



## THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST

**Reading:** John 20

### The third day

It was early in the morning on the first day of the week, the third day after Jesus' death. With great sadness some of his women followers went to his tomb (grave). They carried spices to anoint his body. But they did not know how they were going to move the huge stone that sealed the entrance to the tomb. When they arrived, the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty! Two angels appeared and said to them,

*"Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen"* (Luke 24:5,6).



The women went and told the disciples. Peter and John ran to the tomb to see for themselves. Certainly the tomb was empty, and Jesus' grave clothes were lying inside.

One of the women, Mary Magdalene, returned to the tomb and wept. She thought that someone had stolen the body, despite what the angels had said. Then Jesus came and talked with her, but she thought that he was the gardener (John 20:14-18). Then Jesus said, *"Mary!"* He spoke her name and suddenly she knew that it was her Lord. He really was alive!

### Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

Some people do not believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Here are some of the reasons they give for not believing in the resurrection.

1. **People say:** "Jesus did not die on the cross. It just looked as if he were dead. He recovered later inside the cool tomb."

**BUT...** the Bible says that Jesus did die on the cross. The Roman soldiers broke the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus, so that they would die quickly; but the soldiers did not break Jesus' legs – they knew that he was already dead (John 19:31-33). Also, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus for burial. When Pilate asked a Roman centurion if Jesus was already dead, the centurion confirmed that he was dead (Mark 15:43-45). Centurions could be trusted to know whether a man was dead or alive.

2. **People say:** "His disciples stole the body."

**BUT...** this is not true. The Jewish religious leaders had placed guards at the tomb to prevent this. They were afraid that Jesus' disciples would steal his body and claim that he had been raised from the dead (Matthew 27:62-66). When the angel appeared and rolled back the stone at the entrance to the tomb, the guards were powerless. The leaders later bribed the guards to say that the disciples had stolen the body (Matthew 28:2-4, 11-15).

There is nothing in the Bible to suggest that the disciples stole the body. It would have been impossible for them to move the large stone sealing the tomb while the guards were present. After Jesus' death the disciples were frightened, unhappy and disbelieving. They were too scared to trick the Jewish leaders.

The disciples did not believe that Jesus was alive until they had actually seen him (John 20:19,20). When they were sure that he was alive, the disciples became changed men. They risked their lives preaching about the resurrection. Some even died for their faith. They would not have done such things if they had stolen the body.



3. **People say:** “He left his body behind, and came back as a spirit.”

**BUT...** Jesus was raised from the dead with a body. He did not come back as a spirit. Thomas saw the holes in Jesus’ hands and side that were caused by the nails and the centurion’s spear at the crucifixion. Jesus told him to feel these holes (John 20:27).

Jesus said to his disciples, “*Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have*” (Luke 24:39). Jesus asked for food and ate it as his disciples watched (Luke 24:41-43).

4. **People say:** “The women went to the wrong tomb.”

**BUT...** the women knew where Jesus’ tomb was, because some of them were present when his body was laid there (Luke 23:55). Mark 16:6 shows that the women went to the correct tomb and the angels spoke to them there. Some of the women and disciples saw the grave clothes in the empty tomb.

The religious leaders did not want the people to think that Jesus had risen from the dead. They would have quickly pointed out the women’s mistake and shown the body, if Jesus had not been raised. The leaders knew the correct tomb because they had placed guards there.

It needs faith to accept that Jesus rose from the dead. Even the disciple, Thomas, did not believe it at first. He was not convinced until he saw Jesus for himself. Jesus said to him, “*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*” (John 20:29).

There was never any question about whether the sinless Son of God would rise from the dead. Death is the punishment for sin. God raised Jesus from the dead because he was totally sinless and did not deserve death:

*“God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it”* (Acts 2:24).

### **Had the time for God’s kingdom come?**

When Jesus entered Jerusalem shortly before his death, crowds of disciples gathered along the road and praised him:

*“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”* (John 12:13, Mark 11:10).

They understood that Jesus was the special son whom God had promised David. They also understood that Jesus would restore God’s kingdom on earth and become king. But they thought that it was to happen while he was with them, rather than some time in the future.

Similarly, when the disciples finally realised that Jesus really was alive again, they hoped that he would restore God’s kingdom immediately. During the 40 days before his ascension, the Lord spent time with them speaking about that kingdom (Acts 1:3). They asked,

*“Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”* (Acts 1:6).

Jesus answered,

*“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority”* (Acts 1:7).

There was work to be done before the setting up of God’s kingdom. The apostles were to be sent into the world to preach the Gospel. All this happened nearly 2,000 years ago, but the work of preaching continues today. The delay gives the opportunity for more people to turn to God:

*“But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief ...”* (2 Peter 3:8-10).





## The ascension of the Lord Jesus to heaven

While the Lord Jesus was talking to his disciples about these things on the Mount of Olives, just outside Jerusalem, he was taken up from them into heaven to be with his Father. As they watched him ascend into heaven, two angels spoke to the disciples. The words of the angels in Acts 1:10,11 tell us that Jesus will return.

**Acts 1:10,11** And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven'.

Jesus was taken up into heaven in bodily form (remember, he was not a spirit). It will be this same Jesus who returns. He will come back **in the same way as he went**. Christ Jesus will come again in bodily form to reign as king over the whole earth. Then he will restore the kingdom to Israel.

## The Lord Jesus has been raised to a highly exalted position

After his resurrection the Lord Jesus was exalted to a position of great glory. God gave all authority to him (Matthew 28:18). He is now in heaven, sitting at his Father's right hand. Apart from God Himself, there is no greater being in the whole universe. The apostle Peter says:

**Acts 2:36** ... God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

**1 Peter 1:21** ... (God) raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

**1 Peter 3:22** ... (Jesus) has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

The Lord Jesus Christ has the authority to give immortal life to those who are found acceptable:

*"For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will"* (John 5:21).

We can join with the multitude of angels who praise the Lord Jesus Christ, saying:

*"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!"* (Revelation 5:12).

## The importance of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus

The whole Gospel message depends on the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. If the Lord Jesus, who was sinless, did not rise from the dead, then no one will. The apostle Paul explains this to believers in 1 Corinthians 15. He says that if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then their faith is worthless, and their sins are not forgiven. If this is the case, then those who have died have perished without hope:

*"... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins"* (1 Corinthians 15:17).

What a miserable picture! Thankfully, we know that this is not true – the Lord Jesus did rise from the dead – so Paul adds the following:

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-23	COMMENTS
<p><i>But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.</i></p> <p><i>For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.</i></p> <p><i>For as in Adam all die, so also in <b>Christ</b> shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who <b>belong to Christ</b>.</i></p>	<p>Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first – others will follow.</p> <p>Death came to the human race through Adam. Resurrection from the dead has been made possible through Jesus.</p> <p>Everyone dies, because everyone is descended from Adam. Those belonging to Christ will be made alive. Christ was the first to be raised to immortal life. Those who belong to him will receive immortality when he returns to this earth.</p>





The resurrection of Christ guarantees that those who belong to him will be raised. This means that if we die before Christ Jesus returns, we too can be raised from the dead and receive immortal life. But we will only be given a place in God's kingdom on earth if we are *"in Christ"*. We can *"belong to Christ"* only if we are baptized into his death (Galatians 3:27-29).

### How are the dead raised? With what kind of body?

This was what people wanted to know in Paul's time (1 Corinthians 15:35). Just as the Lord Jesus had a body when he rose from the dead, so true believers will have bodies when they are raised from the dead – they will not be spirits.

The Lord Jesus was given an immortal body when he rose from the dead. When true believers are given a place in God's kingdom their bodies will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51-54). Philippians 3:20,21 says that those whose minds are set on heavenly things await the return of Jesus Christ who will then change their bodies:

*"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will **transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body**, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."*

At present we have mortal (dying) bodies. This is why we can feel tired, suffer pain and become ill – it is all part of the punishment for sin. Those who are given a place in God's kingdom will be made immortal – their bodies will be changed and become undying, free from pain and illness.

What a wonderful offer God has made to us!

- We can have our sins forgiven through the Lord Jesus Christ.
- We can rise from the dead as he did.
- We can be given immortal bodies like him.
- We can have a place in God's kingdom on earth.

It is not surprising that the apostle Paul praises God for this:

*"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).*

This is the great message of salvation. The Lord Jesus told his disciples to preach the message to the whole world. We want to pass it on to you and others!

### Summary

1. God raised Jesus from the dead because he was sinless and did not deserve death.
2. Jesus was raised from the dead with a body – he did not come back as a spirit.
3. After his resurrection the Lord Jesus was exalted to a position of great glory.
4. He ascended to heaven to be with his Father. He now sits at his Father's right hand. Apart from God Himself, no greater being exists.
5. Jesus Christ will return to the earth in the same way as he went into heaven.
6. If we belong to Christ, we too can be raised from the dead and be given immortal bodies.

#### A verse to learn: Acts 2:24

*God raised him (Jesus) up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.*

**Verses to read: Matthew 28, Luke 24, Acts 1**

