

COVENANT — JESUS CHRIST

Jesus' Resurrection

LESSON 13

MAY 31, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Matthew 28:1–20

FOCUS VERSES

Matthew 28:6–8

⁶He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

⁷And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

⁸And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

Jesus' resurrection conquered our final enemy, death.

MY RESPONSE TO COVENANT

I will find hope and eternal life through Jesus' gospel.

COVENANT CONTEXT

Although all founders of history's religious leaders have died, only Jesus has resurrected. His resurrection is at the heart of who we are as Christians. Without it, the gospel would not be good news, for sin and death would still reign. However, Jesus conquered sin, death, and hell and invites all humanity into this new and better covenant with Him.

TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: What is the closest you have ever come to a near-death experience?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to the fear many people have of death.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection. (I)

I. THE RESURRECTION

A. Conquering Death

DISCUSS: *What are some reasons people may fear death? What is Jesus' answer to these fears?*

B. New Life

C. I will respond to the gospel and be born again.

DISCUSS: *What is one thing you are very happy to leave in the past?*

II. LIVING IN COVENANT WITH CHRIST

A. The New Covenant

B. I will maintain my covenant with Jesus Christ.

DISCUSS: *What are some ways you prioritize your relationship with Jesus in your daily life and for your family?*

III. THE GOSPEL AND FAITH FULFILLED

A. Our Faith Is Not in Vain

DISCUSS: *How do you think the disciples felt that day when the risen Jesus suddenly appeared to them?*

- B. Fear Not
- C. I will find hope and eternal life in Jesus. (V)

DISCUSS: *What is one way your life has changed as Jesus trades fear for hope in your life?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to bring our families, friends, neighbors, and coworkers to new birth
- For God to replace fear with hope in our lives and in the lives of others

LESSON CONNECTION

(I) The Romans and the Jews were remembering Jesus' words that He would rise again. A squad of Roman legionnaires in full armor, swords belted on, spears and shields in hand, were commissioned to guard—of all things—a tomb. A massive stone was rolled across the entrance. Pontius Pilate's own seal of imperial Rome was pressed into wax on the stone, proclaiming no one was to open the tomb upon pain of death.

The hardened men standing guard were some of the world's most skilled fighting men. Rome's legions had conquered the then-known world, and these particular men were used to fighting Jewish insurgents who bitterly resented the Romans. If Roman soldiers retreated, the penalty was sometimes decimation: one man in ten killed by his nine fellow soldiers. The penalty for losing a prisoner or for falling asleep on guard duty was also death. It had been a long three days, but these men would have been alert and ready for trouble.

They knew the man in the tomb they guarded was dead. Just three days earlier, they had crowned Him with a thorny crown, draped Him with a cape, and beaten Him over the head with the rod they had given Him as a scepter. They had bowed the knee and mocked, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Some of these soldiers may have been at the Place of the Skull to watch Jesus of Nazareth die on a rugged Roman cross. They knew He was dead.

Roman executioners were efficient. They speared Him in His side, and blood and water flowed from His broken heart and flooded chest. He was dead and buried, and they were only there to prevent His followers from stealing His body and starting vicious rumors that He was alive. These veteran soldiers could send any such rabble of rebels running if they tried anything.

Then the ground started shaking. The soldiers stumbled, bracing themselves against anything they could get their hands on. A figure dropped from the sky, a blinding flash of brilliant white in the pre-dawn darkness. In a moment he rolled back the stone from the tomb and then calmly sat on it as if satisfied that his job was done. The hardened veteran soldiers were frozen with fear. Nothing in their years of combat had prepared them for anything like this. They could fight men, but this was no man.

When they could get their limbs to move again, they fled the scene. But where would they go? Pilate would have them executed if he knew they abandoned their post. Clearly, something supernatural had happened, so they went to the chief priests. Maybe the religious leaders could explain what these men had seen. The priests listened to their story, took counsel with the elders, and then offered the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, "Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept" (Matthew 28:13). It was a far-fetched story, but who would believe them if they told the truth?

They took the money.

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE RESURRECTION

A. Conquering Death

Death reigned like a tyrant until Jesus' resurrection. In the ancient world, death even reigned over the pagan gods of the nations. Ancient worshippers believed that gods like the Canaanite god Baal or the Egyptian god Osiris died and rose again every year in a cycle tied to the seasons and crop cycles. But unlike these false gods, Jesus conquered death once and for all when He rose from the grave, never to die again.

We can almost imagine Jesus asking these questions as He rose triumphant from the tomb: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (I Corinthians 15:55). Up until that moment, the fear of death was the most devastating fear in the world. But no longer. Those who are saved have no reason to fear death, knowing it is only the beginning of eternal life. In Revelation 1:18, Jesus proclaimed: "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." Why should we who know Jesus Christ fear anything He holds the keys to and has control over?

***DISCUSS:** What are some reasons people may fear death? What is Jesus' answer to these fears?*

B. New Life

Just as Jesus asserted He now holds the keys to death and hell, so He also holds the keys to Heaven. He entrusted these keys first to the apostle Peter, and through him to the church as a whole. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter was the first to use those keys to unlock the door to the kingdom of God. After Peter preached about Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, the natural response of the crowd was conviction: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Peter slipped the divine keys into the lock and turned them when he answered: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). Through Jesus' death, we die to our old way of life. When we are buried with Him in baptism, our old life of slavery to sin is dead and buried. When we receive the Holy Spirit, the breath of God is breathed into us to make us alive again. We rise from the dead just like Jesus rose, and we are changed. We are empowered to walk in new life.

C. I will respond to the gospel and be born again.

This is the gospel of Jesus Christ, or the good news Jesus came to enact and commissioned His disciples to spread across the world. This is the gospel they were all willing to lay down their lives to preach. What a hopeful message Jesus has given us: We can be born again. Old things can be left dead and buried behind us. All things can become new. We can become new creatures in Christ Jesus. Our past does not have to define our future. Our failures of yesterday are not our destiny for tomorrow. Jesus offers us a brand-new life and a fresh start, a new identity as a child of God.

***DISCUSS:** What is one thing you are very happy to leave in the past?*

II. LIVING IN COVENANT WITH CHRIST

A. The New Covenant

Hundreds of years before this beautiful new covenant, the prophet Jeremiah watched his nation fall deeper into apostasy and eventually to Babylon. Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet because despite his decades of faithful witness, his people rejected his message from God and paid the price. Yet even in the midst of devastation, God still communicated a promise to His people through Jeremiah: "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33). The writer of Hebrews was inspired to connect this promise with the Cross. (See Hebrews 8:10.) This is the new covenant Jesus came to establish. No longer would the Law be written on cold, hard tablets of stone as they were originally given to Moses. Now God

would write His law on fleshy tables of the heart.

When we receive the Holy Ghost, with the supernatural sign of speaking in tongues, God dwells within us and writes His law on our hearts. Being led by the Spirit does not mean we have license to ignore the commandments of God. Instead, it means they are even nearer and dearer to our hearts than ever. Rather than an external code of laws, they become an internalized way of life. We are no longer spiritually dead people trying to follow a list of dos and don'ts. Now we are spiritually alive and empowered to follow God's principles from the heart.

B. I will maintain my covenant with Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament, the old covenant had to be maintained regularly. So, too, the new covenant with Jesus must be regularly maintained as well. In the Old Testament, God's people had to offer a sacrifice every morning and evening. Today we are called to die daily to our own sinful desires through repentance. In the Old Testament, they were told to write God's Word on the posts of their house and talk about it when they were sitting in their house, when they were walking by the way, when they woke up in the morning, and when they lay down at night. They were to diligently teach the Scriptures to their children. (See Deuteronomy 6:4-9.) In the same way, we must stay focused on the Bible as the Word of God. It should be a daily part of our lives and a constant part of our conversations. In the Old Testament they were commanded to keep the Sabbath holy to the Lord. Today we are called to be faithful to gather in the house of God to worship and hear His Word.

No covenant, whether new or old, will long survive if neglected. Ancient Israel neglected their sacrifices, Scriptures, and Sabbaths, and before long the next generation knew not the Lord or the things He had done for Israel, and they began doing what was right in their own eyes (Judges 2:10). Their nation fell into idolatry and was ultimately destroyed. The same can easily happen to us today if we neglect these basic disciplines that maintain our covenant with Jesus Christ. It goes worse for people who once entered into covenant with God and then fall away from Him than for those who have never known Him at all. (See II Peter 2:21.) It is far better to know Him and stay close to Him and reap all the blessings of covenant.

***DISCUSS:** What are some ways you prioritize your relationship with Jesus in your daily life and for your family?*

II. THE GOSPEL AND FAITH FULFILLED

As Jesus lay in the tomb, the disciples should have known Jesus had done all this to institute a new covenant and was about to rise again in victory over death, hell, and the grave. They should have realized because He had clearly laid out the plan of His Passion for them in the lead-up to the cross. He had told them He would be crucified and the third day He would rise again, but they were too busy jockeying for position to pay attention.

For these disciples, this was their darkest hour. They were hidden away behind closed doors, likely fearing they would be the next to carry Roman crosses. But then, just as dawn was breaking, Jesus rose in fulfillment of all that had been prophesied and all He had promised.

A. Our Faith Is Not in Vain

To the disciples, huddled in that closed room unaware of what was happening at the tomb, it must have seemed their faith had been in vain. They had left all and followed Jesus. They had walked the dusty roads with Him for over three years, living lives of homeless men. They had been through storms with Him and suffered hunger and persecution. All this they had done because they had faith that Jesus was the Messiah, who had come to save Israel. It had seemed so close. They had walked alongside as Jesus rode the donkey, triumphantly entering Jerusalem as the crowds waved palm fronds and shouted, "Hosanna!" They had seen Jesus cleanse the Temple in righteous anger. Surely He would cleanse Israel of the Roman conquerors next.

And then they saw Him arrested, tried, convicted, crucified, and buried in a borrowed tomb, with the crowds turning against Him. The

combined power of the Sanhedrin and Rome crushed their hopes. They must have felt shame at how they had scattered and fled, and even denied Jesus when they had all sworn they would gladly die with Him (Matthew 26:35). It must have seemed like it had all been a farce and their faith had been in vain.

Until. Suddenly Jesus was standing in their midst. They should have been waiting at the tomb that morning for Him to rise, but instead He came and found them. Isn't that how God works? When we are not where we should be, He comes and finds us right where we are. Yes, He scolded them for their lack of faith and hardness of heart, but He was also willing to let them put their fingers in the print of the nails and thrust their hand into His side if that's what it took for them to believe.

DISCUSS: *How do you think the disciples felt that day when the risen Jesus suddenly appeared to them?*

B. Fear Not

The women who were first at the tomb saw the open tomb and the angel seated on the stone. The angel's face was shining like lightning, and his clothes were as white as snow. The angel kindly called to the women: "Fear not ye" (Matthew 28:5). Fear is a natural physical and mental response, but in this and many other circumstances, the command was given to "fear not." God will never give us a command without also giving us the power to obey, so clearly God can help us to overcome and move beyond our fears.

"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (II Timothy 1:7). With the power of God on our side and the power of the Holy Ghost in us, whom should we fear? Knowing that no one can separate us from the love of Christ, why should we fear? Perfect love casts out fear. As the old hymn says, "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone."

C. I will find hope and eternal life in Jesus.

(V) Because Jesus died for us and rose again triumphantly, we have hope both for this life and the next. It would be terrifying to think that this life with all its heartaches and struggles is all there is, but we have hope in Christ not in this life only but also in the world to come. We have hope knowing no matter what the enemy brings against us, God can turn it to good, just like He turned the cross that was made to destroy into a source of eternal salvation. God turns even apparent defeats into ultimate victory. No matter what, no matter how dark, no matter how difficult, our faith is not in vain. Our Jesus arose, and one day, we will too.

DISCUSS: *What is one way your life has changed as Jesus trades fear for hope in your life?*

Teacher Option: *Share the stories below or share one of your own to illustrate how the Resurrection is at the heart of what we believe as Christians.*

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Two groups of witnesses went out into the world from that empty tomb. The soldiers, bribed by the chief priests, spread the word that Jesus' dead body had been stolen away by His disciples while the soldiers slept. The disciples, with no hope of personal gain, spread the word that Jesus was alive again. The soldiers' lie died away almost immediately. The apostolic truth lives on almost two thousand years later.

Shortly before Jesus ascended to Heaven, Jesus commanded the apostles: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). And they obeyed. Ancient tradition states the apostles divided up the then-known world and cast lots to determine who would go where to preach the gospel, and all except John (who wrote Revelation) were martyred for the faith.

James the son of Zebedee was first, killed with the sword by King Herod. According to historical accounts, Peter was crucified upside down at Rome, unwilling to die in the same manner as his Lord. Andrew was crucified in Greece on an X-shaped cross. Thomas, who

had once doubted Jesus' resurrection until Jesus showed him His scars, pressed east as far as India, preaching the gospel and was killed there. Philip is said to have witnessed across Asia Minor and then down to North Africa, where he converted the wife of the Roman governor to Christianity. In retaliation the governor had Philip executed.

The former tax collector, Matthew, carried the gospel across Parthia, Persia, and south to Ethiopia, where some writings say he was stabbed to death. The apostle Bartholomew carried the gospel east, especially to Armenia. He was either beheaded or flayed alive for his faith. James, the son of Alphaeus, remained at Jerusalem, preaching the gospel until he too was martyred. Simon the Zealot carried the message to Egypt, North Africa, and then Persia where he was killed after refusing to sacrifice to the sun god. Matthias, who was chosen by lot to replace Judas, preached in Syria until he was burned at the stake.

Some claimed the apostles were liars, that they stole Jesus' body and were lying when they claimed to be eyewitnesses of His resurrection. But what lie could possibly motivate men to travel the world preaching a message they knew was a lie? What lie could possibly be worth dying for in some of the most excruciating ways possible? They did not lie. Jesus rose again, He appeared to these men, and He is still alive and living in us today.