

WHY BAPTISTS BELIEVE WHAT BAPTISTS BELIEVE, PART 6

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

I want to start by reading this passage out of Matthew Chapter 28. You all know this one. “Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from Heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay’” (Matthew 28:1-6).

What’s interesting about this account is that Jesus’s body coming back to life and leaving the tomb is never actually described. Through the years various artists have tried to depict what the actual resurrection looked like. Various passion plays have tried their best re-create the resurrection scene. Two examples that come to mind are (1) the Oberammergau Passion Play in Germany which has been put on annually for over 100 years; and (2) the Great Passion Play in Eureka Springs Arkansas. They’ll show Jesus coming out of the tomb, the guards frightened, smoke or dry ice for effect, an angel or two standing around. The truth is that none of us knows what it looked like because the Bible doesn’t tell us. All we know is what Matthew records for us, namely, that there was a great earthquake; an angel descended from Heaven; the angel rolled away the stone and then sat on it. He then declared to Mary Magdalene and the other women, “He is not here. He has risen, just as He said He would.”

The last part of the angel's statement is very important: "just as He said He would," is important. Several times Jesus had predicted He would rise from the dead. The third and final time that Jesus mentioned His resurrection is in Luke Chapter 18. The setting here is that Jesus and His disciples are making their way back to Jerusalem for the Passover. It's their last time, just a week or two before His death. Jesus is talking to them. "And taking the twelve, He said to them, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For He will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging Him, they will kill Him, and on the third day He will rise'" (Luke 18:31-33). Who are the Gentiles that He's going to be delivered over to? Who is going to actually crucify Jesus? The Romans. They are the Gentiles that He is referring to.

So, Jesus predicts that He will be delivered over to the Gentiles, to the Romans; will be mocked, shamefully treated and spat upon. After flogging Him they will kill Him by crucifying Him on a Roman cross. And finally on the third day He will rise. So, there you have it. Jesus predicted His own resurrection. Verse 34 says, "But they (speaking of His disciples) understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said." We know the story. Everything Jesus predicted in this passage came true.

Last time we talked about the significance of Jesus's death for us. Now you can understand why His disciples, when He was crucified, were so demoralized, why they scattered and went into hiding. John was the only one of the disciples at the cross when Jesus was crucified. The other disciples including brave old Peter weren't there as far as we know. Meanwhile, Jesus' enemies are celebrating. "We finally got Jesus! We got that trouble-maker out of the way, that blasphemer. We've won!" Or so they thought.

You know the rest of the story. On Sunday morning, on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead! That's what we celebrate on Easter. Praise the Lord! That's shouting ground! Within a few weeks after that we see His once fearful followers now fearlessly proclaiming His resurrection. Jesus's resurrection from the dead changed everything for them. They were no longer merely following the teachings of a dead founder. They were obeying the directives of their risen Savior and Lord.

This same Jesus lives today - a fact that Baptists fundamentally believe. Here is what the Baptist Faith and Message has to say under the heading "God the Son": "[Jesus] was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the Person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into Heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission. He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever-present Lord." So then, the resurrection seems to be pretty important.

So, why is the resurrection of Jesus Christ so important to us? Paul gives the answer to this question in First Corinthians Chapter 15... "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17).

[Question 1] Fill in the blanks. If Jesus Christ was not raised, then our faith is **futile** and we are still in our sins. The New Living Translation says "useless"; the King James Version says, "in vain"; the New American Standard says "worthless." Take your pick. What Paul is saying here in this verse is that without Christ's resurrection we have no **basis of faith**. All that salvation by grace stuff you can just throw out the window if there was no resurrection. It's that important! It's absolutely fundamental.

Within a few weeks after Jesus' resurrection, we see Peter preaching at Pentecost. What happened at Pentecost? The Holy Spirit came - tongues of fire - and He empowered the believers. So, in Acts Chapter 2 Peter is out preaching. He is talking to his fellow Jews who are there in Jerusalem standing around...

"Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:29-32). His message is so powerful and convicting that later in the chapter we read that 3,000 people were added to the church that same day.

[Question 2] What was the main subject of Peter's sermon at Pentecost? **The resurrection of Jesus**. The same Peter who denied Jesus, who often misspoke, who had been hiding away in fear of the Jewish leaders with the other disciples right after Jesus died - that same Peter is now standing before thousands in Jerusalem, including those same Jewish leaders. He's preaching with boldness and conviction under the power of the Holy Spirit the reality of Jesus' resurrection. The resurrection changed Peter!

Now let's stop right here for a moment and analyze the situation before us. We Baptists and for that matter all Christians have based our entire belief system on the death and resurrection of Jesus. We have already established that without the resurrection we have no basis of faith. And yet the Bible never actually describes Jesus coming out of the tomb with a risen, glorified body. All we have is an empty tomb and an angel saying that Jesus has risen. But how do we know for sure that this whole thing wasn't concocted by the disciples to make it look like Jesus

rose from the dead? That's a fair question. It's what the Jews would later claim. So, let's take a look at the facts of the case...

We know that Jesus was crucified on a Roman cross and He suffered a most inhumane death. You can read about that in all four Gospels. After Jesus dies... Hold on right there. How do we know for sure that Jesus died? Let's see what the scriptures say. Let's go to John Chapter 19 and John's account of Jesus's death. "When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished,' and He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. So, the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water" (John 19:30-34).

One commentary I read said that "if Jesus had still been alive only blood would have flowed out. The outflow of blood and water indicated to the Roman executioners that Jesus was unquestionably dead." Remember, these Roman soldiers were professionals. This is what they did. They had executed hundreds, maybe even thousands. They were professional killers. They knew what they were doing. Jesus was really dead!

So after Jesus died His body was taken down off the cross and placed in a tomb that belonged to a rich man named Joseph. "The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, 'Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while He was still alive, "After three days I will rise." Therefore, order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples go and steal Him away and tell the people, "He has risen from the dead," and the last

fraud will be worse than the first.' Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.' So, they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard" (Matthew 27:62-66).

[Question 3] What request did the Jews make of Pilate? **They requested the Romans guard the tomb for three days.** Why did they make this request? They didn't want that scenario to play out that was mentioned earlier where Jesus's disciples come and steal His body. **They feared the disciples would steal Jesus' body and claim that He had risen from the dead.**

They proactively had Roman guards stationed at the tomb to keep the disciples or anyone else from taking Jesus's body. Under the penalty of death, the Roman soldiers were guarding the body with their lives, literally.

[Question 4] Now for a series of True - False questions.

True or false? Jesus predicted His own resurrection. We read earlier the Luke 18 passage where Jesus predicted His own resurrection. So, that statement is most certainly **True**.

True or false? The disciples were fully expecting Jesus to rise from the dead (Luke 18:34, John 20:9). We read Luke 18:34 earlier which says that the disciples did not understand - "For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead." Clearly the disciples did NOT comprehend what Jesus was saying. The disciples did NOT understand and therefore did NOT expect Jesus to rise from the dead. So, this statement is **False**. They should have known. They should have expected it, but they didn't.

True or false? The Jewish leaders were totally unaware of Jesus' prediction that He would rise from dead (Matthew 27:63). We read this passage before. Though Jesus' disciples may not have understood Jesus' prediction that He would rise from the

dead, the Jewish leaders WERE very much aware of it. They clearly comprehended what Jesus had said. So, this statement is **False**. It's interesting how the religious leaders understood what Jesus said, but Jesus's own disciples did not.

“She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. But when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it” (Mark 16:10-11). True or false? When Mary Magdalene went and reported to the disciples that Jesus had risen, the disciples were in a state of mourning and weeping. Yes, they WERE in a state of mourning and weeping when Mary came to them with her report. That's what v 10 says. So, that statement is **True**.

True or false? The disciple's believed Mary's report and praised God. No, the disciple's REFUSED to believe the women's report. V 11 says, “they would not believe it.” And they were certainly NOT praising God. So, that statement is **False**.

We've already established that Jesus died. But for the sake of argument let's assume Jesus did not really die, but instead, as some have theorized, He had only been weakened and wounded by the crucifixion; He somehow survived His horrific experience on the cross; and the Romans were a bunch of idiots who didn't know that He wasn't really dead (all of these are ridiculous notions); assuming all of this, you still have the obstacle of the huge stone sealing the tomb! This is not just a big rock like you might see in your garden or by the side of the road. This is a massive stone that by some accounts took 20 men to move. You have this huge obstacle to deal with. And you still have those armed and trained Roman soldiers posted at the tomb and guarding it with their lives. If Jesus tried to come out of the tomb, He would have to move the massive stone in His weakened state and then, the soldiers would have stopped Him. If Jesus's disciples or anyone else had tried to steal His body, that same large stone and those same Roman soldiers would certainly have prevented

that from happening. And then, Jesus' enemies would never have taken the body because absence of His body from the tomb would only serve to encourage belief in His resurrection. So that would have been counter-productive to what they were trying to accomplish. But if Jesus's enemies DID take His body for some reason, they would have put it on public display just to prove that Jesus really was dead. But none of those scenarios ever happen. What I'm trying to say is that only Jesus rising from the dead can account for the empty tomb!

If all of that isn't compelling enough - the empty tomb, the testimony of the Roman guards and announcement by angels - the absolute BEST proof of Jesus's resurrection would be Him walking around alive. Well, did Jesus appear to anybody after the resurrection to show that He was alive? That's what Paul talks about in First Corinthians Chapter 15...

"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared also to me" (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

[Question 5] So then, looking at the list that Paul provides, which of the following groups or individuals did Jesus not appear to following His resurrection? Jesus appeared bodily, physically to a whole bunch of people. There were many eyewitness accounts that Jesus was, in fact, alive. They saw Jesus alive with their very own eyes. They knew that the person standing before them WAS Jesus. These were the people closest to Him during His earthly ministry. All those listed here are mentioned by Paul as having witnessed the risen Lord except for **the Jewish high priest**.

Some people might ask, “Why didn’t Jesus appear to the Jewish leaders, His enemies, or any of the unbelievers? Why didn’t He appear to them?” Well, for the answer to that let’s go back. Remember the Roman soldiers assigned to guard Jesus’s tomb? After the resurrection occurred, they had some explaining to do! At the end of Matthew Ch 28 they report to the Jewish leaders what had happened – there was this earthquake; there was this angel that came down and rolled the stone away. They’re just telling the Jewish leaders what they saw.

How did the Jewish leaders respond to this shocking report by the guards? “While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, ‘Tell people, “His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.” And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.’ So, they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day” (Matthew 28:11-15). They made up a lie. They covered up the truth. They paid off the soldiers to spread the story that Jesus’ disciples came by night and took His body. How embarrassing it must have been for the Jewish leaders to admit publicly that the very thing they were trying to prevent from happening, happened anyway. Think about that! Rather than believe and accept the truth that Jesus had actually risen from the dead on the third day just like they heard Him say He would (they remembered it, which is why they had the guard posted), they decided to perpetuate this lie, knowing full well it was a lie.

So then, I asked the question, “Why didn’t Jesus appear to the Jewish leaders, to His enemies?” To answer this let’s go to Luke Chapter 16. Jesus gives the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. In that parable the rich man is in torment in Hades, the place of

the dead, of unbelievers. He looks up and sees Abraham with Lazarus by his side “far off,” separated by this great impassable chasm. At one point the rich man cries out, “I beg you, father Abraham, send Lazarus to my father's house-- for I have five brothers--so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Send Lazarus to my family!” Abraham replies, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.” They have the scriptures, which present the truth about how they can be made right with God, be saved. The rich man responds, “No, father Abraham, but if someone will go to them from the dead, they will repent.” And the final words from Abraham to the rich man ring true here in this scenario: “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.” (Luke 16:31). Do you see where I am going with this? The Jewish leaders had the Old Testament scriptures. They had the evidence from the guards and the empty tomb. They had the truth from God's word about the Messiah and about salvation. They had witnessed Jesus' miracles including raising people from the dead (many of the Pharisees had witnessed Jesus raising his friend Lazarus from the dead). And they had heard His claims and clearly understood them (which is why they wanted to kill Him). Despite all the light they had received, they still would NOT BELIEVE in Jesus. So that's why Jesus didn't appear to them. Here's my point - If Jesus had appeared alive to them, it wouldn't have changed anything. That's how hard-hearted they were in their unbelief.

For us Christians, just like with Peter, the resurrection changes everything!