

The Glory of Jesus' Suffering, Death, and Resurrection

Lesson Seven

The Risen One Has Broken the Power of Death

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. (Psalm 16:9,10)

1. The risen Lord descends into hell
2. The risen Lord comforts his disciples
3. Why the Lord Jesus *had* to rise from the dead

Worship

Read responsively Psalm 22:22-27. (These are the words of God the Son to his Father.)

A: I will declare your name to my brothers;

B: In the congregation I will praise you.

A: You who fear the LORD, praise him!

B: All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!

A: For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one;

B: He has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.

A: From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;

B: Before those who fear you will I fulfill my vows.

A: The poor will eat and be satisfied;

B: They who seek the LORD will praise him—may your hearts live forever!

A: All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD,

B: And all the families of the nations will bow down before him.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, open our eyes to see all the glory and wonder of your saving love for us, which has been revealed by your resurrection. May the message of your resurrection give us the peace that knows no end and the joy that lasts for eternity. Amen.

Introduction

Scripture references:

Matthew 28:1-15

Mark 16:1-11

Luke 24:1-12

John 20:1-18

Anyone who has ever waited through a severe storm, such as a tornado or hurricane, knows the sense of relief that comes when the storm has passed. So it was on the first

Easter Sunday. The brightness and joy of Easter morning shattered the gloom and darkness that had enveloped the disciples ever since Jesus' death. He who was dead was alive, just as he had foretold!

Two thousand years later, the events of Easter morning still have the same power to change our darkness into light. The brightness and joy of Easter morning can break through every dark cloud that wants to overshadow our lives.

Background

At first reading, Matthew's, Mark's, Luke's, and John's accounts of that first Easter morning appear to contradict each other in several details. Were there one, two, three, or more women who ventured out to the tomb at Easter dawn? Were there one or two angels who appeared to them? Did Jesus first appear to Mary Magdalene or to the other women on the way back to Jerusalem?

There is no need to jump to the conclusion that the inspired authors did not get the story straight. The fact that John only mentions Mary Magdalene at the tomb in no way denies that other women went to the tomb as well. The fact that Matthew only mentions the angel who actually spoke to the women at the tomb does not deny that another angel was present. And nowhere do any of the gospel writers profess to tell us exactly how many appearances of the risen Lord there were on that morning or in what order those appearances took place. It was not the writers' plan to give a "blow by blow" account of everything that happened on Easter Sunday. Each author had one simple truth to proclaim: Jesus Christ, who was crucified, had risen bodily from the now empty grave!

In this lesson we will focus on this one great truth and its application to our lives: Jesus is risen indeed!

The risen Lord descends into hell

We confess it Sunday after Sunday in the Apostles' Creed. And Sunday after Sunday many who speak the words completely misunderstand the meaning. Many consider these words of the Apostles' Creed, "He descended into hell," to be speaking of our Lord's suffering in hell for the sins of the world. Actually, the exact opposite is true. Let's see what Jesus' first appearance after rising again was all about.

Read 1 Peter 3:18,19.

1. Where does Peter indicate when our Lord Jesus appeared in hell? Why, then, does the Apostles' Creed have this descent into hell listed before the resurrection?

2. Remember the words Jesus spoke on the cross. How does that help us know with certainty that his descent into hell was not for the purpose of suffering for sin?

3. Why, then, did Jesus descend into hell? Consider the words of Colossians 2:15: “Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he [Jesus] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

In the following Easter hymn, C. F. W. Walther, the founder of the Missouri Synod, has a vivid way of expressing the truth of Jesus' stunning victory over the powers of hell. He pictures a wild party in hell when Jesus died. However, it comes to a sudden halt early Easter morning as Jesus crashes the party! Here are stanzas 2 and 3 of his Easter hymn “He's Risen, He's Risen” (CW 143).

The foe was triumphant when on Calvary
The Lord of creation was nailed to the tree.
In Satan's domain did the hosts shout and jeer,
For Jesus was slain, whom the evil ones fear.

But short was their triumph; the Savior arose,
And death, hell, and Satan he vanquished, his foes.
The conquering Lord lifts his banner on high;
He lives, yes, he lives, and will nevermore die.

The risen Lord comforts his disciples

We cannot be sure of the exact sequence of events on Easter morning. Picture fearful and perplexed disciples running here and there all around Jerusalem as word began to spread that Jesus rose from the dead. Only gradually does stubborn unbelief give way to the truth of the resurrection!

Between the tomb and Jerusalem

Read Matthew 28:1-10.

1. Why did the angel roll back the stone from the tomb?
2. How might the angel's words have made the women feel ashamed: “He is not here; he has risen, *just as he said*”?
3. Why do you think the words “my brothers” were so comforting to the disciples?

Mary Magdalene at the tomb

Read John 20:1-18.

1. Explain how Mary at first failed to recognize the angels and Jesus.
2. How could one little word, “Mary,” suddenly snap Mary Magdalene out of her sad stupor?
3. Comment on the importance of these words of Jesus: “I am returning to my Father and *your* Father, to my God and *your* God.”

Peter—somewhere in the area of Jerusalem

Read Luke 24:33,34.

1. Explain why Peter may have been singled out for a special audience with his risen Lord.

Can you imagine how many times the disciples must have kicked themselves for their unbelieving fears and doubts? How important that we realize how unbelieving and foolish we are whenever we doubt any of our risen Lord's promises.

Christian, dry your flowing tears;
Chase your unbelieving fears.
Look on his deserted grave;
Doubt no more his pow'r to save. (CW 159:3)

Why the Lord Jesus *had* to rise from the dead

In 1 Corinthians chapter 15, the apostle Paul tells us that without the doctrine of Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead, all of Christianity becomes utterly meaningless. On the basis of three passages of Scripture, let's look at why the resurrection is absolutely necessary to our Christian faith.

Read Romans 1:1-4.

1. What truth about Jesus' person is powerfully revealed by his resurrection from the dead?

Read Romans 4:25.

1. A better translation of this verse is, “He was delivered over to death because of our sins and was raised to life because of our justification.” This translation better reflects the Greek. According to this verse, why did Jesus die? Why was Jesus raised to life?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-20.

1. If Jesus had not risen from the dead, why would we deserve “to be pitied more than all men”?
2. Focus on the word *firstfruits*. Why is it so comforting that Jesus is “the *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep”?
3. At committal services, these words of 1 Corinthians 15:55-57 are almost always read: “‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” How can we poke fun at death like this when it seems death has won a victory by taking a believing loved one from us?
4. Paul concludes his great resurrection chapter with these words: “Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58). What confidence for this life can we draw from Jesus’ bodily resurrection from the grave?

During the week

Read through all the references listed at the beginning of this lesson. Discover again the joy and wonder of those who first witnessed God’s resurrection miracle.

As we prepare for the last lesson, read the Scripture references that share Jesus’ final resurrection appearances: Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:12-20; Luke 24:13-53; John 20:19–21:25; Acts 1:1-11; and 1 Corinthians 15:1-7.