

# Jesus Is Alive!

April 30 – Mt. 28:1-15; Mk. 16:1-11; Lk. 24:1-12; Jn. 20:1-18

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Day 120 – 245 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

The glorious day is here! Jesus is alive! Mary, Peter, John, and other women found His tomb empty. He had risen just as He said He would.

Did you notice that each of the gospel writers had a unique perspective on the resurrection? They shared details that the other three did not. Let's review a few of them and consider why they are important to us today.

First, consider the timing of the resurrection. It happened on Sunday, the first day of the week. Because of the significance of this day, Sunday became known as the Lord's Day to Christians, and it replaced Saturday (Jewish Sabbath) as the weekly day of worship and reflection.

Second, the Roman guards stationed at the tomb were no match for the angels. The soldiers fell over like dead men when they saw them. The sighting of the angels and the empty tomb was reported to the chief priests. This news, of course, was disastrous for them. It revealed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah and that they were responsible for killing Him. If word got out what had happened, the people would certainly turn against them. Thus, they conspired to lie to protect themselves.

Third, the details about the angels are also insightful — their appearance, power, and position in the tomb. Notice that John described two angels, one sitting at the head and feet where Jesus lay (20:12). This detail is a subtle reference to the Mercy Seat and the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple (Ex. 25:17-22), which displayed two angels and represented God's presence. Mankind can access God's presence through His Son (Jn. 14:6).

Finally, notice the details about Jesus' body after His resurrection. While He could instantly appear and disappear, Mary Magdalene saw Him, touched Him, and spoke with Him. His resurrection was not just spiritual but physical.

## Daily Reflection

Why is Jesus' resurrection so important to us today? There are several reasons.

First, we do not follow, serve, and worship a God who is dead, but a God who is alive. Every other religious leader is buried in the ground. They did not live forever. But our Savior's tomb is empty. We serve a risen and living King!

Second, one of the penalties for sin is death. Death has cursed mankind since the beginning of time. But now, with Jesus' resurrection, death has been defeated. In the span of a few days, Jesus triumphed over mankind's two greatest enemies — sin and death. He redeemed us from sin's curse with His death on the cross, and He defeated the grave with His resurrection.

Third, Jesus is our living hope. The promise of eternal life is real. Because He defeated death, He enables us to defeat death. Because He is not in the grave, He helps us overcome the grave. It wouldn't make any sense for Jesus to promise eternal life if He was still in the grave. No, because He lives, we have hope that we will live after death forever with Him.

The resurrection of Jesus is the greatest event in history! How has it impacted your life?

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"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen, just as He said. Tell others that He is alive!" Luke 24:5, 6

# The Key

May 1 – Luke 24:13-34; Mark 16:12, 13

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## Today in Your Reading

Jesus appeared to two of His followers on the road to Emmaus. At first, they did not recognize Him, but later they would. Thus, they became eyewitnesses who verified His resurrection.

But Jesus' visit with these two followers was more than just to verify His resurrection. It was to solidify their faith in His identity as the Messiah. Notice that when Jesus inquired about the topic of their conversation, they described Jesus as "a prophet mighty in deed and word" (v.19). This statement indicates that their belief in Him was still forming but not yet firm. They even added, "We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel" (v.21). In other words, they thought that Jesus might be the Messiah who would defeat their enemies, but when He was crucified, they began to doubt.

Their lack of faith was symbolized in the fact that their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him (v.16). In other words, their spiritual blindness was pictured in their temporary physical blindness. Jesus even described them as "foolish men who are slow to believe" (v.25). It was only after Jesus explained His identity to them that their eyes were opened, and they saw Him and believed (v.31).

What had Jesus done to convince them that He was the Messiah? "Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (v.27). In other words, Jesus showed them that the Messiah would do more than deliver His people from their enemies. He would also suffer at the hands of men and redeem His people from their sins. Therefore, Jesus walked them through the Old Testament and pointed out all the types, foreshadowing, and prophecies that He fulfilled in His life and ministry. As they listened, they said "their hearts were burning" with excitement and wonder (v.32).

## Daily Reflection

This passage is one of my favorites in the Bible. Why? Two reasons. First, **Jesus validated and elevated the Old Testament** (v.27; 44). Christians often neglect the Old Testament simply because it is long and difficult to understand. But to neglect the Old Testament is to miss much of the importance of the New Testament, especially the ministry of Jesus. It has been said that the New Testament is in the Old concealed, and the Old Testament is in the New revealed. The two testaments go together.

But we say, "The Old Testament is so hard to read and understand!" That's where my second reason for loving this passage comes into play. **Jesus is the key to understanding the Old Testament.** Notice that He said, "He explained to them all the things concerning Himself in the Scriptures" (v.27). **The Old Testament has a key that unlocks its pages, and the key is Christ.** Every chapter, every book, and every story points to some aspect of the Promised One. When we understand that Jesus is the key, it brings the Old Testament to life.

What has been your attitude towards the Old Testament? Have you been blind to its importance, trying to read it without the key?

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The New Testament makes sense in light of the Old Testament, and the Old Testament comes to life as it is fulfilled in the New Testament. **The whole Bible is about Christ. He is the key!**

# Peace Be With You

May 2 – Luke 24:35-43; John 20:19-29

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Day 122 – 243 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

Jesus appeared to the disciples in Jerusalem. It was the first day of the week, Sunday, the day of His resurrection. While the day had been filled with the excitement of the possibility that Jesus had risen, there was still a great deal of confusion because no one had seen Him but Peter and some of the women. Therefore, there was uneasiness among them. If He's really alive, then where is He, they wondered? Did Peter really see Him, or was it just a spirit?

Their uneasiness explains why Jesus repeated the words, "Peace be with you," three times. It was a common phrase in those days, but it was very reassuring in that moment. His appearance settled their minds and hearts and gave them confidence that Jesus was alive and well. His gentle greeting also dispelled any fears they had that Jesus was angry for their abandoning Him.

Jesus' sudden appearance in a locked room may have caused doubt that Jesus was truly there. The disciples may have even thought He was a spirit (like when they saw Him walking on the water). But Jesus alleviated any doubts immediately by showing them His hands and His side. He also asked for food to eat. In other words, while Jesus' risen and glorified body was different than ours, it was still physical in some sense. He could appear and disappear at His pleasure, but the disciples recognized Him, spoke with Him, touched Him, and ate with Him.

Of course, not all the disciples were present the first time Jesus appeared. Thomas was absent. But Jesus appeared again later and allowed Thomas to see and touch His wounds. Thomas' doubts were dismissed, and He believed that Jesus had risen. His response was priceless, "My Lord and my God" (Jn. 20:28). In these few words are the true identity of Jesus the Messiah and our appropriate, worshipful response. Yes, Jesus is God, and we submit to His lordship, His leadership in our lives.

## Daily Reflection

**Jesus' appearance brought His followers peace.** His resurrection was real, and He is alive. All doubt was removed, and their minds could rest. However, that is not all that brought them peace. His words, also, removed doubts.

First, He gave them a mission. "As the Father has sent Me, so I send you" (v.21). They didn't need to wonder what they were to do next. Second, Jesus had promised them help to accomplish their mission by sending the Holy Spirit. His promise was affirmed when He said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (v.22). Whether they received the Spirit that day or at Pentecost (Acts 2) or at both, He kept His word. They would be equipped and enabled to complete their task. Finally, Jesus reminded them that they would now lead His followers, with the assistance of the Spirit, of course. Their decisions, if in accordance with the Lord's will, would be honored by Him (v.23; see also Matt. 16:19; 18:18).

**What did Jesus say or do that gives you peace?** Have you embraced His peace, or do you allow your mind and emotions to cause you unrest?

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**"Peace I leave with you. Let not your heart be troubled"** (Jn. 15:27).

# You Follow Me

May 3 – John 20:30-21:25

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Day 123 – 242 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

We finished the gospel of *John*. Although there is more to the story of Jesus that we will read tomorrow, it was bittersweet to close this wonderful book. It feels like we've been on a long journey, and it has come to an end.

The last few verses of *John* captured Peter's confession and commission. Of course, other disciples were with him, but the story highlighted Peter's redemption after his denials. The story took place at the Sea of Galilee where they first met Jesus. In fact, Jesus recreated the scene when He overwhelmed them with fish after a long night of catching nothing.

But, even amid the excitement of such a catch, Peter could think of nothing but making things right with Jesus. When he realized that it was the Lord standing on the beach, "he threw himself into the sea" and hurried to meet Him (v.7). Though we are not told what Peter did once he got to shore, I imagine that he fell at Jesus' feet and wept. Perhaps, Jesus raised him to his feet, sent him to help the others with the fish, and told him that they would talk later.

Jesus and the disciples enjoyed breakfast together, another clue that Jesus was not just a spirit, but rather He was present in body. But notice the allusion to the night of Peter's denials (*Jn. 18:18*). Jesus built a charcoal fire (v.9), and as the men sat around it, Peter surely thought of the night that Jesus was betrayed and arrested.

But Jesus did not remind Peter of his failures. He was there to redeem Peter with forgiveness. Three times, He asked, "Do you love Me?" Three times, Peter said yes. The third time Jesus asked, Peter grieved (v.17), meaning that he felt sorrow, pain, and regret. While it seems strange to us that Jesus asked Peter the same question three times, Peter knew the reason. Jesus was allowing Peter to repent and to restate His love and loyalty to Jesus.

Despite his denials, Jesus restored Peter and even called him again to follow Him, for there was much work to be done (v.19). He even predicted what kind of death Peter would suffer for His sake (v.18). We know from history that Peter would be crucified by Nero on the Appian Way, just outside of Rome.

## Daily Reflection

When Peter heard of his future, he asked about John's future. But Jesus said, "If I want him to remain until I return, **what is that to you. You follow Me**" (v.22). So often we compare ourselves to others — their appearance, their abilities, their possessions, their good fortune — and we get jealous. We complain to God about our situation or circumstances.

Do you ever compare yourself to others like Peter? Why is that a temptation and a trap?

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God has each of us on a different path. His plan for me is not the same plan as He has for you; and the plan He has for you is not the same as your friends or family members. Jesus says, **"What is that to you? You follow Me!"**

You have surely failed, like Peter, multiple times, but you serve a gracious and merciful God who not only saves you from your failures, but who also sends you out with work to do. You must not get distracted by those around you or get discouraged by past troubles or present trials. **Repent of your comparing and complaining spirit, keep your eyes on Jesus, and follow Him to the best of your ability!**

# As You Go Wherever You Go

May 4 – Matt. 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:44-49

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Day 124 – 241 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

Jesus appeared to His disciples in Galilee to address several topics. First, He dispelled any doubts they might have had regarding His resurrection. Second, He cleared up their misconceptions and misunderstandings about the Scriptures. Third, He commissioned them with a great work. Finally, He gave them signs to confirm that the gospel was effective. Let's look at these four topics more closely.

First, some of the disciples (and other followers) doubted that Jesus had been resurrected (*Matt. 28:17; Mk. 16:14*). Appearing to over 500 people for 40 days after the cross should have dispelled all doubt, but some still did not believe (*1 Cor. 15:1-11*). Jesus "reproached them for their hardness of heart" (*Mk. 16:14*), especially after all He had done to tell them in advance that these things would take place.

Second, before leaving the disciples to return to heaven, Jesus explained the many references to Him in the Scriptures (Old Testament). Though He had been teaching them for three years, they still did not see the big picture. Thus, Jesus "opened their minds to understand" the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms (*Lk. 24:44, 45*). Remember, He is the key that unlocks the Bible.

Third, Jesus gave His disciples (and all followers) a Great Commission, a great work to do. This work includes sharing the gospel (good news of salvation), making disciples, baptizing, and teaching His commandments (*Matt. 28:19, 20; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:48*). Jesus made sure that they knew that He would be with them in this endeavor, through His Spirit, until the end.

Finally, Jesus gave the disciples signs to confirm believers (*Mk. 16:17*). Although this verse is included in a disputed section of *Mark (16:9-20*, as it was not included in the original manuscripts), we can verify that it is true by comparing it to other scriptures (like *Acts*).

For example, we see Christians casting out demons (*8:7; 16:18; 19:11-16*), speaking in new tongues (languages, *2:4-11; 10:46; 19:6*) handling serpents (*28:5*), and healing the sick (*3:7; 19:11; 28:8, 9*). These signs were verified after Jesus' departure. But these signs were not imperatives, meaning they were not expected of all converts to prove their salvation (as we don't enforce these tests today); rather these signs were confirmation that Christ was still working.

## Daily Reflection

As much as the Great Commission was meant for the disciples, it was also meant for us today. We are living in a new era (the Church Age) which will end when Jesus returns. Until the end of that age, He will be with us in spirit to help us perform this great work.

There are three aspects of this commission that I would like to address. First, we must not include baptism as a means of salvation (*Mk. 16:16*) but rather as a profession of one's faith in Christ. Baptism is not a work to be saved (works don't save us), rather baptism is to occur after salvation as a step of obedience.

Second, in Jesus' command to "go and make disciples" (*Matt. 28:20*), **the word go means "as you are going" or "everywhere you go."** Christians do not have to travel to distant places to share the gospel. **We are to share the gospel of Jesus as we go wherever we go. Simply put, the "mission field" is all around us.**

Third, evangelism (sharing the gospel) is just one element of making a disciple. While salvation is crucial (the starting point), it is not the end of the Christian life. We must go beyond evangelism to discipling believers. That's why Jesus said, "Teach them all that I have commanded you" (*v.20*). Once people are saved, we must help them grow spiritually.

**Are you fulfilling your commission as you go?**

# Dynamic Martyrs

May 5 – Mark 16:19, 20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:1-26

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Day 125 – 240 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

Jesus ascended into heaven, and the disciples returned to Jerusalem to await the arrival of the Holy Spirit. We also transitioned from the gospels to the book of *Acts*. *Acts* was the second book written by Luke and is a history of the early church (*Acts 1:1, 2*).

After appearing to over 500 people for 40 days, it was time for Jesus to depart and return to His Father in heaven (*v.3; 1 Cor. 15:6*). He chose the Mount of Olives near Bethany (east of Jerusalem) as the setting for this glorious event. As He was speaking to His disciples, “He was lifted up and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (*v.9*). Mark’s gospel recorded that Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Father, the rightful place of honor and power, having completed all that the Father had given Him to do (*16:19; Lk. 22:69*). There Jesus is mediating for us, preparing a place for us, and awaiting the command to return for us.

After His ascension and while the disciples stared into the sky, two angels assured them that Jesus would return “the same way as you watched Him go” (*v.11*). Thus, after spending time in worship, they returned to the upper room in Jerusalem, as the Lord commanded (*Lk. 24:52; Acts 1:4*).

Luke noted that there were 120 people gathered with “one mind, continually devoting themselves to prayer” (*v.14*). Among them were Jesus’ brothers, evidence that they had repented and believed He was the Messiah (*Mk. 3:21; Matt. 10:36; Jn. 7:5*).

While waiting in Jerusalem, Peter suggested that they replace Judas with another disciple who had been a witness of Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection. After praying over two men (Barsabbas and Matthias), they determined that it was the Lord’s will for Matthias to become one of the twelve (*v.21-26*).

## Daily Reflection

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told His followers that they would “receive **power** when the Holy Spirit had come upon them, and they would be His **witnesses** in Jerusalem, in Samaria, and to the remotest part of the earth” (*v.8*). This verse is the key to the book of *Acts*, as it provides an overview of the events recorded there. Jesus’ followers will share the gospel in Jerusalem first (*Acts 1-7*), then Samaria (*Acts 8:1-9:31*), and finally to Europe and beyond (*Acts 9:32-28:31*).

There are two words in that verse which are especially important — **power and witnesses**. The Greek word for power is *dynamis*, from which we get the word *dynamite*. Dynamite, of course, is an explosive substance that is used to greatly impact whatever it contacts. Jesus said that His followers (including us) would receive the Holy Spirit and with Him would come great might. The Spirit would enable us to impact whomever and whatever we influence for Christ.

The word *witness* is the Greek word *martyres*, from which we get the word **martyr**. A martyr is one who boldly testifies of what he has seen or believed before others, even if it means suffering and death. Such boldness does not come naturally to most of us. It requires a power compelling us to speak out despite the consequences. That power is the Holy Spirit. **Jesus equipped His followers with the power to be His martyrs and impact the world for Him.**

Have you been a bold witness for Christ? What impact have you made on those around you?

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# First Fruits

May 6 – Acts 2:1-47

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Day 126 – 239 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

The Holy Spirit came and indwelt the followers of Christ, another great moment in history. As a result, Jesus' followers were empowered to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, as He foretold (1:8). The event marks the beginning of the church (*ekklesia*, meaning "called out ones," v.39).

The setting for the Spirit's arrival was Pentecost, the fiftieth day after the Sabbath of the Passover week (*Lev. 23:4-7, 15, 16*). Pentecost is also called the Feast of Weeks (seven weeks after Passover) and the Feast of Harvest, the day when the **first fruits** were gathered (*Lev. 23:20; Ex. 23:16; Num. 28:26*). What a fitting title, as **the first fruits of the gospel were gathered after the resurrection**.

The Spirit's arrival was marked by three signs — the rushing wind, the fire over everyone's head, and the foreign languages that they spoke (v.2-4). There were Jews living in Jerusalem from several nations, and they spoke various languages. But that day they heard the gospel preached in their native tongue (v.4-12).

This miracle is quite amazing to us, but it was simple for the Lord. The Creator God, who made the mouth and tongue to speak and who confused the languages at the Tower of Babel (*Gen. 11*), can easily open the lines of communication for His purposes. Imagine heaven, where people from every nation, tribe, and tongue will gather. He will have no problem communicating to us.

Of course, this miracle sparked both amazement and interest. People wanted to know why and how this was happening. That's when Peter stood up and explained that this event was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel (v.15-21). As Peter shared about Jesus, others translated his message, and those who heard were encouraged and convicted. Three thousand people became followers of Christ!

## Daily Reflection

The **first fruits** of the gospel after the resurrection were made possible by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Peter, who was afraid and ashamed of Christ before Pentecost, now was **empowered** with boldness to identify with and testify of Jesus. Christ's followers were **enabled** by the Spirit to speak in a foreign language so that others might hear the good news of salvation. Jewish people, who had called for Jesus to be crucified just weeks before, were now **convicted** of their sins by the Spirit; and all believers were **prompted** by the Spirit to live and worship in unity because of the common bond they had in Christ.

Already we can see the Spirit's effectiveness in bringing people to Jesus. **The same Spirit lives in you** if you are a follower of Christ. The same Spirit **empowers** you with boldness to share the gospel with others. The same Spirit **enables** you to live a disciplined Christian life. The same Spirit **convicts** you of sin, and the same Spirit **prompts** you to live and worship in unity with other believers.

As you read and review the passage today (especially v.41-47), what did you notice about the activities of the early church? What did early believers do that we should be doing today?

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Take time to thank God for the Holy Spirit. God did not leave us alone. We are in capable hands.