

The Power of His Resurrection



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 27:62–66, Luke 24:36–39, Acts 3:14–16, 1 Corinthians 15, Phil. 3:7–10.*

Memory Text: “**I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!**” (*Revelation 1:18, NIV*).

As Easter approached, a teacher sent her students out into nature around the school. She gave each a little box with the following assignment: Bring back something in the box that is a symbol of life. When the children returned, each box was opened, one at a time. The first box had a butterfly, which flew away as she opened the container. Another had leaves. Another twigs. But then one box she opened was empty.

“How stupid!” one student exclaimed. “Somebody didn’t do the assignment!”

At that point, Philip, a boy with Down’s syndrome, spoke up: “That’s my box.”

“Well, Philip,” the same boy continued, undeterred, “you messed up the assignment!”

“No,” replied Philip, confidently. “The tomb was empty!”

On that day Philip became a respected member of the group. He died not long afterward, and at his funeral all the members of the class brought empty boxes to the service, in honor of their fallen classmate.

Yes indeed, the tomb was empty! And in that empty tomb we find the great hope of all Christians everywhere. This week we look at that hope, which is found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 14.*

The Story of the Resurrection: Part 1

(Matt. 27:62–66)

Several events may be described as pivotal to Christianity, among them the Incarnation, the Cross, and the Second Coming. But in a sense, the Resurrection trumps them all, even the Cross that we extolled in last week's lesson. For without the Resurrection, nothing else matters. Indeed, when we talk about the death of Jesus, we logically include the Resurrection, unstated. It is the central doctrine of the Christian faith.

Of all the world religions, Judaism and Christianity are the only two that espouse the concept of a resurrection, as such; and only Christianity makes it central. Only Christianity has been founded on the belief that its central Figure actually was raised from the dead. All four Gospels cover the extraordinary event, and they tell the story with a straightforwardness that makes it utterly credible.

What contribution does each of the following passages make to the credibility of the Resurrection story to follow?

Matt. 27:50–53

Matt. 27:54–56

Matt. 27:57–61 (compare Mark 15:42–47)

Matt. 27:62–66

The occurrences listed here are all public. Given the date of the Gospel of Matthew (believed to be written before A.D. 70), eyewitnesses still would have been alive either to confirm or refute these reports. Nor would the religious establishment have had any interest in letting such claims and assertions go unchallenged if false: The rending of the temple curtain "*from the top*"! (certainly some of those who had ministered in the complex that day would have seen something); the earthquake would have been public and universal for the immediate area; the resurrection of dead people and their appearance to many in the city (what possible reason could the writer have for manufacturing a detail like that!); the witness of the Roman centurion and his fellow soldiers; the sealing of the tomb; the posting of a special guard; the list goes on. These are concrete events, related with no special pleading or defensiveness whatsoever.

The Story of the Resurrection: Part 2

(Luke 24:36–39)

In yesterday’s lesson, we began listing a group of passages in the Gospels that describe events surrounding the death of Jesus, events that in their straightforward and unembellished naturalness commend the credibility of the Resurrection story. Following are a few more passages in the same vein.

What essential message is found in these verses? What key point do all of them have in common? (*Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24:10–44*).

Although the above list does not carry any reference from John, all four Gospels cover the Resurrection in considerable detail.

Why do you think that is so? What is so important about the Resurrection to our faith?

“The historic faith of the Church has agreed with St. Paul: ‘If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile’ (1 Cor. 15:17). All other Christian doctrines are dependent upon the proclamation of the resurrection: the significance of Christmas lies in the fact that the child who was born is the one whom God raised from the dead; Good Friday is only the anniversary of one more martyrdom, unless he who died is the one who rose again; the institution of the Lord’s Supper in the Church would have been unthinkable, had not the Lord been known to the faithful in the breaking of bread.”—Alan Richardson, ed., “Resurrection of Christ,” *A Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), p. 290.

In the texts for today, we see the power of Jesus’ resurrection, both physically and spiritually. He broke the shackles of the tomb; the Roman seals gave way; the grave burst open. And He declares today, “I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!” (Rev. 1:18, NIV). If you were asked to say in ten words or fewer what the Resurrection means to you, what might those words be?

It Empowered a Movement *(Acts 3:14–16)*

How could such an outlandish belief as the resurrection of a dead prophet spread through a pagan empire like that of Rome if it had no credence? Why would a bunch of fishermen and tax collectors, against all odds, invent such a story? And if they did invent it, how did they come to believe it so strongly themselves that they were prepared not only to forsake family and friends to defend it, but to give their lives for the sake of the One they proclaimed as the risen Christ?

The arrest, trial, and execution of their Master had left these followers broken, traumatized, defeated. Disillusioned, the erstwhile inner circle began falling back upon old patterns, moving back into their accustomed grooves (and they themselves tell the story). We hear only about going fishing (the former livelihood of most of them); but there also must have been a lot of brooding by the likes of nonfishermen, such as Matthew and Simon the Zealot, wondering where to go from there, what to do next.

Flash ahead weeks later, to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (*Acts 2*). As Peter delivered his impromptu Pentecostal sermon, it was his reference to Jesus as a living person, risen and exalted before the heavenly Father, the astonishing declaration that Jesus was alive, that hearers homed in on. “‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” they responded (*Acts 2:37, NIV*).

Nor was the emphasis on the Resurrection a fad for these early believers, an ephemeral novelty to be abandoned when something better came along. Quite to the contrary, the Resurrection constituted the central element of apostolic preaching, with Peter and the other apostles repeatedly returning to it in their discourses.

Read Acts 3:11–16, 4:8–12, 7:54–56, 17:29–31. What theme do they constantly refer to? And why?

“For the earliest Christian preaching it is the Resurrection that designates Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. . . . This is the point at which his reign as Messiah begins, when . . . he enters upon and inaugurates the age of GLORY.”—*Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. R–Z, p. 44.

Writing to the Philippians, Paul spoke of wanting to “know Christ and the power of his resurrection” (*Phil. 3:10, NIV*). What do you think that means? How can we today experience the power of the Resurrection in our lives? (See, for example, *John 3:3, Rom. 6:1–12*.)

Provided Authority for Witnessing

(Phil. 3:7–10)

We see the power of the Resurrection in the ministry of the apostles. Peter's words to the cripple are anchored solid in a resurrected Savior: " 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk' " (*Acts 3:6, NIV*). Then as the people go wild with astonishment and wonder over the miracle, Peter reminds them of the trial and death of Jesus (*vss. 13, 14*) and then begins to move toward the good news, his goal from the start: " 'You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead' " (*vs. 15, NIV*). And, says Peter, it is through the power released by His resurrection that the crippled man was made to walk. " 'By faith in the name of Jesus, this man . . . was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing' " (*vs. 16, NIV*).

The spectacular miracle notwithstanding, Peter is arrested and called upon to answer for these unusual developments: " 'By what power or what name did you do this?' " (*Acts 4:7, NIV*). With such an invitation, Peter falls back on what fast was becoming his favorite theme, the resurrection of Jesus: " 'It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed' " (*vs. 10, NIV*).

So, on three separate occasions now, Peter has zeroed in like a laser beam upon the resurrection of Jesus as the source of his power for witnessing. In fact, the very preaching of Christ implied His resurrection (*Acts 5:40–42*).

"The conviction that Jesus continued to live transformed a dozen or so disconsolate followers of a slain and discredited leader into one of the most dynamic groups in human history. We read that tongues of fire descended upon them. People who were not speakers became eloquent. They exploded across the Greco-Roman world, preaching what has come to be called the Gospel but is literally the good news. Starting in an upper room in Jerusalem, they spread their message with such fervor that in their own generation it took root in every major city of the region."—Huston Smith, *The Illustrated World's Religions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), p. 215.

Read 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's great treatise on the Resurrection. How central is this truth to the Christian faith? In other words, how much hangs on it? Do you have loved ones who have passed away? What particular sections of Paul's treatise bring you the greatest comfort?

Guarantees Our Own Resurrection

(1 Cor. 15:20)

No matter how clear the New Testament is on the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus, some liberal theologians, trapped in a purely scientific and rationalist worldview, argue against the Resurrection being real. Instead, they say that the Resurrection should be seen as a myth, a metaphor of a new resurrected life we can have here and now if and when we accept, as a community, the moral teaching of Jesus.

However nice that might sound, it is a view based on human thinking and not on the clear teaching of God's Word, which is exceedingly clear and unequivocal in the literalness of Christ's resurrection.

For us, there is no danger accepting the Resurrection as a metaphor, not if we take the Word of God for what it says; and it is explicit about the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus. And once we are settled in our acceptance of the Resurrection, then we can for ourselves garner the hope it offers us in the face of death. Regardless of what happens to us in this life, we have the hope that, as Jesus rose from the dead, so will we. The promise of the Resurrection helps us to keep everything in its proper perspective.

Read the following passages. What hope do they hold out for our own resurrection?

John 5:25–29

John 11:23–26

1 Cor. 15:51–58

Rev. 1:18

The resurrection of Jesus established three certainties: (1) Our destiny is secure in Jesus (*1 Pet. 1:3–5*); (2) death is a vanquished foe (*1 Cor. 15:20–22*); and (3) power is available to share this fantastic news with others (*John 14:12, Acts 1:8*).

How should the hope and promise of our resurrection from the dead help us to keep our life here, and the things that happen in it, in the proper perspective? Imagine what life would be like if you did not have this hope.

Further Study: “Over the rent sepulcher of Joseph, Christ had proclaimed in triumph, ‘I am the resurrection, and the life.’ These words could be spoken only by the Deity. All created beings live by the will and power of God. They are dependent recipients of the life of God. From the highest seraph to the humblest animate being, all are replenished from the Source of life. Only He who is one with God could say, I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again. In His divinity, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 785.

“During His ministry, Jesus had raised the dead to life. He had raised the son of the widow of Nain, and the ruler’s daughter and Lazarus. But these were not clothed with immortality. After they were raised, they were still subject to death. But those who came forth from the grave at Christ’s resurrection were raised to everlasting life. They ascended with Him as trophies of His victory over death and the grave. These, said Christ, are no longer the captives of Satan; I have redeemed them. I have brought them from the grave as the first fruits of My power, to be with Me where I am, nevermore to see death or experience sorrow.”—p. 786.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Take another look at 1 Corinthians 15, the flagship theological defense of the Resurrection in the New Testament. Follow Paul’s arguments in favor of this basic Christian teaching. Why do these texts make little sense if you believe that the righteous dead go immediately to heaven at death? How is our understanding of the state of the dead vindicated by these texts? What makes the promise of the Resurrection so crucial to us as Seventh-day Adventists with our view of the state of the dead?
- 2 Think about this question, and then bring your answer to class: How differently would you live if you believed that at death everything ended forever?
- 3 Go over all the textual evidence you can find that helps affirm the resurrection of Jesus. Bring it to class, and together review the evidence. How compelling is it? How can you put this material together in a way that could be used as a powerful witnessing tool?

Sanjay's Miracles: Part 1

Sanjay was a musician and played in a band in India. He was a Christian and did not join his fellow musicians when they went drinking or dancing. But something was missing from his life. Sanjay felt bad when his fellow musicians made fun of his Christian faith.

One day he prayed that God would show His power to his friends so they would know that He was the only true God. That evening the band loaded their equipment into a small bus to drive across a mountain pass to their next appointment. They passed the summit and began their descent when the driver suddenly realized that he had no brakes. The bus veered off the road and rolled into the valley far below. No one was killed, but everyone was injured except Sanjay.

Some of the musicians confessed that Sanjay's God had saved him from harm and began calling him "God's man."

Sanjay met an Adventist pastor who urged him to surrender his life totally to God. Sanjay agreed, but even though he felt God wanted him to use his talents to bring people to Christ, still he hesitated to give up the band. Then something happened that changed the course of his life.

One day he climbed an old coconut tree to pick fresh coconuts. He grasped a palm frond to balance himself while he reached for a coconut. However, the palm frond broke loose, throwing Sanjay off balance. He fell from the tall tree into a field of cut sugar cane. The stalks that remained in the field had been cut at an angle and were as sharp as needles. "Lord, save me!" Sanjay cried as he fell.

His brother heard Sanjay's cry and watched in horror as his brother fell into the sharp stalks. He raced to his side, expecting to find his brother dead, but Sanjay was unhurt. He picked himself up and dusted himself off. Sanjay realized that God had saved his life a second time. "OK, Lord," he said, "I'm Yours. Give me something to do for You."

He asked the Adventist pastor for work, and the pastor invited him to come and train to become a lay evangelist. Sanjay agreed. But how could he lead others to Christ? He had no experience with any work but music.

(continued next week)

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