



April 20, 2025
The Resurrection

Group Study: The Resurrection (Luke 24:1-12)

Discussion Questions

1. The angels tell the women to “remember” what Jesus said. How does remembering shape our faith?
2. How do the disciples’ reactions to the empty tomb reflect the difficulty of believing in the resurrection?
3. How does the resurrection fit into the larger story of God's covenant with humanity?
4. What does it mean for us to live as people shaped by the resurrection?
5. What “idle tales” about faith might we dismiss too quickly in our own lives?
6. What risks are involved in believing and proclaiming the resurrection today?

—

Bible Study Podcast Transcript

Good Faith Bible Study
Kathy and Nathan Maxwell
April 20, 2025
"The Resurrection"

Luke 24:1-12

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/bible-studies/>

The resurrection. One of the most familiar and foundational aspects of the Christian faith. But it's one that can also leave us with important questions. What impact does the resurrection have on my life? What does it mean to be resurrected with Christ? How should the resurrection shape our day-to-day decisions? The resurrection is the moment that changed at all.

So, let's start with the biblical perspective. For most of the Old Testament, we have little talk about what happens after death. Psalms, Job, Isaiah and other books in the Old Testament mention *Sheol*. The Hebrew notion of *Sheol* is something like the Greek idea of Hades. It's a world of shades and shadows. Everyone goes there—good and bad. It's not a happy place or a sad place. It's not a reward or punishment. It's just what happens when a person dies.

We see exceptions to this expectation, though, especially with people who have a special relationship with God. Genesis 5:24 tells us about Enoch, who walked with God and “then he was no more because God took him.” Elijah is another example. We find his story in 2 Kings 2. Elijah leaves this life when a fiery chariot swoops down, and he ascends to heaven in a whirlwind. Poor Elisha and the other prophets search for Elijah, but in the end they conclude that he has not died like a normal person dies, but instead has been transported into God's presence.

Covenantal wisdom seems to prevail through most of the Old Testament. If a person accepts God's offer of relationship and remains faithful, they will be blessed in this life. If a person does not, they will be cursed or they will surely perish. A person's reward or punishment was understood to occur in this life.

The idea of resurrection does appear late in the Old Testament, though. Daniel 12:1-2 is an example. Written in the time of exile, when God's people could see no hope in the present, God gives future hope. Daniel prophesies: “At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people shall rise. There shall be a time of great anguish such as never occurred since nations first came into existence, but at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who was found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

Resurrection continues to develop between the Old and the New Testaments in the Intertestamental Period, particularly in the deuterocanonical book of 2 Maccabees. As the Jewish martyrs suffered under brutal Greek rule and lost their lives in this present life for their faithfulness to God, a future hope—a hope for life after death—was revealed to them.

And of course by the time we get to the New Testament, resurrection will take center stage. Paul's letters are the earliest New Testament books that we have, even though they're located after the Gospels and Acts. Paul's ministry was based on the fundamental conviction that Jesus is the risen Lord. Paul doesn't base his claim that Christ is risen on an empty grave. The tomb was empty, but Matthew tells us that skeptics easily explained away the empty tomb—surely one of Jesus' followers just stole away his body!

I Corinthians 15:3-5 contains what's probably the earliest testimony that we have of the resurrection.

Paul writes:

Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scripture.

He was buried.

He has been raised on the third day, in accordance with the scriptures.

He appeared to Cephas [Peter] and then to the Twelve.

In these verses, the first and third lines make the claims of Christian testimony, and then lines two and four provide the proof of those claims. Claim one: Christ died. How do we know? Well, he was buried ... and we don't usually do that to people who are alive. Claim two: Christ has been raised. Well how do we know this? By experience. He appeared to reliable witnesses: Cephas, that is Peter, and the 12 apostles.

Now, just a sidenote here. I think Paul was onto something. Trying to prove the resurrection just by using human reason can be risky. The resurrection starts to lose its depth and becomes more of a mental exercise than a powerful life-changing event. Now don't get me wrong. I am all for mental exercise! And I am a firm believer that the Christian should not check her brain at the door. But if we try to make the resurrection fit neatly into what “seems reasonable,” then we sometimes can end up making God's power seem a lot smaller than it really is.

But back to 1 Corinthians. The Greek word that Paul uses in chapter 15 to describe Jesus' resurrection is *egegertai*. Literally, “he has been raised up.” Now Greek verb tenses serve different functions than English verb tenses, so we would never want to base an entire theological construct on just the tense of a verb, but it's worth noting that with this verb—“he has been raised up”—Paul writes it in the perfect tense. In Greek, the perfect tense tends to indicate an action that took place in the past, but has continuing effects in the present. Here, then, Paul is claiming, “Jesus has been raised up, and that reality still affects us right now.” (You can also see Romans 6:9.)

Paul claims that Jesus' resurrection was different than anyone else's. Other people had been raised from the dead. Lazarus is a pretty famous example from John 11, and we also see the dead who came out of their graves at Jesus' death in Matthew 27, but these were resuscitations—healings, really, from the most serious physical medical condition, which is death. We assume that however miraculous Lazarus' healing was—his resuscitation—he grew old and eventually he died again. He, and the others in the Bible who are resuscitated, are not raised from the dead into a new mode of existence. They enjoy the same body and existence that they always had.

Jesus' resurrection body was the same as a regular body, but it was also different. In 1 Corinthians 15:45b, Paul implies that Jesus' resurrection body was a spiritual body rather than just a resurrected corpse. Paul writes that “the last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45). And in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, it seems like Paul is suggesting that there was a transformation of some sort from a physical body to a spiritual body. I think if we were to ask Paul, “Was Jesus' tomb really empty?” he would say yes. But not so much to prove the absence of Jesus' physical body. Really what Paul is interested in is emphasizing the presence of Jesus' transformed spiritual body.

Of course, this claim leads to the question on everyone's mind—even Paul's imaginary dialogue partner: “What is this spiritual body? What is it like?” The Gospels tell us that Jesus’ body was similar to his physical body. In Luke 24:39, Jesus eats fish and lets his disciples touch his flesh and bone. The real wounds are seen on his hands and side. Jesus was not being impersonated, in other words, by a spirit or an angel. The person raised from the dead was the same Jesus who had ministered in Galilee, the one who had traveled to Jerusalem, who had been betrayed and crucified, the one who had died and been buried.

But according to the Gospel accounts, Jesus's body was also different from his physical body. He appears in locked rooms like in John 20, and he disappears from rooms, too, like in Luke 24. Jesus’ resurrection then, was not proved by an empty tomb. It was proved by the experience of his followers, specifically the indwelling of God's spirit. How did the earliest Christians—and how do Christians today—know that Christ is risen? Because Christ lives in their hearts. They have been filled with his spirit.

It's the Gospels, of course, that give us the first hand accounts of the resurrection, but interestingly, the Gospels don't actually narrate the resurrection itself. All of that happens “off-stage.” We get the sense that the Gospel writers aren't exactly sure how to describe the actual event of resurrection: “I know. It sounds incredible,” they say, “but I'm telling you here's what happened!” What seems most important is the change that the presence of the risen Jesus makes in the lives of his followers.

Returning to 1 Corinthians 15, Paul quotes a well-known first-century saying: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!” This popular proverb seems to celebrate life, but it really centers on death. Death is the driving factor. Death is what controls the narrative.

But resurrection changes that. In the resurrection, God removes the most powerful weapon of any empire, of the dominant culture that oppresses: the weapon of death. In the resurrection, the new driving factor in the lives of Jesus’ followers is not death—not our death or even Jesus’ death—but Jesus’ life and the abundant life promised to his followers.

In an essay on the resurrection, N.T. Wright says, “[The Gospel resurrection accounts] do not say Jesus is raised, therefore we’re going to heaven or therefore we’re going to be raised. They say Jesus is raised, therefore God’s new creation has begun and we have a job to do.”

Peter gives us a great example of this—the bumbling, open-mouth-insert-foot denier of Jesus. After his encounter with the risen Christ (see John 21) and after his receiving of the Holy Spirit, we see a very different Peter. In Acts 2, he certainly has a job to do! He preaches the sermon at Pentecost. He has the audacity to visit the home of a Gentile named Cornelius, to preach to him and to baptize him. And he eventually, tradition tells us, follows this job to the very end, which for him was an upside-down crucifixion in Rome.

What does resurrection mean for us here and now? Well, what was true in the first century is still true today: God's new creation has begun, and we have a job to do.

The old boundaries of ethnicity, social class, gender hierarchies—they are all abolished. We are not citizens of this world. We are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. And as citizens of heaven, we are trusted to be God's ambassadors to this beautiful world that God created—charged with the ministry of reconciliation.

Remembering the resurrection story during the Easter season is much more than just a mental exercise. It's an exercise of the spirit and the heart and the body.

This week's lesson will encourage you to tell the resurrection story in as many ways as you can, and as often as you can. Sometimes that happens with words, but it also happens through your hands and your feet.

As you prepare for Bible study this week, consider what it might look like to live a life shaped by resurrection. What action can you take—this week—in your life and your community in response to the reality of resurrection in your life? What action can you take in the long-term in your life and community in response to the resurrection? Be as concrete and specific as possible.

Perhaps there's no better way to end here than to listen to some of the final words of the risen Christ from Matthew and Luke and John.

Jesus says, “As you go, make disciples of all nations ... I am with you always even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28). In Luke 24, Jesus says, “Peace be with you” as he explains the scriptures and promises the presence of God's spirit. And from John 20:21, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.”