

Jesus' Return to Life—What Does It Mean to Us?



SABBATH—JUNE 7

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 27:62–66; Luke 4:36–39; Acts 3:14–16; 1 Corinthians 15; Philippians 3:7–10.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘I am the Living One. I was dead. But look! I am alive for ever and ever!’ ” (Revelation 1:18, Nlrv).

EASTER WAS COMING. A teacher sent her students out into nature around the school. She gave each student a little box with the assignment: Bring back something in the box that is a symbol¹ of life. When the children returned, each box was opened, one at a time. The teacher opened the first box. Out flew a butterfly. Another box had leaves. Another twigs. But then one box she opened was empty.

“How stupid!” one student spoke out. “Somebody didn’t [did not] do the assignment!”

At that point, Philip, a boy with Down syndrome,² spoke up, “That’s [that is] my box.”

“Well, Philip,” the same boy continued. “You messed up the assignment!”

“No,” answered Philip, boldly. “The tomb was empty!”

On that day Philip became a respected member of the group. He died a short time later. At his funeral all the members of the class brought empty boxes to the service, in honor of their fallen classmate.

Yes, 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. It is found in the resurrection³ of Jesus Christ from the dead.

1. symbol—an object, mark, sign, or person that stands for, or means the same thing as, another object, idea, or thing.

2. Down syndrome—a condition present at birth in which a person has problems learning and may have any number of physical traits, such as a broad face, short nose, slanting eyes, and short fingers.

3. resurrection—return to life from the dead.

SUNDAY—JUNE 8**THE STORY OF THE RESURRECTION—PART 1 (Matthew 27:62–66)**

Several events may be described as very important to Christianity. Among them are the Incarnation,⁴ the Cross, and the Second Coming. But in a way, the Resurrection beats them all. This includes the Cross that we discussed in last week's lesson. Without the Resurrection, nothing else is important! When we talk about the death of Jesus, we really include the Resurrection without saying it. It is the central doctrine of the Christian faith.



Jesus' return to life from the dead is our most important belief.

Of all the world religions, Judaism (the Jewish religion) and Christianity are the only two that teach resurrec-

tion. And only Christianity makes it central (important). Only Christianity has been founded on the belief that its central Person was raised from the dead. All four Gospels⁵ cover the wonderful event. And they tell the story with honesty that makes it very believable.

How do Matthew 27:50–66 and Mark 15:42–47 make the following Resurrection story believable?

The events 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 to support or disagree with these reports. The Jewish religious order (group) would not have let such claims go unchallenged if false. This would have included the tearing of the temple curtain “from the top”! (Certainly some of those who had worked in the temple that day would have seen something.) The earthquake would have been public and very visible (can be seen) for this area. The resurrection of dead people and their appearance to many in the city would also be widely known. (What possible reason could the writer have for making up a detail like that!) The witness of the Roman centurion and his fellow soldiers would also be powerful. And so would the sealing of the tomb, as well as the posting of a special guard at the tomb. And the list goes on. These are

4. Incarnation—the coming of Jesus as a human being (person).

5. Gospels—the four books of the New Testament that tell the story of Jesus' life and His teachings. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

visible events that require no defense.

MONDAY—JUNE 9

THE STORY OF THE RESURRECTION—PART 2 (Luke 24:36–39)

In yesterday's study, we began listing sets of verses in the Gospels that describe events surrounding the death of Jesus. They are the events that support the Resurrection story. Following are a few more sets of verses along the same idea.

What important message is found in Matthew 28; Mark 16; and Luke 24:10–44? What same important key point do all of them have?

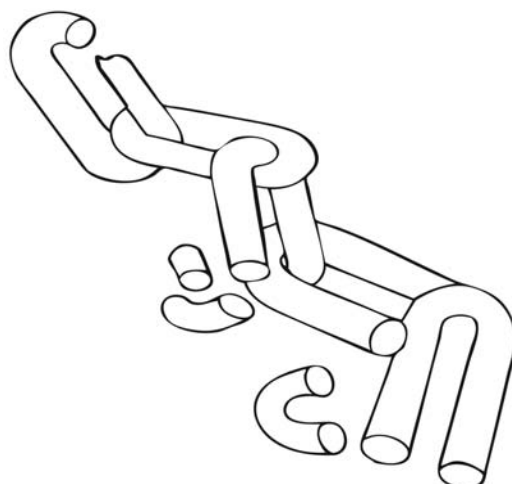
The above list does not carry any reference from John. But all four Gospels cover the Resurrection very well.

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

“The historic faith of the Church has agreed with St. Paul: ‘If Christ has not been raised, your faith doesn't [does not] mean anything’ (1 Corinthians 15:17, NlrV). All other Christian doctrines [beliefs] depend on the resurrection. For example, Christmas lies [is based] in the fact that the born child is really the one whom God raised from the dead. Good Friday is only the anniversary⁶ of just one more martyr⁷

unless you believe that the one who died is also the one who rose again, Jesus. The Lord's Supper in the Church would not have been important if the Lord had not broken the bread [died for man].”—Adapted from Alan Richardson, editor, “Resurrection of Christ,” *A Dictionary of Christian Theology [The Study of God]* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), page 290.

In the verses for today, we find the power of Jesus' resurrection. He broke the chains of the tomb. The Roman seals gave way. The grave burst open. And Jesus announces today: “‘I am the Living One. I was dead. But look! I am alive for ever and ever!’ ” (Revelation 1:18, NlrV). Suppose you were asked to say in ten words or less what the Resurrection means to you. What might those words be?



Jesus broke the chains of death and of the grave.

6. anniversary—the date on which something happened in an earlier year.

7. martyr—a person who is killed because of his or her beliefs or faith.

TUESDAY—JUNE 10**HIS RETURN TO LIFE MADE A MOVEMENT GROW (Acts 3:14–16)**

How could such a “foolish” belief as the resurrection of a dead prophet (special messenger) spread through Rome if it was not believable? Why would a group of fishermen and tax collectors invent such a story? And if they did invent it, how did they come to believe it? They believed so strongly themselves that they were prepared to leave family and friends to defend it and to give their lives for the risen Christ.

The arrest, trial, and killing of their Master had left these followers broken-hearted and defeated. Discouraged, the disciples (followers of Jesus) began going back to their old lives. (And they themselves tell the story.) We hear only about how they went back to fishing, which was the former work of most of them. But there also must have been a lot of sadness among nonfishermen, such as Matthew and Simon the Zealot.⁸ They wondered where to go from there, what to do next.

Flash ahead weeks later, to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost⁹ (Acts 2). When Peter gave his famous Pentecostal sermon, he spoke of Jesus as a living person,

who had risen from the dead and appeared before the heavenly Father. Peter also announced that Jesus was alive. This made a deep impression on the hearers. “ ‘Brothers, what should we do?’ ” they asked (Acts 2:37, NIV).

The focus on the Resurrection was not a fad¹⁰ for these early believers. It was not something to be forgotten when something better came along. Instead, the Resurrection was an important part of the apostles' preaching. Peter and the other apostles¹¹ often returned to it in their sermons.

What theme do Acts 3:11–16; Acts 4:8–12; Acts 7:54–56; and Acts 17:29–31 often return to? And why?

“For the earliest Christian preaching, it is the Resurrection that points to Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. . . . This is the point at which his rule as Messiah begins. This takes place when . . . he enters upon and begins the age of GLORY.”—Adapted from *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, volume R–Z, page 44.

Writing to the Philippians, Paul spoke of wanting to “know Christ and the power of his resurrection” (Philippians 3:10, NIV). What do you think that means? How can we

8. Zealot—a member of a fanatical group in Judea during the first century A.D. who was against Roman rule in Palestine.

9. Pentecost—the time when Jesus' followers received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit after Jesus went back to heaven (Acts 2:1–4).

10. fad—a custom, style, and so on, that many people are interested in for a short time; a passing fashion.

11. apostles—God's disciples (followers) who preached and taught the gospel after Jesus returned to heaven.

today experience the power of the Resurrection in our lives? (Read, for example, John 3:3; Romans 6:1–12.)

WEDNESDAY—JUNE 11

THE AUTHORITY (SOURCE) FOR WITNESSING (Philippians 3:7–10)

We find the power of the Resurrection in the ministry (work) of the apostles. Peter's words to the cripple are based on a risen Savior: " 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk' " (Acts 3:6, NIV). The people go wild with surprise and wonder over the miracle. Peter reminds them of the trial and death of Jesus (verses 13, 14). Then he begins to move toward the good news, his goal from the start: " 'You killed the one who gives life. But God raised him from the dead' " (verse 15, NIV). Peter also says that it is through the power of Jesus' resurrection that the crippled man was made to walk. " 'This man whom you see and know was made strong because of faith in Jesus' name. Faith in Jesus has healed him completely' " (verse 16, NIV).

This is a wonderful miracle. But Peter is arrested and asked to answer for these unusual actions. " 'By what power did you do this? . . . And through whose name?' " (Acts 4:7, NIV). With such an invitation, Peter focuses on his favorite theme, the resurrection of Jesus: " 'You nailed Jesus Christ of Nazareth to the cross.



Peter heals the crippled man.

But God raised him from the dead. It is through Jesus' name that this man stands healed in front of you' " (verse 10, NIV).

So, three separate times, Peter has focused on the resurrection of Jesus as the source of his power for witnessing. In fact, the very preaching of Christ suggested His resurrection (Acts 5:40–42).

"The strong belief that Jesus continued to live changed twelve or so discouraged followers of the crucified (put to death on a cross) Christ into one of the most powerful groups in human¹² history. We read that tongues of fire came upon them. People who were not speakers became powerful speakers. They quickly spread across the Greek-Roman world and preached the gospel. But it is really the Good News. They started in an upper room in Jerusalem and spread their message with such fire that in their own

12. human—of or concerning men, women, or children.

generation it took root in every important city of the area.”—Adapted from Huston Smith, *The Illustrated World's Religions*, page 215.

Read 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's great argument on the Resurrection. How central (important) is this truth to the Christian faith? In other words, how much depends on it? Do you have loved ones who have passed away? What special parts of Paul's argument bring you the greatest comfort?

THURSDAY—JUNE 12

GUARANTEES (SEALS; PROMISES) OUR OWN RESURRECTION (1 Corinthians 15:20)

The New Testament is very clear on the resurrection of Jesus. But some “modern-minded” thinkers are trapped in a purely scientific way of thinking. They argue against the Resurrection being real. Instead, they say that the Resurrection should be seen as a false idea. They argue that it is a symbol of a new resurrected life we can have now on earth if and when we accept the moral (righteous; holy) teaching of Jesus.

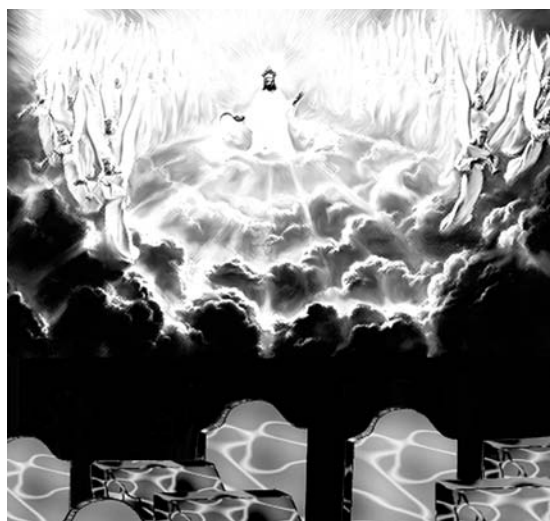
That might sound nice. But it is a view based on human thinking. And it is not based on the clear teaching of God's Word. God's Word is very clear on the realness of Christ's resurrection.

For us, there is no danger in accepting the Resurrection as a symbol. This is because God's Word (the Bible) is very clear about the real resurrection of

Jesus in bodily form. Suppose we are set in our belief in the Resurrection. Then we can for ourselves hold dear to the hope it offers us in the face of death. No matter what happens to us in this life, we have the hope that we will rise from the dead as Jesus did. The promise of the Resurrection helps us to keep everything in its proper light (understanding).

What hope do John 5:25–29; John 11:23–26; 1 Corinthians 15:51–58; and Revelation 1:18 give us about our own resurrection?

The resurrection of Jesus promises three things: (1) that our future is secure (safe) in Jesus (1 Peter 1:3–5); (2) that death is a defeated foe (1 Corinthians 15:20–22); and (3) that power is available to share this wonderful news with others (John 14:12; Acts 1:8).



No matter what happens in life, we have the hope that we will rise from the dead when Jesus comes.

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

FRIDAY—JUNE 13

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Over the open tomb of Joseph, Christ had announced victoriously, ‘I am the resurrection, and the life.’ These words could be spoken only by God. All created beings live by the will and power of God. They are dependent receivers of the life of God. From the highest angel to the humblest animal, all are given life by the Creator of life. Only He [Jesus] who is one with God could say, I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again. As God, Christ had the power to break the bonds [chains] of death.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, “The Lord Is Risen,” page 785, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“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 people did not receive immortality [living forever]. After they were raised from the dead, they were still subject to death. But those who came forth from the grave at Christ’s resurrection were raised to everlasting life. They went up to heaven with Him as

trophies¹³ of His victory over death and the grave. Christ said, ‘They are no longer prisoners of Satan. I have freed them. I have brought them from the grave as the first fruits of My power. They are to be with Me where I am, nevermore to see death or experience sorrow.’”—Page 786, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Take another look at 1 Corinthians 15, which champions the defense of the Resurrection in the New Testament. Follow Paul’s arguments in favor of this basic Christian teaching. Why do these verses make little sense if you believe that the righteous dead go quickly to heaven at death? How is our understanding of the state of the dead supported by these verses? What makes the promise of the Resurrection so important to the Seventh-day Adventist belief in 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 verses that support the resurrection of Jesus. Bring them to class and together review the evidence (proof). How strong is the evidence? How can you put this material together in a way that could be used as a powerful witnessing tool?

13. trophies—things kept as a reminder or keepsake of victory (a win) or success, such as a deer’s head from a hunting trip, a silver cup from a sporting event, or an enemy’s sword from a battle.