

# CROSSROADS (EASTER 2020): "CHRIST AROSE"

4.12.20 Easter Sunday

## INTRODUCTION

I love history- and history is filled with amazing moments. I love them all: sports history, American history, world history- it's all amazing for me to study and learn about. Truth is, I'd rather read a non-fiction book about history than almost anything else.

But through all of human history, while we have witnessed amazing feats in the areas of science and technology (landing men on the moon still blows me away), engineering, sports, the arts, and magnificent acts of bravery in many arenas of life, there is only one moment that can truly be called THE pivotal moment of all time. That moment is what we celebrate today - the resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The gospels all present various facets of this magnificent diamond so, like I did with Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem last week, I will attempt to harmonize those accounts into one. Let's celebrate the story again.

## STORY: SETTING THE STAGE - CHRIST'S BURIAL (Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19)

First, let's set the stage by recounting all that happened immediately following Christ's death on the cross, information we have from all four gospels:

A evening was approaching, a wealthy individual by the name of Joseph, a man from the town of Arimathea who was also a member of the Sanhedrin, went to Pilate with a request: Could he take custody of the body of Jesus of Nazareth, dead but still hanging on the cross? Now what nobody knew was that this Joseph was also a disciple of Christ - in secret due to his fear of the leadership, but strong enough to disagree with their verdict regarding Jesus. Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so quickly; it was not unheard of for men to sometimes take 2-3 days to finally succumb. So, he contacted the lead officer onsite, a centurion who had supervised the crucifixion, who informed him that Jesus was in fact dead. Having that confirmation, Pilate granted Joseph's request.

So, Joseph went to the cross and took down the body of Jesus. He was accompanied by another member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus - the same one who had sought out Jesus one night that we read about in John 3. He had brought some 75 pounds of precious spices: myrrh and aloes. Together the two men placed Jesus in a clean linen cloth and then, taking Jesus' body, they wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. Following that process, the two men placed Jesus' body in a brand new tomb, one that had never been used, cut out of rock, that was in fact owned by Joseph. Once Christ's body was in the tomb, Joseph had a big stone rolled in front of the tomb's entrance, and then he and Nicodemus left the area. However, two women - Mary Magdalene and another Mary - who had in fact followed Jesus from Galilee, watched what Joseph and Nicodemus did and saw where Jesus had been laid. They likely concluded that Jesus' body had been prepared for burial in somewhat hasty circumstances, so they left and went home to prepare the appropriate spices and perfumes. But they didn't immediately return; instead, they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

So that brings us to the end of Friday. But the next day, Saturday, things were still happening - one thing in particular that Matthew tells us about:

***The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to***

*Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, His disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that He has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first." "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard - Matthew 27:62- 66.*

All of this now sets us up for the wonders that occurred on that first Easter morning. Again, I'll harmonize all four gospels:

**STORY: HE HAS RISEN (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20)**

After the Sabbath had concluded, right around sunrise, Mary Magdalene and some other women went to look at the tomb. They were bringing spices with them and hoping to be able to complete the proper anointing of Jesus' body for burial. As they were on their way, they were asking each other, "How are we going to get that huge stone moved that Joseph placed at the entrance?" But as they arrived, they were met by a stunning site: There were no guards - not a Roman soldier in site. There was also no longer any stone rolled in front of the tomb; in fact, the entrance to the tomb was wide open. They entered the tomb and, on top of everything else, Jesus' body was nowhere to be found. But what they did find was a sudden appearance of two men, dressed in brilliant, gleaming white - as white as snow and as bright as lightning. The women in their fright bowed their heads to the ground, but one of the men said: "Don't be afraid, but why are you in here looking for the living among the dead? We know that you came seeking Jesus of Nazareth, who you saw crucified. He is not here. Remember what He said while He was still in Galilee, that He had to be handed over to sinners and crucified, but that on the third day He would be raised again? Come on over here and see the place where they laid him."

I can't imagine all the thoughts that must have crowded those ladies' heads in that moment. If this is true, what should they do? We continue:

The angels could see how overwhelmed those women were with their amazing news, so they gave them some help: "Go quickly to His disciples and tell them what we have told you: He has risen! Make sure Peter hears about this, too. And also tell them that He will meet them back in Galilee." So, the women ran back to where they knew the disciples were staying and told them about the angels and what they had said. At first, the disciples thought those women were nuts. But Peter and John decided to check this out for themselves. They both took off running for the tomb, but John was faster and got there first. He peered into the tomb far enough to see the strips of linen lying there, but he didn't fully go in. Momentarily Peter arrived, and he went in first. He saw what the women had all described - the strips of linen, and the cloth that had been wrapped around Christ's head, laying where His head should have been-but wasn't. After a moment, John also entered the tomb and saw the same evidence. While John believed what this meant, Peter was still unsure, but neither one of them was yet able to link the ancient prophecies that foretold all this. After departing the tomb, they returned to where they had been staying.

But now comes the best part of all - where Jesus actually begins to prove His resurrection by appearing to His followers:

The first one to see Jesus resurrected was Mary Magdalene; the apostle John tells us her story:

She had returned to the tomb, aware only that she didn't know where the body of Jesus was. She stood outside of the tomb, heartbroken. As she cried, she took a look inside the tomb and saw two beings dressed all in white, actually sitting where Christ's body had been laid. They gently asked her, "Why are you crying?" She told them through her tears, "The body of my Lord has been taken, and I don't know where it is." At that moment, she turned around, maybe having heard something, and saw Jesus standing there but, for whatever reason, she didn't recognize Him. He asked her the same question as had the angels: "Why are you crying?" She thought this might be the gardener (the tomb was located in a garden), so maybe he could help her. "Sir, if you've taken Him, tell me where He is and I will go and get Him." Then Jesus simply said, "Mary." In that one word, she immediately recognized Him. She wanted to hold Him tight and maybe never let Him go, so fearful was she of losing Him again. But He was only going to be remaining on earth for a little while longer, so He directed her to go to His disciples with her news. And that is what she did.

After that the appearances came quickly: later that morning to some more of the women, that afternoon to Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus, then sometime that same day specifically to the apostle Peter and finally, later that evening, to ten of the disciples, miraculously appearing in their presence despite their being in a locked room. And, despite his resurrected, glorified body, he showed the nail prints in his hands, the wound in his side, and he also ate. He had, indeed, risen!

Which was also the news that the guardians of the tomb brought into to the chief priests in Jerusalem. Remember that those were the guys who wanted the guard posted to prevent any myths taking hold that, somehow, Jesus had fulfilled His promise of rising from the dead ...and also the ones that had been so traumatized by this supernatural event that they had, as Matthew said, ***The guards were so afraid of Him that they shook and became like dead men -Matthew 28:4.*** They did, however, recover from their trauma enough to get to Jerusalem and share their trauma with the religious leaders. According to Matthew: ***While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, 'You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.' So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day - Matthew 28:11-15.***

## OPPOSITION

Now obviously Christ's resurrection is something that can strain the senses if left to our own abilities to grasp such an amazing event. But even more than the event itself is what it means: If Jesus remains in the ground, then He is nothing more than a good guy, maybe one of the greatest people who has ever lived, a man with great ideas, incredible ethics, and certainly somebody to emulate - but still a man just like the rest of us, who lived and died. If indeed He died for a cause, like world peace or social change or whatever, then His death probably makes Him a martyr - worth remembering and commemorating, but a martyr none the less. But if He has risen, then He is exactly who He said He was: the eternal Son of God. The way to God, the truth about God, and the life of God. If He has risen, then He is the one and only Supreme Being - and I must answer to Him.

Because of opposition to the idea that Jesus is a Supreme Being, that He is in fact God, that

He is in fact the physical, tangible image of the invisible God as Paul said, then there needs to be reason to not believe all that the gospels tell us happened. There have to be alternative theories as to what happened to the body of Jesus, what caused that tomb to be empty. So, let's look at a couple of those ideas:

- 1) Jesus didn't really die on the cross. He "swooned" while on the cross (shock, loss of blood, whatever) but didn't really die, and then came to while in the tomb. The truth is that Jesus suffered a number of catastrophic injuries that ensured death. First, by suffering hematidrosis, sweating drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, his skin would have become very fragile - so much so that the flogging performed on him by Roman soldiers would have had an intensely lethal effect. Second, the flogging itself would have created the circumstances for hypovolemic shock - the body's response to losing massive amounts of blood. Third, being positioned as he was on the cross would have induced, over time, asphyxiation due to the difficulty of just being able to breathe. And all of that stress bundled together would have caused cardiac arrest. As His heart began to fail, fluid would have begun to collect in the membrane around the heart - which in fact we know happened from the gospels' account of Jesus being speared in the side and the resulting flow of blood and clear fluid. This is called *pericardial effusion* - a circumstance that cannot be faked. Jesus died on the cross.
- 2) The disciples stole the body and claimed a resurrected Jesus that wasn't true. The truth is, according to Scripture, there were guards onsite at the tomb. Historians aren't completely sure whether those guards were temple guards or actual Roman soldiers. In the case of Roman soldiers, we do know that they would have sacrificed their own lives for such a failure to fulfill their duty, so they had incredible incentive to do their jobs. Also, the disciples were afraid for their lives assuming that, now that the leadership had gotten Jesus, they were going to come for His followers as well; as a result, as John tells us: ***[T]he disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders - John 20:19a***. To think that these same guys, who had run away from Christ the moment He was arrested, had kept their distance during His crucifixion, and now were living under "lock and key" would all of a sudden find the courage to mount an attack on armed guards to support a story that they would have known to be a lie is a far greater stretch of imagination than any theories that critics have put forward. Historically, we know that Jesus was buried according to Jewish custom, and Jewish authorities knew where the grave containing Christ was located. They certainly wouldn't have moved the body; in fact, if stories about a supposed resurrection had started to spring up, the authorities would have been more than happy to open the tomb and parade Jesus' decomposing body right through the middle of downtown Jerusalem. And, of course, the Scriptures do not tell the story of a dead human body spontaneously returning to life.

The Scriptures instead tell the story of the power of God:

- ***"The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead - whom you killed by hanging Him on a cross. . . . We are witnesses of these things" - Peter and other apostles, speaking to the Sanhedrin, Acts 5:30, 32a.***
- a) ***"We are witnesses of everything He did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed Him by hanging Him on a cross, but God raised Him***

***from the dead on the third day and caused Him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen - by us who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead"- Peter, Acts 10:39-41.***

Conclusion: Jesus indeed rose from the dead by the power of God.

#### **AFFIRMATION**

So, what are a couple of things we can "hang our hats" on that affirm the resurrection? How about these?

- 1) The sheer numbers of post-resurrection witnesses. In addition to the appearances on Resurrection Day that we have already noted, we also have these over the course of the 40 days in which Christ ministered on earth prior to his ascension:

|                           |                                |                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>a)</b> One week later: | 11 disciples (with Thomas)     | John 20:24-29            |
| <b>b)</b> During 40 days: | 7 disciples (Sea of Galilee)   | John 21:1-14             |
| <b>c)</b> Ascension       | 11 disciples                   | Matt. 28:16-20; Luke 24: |
|                           | (possible 500 followers)       | 50-51; Act 1:3, 9-11     |
| <b>d)</b> Undetermined    | James (half-brother of Christ) | 1 Corinthians 15:7       |
| <b>e)</b> Undetermined    | Paul (on Damascus Road)        | Acts 9:3-9               |
| <b>f)</b> 95-96 AD        | John (the isle of Patmos)      | Rev. 1:9-18; Luke 24:    |
|                           | (possible 500 witnesses)       | 50-51; Acts 1:3, 9-11    |
2. The change in the demeanor of the disciples. They went from being afraid of being associated with Jesus to being willing to die for Him. A great example is one time where it is actually the Sanhedrin that confirms how different the disciples had become. Peter and John had been arrested for preaching "in the name of Jesus." While there, Peter and John put up a fearless defense of their actions. That attitude was not lost on the Sanhedrin: ***When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus -Acts 4:13.*** In fact, that is one of the great proofs to the resurrection of Christ -just how "all things new" their lives became. We know that, while people are willing to die for something that is not true (the terrorists on 9/11, for example), it is virtually impossible that people will willingly lay down their lives for something that they absolutely know is a lie. The change in the disciples could actually best be shown by Thomas, when he was confronted by Jesus and, despite the glorified, resurrected body, still was able to see the wounds in His hands, feet and side: ***Thomas said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" - John 20:28.*** Once the disciples saw Jesus after the crucifixion, realizing that He had indeed been raised from the dead, they knew beyond any doubt precisely who He was - a God, a Messiah, a Savior, who was worth dying for, and a God, a Messiah, and a Savior who's word was true because His life had been true. Jesus was exactly who He said He was - for this life, and eternal life. To that end, aside from the possible exception of the apostle John, we are relatively sure that all the other disciples were themselves martyrs for their Lord - beginning with James the brother of John as recorded in Acts 12. They knew their Lord was not only alive, but they knew their Lord was indeed God.
- 2) And lastly, we have intimate, personal testimonies from the disciples that tell how personally they connected with the Lord:
  - a) *The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have***

*seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth - John 1:14.*

- b) [W]e did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to Him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with Him on the sacred mountain -II Peter 1:16-18.*
- c) That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard- I John 1:1-3a.*

### RESULT OF RESURRECTION

So, what does Christ's resurrection mean? In a word, for Christians, everything! The apostle Paul explains it wonderfully, first from the negative side: *If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that He raised Christ from the dead. But He did not raise Him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied - Paul, I Corinthians 15:13-19.* Still hopelessly lost in my sins? I can't imagine anything worse.

But then Paul celebrates the triumph we do know because of the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ: *Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive - Paul, I Corinthians 15:20-22.*

And because Christ rose, and because Christ lives, we can know that same victory, and have that same future hope. And actually there are a couple of OT passages that declare the future we have to look forward to:

- 1) "I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes - I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"-Job 19:25-27.*
- 2) As for me, I will be vindicated and will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness - David, Psalm 17:15.*

Bottom line: Because He lives, we too shall live. Because He triumphed over death, we will triumph over death. And, as John saw so clearly: *[W]e know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is- I John 3:2b.*

### CONCLUSION

Why would somebody deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Because it forces them to

confess to truths that make their lifestyles wrong, their perspectives wrong, their philosophies wrong - and unfortunately, people would often rather live wrong than confess wrong.

But as Christians, we have the joy of knowing, as Jesus so definitively showed that, in the power of God through Jesus Christ, we need fear nothing. Jesus showed victory of sin, death and the power of the devil. When we surrendered to Him, we gained that same victory.

That should make the life we live now an unabashed joy, knowing, as Paul said, that ***in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord-Romans 8:37-39.***

That same joy, that same confidence of the victory we have received and who gave it to us, should fuel our efforts to reach those around us with the same life- changing gospel that so profoundly changed the disciples and the other early Christians. The life that walked out of that tomb is available for anybody and everybody. Are you happy Jesus walked out of that tomb? Let's live like it. Let's pray like it. Let's do church like it. Let's reach out like it. Let's pray!

Love you guys. Have a great week - God bless!

