

ALIVE . . . AGAIN!

Matthew 28

OBJECTIVES

- To affirm three truths about the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- To discuss how we might share similar feelings with the disciples after the resurrection.

OVERVIEW

The resurrection of Jesus gives us hope. Hope is one of those esoteric words that is used a lot in Christianity, but is tough to grasp in meaning. For me, the definition of hope became very real when I visited a prison in Mexico. I was there to play basketball with a team of Christians who were going to share their testimony after the game. Most of the prison basketball players were in the penitentiary for murder. So you can imagine, they had no problem with hard fouls. The prison setting made me miserable and depressed. These men were trapped in a small community with few freedoms. Most were going to die in this setting. Very few had any hope at all to get out. As I talked with them I discovered a strong sense of apathy and hatred. Without hope they had given up on life. They didn't care about relationships. They would stab someone who tried to cut in line for the pay phone.

Later, I thought of the apostle Paul, who spent some time in prison and even wrote some of our New Testament letters while behind bars. Even while in jail, he was able to write about joy and hope. Why was he able to write like this? His writings reveal that his faith was the source of his hope. Paul had assurance of his faith. He knew Jesus had risen from the dead like He promised. Paul knew that what Jesus said was true. He knew that God was powerful.

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then God would be powerless and we would be lost forever, following the teachings of a dead guy. But the resurrection gave Paul hope. If God could raise Jesus from the dead, then He had the power to do anything. Paul had certainty that his sins would be forgiven and that he would spend eternal life with the Creator. This was his formula for hope.

The miracle of the resurrection gives us a hope to keep living 2,000 years after the promised event. We, too, have hope that God will do what He promised. We have hope that the same God who raised Jesus from the dead has the power to make our life better today.

Inside jail and outside, the world is falling apart and the miracle of Easter is our only real hope. Easter isn't about bunnies, baskets, and jellybeans—it's about the hope we have in a faithful God!

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith (1 Corinthians 15:14 NIV).

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OUTLINE

The resurrection of Jesus is God's ultimate proof of His supernatural power. It's the Main Event in the New Testament and the pinnacle message of the Gospels. Since Jesus' resurrection, there have been movements to make Christ just another man by "proving" that the resurrection was a hoax. This teaching outline identifies three main truths crucial to the Easter message.

The Main Events of Easter

1. Jesus REALLY died.

Jesus experienced a cruel death on the cross. Jesus was 100% human (and 100% God), and His death was a human death.

In an attempt to invalidate the resurrection, some people try to explain that Jesus never really died. They believe that the Roman soldiers, who were experts at crucifixion, made a mistake. Jesus just looked dead while hanging on the cross. They believed He was merely unconscious. Then, after He was wrapped in several pounds of burial clothes and placed in the cool tomb, He was suddenly resuscitated. Now that He was conscious, He was able to hobble over (with nail holes in His hands and feet and a back ripped open by whipping) and dislodge a huge bolder. Once the tomb was open, He was able to sneak past the security of trained soldiers and run off. This explanation takes more faith to believe than the resurrection itself.

2. Jesus was REALLY buried.

When someone dies you bury them. The Roman soldiers were aware of Jesus' claims that He would rise from the dead. They weren't going to take any chances and give the disciples Jesus' body. If the disciples were given the body they could lie that He had risen from the dead.

3. Jesus REALLY rose from the dead.

This is the bottom line of our faith. The resurrection of Jesus is the miracle our faith is built on. It wasn't the "spiritual" resurrection of a ghost; it was a physical resurrection! It was God's miracle for our faith.

I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me—that Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the twelve apostles. After that, he was seen by more than five hundred of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died by now (1 Corinthians 15:3-6 NLT).

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

Open

- How would you define hope?
- What do you put your hope in for the future?
- Respond to this statement: "If Jesus had not risen from the dead He would be no different than another good religious leader."
- If Jesus had appeared to you after His resurrection, how would you have responded?

Dig In

1. Transition into your study by reading Matthew 28.

2. Set up your discussion by telling the group that you're going to look at four people who witnessed the resurrection. All of these people loved Jesus, but were consumed with some strong feelings of despair when He died. They thought all hope was lost.

Mary: Mary was consumed with sorrow. She was hurting over the loss of Jesus. She went to the tomb and Jesus was gone. She was crushed and disheartened!

The Disciples: The disciples were consumed with fear. They were locked in their room, afraid of the Jewish leaders who condemned Jesus to death.

Thomas: Thomas was consumed with doubt. Even after the resurrection, he didn't believe the disciples' words and said, "I will not believe until I see the nail marks in His hands. And I will not believe until I put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into His side."

Peter: Peter was consumed with failure. He had denied Jesus three times after swearing to be faithful, even to the point of death.

- Can you identify with any of these people?
- When your faith is weak, which of these four best describes you: sorrowful, fearful, doubtful, or unfaithful?
- Does sorrow, fear, doubt, or failure keep you from knowing God or really living life as it was intended?

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CLOSE

1. How does the resurrection offer you hope?
2. The resurrection of Jesus means there is power to begin again, no matter where you are, no matter what you've done, no matter what you're into. What area of your life needs God's power right now?
3. Who is one person you can share the message of Easter with this year?
4. When you think of sharing this message, which feeling is the first one to arise? Failure? Doubt? Fear? How can you overcome these?