

# The Eyewitnesses

Lesson 5 of 5 in the series: "Brought to Life"

## A. Some important background information:

The Jewish High Council (Sanhedrin) didn't believe Jesus was the Son of God. In fact, they hated Jesus because He had exposed them as greedy, self-righteous, hypocrites who cared more about **appearing religious** than doing God's will. They bribed Judas, one of Jesus' disciples, to hand Jesus over to them secretly to avoid public backlash. Then they manipulated the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, into crucifying Jesus so they could discredit Him as a criminal under God's curse. Finally, to make sure they put an end to any discussion of Jesus being the Messiah they asked Pilate to seal his tomb. "The next day, on the Sabbath, the leading priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate. They told him, 'Sir, we remember what that deceiver once said while he was still alive: "After three days I will rise from the dead." So, we request that you seal the tomb until the third day. This will prevent his disciples from coming and stealing his body and then telling everyone he was raised from the dead! If that happens, **we'll be worse off than we were at first.**' Pilate replied, 'Take guards and secure it the best you can.' So they sealed the tomb and posted guards to protect it." Matthew 27:62-66 (NLT)

Although Jesus' followers believed He was the Son of God, they didn't understand how a loving God in heaven could allow Jesus to suffer so horribly and die so unjustly. Even though Jesus had told them numerous times that he would rise from the dead, none of them expected Him to do so. "Taking the twelve disciples aside, Jesus said, 'Listen, we're going up to Jerusalem, where all the predictions of the prophets concerning the Son of Man will come true. He will be handed over to the Romans, and he will be mocked, treated shamefully, and spit upon. They will flog him with a whip and kill him, but on the third day he will rise again.' But they didn't understand any of this. The significance of his words was hidden from them, and **they failed to grasp what he was talking about.**" Luke 18:31-34 (NLT)

## B. Early Easter Sunday morning an angel opened Jesus' tomb to reveal that He had risen from the dead.

"Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb. Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint. Then the angel spoke to the women. 'Don't be afraid!' he said. 'I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying. And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead...' The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel's message." Matthew 28:1-8 (NLT)

*Note:* On Easter Sunday morning Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection started to make sense. "Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there... he saw and believed—for until then they still hadn't understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead." John 20:3-9 (NLT)

**Life Application:** We don't need to understand everything God is doing in order to trust Him. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Don't be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the Lord and turn away from evil." Proverbs 3:5-7 (NLT)

"And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." Romans 8:28 (NLT)

*Note:* The Sanhedrin bribed the men who had guarded Jesus' tomb and circulated a fake news story about the disciples being grave robbers. "As the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and told the leading priests what had happened. A meeting with the elders was called, and they decided to give the soldiers a large bribe. They told the soldiers, 'You must say, "Jesus' disciples came during the night while we were sleeping, and they stole his body." If the governor hears about it, we'll stand up for you so you won't get in trouble.' So the guards accepted the bribe and said what they were told to say. Their story spread widely among the Jews, and they still tell it today." Matthew 28:11-15 (NLT)

**Life Application:** Jesus hates religious pretense. We must come to Him openly and honestly acknowledging our sinfulness and our need for Him. “Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: ‘Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: “I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.” But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, “O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.” I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.’” Luke 18:9-14 (NLT)

**C. Later on Easter Sunday Jesus spoke with two of His followers as they were walking to Emmaus.**

“That same day two of Jesus’ followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem. As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them. But God kept them from recognizing him. He asked them, ‘What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?’ ‘...The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth,’ they said. ‘He was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. **We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel.** This all happened three days ago. Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said.’ Then Jesus said to them, ‘You foolish people! **You find it so hard to believe** all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. Wasn’t it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?’ Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself... Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared! They said to each other, **‘Didn’t our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?’**” Luke 24:13-32 (NLT)

**Life Application:** Our hope is based on the truth of God’s promises, NOT our feelings/understanding.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 (NIV)

“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Matthew 11:28-29 (NLT)

“I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms.” Ephesians 1:19-20 (NLT)

John Schmidt • 04-17-22 • john@centeringlives.com

**Connect Group Questions:**

1. Share a fresh insight God gave you this Easter.
2. Read Luke 24:13-32. Why had the Messianic hopes of the two travelers been dashed by Jesus’ crucifixion? Why did Jesus rebuke them? What do you think Jesus would say to us?
3. Read Matthew 27:62-28:15. Why did the Sanhedrin ask Pilate to post guards around the tomb of a dead man? Why did they pay a bribe to these guards later? Why do you think the highest-ranking religious authorities in Israel were unwilling to accept Jesus’ resurrection no matter what the evidence said?
4. Discuss the following *Life Application* points. Which one can you relate to most?
  - We don’t need to understand everything God is doing in order to trust Him. (Proverbs 3:5-6, Romans 8:28)
  - Jesus hates religious pretense. We must come to Him openly and honestly acknowledging our sinfulness and our need for Him. (Luke 18:9-14)
  - Our hope is based on the truth of God’s promises, NOT our feelings/understanding. (2 Peter 1:3-4)

5. Why do you think Peter ran to the tomb when he heard it was empty? (John 20:3-9)
6. Discuss the following quotations:

“And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.” 1 Corinthians 15:17-20 (NLT)

“You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.” Colossians 2:13-15 (NLT)