



This morning we come to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. Yet, many claim that we're fools for believing that someone rose from the dead 2,000 years ago. Are we crazy? One theologian writes about the uniqueness of the account of Jesus' resurrection and the events surrounding it by saying the following:

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*In not one single case do we hear the slightest mention of the disappointed followers [of other first century messianic movements] claiming that their hero had been raised from the dead. They knew better. Resurrection was not a private event. Jewish revolutionaries whose leader had been executed by the authorities, and who managed to escape arrest themselves, had two options: give up the revolution, or find another leader. Claiming that the original leader was alive again was simply not an option. Unless, of course, he was. (quoted in *The Reason for God*, p. 208, from *Who Was Jesus?* by N.T. Wright, p. 63).*

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"Unless, of course, he was." That's a very important line to contemplate. First century thinkers would not have thought of an individual resurrection. The Greeks thought of resurrection as only spiritual. Many Jews thought of it as a corporate resurrection. To think of an individual, physical resurrection like Jesus' was generally unthinkable! If something like the resurrection of Jesus wasn't assumed by Greeks or Jews, how or why would the disciples even come up with this message?

This, among many other reasons, have led myriads of people throughout the centuries to believe the message that the disciples proclaimed. Here are a few more quotes regarding Jesus' resurrection from some other Christians:

- **"No one fact in the history of mankind...is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort [than the fact that] Christ died and rose from the dead." Thomas Arnold (professor of modern history at Oxford)**
- **"In the whole story of Jesus Christ, the most important event is the resurrection" William Lyon Phelps (Yale professor)**
- **"Our Savior's resurrection...is truly of great importance in Christianity; so great that His being or not being the Messiah stands or falls with it." John Locke**

Today, millions, if not billions, of people are gathering together in the open-air, in huts, in cathedrals, in homes, in buildings and warehouses around the globe to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. We gather on what is known as Easter Sunday to celebrate something that happened almost 2,000 years ago, yet (as I've already mentioned) there are many people who may feel sorry for us for doing so. Others are angered by what we believe. While still others are ignorant of what is really happening.

How is it that you can have people take such opposing stances on the resurrection of Jesus? This morning, I want to go on a quest to see 1) how we can be assured that Jesus is risen and 2) why the resurrection is so important. The main idea of this sermon is that **We can be assured that the life-changing resurrection of Jesus really did happen, for people's eternal satisfaction in God.** Today, I want you to know that I'm speaking to people who may have doubts. I'm also speaking to resolute Christians to help them to dig deeper in the Word so that their faith is even more firm in Christ. We will search the Bible's testimony about Jesus' resurrection and we will discover evidences that will help point us to the glorious truth that Jesus has been raised! My prayer is that everyone in this room will both mentally affirm that Jesus Christ is risen indeed and that everyone here would also turn from their sins and trust Jesus as their only Savior.

## How can we be sure?

### 1. **The gospels are written historically.**

Some of you may wonder why I word this point the way I do. The reason is because we need to see something clearly before we move any further. There are certain genres of writing. There are allegories. There is hyperbole. There is also historical writing. The books that we call "The Gospels" (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) fit within the historical genre. The reason we know this is because of the way that the books are written. As opposed to various ancient writings that talk about the Greek gods with certain types of details, the stories in the gospels give more details that reveal historicity. For example, when we read about Jesus' birth, we read of the Herod at that time. When we read about Jesus' death, we find that Pontius Pilate was ruling at that time. These are historical figures that necessitate a historical reading of these accounts. That's why the ancient Apostle's Creed has, "suffered under Pontius Pilate" in the creed. The early Christians were declaring that the death of Jesus is historical fact – not just some odd tale like the Easter Bunny who oddly enough lays eggs.

In the story of the resurrection that we read earlier from Mark 16, we have the following situation: There are some women who are going to anoint Jesus' body with spices. They waited until the Sabbath was over to do this – in keeping with the law. The reason why they took these spices was probably to keep Jesus' body from stinking as bad as it possibly could smell. On their way, they are discussing how they are going to roll the stone away from the tomb. The tomb that Jesus was in was actually the tomb of a wealthy man named Joseph. This tomb was a comparatively rare type of tomb where a circular stone was placed in front of the entry way. While the stone was moved on a slant, once it was in place, it would have been very difficult to move. Given the conversation among the women, it seems as though they may have been unaware that there were guards at the tomb.

As they walk to the tomb, an earthquake shakes the ground and sends the guards to the ground, causing the stone to roll away. We also find that the women were alarmed at what was happening! The reason for this response isn't simply because of the earthquake, but because the earthquake is caused by the physical manifestation of bright, shining angels. Then the angel speaks the following: "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here."<sup>1</sup> The angel is talking about the Jesus that these women walked with and talked with. The gospel's testimony is that a real, historical Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, was crucified and rose from the dead. Then the angel says, "He is risen!"

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Mk 16:6). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

To the people who say that the resurrection was not physical, the gospel accounts do not allow for that interpretation. The angel doesn't merely say that Jesus' body isn't there, but the angel then says, "See the place where they laid Him." Now we have eyewitness testimony that Jesus' body is not in the tomb. Then the angel tells the women to communicate this to the disciples (and Peter) to meet Jesus in Galilee. The women do this, and Jesus reveals himself.

At this point in time, you may question certain of these truths or you could accept them completely. I hope you would accept these truths, but I hope you wouldn't accept them blindly. Some people, in talking about the Christian message will talk to those who believe differently and say, "You just need to believe it in faith." And, what they mean is, "Even if it doesn't seem to make sense, just believe it." Now, granted, there are things that we cannot fully comprehend in the Scriptures. But, when we get to the person of Jesus and what He did, the Scriptures say that these things are historically verifiable and therefore can be believed with absolute certainty. Therefore, the Christian message is set apart from various other religions. For example, within Mormonism, you have the story of Joseph Smith going out in the woods and receiving a vision from an angel – even saying that he received tables that he needed to record. The tablets are not verifiable nor is the existence of the angel. But, don't you think that if this "new" revelation were so important, God would verify it not only to Joseph Smith, but also to those who follow? Or, take Islam. Similar events happened to Mohammed. Yet, again, these events weren't verifiable.

Yet, the Christian message is different. The Apostle John says, "but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."<sup>2</sup> John wrote in such a way so as to convince the people of the realities that took place. Then, if the people were truly believing these realities, they would entrust themselves to Jesus with their entire being! But now we may ask, "Do the gospel accounts give sufficient enough evidence?" Let's turn to another portion of the New Testament to gain more insight into the resurrection.

## **2. The Literal, Physical Resurrection of Jesus is confirmed by eyewitnesses (1 Corinthians 15).**

The problem of people ignoring the resurrection is not a 21<sup>st</sup> century issue. It has been rejected among even so-called Christian groups as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> century. And, the Apostle Paul wrote at length to confront one of the churches that seemed to be influenced by a false gospel that included no resurrection. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 15:3 to see how Paul addresses these individuals.

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*<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.<sup>3</sup>*

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Paul starts off his argument for the resurrection the same way the gospels speak regarding Jesus' exit from the tomb. The gospels write like it is fact because it is historically factual. Paul says that the good news for the human race is found in Jesus and what He has done. He died, was buried and rose again. Paul speaks of

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<sup>2</sup> *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Jn 20:31). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), 1 Co 15:3–8.

these things as though they really happened. But, does Paul write about these things as though these things happened in some dark corner? No. Paul bases these circumstances among verifiable evidence. Paul says that Peter, the 12 disciples, five hundred people, the apostles and even he saw the resurrected Jesus. This really should be sufficient evidence for anyone – especially in Paul’s day. Paul is basically saying, “If you don’t believe me, go talk to the hundreds of people who saw Him.” As I mentioned earlier in this message, it would have been common for any person to question such a belief. Therefore, you’d need many eyewitnesses to this. And, in the days of Paul, it would not have been that difficult for any Corinthian to hop on a boat to Jerusalem to do his due diligence in seeking to find out the facts in this. Paul is so confident in the resurrection of Jesus that he says, “If you don’t believe me, talk to the hundreds of people. They’ll verify it.”

In our government’s judicial system, eyewitnesses are critical and important in criminal cases. Sometimes all we need is one eyewitness. If we can prove that person was there and that they aren’t necessarily gaining anything by giving this testimony, we can be confident that the testimony is going to lead to either the acquittal or the conviction of an individual. In a very similar fashion, this is the type of speech that Paul is utilizing here. Jesus has been raised. Over five hundred people have seen Him.

What’s sad to me is how many people can read a passage like this and still ignore Jesus. They’ll say something like, “If five hundred people saw Him, then why don’t more people believe in Him?” Maybe it’s because they’re using the same question you’re using in order to deny Jesus’ resurrection. Oh, but I hope and pray you see the beauty and truth of Jesus’ resurrection. Now, let’s move to the third evidence to believe in the resurrection.

### 3. The resurrection changed the disciple’s lives.

A 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, Blaise Pascal once said, “**I [believe] those witnesses that get their throats cut**” (*The Reason for God*, Keller, p. 210). If someone has nothing to gain, and actually has everything to lose in this life by testifying to something, you should believe that person. This, I believe, is true of Jesus’ disciples. They didn’t gain anything by worldly standards by perpetuating the message of Jesus’ resurrection. But they were absolutely transformed in ways that allured many to Jesus.

If we go back to Mark 16, I think here we can find some practical encouragement regarding the resurrection. Look with me in verse seven: “But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee.”<sup>4</sup> Do you ever find it interesting that the angel specifies Peter’s name to the women? Peter was the one that said he would die for Jesus rather than deny Him. Yet, as the story unfolded, we find that Peter boldly denied Jesus. I can imagine Peter, during the days between Jesus’ death, contemplated Jesus’ words, “whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.”<sup>5</sup> Peter denied Jesus. Is Jesus denying Him? Peter is probably despairing like the other men and then he hears the women come to him, “Jesus is risen! He’ll meet you in Galilee.” What do you think Peter was thinking when he heard this? More importantly, what did Jesus want to teach Peter through his resurrection? I believe that He wanted to affirm Peter’s forgiveness and also teach Peter that he had hope for this life and even the life to come. And, this is what Jesus’ resurrection provides for us.

In John 21, we read of Peter and Jesus’ encounter. There, Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him. And, Jesus doesn’t merely ask once. Jesus asks three times. The fact that Jesus asks three times challenges Peter to

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<sup>4</sup> *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Mk 16:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Mt 10:33). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

the core. Does Peter really love Jesus? Finally, Peter expresses his sorrow to Jesus - being broken and again affirming his love for Jesus. It is here, post-resurrection, that Peter then hears Jesus calling him into gospel-proclaiming ministry. He hears Jesus again basically say, "Put down your net. Follow me and I'll make you fishers of men." Then Jesus says something that seems odd. Jesus prophesies the way in which Peter will die. Because of Jesus' resurrection, the disciples are going to be changed from weak, cowering, fearful, uncommitted people to bold, emblazoned, God-fearing, miracle-working servants of Christ! And, most of them will die for this message.

This yet another great testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. In just a few weeks the disciple's entire demeanor changed. Read the gospels and then read Acts. The disciples lives change dramatically – including Peter's life! And, Peter's life was so committed to God that history records that Peter was martyred for his faith in Rome. After having written inspired letters, Peter dies. After having moved to a different region to share the love of God, Peter dies. Jesus' prophecy of death came true. One question we ought to ask is "If Jesus' resurrection was a hoax, why would the disciples live lives suffering by the hands of people?"

The knowledge of the resurrection changes everything. Peter is just a representative of the many lives who have been changed and shaped by Jesus – including many of us in this room today! The resurrection isn't simply some information that we believe, but it's truth that we bank our lives on. So, up to this point, I've shared evidences for the resurrection. But now, I want to emphasize *why* the resurrection is so important.

### **Why is the resurrection so important?**

#### **1. Without a resurrection, our faith is vain (1 Corinthians 15).**

As I communicate the things I've been talking about this morning, some people in this world may respond by saying, "Wow, you're putting a lot of stock in resurrection. Don't you want to play it safe?" I've heard of people who claim to be Christians, who have said, "If we found the bones of Jesus, that wouldn't do anything to my faith." But, I say that if we found the bones of Jesus, we better abandon Christianity. I believe that the resurrection is of such great importance that I say with John Locke, "Our Savior's resurrection...is truly of great importance in Christianity; so great that His being or not being the Messiah stands or falls with it."

This is what God says in 1 Corinthians 15. I'm going to start reading in verse 14.

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*<sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.*

*<sup>15</sup> We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. <sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), 1 Co 15:14–19.

### **If Jesus has not risen from the dead:**

- **There is no resurrection whatsoever.** None of us who trust Jesus will be raised from the dead someday. The grave is the end for all of us.
- **The Scriptures are lying.** God is a liar if Jesus didn't rise from the dead! Why? Because he promised throughout the Old Testament that there would be one to come who would rise from the dead in a specific way. To deny the resurrection is to call God a liar.
- **Our faith is empty.** If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, our faith is vain. There's no real substance to our faith. There have been many times in the past where my dad has said to me on Easter morning (and on other occasions), "I've been to the tomb. Guess what? He isn't there!" Do you realize that there are shrines for so many other past religious leaders, and there's documented evidence that these leaders have died. But, with regards to Jesus, it's documented that He is no longer in the tomb. Even the enemies of Jesus (Roman Guards and the Religious Leaders who wanted him dead) admitted that His body was no longer in the tomb. In any court system, to have an enemy acknowledge something meant that it was very probably true. If Jesus didn't rise, who or what are we believing in?
- **We are still in our sins.** You may ask, "Why is our faith in vain for simply not believing in the resurrection." The first response of Paul is that we are still in our sins." In other words, at the cross, Jesus is said to have forgiven us from our sins and taken our punishment. But, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then He must not have really died for our sins. Jesus was just a man playing a horrible trick on the human race. But, if we believe that the resurrection really did happen, the Bible says that "just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."<sup>7</sup> Meaning, there's forgiveness and also change that God works in us to love God and love others in new ways that follow Jesus' example.
- **Christians are most to be pitied.** Paul concludes this by basically saying, "If we only have hope in this life, we are most to be pitied!" Have you ever turned on your television to listen to preachers who seem to only speak in such a way as to make the most of *this* life. They talk like Jesus' only purpose was to make us healthy, rich and well in *this* life. They speak like Jesus' life and death are purely moral examples to us. These people don't speak of a resurrection from the dead where we will receive resurrected bodies. They don't seem to talk about how our hope really resides in God and knowing Him both now and into eternity. I pity those preachers. You can gain the whole world and lose your soul! But Jesus rose from the dead so that we would be loved eternally by God and we would honor him with eternal joy forever.

So, Paul's argument is basically, "If we believe in no resurrection, we must be living for this life. Therefore, while we may think we're living for an eternal God, we're not. So, the world should pity us because we'd be living a lie."

These are serious claims to make. Paul then moves on to declare what we gain if the resurrection really did happen.

### **2. With the resurrection, eternal satisfaction in God is guaranteed.**

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*<sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and*

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<sup>7</sup> *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ro 6:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

*every authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death.<sup>8</sup> . . . <sup>42</sup> So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. <sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.<sup>9</sup>*

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**Some glorious blessings of resurrection are: We will rise with a gloriously new body like Jesus' body. The future Kingdom will come. God reigns forever. Jesus rules today to subdue His enemies. Death dies.**

Each of these claims counter what I've already said, and these claims garner greater assurance and hope in God. These claims cause us to rejoice. And all that Paul is writing here keeps in mind the big storyline of human history and God's redemptive plan. All the way back in Genesis, God created humans as vice-regents and priests to God. They lived in a sinless garden. They worshipped God perfectly and experienced peace with him. Then they rebelled, sending all humanity plummeting into the curse of sin and brokenness in this world. God shows mercy and gives glimmers of hope, stating that people can be reconciled to God. But how could that be?

Enter Jesus. As a new "Adam," he perfectly honors God. Then he submits himself to the punishment that Adam's race deserves. He takes the punishment of sin on the cross – and then he conquers death at the grave. Now, we're told that all who trust Jesus will have eternal life, and we will be with God forever in a world to come. Better than Eden because Jesus is superior to Adam! We will be in a New Heaven and a New Earth. Until then, we have his grace to follow him in this world. And we have the present and future privileges of being satisfied in the Eternal One who is the source of all that is good, beautiful and best! But none of this happens if Jesus didn't raise.

Humanity's freedom is dependent on Jesus and his death and resurrection! I know that the story can seem crazy to people around us. Some here might think, "Do I really believe this?" But I encourage you, read the evidence. I encourage you to ponder it truly. **We can be assured that the life-changing resurrection of Jesus really did happen, for people's eternal satisfaction in God. If Jesus didn't raise from the dead, we are without hope. But if Jesus did raise from the dead, then the Bible is all gloriously true. Praise God for the resurrection! Forgiveness, life, freedom and eternal hope are given through Jesus. He is risen. He is risen indeed!**

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<sup>8</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), 1 Co 15:22–26.

<sup>9</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), 1 Co 15:42–43.