

"The Lord's Resurrection"

The Christian faith rests on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders and this is a Bible study, "In SEARCH of the Lord's Way." Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Let's look at the evidence!

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way. We're here to search God's Word for the Lord's teaching. We love the Lord and are determined to show that love by examining the Scriptures to see what God desires of us. God regards searching the Scriptures to find the truth as noble. Thank you for taking an interest in this noble quest for the truth. We want to be a part of your life each week.

Today we're examining the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Whether Jesus arose matters. And if Jesus arose, there is life after death. If Jesus arose, He has fulfilled the ancient prophecies and proven Himself to be the Son of God. If Jesus arose, then His promises are true. If Jesus arose and is the Son of God, He is Lord of all and has authority over our souls. If the Lord Jesus arose, then He will one day come again and judge you and me according to His Word.

Since what we're studying today affects each of us and has eternal consequences for our souls, we need to pay close attention. If Jesus arose from the dead, we can't ignore Him or what He requires of us. We can't hide our heads in the sand. The Bible says in Hebrews 4:12 to 13, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and the intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Now I tell ya, one day you and I will give an account of yourself to Jesus Christ.

Now if you want to learn more about the resurrection of Jesus, we offer a transcript or a CD of our study free. Mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call us at 1-800-321-8633. We also stream our programs on our website www.searchtv.org. You can download study sheets or transcripts any time. Or you can download the audio or video of the program.

Larry Owsley will lead the Edmond church in a beautiful song of worship, and then we'll read from Matthew 28:2 through 7.

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to Matthew chapter 28, verses 2 to 7. Speaking of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you."

This is the story from Matthew about the resurrection of Jesus. And those who were present. Let's pray together. Oh, Father we're thankful that You and Your wisdom have told us about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. That we might have hope of life after our lives are over here. And Father we're thankful that we can come and live with You forever. We pray that You will help us every day. In Jesus name, Amen.

The Lord Jesus predicted His death and resurrection. Jesus said in Matthew 20:18 to 19, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and

they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up.” This is an amazing and specific prediction! Jesus not only predicted He would be scourged and crucified at the hands of the chief priests and the Gentiles but also that He would rise from the dead the third day. Now, others have predicted a resurrection but only the Son of God did that. Only the Son of God could make such specific prediction about His death and resurrection and see its fulfillment just as He predicted.

Now, before we speak of a resurrection, we must first examine the evidence that Jesus actually died upon the cross. Now, all four gospel accounts speak of the beatings and His scourging. A Roman scourging led many men to die. The whip they used lacerated the skin with sharp objects and caused the loss of much blood. Scourging left a person so weak that they couldn't fight being crucified. The Romans, unlike the Jews, did not limit their stripes to 39.

Now, the cross killed a person slowly and very painfully. While the nails through the hands and the feet were not of themselves fatal, the physical position of a crucified person, on a cross, created tremendous pressure on the heart and lungs. A person had to pull himself up to breathe in and out. Well, the cross gradually wore a person down so that he couldn't breathe. And in the case of Jesus, fluid surrounded his heart until it failed.

Now, the reason soldiers would break the legs of a crucified person was to hasten their death. Now, a person with broken legs couldn't push himself up to breathe and would die more quickly. They broke the legs of the two thieves; but these experienced soldiers found Jesus was already dead, so they didn't break His bones in fulfillment of Psalm 34 verse 20 that “not a bone of Him shall be broken.” Instead, a soldier pierced His side with a spear, “and immediately there came out blood and water” (John 19:34). Now, this flowing of water and blood is a sure sign that Jesus was indeed dead. Now, if Jesus had not died from the crucifixion, He could not have survived this spear.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus asked Pilate for the body of Jesus, but Pilate wouldn't release the body until he had proof that Jesus was already dead. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus prepared his body for burial in a new tomb a short distance from where he was crucified. John reveals that they bound the body in linen wrappings with myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight, that's at 12 ounces to the pound. Well, this burial process would have sealed Jesus in a mummy-like wrapping with the spices sealing the cloth together. Well, bound up like this, Jesus—even if He by some remote chance survived—could not have breathed and lived. Jesus was dead in the tomb.

The Pharisees and priests went to Pilate and requested a guard for the tomb. Matthew 27:62 and a little bit later, records what they said. They said, “Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I *am to* rise again.’ Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last deception will be worse than the first.”

Well, Pilate said to them, well “You have a guard; (you) go, make it *as* secure as you know how.” And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone. They were determined to not let anything happen to that tomb. They didn't merely post a couple of guards at the tomb. They made it as secure as they could. Now, some scholars suggest that there were as many as 28 guards there, and they would have been particularly watchful on the third day, when the threat was greatest. Now, the governor's seal meant that it would be criminal to mess with the tomb.

The Scriptures tell us that women came very early on the first day of the week to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. This was their first opportunity since the Sabbath had passed. They wondered, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” Well, they realized

that the stone was “extremely large” according to Mark 16:4. And scholars suggest that this stone weighed between one and a half and two tons. They knew moving this stone was far beyond their ability and that it would require several strong men to move it.

Coming to the tomb, they saw an angel had rolled the stone away. The stone sat in an inclined track. To open the tomb, and they had to roll this stone up the incline. John 20 and verse 1 tells us, that they took away the stone. Apparently it was picked up and moved out of its track away from the sepulcher. Well, how could a group of disciples tiptoe among some sleeping soldiers, pick up an extremely large stone, maybe as much as 2 tons, and then move it away from the tomb? How could they break this official seal, move the stone, and remove the body of Jesus undetected by the soldiers?

When the women reported to the apostles the tomb was empty, many of the apostles laughed and doubted their word; but two apostles wanted to find out for themselves. Peter and John ran to the tomb. John 20 verses 5 to 7 says that they looked in the tomb and saw the linen wrappings lying there. They saw “the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself.” Well, this is curious. Why would the disciples, if they stole the body, unwrap him and fold the face cloth, and leave the wrappings in the tomb, knowing that the guards were just outside?

Whatever understanding you have of this event, you must explain who moved the stone, how the tomb became empty, who took the linen wrappings from the body of Jesus, and folded the facecloth and left them there. The eyewitnesses who examined these events argue without hesitation that Jesus arose from the dead. According to Matthew 28:11 to 15, the soldiers reported all these events to the chief priests, who paid the soldiers a large sum of money to lie and promised to keep them out of trouble with the governor. But down deep these soldiers and the chief priests knew the truth.

Knowing this is the testimony of Scripture, let's ask whether the testimony about the empty tomb is true. Can we test the credibility of the report of the resurrection? Is it believable?

Well, first, let's remember that Jesus believed and taught His people to be honest. The Lord hated hypocrisy and deceit. Jesus praised Nathanael for being a person in whom was no deceit (John 1 and verse 47). Jesus spoke of the devil as a liar and condemned it in John 8:44. Well, how could His disciples abandon everything that they had been taught and spread a lie throughout Jerusalem. By the way, all the Jews had to do to prove that Jesus had not resurrected was merely to produce the body of Jesus. If the Jews produced the body of Jesus, they could stop Christianity. They never tried, why, because they knew they couldn't. All they could do was bribe the soldiers to lie and try to punish the disciples.

Now, let's look at the change in the disciples. Before the disciples knew for sure that Jesus had been raised on the third day, they hid in the upper room with the door locked for fear of the Jews. They doubted and laughed at the women's testimony. Their doubting hearts kept them from believing until Jesus revealed Himself to them. One apostle, you remember Thomas, persisted in his disbelief even when the others insisted they had seen the Lord. Thomas said in John 20 and verse 25, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

Well, John 20:26 to 29 says: After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.” And then He said to Thomas, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.”

Jesus appeared to the disciples and proved Himself to them in a variety of ways. Luke 24:36 to 39 says: He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you." But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

Acts 1 and verse 3, this tells how Jesus "presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God." So strong did He convince them that we see a very different group of men at Pentecost than we do on the day that Jesus arose. Oh, at first they disbelieved, hiding themselves as cowards, and doubting the prophecy of Jesus; but Jesus showed Himself alive with many convincing proofs.

At Pentecost they were bold and unrelenting in their preaching of the gospel. They told everyone that they were eyewitnesses of the resurrection. They called the people to repent of their sins, because they crucified Jesus whom for certain God had made both Lord and Christ (Acts 2 and verse 36). In Acts chapters 3 through chapter 8 the early disciples endured beatings and imprisonment, but they wouldn't stop preaching Jesus as the Christ resurrected from the dead.

When the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council, commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus, Peter and John answered in Acts 4:19 to 20, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." They were convinced that they must obey God and continue preaching the gospel.

In Acts chapter 5, the Council arrested the apostles, flogged them, commanded them to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, and then released them. But the apostles rejoiced "that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:41 to 42). They later suffered imprisonment, beatings and even death for their faith, but nothing kept them from continuing to preach Jesus as the Christ, risen from the dead.

You see, the disciples didn't become rich or find life easy from their preaching. They suffered much to tell the story of Jesus. They stoned Stephen in Acts 7 and beheaded James the son of Zebedee in Acts 12. Not one, not one, of the disciples ever denied the resurrection. You see, they died for preaching it. Now, according to tradition, they were all martyred for their faith except John. Let me ask you, would you die for preaching something that you knew was a lie?

The disciples gained no earthly advantage by preaching Jesus Christ. The only reason they spoke out so boldly about their faith was they believed Jesus truly was the Christ, the risen Son of God. Their bold faith assures us that we too can place our faith in Jesus as Lord.

Let's pray together. Oh, Father help us to have deep faith and a testimony of the apostle that we read about in the New Testament. And give us faith and courage and love for You. And for what Jesus did for us. This is our prayer in His name, Amen.

Saul of Tarsus was originally devoted to Judaism and a persecutor of the church, but He saw Christ on the road to Damascus. Now his conversion is especially important in view of his earlier zeal against Christianity. He gave up everything to become a Christian. What he wrote about in the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 is the earliest documentary evidence that we have. No one can satisfactorily explain the conversion and later life of the apostle Paul except in the way that he himself explained it. He had seen the risen Christ.

Some say Jesus fainted on the cross and revived in the cool of the tomb; but this doesn't explain how Jesus survived the linen wrappings, how He moved the stone, or how He frightened the guards to get away. Others say the apostles only imagined that they saw Jesus after His resurrection, but this doesn't explain why there were linen wrappings in the empty tomb, or how the stone was moved before the women arrived, or how the guards were frightened. Nor does it explain how they were able to touch Jesus.

Though we have barely discussed the evidence surrounding the resurrection, we've seen enough to say confidently that Peter and the apostles how God had raised Him from the dead whenever they spoke about Him and that He is the Son of God and the Lord of all. According to John 12 verse 48 and Acts 17:31 He will one day judge you and me according to His Word.

To become a Christian believe with all your heart that Jesus is the Christ, turn from your sins in repentance, confess Jesus as the Christ the Son of God, and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins as the Bible teaches in Acts 2 and verse 38.

Well we hope that today's study of the resurrection has blessed you and challenged you to believe. If you want a transcript or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org.

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So get your heart focused on God today. Worship at church. There's probably a church of Christ in your area. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Well we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So, keep searching God's Word. Tell a friend about the program. And God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.