoax would claim women as primary witnesses. But Christianity affirms the women’s witness because we know the resurrection is true.

Plus, as mentioned, the women were not the only witnesses. Literally hundreds of people encountered the empty tomb and the resurrected Christ. From Peter and John on Easter morning to the travelers on the road to Emmaus on Easter evening to the apostle Paul outside Damascus, biblical history offers a plethora of testimonies regarding a risen Savior.

But, for many, the greatest evidence of the resurrected Savior is the transformation seen in the lives of the disciples. Almost overnight, this band of cowards hiding in a locked room became an army of bold witnesses in the temple courtyards. And the more their enemies turned up the heat, the more determined they became to share the message of Christ with as many people as possible.

Honestly, it’s hard to imagine them enduring persecution—and ultimately sacrificing their lives—for a hoax. If the resurrection was some kind of scam or joke, they would have come clean as soon as the suffering started to hit home. But they didn’t. They remained faithful to the end, which validates the truth of their message.

WHY IT MATTERS

The resurrection of Jesus is vital to us because it provides the backbone for our faith. In 1 Corinthians 15:12-19, the apostle Paul outlined a spiritual domino effect that topples everything Christ followers hold dear if the resurrection isn’t true. If resurrection is impossible, then Jesus wasn’t raised. If Jesus wasn’t raised, then the gospel is a fraud. If the gospel is a fraud, our faith—and our eternal hope—is worthless.

Going on, Paul noted that if our faith is worthless, we are the most pitiful people on the face of the earth. We should be out doing whatever we want with no guilt or consequences instead of following the teachings of a dead man. Nothing really matters because Jesus isn’t really alive and will never really come back to either judge us or reward us.

But Paul put the brakes on the dominoes with one simple statement of faith: “But as it is, Christ has been raised from the dead” (1 Cor. 15:20). As a result, we know that He is alive and that He is at work in us. Our faith is not in vain. We have purpose. All the so-called sacrifices make sense in light of the bigger picture. Best of all, our hope for eternity remains secure.

And no amount of skepticism or philosophical theories can change that.

He is risen indeed!

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