

EASTER SUNDAY The Reality of the Resurrection

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Date: 27 March 2016

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[0:00] A gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for this Easter Sunday. We thank you for the reminder it is of Christ's resurrection and for what that means in our own lives.

So this morning, father, as we remember again, the reality of this resurrection, please give us ears to hear and minds to understand and hearts that would live in light of the risen Christ.

For we ask it in his name. Amen. Well, I grew up on Looney Tune cartoons. You know those ones with Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, the Roadrunner and so on.

And you remember how each kind of morning's cartoons ended, each episode ended? Something like this would come up on the next slide. That's all, folks. That's how each episode would end. I don't know if you remember that.

Now, Mel Blanc, who was the voice of almost all the Looney Tunes cartoons, characters, when he died in 1989, have a look at what his tombstone said. There it is. On the next slide is a closer option.

[1:11] The next slide, Barry. There's a closer one. Or not. Yep. There it is. At the top, that's all, folks. Now, that's what people often think when it comes to life after death.

Don't they? Once you die, that's all, folks. There is no life after death. For other people, though, it's about being reincarnated. Or on the next slide, perhaps it's like being one of those angels eating cream cheese Philadelphia in heaven on clouds.

Or for others, you simply become a ghost or spirit, like in the movies. In fact, even some Christians believe this. The head of the Anglican Church in Australia is called the primate.

Sounds like head monkey, doesn't it? Though that would make all of us Anglican clergy monkeys as well. No comment. But at the moment, our own Archbishop of Melbourne is the primate, and he rightly believes in the resurrection.

But it's not that long ago when the head of the Anglican Church said that Jesus did not bodily rise from the dead. It was just spiritual. And so it was the same also in Corinth in the day that Paul was writing this letter.

[2:23] You see, these Corinthian Christians were saying that when you die, it's either that's all, folks, or you become a spirit. Either way, they were saying there was no resurrection of the body.

And we can see the issue there in verse 12. Just have a look at verse 12. Verse 12, he says, But if it is preached, this is what they were doing, the apostles were preaching, that Christ has been raised from the dead, How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

Do you see the issue? Do you see what some of them were saying? And when they say no resurrection from the dead, they mean no bodily resurrection. And we know this because in the second half of the chapter, in verse 35, top of the next page there, it talks about the next question they have.

But someone will ask, How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come? You see, raising the dead involves a body.

That's why they ask, With what kind of body are the dead raised? And so in this passage, whenever we read resurrection of the dead, Paul is talking about a bodily, a physical resurrection.

[3 : 34] And so Paul writes this chapter to argue the reality of our physical resurrection one day. But in so doing, he also argues the reality of Christ's resurrection, which is what we celebrate today.

And the reality of Christ's resurrection is the basis for ours. Indeed, it's the basis for our hope, our whole lives. And so let's look firstly at the reality of Christ's resurrection, point one, verse one.

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you have received and which you have taken your stand. By this gospel, you are saved.

If you hold firmly to the word I preached to you, otherwise you have believed in vain. For what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance. And then he goes on to explain the gospel.

See, ever since chapter seven, Paul has been addressing issues that the Corinthians have written to him about. But now in chapter 15, he turns to what matters most, what is of first importance.

[4 : 40] And that is the gospel message about Jesus. Now, why is it so important? Well, verse two says it is by this gospel we are saved, saved from the punishment our sins deserve.

But did you notice the warning in verse two? It only saves if we hold firmly to it. Only if we keep believing it. And this gospel message, we are told, includes the resurrection of Jesus.

So look at the rest of verse three, where he unpacks this gospel message. So the gospel is that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve.

After that, he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have died or fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to the apostles.

And last of all, he appeared to me also as one abnormally, or sort of coming an apostle late in time. You see, Paul affirms the reality of Christ's resurrection by firstly saying that the gospel proclaimed it.

[5 : 55] The message he received, he has passed on to them, and it included the resurrection of Jesus. Now, of course, someone might argue that this gospel message was made up over time.

Perhaps Paul received it late in life, or perhaps the resurrection part was added later on. And so for us Christians who believe such a message, people say we have blind belief.

Have you ever heard people say that before? They've said it to me. You Christians have blind belief. But we don't. We have built belief. Belief that is built on evidence.

And so I'm going to show you four pieces of evidence we have for the resurrection of Jesus so that we can be confident it is real. And the first piece of evidence are these very verses, verses 3 to 7.

Most scholars think they were a creed of some sort that Paul received and that he then passed on to others and then included in his letter here in chapter 15. And this creed, these verses, are regarded by almost every critical scholar as perhaps one of the earliest New Testament writings we have.

[7 : 07] written very close to the events themselves. And why does that matter? Well, because the closer the writing is to the event, the more reliable it is as evidence, the more likely it is to be historically accurate.

In fact, one scholar said this sort of data is the data that historians of antiquity drool over. It's that good. And it's not just Christian scholars who say this.

On the next slide is an atheist called Gerb Ludman. He writes a book to convert people to atheism. And he admits that even these verses here and the quotes on the screen are written within the first two years after the crucifixion of Jesus.

And so it makes them reliable, very reliable as historical evidence. And the problem for Ludman, of course, is that he just says, well, it can't be true.

So yes, they saw it. Yes, it's an accurate account, but it was actually just one big hallucination. The problem with that, of course, is it's even more unlikely for so many people to have the exact same hallucination at different times and in different places.

[8 : 15] That's more unlikely than it is for God to raise a man from the dead. But the point is, what we have in chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians is a summary of the gospel message written very close to the events themselves so that people had opportunity to check it out, to see if it was true or not, to interview the people who witnessed it and so on.

And if it was false, people would have rejected Christianity and it would have died out. But instead, Christianity grew quickly and has spread widely. And these verses have been preserved carefully, all of which makes it even more likely to be true.

And this gospel message always included the resurrection of Jesus from the start. So that's the first piece of evidence. The gospel, this reliable account, included the resurrection of Jesus.

The second bit of evidence in these verses is actually more for the Jews. It's that Christ's resurrection was promised in the Old Testament scriptures. So in verses 3 and 4, you have that repeated phrase.

Do you see there? According to the scriptures. It was promised, in other words, in the Old Testament. So for example, on the next slide, we have Psalm 16, which says, you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

[9 : 34] In other words, God will raise his Holy One, his Anointed One, his Messiah, from the dead. And both Peter and Paul quote this Psalm in the New Testament in connection with Jesus' resurrection.

And so for the Jews, the fact that scripture promised it is evidence that the resurrection of Jesus was real. The third bit of evidence is that Jesus was seen by lots of people.

So in verses 5 and 6, we are told that Jesus appeared to the 12 and then to more than 500 at the same time. And many of whom, it says, are still living. And so it could be questioned by others.

They could, you know, they could have shown the apostles to be lying and said, no, I was there. He didn't rise from the dead. But because they witnessed it and did see it, people kept believing it.

And what's more, it describes different appearances, not just different people, but it actually, these appearances took places on different occasions. And they are backed up by what we read in the other gospel accounts.

[10 : 37] And so if you doubted one person, you could always ask another and another and another. And for historians, the fact that there are multiple witnesses from multiple sources at multiple occasions means it is more likely to be true.

A fourth and perhaps the biggest piece of evidence of all is that the disciples believed it so much so that it changed how they lived and were even willing to die for it. I mean, in verse nine, Paul talks about how he used to persecute the church.

Do you remember? And yet he changed from persecuting the Christian church to proclaiming Christianity. What caused such a dramatic change?

Or what made a scared group of Jewish men and women who ran away when Jesus was arrested and then locked themselves in the upper room, what made them suddenly become bold preachers standing in front of crowds declaring that Jesus is alive?

What happened to make them suddenly accept Gentiles who for centuries they had shunned? What made them, after centuries, change their holy day from Saturday to Sunday?

[11:51] What was it that made them all willing to give their lives for Jesus? Well, they say it was the very real resurrection of Christ. And such a change cannot be explained by an hallucination.

And so on the next slide, the late great Jewish historian, Pincus Lapid, I quoted him last week, but here's another quote from him. He said, If the defeated and depressed group of disciples overnight could change into a victorious movement of faith based only on auto-suggestion or self-deception, you know, hallucination, without a fundamental faith experience, well then that would be a much greater miracle than the resurrection itself.

You see what he's saying? If the change in the disciples was just because they had a hallucination, well that's a greater miracle than the resurrection itself. And so we have courtroom judges in history who say that given the evidence we have for the resurrection, it has to be real.

Now I think I might have shown you these couple before, but it's worth seeing again. So in the 19th century, we have Sir Edward Clarke who said, To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court, I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling.

He's put people away for less evidence. And in this century, on the next slide, we have Justice Peter Young, now retired Supreme Court judge of New South Wales, said in relation to the evidence for the resurrection, he says, My analysis is that the resurrection passes the test, the burden of proof test.

[13:28] It is important that this be said and accepted. You see, the resurrection of Jesus is real. For as we've seen in these first 11 verses, the gospel proclaims it, the scriptures promised it, people witnessed it, and the disciples like Paul believed it, so much so that their lives changed overnight, and they're willing to die for Jesus.

Now I've deliberately spent a bit of time reminding you about the reality of Christ's resurrection for two reasons. First, because let's face it, it's probably the hardest part of the Christian message to believe, isn't it?

It's the bit people have trouble believing. And so we forget that there's actually good evidence for it. But I want you to remember the evidence so that you can be confident in your own faith and confident in sharing it with others.

That's the first reason. The second reason, though, is since Christ's resurrection is real, it has huge implications for us, which is why today is such a day to celebrate.

And Paul goes on to show these implications. He shows them negatively by what we lose if Jesus was not raised, and then he shows them positively by what we gain since he was raised.

[14:45] And we'll move more quickly through these next couple of points. So point to verse 12. See what Paul says here?

If Christ is not raised, then both the apostles' preaching and our faith is useless. It's in vain. It's a waste of time. Paul explains further in verse 15.

He says, more than that, we're then found to be false witnesses about God. Because we testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.

For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. Do you see what he's saying? If Christ has not been raised, then their preaching was not just useless, it was false.

It was lies. And they were saying false things about God, which would have been unthinkable for a Jew. In fact, in the Old Testament, false prophets were to be killed.

[15:57] And so the apostles preaching Christ's resurrection, if it's not real, makes them false prophets. But it's not just their preaching that's the issue. It's our faith. See verse 17?

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you're still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep, that have died in Christ, are lost.

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, then, well, we of all people are most to be pitied. See what he's saying? If Christ has not been raised, then our faith in Jesus is also useless.

Because no matter how much we believe, there's just no forgiveness for sins. There's no life after death. See, sin and death go together.

Death is like the debt collector for sin. Because of our sin, we owe a debt, and it's our very lives. And death will come to collect.

[16:59] But on that very good first Friday, Jesus paid for our sins, so that death had no one to collect anymore. Jesus paid our debt at the cross, and in so doing, he defeated death, you see.

His resurrection, in other words, is proof that he has paid for our sins. Resurrection is like a ticket that you buy to the footy, or to the movies. The ticket is proof that you've paid your money, so you can watch the game.

Well, the resurrection is proof that Jesus has paid for our sins, and so defeated death. If he was not raised, if he remained in the grave, then, well, did he really defeat death?

No. And since death and sin go together, then if he didn't defeat death, well, he hasn't paid for our sins either. So, verse 17, without the resurrection, we're still in our sins.

What's more, verse 18, we have no hope of heaven. No hope of being raised, just a new physical life, where we'll see God face to face, and all our loved ones, who have fallen asleep, or died as Christians.

[18:02] We have no hope of seeing, and being with them again, for they are lost. But it doesn't stop there. Verse 19 says, that no resurrection means, we have no idea of reality. Rather, Christians, we Christians, are deluded fools, who should be pitied, by all people.

And in case that's not enough, Paul says, if Jesus is not raised, then there's no point of doing work for Jesus, living for Jesus. In fact, there's no point to life.

I just skipped down to verse 30 for a moment. Verse 30, he says, And for us apostles, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I face death every day.

Yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus, our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus, that is, dangerous opponents of Paul, with no more than human hopes, what have I gained?

And if the dead are not raised, then let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. You see, if there's no resurrection, then why on earth would Paul put his life on the line to preach about Jesus?

[19:10] Why work for the Lord if there's no resurrection? A friend of mine was a missionary in Indonesia for almost 10 years, teaching the Bible and helping others to teach it, so people could become Christians and go to heaven and so on.

And they spent the first year there with diarrhea every single week, for the whole year, both he and his wife. Now, it took a year for their bodies to adjust to the living conditions, but why would you put yourself through that?

Why would you put your family through that, if there's no resurrection, if there's no heaven for people to go to? Indeed, if there's no resurrection, not only is working for Jesus a waste of time, but we have no purpose in life.

Paul says, if this life is all there is, then, well, eat, drink, because that's all, folks. Tomorrow we die. And if that's the case, then this life is really just one long line to the crematorium.

All you can do is enjoy life in the queue while you wait, and sure, there's enjoyment to be had, but in the end, death will win. Death will have the last say, and death will turn all your work to naught.

[20:22] I mean, it's why people like leaving a legacy these days, because otherwise, when they die, what was the point? Nobel Prize winner, Bertrand Russell, who was perhaps one of the best known atheists of the 19th century.

This is what he wrote. All the labors of the ages, or the devotion, or the inspiration, or the brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system.

Cheery. You see, if the resurrection of Christ is not real, then not only is there no forgiveness of sin, there's also no hope of seeing anyone in heaven.

We have no idea of reality, and there is no point serving Jesus, and no purpose to life. For all is destined to extinction. Are you depressed yet?

Don't be, because Paul turns to the positive in verse 20. Do you see there? But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

[21:33] For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive, but each in his own turn.

Christ the first fruits, then when he comes, those who belong to him. See, Christ has indeed been raised, and so he has indeed paid for our sins.

What's more, Paul says, the resurrection began a chain reaction, which will end with our resurrection in turn. He says, Jesus' resurrection is like the first fruits of a harvest.

When you see those first fruits, you know there is more to come. Those who have fallen asleep, who have died as Christians, will one day rise. For just as Adam's sin guaranteed we would sin, so Christ's resurrection guarantees we will rise.

Indeed, our resurrection has to come. It must happen. If Jesus is to completely destroy death. You see verse 24? He says, when everyone is raised, then the end will come when he hands over the kingdom of God to the Father, after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power.

[22:45] For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. And the last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he has put everything under his feet.

Now these verses here are a little bit complicated, but the point is, Jesus has been raised as king over everything, including death. But death still exists today, doesn't it?

People still die. You see, while Jesus defeated death that very first Easter, he has not fully destroyed death. Death is still around.

And so while Jesus rules over death because he's defeated it, he has not fully exercised that rule and destroyed it. And the only way he can destroy it is by raising everyone from the dead.

For when everyone is raised, there'll be no more death in the world. It will be like smallpox, a disease that once took lives, but now is eradicated and destroyed from the face of the earth.

[23 : 46] Of course, as we heard in our first reading from Daniel, some will be raised to eternal life and others to eternal death. But because Jesus was raised as king over death, then he must destroy death in the end for him to be the true king over everything, to exercise his rule fully and completely.

And so that means we must be raised in the end. Paul's point in these verses means that Christ's resurrection as king guarantees ours.

It means not only do we have forgiveness of sins, but we also have the hope of heaven that is certain. We can be sure that we will see God face to face and we can be sure of seeing our Christian loved ones face to face.

When the wife of a friend of mine died some years ago, leaving behind her four children, my friend wrote this. And my gorgeous Bronwyn went to be with Jesus in glory at 4.45pm today.

On the next slide is the rest of what he said. Although it was gut-wrenching to see her body decay before our eyes, we are so thankful that her suffering is over. And far more importantly, we are grateful that today is Easter Sunday, the day we remember that Jesus rose from the dead to rule with all authority and conquer death, the last enemy.

[25 : 01] And so through broken hearts, we cry, hallelujah. We will grieve for a while yet, but never ever as people without real hope.

Resurrection gives us such certain hope because of Christ's resurrection, ours is guaranteed. And so we have hope for the life to come. Hope of seeing God face to face.

Hope of seeing our loved ones in Christ face to face. But we also have purpose in life. And the purpose is to keep living for Jesus, to do his work, because it's not in vain.

That's how Paul ends the chapter. Have a look at the last verse of the chapter. We'll close on this. He says, Do you see what he's saying?

He's saying, because of the resurrection of Christ is real, then living as a Christian is not deluded. We are not to be pitied, but it is worthwhile. It is really worth standing firm.

[26 : 16] It is really worth not being moved from our faith. It is really worth doing Christ's work, seeking first his kingdom, serving him in whatever ways we can. Even if it means missing out on some things in life.

Why? Because we will be raised, we who believe will be raised to new life in heaven. And that life will more than make up for whatever we miss out on in this life, serving him.

In fact, our eternal existence will be more real, more significant, more fulfilling than this life can ever be. So will you continue to stand firm as Christians? Will you continue to let nothing move you from serving the Lord Jesus?

Will you continue to find purpose in living for him and doing his work, knowing that it is not in vain? As one church signs, I saw put it on the next slide, come work for the Lord.

The work is hard, the hours are long, and the pay is low, but the retirement benefits are out of this world. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we thank you for today.

[27 : 26] And we thank you that today is really a day to celebrate. For this day, we remember the very real resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in turn guarantees ours, who in turn guarantees forgiveness of sins and hope of heaven, and gives us purpose in life.

And so far, we pray that you would help us to joyfully remember this day and what it, what it means, and to keep living in light of Christ's very real resurrection. We ask it in his name.
Amen.