

## “Because He is Risen” (Matthew 28:1-20)

Happy Easter! On Easter, Christians all over the world celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead on the third day. Is this true?

Jesus' resurrection is testified by the empty grave.

Very early in the morning, after the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and some other ladies went to the tomb where Jesus' body was laid. When they arrived, the large stone which was blocking the entrance was rolled away. And the Roman soldiers who were guarding the tomb were trembling with fear. When the women entered the tomb, they didn't find the body of Jesus. The angels said to them, “He is not here. He has risen, as he had told you before.”

Did someone hide Jesus' body and make it look as if he had risen, and circulate this news? This is impossible for two reasons.

One reason is, the chief priests bribed Roman soldiers and made them to say "Jesus' disciples came during the night and stole him while we were asleep." (Matt 28:12-15) If this claim were true, why did they bribe? Because this wasn't true.

Another reason is, women were not allowed to be witnesses in court in those days. If this were a made-up story, Matthew and other writers of the Gospels wouldn't have chosen women as first witnesses. But Matthew had to write that Mary Magdalene and other ladies were the first witnesses of resurrected Jesus, because that was the truth. They were the ones who saw the empty tomb and testified that Jesus rose from the dead.

Jesus' resurrection is testified by the lives of his disciples.

When the disciples heard what the women said, they didn't believe them, because their words seemed to them like non-sense (Luke 24:11). They also didn't believe two other disciples who claimed to have seen resurrected Jesus (Mark 16:13). Luke records that even while they saw resurrected Jesus before their very eyes, they wondered at the sight, thinking they were seeing a ghost, and they did not believe (Luke 24:36-41). Mark says Jesus appeared to the disciples while they were eating, and rebuked them for their lack of faith (Mark 16:14).

If the disciples made up the story of Jesus' resurrection in order to form their own religious group, they will never put such a shameful incident. It would never be a good idea for them to mention it and put it in the book which will be the foundation of their faith. But this incident is recorded in the Gospels. That is, they couldn't hide it because it was the fact.

Disciples couldn't believe the resurrection of Jesus at first. But they were completely changed. Even when they were caught in prison, they would still say, "Jesus has risen. I am the witness of his resurrection." Even when they were forbidden by the authorities, they didn't stop telling, "Jesus rose to life. I am the witness of this."

What benefit did they get by telling that? Nothing. On the contrary, they were persecuted. Some were thrown into prison, some were killed. And many of them were scattered from Jerusalem to other regions. Wherever they had been scattered, they continued to preach the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 8:1-4). Why? "As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

The lives of his disciples prove that Jesus rose to life.

The resurrection of Jesus is testified by the experiences of later Christians.

C.S. Lewis wrote, "A Christian believes in Jesus not because he finds him by laboratory methods, but by actual contact with him."<sup>1</sup>

We start our relationship with Jesus by learning about him. Then, we have experiences where one day we encounter Jesus. Through this we come to know him, and our understanding of him grows beyond head knowledge. We receive Jesus as our Savior and Lord, and we start to live our life with him. This is because Jesus is not a God who is dead and of the past, but a living God. He didn't just die on the cross and wasn't just buried. Jesus rose to life and he is still living now. He is not just living in the memory of his disciples. He is here with us, as one who is real, who has personality and whom we can have a relationship with. Jesus rose to life. He is living. He is here.

I experienced it when I was 26 years old. As my parents were Christians, they had taken me to church since I was very little. I heard and knew the stories in the Bible. But they were just stories. Church was an uncomfortable place for me. But if I went to church, my parents gave me lunch money, so I went to

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Nicky Gumball, *30 Days*, Alpha Publications, 1999, p.12

church. Or more precisely, I slipped into the meeting room just before the service finished and pretended as if I were there in the worship service. I continued to do this till I graduated from university. I didn't like God, I didn't like Jesus, church was boring, Christian faith was just about keeping up appearances, and there was no substance. This is what I thought.

I got a job, I left my parents, and started to live alone. Now I had money and freedom. I could do whatever I wanted. I thought I was being successful.

However, life was not that easy, my work was difficult, and I continued to fail. A year later, I went into a state of depression. I didn't see any worth in myself. I felt that even my existence itself was bad. I was literally at the bottom of my life, in total darkness. I felt as if I was in a tunnel which had no exit.

One night, I was sunken down on the floor of my room, in total darkness. I didn't turn on the lights, or the TV. I didn't eat or take a shower. I was just in a daze. Then, I heard the voice, "You are precious in my eyes. I love you." I intuitively knew it was Jesus.

I wanted to believe that word, but I couldn't. God who created the heaven and the earth sees me and calls me precious. Impossible. I hated God, I chose to go away from God, and had been ignoring Him, but God loves me? I couldn't believe this. But deep down, I wanted to believe that. Then I started to read the Bible.

I couldn't understand it very well, but as I read one page, then two pages, the word started to speak to my heart little by little. I felt as if Jesus was talking to me slowly. "This is how I see you." "I have done this for you." It's not that I understood the Bible with a theoretical understanding. I came to know Jesus as a person. I started to know him. I started a relationship, and it is still continuing. Jesus rose to life. He is still living now. He is here, right beside me.

Jesus resurrected. He defeated death. Death has been swallowed up in victory. Because He is risen we have the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:54; 57).

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, we have the victory over death.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, we have the victory over sin.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, we have the victory over Satan.

It doesn't mean we'll have the victory automatically. But it means we don't have to be bound by death, sin and Satan any longer. We'll never have to obey

them again. We've been set free. We are given the power and authority that are far more powerful than these. Because he is risen, he has the victory over them. Through him, we have the victory.

Satan is the deceiver. He will remind us of our past, and says "God will not forgive you. He doesn't love you. You are no good. You are worthless. You are a loser. You are cursed." When we believe in Jesus, all these that stand against us and condemn us are crucified with Jesus on the cross, and buried (Col 2:14). When we believe in Jesus, we start to live a resurrected life with Jesus (Rom 6:8). "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor 5:17).

Sin is the power to destroy. Sin destroys our lives, our relationships. It destroys others, and destroys nature. Jesus defeated the power of sin, the power that destroys life. When we put our faith in Jesus, when we make Jesus our Lord, we come back under His authority.

We are free from the bondage of sin. We can say "No" to sin, and say "Yes" to God. We can say "No" to temptation, and say "Yes" to the truth. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:1-2).

There is no one who won't experience physical death. What happens after death is an unknown world. People throughout the ages have come up with their own views of this world. Kings of Egypt had their bodies mummified, built pyramids, and had them placed in there. Some people believe in the never-ending cycle of reincarnation. They believe after death they will be reincarnated as another being and live on the earth again. Some people believe there will be nothing after death.

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25). And he defeated death and resurrected. After death, those who believe in Jesus will live forever with him who is life. They will live forever in the kingdom of God, in His perfect rule, perfect love, perfect righteousness, perfect peace and perfect joy. They will never disappear. They will never fade. On the contrary, they will live even more richly, deeply and fully.

"God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:3-

4). There will be a fullness of God's glory and his life. And surely we will be there because he is risen!

Jesus defeated death and he resurrected. Because He is risen we have the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus rose to life. He is still living now. He is here. He is now inviting you to his life and his victory.