

## Christ Dies and Rises to New Life

DeAndre watched his grandfather, Cedric, as he slept. The 87-year-old had sung a worship song, quoted some Scripture, and kept sharing about the love and faithfulness of his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

DeAndre always had respect for his grandfather. Cedric was the cause of his giving his life to Christ, many years ago. Now, with his grandfather in hospice care, DeAndre was even more in awe of him. It was his grandfather's rock-solid faith—his love of Christ and the miracle of grace—that DeAndre admired most in these circumstances.

"We're all going to die, grandson," Cedric had said. "For the Christian, death has no sting. It has no power left. You just be certain that your calling is sure, because mine is. The grave won't hold me."

DeAndre believed it to be true. He just didn't want to lose this godly man who had been so influential in his life. After learning his grandfather was in hospice, DeAndre had been near to his bedside.

"I'm not afraid to die," he repeated. "What can separate me from the love of Christ? Nothing! Not even death!"

Then, a few weeks later came the words, "Now we will hear remarks from Cedric Johnson's grandson, DeAndre Johnson." The minister invited him to the front.

And DeAndre took in a slow breath. As he moved to the microphone, he had a flurry of emotions, but more than anything, he knew his grandfather was with the Lord.

- 1.** *Why doesn't the Christian need to fear death?*
- 2.** *How can the gospel be shared when people are on their deathbed?*
- 3.** *What are some encouraging Scriptures about life after death?*

## The Son of God Dies

*Matthew 27:39–40, 45–54 KJV*

39 And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, 40 And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

47 Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias.

48 And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. 49 The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.

50 Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

51 And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks

*Matthew 27:39–40, 45–54 NIV*

<sup>39</sup> Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads <sup>40</sup> and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"

<sup>45</sup> From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. <sup>46</sup> About

three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

<sup>47</sup> When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."

<sup>48</sup> Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. <sup>49</sup> The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

<sup>50</sup> And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

<sup>51</sup> At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split <sup>52</sup> and

rent; 52 And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, 53 And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.

54 Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.<sup>53</sup> They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

<sup>54</sup> When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

Matthew emphasizes the cruelty of Jesus' execution, especially the verbal abuse He endured. Contrary to the onlookers' demand that He prove His identity by coming down from the cross to save Himself, Jesus instead would prove it by staying put until He died.

And the cosmic events surrounding Jesus' death present an immediate challenge to the crowd's negative assessment of Him. An ominous darkness comes over the scene until Jesus' final moments (v. 45). He cries out that God has forsaken Him and gives up His life to God. Jesus' death sets into motion a second set of supernatural events: the tearing of the temple curtain; a tomb-breaking earthquake; and the raising to life of "many holy people" who had been dead (vv. 51–52). The division of the curtain might have a twofold significance. First, it signifies God's coming judgment on the temple and the priestly leaders who rejected Jesus. Second, it shows that Jesus' death was an atoning sacrifice which fulfills the temple sacrificial system. The way to relationship with God is now open.

After these signs, one Roman commander comments on the execution. There are at least two ways of reading the words, "Surely he was the Son of God." By one reading, the centurion recognizes the signs of Jesus' identity.

Alternatively, some understand the centurion's words as insincere, as mocking Jesus.

**4.** *Why didn't Jesus prove that He is the Son of God by coming down from the cross?*

**5.** *What is the meaning of the torn temple curtain?*

## The Son of God Is Risen

*Matthew 28:1–10 KJV*

1 In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. 3 His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: 4 And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. 6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. 7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there

*Matthew 28:1–10 NIV*

<sup>1</sup> After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

<sup>2</sup> There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup>His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. <sup>4</sup> The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

<sup>5</sup> The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

8 And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word. 9 And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

10 Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

<sup>8</sup> So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup> Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

In the first-century world, women were not considered reliable witnesses. Despite that, Matthew records that the first witnesses to Jesus' resurrection were women. Two disciples—both named Mary—went to see Jesus' body (vv. 1, 5). A supernatural earthquake interrupted them, an earthquake caused by the angel who was rolling back the stone which blocked access to Jesus' tomb (v. 3).

The Roman guards stationed at the tomb and the women were fearful in the angel's presence (vv. 4–5). The angel reassured the women that they did not need to fear because he knew their honorable motives in "looking for Jesus" (v. 5). Then the angel gave them joyful news: "He is not here; he has risen" (v. 6).

The angel commissioned the women to tell the other disciples this good news, but Jesus also met the two women on their way (vv. 8–9). By clasping the feet of His resurrected body in worship, the women affirmed with their actions what the centurion affirmed at the cross: "Surely he was the Son of God!" (Matt. 27:54)

**6.** *Why might it be surprising that the first witnesses of the resurrection were women?*

**7.** *Why were the Roman guards not reassured by the angel that they need not be afraid?*

## **A Crucifix or a Cross? What Is the Difference?**

In the Alpine areas of Austria, Germany, and Italy, it's not uncommon to pass little structures along highways; these are called wayside shrines. Whether elaborate or simple, they each house a crucifix—a wooden cross with a carved image of Christ attached. While this type of relic often appears in Catholic or Orthodox churches and shrines, Protestants favor an empty cross without Jesus' body. However, neither symbol was embraced by first-century Christians. In those days, the cross inspired dread. It was a device of torture and terror. Many early Christians were sent to crosses alongside common criminals.

Crosses and crucifixes coexisted until the Reformation. Many Protestants saw the crucifix as a type of graven image and embraced, instead, the unadorned cross. But to some, the crucifix still serves as a reminder of Christ's death and the suffering that He faced as a sacrifice for humanity. Likewise, an empty cross can represent Christ's resurrection, the Easter miracle which secured new life for those who call upon His name.

The messages of crucifix and cross are each part of the whole. As the crucifix shows, Jesus suffered terrible pain and agony; thus Jesus can be present with us when we suffer. As the empty cross shows, the story didn't end with His death; Jesus triumphed over sin and stunned the powers of darkness. Because of both the death and the resurrection of Christ, we can stand before God, washed in the "blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 12:11).

**8.** *Do you approve of the crucifix and the cross as symbols of Christianity? Why or why not?*

**9.** *What are other cultural symbols of Christian faith, and what might they communicate?*

**10.** *What is the most important message to be heard on Easter?*

## Sharing His Victory

Reflect on what Jesus achieved as a result of defeating death. First, He showed Himself the true Son of God through His miraculous resurrection. Second, He took the weight of humanity's sin upon Himself. Jesus clears a pathway for us to be reconciled to God.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul says, "The new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" Christ's victory provides the believer with the gift of new life. If you have experienced this new life for yourself, how has it inspired you to share the victory with others?

► *This week, take time to reflect on what your life was like before you came to know Christ, and what it has been like since. For your non-Christian friends, is there anything you could share to spark their interest? How could Christ's victory transform their lives? On a sheet of paper, list areas where Christ has transformed your life. Also list what makes you grateful today.*

### KEY VERSE

And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. —Matthew 28:9 KJV

Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. —Matthew 28:9 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of April 21 through April 27

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** John 1:29–36—Here Is the Lamb of God!

**Tues.** Psalm 118:1–14—The Lord Has Become My Salvation.

**Wed.** Psalm 118:15–29—Live and Not Die.

**Thurs.** 1 Peter 1:13–25—Worthy Ransom.

**Fri.** Psalm 99—Celebrate God.

**Sat.** Revelation 21:9–27—Live in the Light.

**Sun.** Revelation 5:1–10—The Slaughtered, Conquering Lamb.