

The Resurrection of Christ

Matthew 28:1-10

Matthew 28:1-10 - *“Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. ² And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. ³ His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. ⁴ And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.*

⁵ But the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. ⁷ And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.”

⁸ So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word.

⁹ And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, “Rejoice!” So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.”

Background Notes

When you compare the accounts of the resurrection of Christ in the four Gospels, you'll find that they differ in a number of details. They differ in the exact sequence of events, who saw the Lord, exactly where and when He appeared to the disciples, and more. For example, Matthew is the only Gospel that mentions the earthquake, and the angel rolling away the stone and sitting on it (v2). So when you compare all four accounts, there are different details. However, there are **no** details that contradict other details, and all the details of the four Gospels can be harmonized.

There are a number of books available on the subject of harmonizing the four Gospels. It would be well worth your time and money to purchase a book such as *The Harmony of the Gospels* for your personal library, because it's very helpful when studying the Gospels. In this book all four Gospels are written out in chronological order in four parallel columns.

It shows the reader that there are **no contradictions in the Gospel record**. The apparent differences are only a matter of **selection** on the part of the Gospel writer. When writing their accounts, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John selected different events in the life of Christ, and they emphasized different details - but there are no contradictions, because **the Holy Spirit of God was guiding them** when they made their selections! All the details of the resurrection accounts in the four different Gospels can easily be harmonized.

By the way, I'm so glad that there are four **different** Gospel accounts of the resurrection, and I'm glad that they do differ in the details! Why do I say that? The differences show that there was no collusion going on between the authors. They didn't get together to make up stories and events.

The four Gospel accounts are not photocopies! They are four different accounts from four independent writers, and even though they differ in the particular details they selected, all the Gospels are in agreement with each other. That adds up to **very good evidence**. A court of law likes to have that kind of evidence to know that an event really happened.

By the way, when someone asks you, "Give me some proof for the resurrection of Christ," and you start to turn to the Bible, and they say, "No, I want evidence for the resurrection of Christ that's not found in the Bible," here's what you can do. Show them the writings of Josephus, the ancient and well-accepted Jewish historian. Josephus was **not** a Christian, but he wrote about the resurrection of Christ! If you want to check it out, go to the GCM website and find it in the "Christian Evidences" course on evidence for the resurrection of Christ.

Doctrinal Points

1. The resurrection of Christ was on the first day of the week.

"Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb" (v1).

The women were coming to the tomb to anoint the Lord's body with spices for permanent burial. The Lord's body had not been anointed according to the Jewish custom because there wasn't enough time. It was late in the day by the time His body was released for burial, and Jewish law required that Lord had to be buried before sunset, so His body was wrapped quickly wrapped in linen cloth and placed in the tomb (John 19). The anointing could not be done the following day because the next day was the Sabbath. So early on the morning of the third day, the women came to the tomb to anoint the Lord's body. It was Sunday morning, the first day of the week.

Sunday worship is evidence for the truth of the resurrection. The Lord Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday, and we celebrate His resurrection on "Resurrection Sunday" or "Easter Sunday." And for 2000 years Christians have worshiped **every Sunday**. Did you realize – that's overwhelming evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Here's the argument. How can Sunday as the Christian day of worship be explained unless the resurrection happened – and it happened on a Sunday? Right from the start of Christianity, Sunday has always been the Christian day of worship. Acts 20:7 says, *"On the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul... spoke to them."*

But the early Christians were primarily Jews, and the Jewish day of worship is the **Sabbath - Saturday, the seventh day of the week!** Why did those Jewish Christians make the earth-shaking decision to make Sunday their day of worship?

They could have worshiped the Lord on the Sabbath. Jesus never taught that the day of worship should be changed from Saturday to Sunday. We don't find that teaching in any of the Gospels. And we know that the early Christians argued over just about everything in the Law of Moses. They argued about dietary laws and special feast days, and they even argued about whether to keep **both** the Sabbath and Sunday! But they **never argued about Sunday as "the Lord's Day"**! Why not? Something very, very significant must have taken place on Sunday that prevented these Jewish Christians from ever raising any questions about Sunday, the first day of the week, being the Christian day of worship.

Well, something very significant **did** take place on Sunday: the miracle of the resurrection! The resurrection of Jesus Christ took place on the first day of the week. And the fact that Sunday replaced Saturday as the day of worship is one of the most powerful evidences for Jesus Christ's resurrection.

The phenomenon of the Christian day of worship being Sunday **cannot** be explained apart from the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Let someone try to do it! They can't! They can't explain why the day of worship suddenly changed from Saturday to Sunday. Something truly amazing must have happened to cause such a major shift. Well, we've got the answer – it was the resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ!

2. The resurrection of Christ was a bodily resurrection.

The angel said, *"He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay"* (v6). Notice that the verse says: He is risen, **as He said**. On several occasions the Lord had told His disciples that He would rise from the dead on the third day. Matthew 16:21: *"From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things... and be killed, and be raised the third day."* And Matthew 17:22-23: *"Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up."* And Matthew 20:18-19: *"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again."*

The women were invited to see the evidence that Jesus Christ had kept His word! The stone was rolled away from the door of the tomb, and the angel said, *"Come, see the place where the Lord lay."* Was the stone rolled away to allow Jesus to get out of the tomb? No! The stone was rolled away so the evidence of the empty tomb could be seen! The women saw an **empty tomb!** The Lord's body was gone.

Some people hold to the idea that the Lord is alive in spirit only, not in body. But the angel didn't mention a spiritual resurrection. The angel invited the women to come and see the place where the Lord's **body** had been placed - and **His body was no longer there!** He had risen **bodily**. The Lord's resurrection was a bodily resurrection.

When the Lord Himself met the women, they held Him by the feet and worshipped Him (v9). They didn't hold the feet of the "spirit of Jesus," or see a "spiritual image" of Jesus. No! The real resurrected body of the Lord Jesus met them. The resurrection of Christ was a bodily resurrection!

When the Lord appeared to the disciples in the upper room, He invited doubting Thomas to "*put your finger here, and look at My hands; and put your hand into the wound in My side*" (John 20:27). You can't touch a spirit. This was not just the spirit of Jesus that was living on. No. Jesus was alive! This was a bodily resurrection.

In Luke 24:39-42, when the Lord appeared to the disciples He said: "*Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have. When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, "Have you any food here?" So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence.*" A spirit doesn't eat real food! The Lord Jesus wanted to prove that He was not just living on as a spirit, but that He was alive **bodily**. The resurrection of Christ was a bodily resurrection.

Practical Application

Trust God to remove the stones.

On Resurrection Sunday morning, the women were on their way to anoint the body of Jesus. According to the Gospel of Mark, along the way they said to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" They didn't turn around at that point and say, "Well, we'd better go home because the stone is in the way. There's no way we can enter the tomb." No, they came to the tomb in faith, believing that God would somehow send help to remove the stone. And they were right! God did send help to remove the stone. He sent an angel.

What a great lesson for us! That stone was a barrier to their service for the Lord Jesus - but God removed the barrier. In the same way, there will be stones that will block our service for the Lord. Financial stones and legal stones. Clash of personality stones. Loss of vision stones and lack of zeal stones. Physical burnout and illness stones. And many "more-we-could-mention" stones. But God can roll away the stones! Do you believe this? Trust God to remove the stones.