

# The Resurrection and Final Words of Jesus

by John F. Walvoord

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*Jesus' resurrection is a historical fact that is supported by eyewitness accounts and has been a source of comfort and strength for believers throughout history.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:1-18, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:34, John 14:20, John 20:26, Acts 1:15, 1 Corinthians 15:6-7

**Topics:** "Resurrection Of Christ", "Great Commission"

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## Description

John F. Walvoord preaches on the appearances of Jesus after His resurrection, detailing the encounters with various individuals and groups, including Mary Magdalene, the women at the tomb, Peter, the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and more. The sermon highlights the significance of these appearances in establishing the reality of Christ's resurrection and the fulfillment of prophecy, despite attempts by some to discredit the event through dishonesty and unbelief. The sermon culminates in Jesus' meeting with His disciples in Galilee, where He commissions them to spread the Gospel to all nations, emphasizing His authority and promise of eternal presence with believers.

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## Transcript

Appearance of Jesus to the Women, 28:1-10

The resurrection of Jesus on the first day of the week is detailed in all four gospels (Mk 16:1-14; Lk 24:1-49; Jn 20:1-23). The probable order of events was as follows:

1. Appearance to Mary Magdalene when she returned after a preliminary visit of the women to the tomb (Mk 16:9-11; Jn 20:11-18)
2. Appearance to the women who had been to the tomb and were bearers of the message of the angels (Mt 28:8-10)
3. Appearance to Peter on the afternoon of the resurrection day (Lk 24:34; 1 Co 15:5)
4. Appearance to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Mk 16:12; Lk 24:13-32)
5. Appearance to the ten disciples on the evening of the resurrection day, Thomas being absent (Lk 24:36-43; Jn 20:19-25)
6. Appearance a week later to the eleven, Thomas being present (Jn 20:26-31; 1 Co 15:5)

7. Appearance to seven of the disciples beside the Sea of Galilee (Jn 21:1-14)
8. Appearance to about five hundred brethren as well as the apostles (Mt 28:16-20; Mk 16:15-18; 1 Co 15:6)
9. Appearance to James, the half brother of Jesus (1 Co 15:7)
10. Appearance on the day of ascension from the Mount of Olives (Mk 16:19-20; Lk 24:44-53; Ac 1:3-12)

Matthew records that "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary" came "to see the sepulchre" (28:1) early that resurrection morning. There were other women, however, including Salome (Mk 16:1). The women were the same group that had beheld the burial of Jesus and therefore knew where the tomb was. Mary, the mother of Jesus, apparently was not with them.

Mark 16:3 records their question, as they approached the tomb, concerning who would roll away the stone. Upon arrival at the scene, there was a great earthquake, and an angel descended from heaven and rolled back the stone. Matthew describes him, "His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow" (28:3).

The Roman soldiers were paralyzed with fear, but the angel said to the women, "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you" (vv. 5-7). Luke 24:1-8 gives further details on the message of the angel and indicates that the women entered into the tomb, but the body of the Lord was gone. Matthew records, "They departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word" (28:8).

The account concerning Mary Magdalene would indicate that she saw the stone rolled away but did not linger long enough to understand the full meaning of it, and informed Peter and John simply that the tomb was empty. It was on her second visit to the tomb that Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene. She, who sought Jesus most earnestly, was honored to be the first to see the resurrected Christ. Matthew records the second appearance to the other women as they also had left the tomb in order to tell the disciples, and records that the women "held him by the feet, and worshipped him" (v. 9). Jesus instructed them, as the angel had also mentioned in verse 7, to tell the brethren to go into Galilee, where they would see Jesus. However, He appeared to them that evening and apparently again a week later before the Galilee appearances occurred. For Matthew, the Galilean appearance was the climax of Jesus' ministry. It was there that Christ witnessed to many outside of Judaism, an anticipation of His worldwide witness.<sup>163</sup>

#### Report of the Soldiers, 28:11-15

Just as Matthew alone records the request of the priests and Pharisees, the watch by the soldiers at the tomb, so Matthew alone records the outcome following the resurrection of Christ. Some of those guarding the tomb went to the chief priests and reported what had happened. It is astounding, as Lenski points out, that the chief priests heard of the resurrection of Jesus before the disciples.<sup>164</sup> The result was that they gave a bribe, described by Matthew as "large money," to the soldiers and instructed them to report that the disciples had stolen the body by night while the soldiers slept. They also promised the soldiers that if it reached the Roman governor's ears that they would protect them and persuade the governor not to punish them.

Under Roman law, the soldiers could be put to death for failure to do their duty, as was done to the soldiers who were watching Peter (Ac 12:19). The soldiers, glad both for the money and for the protection, did as they were instructed and started the rumor among the Jews that the body of Jesus had been stolen.

The dishonesty and lack of integrity on the part of the scribes and Pharisees, when confronted with the fact of the resurrection of Jesus, all too frequently are found in other forms of unbelief. Liberal scholarship today shows the same incredible blindness to the facts and tends to give credence to any criticism of the scriptural record more than to the Scriptures themselves. The unbelief of the scribes and Pharisees is shown here in all its stark wickedness, and their stooping to bribery and lies shows the extremity into which they fell. As Lenski notes, the very soldiers who were ordered to prevent the fulfillment of the prophecy of Christ's resurrection were the first witnesses of it.<sup>165</sup> It is possible that some were beneficially influenced and may be numbered among those who did come to Jesus in the early days of the church, as recorded in Acts.

The story of the soldiers, of course, was obviously false. How could they know that the disciples stole the body if they were actually asleep? So often the truth is more reasonable than the theories seeking to contradict the truth. The three thousand at Pentecost who believed Peter's message concerning the death and the resurrection of Christ no doubt had investigated the story, had seen the empty tomb, and were fully persuaded that the facts as presented by Peter were the truth. The story served to bolster those, however, who, for various reasons, did not want to believe in Jesus, and Matthew reports the story was still common at the time he wrote the gospel.

#### Jesus' Meeting with His Disciples in Galilee, 28:16-20

The closing verses of Matthew's gospel record Christ's meeting with the eleven disciples in Galilee, prophesied in 28:7, 10. This is not clearly identifiable with any other appearance of Jesus. The appearance recorded in Mark 16:15-18, though often considered the same as this appearance in Matthew, could just as well fit the meeting on the second Sunday night, recorded in John 20:26-31. Sometimes also, the reference in Matthew 28 is linked with 1 Corinthians 15:6, where Jesus is said to have appeared unto more than five hundred brethren at once. The meeting mentioned in 1 Corinthians, however, may be another appearance of Jesus not found anywhere else in the gospels. The fact that "some doubted," that is, were not sure the person they were seeing was Jesus, as mentioned in Matthew 28:17, might indicate that there was a larger crowd than just the eleven.

Lenski argues that the one hundred and twenty which met in Jerusalem in Acts 1:15 were a smaller company, and, because of the many converts in Galilee, a group of five hundred there would be understandable.<sup>166</sup> The meeting in Galilee has a prominence in Scripture because it was mentioned three times before, in Matthew 26:32; 28:7, 10. Just as the mountains of Galilee had been the scene of some of Christ's great messages, such as the Sermon on the Mount, and had been the scene of His transfiguration, Galilee was a fitting place for a last meeting with a large group of His disciples.

The fact that "some doubted" is at first glance a problem, but it seems to indicate only a preliminary reaction as to whether or not this was indeed Jesus, not doubt concerning His resurrection. This doubt was soon dispelled, as Jesus spoke saying, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (28:18-20). Only Jesus could speak such words, and it must

have brought reassuring faith to all who were there. As Criswell states, "The commission is mandatory, not optional. High mountains, deep oceans, wide deserts, starvation, shipwreck, death are not to be excuses for not going! We are to preach the Gospel to every creature."<sup>167</sup>

In keeping with the theme of Matthew's gospel, presenting Jesus as the King who was rejected but who will return to reign in majesty and power, these words were the final orders of the King concerning what should go on in His absence. He began by reaffirming His power or authority, both in heaven and in earth. On the basis of this authority, they, as His representatives, were to teach all nations. This was much wider than the purpose of Jesus in relation to Israel. Now the worldwide results of His death and resurrection must be publicized. As they recognized believers by the act of water baptism in the name of the Triune God, they were to instruct them concerning the obedience required by their faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

In commanding them to observe "whatsoever I have commanded you," Jesus was not referring to all His teachings in general, some of which were interpretative of the Law of Moses and were under the older dispensation, but to what He had commanded them as the believers who would be members of the church which was His body. Specifically, in using the word commanded, He was recalling the new commandment which He had given them in the upper room and the particular instructions that applied to the disciples in the organic union, symbolized by the vine and the branches. His presence with them, captured in the statement "ye in me, and I in you" (Jn 14:20), was going to be enjoyed by believers to the end of the world, that is, the end of the present age, which would culminate in His coming for them.

In these words, the gospel of Matthew, which began with the genealogy of the King and recorded His lowly coming in Bethlehem, where according to Luke, He was laid in swaddling clothes in a manger, ends with His reigning authority and commission to those He left behind. Ours is the glorious commission to proclaim the good news of what Jesus accomplished in His first coming and also to announce the fact that He is coming again.

163 Cf. R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 271.

164 R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, p. 1161.

165 Ibid.

166 Ibid., p. 1167.

167 W. A. Criswell, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew*, p. 166.

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