

1 | The Truth of the Resurrection



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

For most of us, national or global news stories are just that: stories we saw or read in the news. It may be a once-in-a-lifetime experience, but on rare occasions we may be able to say, “I was there!”

Of course, none of us were there at the momentous event that changed everything—the resurrection of Jesus Christ—but we joyfully celebrate it every spring. But do we embrace the resurrection as an actual historical event or simply regard it as spiritual folklore? Many people favor the latter view. Others see the resurrection as an “inspiring story” about a great teacher named Jesus, but they don’t believe He is the true Messiah who was resurrected for all mankind.

The apostle Paul had something to say about that. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul made an objective truth claim: Jesus did physically rise from the dead, and many people could attest to that. They could say, “I was there!” Since Christ actually rose from the dead, His resurrection set into motion monumental implications for humanity.

GROUP TIME

THE POINT: The _____ of Christ is a historical

A false claim was spreading around Corinth and some Christians were beginning to believe it. Some were saying that Jesus didn't rise from the dead, as many had reported. Paul argued against this false claim that had garnered some popularity. It's an idea familiar to us today: people simply don't rise from the dead.² So, Paul began this section on the resurrection with a clear reminder of the gospel message—the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus—and its resultant importance for the work of salvation.

1 Corinthians 15:1-3 ¹ Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel I preached to you, which you received, on which you have taken your stand ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold to the message I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³ For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

Christ _____ .

Paul stated that he passed on to the Corinthian believers what he first received. Verses 3-5 are considered to be a creed, or set of stated beliefs, that was formulated between the time of Jesus' resurrection and Paul's writing of 1 Corinthians. This letter is dated at around AD 55,³ placing it within the first twenty-five years after Jesus' death. Knowing both the date of this letter and the time the earlier creed was conceived is important to us today because it demonstrates that even the earliest reports concerning Jesus included all three elements of the gospel story: Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. These statements weren't fabricated by Christians at a much later date.

1 Corinthians 15:4 ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Christ was _____ .

We can't overstate the significance of the resurrection and its historical nature; the very foundation of the Christian faith depends and hopes on the resurrection of Jesus.

- ▶ Paul continued in this verse to lay out the basics of the gospel: Not only did Christ die for our sins, but furthermore, He was buried and raised. Therein lies the uniqueness and importance of the gospel, the news that is profoundly good.
- ▶ Jesus entered into the world as a human and willingly paid the consequence of human sin: death (Romans 6:23). He didn't die for His own sin—He had no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). He died for our sin.
- ▶ Jesus died as a result of a horrific crucifixion, but His body didn't decay (Acts 2:31). Rather, as Paul related to the Corinthians, Jesus was physically resurrected on the third day.

1 Corinthians 15:5-8 ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers and sisters at one time; most of them are still alive, but some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one born at the wrong time, he also appeared to me.

Christ was seen _____ by many.

Paul continued in his line of reasoning by describing how Jesus appeared to many people after His resurrection. This argument makes no sense if Jesus' body was still in the tomb, and scholars generally agree that all evidence from the first century points to an empty tomb. In fact, ancient sources offer no other account of what happened to Jesus after His crucifixion. All we have are the accounts of those who saw Him.

Multiple accounts from different people reported seeing the resurrected Christ in various places. Paul reported that Jesus appeared to one or more of the disciples at least twice, and then later to a group of five hundred people. Paul stated this matter-of-factly, and if anyone questioned the truthfulness of what he said, they could ask those people themselves, since "most of them are still alive" (v. 6).

TRUE STORY

How would you respond to the following arguments against the historical accuracy of the resurrection? (Choose one.)

Jesus didn't actually die on the cross; He just fainted.

Jesus' disciples probably broke into the tomb and hid His body.

The eyewitnesses mentioned in the Bible aren't credible because they believed in Jesus; they were biased.

LIVE IT OUT

The resurrection of Jesus is the most robust answer for what happened two thousand years ago in Jerusalem.

► **Trust.** Commit your life to the risen Christ. “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). Read the inside cover of this book for more information.

► **Read.** For alternative theories about the resurrection and replies to those theories, read *Cold-Case Christianity* by Jim Warner Wallace (see pages 41-50).

► **Share.** Think of someone who needs to know the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. Write that individual’s name down and commit to pray daily for that person. Be ready to share how Jesus’ resurrection has changed your life.

TALK IT OUT

Want to go a step further? Gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, then use the following summary and questions for a deeper discussion.

We are bombarded with information—often touted as news—that too often is unsubstantiated. When we begin to research the information, it often turns up that facts are skewed and opinions are presented as fact. Many people view Jesus Christ in the same way. What they hear presented as truth gets written off as opinion or simply what someone wants to believe. The resurrection of Jesus Christ, however, is solidly grounded in fact and validated by eyewitnesses.

When did you first hear and believe the message of the gospel?

Which key sources of evidence for the death and resurrection of Jesus do you find most compelling?

How would you summarize or describe the gospel in your own words?

DAY 1: The resurrection was foretold by Scripture.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-2.

Critics of Jesus sometimes deny that He was a real person at all, let alone that He died. However, too much evidence testifies to the historical nature of Jesus' death. The gospel accounts, as well as other New Testament authors, bear witness to the truth of Jesus' death. Yet, more than just the gospel writers recorded accounts of Jesus' death, among other facts about His life. For example, non-Christians who also referred to Jesus' crucifixion in their writings include: Tacitus, the most trusted ancient Roman historian; Josephus, the Jewish historian; and Lucian of Samosota, the Greek satirist.⁴

None of these people had reason to support Jesus or His followers—some, in fact, were overtly opposed to them—which aids the trustworthiness of their comments about Christ's crucifixion. We might be tempted to think that corroborating testimony isn't that powerful, but having this much evidence concerning a historical person who lived two thousand years ago is rather impressive. We don't find this quantity of written testimony even for some of the prominent emperors of Rome, the most powerful empire in the world at that time! Because of the compelling historical testimony to Jesus' death, even John Dominic Crossan, certainly no conservative scholar, has written, "That he was crucified is as sure as anything historical can ever be."⁵

Be prepared to summarize your beliefs about Jesus' death and resurrection so you'll be ready to share when an opportunity arises.

"God has raised this Jesus; we are all witnesses of this."

ACTS 2:32

DAY 2: The resurrection was necessary for our salvation.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3.

In verse three, Paul backed up his claims by declaring, “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” Paul tied Jesus’ death back to the Old Testament prophecies that announced the coming Messiah. He had in mind statements in the Old Testament concerning the Messiah’s death, such as the “Suffering Servant” passage in Isaiah 53:5-9, and the description of piercing the Messiah’s hands and feet in Psalm 22:16.

Paul also hinted at the language Jesus used when He instituted the Lord’s Supper before His death. “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28).⁶ Paul stressed that it was critical for Christ to fulfill the Messiah’s role in atoning for the sins of the world. Yet, for Jesus’ atoning sacrifice to matter, Jesus actually had to die. Scriptures attested that a Messiah would come who would bring salvation. In order for that to happen, Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection were necessary.

In your Bible, underline the phrase “according to the Scriptures” as a reminder that Jesus came just as the prophets foretold to deliver us from sin.

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DAY 3: Jesus defeated sin and death.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:4.

Jesus' death and burial also remind us that sin has consequences. His death stands in stark contrast to our culture's current trend of redefining good and evil to be whatever each individual holds to be true. Through Jesus' death, however, we see that good and evil have resulting consequences and that no one escapes the result of evil in the world. As a result of human sin, we all will die. Yet, Jesus, the atoning sacrifice for *our* sin, the One who took on death itself, didn't remain dead. Jesus provided the only defeat of death in the history of the world: a true resurrection.

Think about this: If you want to reverse death, what do you have to do? You have to overcome it with life. Jesus' resurrection was an actual historical event in which the power of God reversed death. Why did God do this? The answer goes back to creation when God declared that all He made "was very good" (Genesis 1:31). God's creation is worthy of restoration and redemption because God Himself declared it to be "good."

To whom is God calling you to proclaim the good news of the resurrection? Begin praying today for an opportunity to share what you've learned about Jesus with this person.

DAY 4: Eyewitnesses boldly proclaimed the resurrection.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:5-6.

The resurrection is recorded in all four Gospels, inspired accounts written within seventy years of Jesus' life. In addition to Scripture, oral tradition also supports the resurrection of Christ. As noted earlier, Paul appeared to be quoting an oral creed used in the early church. The idea that Jesus rose from the dead wasn't something that "evolved" as the church grew; they spoke boldly of it from the beginning. The first sermon recorded in the Book of Acts made a bold proclamation before thousands: "God has raised this Jesus; we are all witnesses of this" (Acts 2:32).

The disciples had nothing to gain from making up a story of resurrection. Indeed, quite the opposite happened: all the apostles except John were killed because of their proclamation of the risen Messiah who appeared to them. They went from terrified individuals in hiding after Jesus' crucifixion to bold proclaimers of the good news of resurrection and salvation in Christ. Their eyewitness testimonies, their lives, and their deaths stand as powerful evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.

Take a look at your church's calendar of events for the next two weeks. Identify an opportunity to invite the person for whom you're praying for to attend. Then, extend the invitation.

DAY 5: The resurrection transforms lives.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:7-8.

Paul noted that Jesus appeared to James. As Jesus' half-brother, James knew Jesus probably better than any of the disciples—but he didn't believe Jesus was the Son of God or the Messiah. "For not even his brothers believed in him" (John 7:5). The details of James's conversion aren't known, but after Jesus' death, James had a change of heart and mind. He not only believed in Jesus as the risen Savior, but he also led the church in Jerusalem, one of the most hostile places for the early church (Acts 15:12-21, Galatians 1:19). Something dramatically changed his point of view from disbelief to profound belief after Jesus' death.

Let's also not forget Paul—formerly known as Saul of Tarsus, the Pharisee of Pharisees—who was relaying this information to the Corinthian Christians. Saul was a man who actively persecuted the church and gave up his entire community and religious status to proclaim Jesus to the Gentiles. He's not a great candidate for shoddy, easily falsifiable arguments. As a former Pharisee, Paul had been part of the highly educated elite. He knew logic and could skillfully present his case before various audiences (as seen in this chapter of 1 Corinthians and in Acts 17 and 26). He hadn't been an easy convert. Yet, he moved from persecuting Christian blasphemers of God to joining their ranks as the most prominent evangelist for Christ. And all this happened because he saw the resurrected Christ (Acts 9:4-6).

Jesus is alive!

How has Jesus' resurrection brought transformation to your life? Spend time today thanking Jesus for the difference His life and death have made.

*"We don't have to doubt Jesus.
His truth is certain and His victory is secured."*

LYSA TERKEURST