

☒ LIFE OF JESUS

March 28, 2021 | *The Burial and Resurrection of Jesus*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Read Matthew 27:57–28:10

Pray that this text will help you prepare to worship Christ as the risen Savior this Easter.

THIS WEEK

☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The Gospels verify the resurrection of Jesus Christ both historically and supernaturally.

☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Jesus's resurrection is the central tenant of the Christian faith. The truth of the resurrection assures us that Christ is our Savior, our sins can be forgiven, and death has been defeated.

☒ MEDITATE

“He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay” (Matthew 28:6).

GETTING STARTED

+Use this section to prepare your heart for the truths you will encounter this week and to connect this passage's main point to your own life.

🗨: *To verify that Jesus rose from the dead, what proof or testimony would you want?*

Q: *If the resurrection is verified by historical sources, why do people continue to doubt it?*

In a criminal trial, the jury considers various types of evidence to arrive at a verdict. They consider forensic evidence that reconstructs the crime. They consider eyewitness testimony to hear various perspectives on the crime. They consider physical evidence found at the crime scene. After weighing all the evidence at hand, the jury votes to convict or acquit the defendant. The gathering and presentation of the evidence can give the jury warrant to convict the defendant of the crime. The process is similar for other forms of historical verification. If you want to prove something happened historically, you gather evidence proving that the event took place. The nature of the event in question can alter the types of evidence produced and how they are weighted. Forensic evidence is crucial for criminal trials, but it does not play much of a role in historical verification. Instead, eyewitness testimony takes more precedence.

Matthew approached Jesus's resurrection in this fashion. He gathered evidence showing the authenticity of the resurrection for his readers. He expected his readers to look at the evidence and believe that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the defining tenant of Christianity. According to the apostle Paul, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:17–19). Matthew also recognized the importance of Jesus's resurrection and included supporting evidence within his presentation of the life and ministry of Jesus.

Q: *What does Matthew's approach to proclaiming the resurrection tell you about his belief in the resurrection?*

Q: *How does Matthew's Gospel help us verify the resurrection even though the eyewitnesses are gone, and we have lost the exact location of the physical evidence?*

APPLICATION POINT – As Matthew and Paul knew, the resurrection of Jesus Christ has vast implications. The fact that Matthew takes this approach to verifying the resurrection means he believed the resurrection could be verified historically and that his readers could investigate the truth behind the claims made in his Gospel. His original audience could speak with Joseph of Arimathea to verify that Jesus was truly dead and was sealed in

a tomb. They could ask the civil leaders if they guarded Jesus's tomb. They could speak with the two Marys to hear for themselves whether an angel told them Jesus has risen from the dead and determine if Jesus appeared to them as they ran to tell His disciples. Although we cannot verify this evidence ourselves, the early readers of Matthew's gospel could, and the evidentiary claims he presented in his Gospel remained uncontested even by those who refused to believe Jesus had risen from the dead. We have solid evidence from which to conclude that Jesus did rise from the dead.

▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+ Matthew 27:57–28:10 centers on the actions of four characters—Joseph of Arimathea, the chief priests and Pharisees (as a collective whole), the angel who rolled away the stone, and Jesus Himself. Two other characters, the two Marys, link these four together.

1. JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

2. THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND PHARISEES

3. THE ANGEL

4. JESUS

GOING DEEPER

+ *This section will examine each of the four characters above to understand the evidence they provide for the resurrection of Jesus and to consider what additional applications these verses may have for our lives.*

1. JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

▣ MATTHEW 27:57–61

Q: *How do these verses verify what happened to Jesus's body after the crucifixion?*

Q: *Who could have verified the claims made in these verses?*

After the resurrection, Jesus's body was received by a man known as Joseph of Arimathea, who received permission to bury Jesus's body from Pilate, the Roman governor over Jerusalem. After preparing the body for burial, Joseph placed Jesus in his own tomb. The tombs of this period would have been a simple passage or hall with several niches cut along the sides where the bodies of the deceased could be placed. The fact that Joseph's tomb was new indicates that no other bodies had been placed inside the tomb.

All this information could have been verified by Joseph and Pilate. If the Roman authorities had thrown the body of Jesus into a shallow grave outside Jerusalem after the crucifixion, Pilate and his soldiers could have denied that Joseph received Jesus's body. If Joseph's tomb were previously occupied, he, and likely others, could have contested Matthew's point that it was "new." As far as we can tell historically, Matthew's claims remained unchallenged by those who could have called the facts into question.

🔗: *Was it risky for Joseph to approach Pilate for the body of Jesus?*

🔗: *In what ways are you called to risk your place in society or work for the cause of Christ?*

APPLICATION POINT – The underlying point of the whole passage is that we should believe in the resurrection. That being said, a number of other points should draw our attention because of their relevance to our lives. For instance, Joseph of Arimathea was willing to be a witness for Jesus in the public square at great risk to himself. Joseph was a wealthy man. He had access to the elite in society. Jesus had just been executed as a criminal. This did not dissuade him, however, from interceding on Jesus's behalf with Pilate at great risk to himself. Followers of Christ need to represent Christ in public and even in our private conversations about public life. We need to look at how our Christian faith should influence our views on the issues facing our nation, and we need to vote from these convictions. Do not listen to claims that we should leave our Christian faith out of the public arena or politics. No one can live as though their beliefs about the most important things in life do not matter, turned on and off as the occasion demands. Those who reject Christ have made an idol of their sins, and they do not leave those idols behind when they enter the public square or political discourse. Christians must be ready to represent Christ at whatever cost and in whatever season. Joseph of Arimathea modeled this for us when he approached Pilate to care for Jesus's body.

🔗: *Who could the readers of Matthew's Gospel have appealed to for verification that Jesus had died?*

Q: *What measure did Joseph take to protect Jesus's body?*

Joseph of Arimathea received Jesus's body and prepared it for burial. This was a tedious process, requiring up-close contact with the deceased. If Jesus were merely passed out from exhaustion and not really dead, Joseph would have known. The claim that Jesus never died and thus never rose from the dead is unsubstantiated from Matthew's Gospel. Joseph's testimony would refute this claim.

Q: *What does Jesus's death mean for us beyond the forgiveness of our sins?*

Q: *What do you do when you feel as though you do not have an advocate?*

APPLICATION POINT – We can be certain that Christ died on our behalf. In this life, we can often feel alone and as though we have no advocate. This can be especially true in the aftermath of COVID-19 and the common resulting search for employment. After being turned down for numerous posts, it can be easy to feel as though no one will ever act on your behalf. The digital nature of the application process these days reinforces these fears. Christians, however, can always know that Jesus Christ has acted on our behalf, even at the cost of His own life. We need not despair in times of need but should instead dwell on what Christ has done for us.

2. THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND PHARISEES

■ MATTHEW 27:62–66

Q: *How did the priests and Pharisees refer to Jesus?*

Q: *What claim were these leaders seeking to refute?*

The Pharisees approached Pilate and referred to Jesus as an imposter and fraud. In their minds, Jesus's death was the last word in their struggle with this troublemaker. His radical claims and disregard for their traditions had come to nothing. In reality, Jesus's message and ministry were about to be authenticated by His resurrection. It was the priests and Pharisees who were the real imposters. It was their traditions that were fraudulent. This is one of history's greatest reversals, and it is based in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

🔍: *Who understood Jesus's claims better, His disciples or the priests and Pharisees?*

🔍: *Since the priests and Pharisees were aware of Jesus's claims, why did they oppose Him?*

APPLICATION – Unlike the disciples, the priests and Pharisees seem to have perfectly understood Jesus's claim that He would die and rise from the grave three days later. They even took action on this claim. They went to Pilate and asked for permission to falsify Jesus's claim. But they were the ones outside looking in after the resurrection. This shows us that following Jesus requires more than just knowing what He said or a few details about His life. Following Jesus demands that we believe in His message and confess Him as Lord of our lives. On most Easters, churches are filled with people who know a few things about Jesus. For whatever reason, they feel obligated to appear at a church service, but like the priests and Pharisees, they are far from being followers of Jesus. This year commit to having challenging conversations with people about the meaning of Easter. This is the one time of year when they come to you, and you have their attention. Commit to making the gospel of Jesus Christ known to those who are on the outside looking in.

🔍: *Why did the priests and Pharisees request for Pilate to have the tomb guarded?*

🔍: *How has their request worked against them for nearly two thousand years?*

Although, in their minds, the threat had passed, the priests and Pharisees were still afraid Jesus's disciples would steal His body and perpetuate His claims. Their solution was to have the tomb guarded by soldiers to ensure the

disciples would not be able to falsely claim He had risen. Then they could put Jesus and His disciples to rest.

Their plan did not go as intended. Instead, when Jesus arose from the grave, it provided extra witnesses who could affirm Jesus was risen from the dead. Furthermore, by ensuring that the disciples could not steal the body, the priests and Pharisees ruled out one explanation that they could have used to explain the empty tomb. Their plan backfired and worked against them. (Of course, in Matthew 28:13, they came up with a ruse to perpetuate the very idea they had worked to discredit.)

🔗: *Do you ever fear the plans of those who conspire against God?*

🔗: *How has God disrupted the plans of those who would challenge His rule?*

APPLICATION POINT – God is able to bring to nothing the plans of those who rebel against Him. We need not fear the plans of those who oppose Him. Many Christians in America become anxious when the opposing political party comes into power. It is not uncommon to hear laments that the end of America or the end of freedom has arrived or something such as this. They could be right. If God has determined the decline of any nation, then that nation will surely fall. But Christians need never worry that God will be caught off guard or overcome by the plans of the wicked. As with the plans of the priests and Pharisees, He can bring the plans of the wicked to nothing if He chooses. We need not ever fear.

3. THE ANGEL

📖 MATTHEW 28:1-7

🔗: *Who opened Jesus's tomb on the day of the resurrection?*

🔗: *Why did Matthew describe the appearance of the angel?*

The resurrection was a supernatural act. Thus, it is fitting that it would be substantiated by supernatural evidence. These verses are filled with descriptions of the supernatural quality of the angel. He descended from heaven. He appeared and was dressed as an angel. He frightened everyone who saw him. By opening the tomb and sitting on the stone, the angel served as a supernatural witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Q: *What is your belief in the supernatural like?*

Q: *Do you think most Christians over- or underemphasize the work of supernatural beings on the earth?*

APPLICATION POINT – In a quickly secularizing culture, Christians are going to be challenged more and more concerning their belief in the supernatural. But the Bible clearly presents an active supernatural world at work within the world we see. Christians are not at liberty to abandon belief in the supernatural. Not only would it deny Scripture, but it would also deny one of the ways in which the Bible authenticates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This does not warrant finding supernatural causes behind every development. Belief in the work of the supernatural is especially troubling when used as a cover for unchecked human sin (i.e., a demon is making him do that). But the Bible affirms the supernatural, and Jesus’s resurrection is verified by a supernatural source. We dare not deny this.

Q: *What other evidence does the angel reveal?*

Q: *After showing the evidence for the resurrection, what does the angel tell the women to do?*

The angel was a supernatural evidence of the resurrection, but he pointed to the physical evidence of the resurrection. He rolled away the stone of the empty tomb. He announced that Jesus was not in the tomb because He rose from the dead. He invited the women to enter the tomb to see where Jesus lay. These are all physical indications of what had happened.

After inviting the women to examine the evidence for themselves, the angel instructed them to go report to the disciples what had happened. They were to become witnesses.

Q: *What is your response to the evidence of the risen Lord Jesus?*

Q: *Since this evidence has been preserved in literary form in Matthew's Gospel, it has become secondary evidence. We do not see the evidence itself but read a report about it. How does this influence our faith?*

APPLICATION POINT – Our access to the evidence of Jesus's birth comes from the Gospels and the other New Testament documents as well as extrabiblical sources. We only have secondary access to the evidence for the resurrection. Our confidence in the resurrection can be only as high as our confidence in the Bible. This is one reason belief in the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture is crucial to a confident and growing faith in Christ. The Bible is God's Word. We can trust God's Word, including what it has to say concerning the resurrection.

4. JESUS

▣ MATTHEW 28:8-10

Q: *What was the women's response to the risen Lord Jesus?*

Q: *What did Jesus instruct the two Marys to do after they encountered Him?*

The events already described are extraordinary. The angel descended from heaven and rolled away the stone. The typically terrifying Roman guard was terrified to the point of immobilization. The angel spoke to the two women and offered to show them proof of the most wonderful event in all of human history. But the most amazing moment of that Easter morning had to be when the women came face to face with the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Somehow, Jesus's appearance almost seems like an afterthought to all that the women had witnessed thus far. They were not seeking Him. They were on their way to His disciples when He seemed to suddenly appear out of nowhere.

The women responded to Jesus with worship, which Jesus accepted. Worship is an expression of one's dependence and submission to a worthy figure. Jesus's resurrection from the dead affirms that He is worthy of worship. The resurrection is the first piece of the new creation, which Jesus launched on that first Easter morning. And worshipping Jesus will be the centerpiece of this new creation.

Q: *What actions do you take to worship Jesus?*

Q: *Is worship a public or private activity or both?*

APPLICATION POINT – Worship can often feel uncomfortable in our culture. We are not used to expressing adoration or extreme allegiance. When singing, we can sometimes feel like all eyes are on us or that everyone can hear us drone on out of tune. This is a sign, however, that we are not completely given to worship. When we truly worship, we leave ourselves behind and focus completely on Jesus. As you worship in your corporate setting over the next few weeks, strain to move the focus from yourself to your Savior, Jesus Christ.

NEXT STEPS

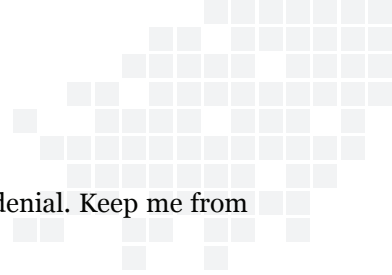

It is important for us to know why we believe in the resurrection and be able to make a case for believing in it. Matthew presents physical, supernatural, and eyewitness evidence of the resurrection. This evidence depends upon the reliability of Scripture. Write out some of the key details and verses for each type of evidence in summary form. Take your argument a step further by explaining why we believe Scripture is inspired and inerrant (2 Timothy 3:15–17).

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

Resurrected Lord Jesus, my heart seeks to worship and adore you.

Father, help me to be able to defend my belief in the resurrection to others.



Lord, make me aware of how the supernatural world is at work around me. Keep me from denial. Keep me from fanciful obsession.

Lord, bring the wicked plans of the rulers and influencers of this world to nothing.

