

Risen!

Christ's resurrection assures believers of salvation.

MATTHEW 28:1-10,16-20

MEMORY VERSE: MATTHEW 28:6

STUDY Matthew 28:1-10,16-20, noting the commands given throughout this account. Use Explore the Text on pages 75–79 to fully reflect on how these commands point to the truth of the resurrection of Jesus and how we can know that these biblical accounts reflect firsthand knowledge. Read also Matthew 27 to add to the context of this session's content.

CREATE a teaching plan for your group time using the ideas on pages 80–82. Review the suggestions and focus on helping the group consider how the resurrection of Jesus assures believers of salvation. Look for ways to use the Key Doctrine (PSG, p. 69) to help the group reflect on the resurrection of Jesus.

GATHER the following items:

- Extra Personal Study Guides (PSGs)

Prepare to display:

- Pack Item 5** (*Key Verse: Matthew 28:6*)

Make copies of:

- Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*)

CONSULT the weekly Explore the Bible adult podcast to gain insights on the go about this week's study on Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.

REINFORCE the lesson by encouraging the group to follow up on guests who attend on Easter. Discuss ways you can continue to share the truth of the resurrection with those who have never heard.

FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

Jesus

Jesus was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion (See Luke 24:46; John 20:27.)

A game show on television allows contestants to reach out by phone to a person they know for assistance. The host generally asks the contestant why he or she selected that person. The reasons vary, but typically it is because the contestant trusts that person and what that person knows about the subject. The more firsthand knowledge the person has, the greater the confidence and trust. When we consider the resurrection of Jesus, we find confidence in knowing that the biblical accounts reflect firsthand knowledge.

(In PSG, p. 64) **If you were a contestant on a game show, to whom would you reach out if allowed to get assistance with one question? What are your reasons for selecting that person?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

BIBLE SKILL

Use a Bible dictionary to gain insight.

Read an article from a Bible dictionary on resurrection. Note the various occurrences of a person being brought back to life and how those experiences are different from what happened to Jesus. Focus on the difference between resuscitation and resurrection. Write a summary of what you discover.

MATTHEW 27–28

The chapters immediately leading up to Matthew 28 are filled with distressing news. Matthew 27:3-4 reveals that Jesus was betrayed by Judas. Judas had seen the miracles of Christ. He had firsthand knowledge of Jesus walking on water, feeding the masses, and healing the sick. Yet, he set all this aside for thirty pieces of silver in pursuit of his own personal agenda.

The story continues with the rejection of Jesus. Pilate, who was the governor of that region during this time, knew Jesus to be innocent of the charges and appealed to the crowd for action. It was Pilate's intention to release Jesus (27:15-26). One would think the story would improve here since Jesus had faithfully served and ministered to some in this crowd over the past three years. Instead, the story continues down a troubling path as the crowd opted for the release of a common criminal.

Jesus then was openly ridiculed. The Roman soldiers mocked Him by putting a crown of thorns on His head and dressing Him in purple to symbolize royalty. They then proceeded to beat Him and spit on Him (27:27-31). While Jesus hung on the cross, the elders and scribes taunted Him and challenged Him to save Himself. They indicated that if He would simply come down from the cross, then they too would believe in Him (27:42).

A centurion—a Roman soldier—was at the cross of Jesus and observed all that took place. Upon the death of Jesus the centurion said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Matt. 27:54). Jesus died and was placed in a tomb. The distress found in the events leading up to this point was about to be reversed.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

RESURRECTED (MATT. 28:1-4)

Verse 1

When Jesus died on Friday, His followers acted quickly to prepare His body for burial. Once **the Sabbath** began, they could do no work, especially work involving a dead body. But once **the first day of the week** (Sunday) arrived, they could return to finish the task.

Joseph of Arimathea, who owned the tomb, and Nicodemus had done what they could before the Sabbath (Matt. 27:57-60; John 19:38-42). Both **Mary Magdalene and the other Mary** had been with them and knew the way (Matt. 27:56,61). *Mary Magdalene* had followed and supported Jesus after He had delivered her from seven demons (Mark 15:40-41; Luke 8:2). The *other Mary* was probably the mother of James, one of the disciples. Early Sunday morning, these women left to complete the burial process.

Identifying women as the first witnesses of the resurrection is significant. Since the testimony of women was not legally binding in first-century culture, early church leaders would not have used them as eyewitnesses if they had fabricated the story about the resurrection of Jesus. The fact that they did, however, validates their account.

Verses 2-4

Matthew recorded a **violent earthquake** on Sunday morning. Earlier in his Gospel, he described a powerful quake associated with the tearing of the temple veil and the resurrection of saints in the area (Matt. 27:50-53). This was a different earthquake, caused by an **angel of the Lord**.

Angels are heavenly messengers, and this angel had a specific task to perform. He **approached the tomb** and **rolled back the stone**. The stone would have required several men to move. Additionally, it carried the governor's seal (Matt. 27:62-66). In his Gospel, Mark noted that the women were not sure how they would remove the stone without help (Mark 16:3). The angel's action made their concerns a moot point; and, in a sign of triumph, the angel was **sitting** on the stone he had just moved.

The angel did not move the stone to let Jesus out of the tomb. His resurrection had already taken place, and the tomb was empty by then. Instead, the angel's action allowed Christ's followers to enter the tomb and understand that God had raised Him from the dead.

The angel's **appearance was like lightning** and his clothes were **white as snow**. Undoubtedly, this angel was unlike anything the Roman soldiers had ever encountered. In response, the guards were **shaken by fear**. The Greek word here is closely related to the word describing the earthquake in verse 2. The angel's power and glory created a personal earthquake in their hearts. In fear, they **became like dead men**. Roman soldiers were tough men, known for their strength and courage. Yet they fainted when faced with God's power. Once they recovered, they likely abandoned their posts completely. Their presence was not mentioned when the women arrived.

VERSE 1

¹ After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to view the tomb.

VERSES 2-4

² There was a violent earthquake, because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and approached the tomb. He rolled back the stone and was sitting on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so shaken by fear of him that they became like dead men.

What questions or doubts do you have about Jesus's resurrection? Who can you talk with to get a better understanding of that first Easter?

ANNOUNCED (MATT. 28:5-7)

Verses 5-6

VERSES 5-6

⁵ The angel told the women, "Don't be afraid, because I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here. For he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.

While the women likely were shocked to see this heavenly being, the angel urged them: **don't be afraid**. The Greek structure is a command to stop doing something that's already being done. The angel told them to release their fears. Angels offered similar encouragement to Zechariah (Luke 1:13), Mary (Luke 1:30), and the Bethlehem shepherds (Luke 2:10). One reason the women had no reason to fear was the nature of their mission. The angel knew they were **looking for Jesus**.

The object of the women's search (Jesus) was on target, but they were looking in the wrong place. The angel declared that **he is not here**. The angel's simple statement represents the heart of Easter and of the Christian faith (1 Cor. 15:3-8). Paul told the Corinthians that Christianity without a resurrected Savior is a fraud and Christians "should be pitied more than anyone" (1 Cor. 15:19).

The angel assured the women that Jesus **has risen**. The Greek verb is passive, meaning Jesus was acted upon. He had been dead and could not raise Himself. Instead, Christ rose through the power of God the Father. The angel confirmed this in two ways. First, he reminded the women that Jesus had told them about His resurrection (Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31). Even His enemies knew about this claim (Matt. 27:62-66).

Second, the angel invited them to **see the place where he lay**. The women knew that Joseph and Nicodemus had put Jesus's body in the grave on Friday night. The angel's offer verified they were at the correct tomb. Now, they had the opportunity to see that it was empty.

Verse 7

VERSE 7

⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has risen from the dead and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there.' Listen, I have told you."

The angel's announcement came with an assignment. As the first witnesses to the empty tomb, the women were instructed to **go quickly and tell his disciples**. Just as the angel had calmed their fears, they would help relieve the anxieties of the disciples.

In addition to the resurrection, the disciples also needed to know that Jesus was **going ahead of them to Galilee**, possibly at the end of the Passover festival. Located in the northern region of Palestine, Galilee was the home of several disciples and served as Jesus's "headquarters" on earth. During Passover, Jesus had said He would meet His disciples in Galilee (Matt. 26:32). They would **see him there** and would receive His marching orders for the initiation and spread of the early church.

(In PSG, p. 69) **Why was it important for the women to act with urgency in delivering the message of Jesus’s resurrection? Should that same urgency be felt today? Explain.**

How does the truth of Jesus’s resurrection calm your fears? Why?

ENCOUNTERED (MATT. 28:8-10)

Verses 8-10

The women understood two things clearly. First, they knew Jesus had been raised from the dead. Second, they knew that Jesus expected them to tell others about what they had witnessed. So they **quickly** did as they were told.

As they ran, they experienced a mixture of emotions. On one hand they were filled with **fear**. This word indicates some residual panic but also suggests reverence and awe. They also experienced **great joy**. The hopelessness of Friday and the questions of Sunday morning were gone. This combination of fear and joy suggests that they knew something wonderful had happened and that things would never be the same.

Along the way, the women encountered the risen Messiah: **Jesus met them**. Matthew’s wording suggests a sudden appearance, even as they were still trying to process the morning’s events. He offered them a common salutation—**Greetings**—that was anything but ordinary. For these women, it provided a positive and affirming welcome.

Rather than a ghost or spirit, Jesus appeared with a physical—though heavenly—body. This is clear from two things Matthew mentioned in verse 9. First, the women recognized Jesus. They **came up** to Him, which indicates they were familiar with Him. Second, Matthew said they **took hold of his feet**, a common act of submission in the first-century Near East. This would have been impossible if Jesus was just a spirit. Instead, they were able to touch Him like any other person.

The women also **worshipped him**. They had seen His dead corpse and His empty tomb. Now, they were seeing His living body. That was enough to convince them that He was divine and worthy of worship.

Jesus offered them the same encouragement as did the angel. He urged them to **not be afraid** then gave them the same instructions: **go and tell my brothers to leave for Galilee**. They would **see** Him there.

It is interesting to note the Lord’s reference to *brothers* rather than “disciples.” This is the only place in the Gospels Jesus used that term of endearment for His followers. Most of them had deserted Him, and Peter had denied Him. Only John came to the crucifixion site. Yet Jesus still embraced them and affirmed the relationship they shared.

VERSES 8-10

⁸ So, departing quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, they ran to tell his disciples the news. ⁹ Just then Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” They came up, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus told them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there.”

If you were in the women's sandals, how would you have responded to Jesus's sudden appearance? How does this translate into His work in your life today?

VERSES 16-17

¹⁶ The eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted.

COMMISSIONED (MATT. 28:16-20)

Verses 16-17

Matthew followed the resurrection story with a brief account of the Jewish leaders bribing the Roman soldiers to lie about Christ's resurrection (28:11-15). They knew the claims Jesus had made and were eager to squelch any speculation. From there, the narrative turns back to Jesus and His brothers. Matthew pointed out that the **eleven disciples** made the trip to Galilee. This would have been the original disciples with the exception of Judas. Most likely, others were also present, but Matthew focused on the apostles.

They traveled to the **mountain where Jesus had directed them**. Throughout his Gospel, Matthew highlighted mountains as a backdrop for the life and ministry of Jesus. In addition to teaching (Matt. 5:1; 24:3), Jesus also prayed (14:23), healed (15:29-30), was tempted (4:8-10), and was transfigured (17:1-4) on a mountain.

While this is the only post-resurrection meeting between Jesus and His followers recorded in Matthew, the other Gospels describe additional encounters. Some of these occurred in Jerusalem soon after the resurrection (Luke 24:13-53; John 20:19-29). Others happened in Galilee (John 21:1-14). Paul mentioned a time when Jesus appeared to five hundred people at once (1 Cor. 15:6).

On the mountain, Christ's followers **worshiped** Him. Some, though, **doubted**. This Greek word refers to wavering or having a divided mind. The idea is more like hesitation or confusion than skepticism. Some of those present responded more slowly, while others quickly believed.

All Jesus had was at their disposal to fulfill His command.

Verses 18-20

The Great Commission serves as the marching orders for the church. While many Christians associate the commission only with verses 19-20, it is important to understand the marching orders in light of verse 18. As Jesus sent His disciples into the world, He promised **all authority**. Without His authority and power, our efforts would be wasted.

Jesus alone holds ultimate power **in heaven and on earth**. Nothing exists outside His influence and control. The implication is that He would

share this power with His followers. All Jesus had was at their disposal to fulfill His command.

The disciples were called to use this authority to make a spiritual impact on the world. The word **go** is better translated “as you are going,” which suggests a lifestyle of evangelism. The Christian life is not stagnant but active and purposeful as we share and support others who share.

Make disciples is the primary command in the Greek structure. And these disciples would come from **all nations**. The Greek word used here is *ethne*, from which comes our word “ethnic.” It is a broad term and includes every demographic category. Everyone needs the gospel, and everyone should be given the chance to respond to it. This meant Gentiles could be saved without becoming Jews first. This was a significant matter for Christ’s followers and Matthew’s Jewish audience.

The process of making disciples is modified by two phrases. Once individuals become disciples, they should be **baptized**. In fact, ancient readers may have seen baptism as a natural extension of evangelism. Of course, baptism does not *provide* salvation, but it does *proclaim* salvation as an act of obedience. Jesus also shared a triune formula for such baptisms: **in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**. The singular use of *name* to reference all three members of the Godhead affirms the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

In addition to evangelizing and baptizing, the disciples were responsible for **teaching**. False teachers would arise within the church and attempt to lure believers away from solid doctrine. But disciples who **observe** everything Jesus taught will stand firm. Jesus was the new standard for righteousness before God. All Scripture—the Law, the Prophets, even the New Testament—finds its substance and fulfillment in the Person of Christ.

Jesus opened the commission with a promise of His power (v. 18) and concluded it with a promise of His presence. His presence is eternal, taking believers to the **end of the age**. Christ offered His personal presence while ministering on earth, and He assures His followers that His spiritual presence will remain until He returns to earth. Even then, He won’t leave His people but will dwell with them for eternity. Just as Matthew began his Gospel with a promise that Immanuel (“God with us”) had come (Matt. 1:23), he closed his work with a promise of the Messiah’s abiding presence.

What are some man-made barriers Christians should break down for the gospel? How can you personally reach out across such a divide?

VERSES 18-20

¹⁸ Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION

BEGIN: Begin the session by leading the group to name television game shows. Write responses on a board, and circle those that are based on facts or knowledge.

RESPOND: Continue the discussion about game shows by directing attention to the first paragraph on page 64 of the PSG. Stress that the more firsthand knowledge one has, the greater the confidence and trust.

DISCUSS: *If you were a contestant on a game show, to whom would you reach out if allowed to get assistance with one question? What are your reasons for selecting that person?* (PSG, p. 64)

TRANSITION: *When we consider the resurrection of Jesus, we find confidence in knowing that the accounts in the Bible are filled with firsthand knowledge.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCE: Enlist a volunteer to read the session title and summary statement on page 64 of the PSG—*Risen! Christ's resurrection assures believers of salvation.* Summarize the information from Understand the Context (PSG, p. 65) to identify the sequence of events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus. Conclude by reading aloud the Roman soldier's comment when Jesus died: *"Truly this man was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54).*

TRANSITION: *Jesus died and was placed in a tomb. The distress found in the events leading up to this point was about to be reversed.*

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 28:1-4, while the group listens for reactions and responses by various

people at the tomb of Jesus. Invite the group to share words and key phrases, and write these on a board.

SEARCH: Form three groups, and assign each group one of these: Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, the angel, and the guards. Instruct the groups to search the Scripture and information about verses 1-4 (PSG, pp. 66-67) for the reason their assigned people were at the tomb and their response after getting there. Invite a spokesperson from each group to share highlights of their discussion.

ASK: How do the details given instill assurance that Jesus was resurrected? (PSG, p. 67)

TRANSITION: *Mary Magdalene and the other Mary visited Jesus's tomb to anoint His body—but instead they discovered the empty tomb that attests to His resurrection.*

READ: Direct the group to read Matthew 28:5-7 and locate the way the angel calmed the women while announcing Jesus's resurrection. Lead the group to identify key words and phrases from the passage. Add these to the list on the board.

MINI-LECTURE: Present a mini-lecture about angels. Use the comments about verses 2-3 (PSG, p. 66) to recall other appearances of angels in the Bible. Summarize the information about verses 5-7 (PSG, pp. 68-69) to highlight the angel's assurance and factual evidence.

HIGHLIGHT: Direct attention to **Pack Item 5** (*Key Verse: Matthew 28:6*), displayed on the wall. Lead the group to identify the factual evidence the angel provided in Matthew 28:6. ("He is not here." "He has risen.") Point out that the angel backed up his facts by inviting the women to step into

the tomb and see for themselves. He knew the resurrection of Jesus was true, and he wanted to make sure others knew this to be true as well.

EMPHASIZE: Direct the group to search verses 5-7 and locate instructions the angel gave the women. Discuss responses, which may include, “Don’t be afraid,” “Come and see,” and “go quickly and tell.” Ask: **Why was it important for the women to act with urgency in delivering the message of Jesus’s resurrection? Should that same urgency be felt today? Explain.** (PSG, p. 69)

TRANSITION: *Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were obedient to the command given by the angel of the Lord. The news of Christ’s resurrection and message for the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee was not information that could afford delay.*

READ: Enlist two volunteers to read aloud Matthew 28:8-10. Instruct one volunteer to read the narrative that describes the women’s actions, and the other to read Jesus’s words in quotation marks.

RESPOND: Invite the group to highlight the element in the passage that stands out most to them. Add to the list on the board, and allow time for them to explain their responses.

STUDY: Place the group into pairs, designating one person to review information about verses 8-10 (PSG, pp. 69–70) that relates to the women’s actions and response. Instruct the other person to review the same information for Jesus’s actions and direction to the women. Guide them to share their observations with each other and with the group, if time allows.

DISCUSS: **How was the encounter with Jesus critical for the women? How does an encounter with Jesus change a person’s view of Him?** (PSG, p. 70)

TRANSITION: *Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were commissioned to tell the remaining disciples of Jesus’s resurrection and call them to travel to Galilee.*

READ: Direct the group to read Matthew 28:16-20 and notice the disciples’ response to Jesus. Point out that “some doubted,” but it was more hesitation or confusion than skepticism. Ask: **What might cause a person to doubt the resurrection despite the eyewitness accounts?** (PSG, p. 71)

FOCUS: Direct attention to Matthew 28:19-20, which is known as the Great Commission. Point out that Jesus wants us to know Him personally and follow His teachings and to help others do the same. Explain that “go” indicates a continual action or lifestyle. “Baptizing” and “teaching” further indicate the necessary steps involved in fulfilling His command.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Direct attention to the words and phrases listed on the board during the session. Ask: **Which of these is most significant to you? Why? How does this affect your understanding of Jesus’s resurrection?**

RESPOND: Lead the group to respond to the third question set under Apply the Text (PSG, p. 72): **Discuss as a group the role your group has in helping your church accomplish the different elements of the Great Commission. What actions can your Bible study group take this week that would lead to faithfully living out this command?** (PSG, p. 72)

PRAY: Conclude the group time with prayer, praising God for the reality of Jesus’s resurrection and the assurance of salvation for believers.

OPTIONS

Use these options to supplement and enhance the group plans on the previous pages.

MUSIC

Before the session, gather a list of popular songs and hymns about the resurrection of Christ such as “He Lives,” “He’s Alive,” “Because He Lives,” “I’ve Just Seen Jesus,” and “Christ Arose.” Pick one to introduce each of the Scripture sections. Sing, play, or read selected lyrics from each. As the song is presented, lead the group to consider what the resurrection of Jesus means to them.

NATURE

Direct attention to Matthew 28:1-4. Identify the natural events mentioned in the passage. Guide the group to describe what the surroundings likely looked and felt like on that resurrection morning. Lead the group to reflect on other times nature is mentioned in the Bible and how it enhances our understanding of the Scripture.

PRESENTATION

Pre-enlist a volunteer to prepare a presentation about angels in the Bible. Point them to information about Matthew 28:2-3 (PSG, p. 66), a Bible dictionary, and other study tools for assistance. Invite the volunteer to share the presentation and allow the group to ask questions or share observations.

MONOLOGUE

Pre-enlist several volunteers to develop a monologue based on one of the people mentioned in Matthew 28:1-10,16-20. Lead them to consider their person’s emotions and reactions according to the Scripture. Refer to the PSG for more information. Invite the volunteers to share their monologues with the group.

WORD STUDY

Bible dictionaries

Use the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 67) with the group. Form two teams and distribute a Bible dictionary to each. Instruct teams to review articles about resurrection and note various occurrences of a person being brought back to life and how those experiences are different from what happened to Jesus. Focus on the difference between resuscitation and resurrection. Discuss how this information can help in witnessing to those who don’t believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

CREATIVE WRITING

Paper and pencils

Read Matthew 28:6 from various Bible translations. Lead the group to write about different ways the passage could be expressed. Invite volunteers to share what they wrote. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*) to those who don’t have one. Encourage the group to memorize Matthew 28:6 this week, repeating it every morning.