

Last week, we looked at Jesus’ suffering and death that crushed Satan’s head, satisfied God’s wrath at our sins, saved us from endless torment in hell, and opened to us the doors of heaven. This week, we return to His tomb. The huge stone rolled over the entrance might remind you of week five when we talked about Daniel as he spent the night in the lions’ den, a huge stone rolled across the entrance. The next morning, King Darius stood outside the tomb, doubtfully asking Daniel if his God had rescued him from the lions. When he heard Daniel’s strong voice respond from behind the stone, the king was filled with wonder, joy, and amazement.

Something similar happened on the third day when Jesus rose from His tomb. As far as the Gospels record, there were no witnesses to the moment of Jesus’ resurrection. No human was standing in the tomb to watch His breath return, see His eyes open, see Him arise. But no human actually *had* to witness that moment to know that it really happened. We only need witnesses to the risen Jesus—people who saw Him alive, standing, walking, talking. And over a period of forty days, Jesus appeared to witnesses over and over again. There are more than enough sightings recorded for us in the Bible. In his great resurrection chapter in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul, one of those eyewitnesses, writes, “He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:5–6). Paul’s point is clear, at the time he wrote 1 Corinthians, witnesses were still alive who could testify they had seen the risen Christ, as had Paul himself.

After Jesus left the empty tomb, there was nothing to see there except the empty linen cloths which Joseph and Nicodemus had wrapped around Jesus when they buried Him. But those empty cloths spoke volumes to any who would think about them. And they answered one of the strangest lies that was passed among the Jews.

When the guards went to the chief priests to report to them that there had been an earthquake, an angel came down from heaven and rolled the stone away from the tomb, they found the body of Jesus was missing. The only thing in the tomb were the cloths Jesus had left behind.

Rather than admit they were wrong and seriously consider that Jesus might be the promised Savior, the chief priests bribed the guards instructing them to spread the story that they had fallen asleep and Jesus’ disciples had stolen the body.

Any reasoning Jew should have seen through that. It was widely known that Roman soldiers who fell asleep on their watch would immediately be executed—especially if that person or thing they were watching had been stolen as they slept. Also, it was an undeniable fact that Jesus’ disciples had abandoned Him at His arrest after Jesus had stopped Peter’s attempt to defend Him. Even now the disciples were quaking in their sandals behind locked doors for fear of the Jewish leaders hunting them down as well.

But an even stronger argument against that story were the empty grave cloths themselves. If the disciples had stirred up the courage to sneak in during the night to steal Jesus’ body, if they had been able to sneak past the sleeping guards and silently roll the stone away, why would they risk taking the time in the tomb to unwrap Jesus’ body? They would have had every reason to expect that body was beginning to decay. Wouldn’t it have been smarter to take the body with the wrappings intact around it?

No, the empty wrappings were an eloquent testimony that Jesus had risen and was alive. But the first witnesses didn’t recognize that right away. Mary Magdalene, a woman who had followed Jesus, saw the grave cloths, rushed back to the men, and told Peter and John someone had stolen Jesus’ body. Peter and John ran out to inspect the tomb. They went in and saw the linen cloths lying where Jesus’ body had been, but they didn’t see Jesus. Confused by this, they returned to the city.

Meanwhile, Mary had returned to the tomb. We read in John 20: “But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain... They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.” Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to Him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that He had said these things to her” (John 20:11–18).

Later that afternoon, Jesus appeared to two of His followers as they were leaving Jerusalem and walking to a nearby village called Emmaus. He asked

them why they were sad and their faces downcast. In amazement that this stranger didn't know what had happened, they related the events of Holy Week—Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, then His stunning arrest, trials, and crucifixion, which had shattered the men's hopes that Jesus would redeem Israel. They also related how the women had said Jesus had risen, but they didn't believe them.

Finally, Jesus took them through the Old Testament, showing from passages like those we looked at in our first five weeks that the Christ had to suffer and die and afterward enter into His glory. Then when they stopped for supper, He revealed Himself to them as He broke the bread for them.

They rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the Twelve and learned that Jesus had appeared privately to Peter earlier in the day. Then as they were relating their experience along the road, Jesus came and stood among them. They were terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost—an indication that Jesus must have materialized out of thin air. After all, if He had knocked on the door or climbed in a window, no one would have thought it was a ghost. He showed them His hands and side, inviting them to touch Him and see that He had flesh and bones. He even ate some of their fish to show it was really Him, risen from the dead.

When the Twelve gathered that night, there were two missing—the betrayer Judas, who had killed himself when he learned Jesus was condemned, and Thomas, who had not been with them that night. Through the following week, the disciples assured Thomas they had seen Jesus, but he refused to believe, insisting that he must put his fingers in Jesus' nail-marked hands and put his hand into the spear wound in Jesus' side or he will never believe. One week later, while the doors were locked and Thomas was with them, Jesus appeared to them. He invited Thomas to touch His hands and put his hand into Jesus' side. "Do not disbelieve but believe." Thomas answered Him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:27-28)

Jesus' resurrection was proof of His victory over Satan, sin, death, and hell. It also assures us that when He returns, He will also raise us from the dead. We need not fear death. In fact, Jesus will raise all people from the dead, believers and unbelievers, & all will stand before Him to be judged.

Think about it. Not a single child of Adam and Eve will be able to escape standing before our Judge, God's Son, Jesus Christ on Judgment Day. It doesn't matter how they died, what happened to their bodies—Jesus will raise all of us and each of us, and we will stand before Him, our eternal destiny in His hands:

living in bliss with Him in the new heavens and the new earth or suffering eternal torment in the fires of hell with the devil and all his angels.

If that strikes terror into your heart, it should. Because all of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. None of us has lived the perfect life God demands for anyone who would dwell with Him in His restored creation. But Jesus Christ lived that perfect life in your place and mine. He took our failings, our sins, our offenses upon Himself and suffered and died on the cross to pay the penalty of death and eternal suffering we deserve. That is the story of our Savior and the great salvation He won for all humanity.

Over a period of forty days, the risen Jesus appeared to His followers to assure them of His resurrection, show how He had fulfilled the promises throughout the Old Testament, and teach them what He had accomplished by His suffering and death. On the fortieth day, Jesus ascended into heaven in the sight of His disciples.

Now He sits at the Father's right hand in heaven. He intercedes for us and governs all things that happen on earth for the benefit of His Church as it works to bring the Good News of Jesus' salvation to all the world. Through pastors, missionaries, teachers, and each of us Christians, Jesus Christ continues to minister to people, proclaiming the Good News of God's mercy and grace, confronting sin, and forgiving repentant sinners. He builds His kingdom, His bride the Church, and on the Last Day will return to completely restore His creation and live with us through all eternity. Amen.