



# THE LIFE OF CHRIST

EVENTS WE MUST  
UNDERSTAND TODAY



## Growth Group Study Guide







## **Events We Must Understand Today in the Life of Christ**

Mark Twain famously wrote: "It ain't the parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand." Jesus' life was lived to help people see, know, and understand God. He performed miracles with witnesses present so that humans could share and validate the reality of the events.

Because those events happened two millennia prior to our lives, understanding them today as gateways to deeper relationship with Jesus requires thoughtful engagement with the accounts of the eyewitnesses. This month as we approach the holiest of days in Christianity, our aim is to immerse ourselves in six important to understand events in Jesus' life.



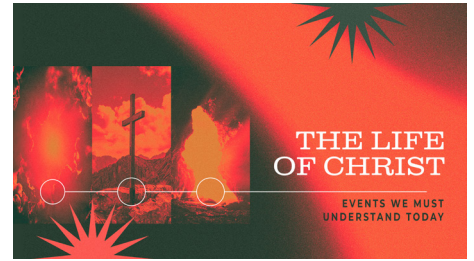
Ascension by John Singleton Copley (1775)

Acts 1:7-11 gives us a glimpse of the final moments of Jesus' time on earth and tells of His ascension into heaven. Can you feel the emotions of those who witnessed this miraculous moment? Can you hear the words of comfort from the angels?

March 3, 2024

## Session 1 | His Ascension

***Before you begin*** this Growth Group session, read the summary found inside the cover of your Growth Group materials.



### Background:

*This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

Both The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed affirm our belief in the Ascension of Christ into heaven and that He is seated at the right hand of the Father. As Methodists, we observe Ascension Day forty days after Easter to commemorate what is written in Luke 24:36-53. John Wesley felt that observing Ascension Day was important to our belief and referred to it as a non-Sunday holy day observance (he only specified three such days, the other two are Good Friday and Christmas). Why is Jesus' ascension significant and what does it mean for us?

*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.*  
Hebrews 4:14

In Hebrews we read that the ascension of Christ marked the end of His earthly ministry (Hebrews 10:12) and the beginning of His work as our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14). We further learn that, with Jesus as our High Priest, we can obtain God's mercy and grace in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16). We also read in Acts, because of Christ's ascension, that the Holy Spirit has been sent to dwell in us (Acts 2:33), and we have a promise of Christ's return (Acts

1:11). And in 1 Thessalonians we read that the remaining believers will be caught up to heaven in a fashion similar to Christ's ascension in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:17) and "we will be with the Lord forever".

*Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*  
Hebrews 4:16

Oh, glorious day! Christ's suffering and death were necessary so that He could conquer death and save us from our sins, then ascend into heaven and sit at the right hand of the Father, where He will for evermore be our representative to God Almighty.

**Scripture:** Luke 24:36-53; Acts 1:1-11

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passages aloud.*

### Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What challenged you about this sermon?

3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

### Questions from the Bible:

1. What does the Luke passage tell us about Jesus' resurrected body? Do you consider this good news?
2. How does Jesus spend the forty days between His resurrection and ascension? What is the significance of this and what is Jesus' plan for people to hear the good news?
3. Acts 1:4-5 tells us that Jesus gave the following command to His disciples; "*Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.*" To what later event was this command referring? Why was it important that this happened right before Christ ascended into Heaven?
4. In Acts 1:6, one of the disciples asks Jesus, "*Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?*" What did the disciples think Jesus was there to do?
5. What do you think was going through the disciples' minds as they watched Jesus ascend into Heaven? What do the Acts verses tell us about how Jesus will return one day?
6. What is the difference between the book of Acts and the Gospels?

## Questions for Application:

1. Luke 24:45 reads “*Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.*” What was it that Jesus wanted the disciples to understand about the Scriptures? What might this mean for you and your own understanding of Scripture?
2. Luke writes in Acts 1:3, “*After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.*” When it comes to matters of faith, are you a person who requires “*many convincing proofs*”? Why do you think that is? Has this always been the case?
3. Luke 24:36-53 and Acts 1:1-11 give markedly different accounts of the Ascension of Christ. Both books were written by the same author, so why do you think the account in Acts includes different details?
4. In Acts 1:11, the “men dressed in white” (angels) told those gathered, “*Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.*” What do we as Christians believe about their statement?
5. Just as it was important for the disciples to see Jesus taken up into heaven (for then they knew without a doubt that He was God and was home in heaven interceding for them), how is the knowledge of the ascension significant to us as Christians today? If Jesus did not ascend, what would that mean for Him and us?
6. When the disciples asked Jesus about restoring the kingdom to Israel, Jesus answered them by saying, “*It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.*” (Acts 1:7) In Matthew 24:36 Jesus says, “*But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*” What do these teachings tell us about any speculations concerning the timing of His return? Speculate as to why the Father is the only one who knows the day and hour.

7. Now that we have considered the futility of speculation, and done a bit of speculating about God's timing, we read in Isaiah 55:9, that God has said, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." What is your reaction to this? Do you find this prospect comforting or disconcerting?
8. In Acts 1:8, Jesus commands His believers to be His witnesses to "the ends of the earth". How can we fulfill this command?

**Resources:** Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic

Ascension Day -11-day plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/19858-ascension-day>

The Ascent -15-day devotional: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/13158-the-ascent>



Ascension Day



The Ascent

### Questions for Discussion:

1. What are you reading in the Word this week?
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship – prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

### Growth Challenge:

Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you in the coming week.



# NOTES



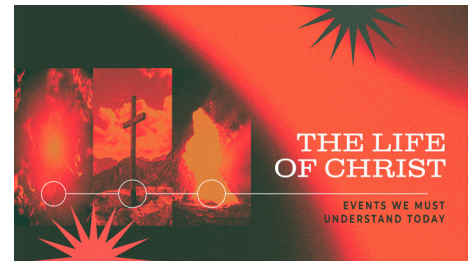
The Transfiguration by Giovanni Battista Moroni (c.1520–1525–1578)

Consider this painting by Giovanni Moroni as you read Matthew 17:1-9. When you read of Moses and Elijah joining Jesus, consider what the artist shows in their hands. Can you see the significance of these two and the items they carry?

# March 10, 2024

## Session 2 | His Transfiguration

***Before you begin*** this growth Group session, read the summary found inside the cover of your Growth Group materials.



### Background:

*This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

The Scripture for this week's sermon starts with the words, "After six days..." To fully appreciate the significance of this passage, we need to know what happened six days earlier. Matthew 16 ends with Jesus telling the disciples, "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." (Matt 16:28) It is likely that some will understand this to say that some of those present will still be alive to witness the second coming of Christ. However, if you consider the words in chapter 16 and the events in chapter 17 together, it is apparent that Matthew is focusing our attention on the significance of the Transfiguration of Christ.

*Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.*  
Matthew 17:3

Mathew 17:1 states, "After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves." While on the mountain, Jesus was joined by Moses, representing the Law, and Elijah, representing the Prophets. Their presence reinforces the idea that the earthly ministry of Jesus was built upon the Law and the teachings of the Prophets. Jesus himself said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (Matthew 5:17)

In 17:2, Matthew tells us that the face of Jesus "shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light." In the United Methodist Hymnal, the prayer Transfiguration (#259) states, "By His transfiguration enlighten our path that we may dare to suffer with Him in the service of humanity". In verse 2 of the hymn Christ, upon the Mountain Peak (#260) we sing "Trembling at His feet we saw Moses and Elijah speaking. All the prophets and the law shout thru them their joyful greeting." And in the painting The Transfiguration by Giovanni Moroni, we see this as envisioned by the artist. All these things focus like a spotlight on the supernatural aspects of this event. Peter, James, and John were witnesses to the visible glory of Jesus, to the appearance of Moses and Elijah, and heard the voice from the cloud say "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5b) Peter, James, and John saw the glory of "the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

*Peter, James, and John saw the glory of "the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."*

**Scripture:** Matthew 17:1-9

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passage aloud.*

### Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?

2. What challenged you about this sermon?
  
3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

### Questions from the Bible:

1. Matthew 17:3 states, “*Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.*” What was the significance of Moses and Elijah in the earthly ministry of Jesus? (Ref: Luke 24:44 and Matthew 5:17)
  
2. Do you find anything unusual about Peter’s response to the arrival of the two individuals meeting with Jesus? (Ref: Matthew 17:4) Why do you think he offered to build shelters?
  
3. Matthew 17:6 states, “*When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.*” What did they hear that frightened them?
  
4. Several supernatural occurrences happened in the scripture passage for this week. Why do you think hearing the voice of God elicited a different response than the transfiguration of Jesus or the appearance of Moses and Elijah, from the three disciples present?
  
5. Why do you think Jesus instructed the disciples, “*Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.*”? Jesus often gave a “don’t tell” instruction to those who had experienced a miracle. Why do you think Jesus instructed people not to tell anyone about what they had seen and experienced?



## Questions for Application:

1. In his painting The Transfiguration, Giovanni Moroni depicts Moses and Elijah holding items in their hands. What do you think is the significance of the items they hold?
2. In the Matthew 5:17 verse quoted in the Background text, Jesus said that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them. What is your understanding of the meaning of this? Do you consider these words of Jesus to have ramifications for Christians today?
3. In 2 Corinthians 3:18 we read about how we are “*being transformed into His image*”, in other words, transfigured. What does this mean to you? How can the Holy Spirit help us to be transformed?
4. Practically speaking, how can we allow Christ to transform us? What can we do to make ourselves more available to His transforming work in our lives?
5. Do you think that focusing more on the power and holiness of Christ would affect your spiritual life? Why or why not?
6. If you had been a witness to Christ’s transfiguration, how do you think you would have responded? How would this experience shape your belief that Jesus is the Son of God? Would you have been able to keep this a secret as Jesus instructed the disciples in Matthew 17:9?

**Resources:** Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic

Lessons ~ The Transfiguration – 11 day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/24462-lessons-the-transfiguration>



The Transfiguration

Jesus and Issues Everyone Faces – 6 day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/11193-jesus-issues-everyone-faces-disciple-makers-series>



Jesus & Issues Everyone Faces

### Questions for Discussion:

1. What are you reading in the Word this week?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship – prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

### Growth Challenge:

Imagine that you were a witness to the Transfiguration of Christ. How would you explain the experience so that others would believe that it really happened?

# NOTES



Christ in the Garden by Hans Zatzka 1886

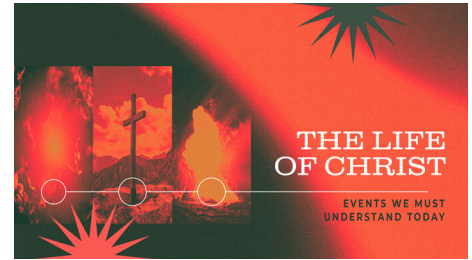
This is an oil painting of Christ alone in the Garden of Gethsemane. What details do you see? Do you see anything supernatural? By looking at His face, can you understand what He is feeling, thinking?



# March 17, 2024

## Session 3 | His Prayers

*Before you begin this Growth Group session, read the summary found inside the cover of your Growth Group materials.*



### Background:

*This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

We teach our children and grandchildren to pray. We pray before meals. We pray for friends, family, and coworkers. We pray when someone is hurting. We pray for strength, guidance, and for healing. We pray for our leaders and for peace.

*"Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it and not in the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference." Max Lucado*

So, what is prayer, and why do we have it? According to minister and author, John Piper, "God has established prayer as the means by which we receive His supernatural help. And without supernatural help, we cannot live a life worthy of the gospel. Everything that distinguishes Christians from the world in a Christ-exalting way is a work of God's supernatural grace. And God has ordained that this grace flows to us through prayer. That's why prayer must be central, not peripheral, in our lives and families and ministries."

How did Jesus communicate with God? He prayed. On the night when His heart was the heaviest, He went to a quiet place, a garden. His soul was so overwhelmed with sorrow that He felt He could die. He prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." He was in agony, hurting for Himself. But still wanting His Father's will to be done, He didn't just pray this prayer one time, but three times. Christ's prayer reveals the pain and agony of being separated from God is worse than death itself. The sinless Son of God took our sins upon Himself to save us from this suffering and separation from God.

*"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."  
Matthew 26: 39*

**Scripture:** Matthew 26:36-46

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passage aloud.*

### Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What challenged you about this sermon?

3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

### Questions from the Bible:

1. Three times Jesus asked the Father to take the cup from Him. What was He asking? What does Jesus' repeated use of "*not as I will, but as you will*" mean? What does Jesus' experience teach us about prayer?
2. Why do you think the Father turned down the request of his beloved Son? What does this teach you about God?
3. Today's Bible verses tell us that Jesus took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, with Him to Gethsemane. Jesus took these same disciples up the mountain with Him to witness the transfiguration that we studied last week. What are your thoughts about these three disciples sleeping at such a critical time?
4. In Matthew 26:41 Jesus tells Peter, "*Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*" What is Jesus trying to help Peter prepare for?
5. What did Jesus model for us while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane?
6. Read Matthew 26:38. Why do you think the soul of Jesus would be "*overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death*"?

7. Matthew 26:45b states that, “*the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners.*” What is Jesus talking about?

### Questions for Application:

1. The purpose of prayer is to get our hearts into alignment with what God wants. Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever experienced a time when others failed you and did not give the comfort and support you needed? What lesson did God teach you at that time?
3. Reread the Max Lucado highlight box. Do you agree that it is okay to offer awkward, feeble prayers to Almighty God? Why, or why not?
4. What is your biggest excuse for not praying? How can you overcome it?
5. How does a faithful prayer life keep you strong in your faith?
6. A part of the John Piper quote in the second paragraph of the Background reads, “Everything that distinguishes Christians from the world in a Christ-exalting way is a work of God’s supernatural grace. And God has ordained that this grace flows to us through prayer.” What is your understanding of this?

**Resources:** Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic.

Let it Rise: Sacred Ingredients for a Life of Prayer -5-day devotional plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/35987-let-it-rise-sacred-ingredients>



Let It Rise

Meditate in 360 -3-day devotional plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/39448-meditate-in-360>



Meditate in 360

Between Calamity and Calling -6-day devotional plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/33602-between-calamity-calling>



Between Calamity & Calling

Lessons from the Garden, When Prayer Goes Unanswered-5- day devotional plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/30501-lessons-from-the-garden>



Lessons from the Garden

### Question for Discussion:

1. What are you reading in the Word this week?
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship - prayers, presence, gifts, witness, and service?

### Growth Challenge:

Prayer is our direct line to communication with God. Are you calling and communicating with Him? His line is never busy. If your prayer life is not where you want it to be, challenge yourself to pray every morning and every night. Make a list of what you want to pray about.



# NOTES

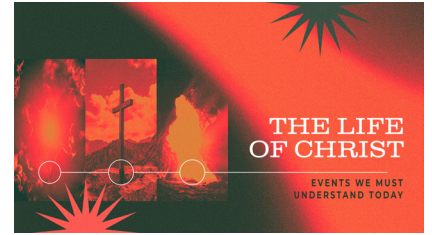


Christ's Entrance into Jerusalem by Bernhard Plockhorst

How does this painting compare to the mental image you have of Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem? What expressions do you see on the faces of the people in the crowd? Is Christ reacting the way you would expect?

# March 24, 2024

## Session 4 | His Parade



***Before you begin*** this Growth Group session, read the summary found inside the cover of your Growth Group materials.

### Background:

*This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

Hosanna to the Son of David! Jesus makes His triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The crowds surround Him waving palm branches. They are climbing trees to catch a glimpse of the one they call Lord. People are laying their garments on the ground before Him as He enters the city. What does it all mean?

*Hosanna to the Son of David!  
Blessed is he who comes in the  
name of the Lord!  
Hosanna in the highest heaven!  
Matthew 26:9b*

The account of what we celebrate as Palm Sunday is recorded in all four Gospels. The Bible tells us that Jesus sent two disciples ahead to retrieve a donkey and her colt for His use, and the only explanation needed was to tell the owner “*the Lord needs them*”. Nothing was pre-arranged, but this simple phrase was satisfactory. Why was the colt needed? To fulfill

the prophecy foretold in Zechariah 9:9.

What was symbolic about entering Jerusalem on a donkey? It was customary that a victorious king would enter on horseback, but in times of peace a leader would enter riding a donkey. In the accounts written by Mark and Luke we also learn that the colt had never been ridden, but here is Jesus calmly riding the colt through the crowded streets.

Why were the crowds laying palm branches and their garments in Jesus’ path? In their culture, palms were a symbol of triumph. As we read in 2 Kings 9:13, placing cloaks on the ground before Him symbolized submission to a king. That Jesus was being heralded as a king was surely insulting to the Jews, and offensive to the Romans who had Caesar for a king. The powers that be in Jerusalem were witnessing Jesus entering their city being treated as a triumphant king. They felt threatened and things needed to change.

*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout,  
Daughter Jerusalem!  
See, your king comes to you,  
righteous and victorious,  
lowly and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.  
Zechariah 9:9*

**Scripture:** Matthew 21:1-11

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passage aloud.*

### Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?

2. What challenged you about this sermon?
  
3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

### **Questions from the Bible:**

1. What is the importance of Jesus' celebratory entry into Jerusalem that we celebrate on Palm Sunday?
  
2. In the Background we read that "it was customary that a victorious king would enter on horseback, but in times of peace a leader would enter riding a donkey." What victory was Jesus' triumphal entry foreshadowing?
  
3. When Jesus sent two disciples to get a donkey and her colt, how did He instruct them to respond, if questioned as to why they were taking the animals?
  
4. Read Zechariah 9:9. How is this passage related to the events in Matthew 21:1-11 and why is this prophecy important?
  
5. In Matthew 21 we read of Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The crowd is welcoming their promised king into the city. Do you think that Jesus fit the image of the king that they were expecting?
  
6. When you read Matthew 21:1-11, what does it show us about the crowd's opinion of Jesus?

7. The crowd that cries “*Hosanna to the Son of David!*” in Matthew 21 is the same crowd that cries “*Crucify Him!*” later that same week. How can this be? What do you think the crowd wanted at the palm parade? What has happened in those few short days to change the minds of so many people? Did the religious elite influence them?

## Questions for Application:

1. What do you think it meant to those who were shouting “*Hosanna to the Son of David!*”?
2. Jesus rode a donkey to make a statement about His Kingdom being one of grace, not military power. How do most people tend to operate – according to Jesus’ strategy or the strategy of the world? How about you? Talk about some practical examples of this as they pertain to home, work, etc.
3. In our society today, who receives the type of praise and celebration similar to what Christ received during His triumphant entry into Jerusalem? Are they a politician, an athlete, or perhaps someone famous? How have any of these individuals impacted your life as much as Jesus?
4. Jesus didn’t meet the expectations of many people in the crowd. Have you ever known someone who was disappointed when God did not meet their expectations? What are some unrealistic expectations we sometimes have of God? What can we do to keep our expectations of God rooted in truth?
5. What kind of Jesus are you following, one of your own devising or one who brings transformation & cleansing?
6. How might we be able to change our city or country if we honored Christ as King over all?



7. How would you describe the events of Holy Week to a non-Christian friend?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. If someone not familiar with Easter were to ask you what Easter traditions have to do with Jesus, what would you tell them? Which Easter traditions does your family observe?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. How will you prepare your mind for Easter during this Holy Week? When will you set aside some quiet time to grapple with what Christ endured for your salvation? What can you do to enhance your gratitude and praise for what Jesus did for you?

**Resources:** *Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic*

Responding to God – 4 day devotional: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/11219-responding-to-god-4-lessons-from-palm-sunday>



Responding to God

The Palm Sunday Pressure – 5 day devotional: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/19133-the-palm-sunday-pressure>



Palm Sunday Pressure

### Questions for Discussion:

1. What are you reading in the Word this week?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship - prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

### Growth Challenge:

Who are you inviting to Easter service to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus?

# NOTES

Good Friday, March 29, 2024  
His Sacrificial Death



The Crucifixion by Michiel Coxie (1540-1592)

This rendition of the Crucifixion is found in the Cathedral of St. Michael and St. Gudula in Brussels, Belgium. As you read Matthew 27:27-55, consider the details depicted in the above painting. Do you see Simon of Cyrene? Did you spot the sponge with wine vinegar and the soldiers casting lots? Do you see the women weeping as they watch in anguish? What emotions do you feel as you read this passage and contemplate this picture?

# NOTES



**GOOD FRIDAY**

IT IS FINISHED

**MARCH 29 AT 7:00 PM**  
**MARION METHODIST SANCTUARY**





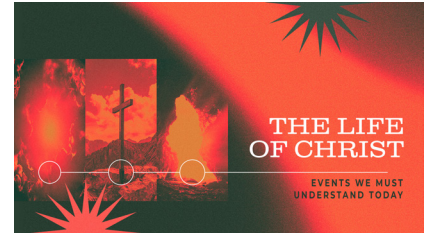
Resurrection, 1304-1306, Giotto di Bondone

This is one of the images from the “Life and Passion of Christ” depicted on the walls of the Arena Chapel in Rome. (It is called the Arena Chapel, because the chapel was constructed on the site of a Roman arena.) The chapel was commissioned in 1300 by Enrico Scrovegni as penance for the sins of his father Reginaldo. Bondone completed the painting of the interior fresco around 1305. (A fresco is a painting done on wet plaster on a wall or ceiling, so that the colors penetrate the plaster and become fixed as it dries. Oxford Languages) Why might Christ’s resurrection have been chosen as a part of the subject matter? What do you see? What more would you like to know about this fresco?



# March 31, 2024

## Session 5 | His Resurrection



*Before you begin* this Growth Group session, read the summary found inside the cover of your Growth Group materials.

### Background:

*This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

Throughout the course of this sermon series, we have been exploring the miraculous events of the final 60 days or so of Jesus' life. Jesus' time as Immanuel, "God with us," was ending, but the disciples still had questions and were failing to grasp the scope of His ministry, so Jesus gave the disciples—**and every believer ever**—the gift of witnessed miracles, in order that we might have confident assurance in Him, His teachings, and in our triune God.

*"An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives!"*

Belief in the resurrection of Jesus is imperative for the Christian. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then He is a liar and there was no victory over death, Satan hasn't been defeated, and there is no eternal life. Paul addresses this in 1 Corinthians 5:14 when he says, "*If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.*" Praise God, He is not dead, and our faith is not useless!

Throughout history, atheists and skeptics have fanned doubts about the resurrection by asking why Jesus needed an angel to roll away the stone, and why He didn't simply walk out of the grave? Satan wants us to get hung up on this, so that we will respond to these doubters with doubts of our own. Their mistake is that they assume Jesus was still in the grave. But what did the witnesses report? Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, as well as the guards, witnessed the angel come down from heaven, roll the stone back and sit on it. They didn't report seeing Jesus emerge, because He didn't. He wasn't there. Had they seen Him emerge from the grave, the Marys would have reported this to the disciples. Instead they reported seeing Him on the road. So, why the angel? Had the stone not been moved, no one could have witnessed the empty tomb! The miraculous nature of the empty tomb has been immortalized in the beloved hymn, "Because He Lives," by Bill and Gloria Gaither; "An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives!"

*"Men may be willing to die for what they believe to be true, but they would never die for what they know to be false."*

The story passed on to the chief priests by the guards was believable enough, compelling enough, that the soldiers were given a "large sum of money" to change their story. They should have saved their money... There were too many witnesses, too many miracles. Evidenced by the fact that the same disciples who denied, doubted, and scattered at the time of Jesus' trial and crucifixion, all believed in His resurrection and went on to spread His Good News. With the exception of the apostle John, all of the disciples would eventually be martyred for their beliefs. It has been said, "Men may be willing to die for what they believe to be true, but they would never die for what they know to be false."

He is risen. He is risen indeed.

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:1-20

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passage aloud.*

## Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon?
3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

## Questions from the Bible:

1. After His resurrection, Matthew tells us that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. Why do you think Jesus chose to appear to them first?
2. How does the reaction of the guards to the appearance of the angel contrast with the reaction of the Marys?
3. Why did the chief priests pay the soldiers that were guarding Jesus' tomb to change their story about what they had witnessed? What were they concerned about?
4. In Matthew 28:14, the chief priests and the elders tell the guards, "*If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.*" Why is this an important detail?
5. All four Gospels include an account of the resurrection of Jesus, and yet they are all unique. What reasons can account for the differences?

6. As Christians we are called to believe in Christ's resurrection on the basis of our faith. Name some examples of other Bible stories that we believe on the basis of our faith.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. What does Proverbs 3:5 have to do with our faith?

### Questions for Application:

1. How does the resurrection of Jesus affirm your faith in His divinity?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. The resurrection of Jesus is the most important fact of the Christian faith. Why? How does the resurrection of Jesus give us hope for today and for all eternity? How does it affect your life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. For some people, belief in the resurrection is a challenge due to the lack of scientific evidence. Forensic science is a form of science that uses scientific principles and techniques to examine evidence in support of claims. Consider this week's resurrection story. Is there sufficient forensic evidence for you to believe? Do you wish there were more evidence? What more information would you like, in order to have confidence in Jesus' resurrection?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What forensic evidence is there to support your personal claim of faith?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. How does the angel's message to the women at the tomb impact your faith?

6. The closing verses of Matthew 28 are often called The Great Commission. What is Jesus commissioning the disciples, and us, to do? What does the Great Commission mean to you personally? How can you apply it in your life? What assurance does Jesus provide in support of the task we are commissioned to do?
7. “*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” What comfort do you get from these final words of Jesus in Matthew 28? Are you able to share that comfort with others?

**Resources:** Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic

Case for the Resurrection of Christ – 4 Day Plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/11451-case-for-the-resurrection-of-christ>



Case for the Resurrection

The Rising: 7 Ways the Resurrection Changes Everything – 7 Day Plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/17853-the-rising-the-resurrection-changes-everything>



The Rising

### Questions for Discussion:

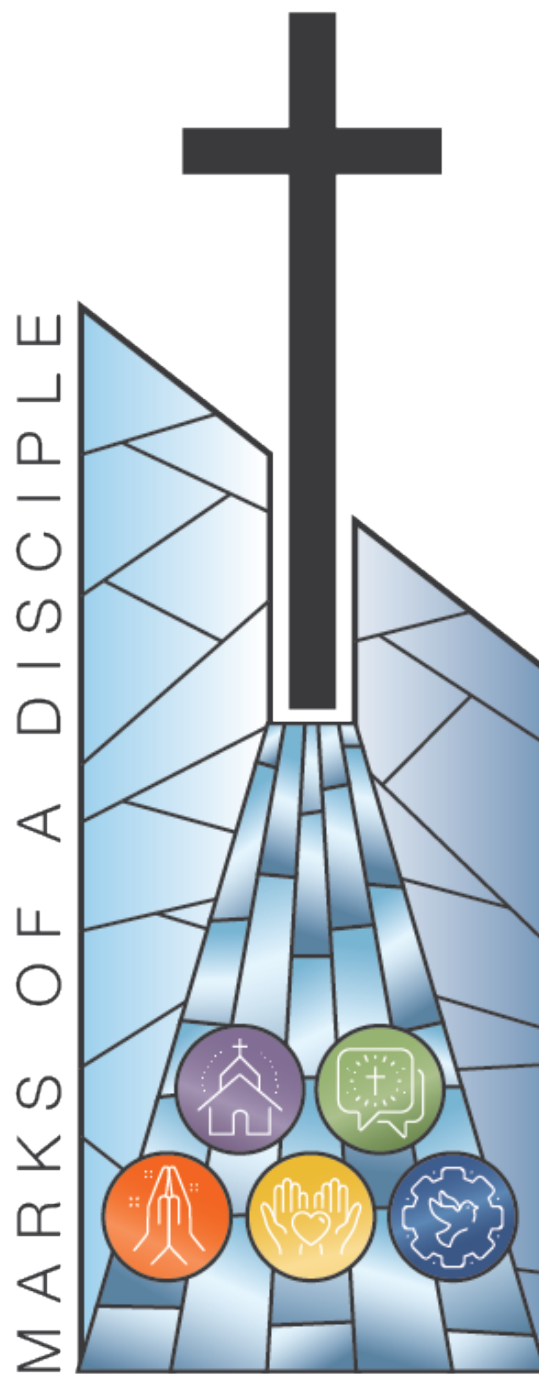
1. What are you reading in the Word this week?
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship - prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

### Growth Challenge:

Spend some time this week considering what it is you believe to be true about the resurrection of Christ. If this time reveals some areas of doubt or concern, take them to Jesus; just like the father who said to Him, “*I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief.*” (Mark 9:24b) You can rest assured that, if Jesus was willing to go to the cross for you, He is willing to help you overcome any areas of unbelief.

# NOTES





MARKS OF A DISCIPLE



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