***Who Moved the Stone?***

**Resurrection Sunday, Mark 16:1-8 April 9, 2023**

***Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise,  
they were on their way to the tomb and asked each other,  
“Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”***

**Mark 16:2-3**

**The Easter morning story**

*When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body. 2 Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb 3 and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”*

*4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. 5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.*

*6 “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’ ”*

*8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*

Mark 16:1-8 (see Matthew 28:8 for the very next thing that happens)

1. In preparing to carry out their final obligations to Jesus, these women are publicly identifying themselves with Jesus

2. The stone is rolled away (“thrown” in John’s gospel) not so Jesus could get out but so that we can  
see in

3. The “young man” reminds the women that this is happening “just as he told you.”

4. Mark ends his story with the “fear of anticipation” precisely because everyone who knows that the story ends with this fear resolved when the women and disciples meet Jesus!

5. From this moment on, the empty tomb has been essential to our belief in the resurrection

![Engineering drawing

Description automatically generated with medium confidence]()

**The center of Act 3 (and the setting of our text)**

*37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.*

*38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”*

*40 Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. 41 In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.*

*42 It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. 44 Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. 45 When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. 46 So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.*

Mark 15:37-47

1. Jesus’ death (“a ransom for many”) is the dramatic climax of Mark’s gospel, but the resurrection completes Mark’s gospel

2. The women are acting out of incredible courage and faith

3. Jesus’ death and resurrection assure me of the credibility of his teaching, the integrity of his claims, and his power to save (see Romans 4:25 and Deffinbaugh’s sermon)

**From resurrection alarm to resurrection joy**

*6 “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him . . . .”*

Mark 16

1. The gospel doesn’t end at the cross – the resurrection matters because Scripture matters and because faith needs a solid foundation

*Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.*

*3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 6 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.*

1 Corinthians 15 (but get to “And is Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile” in 15:12-19)

2. In the resurrection story, fear turns to joy and lives are transformed when I meet Jesus

***36****As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!”* ***37****But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.* ***38****And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?* ***39****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.”* ***40****And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.* ***41****And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?”* ***42****They gave him a piece of broiled fish,* ***43****and he took it and ate before them.*

Luke 24

3. This is the salvation to which Isaiah looked forward and the salvation on which we look back  
(with thanks to Kim Riddlebarger’s “He Is Risen” sermon)

*6 On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare*

*a feast of rich food for all peoples,*

*a banquet of aged wine— the best of meats and the finest of wines.*

*7 On this mountain he will destroy*

*the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations;*

*8 he will swallow up death forever.*

*The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces;*

*he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth.*

*The Lord has spoken.*

*9 In that day they will say, “Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us.*

*This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.”*

Isaiah 25

**Resources for studying Mark**

The poster for Mark can be found at [*bibleproject.com*](file:///I:\Lent%202023\bibleproject.com)

Redeemer Presbyterian’s Lent devotions are online at [*https://gospelinlife.com/lent-devotional/*](https://gospelinlife.com/lent-devotional/)

There is a wonderful series of sermons by Kim Riddlebarger (though I think he gets the “don’t go into the village” part at least partly wrong) at [*http://kimriddlebarger.squarespace.com/downloadable-sermons-on-mark/*](http://kimriddlebarger.squarespace.com/downloadable-sermons-on-mark/)Kim Riddlebarger has his Mark 16 resurrection sermon at [*http://kimriddlebarger.squarespace.com/downloadable-sermons-on-mark/He%20Is%20Risen.%20%20He%20Is%20Not%20Here%20revised%2046.pdf*](http://kimriddlebarger.squarespace.com/downloadable-sermons-on-mark/He%20Is%20Risen.%20%20He%20Is%20Not%20Here%20revised%2046.pdf%20)

J. C. Ryle has an interesting commentary on Mark’s gospel at [*https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/mark16.htm*](https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/mark16.htm)

Doug’s favorite Mark commentaries include   
J.R. Edwards *The Gospel According to Mark* (Eerdmans, 2002)  
France’s NIGTC volume (Eerdmans, 2002)  
Hendricksen’s *Expository Commentary* (Baker, 1975)  
Walter Wessel’s volume on Mark in *Expositors’ Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1984)

Note: Again for this passage, I think Hendricksen has the best analysis.

Josh McDowell, at his Cru site, has a short introduction to the philosophy of the resurrection at [*https://www.josh.org/christianity-philosophy-or-history/*](https://www.josh.org/christianity-philosophy-or-history/)

Archibald Alexander has an interesting analysis at [*https://www.monergism.com/one-thing-you-lack*](https://www.monergism.com/one-thing-you-lack)

Spurgeon has a Mark 16 sermon at [*http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols34-36/chs2060.pdf*](http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols34-36/chs2060.pdf)

I appreciate Ray Stedman’s work on this text at [*https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/mark/the-child-in-our-midst*](https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/mark/the-child-in-our-midst)

Warfield (1884) has a powerful argument for the reliability of the apostolic eye-witness at [*https://www.monergism.com/resurrection-christ-historical-fact*](https://www.monergism.com/resurrection-christ-historical-fact)

*There are only three theories which can be possibly stated to account for these facts. Either, the original disciples of Christ were deceivers and deliberately concocted the story of the Resurrection; or, they were woefully deluded; or the Resurrection was a fact.*

I suggest Horton’s longer “Can We Still Believe in Resurrection?” article at [*https://www.monergism.com/can-we-still-believe-resurrection*](%20https:/www.monergism.com/can-we-still-believe-resurrection)He has a shorter resurrection article at [*https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/*](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/)

Bob Deffinbaugh’s resurrection sermon is at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ*](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ)I included this sermon in my notes because Deffinbaugh does a good job of noting the significance of the resurrection.

# The Burial and Resurrection of Christ

# Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ*](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ)

**(**[**John 19:38-20:31**](javascript:%7b%7d)**;** [**Matt. 27:57-28:15**](javascript:%7b%7d)**;** [**Mark 15:42-16:18**](javascript:%7b%7d)**;** [**Luke 23:50-24:43**](javascript:%7b%7d)**)**

### Introduction

One of my friends, Craig Baynham, tells the story of an uncle who one day was leisurely driving his convertible in the mountains. He had his top down, his radio turned up loud, and was enjoying to the full the beauties of the winding mountain road on which he was driving. So intent was he on the scenery, and so deafened by the blaring of his radio, he failed to notice the driver behind him becoming more and more impatient.

Finally the road presented sufficient room for the furious driver to pass. A blast of the horn and a shake of the fist (even a few not-so-well chosen words) were not sufficient to appease the anger of the hostile motorist. Forcing the uncle’s car to the side of the road he proceeded to verbally vent his frustration. Craig’s uncle, who had been oblivious to the whole matter until now, proceeded to apologize for the inconvenience he had caused. But no apology was sufficient.

“Your apology is not enough. I’m going to pick you up out of that car and beat you to a bloody pulp,” the man finally threatened. As the motorist began to close in on him, the uncle quickly removed a 45-caliber revolver from under the seat and aimed it point blank at his attacker. With only a moment’s hesitation the aggressor blurted out, “I accept your apology.” And with this he returned to his car and went his way.

The moral to this story is that the introduction of one unexpected element can completely change one’s perspective on a situation. That, in my mind, is precisely what occurred early on that Easter morning nearly 2,000 years ago. In the mind of the Jewish religious leaders, the crucifixion of Christ had once and for all dissolved the popular movement that centered about Jesus the Nazarene, which so threatened their position of leadership in the nation Israel.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ overruled the verdict of the Sanhedrin that Jesus was a malefactor who must be removed. When He rose triumphant from the dead, the claims and teachings of our Lord were undeniably validated. This event revitalized the feeble faith of the disciples and became the heart of the message which the apostles began to preach. It forced the enemies of the cross to face their responsibility for rejecting God’s Messiah and to reconsider the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead not only demonstrated the truth of His teaching, but the value of His death. It proved Him to be the Son of God. It transformed discouraged and disbelieving disciples into fearless preachers of the gospel. Those who shrank back from suffering were now gladly willing to suffer and die for the cause of Christ. One new element transformed the course of history. That element was the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave.

The importance of the resurrection can hardly be overstated. We should recall that our Lord had publicly staked His credibility on one final and conclusive sign to the nation, the sign of the prophet, Jonah.

“Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’ But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth’” ([Matthew 12:38-40](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The effectiveness of our Lord’s entire ministry hung upon His ability to rise from the grave. And lest we think of this only as a theoretical and historical issue, we must also recognize how crucial the resurrection of our Lord is to Christians today. It is an essential part of the gospel message that men must believe in order to be saved: “… if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved” ([Romans 10:9](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The resurrection is also the cornerstone of the Christian faith and our assurance of life beyond the grave: “… if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, your faith also is vain … and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins” ([1 Corinthians 15:14,17](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Let us give careful attention to this matter of our Lord’s burial and resurrection.

### The Burial of Jesus

In several ways the burial of our Lord prepared the way for His resurrection. It may seem needless to say, but the burial of our Lord testifies to the reality of His death. Skeptics and unbelievers have sometimes advocated a ‘swoon theory’[199](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P3962_1213536) which explains away the resurrection as merely the physical recovery of a dying Christ. Our Lord, they tell us, was not really dead, but merely unconscious. In the cool of the tomb, Jesus revived and went His way, limping from recorded history. The evidence against such a theory is too extensive to recount.

The death of Jesus was undisputed by everyone who witnessed His crucifixion.[200](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P3964_1214370) The Roman soldiers, who were experts in this field, were satisfied.[201](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P3965_1215353) Not only had they witnessed the unusual dismissal of His own spirit, but a spear was thrust into the side of our Lord, piercing the vital organs, probably including both His lungs and His heart. In addition, blood and water issued forth, which medically verified that death had already occurred.[202](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P3966_1215666) Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus prepared the corpse, which would have revealed the normal evidences of death.[203](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P3967_1217058) The women planned to return at a later time to further prepare the body ([Luke 23:55-56](javascript:%7b%7d)). There was not one glimmer of hope that life remained in our Lord’s body.

Matthew’s account of our Lord’s burial includes some very interesting detail, not mentioned by the other gospels. The request made of Pilate by the chief priests and Pharisees is most revealing:

“Now on the next day, which is the one after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and 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, lest the disciples 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. Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard, 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” ([Matthew 27:62-66](javascript:%7b%7d)).

First of all, this petition reflects a lingering uneasiness concerning the person of Jesus Christ and the power He possessed. Why would they still be wary, unless the way our Lord died evidenced a most unusual happening, the end of which was not yet in sight? (Cf. [Luke 23:48](javascript:%7b%7d).) Further, it indicates how aware the Jewish leaders were of our Lord’s teaching. They knew that He had staked His entire ministry on His ability to rise from the grave ([Matthew 12:38-40; 27:63](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Finally, the religious leaders unwittingly fulfilled the purpose of God by taking extreme security measures at the grave site. So long as the corpse was at hand, Christ could be shown to be only a self-deceived fanatic by His failure to rise from the dead. It would at least be possible for some of the disciples of Jesus to remove His body and claim He had risen. Pilate, who had to this point gone along with their requests, told them to use whatever means were necessary to provide maximum security. In their zeal to protect Jesus’ body from theft, the enemies of our Lord provided irrefutable evidence to the miraculous resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead.

The precautions taken by the Jewish and Roman leaders at the grave site of our Lord were something akin to the actions of Elijah at the contest on Mt. Carmel ([1 Kings 18:33-35](javascript:%7b%7d)). Three times Elijah commanded the altar to be drenched with water, making a fire humanly impossible to kindle. And yet this only heightened the effect on those who beheld the fire from heaven which consumed the wood, the sacrifice, the water, and the stones ([1 Kings 18:38](javascript:%7b%7d)).

I cannot pass by the burial of our Lord without several observations concerning the people who took part in the burial of the Savior. First, I must reluctantly acknowledge that none of the eleven disciples were there to claim the body of Jesus, as John the Baptist’s disciples had done ([Mark 6:29](javascript:%7b%7d)). Their absence at the foot of the cross and at the graveside was conspicuous.

It was two members of the Sanhedrin, the council which condemned our Lord, who cooperated in the burial of the Lord. Neither of these two were known to be courageous or bold in their faith ([John 19:38-39](javascript:%7b%7d)), but their love of Jesus outweighed their fear of their colleagues or of Rome. Joseph of Arimathea provided the tomb, while Nicodemus brought myrrh and aloes, spices customarily used in the preparation of the body for burial. Due to the lateness of the hour, things were done somewhat hastily ([Luke 23:54-56](javascript:%7b%7d); [John 19:42](javascript:%7b%7d)), and the final preparations would be made after the Sabbath.

Once again we find the women who ministered to our Lord, unashamed of their love for Him. As many have observed, they were the last to leave our Lord at His death and the first to return to find Him alive. The fact that our Lord first revealed Himself to Mary Magdalene must have been both a reward for her deep love and devotion, and a rebuke to the unbelief of the men who were His closest friends.

I must say that the more prominent role that is assigned to men in Scripture is no evidence of either greater spirituality or devotion to our Lord, nor is it any evidence of the rewards which we will receive from Him. It is not the magnitude of the task which brings about the commendation of the Savior, but the motive for our service (cf. [Matthew 10:40-42; 25:40](javascript:%7b%7d)). These women surely loved their Lord!

### The Resurrection of Our Lord

#### The Events of the Resurrection

As each of the gospel writers presents the resurrection from a different perspective, and with a different purpose,[204](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P3982_1221910) one cannot easily blend every event into a sequence[205](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P3983_1222954) that is completely satisfactory. This is no reflection on the accuracy of each account,[206](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P3984_1223159) but the product of our own lack of information.

Our Lord, unwitnessed by mortal eyes, was literally, physically raised to new life from the dead. This was not merely the restoration of life, the rejoining of soul and body, but a transformation whereby Jesus was both similar to His old self, and yet strangely different as well. His body still bore the marks of His crucifixion, and Mary was able to recognize Him by His voice ([John 20:16](javascript:%7b%7d)). He no longer was limited by objects, such as locked doors, grave clothes, or tombstones, but could pass through solid objects (cf. [John 20:19](javascript:%7b%7d)).

After the resurrection, an earthquake occurred, which was instrumental in the angel’s removal of the stone, covering the tomb. As others have commented, this was not for the benefit of our Lord (so that He could get out), but for the disciples, so they could look in and be convinced of His resurrection. Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb first, saw that it was empty, concluded that the body had been moved,[207](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P3987_1225197) and reported this to Peter and John.

Following the sequence of events as outlined by John, Mary Magdalene first arrived at the tomb, found the stone already rolled away, and concluded that someone had removed the body of Jesus ([John 20:1-2](javascript:%7b%7d)). On hearing her report, Peter and John[208](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P3989_1226399) ran out to the tomb. John, being the younger, arrived first and looking in from outside, could see the linen wrappings lying inside. Peter, undaunted by the thought of entering a tomb, barged in for a closer look, followed by John ([John 20:4-8](javascript:%7b%7d)).

While Peter’s response is not recorded, John says of himself that he believed.[209](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P3991_1226899) If John did truly believe Jesus had been raised from the dead it would be due to the evidence inside the tomb, and not that contained in Scripture, “For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead” ([John 20:9](javascript:%7b%7d)).

John also must have kept his conclusions to himself, for faith does not seem to come to the disciples until our Lord appeared to them ([John 20:19](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.). The disciples had refused to accept the report of the women, both concerning the angelic messenger and his words, and of seeing the risen Christ ([Mark 16:9-11](javascript:%7b%7d),14; [Luke 24:11;22-24](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The evidence inside the tomb was compelling. The stone was rolled away, the guards were missing, the body, likewise was gone. But strangely the evidence was not one which pointed to theft. Had the body been stolen, the thieves would surely not have taken the time to unwrap the body there. The wrappings were neatly arranged, not flung aside in haste. Perhaps they were not unwrapped at all, but simply collapsed, like a cocoon, since our Lord could have simply passed through them as He later did the bolted door of the Upper Room ([John 20:19](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Not yet seeing the Lord, the disciples simply went home to await further developments. If they believed the body to be stolen, surely they grasped the fact that they would be the prime suspects, and might expect a visit from the authorities.

Mary lingered at the tomb. Here was the place where she had last seen His body. When she looked into the tomb, she beheld not only the place where the body had once lain and the grave clothes, but also two angels. It seems that she did not recognize them as such and mechanically answered their query as to why she continued to weep ([John 20:13](javascript:%7b%7d)).

In what to me is the most moving scene of the entire New Testament, Mary is now confronted by a third Person, Whom she does not yet recognize as her Lord. “Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?’ Supposing Him to be one of those who had removed the body, she replied, ‘Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away’” ([John 20:15](javascript:%7b%7d)). And then, in the one word reply, ‘Mary,’ she recognized the voice of the One Whom she most dearly loved. Tears of sorrow became those of joy. She grasped Him so as never again to be separated from Him. It was not that Jesus couldn’t be touched (cf. [John 20:25](javascript:%7b%7d)), but that men could not cling to Him so as to keep Him from returning to the Father. He was alive, but He must shortly go.

“Stop clinging to Me; for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren, and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God” ([John 20:17](javascript:%7b%7d)).

With great joy Mary departed to share her good news with the disciples. What a disappointment their unbelief must have been to her. At least she and the other women knew He was alive ([Luke 24:10-11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

#### The Evidence for the Resurrection

Evidences for the actual, historical, physical resurrection of our Lord on the third day are not wanting. Several lines of evidence will be mentioned.

**First of all, there was the empty tomb.** This in spite of the fact that the greatest security efforts were taken. An armed guard was on constant duty, realizing the consequences of failing to do their task well. A great stone ([Mark 16:4](javascript:%7b%7d)) lay outside the tomb, making a clandestine entry or escape impossible. And on this stone was placed the seal of Rome, threatening death to any who would defy Rome’s authority by breaking it.

To any grave robber, there was no great value attached to this body, surely not so great as to challenge Rome to steal it. There were plenty of other bodies available at much less risk. To the enemies of Christ, there was no reason to steal the body. Their cause was strengthened by its presence under Roman guard. And for the disciples, there was no desire to steal the body. For them, the matter was as dead as the Lord Whom they had followed. What could be gained by taking His body? Who would wish to pursue the cause of a dead Messiah?[210](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P4004_1231734)

We must not overlook the testimony of the guards themselves ([Matthew 28:11-15](javascript:%7b%7d)). They witnessed the earthquake which the angel employed to remove the stone. They beheld the radiant appearance of the angel and trembled in his presence. They knew that Jesus’ body was not taken, but transformed. And surely they could not have known who ‘took’ the body if they were really sleeping when it happened (cf. [Matthew 28:13](javascript:%7b%7d)). The religious leaders feebly tried to cover up this incident.

**Then there was the evidence inside the tomb.**[211](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P4007_1233326) The grave clothes were neatly arranged, and not scattered about. This evidenced a calm and orderly event, not a hasty theft. Perhaps the wrappings were simply collapsed, rather than unrolled, evidence of the fact that Jesus simply passed through His burial shroud. John may well have been saying that his belief was the sole result of the evidence inside that empty tomb, without any grasp of the biblical necessity for such an event, and before he had even seen the Lord Jesus raised and alive. And inside the tomb were the angelic messengers who assured those who came that they had come to the right tomb, but that Jesus had already been raised, just as He promised.

**Then, too, there was the earthquake which shook Jerusalem at the time of Jesus’ death and opened the graves of the believing dead** ([Matthew 27:51-53](javascript:%7b%7d)). After our Lord’s resurrection, these resurrected saints appeared to many in Jerusalem. I would conjecture that these Old Testament saints were the first fruits of our Lord’s resurrection power. I believe that they appeared in Jerusalem during the 40 days of our Lord’s sojourn on earth, and then, with Jesus, ascended to Heaven.

**There was, as well, the eye-witness appearances of our Lord to various groups or individuals after His resurrection.** He appeared to Mary Magdalene ([John 20:14-17](javascript:%7b%7d)), and to the women who had come to the tomb ([Matthew 28:9-10](javascript:%7b%7d)). Jesus also appeared to Peter and to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus ([Luke 24:13-35](javascript:%7b%7d)). He also revealed Himself to the disciples, once in the absence of Thomas ([John 20:19-25](javascript:%7b%7d)), and then with him present ([John 20:26-29](javascript:%7b%7d)). In all, over 500 witnesses could be named who had seen our Lord risen from the dead. And Paul made this claim at a time when many of those witnesses were still alive and able to verify the claims of the apostles ([1 Corinthians 15:5-8](javascript:%7b%7d)).

**One of the most convincing evidences of the resurrection is the dramatic change in the lives of the disciples.** Before the resurrection, they were a forlorn and defeated group of men. Afterward, they were men who fearlessly proclaimed the gospel, even in the face of great opposition and danger (cf. [Acts 2-5](javascript:%7b%7d)).

### The Significance of the Resurrection

**(1) The empty tomb conclusively established the credibility of our Lord Jesus Christ and His teaching.** Throughout His ministry, our Lord was challenged to prove Himself to His skeptics. Many signs and wonders had been accomplished by the Lord Jesus, but His opponents persisted in their unbelief. At last, Jesus refused to grant further signs other than one final demonstration of His power, that of His resurrection from the grave ([Matthew 12:33-40](javascript:%7b%7d)). When our Lord arose from the dead, it was His last sign to Israel as to His divine power and authority. His resurrection was the dominant theme of apostolic preaching.[212](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P4014_1236177)

**(2) The resurrection went beyond attesting to the integrity of Jesus in assuring men of His identity as the Son of God.** “Who was declared with power to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead …” ([Romans 1:4](javascript:%7b%7d)). It was Jesus’ claim to be the Son of God which was the basis for Jesus’ condemnation by the Jewish Sanhedrin ([Luke 22:70](javascript:%7b%7d); [John 19:7](javascript:%7b%7d)). The resurrection was God’s way of publicly overruling the verdict of the Sanhedrin and testifying that Jesus was, indeed, the Son of God, even as He claimed.

**(3) The resurrection demonstrated our Lord’s ability to save.** “He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification” ([Romans 4:25](javascript:%7b%7d)). Throughout His earthly life and ministry, Jesus had spoken of Himself as the One Who had come ‘to seek and to save that which was lost.’[213](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P4017_1237048) While the cross demonstrates the love of our Lord and His willingness to save men, the empty tomb reveals the power of our Lord and His ability to save.[214](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P4018_1237246) Warfield likens the Christ’s resurrection to His healing of the paralytic in Mark chapter two. If Christ can make a paralytic walk, can He not also forgive sins?

**(4) The fact of the resurrection confronts the Christian with the necessity of godly living.** Throughout Scripture we are exhorted to make our practice conform to our position. In the sixth chapter of Romans, Paul shows the folly of the Christian continuing to live in sin. We cannot claim to have died to sin in Jesus Christ without endeavoring to cease living in sin. We cannot profess to have been raised to new life in Christ without some evidence of a newness of life in our daily walk ([Romans 6:1-11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

**(5) Closely related to our last point, the resurrection provides the Christian with a measure of the power which is at work in him to enable him to live the Christian life.** “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you” ([Romans 8:11](javascript:%7b%7d)). God supplies the ability to do whatever He commands. The resurrection is the measure of the power which is at work in us.

**(6) The empty tomb firmly roots our spiritual destiny in the soil of history.** Many recent theologians have attempted to convince us that it really does not matter whether or not the tomb was really empty, that it is only our resurrection faith which counts.[215](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P4022_1239407) The New Testament writers refuse to speak of a faith ungrounded in history. In fact, our faith stands or falls on the historicity of the resurrection ([1 Corinthians 15:1-19](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Furthermore, our Lord promised His followers that the Holy Spirit would convict men of sin, righteousness, and judgment ([John 16:3](javascript:%7b%7d)). The basis for the Spirit’s conviction concerning the righteousness of Christ was the fact of His resurrection and ascension: “And concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me” ([John 16:10](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The fact that Christianity is subject to factual and historical verification opens the door for Christian apologetics. The facts bear out that Christianity at its roots is both supernatural and historical. Men need not take leaps of faith, for faith can and must be rooted in fact. While apologetics can never convince men of the truth (cf. [Luke 16:31](javascript:%7b%7d)), historical facts concerning Christ’s resurrection do provide the Holy Spirit with a basis for convicting men of the truths of the gospel.

Finally, the fact of a risen Savior assures the Christian of a hope which lives beyond the grave. In the words of the apostle Paul, “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus” ([1 Thessalonians 4:14](javascript:%7b%7d)).[216](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P4026_1242087)

### Conclusion

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ has much to say to the unbeliever. It demands that the claims of One Who cannot be held captive by death must be taken seriously. Have you carefully considered the claims of this Jesus Who yet lives, 2000 years beyond His crucifixion?

Also, the resurrection of Christ is a warning to those who die apart from a saving faith in the work of the Savior. Some today welcome death as the only viable solution to a world of pain, frustration and seeming futility. May I remind you that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead means that death does not end it all for the unsaved. Paul tells us that Christ’s resurrection from the dead assures all men of resurrection from physical death: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” ([1 Corinthians 15:22](javascript:%7b%7d)).[217](https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ#P4031_1242968)

The frightening reality is that those who have not come to faith in Christ must spend an eternity apart from Him in judgment (cf. [2 Thessalonians 1:9](javascript:%7b%7d)). Death is not the end for the non-Christian. Everyone will be raised from physical death, and those who have not believed in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of men must face judgment beyond the grave: “And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment” ([Hebrews 9:27](javascript:%7b%7d)).

There is yet another danger for the unbeliever, and that is to equate intellectual understanding and academic assent with saving faith. You may say, “I believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God Who gave His life to save sinners.” That is not enough, for James tells us that the demons also believe ([James 2:19](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The difference between academic belief and saving faith is this: The unbeliever acknowledges the facts of the gospel without adhering to the Savior. The true Christian believes that Christ died for sinners and rose again from the dead. But he goes the extra step from belief in a concept to a commitment to Christ. The Christian says with sincerity Christ died on the cross, and I with (in) Him. Christ rose from the dead, and with Him, so did I ([Romans 6:1-11](javascript:%7b%7d); [Colossians 2:8-15](javascript:%7b%7d)). Salvation is trusting in the work of Christ as the sole basis of your eternal salvation. It rests upon historic facts, but goes from these facts to personal faith in the person and work of Christ on the cross. His death was to bear the penalty of sinners. His resurrection was for the justification of sinners. Are you resting in His work alone?

Finally, there is admonition and instruction for true believers in the Lord Jesus from this passage. Do you see how devastating and debilitating unbelief is? How fruitless and frustrating for the disciples of our Lord when they doubted His presence and power among them.

I do not really believe that the disciples conceived of our Lord as forever gone. They probably would have expressed a hope of seeing Him again in the resurrection, much as Martha did at the death of Lazarus ([John 11:24](javascript:%7b%7d)). What disabled the disciples was that they felt that they would no longer experience His presence and power at the present, in the midst of their activities and ministries. The resurrection dealt with this in a mighty way.

But isn’t the problem of the disciples essentially the same problem which you and I face? Don’t we often refuse to believe that Jesus Christ is alive and well and working in and among us right now? Isn’t it true that we often think of Jesus as coming in the ‘sweet bye and bye’ rather than working mightily in our midst? It is the assurance of Jesus’ power and presence among us now which gives us assurance and confidence that we labor not alone.

199 For a devastating analysis of this theory, see “The Resurrection—A Historical Fact” by B. B. Warfield*. Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfiel*d -*I*. Ed. by John Meeter (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), pp. 183-184. This volume contains two very persuasive articles concerning the historicity of the resurrection (pp. 178-192) and the fundamental importance of the doctrine of the resurrection (pp. 193-202).

200 “What thoughts concerning the Dead Christ filled the minds of Joseph of Arimathaea, of Nicodemus, and of the other disciples of Jesus, as well as of the Apostles and of the pious women? They believed Him to be dead, and they did not expect Him to rise again from the dead—at least, in our accepted sense of it. Of this there is abundant evidence from the moment of His Death, in the burial spices brought by Nicodemus, in those prepared by the women (both of which were intended as against corruption), in the sorrow of the women at the empty tomb, in their supposition that the Body had been removed, in the perplexity and bearing of the Apostles, in the doubts of so many, and indeed in the express statement: ‘For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.’” Alford Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, American Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), II, p. 623.

201 Cf. [John 19:33](javascript:%7b%7d).

202 Tasker quotes John Lyle Cameron: “The soldier was a Roman: he would be well trained, proficient, and would know his duty. He would know which part of the body to pierce in order that he might obtain a speedily fatal result or ensure that the victim was undeniably dead. He would thrust through the left side of the chest a little below the centre. Here he would penetrate the heart and the great blood vessels at their origin, and also the lung on the side. The soldier, standing below our crucified Lord as He hung on the cross, would thrust upwards under the left ribs. The broad, clean cutting, two-edged spearhead would enter the left side of the upper abdomen, would open the greatly distended stomach, would pierce the diaphragm, would cut, wide open, the heart and great blood vessels, arteries and veins now fully distended with blood, a considerable proportion of all the blood in the body, and would lacerate the lung. The wound would be large enough to permit the open hand to be thrust into it. Blood from the greatly engorged veins, pulmonary vessel and dilated right side of the heart, together with water from the acutely dilated stomach, would flow forth in abundance.” R.V.G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), pp. 212-213.

203 [John 19:38-41](javascript:%7b%7d). I find it difficult to follow Edersheim at this point, where he suggests that none of the normal evidences of death would accompany His expiration. This is on the premise that Scripture prophecies that corruption will not occur in our Lord’s body. See *Life and Times*, II, p. 615.

204 “St. Matthew describes the impression of the full evidence of that Easter morning on friend and foe, and then hurries us from the Jerusalem stained with Christ’s Blood back to the sweet Lake and the blessed Mount where first He spake. It is, as if he longed to realise the Risen Christ in the scenes where he had learned to know Him. St Mark, who is much more brief, gives not only a mere summary, but if one might use the expression, tells it as from the bosom of the Jerusalem family, from the house of his mother Mary. St. Luke seems to have made most full inquiry as to all the facts of the Resurrection, and his narrative might almost be inscribed: ‘Easter Day in Jerusalem.’ St. John paints such scenes—during the whole forty days, whether in Jerusalem or Galilee—as were most significant and teachful of this threefold lesson of his Gospels: that Jesus was the Christ, that He was the Son of God, and that, believing, we have life in His Name.” Edersheim, *Life and Times*, II, p. 622.

205 For one proposed sequence, cf. J.W. Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), pp. 611-612.

206 “No doubt there are difficulties connected with the resurrection narratives. The order in which the appearances occurred, for example, is not so clear as to be undisputed. It should not disturb us that the various Evangelists introduce variety in details, for this is true of their records of the ministry as a whole. Broadus rightly says, “The sacred writers do not treat their Lord’s resurrection as a doubtful point, needing to be established by their statements, but as an unquestionable fact.” What Sabatier wrote about the variations in the three accounts of Paul’s encounter with the risen Lord ([Acts 9:22-26](javascript:%7b%7d)) applies equally well to the resurrection narratives. “It is obvious to any unprejudiced mind that they were **undesiged**…. They are discrepancies of precisely the sort that one always finds existing in the most faithful repetitions of the same narrative…. They cannot in any way affect the reality of the event in question.” *A Short Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 241. (Harrison’s footnotes are deleted above.)

207 It is common to suppose that Mary concluded the body of Jesus had been stolen by grave robbers. I do not think that the text necessarily lends support to this. If the burial took place late on Friday afternoon, it was done somewhat quickly, due to the fact that the Sabbath was about to begin ([John 19:42; 20:1](javascript:%7b%7d)). The preparation of the body was not complete, and would be finished on Sunday ([Luke 23:55-56; 24:1](javascript:%7b%7d)). Since the burial was conducted by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus somewhat hastily, Mary might well have thought ‘they’ (cf. [John 20:2,13](javascript:%7b%7d)) had moved (not stolen) the Lord’s body. Since the women were seemingly unaware of the precautions taken at the request of the religious leaders, it would also be possible to assume that either the Romans or the Jews moved the body of Jesus. Notice that Mary asked Jesus (whom she mistook for the groundskeeper of the graveyard) if He had moved the body ([John 20:15](javascript:%7b%7d)).

208 It is generally believed that John is the second party who accompanied Peter, but specifically not stated in the text. This would be natural for John, as the author, to omit.

209 I have difficulty determining just what it was that John ‘believed.’ In some ways I am inclined to think he only believed Mary’s report that Jesus’ body was missing. Verse 9 could easily support this, along with the other gospel accounts which tell us that the disciples refused to believe the words of the women until they personally saw Jesus ([Mark 16:11](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 24:11](javascript:%7b%7d); cf. also [John 20:20](javascript:%7b%7d)). If John truly believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead, then he did so without any predisposition to do so, and solely on the evidence before him in that empty tomb. If this be the case, Warfield’s words are particularly appropriate when he writes, “That empty grave is alone enough to found all Christianity upon.” “The Resurrection—A Historical Fact,” *Selected Shorter Writings*, I, p. 190.

210 “No one will so stultify himself in this age as to seriously contend that the disciples stole the body. Not only is it certain that they could not possibly have summoned courage to make the attempt, but the very idea of Christianity owing its life to such an act is worse than absurd. Imagine, if one can, this band of disheartened disciples assembled and coolly plotting to conquer the world to themselves by proclaiming what must have been seen to be the absurd promise of everlasting life through One who had himself died—had died and had ***not*** risen again. Imagine them not expecting a resurrection nor dreaming of its possibility, determining to steal the body of their dead Lord, pretend that he had risen, and then, to found on their falsehood a system of the most marvelous truth—on this act of rapine a system of the most perfect morals. Imagine the body stolen and brought into their midst—who can think they could be stirred up to noble endeavor by the sight?” Benjamin B. Warfield, “The Resurrection: A Historical Fact,” *Selected Shorter Writings* *-I*, p. 188.

211 [Matthew 28:6](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 16:5-6](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 24:12](javascript:%7b%7d); [John 20:4-8](javascript:%7b%7d).

212 Cf. [Acts 2:22-36; 3:12-26; 4:10; 5:30](javascript:%7b%7d), etc.

213 [Luke 19:10](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 10:45](javascript:%7b%7d); [John 10:10-11](javascript:%7b%7d); etc.

214 “That he died manifests his love, and his willingness to save. That he rose again manifests his power, and his ability to save. We are not saved by a dead Christ who undertook but could not perform, and who lies there still, under the Syrian sky, another martyr of impotent love. If we are to be saved at all, it must be by one who did not merely pass to death in our behalf, but who passed through death. If the penalty was fully paid by him, it can not have broken him, it must needs have broken upon him. Had he not emerged from the tomb, all our hopes, all our salvation would be lying dead with him unto this day.” Benjamin B. Warfield, “The Resurrection of Christ—A Fundamental Doctrine,” *Selected Shorter Writings -I*, p. 200.

215 Warfield summarizes the views of Harnack (The History of Dogma): “It can indeed, never be necessary to have faith in a fact; religious belief must not hang on history and must be independent of all facts, which would hold good apart from that belief. Whether Christ rose from the dead cannot, therefore, be of moment to the Christian; all that is of any significance is the religious conviction that he was “not swallowed up in death, but passed through suffering and death to glory, that is, to life, power, and honor.” Faith has nothing to do with knowledge of the form in which Jesus lives, but only with the conviction that he is the living Lord…. Christianity is not built on the rock of fact in any case, he tells us; it is a castle in the air, adjusting itself readily, as it floats over the rough surface of solid earth, to all sorts of inequalities and changes of ground, and is best entered by disengaging ourselves from the soil and soaring lightly into its higher precincts. No doubt the professed purpose of this new determination of the relation of Christianity to fact is to render Christianity forever unassailable from the point of view of historical science; if it is independent of all details of history it cannot be wounded through the critical reconstruction of the historical events which accompanied its origin.” *Selected Shorter Writing -I*, p. 1194-5.

216 [1 Corinthians 6:14; 15:20](javascript:%7b%7d)f.; [2 Corinthians 4:14](javascript:%7b%7d).

217 Cf. [John 5:28-29](javascript:%7b%7d); [Revelation 20:4-5](javascript:%7b%7d),12-15.