

Discipleship 101

a beginner's guide to Christianity

Chapter 10

Alive forevermore!

Jesus did not stay dead for long. Early Sunday morning, near sunrise, some disciples discovered that the Son of God had risen. They did not see the resurrection itself, but they saw Jesus, alive and well. Over a period of 40 days, they saw Jesus on numerous occasions. Then he rose into heaven.

But Jesus is not taking a vacation. His ministry continues, even in heaven. He serves and leads the church, interceding for us, helping us, preparing us for eternal glory. Christ will return, and after he has subdued every enemy, he will give everything to the Father. Mission accomplished.

Resurrection

Many people have a hard time believing that Jesus rose from the dead. In their experience, dead people always stay dead. They are skeptical of such an extraordinary claim. The disciples must have been mistaken, they say, or else they made it up.

The disciples were skeptical, too. When they went to the tomb, they expected to find a body. When they did not find a body, they first assumed that someone had stolen it. They did not expect a resurrection. It was only when Jesus *appeared* to them that they believed that he was alive again.

Most Jews believed that there would be a resurrection at the end of the age, when everyone would rise for judgment (Daniel 12:2). But a resurrection into glory before the end was just as unexpected as a crucified Messiah. Although Jesus had taught both these ideas (Matthew 16:21; 17:23; Mark 9:9), the disciples didn't understand or believe this (verse 10). They expected him to stay dead.

But if Jesus is the sinless Son of God, then he is



The women discovered that the tomb was empty.

unique among the billions of people, and he did not deserve death. We should be surprised if he were *not* resurrected. We also have evidence that gives us confidence that Jesus rose from the dead (as we will cover in our next article).

Many of us also have experiences in our own lives that convince us that God exists, that he sometimes causes miracles, that Jesus is alive and the Holy Spirit is active in his people. This gives us further reason to believe that Jesus is alive.

Significance of the resurrection

The resurrection meant life for Jesus—but a far better life than what he had on earth, the glory that he had with the Father before his incarnation (John 17:5). By his resurrection, he was powerfully revealed as the Son of God (Romans 1:4)—the resurrection declared who he had been all along. The resurrection proves that God will judge the world through Christ (Acts 17:31).

But the resurrection also means life for *us*. As Paul says, we will “be saved through his life” (Romans 5:10). If you “believe in your heart that God raised

him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith” (1 Corinthians 15:14). Our salvation depends not just on Jesus’ death, but also his resurrection (1 Peter 3:21).

Even justification, most commonly associated with Jesus’ death, is also a result of his resurrection (Romans 4:24-25). Our salvation depends on the entire sequence of incarnation: his birth, ministry, death and resurrection.

Our baptism pictures our participation in Jesus’ death and resurrection. Rising from the water pictures our new life (Romans 6:4) and it pictures our future: “We will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection” (verse 5). “When he appears, we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2). Our resurrected bodies will be like his (1 Corinthians 15:42-49).

God has “made us alive with Christ...raised us up with Christ” (Ephesians 2:5-6). We were “raised with him” (Colossians 2:12). By faith in Christ, we are spiritually united to him. Our sins are given to him and paid by him, his righteousness and life are given to us, and we join him in his resurrection. “He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you” (Romans 8:11). His resurrection is promise that we will also live again!

Ascension

After Jesus was resurrected, he “gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). On the last day, “he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight” (verse 9). He did not simply disappear. He went up bodily into the sky, as a visible indication that he was going into heaven. His post-resurrection appearances had come to an end. (His later appearance to Paul was abnormal—1 Corinthians 15:8.)

As the disciples stared at the sky, two angels appeared and told them that Jesus would return “in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). What were the disciples to do in the meantime? They were to wait in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit (verse 4), and then they were to be witnesses for Jesus throughout the world (verse 8). They testified that he is alive, that salvation is available through him.

At the right hand

Jesus did not just go to heaven—he was “exalted to the right hand of God” (Acts 2:33). “God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior” (Acts 5:31). Being at the “right hand” is a figure of speech meaning “in highest authority.” Jesus was exalted to the highest place in the universe, second only to God himself (Philippians 2:9; 1 Corinthians 15:27). He is

Resurrection appearances

Before dawn, Mary Magdalene finds the tomb open and reports the body gone (John 20:1-2). Other women arrive and are told by angels to tell the disciples (Matthew 28:5-7; Luke 24:1-9). They visit the tomb and find it empty (John 20:3-10).

1. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18).
2. Jesus appears to two women (Matthew 28:9-10).
3. Jesus appears to two men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-33).
4. At some unspecified time, Jesus appears to Peter (verse 34).
5. Jesus appears to ten of the Eleven (verse 36; John 20:24).
6. One week later, Jesus appears when Thomas is present (John 20:26-29).
7. Later, seven disciples see Jesus at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-22).
8. The Eleven meet Jesus on a mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20).
9. At an unspecified time, Jesus appears to 500 people (1 Corinthians 15:6).
10. Jesus appears to James at another time (verse 7).
11. Jesus appears to the Eleven just before ascending to heaven (Acts 1:6-11).
12. He appears to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-5).

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exalted above the heavens, ruler of all things (Hebrews 7:27; 1:2).

At least 12 times, Scripture says that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father. Five of these are quotes from Psalm 110:1: “The Lord says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” The picture is that the Father gives Jesus a throne, even while there are enemies to be subdued. God will take care of the enemies; Jesus is secure in his authority. Using the Latin word for “sit,” this is sometimes called the “session” of Christ—being seated on his throne.

Ministry

Using his position of power in heaven, Jesus continues working for our salvation. He sends the Holy Spirit to us (John 15:26; 16:7), and the Holy Spirit testifies about Jesus and helps us understand what he taught (John 14:26; 15:26). The Spirit is the way that the Father and the Son live within us (14:18, 23).

Jesus is our Advocate (1 John 2:1). He is like a defense attorney who “speaks to the Father in our defense”—if anyone accuses us, Jesus is there as a perpetual reminder that our sins have been covered by his sacrifice. It is therefore pointless to make accusations (Romans 8:33-34) — there is no condemnation for anyone who has faith in Christ (verse 1).

The risen Christ intercedes for us, to defend us from accusation and to give us help. “He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (Hebrews 7:25). “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (Hebrews 2:18). Because he can sympathize with our weaknesses, we can be confident that he will give us the help we need in our struggles (Hebrews 4:15-16).

The book of Hebrews calls him our high priest, who sacrificed himself for us and now lives to help us

(Hebrews 2:17; 3:1). Since our sins are forgiven through his death, we can approach God with confidence (Hebrews 10:19). “And since we have a great priest over the house of God,” we are encouraged: “let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith” (verse 22).

Jesus is our mediator, who resolves conflicts and brings us to God (1 Timothy 2:5). He ushers us into the throne room of heaven, assuring us that God will hear us with favor. This is part of the ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is also our Shepherd (John 10:11; Hebrews 13:20), implying that he loves, protects and provides for us. Peter brings similar images to mind when he calls Jesus “the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Peter 2:25). Jesus watches over us. The book of Revelation tells us that we are shepherded by a Lamb, a gentle guide who sacrificed himself for us (Revelation 7:17). He will supply our needs, because he knows what they are.

God assigned Jesus to be Head of the church (Ephesians 1:22; 4:15), and the church is to submit to his leadership in everything (Ephesians 5:24). As head, he has supremacy over all things (Colossians 1:18; 2:10). Jesus already has all authority on heaven and earth (Matthews 28:18). God has already seated him above every power and authority (Ephesians 1:20-22; Colossians 2:10).

Through faith, we join Jesus in his amazing journey. We are crucified with him, we rise with him, we are joined with him by the Holy Spirit. We will be given glory with him and will reign with him forever (2 Timothy 2:11-12). Believe the good news!

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