

The Resurrection of Jesus

Matthew 28; Mark 16;
Luke 24; John 20; 21

“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is” (1 John 3:2).

Resurrection! This is the defining difference that sets Christianity apart from all other religions! It has been said if there had been no resurrection, our world today would never have heard of Jesus. Angels asked, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen” (Luke 24:5b, 6a). Jesus was not resuscitated, reincarnated, or recreated; He was resurrected. He went “through death and out the other side into a new world, a world of new and deathless creation, still physical only somehow transformed” (N. T. (Tom) Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 296–97.). Christianity claims that something happened to Jesus that had not happened to anyone else in the history of the world. Our Christian hope is not just immortality of the soul, but the resurrection and transformation of our bodies.

Most religions have holy places; Christianity does not. Other religions have tombs; Christianity does not. Of what use is a “dead Savior”?

No man witnessed the resurrection. Who was there? Was God there? God did resurrect Jesus (See Acts 2:24, 32, 36; 3:15, 26; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 33, 34; 17:31; Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 6:14; 2 Corinthians 4:14; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:20). Was the Holy Spirit there? Paul said that the Spirit raised Jesus (Romans 8:10, 11). Were angels there? We do not know. Man was not! Christians believe Jesus is the Son of God because of an empty tomb! Christianity stands or falls upon an empty tomb! One bone of His body found would totally destroy Christianity! Paul said, “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection” (Philippians 3:10a). Jesus physically died and literally was resurrected. This means that He is alive today. It also means that we can believe in and obey Him today. This is the gospel! The Christian hope is not life after death, but life, period! He said, “I am the resurrection and the life . . .” (John 11:25, 26); “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6a). Resurrection faith is built upon the resurrection fact.

Nothing is more fatal to the Christian faith than to locate its meaning outside its happening. The resurrection is without meaning unless it really happened. Jesus is not a liar, a hoax, or a fraud. The cross is not fiction; it is not a myth or an allegory. His death and burial were real. His resurrection was real. Jesus is historical. An expert in myths studied himself into faith and said, “These things really happened. I know what myth is . . . this is not myth.” Christians do not have a cemetery or a tomb because Christ’s tomb is empty. No one denied that His tomb was empty!

The Burial

The gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1–4). We must not think about the death and the resurrection, but skip the burial. A burial demands a death. Skeptics tell the fairy tale that Jesus fainted or was in a coma, and that He fooled the authorities. Angels pointed out where Jesus’ corpse was placed (Matthew 28:6; Mark 16:6). Resurrection demands a death and a burial. A burial demands a body.

Baptism is a burial into the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:1–5; Colossians 2:12). A sinner’s greatest burial is to be buried by baptism with Christ and into Christ! The burial shouted, “All is lost. Death has won; life has lost.” The situation may have seemed bleak on Friday, but the resurrection came on Sunday!

The Three Days

Counting back three days from Sunday, the day of the resurrection, some people calculate that Jesus was crucified on Wednesday. Going back that far in the week interferes with Jesus' final activities as recorded in the Gospels, which surely eliminates this view. The Thursday theory also creates more problems than it claims to solve. The Bible teaches that He was raised on "the third day"—not "the fourth day" or "the fifth day." Throughout the centuries, Friday has been viewed as the day of His death. Some even call it "Good Friday."

Jesus did speak of three days and three nights in relation to Jonah (Matthew 12:40)—but this was figurative, not literal. If He had spent three full days and nights in the tomb, the Resurrection would have been on "the fourth" or "the fifth" day. Man counts hours; the Bible simply refers to "the third day." From Friday, Sunday is the third day. The Jewish leaders knew this (Matthew 27:63). They asked Pilate to take action because they knew what Jesus had said. The apostles remembered this after His resurrection (Luke 24:8; John 2:18–22). They then understood what Jesus meant.

Unlike the gentle Jesus we have created in our minds, Jesus spoke harshly about Herod: "Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I reach My goal'" (Luke 13:32; emphasis mine). He indeed reached His goal on the third day—Sunday, the day He rose from the dead!

Infallible Proofs of the Resurrection

"To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). Christianity is built upon tangible, reliable evidence. If Jesus cannot do anything about death, then whatever else He does amounts to nothing. "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen," an angel said (Luke 24:5b, 6a). The Book of Acts does not debate the resurrection—it declares it! A dead Savior did not produce Christianity. The resurrection is the most certified fact in all history. Lyman Abbott said, "The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best attested fact in history" (CoLyman Abbott, *The Theology of an Evolutionist* (New York: Outlook Co., 1925), 129).

Jewish law refused circumstantial evidence. The verdict came from two or more witnesses (2 Corinthians 13:1). The gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1–4). God gave considerable space in the Scriptures to the witnesses. The resurrection will stand in any court of law.

(1) *The apostle Paul*. The conversion of Saul (Paul) is enough to certify the resurrection. The persecutor became the preacher! Why? He saw the risen Savior (1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8–11). He had no doubts. He died for his faith and for his preaching. Paul believed in and preached a bodily resurrection.

(2) *The enemies*. Paradoxically, enemies believed when the disciples doubted. They warned Pilate that Jesus promised a resurrection in three days. Pilate said, ". . . make [the tomb] as secure as you know how" (Matthew 27:65). A huge stone was rolled over the entrance and sealed. Soldiers were put in place to guard the tomb. Humanly speaking, man could not have removed the body.

When the rock was rolled aside, exposing the empty tomb, no one shouted, "Find that body!" The Jewish leaders, Roman soldiers, Pharisees, Pilate, and Herod did not go from house to house in search of the body. They knew Jesus was resurrected! They immediately tried to squelch the news. The rock at the tomb was not rolled aside to allow Jesus to exit, but to allow man to enter. Jesus' enemies knew that a corpse could not be found!

Throughout history no skeptic, Jew, or Roman has found Jesus' body. The silence is staggering! Disposing of a human body without a trace would be a miracle in itself. When Peter preached the first gospel sermon (Acts 2), he was in close proximity to that cemetery. Three thousand people from

everywhere obeyed his resurrection message. He told them, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). Skeptics have to face this question: “What happened to that body?” There are more verses in the Bible on the resurrection than on Jesus’ birth.

(3) *The apostles*. Cowards became martyrs! What can explain this? The resurrection! Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, and Paul were competent witnesses. Would you brand them liars? Can you trust the Gospel Accounts in the Bible? Scholars call Luke an historian of the first rank. How can you explain the beginning, the growth, and the continued existence of the early church? It all arises from the resurrection!

(4) *The women*. Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9–11; John 20:1–18). The women came to visit a cemetery and bring flowers (Matthew 28:1–10). Honor them for this! Their testimony is made stronger when you realize that they never dared to imagine a resurrection. When, in joy, they found the apostles, the apostles laughed at them and refused to believe (Luke 24:11; Mark 16:11). Jesus rebuked the apostles for this (Mark 16:14). We cannot grasp the problem they had in believing. They were so focused upon finding a dead body that they could not recognize a living Savior!

(5) *The appearances*. Most scholars list ten resurrection appearances, while some list twelve:

- to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9–11; see John 20:1–18)
- to other women (Matthew 28:1–10)
- to two men on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:13–32; see Mark 16:12)
- to Simon Peter (Luke 24:34)
- to ten apostles, without Thomas (John 20:19–25; see Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36–49)
- to eleven apostles, with Thomas (John 20:26–28)
- to seven disciples at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1–23)
- to eleven apostles in Galilee (Matthew 28:16–20; see Mark 16:15–18)
- to more than five hundred brethren (1 Corinthians 15:6)
- to James (1 Corinthians 15:7)
- to eleven apostles (Luke 24:50–53)
- to Paul (1 Corinthians 15:8; see Acts 9; 26).

Notice that Jesus did not appear before His enemies—the religious Jews, Pilate, or Herod; He appeared to His disciples.

(6) *John*. John arrived at the tomb, stopped, and then followed Peter inside. When he saw the folded grave clothes, he put all the evidence together. He saw and believed (John 20:2–10).

(7) “*Doubting*” *Thomas* (John 20:24–29). Like the others, Thomas was devastated by the death of Jesus. Thomas missed the first assembly (John 20:24). This failure could have been fatal to his soul. The disciples went after him. We must learn and practice this today (James 5:19, 20; Galatians 6:1, 2; Jude 22, 23). He was present the next time. Do not be too harsh with him. Have you ever seen a resurrected man? Would you believe such a claim? Thomas demanded the “finger test.” Jesus welcomed it! Thomas declared, “My Lord and my God!” The witnesses have spoken!

Graveyard Humor

The Bible is a fascinating book. Man could not have written it. He would not have written it if he could have. This fact is a powerful argument for inspiration.

(1) *The women*. The angels and Jesus appeared to women first! They came with spices. This was a beautiful gesture, but not a practical one. Then it occurred to them: Who would roll away the rock? Several strong men would have been needed, but it required one angel!

(2) *The soldiers*. Can there be anything more ludicrous than the Roman army guarding a tomb? There was an earthquake; then an angel rolled back the stone (Matthew 28:2). The guards became as

dead men. Were they rebuked? Were they commanded, “Find that body”? Were they executed according to Roman custom? No! The chief priests bribed the soldiers at a great price (Matthew 28:11–15) to say that they had fallen asleep! The price paid by a soldier found asleep on his watch was always death—but not in this case!

(3) *The disciples on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:13–32)*. Jesus joined two devastated disciples as they walked. They were amazed that Jesus had “missed” everything that had been happening in Jerusalem. They were the ones who had missed it! Ironically, Jesus, using the Scriptures, preached the gospel to them. When Jesus blessed and broke the bread, they recognized Him. If Christ is not risen, then our faith is empty (1 Corinthians 15:10–19).

Resurrection Power

Paul said, “. . . that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection” (read Philippians 3:7–11). The heart and soul of the church is to seek and save the lost through the power of the gospel of a risen Lord. The cross was the victory won; the resurrection was the sacrificial death accepted, validated, and endorsed by God. Death could not hold Jesus (Acts 2:22–36). In death Jesus defeated death. The cross marks the “death of death.” Jesus freed us from the “sting” of death (1 Corinthians 15:54–57). Sinners are saved by Christ’s death—not by His resurrection.

By His death, Jesus saved us from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1, 2). To conquer sin is to eliminate death. Jesus appeared in heaven with His blood (Hebrews 10). He is “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25, 26), not merely “immortality and life.” Hell is immortal. Our souls are immortal. Jesus is eternal “resurrection”! Paul promised our change (1 Corinthians 15:50–58). On the cross Jesus abolished death (2 Timothy 1:10). He took the power of death from Satan (2 Timothy 1:10). We are saved “. . . since a death has taken place” (Hebrews 9:15).

Jesus’ resurrection guarantees ours. What God did in a Jerusalem cemetery for Jesus, He will do for us. We were not made to die, but to live. What is the doctrine, the hope of the resurrection, right now? Nothing on earth is irreversible! My life is not futile; it has a purpose. My failures are not fatal; they are forgiven. My death is not final; there is a resurrection. What a faith! What a hope! We will be like Jesus! When He was on the cross, Satan was defeated, sin was overcome, and death was abolished. “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

*The cross . . .
there is no other way!*