

The End or the Beginning?

Helpful Resources

The Passion Week: The Last Seven Days of Christ's Ministry, Disputed Section of Mark

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

This week's passages might be the most exciting in all the Bible! They represent a monumental transition from the ministry of Christ to the mission of the Church. As one chapter closed, another one opened. In some ways, Jesus' followers might have felt like this was the end, but that was not the case. This was only the beginning. In this review, we will consider this important transition — the end of one era and the beginning of a new one — and what it means for our lives.

- The End or the Beginning?

1. **Death to Life** (Mt. 28:1-15; Mk. 16:1-11; Lk. 24:1-12; Jn. 20:1-18): Last week ended with Jesus' death on the cross. This week started with the empty tomb! Last week ended with Jesus saying, "It is finished!" This week began with the angel saying, "He is risen!" Sorrow and sadness were replaced with unspeakable joy and gladness!

What does this mean for us? First, we serve a living Savior. Jesus was the Messiah, everything the prophets said He was and everything He claimed to be. Second, Jesus defeated mankind's two greatest enemies — sin and death. Our sin was defeated at the cross, and death was defeated in the empty tomb. Therefore, Jesus can offer salvation from sin; and because He defeated death, we can too. He is our living hope!

2. **Saturday or Sunday?** (Matt. 28:1; Mk. 16:2; Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1): Jesus rose from the grave on a Sunday. Christians refer to Sunday as "the Lord's Day," our day of worship or celebration. Thus, while the Jews special day (sabbath) is the end of the week, Christians' special day is the beginning of the week (Sunday).

What does this mean for us? Observing the sabbath was a sign between God and Israel (Ex. 31:16, 17). The sign of sabbath is not commanded of Christ's followers, neither is worship on Sunday. Sunday worship is a tradition, not a mandate. Paul made it clear that we can worship on any day of the week (Rom. 14:5, 6; Gal. 4:9, 10).

3. **The Old and New** (Luke 24:13-34, 44, 45; Mark 16:12, 13): John the Baptist's life and ministry represented the end of the Old Testament, while Jesus' life and ministry signaled the beginning of the New Testament. However, to unlock the mysteries of both the Old and New Testaments, one must have "the key," which is Christ.

What does this mean for us? Since we live after the first coming of Christ, we have more clarity regarding the Old Testament. We view it in light of the Messiah. He is the key to understanding not only Scripture but also our salvation (New Testament).

4. **Peter's Redemption** (*John 20:30-21:25*): When Peter denied that he knew Jesus, he must have thought that was the end. However, Jesus was merciful. He not only forgave Peter, but He gave him new direction and a new ministry — "Feed My sheep."

What does this mean for us? While we may believe that our sins and shortcomings are the end of our usefulness, the Lord redeems and restores us to new direction and purpose. In Christ, "the old passes away, and all things become new" (*2 Cor. 5:17*).

5. **The Great Commission** (*Matt. 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:44-49*): As Jesus arrived at the end of His earthly ministry and the time for His departure had come, He gave His followers a new mission — "go and make disciples" of others.

What does that mean for us? While we may live in different areas, work different jobs, and perform various activities, we have the same calling — to make disciples. With everything we do and everywhere we go, we take Christ with us and are to share Him with others. While we have many priorities, the gospel is priority number one.

6. **The Ascension** (*Lk. 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-11*): When Jesus left earth to return to His Father, that seemed to be the end of His ministry. However, while it may have been the end of His earthly ministry, it was the beginning of His new work in heaven. Though He sat down at the Father's right hand and His work on earth was finished, He began interceding for us (*Rom. 8:34*) and preparing a place for us in heaven (*Jn. 14:2*).

What does that mean for us? Jesus still thinks of us. We are very much on His mind. Furthermore, the work that He began in us, He will complete someday (*Phil 1:6*).

7. **The Power of the Spirit** (*Mark 16:19, 20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:1-2:47*): Though Jesus was leaving, He promised to send the Helper. That Helper is the Holy Spirit who came at Pentecost to indwell Christ's followers. He immediately enabled the disciples to share the gospel in foreign languages, preach with boldness, and perform miracles.

What does that mean for us? Despite our weaknesses, God empowers us to live the Christian life, to be His witnesses, and to do ministry. In our weakness, He is strong.

8. **The Church Age** (*Acts 2:1-47*): With Christ's departure and the arrival of the Holy Spirit, a new era began — what we call the Church Age. During this time, Jews and Gentiles will be brought into "the fold," finding salvation and eternal life in Christ. This age will last until Christ returns to gather His followers and deal with His enemies.

What does that mean for us? The Church is the bride of Christ. There is nothing on this earth that He adores more. Therefore, we should remain loyal to the Church, care for the well-being of the Church, and use our spiritual gifts for the good of the Church. We must be faithful to do our part in this age until Christ returns for the Church.

The Bottom Line

Christ's departure was not the end of the story but a new beginning.

Questions to Consider

1. What encouraged or challenged you most in your reading this week?
2. What are your roles in this exciting new work that God is doing in the Church Age?