



Week 10: The Resurrection

Read Matthew 27:50-28:15

This lesson is about two things:

- 1) Comparing the three synoptic gospel versions of the resurrection
- 2) How resurrection is understood in Jesus' time and now

Three resurrection narratives (NIV) *<http://www.jesuswalk.com/resurrection/resurrection-parallels.htm>)

Some readers try to create a “harmonization” of the gospels, in which they seek to reconcile all the details of the various resurrection accounts into one single story. As we have seen throughout our study of the gospels, it is difficult to make it all fit together, and easier to consider them in parallel fashion.

Matthew 28:1-10	Mark 16:1-8 and 9-14 (from longer ending)	Luke 24:1-12
¹ After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.	¹ 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	¹ On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.
	³ and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"	¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them....

Matthew 28:1-10	Mark 16:1-8 and 9-14 (from longer ending)	Luke 24:1-12
<p>² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.</p> <p>³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.</p> <p>⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.</p>		
	<p>⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.</p>	<p>² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,</p> <p>³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.</p>
	<p>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.</p>	<p>⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.</p> <p>⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground,</p>
<p>⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.</p> <p>⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>^{5b} but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"</p> <p>⁶ He is not here; he has risen!</p>
		<p>^{6b} Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:</p> <p>⁷ 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'"</p> <p>⁸ Then they remembered his words.</p>
<p>⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."</p>	<p>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.'"</p>	

Matthew 28:1-10	Mark 16:1-8 and 9-14 (from longer ending)	Luke 24:1-12
<p>⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.</p>	<p>⁸ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.</p>	<p>⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others.</p> <p>¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles.</p> <p>¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.</p>
<p>⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.</p> <p>¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."</p>	<p>⁹ When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. ¹⁰ She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping.</p> <p>¹¹ When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.</p>	
<p>(vss. 11-15, guards report to the chief priests and are bribed to lie)</p>		
		<p>¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.</p>

A few general notes about the narratives

- None of the canonical gospels actually narrate the resurrection itself. Rather, they simply point to the consequences of the resurrection. ("Canonical" gospel means one that is in our Bible. The word "canon" means ruler or measure. There are other gospels that detail the story of Jesus' life which were not viewed as accurate or important by the early church, so were not included in the Bible. Some of these include different stories that detail the resurrection.)
- Mark originally ended at 16:8, and the earliest manuscripts found end there. A longer ending, Mark 16:9-20, was written by the second century at the latest. It describes events that were included in the original endings of the other gospels (including the women telling the others about the resurrection).
- The women must have just missed the resurrection, if the prediction is to be validated. Friday, the day of crucifixion, was the first day. Saturday, the Sabbath, was the second day, and Sunday, the day after the Sabbath, was the third day. Sunrise begins the third day, so it is important that they experience the empty tomb just after sunrise. Still, from death to resurrection would have been just 39 hours or so.

- It is significant that it is women who are first to experience the resurrection. This follows a somewhat typical Biblical pattern in which God chooses those with lesser social standing to accomplish God's purposes.

Differences and Similarities in the Narratives

Matthew	Mark	Luke
Two women: Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (mother of James the lesser)	Three women, adding Salome	Three women, adding Joanna, and "the others"
They go to see the tomb	They go to anoint him with spices	They go to anoint him with spices
Stone rolled during earthquake, and guards are there and afraid	Stone already rolled away, no guards mentioned	Stone already rolled away, no guards mentioned
One angel, who rolls back stone and sits upon it	One man, presumably angel, inside tomb.	Two men, presumably angels, inside tomb
Angel says, "Don't be afraid."	"Don't be alarmed."	Women bow down in fright
"You are looking for Jesus who was crucified."	"You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified."	"Why do you seek the living among the dead?"
"He is not here, He has risen. Come and see the place where he lay."	"He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him."	"He is not here; he has risen!"
"Go tell his disciples; he is going ahead of you to Galilee"	"Go tell his disciples and Peter, he is going ahead of you to Galilee"	Stay in the city (Jerusalem) until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:48-53)
Jesus himself appears to the women as they are leaving, and they touch his feet and worship him	Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene (second ending)	Peter runs to the tomb to see it for himself, and he sees the strips of linen
Guards are paid to lie by the Chief Priests	No guards mentioned	No guards mentioned

The Gospels' Resurrection agendas

Mark's resurrection story...

... is the **shortest**, and like most of Mark, has fewer details, and is aimed at giving the basic facts.

... is written right at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans, a time of the greatest **persecution**, so its original ending is appropriate: "trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid."

... portrays the disciples as **not really understanding** or believing the prediction of the resurrection. Even in the second ending, when Mary tells them of the resurrection, they do not believe.

... is designed to end still **leaving the whole issue up in the air**, as if you were to complete the story yourself. Do you believe him? Will you live in fear? Will you tell anyone?

Luke's resurrection story

... points back to the **birth narrative**. The baby Jesus is wrapped in swaddling clothes, strips of cloth to bind a baby tightly. Peter looks into the tomb and sees the “strips of linen” lying there.

... has the **disciples stay in Jerusalem until they are clothed with power from on high**, the coming of the Holy Spirit. Luke always tells his story from the perspective of the early church's magnificent growth, and the gospel spreading by the Spirit's power across the world.

Matthew's resurrection story...

... has a series of interludes about **the guards**. The chief priests get Pilate's permission to post a guard at the tomb (27:62-66); the guards are at the tomb and are in fear (28:4); soldiers are paid off to lie that the body was stolen (28:11-15). This apparently was a rumor that had been spread through the Jewish community in Antioch (28:15). Additionally, remember that the author of Matthew would be in a conflict with the Jewish leadership over what constitutes “the true Judaism.” The gospel is making clear the corruption of the Jewish leadership, and the lies they tell to turn people away from the truth.

... gives greater credibility to the witness of **the women**. In Mark, the women are not believed, and in Luke, Peter has to validate the empty tomb for himself. In Matthew, however, the women are mentioned as present at the crucifixion, witness the burial, discover the empty tomb, are commissioned by an “angel of the Lord,” and most extraordinary of all, meet the Risen Jesus on their way to the disciples. Their authority as bearers of the resurrection message is unchallenged and the eleven apostles will gather in Galilee as they had been instructed (28:16-20).

... focuses on the theme of the Jewish Messiah inaugurating the Kingdom of Heaven, in which the whole world will **worship** him. When Jesus is born, the Magi come and worship him. Throughout the gospels, those who make a request of Jesus worship him. The women on the way from the tomb fall down and worship him. The disciples will worship him when he appears to them on the mountain in Galilee. (remember the importance of mountains in Matthew).

... has one other strikingly different narrative concerning the resurrection. In the description detailing the death of Jesus in Matthew 27, we find this passage:

⁵⁰Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.⁵¹ At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵²The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. ⁵³After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many.

This particular passage leads us to an important discussion regarding our understanding and the Biblical witness regarding what happens after we die. The belief has two facets: resurrection and the afterlife.

Resurrection

Resurrection refers to a physical body being made alive again. “Resurrect” comes from Latin meaning “to make straight again” or “to stand up again.” The Jews of Jesus time were divided about whether there is resurrection. During the early history of Judaism, before the exile to Babylon, the Jews simply did not believe in resurrection. The dead were relegated to Sheol and were cut off from God. Isaiah 38 says, “For

Sheol cannot thank you, death cannot praise you; those who go down to the Pit cannot hope for your faithfulness.” Psalm 115:16-17 echoes this: “The heavens are the Lord’s heavens, but the earth he has given to human beings. The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any that go down into silence.”

The belief by some Jews that there would be a general resurrection at a day of judgment begins sometime after the Jews returned from the exile in 539 BC, in what is called the Persian period. By the time we get to the Maccabean period, (around 167 BC), when the Maccabees are fighting the cruel Seleucid Empire of Antiochus Epiphanes IV, the idea of resurrection has taken hold among many Jewish teachers. The book of 2 Maccabees (included in Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox versions of the Bible) and the book of Daniel are both written during that struggle. Both make reference to the resurrection of the dead. The belief is that there will be a judgment day, in which the dead will be raised up. *“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”* (Daniel 12:2-3)

By the time of Jesus, it appears that the Pharisees have adopted this belief, and are teaching it. The Pharisees, while believing in strict adherence to the law, also believe in the oral law, and teachings of Scripture beyond the five books of the Torah. They have embraced the resurrection of the dead on the Day of Judgment. In the Gospel of John, when Lazarus dies, Jesus comforts Martha: *“Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live...”* (John 11:23-25). On the other hand, the gospels state in a number of places that the Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection, ostensibly because it is not mentioned explicitly in the Torah. Additionally, it may be because it is associated with the Maccabees/Hasmoneans, who are viewed as possible rivals to the power given to them by King Herod.

The Pharisees are the ancestors of modern Rabbinical Judaism. Today, Jewish rabbis may offer a great deal of flexibility in what to believe about the afterlife. Like many Christians, they will almost all note that Judaism’s focus is on this life and this world, and God’s desire to make it right. Nonetheless, there is still a recognition of resurrection. Consider the Burial Kaddish, a prayer said after the burial by the son of the deceased:

The Burial Kaddish (Ashkenazi Judaism)

Exalted
and sanctified
be His great name
In the world that in the future
will be renewed,
and where He will revive the dead,
and raise them up to eternal life
rebuild the city of Jerusalem
and establish His Temple in it;
uproot alien worship, and restore
the holy service of Heaven
to its place, along with its radiance,

glory and holy presence
and may He bring forth His redemption
and hasten the coming of His Messiah.
in your lifetime and in your days
and within the life of the entire House of
Israel, speedily and in the near future
- and let's say to it, Amen.

The soul and the afterlife

A second perspective regarding life after death has to do with a separation of soul and body. By the time of Christ, most of the Roman world has adopted a view originated by the Greek philosophers, most formally by Plato, that the soul and body are distinct and separate after death. This is not yet fully embraced by the Jewish teachers, and is not found anywhere in the Old Testament. Nonetheless, in the period around the time of Christ, the Platonic notion of duality has crept into Judaism. Neil Gillman is an orthodox Jewish scholar, who has written about the Jewish understanding of the afterlife.

In the Bible itself, the human is not a composite of two distinct entities, but rather a single entity, a breathing, "living" clod of earth. And death is understood as the "going out" or dissipation from the body of the life-breath which originally, according to Genesis 2:7, God breathed into the clod of earth thus vivifying it. This life-breath has none of the qualities which later came to be identified with the soul: awareness, a sense of self-identity and memory.

A second theory of the afterlife of the individual enters Judaism during the period that bridges the end of the biblical age and the emergence of rabbinic Judaism. (note - this is about the time of Jesus) This is the notion that every human being is composed of a material body and a non-material "soul"; that the soul, precisely because it is a spiritual substance, is indestructible; and that, at death, it leaves the body and enjoys eternal life in some supernatural beyond.

Gillman, Neil. *The Death of Death: Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish Thought* (Kindle Locations 1353-1356, 1363-1366). Turner Publishing Company. Kindle Edition.

It is about the time of the writing of the gospels that we see this idea begin to develop. There is a "Olam Haba," which is the world to come. The first century sage Yohanan ben Zakkai writes "There are two paths before me, one leading to Gan Eden (the Garden of Eden-Paradise) and the other to Gehinnom (Hell)." We see this view reflected in Jesus' statement, recorded in the Gospel of Luke, the gospel most influenced by and aimed at the Greco-Roman world of the west, and the gospel most focused on the outcast and rejected:

*"One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, **today** you will be with me in Paradise.' (Luke 23:39-43)*

The Significance of Jesus' Resurrection

As we have learned, Jesus' understanding of resurrection seems to be consistent with that of the Pharisees, and others in his time with their school of thought, both in terms of the general resurrection of the dead, and the soul and the afterlife. What was so significant then about the resurrection of Jesus?

- 1) The resurrection was happening right then, in that moment! It was not some far off moment, but was underway already. Yes, there is a day of resurrection coming, and Jesus is the beginning of it. The promised Kingdom of God is happening. The passage from Matthew, in which the saints are raised from their tombs immediately after the resurrection, is a foretaste of what is to come and is already beginning. And this resurrection is a sign of the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven and righteousness in the here and now. Yes, the world is still a mess, but, in the words of N.T. Wright: "A new CEO is in charge." We get to join in this work, pointing to a day any minute now when God finishes that new creation.
- 2) Nothing can stop this coming kingdom. The triumph of Jesus' pattern of life – servanthood, discipleship, losing one's life to gain it, is assured. If the cross cannot stop it, but in fact enables that resurrection, than nothing can.
- 3) The route to both afterlife of the soul and general resurrection are tied to acknowledgment that he is the Messiah, rather than to deeds of good or evil. Look again at the passage from Luke: *"One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'" (Luke 23:39-43)*

Let me conclude with N.T. Wright's charge to believers:

"...left to ourselves we lapse into a kind of collusion with entropy, acquiescing in the general belief that things may be getting worse but that there's nothing much we can do about them. And we are wrong. Our task in the present...is to live as resurrection people in between Easter and the final day, with our Christian life, corporate and individual, in both worship and mission, as a sign of the first and a foretaste of the second."

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Imagine you are the women walking to the tomb, bringing oils for anointing (Mark, Luke) or to stand vigil (Matthew). What might you be thinking or talking about?
2. How did the women react in each gospel story? What does this say about their faith?
3. In the Gospel of Luke, the women remember Jesus' words after the angel spoke. What words did they remember? Why might they have forgotten them? How does holding on to what Jesus told them in Galilee give them hope in their despair?

4. The angels asked the women why they sought “the living among the dead.” Are you searching for the living God among dead things in your life, such as your job, your possessions, your sense of power?
5. According to the Gospel of Luke, Peter needed to see the empty tomb in order to believe that Jesus was raised. Do you ever struggle to believe without proof? Does your faith ultimately rest on the body missing from the tomb or from the felt presence of Jesus in your life?



Daily Readings

Week 10: The Resurrection

Week 10, Day 1

Mark 15:42-47

Commentary:

When John the Baptist died, his disciples claimed his body and laid it in a tomb (Mark 6:29). None of Jesus' disciples did this, maybe out of fear that they would be punished for close association, so it was left to someone else to do. Joseph of Arimathea is described simply in the Gospel of Mark as a member of the council, but the Gospel of Luke also records that he did not agree with the council's decision. He had to stand up to the powerful council in order to bury Jesus.

Reflection Question:

When have you overcome fear and done something brave in the name of your faith?

Week 10, Day 2

Matthew 27:62-66

Commentary:

The Preparation takes place in the hours preceding the beginning of the Sabbath, so "after the day of Preparation" would be on the Sabbath. That the chief priests and Pharisees wanted to take action on the Sabbath (thus breaking their laws) is an indication of how seriously they felt about keeping Jesus' body in the tomb. The flaw in their mission was that they didn't realize that no stone, seal, or guard would keep Jesus in the tomb.

Reflection Question:

Have you ever tried to confine Jesus to one part of your life? How did that work out?

Week 10, Day 3

Matthew 28:1-10

Commentary:

The angel commands the women to tell the disciples about Jesus' resurrection, making them the first evangelists of the good news. Though they were still fearful, they had great joy, which allowed them to overcome their fear and spread the word.

Reflection Question:

How does the great joy of Jesus' resurrection help you overcome your fears?

Week 10, Day 4

Mark 16:1-8

Commentary:

Unlike Matthew and Luke, in which the women tell the disciples about the empty tomb, the Gospel of Mark records the women fleeing in terror and keeping quiet about what they saw.

Reflection Question:

The ending of the Gospel of Mark poses a question to the audience: what would you do? Would you run away as the women did or would you boldly proclaim Jesus' resurrection?

Week 10, Day 5

Luke 24:1-12

Commentary:

The angels asked the women why they were looking for the living among the dead. There is a common tendency for us to look for Jesus in the wrong place also – we try to find Jesus in politics, in doing church a certain way, in following the rules. We miss the boat completely because we are hoping Jesus will fit in our perceptions and paradigms.

Reflection Question:

Take a few minutes to think about the places you've been trying to find Jesus or make Jesus fit. Try to let them go. Ask God to help you see where Jesus is.