

THE RESURRECTION ESS09
1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-8 4/12/09

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you - unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also...

When I coached Little League baseball, at times we'd all get caught up in the excitement and take it too serious. I always felt that as the coach, part of my job was to try and keep the right perspective. I'd say, "Boys, it's just a game. This isn't brain surgery. Baseball isn't life and death." ...*Unless of course the Braves are playing the Mets...*

But Christianity IS life and death! In 1Corinthians 15 Paul sums up what the Bible calls "the Gospel" - "Christ died for our sins... He was buried, and He rose again the third day... and He was seen..." Jesus died by crucifixion – was buried in an identifiable tomb – then the exact same body, marked by His scars, came to life three days later. Christianity isn't a game or a mere religion. *It is life and death.*

Christianity is what the historians call *falsifiable*. It's open to objective scrutiny and investigation. Philosophies and metaphysical beliefs can hide behind subjective criteria. *Who can argue with an experience?*

Say you worship azalea bushes... You pray to the Great Azalea in your yard. You say, "*Life is more colorful since I trusted in the Great Azalea.*" I think you're a *blooming idiot*, but it's my word against your word.

But Christianity doesn't hinge on metaphysical boasts. If Jesus' resurrection was an outright lie, or the ruminations of ecstatic followers, or even a carefully crafted ruse... it would have easily been refuted. Just produce the body of Jesus and Christianity disappears...

Paul says in 1Corinthians 15:17, "*If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!*" The OT predicted and Jesus foretold He'd suffer, die, and rise the third day. Jesus said, "*I am the resurrection and the life.*" Jesus claimed to have power over life and death. If the grave had held Jesus He would not be *the Savior and the Lord*, but a *sinner and a liar*.

Jesus tied all His claims to historically verifiable events that occurred in time and space... Christianity isn't a mystery religion that involves secret societies, and clandestine meetings, and cryptic codes! Christianity was born on the evening news. It came to life in the streets of Jerusalem.

Two decades after the resurrection, Paul stood in a theater at Caesarea before the Roman Governor and Jewish King Agrippa to testify of Jesus. He said the Prophets foretold that Messiah would die and live again. But when Governor Festus heard the term "*resurrection*" he accused Paul of insanity. *Paul wasn't playing with a full deck*. Ancient paganism said you had to be mad to make such a claim. Romans believed in the afterlife, but never in the literal resurrection of a physical body.

By the way, have you noticed every Easter the pseudo-History Channel airs a program that claims the doctrine of the resurrection was borrowed from pagan mythology? *They suggest the bodily resurrection of Jesus was an invention of an overzealous Church... That's just not true!*

Festus was a Roman steeped in ancient paganism and he considered the notion of a resurrection as silly. The message of the resurrection gave the Church zero advantage. Rather than endear us to the world, it put us at odds... The only reason for faith in the resurrection is if it were true.

Festus was fresh off the boat from Rome, but the Jewish King Agrippa had been in town when the story broke. He was privy to the evidence. In Acts 26 Paul calls him out, “For the king, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escape his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner.” Agrippa would have to be living under a rock to not have heard about Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus staged His greatest miracle in plain view. News was all over town. The tomb was empty. And no reasonable explanation had surfaced *other than a miracle*. In fact, for 40 days, Jesus-sightings had become common occurrences.

This morning our **Essentials** series discusses an event of such gigantic proportion that it *shook the Jews, energized the disciples, conquered the Roman Empire, changed the whole world, and will alter ages to come*. If Jesus’ physical body decomposed in Jerusalem dirt or was eaten by wild dogs, *Christianity is a crock*... If the **resurrection** is true, then Jesus will decide your eternal destiny... *Everything* rides on the resurrection.

Here’s today’s statement of faith, “We believe Jesus conquered sin and death, and rose bodily from the dead as proof. He was seen by many eyewitnesses. Jesus ascended to God’s right hand where all things have been placed under His feet. Everyone in Christ shares in His authority.”

Of course, over the centuries the enemies of Christianity have mustered several alternative theories to explain the empty tomb. Here’s a few...

First, is the **Wrong Tomb Theory**... The women just went to the wrong tomb - saw a shroud, but no body – and assumed Jesus had risen.

Some years ago Kathy and I traveled to Ft. Lauderdale where she grew up. Kathy wanted to visit her dad's grave. We drove to a large graveyard – *there were no tombstones, just markers*. Though it'd been 20 years since she'd been there - Kathy knew the exact spot where her dad was buried!

It's demeaning and preposterous to suggest these women, who dearly loved Jesus, forgot His body's whereabouts. Besides, this grave was the property of a wealthy Jew named Joseph. It was well known real estate.

And remember, the Jewish leaders knew exactly where the grave of Jesus was located. They had Pilate dispatch soldiers to stand guard. Certainly, when the disciples started preaching the resurrection if they'd gone to the wrong grave their enemies would've uncovered the mistake by just presenting the body. They didn't, because Jesus was alive!

There's also the **Swoon Theory**... Jesus didn't really die. He fainted. The disciples thought He was dead. When they took Him off the cross, they put Him in a cool damp tomb where the chilly air revived Him...

Islam was an early perpetrator of this myth. The Koran suggests that Jesus just pretended be dead. He staged or feigned his death. Other people have suggested Jesus was drugged and appeared as if He were dead - but he wasn't. Again, this flies in the face of the facts...

Remember Jesus was *crucified* and the point of crucifixion was death. Professional executioners oversaw the operation. Killing was their job. A spear was thrust under Jesus' ribcage and out came blood and water. You don't have to be a doctor to know a spear through one lung and the heart insures a person's death. There's no back-up for a perforated heart.

Recall too that Jewish burial required dressing the corpse with as much as 100 pounds of spices, then wrapping it in tightly wound strips of cloth.

So you tell me, how does a man suffer severe blood loss, the trauma of torture, a ruptured heart, and the suffocation of burial - only to awake three days later, free himself from the shroud and spices, walk on impaled feet, pop His shoulders back into joint, tack up His internal organs - and with heavily damaged hands move a two-ton stone, fight trained Roman troops, then be in a such condition as to impress His disciples? Believe that, and I've got some swampland I'd like to sell you! It takes more faith to believe Jesus didn't die and rise, than to believe He did!

Another alternative for the empty tomb is the **Hallucination Theory**... the resurrection was just the result of wishful thinking. The disciples saw what they wanted to see... *But have you read the Gospels?*

For hallucination to occur there has to be some prior anticipation. The disciples had no expectation of a resurrected Jesus. They doubted the first reports that He was alive. When the women came with the news, Peter and John ran to the tomb to see for themselves. Recall Thomas refused to believe until He saw the scars in Jesus' hands and side.

In addition, Paul tells us in our text that 500 eyewitnesses saw Jesus alive at the very same time. Hallucination is a private phenomenon. 500 people don't freak out simultaneously and entertain the same illusion.

And understand the impact of these eyewitnesses. 1Corinthians was one of the earliest of the NT letters. In chapter 15:6 Paul points out that many of the 500 witnesses who saw Jesus alive were still accessible. Paul's implication is if you don't believe him, check it out for yourself. He'll give you names and addresses. Do your own investigation. Once again, the claims of Christianity can withstand empirical scrutiny.

And the granddaddy of all cover-ups was the **Stolen Body Theory**... This was the first false theory posed just hours after the resurrection. Listen to Matthew 28:11, "**Some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a large sum of money (hush money) to the soldiers saying, 'Tell them, His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.'**" Preposterous!

This didn't make sense – it's contradictory. *If the soldiers were asleep, how did they know it was the disciples who came and stole the body?* What lawyer wouldn't love to cross-examine that testimony? Besides, these soldiers would never have fallen asleep. A legionnaire could lose his life for neglecting his duty and botching an assignment.

And tell me, which of the disciples was brave enough to man-up - risk his life to slip a Roman battalion – maybe 16 soldiers strong - move a two ton stone - then walk away with the body? *The disciples had already proven they were cowards.* They bailed on Jesus when He needed them most. When Jesus rose from the dead they were behind closed doors afraid they would be next.

And if they lied about the resurrection what was their motive? The disciples lived their lives in obscurity - poor and persecuted. Peter was crucified upside down in Rome. Andrew was crucified on an X-shaped cross. James was beheaded. Thomas preached in India and was impaled with a spear. Bartholomew was skinned alive in Armenia. All but John died a martyr for the sake of the Gospel – and they tried unsuccessfully to boil John in oil. I guess he was one tough peanut. Here's the point, a person might lie for money or fame, but no one submits to torture and death for what they know to be a hoax.

Chuck Colson, the former hatchet-man for President Nixon, remembers the Watergate Scandal and how quickly the president's chief allies distanced themselves from Nixon to save their own skin. Colson writes, "**The most powerful men around the president of the United States could not keep a lie for three weeks. And you'd have me believe the apostles – powerless, persecuted, exiled, many martyred, their leader Peter crucified upside down – common men, gave their lives for a lie, without ever breathing a word to the contrary? Impossible.**"

Even Jesus' own mother and brothers embraced Him as God knowing full well that if they were wrong they would be damning their soul to hell. In Acts 6:7 we're told some of the Jews who a few days earlier had cried out for Jesus to be crucified, suddenly bowed to Him as Lord. Nothing short of the resurrection could provoke such allegiance. The only explanation for the empty tomb, that fits the facts, is the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Jesus conquered sin and death.

And not only does the Bible testify of the resurrection of Jesus, there are secular sources that do the same. Romans named [Tacitus](#), [Pliny the Younger](#) - the historian [Suetonius](#) - even the [Jewish Talmud](#) make historical references to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

Josephus was a Jew on the Roman payroll - a state historian. This is what He wrote, "[Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and Gentiles. He was Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, condemned him to the cross, those that loved him did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day... and the tribe of Christians, named from him, are not extinct at this day.](#)"

Thomas Arnold, a professor of History at Oxford University, summed it up, "[No one fact in the history of mankind... is proved by better and fuller evidence... than the fact that "Christ died and rose from the dead."](#)

In the three days after Jesus' crucifixion it appeared Rome had won. The leader of the uprising had been crucified. His key men had fled in the night. They denied their faith before little girls. They trembled behind closed doors in an upper room. *They would never be heard from again.*

Yet roughly 300 years later it was Rome who bowed to Jesus. For three centuries Christians were ordered to renounce Jesus as Lord or be thrown to the lions. Yet one by one, men and women gave themselves as martyrs until their faith could no longer be ignored. *Christians had no fear of death.* What was it that made these Christians so courageous? Obviously, the resurrection of Jesus had changed their attitude toward death.

Once, a missionary visited a tribe that lived deep in the jungle. He had to wade across a murky river to reach these needy people. There he found the whole tribe suffering from a dreaded disease. He recognized the illness as an infection that was easily treated with the proper antibiotic. And there were doctors in a nearby village who could administer the life-saving drug - *but the tribesmen refused to travel...*

The problem was the river. Superstition said it was home to demons, and death, and evil spirits. The tribesmen saw the river as the enemy. They feared the river. No villager had ever crossed to the other side. The witchdoctors said it was futile to try. These desperate people were trapped by the river. And that's why the missionary knew exactly what he needed to do to save the village from the life-threatening illness...

He led the tribe to the river's edge, and then waded into the water. The villagers begged their new friend not to risk his life. They were sure the river would swallow him up. They held their breath when he vanished under the water... Imagine their elation when he resurfaced on the other shore - *alive and well!* The river was harmless after all. Victory was won.

Jesus was a missionary sent from heaven to our village. We belong to a tribe called humanity that suffers a contagious and lethal disease - sin and death hold us in its grip. Jesus promised us *forgiveness for sin* and *life for death*. But no one was really sure He could deliver until he braved the icy waters of the grave and three days later appeared on the living shore. Today, death is no longer something to be feared. The resurrection of Jesus means death is no longer a *tombstone*, but a *stepping stone*.

And this is not the end of the story! The book of Acts tells us that for 40 days after Jesus' resurrection He "presented Himself alive... by many infallible proofs..." For six weeks Jesus kept dropping in... He was training His disciples to live in the awareness of His resurrection. He's alive and never out of touch.

Jesus appeared to the women who came to the empty tomb.

He showed Himself to the disciples in the Upper Room, and challenged a doubting Thomas to touch the scars in His hands and side.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 He made a private appearance to Peter.

Jesus cooked breakfast for seven of His men on the shores of Galilee.

He joined two disciples and walked with them on the Road to Emmaus.

On one occasion 500 eyewitnesses saw Jesus at the same time.

"Jesus presented Himself alive... by many infallible proofs!" And the most impressive of these proofs occurred just east of Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives. We're told in Acts 1, "While (the disciples) watched, (Jesus) was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight." Then two angels appeared and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go to heaven."

Christians call this event the **Ascension** of Jesus – His **exaltation**. This is vitally important. Today, we know where Jesus is and exactly what He's doing. He's not missing in action. After Jesus rose from the dead, He didn't fall off the grid. Jesus is in heaven - ruling on God's throne – preparing to return.

Today is Easter Sunday - yet sadly, churches are full of people with the wrong idea. They view the resurrection of Jesus like the final scene of an old Western... The *cavalry* shows up at *Calvary*. The cross saves us. Then because heroes live forever, Jesus rises Sunday morning. All day Easter we admire Jesus, but as the day ends He rides off into the sunset for the rest of the year... We'll repeat the festivities 364 days from now.

I hope you're not so foolish. Jesus didn't just wrap up His work on earth, then skip town. The God who *descended* also *ascended* back to heaven. Jesus is exalted. Heaven is God's active headquarters. In the Kingdom of God, heaven is the county seat – it's the capitol of God's government.

Revelation 4 raises the veil between the physical and spiritual realms. John is given a glimpse into heaven, and what dominates His vision is God's throne. Its emerald green, and a rainbow arcs over His seat... Apparently, it's plugged in. It's electrically charged. Lightning, thunder, and voices spark from the throne. Its seven lamps are all on fire. A crystal sea stretches out before it - strange beasts hover above it – mighty men fall prostrate and cast down their crowns to Him who sits on the throne.

And who does John see in the midst of God's throne in heaven? Listen to His own words, "I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes..." John sees Jesus, the Lamb of God, the crucified Christ, but He's no longer an innocent, sacrificial lamb tied to the horns of the altar. He's a lamb with horns on His head. *He's ram tough*. Jesus is Rambo. He owns the earth, and bides His time until He takes possession. Seven horns depict *perfect strength*. Seven eyes speak of *perfect judgment*.

And John isn't through... He sees angels, and leaders, and innumerable people shouting with a loud voice... "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" All heaven worships the Mighty Lamb forever and ever.

Understand a Jesus who's alive - yet rides off into the sunset - yields a deficient faith. How do you *worship* - or *pray to* - or *trust in* - or *fight for* a Savior whose MIA? To lean on Jesus you got to know where to find Him. Hey, Jesus didn't just vanish into thin air. He's not missing in action. Jesus is ruling in heaven. He answers prayer. He's our anchor in the storm. Through His Spirit He give gifts and empowers His Church.

Today, all heaven knows the whereabouts of Jesus. Right now, a man is sitting in God's place on God's throne. Jesus is the ultimate champion. 1Corinthians 15 tells us God has put all creation under Jesus' feet. He has complete and absolute authority. Here's a picture of Jesus' socks, "[The enemy is under My feet.](#)" He's Ruler and Sovereign over all. The Bible calls Jesus, "[King of kings and Lord of lords.](#)"

This means if you're Hindu, or Muslim, or Mormon, or Republican, or Lesbian, or Baptist, or Liberal, or Homosexual, or Hells' Angel, or Phi Beta Kappa, or a delivery man for Napa, or CEO, or MVP, or MD, or AARP, or BYOB, or Manager, or Senator, or Governor, or Obama, or Osama... One day, your knee is going to bow to the risen Lord Jesus!

Through the **incarnation** God became a man and a humble servant.

Through the **crucifixion** God paid in full the penalty of our sin.

Through the **resurrection** God won the victory over death.

But now through the **ascension** God has exalted Jesus over all nations, tribes, and tongues – all rulers, races, religions, and rituals – all ideals and ideas and ideologies – all people, places, perspectives, and preferences - all choices, cultures, customs, categories, and clubs - all methods, men, money, and morals – all families, fads, fancies, and fixations... Jesus is NOT *out there, some where*... Jesus reigns from heaven!

And here's good news... If you believe in Jesus you're seated with Him in heavenly places. You share in His authority over sin, death, and Satan.

[We're dead to sin and alive to God...](#)

[The nature of Jesus – God's love, is implanted in us...](#)

[The Holy Spirit gives us power and spiritual gifts...](#)

[The devil and demons can no longer bully us around...](#)

[The strongholds of sin are broken...](#)

[We have victory over fear and lust and worry...](#)

[We can move mountain-size obstacles through Christ who strengthens us...](#)

Usually, when people think of Jesus, 99% of the time they imagine Him as He use to be, in His incarnation – praying to His Father, or healing the sick, or forgiving sin, or teaching children, or washing the disciples' feet. The incarnate Jesus is our example... We too should live our lives humbly, with no expectation of special treatment, with the heart of a servant.

But we also should see Jesus as He is today – right now. Model the *Incarnate Jesus* - but worship the *Exalted Jesus*. Fear His coming judgment. Yield to His sweeping authority. You recall the Christ who came... But you will bow to the Christ who is coming...

And this is the line in the sand, is it not? There is no controversy when I say "[Jesus is my personal Savior...](#)" "[Jesus is the God of all Christians...](#)" "[Calvary Chapel worships Jesus...](#)" "[Jesus is my Lord and my King...](#)" No one argues with these assertions, or our right to make them.

But that's not the message God has called us to preach. We proclaim that Jesus is Lord over *every person*, and *every persuasion*, and *every population*. *Nowhere* and *no one* are outside of Jesus' jurisdiction.

And this is exactly what our 21st century, post-modern mindset rejects. Our world today renounces any form of authority... No one is over or above the circle of life. We're all just part of

the circle - swimming together in the sea of life. Thus, there's no objective pinnacle from which history, or people, or culture can be judged. Right and wrong, true and false - if they exist - can never be known, because no one is in position to differentiate. And most of the despair and confusion in our world is the result.

Just before the risen Lord ascended to heaven Jesus said to the people who would take His message to the world... "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." You can't have any more authority...

And Jesus tells His disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." In other words, there are nations who bow to different kings - people who serve various gods - individuals with diverse preferences and alternative lifestyles... Don't be intimidated, *tell them about Jesus*. No one is his own boss. Everyone is under the authority of Jesus!

And this is the message over which the blood of the martyrs was spilt. This is also the truth that puts Christians at odds with the world today. Yet this is the reality that changes lives and determines destinies, and lives forever... *Jesus is risen, alive, on the throne, and coming again.*

Let me close with today's statement, "We believe Jesus conquered sin and death, and rose bodily from the dead as proof. He was seen by many eyewitnesses. Jesus ascended to God's right hand where all things have been placed under His feet. Everyone in Christ shares in His authority."