

# JESUS LAST WEEK

## WEEK 7: SUNDAY; THE TRIUMPHAL REENTRY

### LENTEN STUDY - 2009

By: Ray Handisides

#### INTRODUCTION

Over the 6 weeks of Lent we followed Jesus Last Week and his Path to the Cross. Last week we saw Jesus being on trial for crimes he did not commit, the horror of his crucifixion, and the simple burial he was given. Saturday, being the Sabbath and the particularly Holy Day of the Passover, Jesus followers left Jesus in his tomb. If our story ended here it would probably be the end of the saga of Jesus of Nazareth. The story continues and so we follow the path as it goes beyond the Cross.

Jesus resurrection from the dead is the central fact of Christianity history. On it, the church is built; without it, there would be no Christian church today. Jesus' resurrection is unique among religions. Other religions have strong ethical systems, concepts about paradise and an afterlife, and various Holy Scriptures. Only Christianity has a God who became human, literally died for his people, and was raised again in power and glory to rule his church forever.

Why is the Resurrection important?

- Because Christ was raised from the dead, we know that the kingdom of heaven has broken into earth's history. Our world is now headed for redemption, not disaster. God's mighty power is at work destroying sin, creating new lives, and preparing us for Jesus' second coming.
- Because of the Resurrection, we know that death has been conquered and that we too will be raised from the dead to live forever.
- The resurrection gives authority to the church's witness in the world. The early apostles' most important message was the proclamation that Jesus Christ had been raised from the dead.

- The Resurrection gives meaning to the church's regular feast, the Lord's Supper.
- The Resurrection helps us find meaning even in great tragedy. No matter what happens to us as we walk with the Lord, the Resurrection gives us hope for the future.
- The Resurrection assures us that Christ is alive and ruling his kingdom: he is alive and real.
- God's power that brought Jesus back from the dead is available to us so that we can live for him in an evil world.
- The power of God that brought Christ's body back from the dead is available to us to bring our morally and spiritually dead selves back to life so that we can change and grow.

Christians can look very different from one another, and they can hold widely varying beliefs about politics, lifestyle, and even theology. But one central belief unites and inspires all true Christians – Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

#### GOSPEL ACCOUNTS

We now turn our attention to Gospel accounts of the witness's accounts of Jesus resurrection. Read the following Scriptures:

- Matthew 28:1-20
- Mark 16:1-20
- Luke 24:1-53
- John 20:1-23

All four gospels tell the same story with minor differences. The table below shows the interrelationships between the gospels.

MARK	MATTHEW	LUKE	JOHN
Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome go to tomb, at dawn, with spices.	Mary Magdalene and the other Mary visit the tomb at dawn	Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and another woman go to tomb with spices	Mary Magdalene goes to tomb
Finds stone rolled away	Experience earthquake that rolls stone from tomb	Finds stone rolled away	Finds stone rolled away and tomb empty
			Mary runs to tell Peter
			Peter and another disciple run to tomb and find it empty so go home
On entering tomb find young man clothed in white	Angel descends from heaven who is radiant and dressed in white	Two men in dazzling apparel in tomb	Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene who she thinks is the gardener
Told that Jesus is risen	Told Jesus is risen	Told Jesus is risen	Jesus tells Mary not to cling to him as he has not yet ascended
Told to tell disciples that Jesus would meet them in Galilee	Told to tell disciples that Jesus would meet them in Galilee		
Women flee from tomb	Women leave to go tell disciples	Return to apostles to tell them what they saw and heard	Jesus tells Mary to go tell the disciples
Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene who goes and tells others	Jesus meets the women and tells them to go to Galilee	Peter goes to the tomb to check what he had been told	
Appears to two disciples walking in country	Guards tell authorities of Jesus resurrection and they are told to tell disciples stole the body	Appears to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Shares a meal and at breaking of bread they recognize Jesus	Jesus appears to disciples in a closed room
Jesus appears to 11 disciples who are gathered in a room	Disciple go to mountain in Galilee where Jesus appears to them	Appears to disciples in room in Jerusalem and eats with them	
Jesus gives great commission	Jesus gives great commission		Jesus sends disciples out as he had been sent
Jesus raised to heaven		Takes apostles to Bethany and was raised to heaven	Disciples receive the Holy Spirit from Jesus

As can be seen from this comparison the stories are basically the same. The difference can be accounted for by the artistic license the writers took in making it part of their total gospel story and the emphases they wanted. The differences are irrelevant in the overall picture of this story. The important things are:

- The stone is rolled away from the tomb

- Women, with Mary Magdalene being a common denominator, go to the tomb to anoint Jesus body after the hasty burial.
- The tomb is empty
- There is an appearance of angels confirming Jesus has risen
- Jesus appears to the disciples and commissions them to continue his work

This is the most magnificent story in the whole of scripture and is one we should look at carefully. As Christians our whole faith hinges on this event. If there is no risen Jesus there is no Christianity.

## BEHIND THE GOSPELS

The events of this day, as we have said, were not only to change the lives of Jesus disciples but were to change the world. If Jesus had not conquered death he would have just been another radical preacher of the day who was crucified by the Roman juggernaut, leaving behind his followers to carry on his teachings. The followers would have stayed as a group for a while and maybe spread the word but they would have eventually fallen back into Judaism. They were Jews and Jesus teachings were primarily Jewish and so it would have been another fad sect that came and went. The fact that Jesus rose and appeared to the disciples completely changed what this small group would do. What started with one man and spread to his chosen twelve, and then to a large group of followers was about to take over the world all because God came to earth in the form of his Son and then following Jesus death raised him from the dead so that all could come to God through Jesus Christ. Jesus followers thought that they had reached the end but it was only the beginning. We have taken the Path to the Cross and have now gone beyond.

Let us now turn to two of the important events in this story and explore what the writers are telling.

### THE ROLE OF THE WOMEN

Women in Jesus time were a lower class, whether we like this or not it was the case in their society. Women had specific roles to do. At death it was their job to prepare the dead for burial. In Jewish culture a person must be buried before sunset of the day they died. This accounts for the hurried burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea. At the burial we see Mary Magdalene and others following Jesus body and seeing him put in the tomb and the stone rolled to seal it. The women observed the Sabbath which was from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday and at the first opportunity, which was sunrise on Sunday they went to the tomb looking to anoint

Jesus body for a proper burial. They would have seen this as being their duty as the women of the group, but since it Jesus had already been buried and in John's account we see Nicodemus wrapping the body with spices as was required, it was not essential for them to go. They knew there was the obstacle of the stone covering the entrance and were unsure how to deal with this. They went not of necessity but out of love and devotion for Jesus. You can imagine how devastated they were at having seen their leader, that they adored and loved, being nailed to a cross and then hanging there until he died, and then seeing him carried away and put in a tomb.

When they arrived at the tomb they did not know what to expect. You can imagine their horror, heartfelt agony and devastation when they arrived at the tomb to find the stone rolled aside and the tomb empty. I'm sure at first seeing this there were tears of shock and horror, if they had any tears left after what they had been through. Their emotions would have sunk to great depths at this moment. God had a big surprise for them. Either by the appearance of an angel or by Jesus himself, depending on the account you choose, they learn that Jesus is not dead but has been raised from the dead. Again I sure there was shock and unbelief at first but the appearance of the messengers convinced them this was a message from God and they were convinced of the reality of what they were told. This sent them scurrying to inform the other disciples who were gathered in a room in Jerusalem keeping away from any detection by the authorities.

The significant part of this story is that the women were the first to hear of Jesus resurrection. God did not choose Peter, James and John, who were the leaders and favored ones of the apostles, he chose the woman. Not a male servant but a woman. Not a Jewish leader but a woman. As we saw earlier women held a lowly position in the culture of the day and it was women that the proclamation of Jesus resurrection was given to. God just as he declared Jesus birth to lowly shepherds went against the accepted norms of society and used women. Women were to be the proclaimers of the new beginning in the risen Son of Man. The women out of devotion went to worship their earthly leader

following his death but came away proclaiming the new salvation and victory over death that the risen Jesus had given them. This again shows that God does not do the normal and works by his own rules. He uses anybody to do his work and so we must always be ready to accept the challenges and tasks he gives us.

## THE RESURRECTION

Through the ages theologians and historians have debated the validity of the resurrection of Jesus. There have been many stories from the disciples, religious leaders or thieves stole the body of Jesus for their own agendas, to the women made a mistake and went to the wrong tomb, to Jesus were not really dead and just unconscious when he was taken off the cross and revived during the night. Some have claimed that the Gospels were written as a parable to explain the events. Proponents of this theory say that the resurrection stories follow the genre of Jesus parables. This means that the meaning is in the story not the factuality of the events. The important thing is that Jesus was dead and that the resurrection occurred where Jesus came back to life. All of this was in God's plan for our salvation in that there was victory over death. God planned this as the new covenant in his Son for our salvation. No matter what you believe the truth is that Christ is risen and lives with us today.

I would now like to take time to give you my interpretation of the events and Jesus resurrection. If we look at the stories around the resurrected Jesus we get insight into the form the risen Jesus had. We read that Jesus had a bodily form that was the same as when he was alive, He was able to eat and drink and cook meals. We even read of him walking with the two disciples to Emmaus. He was therefore a form that we recognize as a human body and had all the attributes we would expect a human to have. Then as we read the accounts there are some other mysterious events that go beyond normal explanation. Mary Magdalene did not recognize Jesus and thought he was the gardener until he spoke. This seems unusual as Mary was very close to Jesus. This indicates that although Jesus had a human form there must have been something different about him. The same thing happened to

the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They walked and talked with Jesus but they did not recognize him until he broke bread with them. The most important part of this is that once they recognized Jesus they realized their eyes had been opened to the Scriptures to give them new understanding. This was one of Jesus promises and something we can have when we see Jesus.

There were other significant things about Jesus that happened in his appearances to his followers. Going back to the two disciples from Emmaus, once they realized who Jesus was we read he just "vanished." Other accounts have Jesus just appearing and disappearing. We read how he appeared to the disciples who were locked in a closed room. He could appear at one time in Jerusalem and at another in Galilee. All of this seems to defy our known laws of human behavior.

What can we read from this? If we look at apocryphal writings in Daniel, Revelation and even Jesus own teaching we don't see that at the end of this current time on earth that we will be raised to heaven but that heaven will come to earth (see Revelation 20). This means that what will occur is what we Jesus has given us a glimpse of when he was raised from his grave. It will be like earth as we know it but there will be an added dimension(s) to our new, resurrected being. I like to think of this in the following way. If you as a person who lives in a 3 dimensional world were to suddenly become Flat Stanley and be place in a two dimension picture. Now try explaining to the characters who have only existed in a 2 dimensional world about 3 dimensions. How would you explain that you could not only jump up and down but also forwards and backwards? How would you explain that a ball was not just round but spherical? Jesus when he came back was not just living in our 3 dimensional world by living in a space we cannot imagine.

We can also move on from this discussion to when we will be raised from the dead to be with Jesus. Again we can look at Jesus experience. He was raised within three days of his death. We can also expect this to happen to us. We live in a time/space continuum where time is linear and space is three dimensional. We have just considered that in the new age we will not be in just a 3 dimensional world.

Now let us consider time. Einstein postulated that if we were to travel at high speed the closer we got to the speed of light the slower time would be and once you reached the speed of light time would stop. This has since been proved scientifically using linear accelerators. For us when we die time stops. In the new age just as the dimensions are different so time is different. Time to us is linear dimension and second by second it continues to move forward. In the new age there probably is no time or if there is it is not linear as we understand it. This means that if something happened 2000 years ago to us is happening now. What will happen in 2000 years is also happening now along with the events of now. If we look at the promised coming of the new age, as promised by Jesus, it is there now. The new Jerusalem exists but not in our time/space continuum. When we pass from this world and are raised we move into this new world, God's kingdom come on earth. We are united with Christ and in the presence of God and reunited with all those that have gone before us. It is as promised, "the old is passed away and all is new." There is no suffering or pain all that is gone because we are in God's new kingdom.

I believe Jesus resurrection gave us a glimpse at this with his appearing in this present age. He crossed back to help us understand what would happen and to show us that what he had promised while he was truly human would happen to each of us. There are many different explanations and beliefs around Jesus resurrection. I have shared what my views are and I am sure you may have different views and even some may say that what I have said is sacrilege. The truth will only be revealed when we leave this life and pass to the next. What we believe is an individual thing. There is only one important thing in all this and that is Jesus Christ lives and is with us today and will live in each of our hearts if we will only ask him to.

## CONFRONTING THE ISSUES

These passages are rich in meaning for us today. As we said at the beginning our whole identity as Christians and our whole faith is bound up in the words we have looked at. Without Jesus death and more importantly his resurrection there would be no

Christianity. Let us now look at some of the issues that confront us today.

### JUST DO IT

We read in the Gospel accounts that the three women who set out to honor Jesus body faced overwhelming problems., First the soldier guard would prevent them from what they wanted to do; second, the rock in the tomb's doorway would be too heavy to move; and third, Jesus' body would have begun to decompose. Against such obstacles, what would these three women have expected to accomplish? Yet urged on by love and gratitude they were determined to do what they could.

- **Considering your life today, do you face obstacles in serving Jesus? What are they and how can you overcome them?**

### GOD IN FRONT

When problems appear too strong to handle and you feel like quitting, remember that God is way out in front, already blazing a trail for you. When you are so preoccupied by problems that you don't even take time to pray, as perhaps happened to these women, God still guides your way.

- **Try and identify a stone that is blocking your way, a stone too heavy to budge? How can we go about moving this stone?**

### HE IS NOT HERE

No one could keep Jesus in the grave, The religious big shots who wanted him out of the way failed to do it; the power of the Roman army and justice system could not hold him; even the lack of faith on the part of the disciples couldn't keep him dead. They expected to find Jesus when he promised he would not be there. God's power to raise Jesus is greater than any power in the universe. Trust God's promises. He is greater than all our problems or infirmities.

- **What is the big promise we get from the Resurrection?**

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## BY FAITH

A Russian cosmonaut once claimed that he did not find God anywhere in space. But the cosmonaut travelled without faith. The disciples had been given evidence of Jesus' resurrection, but they still needed to appropriate the meaning of it by faith. They were told that Jesus would appear to them, but going to Galilee would take a lot of faith. Unfortunately, they lacked that faith and remained huddled in Jerusalem. Yet even there, in a locked room, Jesus came to them.

Today we find Jesus not in ironclad certainties of logic, not by astronomical survey, nor by sitting still. Faith is a moment-by-moment commitment to act on what God says – acting trusting and expecting to find Christ when we arrive. We take a step of faith, and Jesus comes closer, and another step and Jesus becomes clearer, another step and Jesus becomes dearer. Each time we seek in faith, we find. That's God's promise.

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## WHEN PEOPLE GO DEAF

It's not uncommon for people to refuse the truth. Even the disciples had wax in their ears and cotton in their heads.

When listeners today turn a deaf ear, the right response is love, care, and persistence. It's wrong to get angry or offended. It's right to remember that even those closest to Jesus had a tough time accepting the reality of a risen Lord.

Keep praying for the hard of heart. Keep sharing the Good News in ways that connect with compassion. And like Mary, return often to the presence of the Lord, there to find wonderful assurance.

God wants those people – your friends and family – in his kingdom. You're the channel, but God makes the miracle happen.

- **Assume you have a family member that does not know or accept the Good News that Jesus is alive and provides salvation for all who accept him. How would you go about making sure they heard the Good News?**

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## TRUE DISCIPLES

Jesus told his disciples to go into all the world, telling everyone that he had paid the penalty for sin and that those who believe in him can be forgiven and live eternally with God. Christian disciples today in all parts of the world are preaching this gospel to people who have not heard about Christ. The driving power that carries missionaries around the world and sets Christ's church in motion is the faith that comes from the Resurrection. Do you ever feel as though you don't have the skill or determination to be a witness for Christ? You must personally realize that Jesus rose from the dead and lives for you today. As you grow in your relationship with Christ, he will give you both opportunities and the inner strength to tell his message. We are to go – whether its next door or to another country – and make disciples. It is not an option, but a command to all who call Jesus "Lord." We are not all evangelists in the formal sense, but we have all received gifts that we can use to help fulfill the Great Commission. As we obey, we have comfort in the knowledge that Jesus is always with us.