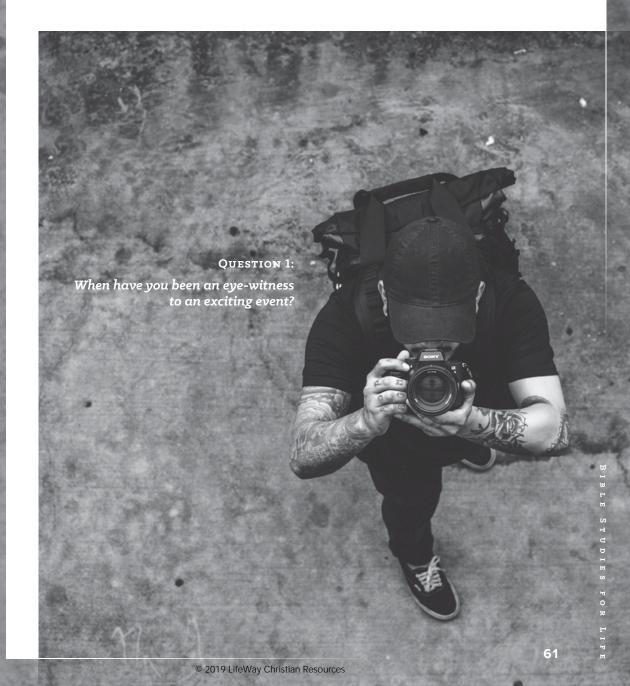
Special Focus:

The Truth of the Resurrection



THE POINT

The resurrection of Christ is a historical fact.



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. However, 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 do not 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 triggered monumental implications for humanity.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

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,

Paul was arguing against a culturally accepted idea that had influenced some Christian believers in Corinth. It's an idea familiar to us today: people simply don't rise from the dead.¹ 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 salvation.

Paul stated that he passed on to the Corinthian believers what he first received. Verses 3-5 are considered to be a creed that was formulated between the time of Jesus' resurrection and Paul's writing of 1 Corinthians. This letter is dated around AD 55, 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 because it demonstrates that the earliest reports concerning Jesus included all three elements of the gospel story; they were not a fabrication by Christians at a later date.

In verse three, Paul sets up his claims by declaring, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." Paul 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 His hands and feet in Psalm 22:16. Paul tied Jesus' death back to the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. He

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.

OUESTION 2:

What emotions do you experience when you consider that Jesus died for your sins?

More than just the Gospel writers, others recorded accounts of Jesus' death. 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
- Lucian of Samosota, the Greek satirist
- Mara Bar-Serapion, a prisoner writing to his son.³

We do not find this quantity of written testimony even for some of the prominent emperors of Rome. 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."

1 Corinthians 15:4

4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

We cannot 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.

OUESTION 3:

Why is the resurrection an essential element of the gospel?

Paul continued with the creed in verse 4 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 did not die for His own sin—He had no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). He died for ours. He died as a result of a horrific crucifixion, but His body did not decay (Acts 2:31). Rather, as Paul related to the Corinthians, Jesus was resurrected on the third day.

Jesus was laid in a tomb because He was a real human with a physical body like us. He was neither a disembodied spirit nor a mythological god nor a demi-god. He was both fully human and fully God, which afforded Him the power to lay down His own life and the authority to take it up again (John 10:18). Jesus' burial—the fact that he was laid in a physical tomb—reminds us that He was a physical human being.

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, and generally believing those beliefs should not have any real consequences. 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 and evil, the One who took on death itself, did not remain dead. Jesus provided the only defeat of death in the history of the world: 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 it was good.

Critics might say resurrection sounds like a fairy tale to soothe those who are afraid to die. If the resurrection were not true, Paul surely would not have labeled it a fairy tale. Far from it. He wrote a little bit later in this passage that if Jesus was not raised from the dead our faith is useless (1 Corinthians 15:14,17). His description of such a situation was not the stuff of fairy tales, but of hopelessness.



"God has revealed Himself in a decisive way in history, namely, in the resurrection of Jesus."

WILLIAM L. CRAIG

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.

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, yet scholars generally agree that all evidence from the first century points to an empty tomb.

Christ. Their eyewitness testimonies, their lives, and their deaths stand as powerful evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.

OUESTION 4:

What facts did Paul establish throughout these verses?

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-offactly, and if anyone questioned the truthfulness of what he said, they could ask those people themselves, since "most of them are still alive."

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

OUESTION 5:

How does Jesus' resurrection give you hope?

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). After Jesus' death, James 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).

Let's also not forget Paul. As a former Pharisee, Paul had been part of the highly educated elite. He had not 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!

RESURRECTION TRUTHS

Choose one of the following truths about the death and resurrection of Jesus, and write how it has helped to strengthen your faith.

1. Christ died for our sins.
2. Christ was buried and raised on the third day.
3. Christ appeared to many people after His resurrection.
4. Christ's death, burial, and resurrection occurred according to the Scriptures.

LIVE IT OUT

The resurrection of Jesus is the most robust answer for what happened two thousand years ago in Jerusalem. What will you do with that truth?
Trust Christ as your Savior and Lord. 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 other accounts. For alternative theories about the resurrection and replies to those theories, read Cold-Case Christianity by Jim Warner Wallace.
 Share Christ's resurrection. Think of someone who needs to know the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. Write that individual's name down and pray for that person. Pray also for an opportunity to share about Christ's resurrection. Be ready and willing to engage in a conversation on the powerful truth of the resurrection, an event that changes everything for us!
 Many see the resurrection as an "inspiring story" about a great teacher named Jesus. But history provides the evidence on which humanity can place this truth: Jesus is the true Messiah who was resurrected for all humankind.
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1. Adapted from Kistemaker, Simon J., Baker New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthian (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1993) 523; retrieved from https://app.wordsearchbible.com. 2. Gary Habermas and Michael Licona, The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004), 52. 3. Ibid., 49. 4. John Dominic Crossan, Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995), 145.