

# THE TRIUMPH OF GOD THROUGH THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

## Matthew 27:57—28:15

*Please review this week's catechism question.*

### INTRODUCTION

What kinds of things cause you to feel hopeless? When have you felt the greatest amount of despair in your life?

Matthew 27:55-61 describes the most hopeless situation that could be imagined. Late on that Friday afternoon, the mangled body of Jesus is taken down from the cross and laid in a tomb cut from rock. A stone is rolled across the door of the tomb, shutting out all light. There his body lay in the blackness of death. His voice silenced, his eyes blind, his ears deaf, and his body motionless. Sitting forlorn, outside the tomb are two women, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, watching as Jesus is laid in the dark tomb while they remain in the land of the living. I'm not sure that it is possible for us to imagine, the kind of despair, of hopelessness that has come to the disciples of Jesus. Some of us have tasted this level of despair as we've watched loved ones die, as our marriages have dissolved, as our children have gone astray, as disease and accident has brought long lasting suffering. However, the blackness that has enveloped this group of people who only days earlier were dreaming of God's kingdom coming to earth is hard to describe. That's not even to mention the deepest darkness that Jesus himself has endured in the physical suffering, the unrelenting mockery and the abandonment of God.

As Matthew has gone to great lengths to show, this hopeless situation has come about by the will and work of God. He has created the most hopeless of conditions in order to display his glory in the resurrection of Jesus. The brilliance of God's power shines forth against the backdrop of dark despair. In Matthew's account of the resurrection he aims to point out three things that God accomplishes in raising Jesus from the dead.

### STUDY

1. What difference would it make if Jesus Christ were not raised from the dead?

*If Jesus did not rise from the dead, it would mean that his enemies were right. He is a deceiver, a liar, just as the chief priests say in v. 63. He is a nothing and a nobody, worse he is a blasphemer for he called himself God. He is not the Son of God. He is not the Savior of the world. If he is not raised from the dead then he is merely dust and cannot save anyone because he could not save himself. All who profess to believe in him are fools. We are all still in our sins and destined for eternal judgment if Christ is not raised.*

2. In vv. 35-39 what does Matthew emphasize in the burial of Jesus that points towards God's approval of his Son's death? (See Isaiah 53:9-11)

*Matthew is careful to point out that Jesus is buried in a manner fitting a king. His body is not left to rot upon the cross, which was the most common thing to happen to crucified people. He is buried in a new tomb, cut from rock, by a wealthy man. Matthew is the only one of the gospels to mention the wealth of Joseph of Arimathea. He does so in order to draw our attention to Isaiah 53:9. The appearance of this wealthy man openly identifying with the crucified Christ out of nowhere can only be explained by the work of God. While the disciples cower in fear and despair, this man risks his life to openly honor and show his loyalty to the Son of God. By doing this, he points all who have eyes to see the hand of God fulfilling the words of the prophets. For those who know the words of the prophet, anticipation builds because we know that "after the suffering of his soul he will see the light of life."*

3. What "signs" accompany the resurrection in 28:2-4 and how do they point to God's approval of his Son?

*God announces the resurrection to the watching women and to the pagan guards by sending an angel and an earthquake. As I mentioned last week, earthquakes, throughout the OT accompany God's coming*

to save his people (Psalm 18:4-7 & 19). When God shows up to save his people and destroy his enemies the earth itself trembles. Creation shudders in horror and trembles with excitement when the creator shows up. The angel has come to do a work and to convey a message. First, he removes the stone from the door of the tomb. He doesn't do this to let Jesus out of the tomb. He does it let the witnesses into the tomb. Jesus has already left the tomb when the rock is removed. The brightness of the angel's appearance confirms that he has come directly from heaven, from the presence of the glorious Creator God. He sits on the stone to represent God's power over death. Christ's enemies, the guards, fall before the power of the resurrection confirming the numerous statements that this is what will happen to the enemies of the Messiah.

4. Who does the angel say the women are looking for? What is significant about the angel using this phrase to identify Jesus?

He names Christ as the crucified one. Thus, he shows that the resurrection is first of all God's endorsement of the death of his Son. The book of Revelation repeatedly emphasizes the fact that Jesus' reputation in heaven is due to the fact of this crucifixion for sin. Everywhere the NT emphasizes that God exalts Christ to his right hand because he suffered this brutal death. Christ is great because of his willing death on our behalf. He appears in heaven as the lamb that has been slain. He stands in the presence of God with the scars upon his hands and side to intercede for his people. This is who we are looking for. We must have a crucified Savior if we are going to know God. The resurrection confirms that our greatest problem is our own sin and our greatest need is to find a way to escape the punishment due to us for our sins. Like the women, we are looking for Jesus, the one who has been crucified on our behalf. He is alive and now lives in the presence of God forever to intercede for us.

5. How does the resurrection relate to the words of Jesus?

The other way the resurrection displays the Father's glorifying the Son is in the fact that Jesus told his disciples that he was going to be raised from the dead. The angel tells the women he is not here, he is risen, just as he told you. The resurrection confirms that the word of Jesus is

the truth. He is not a liar or an imposter. We know that all he says is true because God raised him from the dead, which he said would happen.

6. How does the resurrection help you to trust and love Christ?

**In raising Jesus from the dead, God displays his approval of his Son and his work on the cross.**

7. While we know from the other gospels that many people witnessed the resurrection, Matthew concentrates only upon Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary". What are we told about these women prior to v. 8?

He does not tell us anything about their state of mind or their intentions other than that they witnessed the crucifixion (vv. 55-56), the burial (v. 61) and were coming, at dawn on that Sunday morning to see the tomb where Jesus was laid (v. 1). The only thing that is apparent from what Matthew records is that they did not believe in the resurrected Christ. They did not come to the tomb expecting to see a resurrection. They came looking for a dead Jesus. They did not remember his words that he would be raised from the dead.

8. According to v. 8 how did the women respond to the earthquake, the angel, the empty tomb, the guards laying on the ground and the words of the angel?

The women believed what the angel told them. They quickly left the tomb and ran to obey the angels words to tell the disciples that Jesus was risen and that he would meet them in Galilee. They left the tomb "with fear and great joy."

9. What are we to make of the fact that the women were afraid and both the angel and Jesus commanded them to not be afraid?

The fear they felt is not the result of faith. The fear they are experiencing isn't the fear of faith but the fear of unbelief, of superstition. We are to fear God, to fear his wrath against sin. As the writer to the Hebrews says, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the

*hands of the living God.” However, this is not the fear they are experiencing. This fear is like the fear of the guards. They did not expect to see an angel. They did not expect to see the resurrected Christ. They did not believe the words of Jesus. Therefore, when they see the angel and they see Christ, they are afraid of them. Christians do not fear the crucified and resurrected Christ. He laid down his life for us. He calls us, as he says in v. 10, his brothers. We are members of his family by his gracious work and so we ought not fear him. The fear these women have is the lingering effect of their unbelief.*

**10.** What does the emotion of “great joy” and the actions of these women in vv. 8-10 tell us about the nature of faith?

*Their joy is the fruit of the faith that has been born in their hearts. The crucified Christ is alive and so they are full of joy. True faith always produces joy. It is the nature of faith to generate joy. If your dad tells you that he has made reservations at one of the water park hotels up in Wisconsin Dells for the family for next weekend how are you going to feel? You believe what your dad says and you believe that going to the water park will make you happy and so you are full of joy. During the next week, if you get sick or if you are bummed out by having to do your homework all you have to do is to think about the fact that you are going to the water park and you’ll be happy. These women are told that the crucified Jesus is alive and that he is going to meet all the disciples in Galilee. They believe the word of the angel, they are delighted with the thought of being with Jesus, and so they are full of joy.*

*Notice that not only are they full of joy but they obey the word of the angel. They quickly go to tell the other disciples that Jesus is raised from the dead and that he will meet them in Galilee, just like he said. They obey God and go to bear witness to the resurrected Christ. As they are running from the tomb to the disciples to tell them what the angel said, Jesus himself approaches them. Immediately they recognize that it is Jesus and they fall on their faces before him, seize his feet and worship him. Again, notice what faith does. Faith obeys the word of God. Faith bears witness to the resurrected Christ and faith worships Christ.*

**11.** What is Jesus seeking to communicate to his disciples when he calls them his “brothers”? Compare with Matthew 12:46-50. What is surprising about this?

*Jesus calls these cowards, these unbelieving deniers “brothers”. The disciples who all ran for their lives when Jesus was arrested are called brothers. Peter, who denied that he even knew Jesus, is called a brother. While they sit in the despair of unbelief he calls them brothers. This is even more astonishing when we remember the other time in Matthew when he called his disciples his brothers. It was back in Matthew 12. Jesus’ mom and biological half brothers had come to see him while he was teaching a crowd of people in someone’s house. He was told that his mother and brothers were standing outside and they wanted to speak with him. Jesus responded to this information by saying this, “‘Who is my mother and who are my brothers?’ Pointing to his disciples he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’” The despairing, fearing, cowardly, self-centered disciples are called by Jesus, “those who do the will of his Father in heaven.” How can he say this? He can say this because people do not become his brothers and sisters by their own efforts or by their own merit. These men are brothers because Jesus says they are brothers. He chooses them, they don’t choose him. He calls them brothers and then they do the will of God. The cause of their obedience, which we read about in the book of Acts, is due to the grace of God, not due to their own natural goodness. It is by the free, unmerited grace of God that humans become the brothers and sisters of the resurrected Christ.*

**12.** In what ways is your faith in Jesus Christ like and unlike the faith of the two Mary’s?

**In raising Jesus from the dead, God gives faith to his people.**

**13.** Of the four gospels, only Matthew records the events of 27:62-66, 28:4 & 11-15. Why does he do this? Why is it important to him to record these events? CLUE: Read Psalm 2:1-6. Consider, what are the chief priests trying to prevent and how successful are they? How believable is the story the guards tell?

*Verses 62-66 are a perfect description of rulers plotting in vain. The chief priests plot with Pilate to keep the Son of God in the grave. They voice their contempt for God's Messiah, calling him a deceiver. They think to keep the body in the tomb by putting a string across the rock that covers the tomb with a lump of clay marked with the imperial Roman seal. They mean to frighten God with the threat of arousing the wrath of Rome if he dare break that seal. Then they station 4 to 12 fierce soldiers with swords and spears to fight off any attempt to steal the body.*

*Look at verse 4. God sends an angel and an earthquake. The angel throws the stone to the ground, breaking the frightening seal. He sits on the stone and these battle-hardened, ferocious warriors fall to the ground like dead men, due to their fear. The angel terrifies them. Most likely, these are some of the men who bowed before Christ in mockery, spit in his face, and hit him on the head. God turns the tables on these brutal men and laughs at them.*

*At some point, they are able to pick themselves off the ground and flee for their lives, after seeing the empty tomb. They know how upset the chief priests will become once this story of the angel and the earthquake and the empty tomb gets out. So the cunning soldiers go to the chief priests and report to them what they have seen for the purpose of blackmailing them. They report the angel, the earthquake, the angel telling the women that Jesus is risen from the dead and the empty tomb. Just like they knew, the religious leaders give them lots of silver to buy their false testimony.*

*This story is ludicrous. A dozen peasants who all fled at the arrest of Jesus and have been hiding out in fear of being arrested dared to come to the tomb, into the very presence of the soldiers they feared, break the Roman seal and carried away a corpse? You mean to tell me that all of these soldiers, knowing that falling asleep at your post would mean death, fell asleep? If the disciples came while the soldiers slept, how do they know it was the disciples that stole the body? If they know it was the disciples then surely they have tracked these desperate criminals down, arrested them, and recovered the body? Surely, the rulers of the earth have plotted in vain. God laughs at man's attempts to thwart his efforts to install his king on his holy hill. What God did*

*to these religious leaders and these soldiers he will one day do to all of his enemies. One day every knee will bow to the resurrected Christ in abject fear. One day all his enemies will fall at the feet of the crucified and resurrected Christ like dead men out of terror at this presence. God laughs at his enemies.*

**14. Why do the guards and the religious leaders not believe in the resurrected Jesus?**

*The soldiers see the empty tomb. They know it is true that Jesus is raised from the dead. However, they don't believe in the resurrected Christ. The religious leaders know that Jesus is raised from the dead but they do not believe in the resurrected Christ. The soldiers seek to use the resurrection to make themselves rich. The religious leaders seek to cover up the resurrection to preserve their power and prestige. They don't believe because they don't want to believe, not because there is no evidence to believe.*

**15. Why do people not believe in Jesus?**

*If you do not have this faith, it is because you love something other than God, just like the soldiers loved money and the leaders loved power. You trust something other than the gospel, not because it is more rational, but because you are an enemy of God and no one can love what they hate. These soldiers and these leaders show how right it will be for God to destroy all his enemies forever in hell because his enemies have refused to believe what is obviously true because they hate him, not because he has not given them adequate reason to believe. Refusal to believe in the resurrected Christ proves that you are no different than the brutal soldiers who tortured Christ or these religious hypocrites who pursued the Son of God to death.*

**In raising Jesus from the dead, God laughs at his enemies.**