

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

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THE RESURRECTION

Reading: Matthew 28:1-20

Before looking into our lesson we need to think about what has happened and the effect it had on the people.

The disciples and the women who loved Jesus so much were devastated, they had looked for Jesus coming into Jerusalem to make himself king. They knew all the Old Testament scriptures showing the work of the Messiah. Jesus had done so many miracles, his teaching was so good and true they felt that surely this must be God's beloved son. Yet their hopes were dashed, they were confused, upset and in mental turmoil, they had seen their hopes die on that stake. The disciples had scattered frightened for their own lives. The women were more faithful, they had watched what had happened to the body of their Lord. Peter in particular was feeling so wretched, although Jesus had told him that before the cock crew he would deny him three times, Peter denied this and told Jesus that although everyone else would, he never would. Yet on the night of the arrest he was quick to deny that he ever knew Jesus fearing that if he owned up to being one of the followers of Jesus he too would be taken and beaten and perhaps killed. Now when the realisation came of what he had done he was so ashamed he would never be able to forgive himself.

Normally criminals who were crucified were taken from the cross and their bodies flung outside the city in to *Gehenna* where all the rubbish of the city was burnt. This would have been the fate of Jesus, but Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of the Lord Jesus and with the help of another secret follower, Nicodemus, took Jesus and laid him in new linen cloth and put him to rest in his own new tomb. This was spoken of in Isaiah 53:9, which said he was *with the rich in his death*. God again was in control of all things.

Jesus died on the Day of Preparation and the following day was the Sabbath. The elders of the Jews were still troubled that their plans to get rid of Jesus would fail. Fear had gripped them for as they mocked Jesus on the stake the heavens became black and the earth shook and they would not understand that something had ripped the veil of the temple in two. These were all ominous signs, they must be sure that Jesus remained in the tomb and was not stolen away by his disciples. However from Pilate they had the permission to put a watch and a seal on the tomb as we saw last week and they thought their job was now done.

The Women First to the Tomb

Two faithful women watched where Joseph had put the body, so after resting on the Sabbath Day they came at the early dawn of the first day of the week to the tomb with spices and ointment to anoint the battered body and their beloved Lord. As they walked towards the tomb they would question among themselves who would roll away the stone. On arrival they found to their amazement that the stone was rolled away from the door of the tomb and the tomb was empty of the dead body but instead they saw two angels in shining clothes. Imagine their fear at the sight of these immortal beings, as they stood shaking with fear the angels spoke to them... "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here but is risen".

The women were in state of shock. Could this be true? It must be, but where was the body and what had happened to the soldiers who had guarded the tomb? They must get back to the disciples and tell them all that had happened.

Bursting in upon the company of the sad and disillusioned disciples they told the news but it was too good to be true; they thought the words of the women were like idle tales. Peter as impetuous as ever jumped up to go and find out what all this was about for himself. He and John went to the tomb and found it empty and the clothes neatly placed on one side and the napkin which was around the head of Jesus, place on its own. Even in the darkness of the tomb Peter would see that Jesus had gone, but he was unconvinced. What could have happened to him?

From this time Jesus showed himself to the disciples on many occasion so that they might firmly believe and see that he had truly risen from the dead just as he has said he would.

On the Road to Emmaus

The account of this appearance gives us much to think about. We find two of the disciples leaving Jerusalem for Emmaus, a small village about 6 miles away. As disciples they were even more upset than ever because not only had they lost their Lord in death, they did not even know where the body was. As they walked they talked and a stranger joined with them. Asking them why they were sad they began to talk to him and tell him about Jesus and how he was a prophet mighty in word and deed, but he had been crucified and yet they thought he was to be the one who was to redeem Israel – notice how they had given up all hope that he was the Messiah. The stranger listened and then replied by saying that The Christ must have suffered these things as the prophets had spoken. He went on to show them from the Old Testament the quotations which although spoke about the great king to come who would bring peace and righteousness to all nations, it also showed how he would suffer and die for sin and then rise from the dead. Hour followed hour and the disciples were spell bound at the words of the stranger and how he was showing the scriptures to them in a way they had never seen before. Asking him to share the evening with them and rest from the journey it was not until he took bread and blessed it and broke it that they realised it was the Lord. Jesus was alive; yes the resurrection had taken place. There he was free from the pain and the suffering, free from that battered weary body, now alive.

Running all the way back to Jerusalem these two confirmed that Jesus was indeed alive. They began to tell all that had happened. Then suddenly Jesus appeared in the midst of them. Imagine how startled they would be, but Jesus seeing the worry on their faces asked them to look at his hands and feet, and asked them to touch him. “A spirit has not flesh and bones as you see I have”.... Notice Jesus did not say flesh and blood because Jesus was now energised by the Holy Spirit and not by blood pumping through his veins. There was no mistaking his hands and feet, the terrible holes left by the nails. They wanted to believe that Jesus was alive and that they were not seeing things, yet they found it so hard to do so. Jesus took food and ate it in front of them, this was the sure prediction that indeed Jesus was with them again and alive.

Earlier in the garden, Jesus had also appeared to the beloved Mary, who when she saw Jesus thought he was the gardener and it was only when he spoke that she recognised the voice. This was the Master and she reached out not wanting to lose him again, but Jesus gently had to rebuke her because he had a great work to do and could not be kept from this.

Thomas was not present with the rest when Jesus appeared to them and he could not believe the words of his fellow disciples. He told them that unless he put his fingers into the holes where the nails had been and into the place in his side where the spear had been put he would never believe. Imagine how he must have felt when a little time later Jesus appeared when he was with the rest of the disciples and spoke to him, inviting Thomas to put his finger into the holes. Jesus knew Thomas had said about how he doubted. He knows the hearts and minds of us all and he knew how the disciples were thinking and feeling. But Thomas was convinced, he did not need to reach forward but he proclaimed *my Lord and my God*. This was enough, Jesus was alive again.

In John 20:30, after the account of the resurrection of Jesus had been told:

"Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God and that believing ye might have life through his name...."

In Paul's writing we find the verse which says:

"And if Christ is not raised your faith is vain, you are yet in your sins...."

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is essential to our salvation. Jesus died and rose again; we believe it and we look to his return. Many, many people have tried to disprove it, even the priests bribed the people to say that the disciples had stolen the body. We know this could not be true because the guard was firmly in place and this could not have happened. It could only be the great work of the Lord Jesus in living a sinless life made it essential that he should rise again.

Remember, God is always just and our Bibles tells us that the wages of sin is death. Jesus never sinner so although he was crucified, he did not deserve to die and if God had left him in the grave he would have been unjust and God is never so.

One man set out to disprove the story of the Resurrection of Jesus but the more he looked the more evidence he found and in the end he wrote a book proving that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead. The book is called *Who Moved the Stone*.

Extra work: In your own words, how would you prove to an interested friend that Jesus was indeed alive and that you are convinced of this? Use quotations to prove your point.