

Death Has Been Defeated!

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections

November 5 — *Luke 24:1-12; John 19:38-20:18; Matt. 28:1-15; More*

Day 309 — 56 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We witnessed the greatest event in all of history — the resurrection of Jesus. Paul considered the resurrection as the lynchpin for the Christian faith (*1 Corinthians 15*). Before we expand the significance of this truth, I would like to clear up two issues that are oftentimes confusing to believers, that of the timing of the resurrection and the ending of the book of *Mark*.

First, did you notice that there were two endings to the book of *Mark* — a shorter one and a longer one? What's going on here? The earliest and oldest manuscripts of the book end the resurrection story with the women who were afraid (*16:8*). Later manuscripts of the book include the extended ending (*v.9-20*). Bible scholars have noted that the additional verses reflect a different style than the rest of the book, which means that Mark probably did not write it; an unknown author completed the story for the benefit of the reader. Since there has been so much debate over what to do about the passage, modern translations include both of them.

Another confusing issue that needs to be addressed in this passage is the timing of the resurrection. We know that Jesus was resurrected on the first day of the week, which is Sunday; but, on what day of the week was He crucified? Traditionally, Christians have held to Friday as the day of His death; thus, we annually commemorate Good Friday just before Easter. The scholars behind the *New Living Translation* inserted Friday into the story (*Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54*), although the Bible's original manuscripts do not give us a specific day. The reason why Friday seems to be the obvious day of Jesus' death is that there are several mentions of the Sabbath (Saturday) in the story, which the characters involved would have honored.

However, inserting Friday into the passage is a bit misleading because it does not allow for the prophecies of Jesus' death and resurrection to be completely fulfilled. Jesus said Himself, "As Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so I, the Son of Man, will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights" (*Matthew 12:40*). A Friday crucifixion might allow for the three days (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday) but it does not allow for the three nights. What is the solution then?

A possible solution to the confusion is that there were two Sabbath days in that week, the normal one on Saturday and a second one associated with the Passover celebration (*Leviticus 16:29-31; 23:24-32, 39*). Holy days, like Passover Sabbath, do not have to fall on Saturday; they can be any day of the week. Therefore, Jesus' crucifixion could have occurred on a Wednesday or Thursday.

Daily Reflection

In the resurrection, **Jesus confronted and conquered your greatest enemy — death.**

The penalty for Adam's rebellion in the Garden was death, spiritually and physically. But Christ, after having died on the cross, was placed in a grave, where He did not rot. Rather, He rose from the dead and broke the power of the grave over men's lives. **Because Christ was able to defeat death, He then had the right and the power to extend everlasting life to His followers.** His resurrection was and is the hope for all mankind. Because He defeated death, you can have hope that death is not the end. "Don't be afraid," the angel said. "Jesus isn't here. He has been raised from the dead, just as He said would happen" (*Matthew 28:5, 6*). Jesus also said that He was going to prepare a place for you, so that you might be where He is. *The resurrection of Christ guarantees your resurrection!*

Our Great Commission

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections

November 6 — *Luke 24:13-49; John 20:30-21:25; Matt. 28:16-20; More* Day 310 — 55 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

Jerusalem was buzzing with the excitement of Jesus' resurrection. Some believed it was a hoax, while others knew it to be real. Still others, like the religious leaders and Romans, were scratching their heads trying to account for "losing the body." They did what they could to cover up the whole ordeal. In the meantime, Jesus appeared to many of His followers, assuring them that He was, indeed, alive.

It is equally important that Jesus was not just seen but touched. He walked with people, ate with people, spoke with people, and His wounds were verified. His bodily resurrection ensures that we too will be raised with new bodies, just as He promised. He was not a ghost; He was resurrected in a physical and recognizable form.

So many events and conversations took place in our passage today. However, a good summary would be to say that, in these forty days after the resurrection, *Jesus prepared His followers for the coming Church Age*. What were some of the pieces that needed to be set in place before Jesus exited the scene?

First, **His closest followers had to be convinced of His resurrection**. The truth of His defeat of the grave would be the driving force behind their efforts. Therefore, before He returned to heaven, Jesus would appear to them several times (*Acts 1:3*). They were not serving a dead Messiah but a living one!

Second, **the verbal leader of the disciples had to be restored**. Peter, who would play a prominent role in the early church was, after the crucifixion, at an all-time low in his life. Three times he had denied that he knew Jesus. When he heard of Jesus' resurrection, I am sure that the news was bitter sweet. On one hand, he was relieved that his betrayal would not be the last

experience that he would have with Jesus; yet, he had to be a little anxious about seeing Jesus again. What would He say to Peter regarding His denials? Jesus, of course, forgave him, when He appeared to the disciples in Galilee. He gave Peter a chance to affirm His love for Him three times. He also charged Peter to "Feed My sheep," a challenge to tend to the flock of people who would soon follow Christ.

Third, **Jesus reminded His followers that He would send the Holy Spirit to help them**. Without having Jesus among them to empower the work of the ministry, the followers of Christ would need another Helper. That person was the Holy Spirit. Jesus told them to "stay in Jerusalem until He comes" (*Luke 24:49*).

Fourth, **Jesus opened the eyes of His followers to understand the Scriptures**. It would be important for them to know these things so that they could communicate them to others. At least twice, Jesus took time to explain all that was written about Him in the books of Moses and the prophets (*Luke 24:25-27, 44-46*).

Last, but certainly not least, **Jesus focused His followers on the most important work of the Church** — "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone, everywhere" (*Mark 16:15*). While the Church will have other ministries, *all of them will be energized by the propagation of the Gospel*, the most important goal.

Daily Reflection

As followers of Christ, you and I have been given a great responsibility, a great commission. As His ambassadors, we are charged with sharing the Good News of salvation, the Gospel, everywhere we go and with everyone we meet. **While we may not go to the same places, we have the same calling and message.** Have you been faithful to your commission?

The Great Enabler

Today In Your Reading...

After Jesus had ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives, His followers returned to Jerusalem, as He had instructed. Ten days later, on the Day of Pentecost, they all gathered together to pray. Then, a violent rushing wind entered the room where they were and startled them. Next, tongues of fire hovered over them, and they began to speak in languages that were not their own.

This event caused such an uproar that a crowd began to gather. Foreigners were shocked to hear preaching in their own language, especially from those who were not native to their country. Someone even accused the “Jesus followers” of being drunk; but, Peter calmed everyone down and pointed out that God had predicted this event in Scripture. The prophet Joel had written that the Lord would pour out His Spirit on the people and they would tell the good news of His salvation (*Joel 2:28-32*). Peter then shared the Gospel with those who would listen and three thousand people were saved that day!

The Holy Spirit is the most difficult member of the Trinity to comprehend. He is God, a non-material, omnipresent, omniscient, and holy Being who dwells in us. He is the Helper to whom Jesus referred, a Helper with the same power which raised Him from the grave (*John 14:15-17; 16:5-15*).

The Spirit’s purpose is to enable us to live the Christian life. He transforms our mind, our heart, our will, and our actions to glorify Christ. He convicts us of our sins. He leads us into all truth and helps us to remember God’s Word. He also protects our souls for eternity. Every person who has given his life to Christ has the Holy Spirit dwelling within him, to empower him to become conformed to the image of Christ (*1 Corinthians 3:16; Romans 8:29*).

Daily Reflection

What are some evidences that the Holy Spirit resides in a person?

The first response that we see from those who were filled with the Spirit at Pentecost is that they were empowered to witness. **If the Spirit of God is in you, you will not only desire to tell others about Jesus, you will be compelled to do so.** You will not be able to contain the Gospel message of salvation.

What if you do not sense that desire to share Christ with others? What does that mean? It could mean several things. First, it could mean that you may not have the Holy Spirit within you, that you are not saved, but that you have been deceiving yourself. Second, it could mean that you have ignored the Spirit’s leading in your life, so much that you are no longer sensitive to His prompting. Third, it could mean that you have been disobedient to God and there is sin in your life. Your sin has grieved the Spirit and you are not available or willing to allow Him access to all areas of your life.

Know that for the Spirit to empower you to do God’s work, **you must make yourself available to Him.** He desires to glorify Christ in you, to conform you into His image, and to bear fruit of His influence in your life. Will you let Him?

A World of Opportunity

Today In Your Reading...

Peter, John, and the other disciples capitalized on the momentum that was created by the coming of the Holy Spirit, the preaching of the Gospel in various languages, and the thousands of people who were coming to Christ. The early Church was growing quickly and “each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

In the midst of all that God did in our passage today, one word particularly caught my attention — **opportunity**. Webster defined opportunity as “a fit or convenient time, a time favorable for the purpose” (1828 Dictionary). In regards to glorifying God or shining a light on the Gospel, the God of providence is constantly arranging opportunities, “fit and convenient times, favorable for His purposes.” However, **we are not always alert to their presence, nor do we take advantage of them**. Consider what God did with Peter and John today.

First, they met a man in need on the way to the Temple (3:1-11). Rather than ignore him, they took advantage of the opportunity and stopped to help him. By God’s power, they were even able to heal him. As a result of the miracle, “They were absolutely astounded! They rushed out to where he was, holding tightly to Peter and John. Everyone stood there in awe of the wonderful thing that had happened.”

Notice what happened next. “**Peter saw his opportunity** and addressed the crowd” (v.12). Because they had stopped to help the lame man, God had afforded them the opportunity to share the Gospel with a great crowd of people. Because they walked through one door, it led to another. It gets even better.

When the religious leaders heard what was going on, they arrested Peter and John and threw

them in jail (4:1-22). While this may seem like a terrible situation, in truth it was just another opportunity. The next morning, Peter and John found themselves with a private audience of the chief priests. Once again, Peter was alert to the opportunity and shared the Gospel with them. “There is salvation in no one else,” he told them. “There is no other name in all of heaven for people to call on to save them” (v.12).

Daily Reflection

You live in a world of opportunities. They are all around you. Every day, the Lord provides open doors for you to walk through, opportunities for you to glorify Him in some way or even to share the good news of Jesus Christ. The question is this — are you seeing them? What are some reasons why you may miss seeing opportunities that God has provided for you?

Even though you may see opportunities does not mean that you will take advantage of them. Why not?

When “all of the believers were united and lifting their voices in prayer” (4:24), one of the things they prayed for was boldness (v.29-31). **It is one thing to see opportunities, but it is another thing to use them.** That requires boldness. The enemy wants you to remain silent, to ignore open doors, to squelch the Spirit’s prompting, or to wait for another time. Be faithful to see and take advantage of opportunities!

The Fear of Man

Today In Your Reading...

In the early Church, so many people were following Christ in Jerusalem that the disciples were overwhelmed with the needs of the people. Simply put, there were not enough of them to give the time necessary in order to minister adequately. As a result, their ministry suffered. They got bogged down in meeting physical needs and, thus, neglected the spiritual needs. Even the people recognized what was happening and voiced their complaints.

The disciples acknowledged the problem and suggested a solution. They asked the people to choose seven men who would feed the widows, care for the poor, and tend to the physical needs of the people, which would allow them to continue preaching and praying. As a result of this teamwork, the Gospel continued to spread.

One of those seven men was named Stephen. He distinguished himself from the others, as he was "full of God's grace and power and he was performing miracles and signs among the people" (6:8). Not only had Stephen earned the admiration of the Christians, he had caught the attention of the Jewish leaders. "None of them was able to stand against the wisdom and Spirit by which Stephen spoke" (v.10). Soon, Stephen was arrested and brought before the High Priest. When Stephen was allowed to defend himself, he took the opportunity to charge his audience with betraying Jesus and murdering Him. Of course, these men took offense at his accusations and immediately ran him out of town and killed him.

The account of Stephen's death highlights several noteworthy truths. First, **the lies of this world are exposed by the wisdom of God**. Those who hold to these lies are offended by truth. Second, when their sins, errors, and ignorance are exposed, **our enemies' only re-**

course is to lash out at us, insult us, and persecute us. However, the third truth is that, despite this persecution and mistreatment, **the Lord is honored and we are blessed**.

Daily Reflection

Jesus once said, "God blesses you when you are mocked and persecuted and lied about because you are My followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven" (*Matthew 5:10-12*).

Why are these things easier said than done?

All of us want to be liked by people. **No one intentionally sets out to offend others; but the reality is that truth offends**. We may be humble and gentle with our words, but biblical principles, values, and teaching will cause some to take offense.

What are we communicating to God when we avoid talking about Him, or spiritual things, in order to avoid backlash, persecution, or offending others?

If you are true to God's calling on your life, you will stand up and speak out, and persecution will come. But, **persecution is not a sign that you are doing something wrong; rather it is a sign that you are doing something right**.

A New Life

Today In Your Reading...

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told the disciples, "When the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about Me everywhere — in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (*Acts 1:8*). The author of the book of *Acts* (whom we believe to be Luke) documented the fulfillment of this prophecy. When the Holy Spirit came to indwell the followers of Christ at Pentecost, they immediately began preaching the Gospel to the people of Jerusalem. Leading the way was Peter, John, and Stephen (*Acts 2-6*). Next, the author recorded Peter's travels throughout Judea (*9:32-43*) and Phillip's ministry in Samaria (*8:4-25*). For the remainder of the book, the author followed the ministry of Saul (or Paul), to see how the Lord used him to take the Gospel "to the ends of the earth."

Notice that as soon as the Church was established in Jerusalem and began to grow exponentially, enemies of the Gospel got organized and motivated to put a stop to it. Their efforts were centralized in one man — Saul of Tarsus — a young Pharisee who had a zeal for the Law of Moses and who could not stomach anyone who proclaimed "a new way to God." Thus, his passion would be the catalyst to ignite a severe persecution against the Church.

As Saul began to round up, imprison, and even kill "people of the Way," followers of Christ scattered in all directions. Many of them went to a city far to the north called Damascus. Saul was not deterred; instead, he sought permission from his superiors to pursue these "law-breakers" as far as possible, in order to bring them to "justice." However, on his way to Damascus, the Lord confronted Saul, got his attention, and changed his life. He would be God's chosen instrument to take His message to the Gentiles, to kings, and the people of Israel.

Daily Reflection

Several truths surface from the story of Saul's conversion. First, **God can and does use persecution for His purposes**. Did you notice that "a great wave of persecution swept over the church in Jerusalem and all the believers fled into Judea and Samaria"? (*8:1, 2*). In itself, persecution is terrible, but here, God, in His sovereignty, used it to spread the Gospel.

Second, **no one is out of the reach of God**. Even the most hardened criminal, angry atheist, strung out addict, or intellectual skeptic can be changed by Christ. Oftentimes, the Lord uses these types of people in mighty ways, to reach and impact others just like them. Saul's pedigree and misguided passions will make for a tremendous testimony which God will use to draw thousands of people to Him.

Third, when Saul was converted to Christianity, **he was given a new name** — Paul (*Acts 13:9*). He was also given a new purpose, a new direction in life. Isn't it true, when we too come to Christ for salvation, that He gives us a new name — Christian — as well as a new hope, a new purpose, and a new direction in life?

In essence, Saul's story is our story, your story. How so? How does Saul's story, in general, reflect the life of every believer, even your own?

Paul would later write, "**Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person**. The old life is gone; a new life has begun" (*2 Cor. 5:17*). Praise God today, that He has given you a new name, a new hope, and a new direction in life.

No Boundaries

Today In Your Reading...

A significant shift occurred in the direction of the Gospel, as Peter, arguably the leader of the early Church, ministered to a Roman officer, named Cornelius, and his family (*Acts 10:1-8*). What was the big deal? Their salvation and reception of the Holy Spirit threw a wrench in their perception of God's plans. The original strategy of the disciples was to take the Gospel only to the Jews. Non-Jews like Cornelius, known as Gentiles, were not even "on their radar."

However, the Lord altered their plans in a vision that He gave to Peter. After showing him a host of animals, reptiles, and birds that were considered unclean to eat by Mosaic law, the Lord commanded Peter to "get up, kill, and eat." While he was reluctant, at first, the Lord encouraged him by saying, "If God says something is acceptable, don't say it isn't" (v.9-29).

Later, when Peter was invited to the home of Cornelius, the meaning of the vision became clear. "You know it is against the Jewish laws for me to come into a Gentile home," he said. "But God has shown me that I should never think of anyone as impure... I see very clearly that God doesn't show partiality" (v.28, 34). Something new was happening here. **God was opening the door of salvation for Gentiles to be saved.** Peter told the disciples, when he met with them in Jerusalem, "God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of turning from sin and receiving eternal life" (*11:18*).

This "new direction" for the Gospel was foreshadowed many times before Peter's vision. Even when God made a covenant with Abraham, who is considered the father of the Jewish people, He told him, "**All the families of the earth** will be blessed through you" (*Genesis 12:3*). Prophets, like Isaiah, foretold of this phenomenon. He wrote of the Lord's Servant, "You will do

more than restore the people of Israel to God. He will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (*49:6*). Jesus Himself, though His focus was on the Jewish nation, ministered to Gentiles during His time on earth. Remember the Canaanite woman (*Matthew 15*), the Roman centurion's servant (*Luke 7*), the Gerasenes (*Mark 5*), and the Samaritan woman (*John 4*). Finally, even the Apostle Paul would be used of God to "take His message to the Gentiles" (*9:15*).

Daily Reflection

With this new revelation, Jesus' charge to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth becomes more clear (*Acts 1:8*). **The Gospel has no boundaries!** The good news of salvation in Jesus Christ is for everyone, regardless of gender, color, social status, or nationality. He is the Lord of all!

Why should this news cause you to be grateful?

How should this news affect your view and drive your efforts in sharing the Gospel with others?

In saving you, the Lord has shown great mercy. You too should extend the same mercy to others. **The Gospel has no boundaries.** "It is the power of God for salvation, first to the Jews and also to the Gentiles" (*Romans 1:16*).