

Lecture 31 “Resurrection and Ascension”
Matthew 28:1-20, Mark 16:1-20; Luke 24:1-53

In our lesson last week we studied in detail the crucifixion of Jesus from Simon being forced to carry the cross for Jesus; to the actual crucifixion of Jesus where He uttered seven sayings from the cross as He suffered and died. The temple veil split from top to bottom so no longer would there be a barrier between us and the Holy Place of the Father’s dwelling. Dan gave us application for our Scripture by looking at how personally encountering the death of Jesus not only reestablishes our spiritual connection with God the Father but also brings change in one’s life, especially when we consider our participation in the sufferings of Christ as we, by faith, choose to follow Him.

Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb received the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, and, responding to the pleas of the chief priests and Pharisees, Pilate agreed to have the tomb secured by a stone, sealed with an official Roman seal and a guard placed outside to alleviate their fears that the disciples would come and steal the body and claim that Jesus was raised from the dead.

But as author Tony Campolo reminded us, “It’s Friday but Sunday’s Comin’!”

There are lots of books written with the goal of trying to prove or disprove the facts of the resurrection. Certainly Josh McDowell’s *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* is one of the best. But that’s not

really the purpose of our lesson today. Our purpose is to rejoice in the fact that “Friday’s past and Sunday is here!” He is risen! He is alive! Hallelujah!

The forty days between the resurrection and the ascension needs information from all four gospels to get the full picture of events recorded for us. We didn’t study the Gospel of John’s account following discovery of the opened tomb, but John records Jesus appearing to the disciples giving them instruction on forgiving sin; appearing to reassure doubting Thomas; preparing breakfast for them on the beach; and reinstating Peter with instructions to “feed my sheep.”

But let’s go back to that first Easter morning and take a look at five things and make an application to our lives:

The Anxiety

The Angel

The Appearance

The Awakening

The Ascension

Anxiety and fear go together because it usually involves something we can’t control whether it’s circumstances or consequences. From the three gospels we learn that a group of women – among them Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary mother of James and Salome were headed for the tomb in the early morning hours intent on bringing spices to anoint body of Jesus.

They were anxious because they didn't know who would roll away the stone to let them in, let alone the fact of Roman guards allowing the breaking of an official Roman seal.

Matthew tell us there was a violent earthquake “for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat upon it.” The guards were afraid of him (you think?), shook and became like dead men. Today, we'd probably say “frozen in fear” – like when your mind and common sense says “run” but your feet have cement shoes.

The guards heard the angel tell the women the tomb was empty . . . so now what . . . there was nothing left to guard. The conclusion was – let's go tell the chief priests. The priests plan was simple, give the guards a large sum of money and have them say the disciples stole the body while they were asleep. How long do you think it took for them to sell that idea? At any rate, they promised to keep the soldiers out of trouble if the report got back to the governor.

Do you suppose the bribery money let the guards sleep easier each night? Maybe, but neglect of duty was a serious crime. Did they live in fear of exposure? How many times did their fear send them back for more “hush” money? The lie was simple, yet it was still a lie.

The application for anxiety: 1) never under estimate the power of God as the women did, and 2) never forfeit the peace of God by living with a lie as the guards did.

Second, let's look at the **Angel**. We learn a lot about "angelology" from this brief encounter with the angels. 1) They are embodied, and can freely pass from heaven to earth. 2) This angel had clothes on, was dazzling bright, and stuck terror into those who saw him. 3) He spoke presumably in Aramaic, for he was understood. What the guards did (be afraid), he told the women not to do. 4) The angel knew Jesus, and he knew why the women were at the tomb. 5) He knew that Jesus had predicted the resurrection, that Jesus was risen, told the women so, and asked them to examine the place. 6) He calls Jesus "the Lord." He knew Jesus had disciples, told the women to go inform the disciples and Peter of the resurrection, and said that Jesus would appear to them in Galilee and he spoke with authority. Don't you just love the way that Luke relates it? "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, He is risen!"

What a wonderful message to deliver! The ministry of angels . . . it's a lot to think about. The application is straight from Hebrews – 1:14 "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" and 13:2 "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by doing so some people have entertained angels without knowing it."

Third, the **Appearance** of Jesus. In Matthew, Jesus suddenly met the returning women and said, "Greetings." They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped. John, however, tells us that Mary Magdalene in her despair over where they had taken the body, recognized the Lord

when He said to her, “Mary.” Often we take Jesus’ next words, “Do not hold on to me,” to mean don’t touch me. That wasn’t the case. When He appeared to the disciples, He invited them to touch His nail prints and His side. Jesus was not declining the physical intimacy of touch, but raising Mary to a new spiritual level. No longer would there be the clinging relationship to His humanity that she knew as a follower of the Lord before His death, but now a new spiritual relationship. We live by faith, not by sight.

The fear felt at the angel’s announcement turned to great joy as the women hurried to tell the disciples the good news of the resurrection. Mark simply says that Mary Magdalene’s account was not believed. Luke says the women told the disciples but they did not believe them. Peter ran to the tomb, saw the stripes of linen and went away wondering to himself what had happened. John relates how he too ran to the empty tomb, and that they came away believing, but not fully understanding the impact of the resurrection.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” After He said this, He showed them His hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. (John 20:19-23)

Imagine seeing the actual first fruit of the resurrection; a resurrection body – not a spirit or a ghost – but the living Lord Jesus Christ. They could see Him, touch Him, eat with Him.

And the disciples weren't the only ones to see Him. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also."

The application for the appearance of Jesus is an individual one for each of us. Have your spiritual eyes been opened to behold the risen Savior? Have you heard Him call your name with comfort and assurance? Have you responded, "My Lord and my God" and been filled with the joy of a personal relationship with Jesus just like the disciples had? I pray you have.

The **Awakening** is an exciting aspect to this week's study because God helped me uncover a brand new thought from Scriptures I've studied many times. It has to do with the story in Luke of the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Listen to Luke 24:13-16 “Now that same day (Easter evening) two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.” Vs. 18 “One of them, named Cleopas . . .” Let me stop there.

John 19:25 “Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene.”

I’d never connected the two together before. I guess I always thought the two going to Emmaus were both men. But isn’t it possible that Cleopas and his wife Mary were the two disciples returning to Emmaus? The Luke Scriptures just says a generic “they or them.”

This pair was amazed that the stranger didn’t know about what had happened to Jesus of Nazareth and they shared that they had hoped He would be one to redeem Israel, the Messiah.

Then came the awakening . . . first with the “Word made flesh” Himself explaining the Word of God from Moses and the Prophets and its fulfillment to open their hearts, and next with recognition through the breaking of bread to open their eyes. Then He disappeared from their sight. Quickly they returned to Jerusalem with the news, “It is true. He is alive!”

The application, especially to us as People of the Word, is so obvious . . . it's the Word of God that the Holy Spirit uses to reach and to teach our hearts today. Dan said last week that Jesus' suffering and death glorified Him. What else glorifies Him? When we believe in faith that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and we take Him as our personal Savior. His death brought us eternal life. Until we surrender our hearts to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, our spiritual eyes will be clouded. In communion we, as believers, not only remember His sacrifice, but rejoice in our salvation!

Before we turn our attention to my last thought on the ascension, I want to address those last few verses in the Gospel of Mark 16:16-18. "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will lay their hands on sick people and they will get well."

Most of your Bibles have a footnote that these verses are not found in the most ancient manuscripts. Nevertheless, there is nothing here that contradicts the message of the gospel found elsewhere. The basis of salvation is faith. A believer is to be baptized. God used many signs and wonders to validate the ministry of the early church before the New Testament was written.

Most of the contention surrounds the verse that says, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” Those who usually argue about the verse want to connect baptism as a condition for salvation. Clearly believers are to be baptized; however, salvation is through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Unbelief in that is what brings condemnation.

As to the snake handling and drinking poison, we all know that there are some sects that take that literally and practice it to this day. If someone dies from the snake bite or poison, it’s because they do not have enough faith. In my opinion that’s a perversion of Scripture. Not every sign and wonder that the early church experienced as they spread the gospel is recorded for us; however, I don’t think this is a blank check to test God or one’s faith, but merely an assurance that the church would have power and authority and protection from the Lord Himself. You are free to disagree with me agreeably.

Last, let’s look at the **Ascension** and the giving of the Great Commission. There are five commissions given to the church in the Scriptures.

Matthew 28:18-20 “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.”

Mark 16:15 “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”

Luke 24:46-49 “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations beginning in Jerusalem. You are my witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what My Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

John 20:21 “And Jesus said, Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

Acts 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Go. . . make disciples . . . teach . . . preach . . . be my witnesses. All action words meant to be acted upon. But most important (and what we often fail to grasp) we don’t do it in our own power. We are enabled; we are entrusted; we are envoys of the King of King and Lord of Lords. What an awesome privilege and responsibility to be an ambassador for the risen Lord!

For Matthew who presented Jesus as King, his gospel ends with final instructions from the King . . . the Great Commission.

For Mark who presents Jesus as a Servant, his gospel ends with “After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven

and he sat at the right hand of God.” His service on earth was done, now He serves as our advocate in heaven.

For Luke who presents Jesus as the perfect man, he ends his gospel with the ascension account. “When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.”

Luke continues in Acts 1:9-11 “After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. Men of Galilee, they said, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

The application for the ascension is twofold: 1) The great commission is not an option, it is a mandate. 2) What has gone up WILL come down. And that’s the truth!

So, I ask you as we finish this year’s study, “What knowledge have we gained, what encouragement have we received, what assurance has been confirmed to us?” as we’ve studied the Life of Christ? I sincerely pray that you have come to know the human side of our Lord and Savior and how He faced so many of the same situations we do – the pressure of time when people are counting on us, the resistance of others as we work towards our goals, the burden of broken relationships.

We're encouraged by His love for children, His compassion for those grieving, His acceptance of our failures.

And we have His assurance that all our sins have been paid for by His shedding of blood on the cross, death has been conquered and we can live confidently in resurrection power because He will never leave us or forsake us and He gave us the Holy Spirit to empower us.

Let's pray. Father, we are so grateful for the gift of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been inspired by His life, transformed by His death, thrilled by the resurrection, and we rejoice at the anticipation of His coming again. As the old hymn says,

And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight

The clouds be rolled back as a scroll

The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend

Even so, it is well with my soul

Protect each family represented here and those they love. Bring us safely together again in the fall, is my prayer in the strong and powerful name of Jesus. Amen.

Next year (**CLICK**) will be studying the Divided Kingdom – the books of Kings and Chronicles and the minor prophets who ministered in both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. It picks up with the history of Israel after King Solomon died.