

We Believe Part 11

What do you believe? It determines your choices, it affects how you deal with people, how you deal with setbacks and trouble, how you handle success or fame. What you believe will set the course for how you live and how you will face death. What do you believe? Here is what the followers of Jesus Christ believe. Let's say it together: **I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy, apostolic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.**

This is what we believe. Look around this morning because there may be some crazy people sitting next to you. Think about it. You are sitting near someone who said they believe that Jesus Christ is God's Son and that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. That's not possible is it? You may be sitting next to someone that just declared they believe that this man, Jesus, died, was buried, went to the place where dead people go (better translated as *hades*, the place of the dead) and then on the third day rose from the dead! That is not something modern or post-modern folks like us can believe is it? That someone rose from the dead? We are going to focus on the resurrection this morning. Think of what we are saying!

From the beginning that is what the followers of Christ said. The tomb was empty because Jesus rose from the dead. They didn't just theorize that to be the case. "Hmm, no body, I bet he rose from the dead and went back to heaven." No! He rose from the dead and then appeared to the disciples. "Well, maybe they just made up the story." That's what the Jewish leaders did. They made up a story to explain the disappearance of the body. They paid the soldiers that had been guarding the tomb to say the disciples came during the night and stole his body away (Matthew 28:13). But it wasn't just the missing body and empty tomb that caused people to say he rose from the dead. It was the eyewitness accounts of people who saw, spoke with, walked with even ate with the risen Lord. Jesus sightings in Jerusalem, on the road to Emmaus, in the Galilee.

It wasn't only the disciples that saw the risen Lord. There were others, eyewitnesses to Jesus being alive again after having witnessed his death and burial. It was stunning and seemed impossible, yet the evidence was overwhelming that Jesus indeed had risen from the dead. Consider what the apostle Paul wrote. **“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 living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also.”**
I Corinthians 15:3-8

This wasn't a late theory of Paul. It is obvious since Paul said “what I received I passed on to you” that he didn't create what scholars call an early “creed”. (It sounds like the creed we stated doesn't it?) The doctrine that Jesus died, was buried and then rose from the dead on the third day was in place from the very beginning. In fact even some liberal scholars believe this “ancient text” that Paul is quoting was in use by as early as 30-33 A.D.

Paul tells us that he himself met with the eyewitnesses. He wanted to make sure he was proclaiming the truth. He met with Peter, he met with James the brother of the Lord who himself didn't believe that Jesus was Messiah and Lord until he saw him after the resurrection (John 7:5). Paul met with the apostle John. These men confirmed they had seen the risen Lord. This wasn't a late idea created by Paul or second century Christians. This was believed, taught and proclaimed from the beginning because these people saw Jesus alive after the crucifixion!

My point is, even if you think miracles don't happen and people can't be raised from the dead, something happened that convinced the disciples along with another 500 people or more that Jesus was alive and risen from the dead. That is a whole lot of crazy folks if it didn't happen.

Here is the deal. For everyone who can't believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, here is all you have to do. Just fill in the blank. **“Jesus didn't really rise from the dead. What really happened was _____.”** When you finish filling in the blank you will likely discover that in the past 2,000 years someone has already come up with that possibility and it has been disproved. Nothing else can explain the dramatic change in the

disciples. They ran when Jesus was arrested in the garden, hid behind closed doors after his crucifixion, but a few weeks later on Pentecost they publicly proclaim Jesus, risen from the dead! Peter declares to the citizens of Jerusalem, **“God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.” Acts 2:32** They were witnesses, so convinced of what they had seen that they were willing to die for what they believed. Gary Habermas wrote, “...the disciples died for more than being sold out to a cause. They willingly gave their lives precisely because they were absolutely convinced that they had seen the risen Jesus.”

They were convinced as Paul wrote, **“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...” 1 Corinthians 15:3-4**

This truth of the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was the centerpiece of every sermon and every action of the disciples. They went from town to town proclaiming that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God who had come to bring salvation and eternal life to all. “Well, tell us more.” “This Jesus was crucified as a criminal but the truth is, he was the sinless Son of God. He didn’t die for crimes he committed, he died for crimes and sins we committed. He died as our substitute, he died in our place.” “Well, how can we know for sure that his death provided the forgiveness for our sins?” “God showed his acceptance of the perfect sacrifice by raising Jesus from the dead!”

The resurrection shows God’s acceptance of the sacrifice made for our sins. Here is the proof. The resurrection of Jesus is God’s public stamp of approval and affirmation and confirmation of all that Jesus did. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 1 that Jesus **“[Jesus] was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.” Romans 1:4.** In Romans 4 Paul tells us, **“[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” Romans 4:25.** A better translation might be, **“Jesus was put to death because of our offences and was raised to life for our acquittal.”** The resurrection testifies that our sins have been forgiven because the sacrifice has been accepted. We’ve been acquitted!

Jesus said “I have come to give my life as a ransom for many.” His death on the cross was the ransom given. The resurrection is God saying, “The ransom has been paid, the sacrifice is accepted, the mission of salvation and reconciliation has been completed. Salvation and

eternal life is now available to all who will place their in Christ as Savior and Lord.”

The resurrection shows God’s acceptance of the sacrifice for our sins. **The resurrection demonstrates the divine power of God.** R. A Torrey wrote, **“Every effect must have an adequate cause...and the only cause adequate to account for the Resurrection of Christ is God, the God of the Bible.” ...R.A. Torrey**

For all of time men lived and then men died and that was the end of it. They were powerless to do anything about death, but God demonstrated his power by raising Jesus from the dead. Recall again the passage from Romans 1, that “Jesus was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.” The resurrection shows both God’s divine power and the certainty that Jesus is indeed the divine Son of God.

But let’s stay with this idea of God’s power for a moment. We are confronted by all kinds of problems and difficulties in life and death is perhaps the biggest enemy and problem of all. We battle hard against death. Through our efforts and that of doctors and medical science we try to fend off death for as long as we can, but it is inevitable. The bible calls death an enemy and all we have to do is look around to realize it is a powerful enemy. It robs us of our loved ones and the best efforts of doctors and all of our faith and prayers doesn’t seem to be able to stop death. But, death doesn’t have the final say. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God demonstrated his power to be greater than the power of death!

The apostle Paul wrote, **“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 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.” 1 Corinthians 15:20-22**

Death came into the world through Adam’s sin in the garden of Eden. Because we are “in Adam”, sharing his sinful dna, we die for our sins. But if we are through faith “in Christ” and his salvation, we then share in his resurrection and share in his eternal life. Through his resurrection, death loses its grip on us and on all who have placed their faith in Christ. As Paul said, “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

Peter wrote, **“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 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.” 1 Peter 1:3-4.**

Jesus' resurrection gives us hope for today and hope for tomorrow. You see, Jesus' resurrection reminds us that all things are possible. Imagine the disciples in that upper room, the shutters closed on the windows, the doors locked and bolted from inside. All of their hopes and dreams had no doubt perished with Jesus on the cross. They had watched as his lifeless body was placed in Joseph's tomb, the stone rolled in place and the sealing stone set. Now they hid in fear and hopeless despair. What should they do? What could they do?

We find ourselves in similar situations at times. There is nothing we can do to change our circumstances. We act as if God doesn't have the power to do anything about our situation. There simply is no hope. But that's where the reality of the resurrection comes in! His resurrection means there is hope for us after all!

Suddenly, in spite of closed windows and a locked door, Jesus is standing in the room with the disciples. The risen Lord appears and says, **“Peace be with you!” They were startled and frightened thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.’” Luke 24:36-39**

“It is I myself.” Not a ghost, not a vision, not a hallucination or spirit, it is Jesus in flesh and bone. From that moment on, everything changed for the disciples. For them and for us the resurrection shouts, “Everything is possible with God!” Nothing is too difficult, nothing is beyond his power. His power doesn't stop at the cemetery gates, it's not limited by anything or anyone. God can do all things. There is hope for us. There is hope in every trial, in every situation. Regardless of how dark the night or how impossible the circumstances, the resurrection says “trust in God.” “Touch me and see. Look, I'm here and everything is going to be all right.”

Jesus' resurrection changes the way we face the future. We live in hope. His resurrection reminds us that we too will live eternally in his presence. We don't have to fear tomorrow or death, for even if we die, because we are “in Christ” we will rise again to be with him forever. We don't sorrow or grieve as those who have no hope. His resurrection changes how we handle the death of a loved one and how we face our own death. We live aware of our eternal destiny. Because he lives, we live also.

Jesus' resurrection changes the way we live today. We live in hope. Listen to what Paul

writes in 1 Corinthians 15, (this is from The Message paraphrase) “And why do you think I keep risking my neck in this dangerous work? I look death in the face practically every day I live. Do you think I’d do this if I wasn’t convinced of your resurrection and mine as guaranteed by the resurrected Messiah Jesus. Do you think I was just trying to act heroic when I fought the wild beasts at Ephesus, hoping it wouldn’t be the end of me? Not on your life!” **“It’s resurrection, resurrection, always resurrection, that undergirds what I do and say, the way I live. If there’s no resurrection, ‘We eat, we drink, the next day we die,’ and that’s all there is to it. But don’t fool yourselves. Don’t let yourselves be poisoned by this anti-resurrection talk....Think straight. Awaken to the holiness of life. No more playing fast and loose with resurrection facts. Ignorance of God is a luxury you can’t afford in times like these. Aren’t you embarrassed that you’ve let this kind of thing go on as long as you have?” 1 Corinthians 15:30-34**

“It’s resurrection, resurrection, always resurrection that undergirds what I do and say, the way I live.” Hope for today, because Jesus lives. Hope for tomorrow, because Jesus lives. Jesus rose from the dead. He lives and that means his sacrifice was accepted and my sins have been forgiven. Jesus rose from the dead and that means he is truly the divine Son of God. Jesus rose from the dead and that means he has power to conquer sin and sickness and death and power to help us live today. Jesus rose from the dead and that means we don’t have to fear death because it has lost its hold on us. Jesus rose from the dead and he lives and that means all things are possible. Jesus rose from the dead and he lives and that means when I die I’m going to rise again to live forever and I want to make sure I’m going to rise to spend eternity with him and not away from him. Jesus rose from the dead and he is alive and that means I can believe everything he said about himself, and life, and death, and heaven. Jesus rose from the dead and he is alive and that means it’s all true. This book is true. His word to us is true so do as Paul said, “Think straight. Awaken to the holiness of life. No more playing fast and loose with resurrection facts. Ignorance of God is a luxury you can’t afford in times like these.” Christ is risen from the dead, he ascended to the Father and he is coming again to judge the living and the dead. It’s all true. Are you ready?

Thank God for the resurrection!