

Resurrection: Past, Present and Future
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It's ironic that Easter and April Fool's Day fall on the same day this year. Many people think that Christians are foolish because we believe in:
 A God they don't think exists
 A Bible they believe is irrelevant
 A Savior they don't believe is alive.

The irony is that Psalm 14:1 says: *Only fools say in their hearts, "There is no God."*

So – who is truly foolish? Believers or unbelievers? For me – there is so much evidence that God exists – that the Bible is His Word – and that Jesus rose from the dead – that it would be foolish for me to not believe it!

We are in a sermon series teaching through the book of Colossians. The theme of this book is Christ Above All.

What proves that Christ is above all?

What proves that faith in Jesus is the only way of salvation?

Why aren't all the other world religions just as valid?

The proof that Jesus Christ is above all is what we've been celebrating today: the resurrection. The resurrection sets Christianity apart from all other religions.

Christianity is the only religion that has a Savior.

Christianity is the only religion that has a cross.

Christianity is the only religion that has a resurrection.

Christianity is the only religion that is not based on your own works. Christianity tells us we cannot be good enough on our own. We have all sinned and we all need a Savior. We need forgiveness.

Christianity is the only religion whose God says I love you so much that I will give my own Son to die in your place to pay for your sin.

The resurrection of Jesus is the heart of Christianity. Please understand this – Christianity rises or falls based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

If there is no resurrection – we are still dead in our sins.

Without the resurrection, there is no Christianity.

Without the resurrection, there is no salvation.

Without the resurrection, there is no eternal life.

But if there is a resurrection – that proves that Christ is above all and we must place our faith in Him for salvation and eternal life. 1 Corinthians 15:13-20 says:

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have 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. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.

One of the most important questions we will ever have to face is what do we believe about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I want to talk today about Resurrection: Past, Present and Future. I got that idea from reading through Colossians this week looking for verses on the resurrection. Let's first look at:

1- Past Resurrection

By past resurrection, I mean the resurrection of Jesus from the dead 2,000 years ago. Colossians 1:18 says:

And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy.

Christ has supremacy – authority, power and Lordship – because He is the firstborn from the dead. This does not mean literally that he was the first who rose from the dead for He himself raised up Lazarus and others.

We find the story of Lazarus in John 11:17-45. Lazarus had been dead and buried for 4 days. When Jesus arrived at his home, the family went out to meet Him.

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give You whatever You ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"

"Yes, Lord," she told Him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

Then Jesus went to the tomb of Lazarus and raised him from the dead. Several people in the Bible were brought back to life by Jesus, but every one of those who came back to life eventually died. That's why He has pre-eminence among them all - because He is the only one who was resurrected never to die again. That's because Jesus was not only resurrected – He is the resurrection!

There's a big difference here. Lazarus was resurrected – but he was not THE resurrection. Jesus IS the resurrection!

Christ's resurrection proves that Christianity is true and that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. There are many proofs that the resurrection of Jesus Christ

is true. Belief in Jesus is not a blind leap in the dark – His life is grounded in the facts of history.

Acts 1:3 says that *Jesus presented Himself alive after His crucifixion by many convincing demonstrations, unquestionable evidences and infallible proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days.*

What are these proofs?

THE TESTIMONY OF HISTORY AND EYEWITNESSES

History is recorded by eyewitnesses - those who observed it and history proves the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus are some of the most provable facts in history. There is more historical proof about Jesus than any ancient figure – more than Caesar or Alexander the Great.

Historical evidence says that over a period of 40 days after His resurrection, Jesus appeared alive a dozen different times to more than 515 people. 515 people! That's a lot of eye witnesses. 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 says:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: 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 Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles...

The resurrected Christ was seen by over 500 people! How many witnesses does it take to prove something?

I mean – if you and I have different stories, it's your word against mine. But if I have another witness, the weight of proof is on my side. But what if I had over 500 witnesses? That would be indisputable evidence! The resurrection of Jesus Christ is true because over 500 eyewitnesses say so!

CHANGED LIVES OF THE DISCIPLES

Matthew 26:56 reveals that all the disciples deserted Jesus and ran when he was taken by the authorities and crucified. They hid in fear with the doors locked. Yet, they all became bold, fearless men.

Most of them died martyrs' deaths for the lord. What changed them? The only reason for this incredible change was the resurrection of Jesus. They saw Him. They knew He was alive and that changed them forever.

CHANGED LIVES TODAY

The best proof of the resurrection and that Jesus is still alive is the fact that He did not stop changing lives after He died. He rose again and He is still in the

business of changing lives today. I can tell you countless stories of people being drastically changed, dramatically healed and restored. And I believe God can change your life!

Of course, one of the greatest proofs of the resurrection is:

THE EMPTY TOMB

You can visit the bones of Buddha, or go where Confucius is buried, or where Mohammed is buried. You can also visit where Jesus was buried. But, if you go there, you'll find an empty tomb. There's a sign there that says: He is not here; He is risen!

The unanimous testimony of history is that the tomb was empty on Easter Sunday. Even His opponents admitted it was vacant on Easter!

Now, the question is, how did it get empty? All evidence points to the fact of the resurrection. Everyone who truly examines the facts comes away changed.

Lee Strobel was an atheist who wrote for the Chicago Tribune. His wife got saved and Lee wanted to prove to her that there is no God, so he started examining the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He ended up becoming a believer and writing books called, *The Case for Christ*, *The Case for Faith* and *The Case for Easter*. Why did this skeptic end up a believer? Because the resurrection of Christ is true. And if you will examine the facts – you too will discover it is true!

2- Future Resurrection

The Bible teaches that one day all of us will die. But it also teaches that we will be resurrected and appear before God. Hebrews 9:27 says:

It is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment.

God gives us many chances to get it right in life, but after we die, there are no more chances. We die once – and after that we will be resurrected and face God's judgment. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 teaches that believers will be resurrected.

For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Believers can encourage one another with those words. But we must also warn unbelievers with these words that Jesus spoke in John 5:28-29:

Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

Many unbelievers mistakenly believe that since God is a God of love – they can live like they want with no consequences. But Jude 14-15 says:

See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of His holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.

Wow! That sounds pretty serious! You see God is a God of love - but His love is not the way of salvation! His love made a way of salvation by sending His Son to die in your place. That requires you to repent of your sins and place your faith in Jesus. Acts 17:30-31 says:

God commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to Him. For He has set a day for judging the world with justice by the Man He has appointed, and He proved to everyone who this is by raising Him from the dead.

You see, in the future resurrection, God is going to judge with justice – not love. It will be too late to try to repent then – repentance must happen now. Faith must happen now. That’s how you are born again and your name is in the book of life. Revelation 20:12-15 says:

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Everyone will stand before God’s throne one day – including you!
Everybody will be judged based on what they’ve done.
But the key will be this: is your name in the book of life?
If it is, you will be saved. If it is not, you will be lost forever.

Faith in the past resurrection prepares us for the future resurrection. It also empowers us for the:

3- Present Resurrection

Since Jesus resurrected from the dead and since we will be resurrected to live with Him forever – how does that impact us now? Colossians 2:13 says:

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ.

Before you are born again – you are dead in your sins. But when you are born again – you receive the life of Christ. Colossians 2:6 says:

Having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Notice that our salvation is based on faith in the resurrection power of God. The power of the resurrection is also the power that changes people. Ephesians 1:19-20 says:

I pray that you will begin to understand how incredibly great His power is to help those who believe Him. It is that same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him in the place of honor at God's right hand in heaven.

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to those who believe in Him. Paul made it emphatically clear that no power has ever equaled or rivaled the power that was required for Christ's resurrection. It was the greatest manifestation of power that the universe has ever witnessed. It literally seized Jesus from death's grip, raised Him back into His body, and then continued to lift Him up through demonic principalities, powers, might, and dominion until He was seated at His throne at the right hand of the Father.

No power in hell or on earth, could resist this divine power. And that same power is available to those who believe in Christ. So – if you're thinking you don't have the power to change your life, you're wrong.

The resurrection power of Jesus can overcome anything!
 Resurrection power forgives all your sins!
 Resurrection power cancels out your past life and gives you new life.
 Resurrection power gives you a new identity in Christ.
 You are no longer defined by your past – you are a new creation in Christ!
 Resurrection power gives you hope for your future!

1 Peter 1:3 says:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

In other words – when we have faith in Jesus Christ – when we believe in His death and resurrection – we have a new birth. We are born into a new way of life. We are born into a new family called the family of God. But we are also born into hope.

Jesus is the resurrection and the life and He loves to bring life back to what is dead. That same resurrection power that raised Christ from the dead 2000 years ago is available to change your life today. 1 Corinthians 1:18 says:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Some of you feel dead inside – resurrection power can change that!

Some of you are going broke and you’ve lost your hope - resurrection power can change that!

Some of you feel your marriage is dead and should probably be buried - resurrection power can change that!

Some of you have wounds from the past that you think will never heal – resurrection power can change that!

Some of you are struggling with a sin or an addiction – drugs, alcohol, sex, pornography, gambling - resurrection power can change that!

Some of you have believed and prayed for something for a long time and you’ve given up hope of ever receiving an answer - resurrection power can change that!

Some of you are so down on yourselves that you don’t even want to go on living - resurrection power can change that!

Some of you don’t even know if you believe in God anymore - resurrection power can change that!

The most powerful resurrection in life happens when we are born again. The Bible teaches that before we believe in Christ we are dead in sin. Ephesians 2:1; 4-5 says:

Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. But God is so rich in mercy, and He loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)

So – how do we receive that saving grace? Romans 10:9-10 says:

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. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Notice that salvation requires believing in the resurrection of Jesus.

I ask you as Jesus asked Martha – “Do you believe this?”

This isn’t a multiple-choice question – it’s true or false – yes or no.

All of us must make a decision based on that truth. We can either accept it as true or dismiss it as false – but we cannot just ignore it. This is the most important question ever asked! And the way you answer will determine your eternal destiny. If you say “YES” to that question, that one YES can change your life forever. The Bible teaches that apart from Christ you are lost. You need to be saved and salvation is only found in Christ.

This passage shows us what you need to do to be saved:

Acknowledge your need for forgiveness and salvation

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and His resurrection

Confess Him as Lord

Do this and the resurrection life and power of Jesus Christ will change your life forever because He is the resurrection and the life!