

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Commission: A Study of Matthew 21–28

STUDY TWENTY

Resurrection: What Happened . . . What Didn't?

Matthew 28:1–15

The angel moved back the stone not to let Jesus out but to let us in to see that the grave was empty. Jesus was not there!

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE tomb of Christ was in a private, peaceful garden, secluded from the noisy city outside its gate. Springtime flowers blossomed. Neatly tended beds burst with new life. Vines bearing their first-fruit buds stretched along trellises and climbed walls, casting the garden in a green, tranquil hue.

At the far end, the tomb was visible only by the round stone rolled in front of its entrance. On Friday, just before sundown, Joseph and Nicodemus encased the lifeless body of Jesus with linen cloth and sweet spices before laying Him to rest.

Jesus' tomb, however, was not a mere holding place for a decaying corpse. It was more like the fertile beds of the garden. Planted like a seed in the ground, Jesus' body would soon spring to life. Jesus' heavenly body would emerge, becoming the first fruit of "a great harvest of all who have died" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

Let's join the women as they enter the garden on that first resurrection Sunday and discover, to their amazement, an empty tomb and, to our relief, real hope for our dying world.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Resurrection: What Happened . . . What Didn't?

Matthew 28:1–15



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Only Jesus can guide us through death into life. Open this *Searching the Scriptures* study by setting your hope solely on Him.

Father, please lift the shadows that creep over my spirit when I focus too much on the affairs of this life. Through Your Word, help me to see beyond the horizon of this earthly existence. Fill me with Your hope. Empower me to experience the life of Christ now as I await the glorification to come. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you read [Matthew 28:1–15](#), notice how Matthew tells his readers *what happened* when the angel announced Christ is risen. Matthew also tells *what didn't happen*, specifically, Jesus' body was *not* stolen. This false story was circulating at the time, and Matthew's purpose was not only to record the truth, but also to debunk the lie.



Observation: The Miracle versus the Deception

To truly engage with this passage, we must use all our senses.¹ Feel the crispness in the early Sunday morning air. See the first rays of dawn spreading over the Mount of Olives. Sense the women's urgency as they hurry along the hilly route through the city. Smell the spices they carry to finish the job of anointing Jesus' body (Mark 16:1). Experience their shock when they arrive at the garden.

The Miracle of Resurrection—Matthew 28:1–10

What details do you observe in [Matthew 28:1–4](#)? The soldiers “fell into a dead faint” before the women arrived. What frightened them?



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What did the angel say to the women, according to *Matthew 28:5–8*? Why do you think the angel rolled back the stone?

According to Pastor Chuck Swindoll's harmonization of the resurrection accounts, Mary Magdalene rushed off to tell John and Peter (John 20:1–2), while the other women went to find the rest of the disciples.² What happened along the way, according to *Matthew 28:9–10*?

The False Testimony from the Deceivers—Matthew 28:11–15

The women weren't the only witnesses of the events that morning. After reviving from their dead faint, some of the guards "went into the city and told the leading priests what had happened" (Matthew 28:11). Amazingly, the priests believed their story! A miracle had happened, but still they were determined to stand in God's way. What did the Jewish authorities do to discredit what they knew to be a supernatural event, according to *Matthew 28:12–15*?



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The resurrection of Christ was so significant and miraculous that skeptics immediately planned a lie about it, and to this day, the lie is still being told. How much easier it is to believe a lie than to accept a miracle that you can't explain! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Skeptics' False Explanation

From the beginning, skeptics have tried to cast doubt on the biblical accounts of the resurrection, offering alternative theories to explain what happened to His body. In his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll addresses the argument that the body was stolen and then gives reasons against it.

Read pages 316–317 of the commentary and in the space below summarize what you learn. Or, for an online rebuttal of the false theory, consult Matthew 28:12–14 of [Constable's Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#).

The “stolen body” theory just doesn't hold water. If the body was stolen, surely someone would have tracked it down and produced it, but no one ever has so the claim of the soldiers is empty.

In addition, the soldier's story that they fell asleep was ridiculous. How likely was it that *all* the soldiers fell asleep and *none* awakened at the sound of the disciples fumbling in the darkness? Besides, the disciples were defeated and scattered. None of them understood the meaning of the resurrection (John 20:9–10). How could this frightened bunch concoct such a bold plan so quickly? Furthermore, would they have later sacrificed their lives as martyrs for a cause they knew to be a lie? No way!

The angel's message is the only possible explanation for Jesus' missing body: *He is risen*.



Correlation: Our Hope Rests in a Living Savior

Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice on the cross set in place the cornerstones of Christianity, such as *redemption*, *justification*, and *forgiveness*. But without Jesus' resurrection, these stones would be buried under the tangled weeds of Joseph's lost garden.



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According to Paul in *1 Corinthians 15:17–19*, what would be our plight if Jesus had not been raised?

Thankfully, Christ is risen! His triumph over death gives us hope of our own resurrection. In *15:42–44*, Paul contrasts our earthly bodies that die with our resurrected bodies. Read those verses in two Bible versions and use the following chart to list the contrasts.

Earthly Body	Resurrected Body

Our hope rests in a *living* Savior. According to *15:51–53*, what will happen when He returns?

The resurrection of Christ is a message of hope. We must not think we just move into “nothingness” when we die. With Christ, we live on and on, just like Him.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Application: Which Story Do You Believe?

Skeptics find it easier to believe the stolen body theory rather than surrender their lives to a living Savior. To be certain, believing in the resurrection without seeing Jesus alive takes faith.

However, while believing without seeing calls upon a higher level of faith, it yields a greater spiritual blessing—just as Jesus declared when He appeared to Thomas:

“You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.”
(John 20:29)

Are you going through a dark period of grief or loss that has cast a shadow across your spirit—just like the disciples after Jesus died? What is causing you to be discouraged?

What about Jesus' empty tomb and the angel's earth-shaking announcement revives your hope?

Perhaps the greatest blessing of the resurrection is the assurance that God has a future for us as well as His entire creation. Close this study by declaring with Paul your faith in Jesus whose resurrection guarantees your life beyond the grave.



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Let me tell you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.

Then when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, the Scripture will be fulfilled:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?”

For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:51–57)



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for raising Your Son from the dead and giving me hope beyond this life. I claim by faith the promise of eternal life through faith in Jesus, my living Savior. He is risen! He is risen, indeed! In His name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](http://insight.org)" at insight.org.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 16–28*, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 312–313, 319. Read the entire harmonization of the resurrection accounts as it is presented in three parts. "Excursus: Resurrection Accounts Harmonized, Part 1—From Thursday to Saturday," 303–305. "Excursus: Resurrection Accounts Harmonized, Part 2—From Saturday Night to Sunday Morning," 311–313. "Excursus: Resurrection Accounts Harmonized, Part 3—Sunday and Beyond," 319.

