

We Have Victory in Christ

Scripture Lesson: John 20:1-10; Romans 6:1-14 **Devotional Reading:** Romans 6:15-23.

Background Scripture: John 20:1-10; Romans 6:1-14.

TIMES: A.D. 30; A.D. 56 **PLACES:** Jerusalem; from Corinth

John 20:1-10

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” ³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Romans 6:1-14

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Today’s Aim

- Facts: to review John's account of Jesus' resurrection and examine the implications of that resurrection concerning the victorious Christian life.
- Principle: to show how the resurrection provides us with power for victory.
- Application: to challenge Christians to exploit the potential for victory that Christ's resurrection has provided.

Introduction

Take Heart-Jesus Lives!

As Christians around the world celebrate Easter Sunday today, many will read from 1 Corinthians 15-the "resurrection chapter" of the Bible. In verses 19 and 20 of this chapter, Paul offers a striking contrast between life without and with the hope of resurrection: *"If we have put our hope in Christ for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep."* He concludes the chapter on this triumphant and encouraging note: *"Therefore, my dear brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."*

The apostle's words ring just as true in the twenty-first century as they did in the first. To those who at times may envy the prosperity and self-assurance of the godless or who become discouraged at the lack of fruit in their labors for Christ, take heart! Today provides a wonderful opportunity to remind ourselves of what distinguishes Christian faith from other "faiths." The difference is like night and day-or, to use today's emphasis, death and life.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Following the crucifixion and burial of Jesus, those who felt the deepest disappointment were most likely the eleven faithful disciples of Jesus. These men had left their families and jobs; they had spent most every day since then listening to His teaching and assisting Him as He carried out His ministry.

There were also several godly women who had invested their time, care, and resources in the ministry of Jesus. They had traveled with Jesus and His disciples and were *"helping to support them out of their own means."* (Luke 8:3). Perhaps they had provided assistance with food and clothing, and had offered spiritual nourishment through their prayers and encouragement. Perhaps they, along with the disciples, held expectations that Jesus would establish His kingdom (political in nature) and overthrow the Romans. Now He was disgraced and dead.

Some of Jesus' followers realized that the least they could do was to be sure that Jesus was buried with proper dignity. So Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus prepared His body (John 19:38-42). Some of the women watched as He was placed in Joseph's new tomb (Matthew 27:61). Then early on the first day of the week, the women went back to the site, eager to add their skillful and sensitive touch to the burial preparation. They were concerned about how the stone could be rolled back from the tomb in order to give them access to Jesus' body.

Today's printed text includes John's account of resurrection morning. Although he focuses especially on Mary Magdalene, it is clear from the other three accounts that other women came to the tomb early that day (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 23:55-24:1). Mary serves as a model of devotion to Jesus-present at the cross, the burial site, and the empty tomb.

The other part of the lesson text continues our study of Romans by including a section of chapter 6. There we will consider the kind of resurrection that we are to experience in response to Christ's resurrection.

Jesus' Resurrection (John 20:1-10)

Jesus was crucified at Passover time and placed in the tomb sometime before the Sabbath began. Being godly Jews, the followers of Christ rested on the Sabbath. At daybreak Sunday, some women went to the tomb to anoint the body of their Master (Mark 16:1). Since John wanted to focus on the encounter Mary Magdalene had with the risen Lord (John 20:11-18), he did not mention the other women who came with her.

Because Christ arose on *"the first day of the week"* (John 20:1), Christians have usually worshiped on Sunday (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2) instead of Saturday, as did the Jews. The fact that Christians gather on *"the Lord's day"* (Rev. 1:10) instead of the Jewish Sabbath commemorates the resurrection of Christ. Each Sunday is therefore Easter! Whereas the Sabbath commemorated God's finished work of creation (Gen. 2:2), the Lord's Day commemorates God's finished work of redemption through the risen Lord.

We know very little about Mary Magdalene other than the fact that she was a devoted follower of Christ out of

whom He had cast seven demons` (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:1-3). That she was privileged to be the first to see the risen Lord and announce this glorious news is noteworthy.

Beginning while *"it was still dark"* (John 20:1) and arriving *"very early in the morning"* (Mark 16:2), the women were concerned about the difficulty of gaining entrance to the sealed sepulcher (v. 3). Prior to their arrival, though, "the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door" (Matt. 28:2).

1. Why did Mary wait until Sunday to come to the tomb (John 20:1)?

Mary leaves the scene in a panic. She hurries to report to Peter and the other disciple. Apparently this "other disciple" is John, who keeps himself in the background through use of this phrase in his Gospel, along with the phrase, the disciple whom Jesus loved (also John 19:26; 21:7, 20).

Notice that Mary's words to Peter and John reflect her belief at this point that the body of Jesus has been "taken away." For now, she is not thinking in terms of a resurrection. She also uses the term *we*, referring to the other women who had accompanied her to the tomb.

"Both" disciples hurry to the tomb. Most commentators propose that John was somewhat younger than Peter and therefore more athletic. Perhaps Peter is stouter and stronger, but not as fast afoot as John. John arrives at the tomb first, but he is not as inquisitive as Peter.

2. What does Mary believe happened to the body of Jesus? Who ran to the tomb after Mary discovered that it was empty (vs. 2-4)?

True to his impetuous nature, Peter wasted no time in entering the tomb to see for himself. The "linen clothes" were the customary sheets and strips of cloth that had been wrapped around the body of Jesus. The "napkin" was a customary wrapping for the head of the deceased (cf. 11:44).

That the napkin was *"folded up in a separate place by itself"* (20:7) seems to indicate that it was neatly folded by one who had no further need of it.

Once Peter braved the darkness of the tomb, John was emboldened to enter as well. Consequently, *"he saw, and believed"* (v. 8). John saw this as incontrovertible evidence that Christ was alive. Although seeing may lead to believing, a greater blessing is promised those who *"believe without seeing"* (v. 29). Indeed, John's purpose in writing his Gospel was that his readers *"may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God"* (v. 31).

3. What is the significance of the linen clothes and napkin left in the tomb (vs. 5-8)?

In spite of the fact that the Lord had foretold both His death and resurrection (Matt. 16:21; Mark 10:45; Luke 18:33), the disciples seem to have been blinded to this teaching.

"As yet," none of the disciples understand the messianic expectation of the Scripture (in this case the Old Testament) correctly. Like many, they expect a triumphant, earthly ruler, who will restore Israel's greatness by overthrowing the hated Romans-not a man who will be executed as a common criminal and then rise again from the dead.

Uncertain about what else to do or think, these disciples take the only course of action available at this point: they go home. Later in this chapter, John records Jesus' appearances to Mary Magdalene (vs. 11-18), the disciples minus Thomas (vs. 19-23), and the disciples with Thomas (vs. 24-29). Another appearance to seven of the disciples, recorded in John 21, concludes with a focus on the future service of Peter and John (vs. 15-23).

4. Why were the apostles surprised concerning the resurrection (vs. 9,10)?

The Christian's Resurrection (Romans 6:1-14)

Dead to Sin (vs. 1-3)

Thus far in Romans we have learned that we are all sinners (3:9,10), that the gospel has the power to save us (1:16), that both Jews and Gentiles will be judged (2:9), and that we are justified by faith in Christ (5:1).

Paul frequently had to confront various distortions of the gospel. One such aberration was the so-called Judaizing controversy. These false teachers wanted to force Gentile converts to keep the Mosaic law.

Another group, often referred to as antinomians (literally, "antilaw") wanted to cast aside all moral restraints. They seemed to take the view that the more one sinned, the more grace one would receive and that therefore one should sin a lot in order to receive a lot of God's grace. Paul rejected such an understanding of Christianity with a thundering "God forbid" (6:2).

Since believers are "dead to sin," their goal should be to live above sin, not in sin. To be sure, we will fall short of perfection; however, to take a nonchalant approach toward sin will not result in a closer walk with God. Instead, we will be setting ourselves up for failure (1 Cor. 10:12; Titus 2:11,12; Heb. 12:15).

5. What misunderstanding of the Christian life did Paul respond to in Romans 6:1,2?

Paul's exhortations concerning a Christian's armor (Ephesians 6:10-18) tell us that we must always be on guard against our enemy, Satan. Satan is an expert at picking the specific areas of weakness in our characters. For one person the weakness may be greed, for another it may be lust, and for another it may be pride. However strong those temptations may be, in Christ we have been given the power to resist the enemy and to say "No." Remember the words of 1 John 4:4: *"Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."*

6. If we are "dead to sin," why do so many of us struggle with temptation?

One way to remind the Roman Christians of the absurdity of such an approach to the Christian life was to recall their conversion experience, symbolized in Christian baptism. Although Paul had never visited the Roman church, he knew that they had been baptized, since baptism was commanded by Christ in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19).

Regrettably, baptism has been a theological battleground throughout history. Nearly every aspect of baptism has been debated. Baptism is not something to argue about; rather, it is a command to be obeyed. Just as the heavenly Father was pleased at Jesus' baptism (Matt. 3:13-17), so God is pleased when we follow the Lord's example in this regard.

The New Testament mentions several different baptisms: John's baptism (Matt. 3:1-8), baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5), baptism in fire (Matt. 3:10-12), baptism in suffering (20:22-23), and Christian water baptism (Matt. 28:19; Gal. 3:27).

What baptism was Paul speaking about in Romans 6? Clearly, he was speaking of spiritual realities in this passage; thus, Spirit baptism, the work of the Spirit that places one in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), seems to be in the forefront. Still, these inner spiritual realities are pictured by external water baptism. The two baptisms are, in fact, closely related in Scripture.

In Acts, baptism was the immediate response of those who accepted the gospel (2:41; 8:12, 35-39; 9:17-18; 10:47-48; 18:8). Ancient Christians did not consider baptism optional. It was a command to be obeyed as soon as one accepted Christ.

We note that Paul said that we were "baptized into Jesus Christ" (Rom. 6:3). By faith, believers are spiritually incorporated into Christ and His spiritual body, the church, at the moment of their conversion (1 Cor. 12:13). In this union with Christ, believers are spiritually identified with Christ's death-they died with Christ. This truth is symbolized by water baptism.

7. What does baptism picture in the life of Christ and in the life of the believer (v. 3)?

The symbolic value of water baptism is twofold. First, it pictures what happened to Christ. He was crucified, buried in the tomb, and then raised. Second, it pictures what happened to us. We died to sin through repentance and faith, were "*buried with him in baptism,*" and were then raised to new life in Christ (Col. 2:12).

Our union with Christ in His death also guarantees our union with Him in His resurrection (Rom. 6:5). This may refer to the Christian's resurrection to a new life, as in verse 4; however, it seems to point to the future bodily resurrection. Because of Christ's death, we have forgiveness. Because of His resurrection, we shall also be raised from the dead. As Jesus said, "*Because I live, you will live, too.*" (John 14:19).

While the Christian life has present benefits, the greatest blessings are yet to come. While there are many questions concerning the nature of the resurrected body, we know that it will be something on the order of Jesus' glorified body (1Cor. 15:35-44; 1 John 3:2).

8. What future promise are we given through our union with Christ (vs. 4,5)?

The "*old self*" (Rom. 6:6) is the person the believer was before conversion. That person was "crucified" with Christ so that "*sin's dominion over the body may be abolished,*" or made powerless.

Our coming to Christ not only dealt with past sins but also provided the spiritual resources to deal with future sins, so "*that we may no longer be enslaved to sin*" (v. 6). For a believer to "serve sin" is to deny the reality of the conversion experience. For those who profess Christian faith and "continue in sin" (v. 1), it is safe to conclude that what they profess is not something they possess!

9. Who is the "old self" (v. 6) that was crucified with Christ?

The one who has "*died*" to sin is also "*freed from sin*" (v. 7). The word translated "freed" is the same word elsewhere translated "justified," which means to be declared not guilty, or righteous. One should not therefore conclude that believers are somehow incapable of committing sin (cf. 1 John 2:1).

We are "dead with Christ" (Rom. 6:8) and "*we will also live with him*" reiterate concepts Paul presented earlier. Christ not only paid the penalty for sin but also broke the power of sin in our lives. We should therefore "*walk in a new way of life.*" (v. 4).

10. In what ways have we been "freed from sin" (vs. 7,8)?

When Jesus died, it appeared that sin had won. The enemies of truth rejoiced. But their celebration was short-lived. When Christ arose He conquered death completely and finally (cf. Rev. 1:18). Christ's victory over the power of sin was decisive. Jesus' death does not need to be repeated; it happened once for all (Hebrews 9:24-28). Jesus now lives unto God, dwelling with the Father as He did before laying aside His glory to come to earth.

As Christians we are dead indeed unto sin. Paul has already made that clear. But that is more than just a point of doctrine; we are to live like that-alive unto God, alive in the presence of God, alive for God and His eternal purposes.

11. How can we be sure that Christ's death doesn't have to be repeated (vs. 9-11)?

God is so good about bringing role models into our lives to provide the counsel and encouragement that we need. Most of us will find such people in our churches or, if we are especially blessed, in our families. If they are missing from our lives, we can certainly look to the pages of Scripture and to the biographies of noteworthy Christians for our inspiration and guidance.

12. Whom do you know who exemplifies the phrase, "alive unto God"? What can you learn from him or her about living for God?

You can live according to who (and whose) you are. You have been set free, so live as a free individual. You have become a child of God. You have an alternative to the path of sin. Sin no longer has to "reign" over you (v. 12); through Christ you can reign over it (Ephesians 6:10-18).

Christians live in the era between the moment that God dealt "sin" a deathblow through Jesus' death and resurrection and the final victory that will occur at Jesus' return. During this interval, we are to live under God's authority, reflecting the righteousness that He requires of His people (Ephesians 4:24).

Verse 14 of today's lesson may be considered a summary of Paul's answer to the question raised in verse 1. We must not keep sinning, because sin is our former master. Although Paul has not mentioned the law yet in this section, the law is part of the reason for sin's mastery; it points out our sin. The problem is that the law cannot provide an answer to that mastery. It cannot free us from the guilt it produces. Only God's grace can supply what we need and solve our dilemma. By grace, death has been destroyed, sin's hold has been broken, and the law has been fulfilled through the perfect obedience of Jesus.

13. How can we live victoriously over sin on a daily basis (vs. 12-14)?

CONCLUSION

Jesus died for our sins and rose again! John concurred with the other Gospel writers in establishing the fact of Christ's literal resurrection from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus has implications for those who believe. We have been baptized into Christ, thus sharing in His death and resurrection. We need no longer serve sin. We have the power to yield our bodies to God.

PRAYER

To the truths that we celebrate on this glorious day, our Father, we commit our lives. That You would permit Your only begotten Son to be crucified for us is beyond our comprehension, but it is the reason for our profound gratitude. That You brought Him back to life is the cause for our celebration. And that we shall live as children of life rather than as slaves of death is our commitment. In Jesus' name. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

"Because I live, you will live too" (John 14:19).