

CHAPTER 27, THE RESURRECTION

TIMELESS TRUTH: HE IS RISEN!

CHAPTER SUMMARY (Have someone in your group read the summary section.)

Ashamed. Afraid. Absent. Mere hours after they pledged never to leave Jesus—even to die with Jesus—the Eleven were nowhere near the cross as the sun began to set. The Roman soldiers were still there though and pierced His side to prove Jesus was very, very dead. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, an unlikely duo, show up at the cross. These two members of the Sanhedrin shed their secret discipleship and took responsibility for burying Jesus' body. Wrapping Him in enough spices for a king, they laid Him in a nearby tomb. Remembering Jesus' words, the Jewish authorities and Pilate secured the tomb and posted a guard there to keep the three-day resurrection story from gaining any traction.

Early Sunday morning, a small band of faithful women approached His tomb wondering who could remove the rock that sealed the entrance. Imagine their shock as an angel announced to them that Jesus was not there, *"He is risen, just as He said!"* Hearing the news, Peter and John sprinted to the tomb. They, too, found it empty. As Mary Magdalene remained weeping, Jesus appeared to her. Later the same day, an unrecognized Jesus approached two downcast disciples on the road to Emmaus. Evidently all of Jerusalem was abuzz with the events of the last three days. The One whom they had trusted to redeem all of Israel had been crucified and they were disappointed. Some silly women even had an unbelievable angelic vision and the tomb was empty. But what's a guy to do except head home to Emmaus? Jesus admonished the two for their unbelief. Then He used Moses and the Prophets to teach them about the Messiah. Jesus dined with them that evening. When their eyes were opened and they recognized Him, He disappeared from their sight, but they finally got it! So they headed back to Jerusalem at full speed and full of joy to report their experience to the Eleven. They were interrupted there by yet another Jesus appearance. An empty tomb and two appearance reports later, the disciples still cowered and mistook Jesus for a ghost when He spoke to them. *"Touch me and see,"* He said as He showed them His hands and feet. When Jesus re-explained the Old Testament in light of all that had happened, He opened their minds so they too finally understood.

Thomas was not about to believe these second-hand stories. He wouldn't believe it until he saw the nail marks for himself. A week later, Jesus graciously appeared to Thomas and the others just so he could touch the scars for himself. Thomas confessed, *"My Lord and My God!"* Yes, now he believed that Jesus was the God-man and that He was risen indeed.

Sometime later, Jesus appeared to the disciples by the Sea of Galilee. Having caught nothing all night, Jesus told these fishermen to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. The miraculous catch was so great that they could hardly get the fish into the boat. It prompted Peter to bail out and head to the Lord. Over a beach breakfast, Jesus three times asked Peter if he loved Him. Then He told Peter three times to care for His sheep. The Eleven met Jesus on a Galilean mountain where He commissioned them to continue to carry out His mission by saying, *"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."*

As God, Jesus had all authority to now commission His disciples to carry out the building up of His new community of believers who would be identified with the Triune God. They in turn could accomplish their mission because, as Emmanuel (Matthew 1:23), He would be with them to do so. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ vindicated Him as the Son of God. It is the cornerstone of the Christian faith and the climax of God's great story of redemption. The redemptive work was finished, but now there was more work to do to spread the good news, and this ragtag group of disciples were just the ones to do it, armed with the supernatural power headed their way.

ICEBREAKER QUESTION: How did you celebrate Easter when you were a child?

1. People have always had difficulty believing that Jesus was God in the flesh. (Read 1 John 1:1, 2:22 and 4:2-3.) What details did John include in the crucifixion story for his readers to know for certain that Jesus, fully human, had truly died? How does knowing that God came to live among us affect your daily life?
2. For whose sake did the angel roll away the stone (p. 382)? What other major events have been announced by angels?
3. List everything you have learned about Jesus' resurrection body from this chapter. Why is Jesus' literal, physical resurrection a non-negotiable teaching of the Christian faith? (See Romans 1:4, 4:25 and 1 Corinthians 15:17.)
4. Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-23, 42-49. What does Jesus' resurrection mean for you personally and for all believers?
5. Thomas is frequently referred to as "doubting Thomas" because he refused to believe his fellow disciples' testimony. Then, a week after the resurrection, he confessed, "*My Lord and My God!*" Do you think Thomas' reputation is justified or do you think he has been labeled unjustly? Why or why not?
6. What parallels can you find between Peter's denial story (John 18:17-27) and his restoration story (p. 387-388, John 21:15-23)? What does Peter's restoration reveal about Jesus' heart and how does it apply to you personally?
7. What does Jesus' Great Commission on the mountain in Galilee require of all His disciples (p. 388)? Discuss what is involved in "making disciples."

In the time remaining ask your group members to share any of their personal reflection insights from their journal entries.

CLOSING PRAYER

CHAPTER 28, NEW BEGINNINGS

Journal your answers to these questions as you read through the chapter this week. You may wish to read one day and journal the next, or spread the questions over the whole week.

DAY 1

1. Just fifty days earlier Peter denied Christ and cowered in fear and shame. Now we find Peter preaching in the first megachurch, facing down Jewish religious leaders, and noticeably full of courage. What factors accounted for this change?
2. What was the new church doing to build relationships and to make disciples in Jerusalem (p. 392, 395)? How can our church do the same?
3. How did early Christians regard material possessions (p. 395)? What should be the role of the church in helping the poor today?

DAY 2

1. Why do you suppose the early believers “enjoyed the favor of all the people” (p. 392) and “were highly regarded by the people” (p. 395)? How critical is this to the mission of the church?
2. When ordered by the Sanhedrin to discontinue teaching and preaching in the name of Jesus, Peter answered, “We must obey God rather than human beings!” (p. 396). He was also willing to accept the consequences of his stance. Yet Christians are also called to respect and to submit to governmental authorities (Rom. 13:1-7). When do you think it is okay for Christians to resist authority and when is it not?

DAY 3

1. Cornelius’ conversion along with his household dramatically changed the direction of the church. What began as a Jewish messianic movement would now cross ethnic barriers. Consider the ethnic and racial barriers that exist in the Church today. What are some ways that our church can promote greater racial and ethnic integration and harmony in the church locally? Globally? Personally?
2. What did you learn about the relationship between the Holy Spirit and believers from this chapter of *The Story*? What does this mean for you?