

## **Convinced!**

I want to take these next two Sundays after Easter to focus a bit more on Jesus' resurrection. I want you to know the certainty of his resurrection. There are skeptics and doubters. I see comments on social media from people that read some fringe theory about the hoax of the resurrection or some conspiracy of the early church councils to make Jesus into God when they knew he was just a man. Because you read something on the internet doesn't mean you know more than all the saints and scholars of the past 2,000.

I believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. I wish I could communicate to you the importance and significance of his resurrection. We state casually, "He rose from the dead." But you need to understand how earth shattering this was. It's not just that he was raised from the dead. Others were raised from the dead in the New Testament. Jesus raised a ruler's daughter from the dead, and the widow's son and Lazarus. But Jesus' resurrection was something different, unique. His resurrection was a game-changer.

Those Jesus' raised from the dead still had the same mortal, physical body and they would die again. Jesus was resurrected, to use the apostle Paul's terminology, as "the firstfruits of those who have died". He was the first of his kind in the sense that he had a new body of a different kind – flesh and bone, yet eternal, no longer subject to death. Jesus' resurrection was more than just him coming back from the dead. It gave us a glimpse beyond physical death, to what the prophets had spoken of – the day of the Lord – the heralding of a new age and a new life to come. His resurrection allows us to see something of life on the other side of this life. Jesus' resurrection shows us there is life after death, that what we are doing now, the way we are living now, matters for eternity. Does it matter if you are living for Jesus and serving him? Maybe it doesn't if we are all just going to die and that's it, but if there is a resurrection, if there is life after death, if we are going to face judgment, if there is heaven and hell then yes it matters. And why do I think there is a heaven and hell and judgment and that it matters for eternity? Because the guy who said that, Jesus, died and rose again. His resurrection from the dead proves and validates that everything he said was right and true. The resurrection of Jesus matters. It changes everything and through Christ and his resurrection, we have hope that we will share in that experience, that new life, that new body, a new existence. Christ is risen indeed and because he lives, we will live also.

Christ is risen indeed. But what did resurrection mean for the disciples and the early church? Were they talking about a literal, physical, resurrection from the dead? Was it a spiritual resurrection? Metaphorical? That's what some think. Jesus' resurrection was a spiritual event. The disciples knew Jesus was still with them in a spiritual sense even after his death. He was Savior and Lord and it didn't matter if the tomb was empty or if the physical body of Jesus was still in the tomb. It was a spiritual thing. But that's not what the disciples said. That's not what they believed. That's not what the church believed. They believed in an empty tomb and a risen, living Savior. One they had seen with their physical eyes. One they had eaten with and spoken with and walked with. The bodily, physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead was essential to the faith. Paul said, **“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins...But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead...” 1 Corinthians 15:17, 20.** Someone said, “Christianity without the resurrection is no Christianity at all.” Then can we really know for sure that Jesus rose from the dead?

What do we know for sure? **We know Jesus lived and died.** We have proof outside of the bible that Jesus lived – Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger. We have proof he died. We have eyewitnesses. A crowd watched his crucifixion, including Roman soldiers who were his executioners. They knew their job. Mark 15 tells us that Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews, went to Pilate the Roman Governor and asked for the body of Jesus in order to bury him. Crucifixion was meant to prolong maximum suffering and Pilate was surprised to hear Jesus was already dead, so he called for the Roman Centurion in charge to verify Jesus' death. The centurion assured him Jesus was dead. In fact one of the soldiers had thrust a spear into Jesus' side, into his lungs and heart to make sure he was dead. We know for sure he lived and he died.

**We know Jesus was buried.** The gospel of John identified Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus as the two men who took Jesus' body and prepared it with a mixture of myrrh and aloes, wrapping his body in strips of linen in accordance with Jewish burial customs. These weren't anonymous men, but prominent members of the Jewish community. It would have been easy for anyone doubting Jesus' death or burial to have verified the facts with these two men. Real men buried the real, actual, dead body of Jesus in a tomb. Matthew's gospel tells us Joseph rolled a stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and women watched as the tomb was sealed. There was no question he was dead and buried. What else do we know?

**We know the tomb was empty and his body was gone on Sunday morning.** How do we know? The gospel writers tell us. “Well, they could have been making it up.” You don’t have to believe the story about the angels saying he is risen, but for sure the tomb was empty and the body was gone. All anyone that doubted had to do was look! There is no doubt the body was gone and the tomb was empty. That was never disputed. Even the Romans and the Jewish rulers agreed about this. But was Jesus resurrected? No one was there to actually witness the resurrection. No one knows what happened inside the tomb between Friday night and Sunday morning. Can we prove a resurrection? What we can prove is that Jesus really lived, really died, really was buried and on Sunday morning his body was gone and the tomb was empty. But that’s not the end of it.

**We know people saw Jesus alive after his death and burial.** Again we have eyewitness accounts. Maybe we can’t prove he was resurrected because we didn’t see the actual resurrection, but what we can prove is a whole lot of people saw him alive after he died and was buried. I suppose we can call that circumstantial evidence to prove the resurrection. Bottom line is – he was dead, buried and now he is alive again and we have multiple eyewitnesses that saw him and spoke with him, ate with him, interacted with him. These weren’t apparitions/visions.

We are told of ten separate appearances of the risen Lord to different people in different places. He appeared to Mary Magdalene outside the tomb, to other women returning from the tomb, to Peter, to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, to ten disciples gathered in the upper room (without Thomas), to the eleven including Thomas a week later, to more than five hundred believers at one time, to James his half brother, to a group of disciples including Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James and John by the sea of Galilee where Jesus fixed breakfast for them, and he appeared to a group of disciples and followers on the Mount of Olives near Bethany at the time of the ascension. Remember Paul mentions that many of those 500 eyewitnesses were still alive at the time he wrote 1 Corinthians around 56 AD (twenty years later). The writers of the gospels and the epistles were either eye witnesses or had access to the eyewitnesses. You can trust the reliability of the Scripture.

Understand, the eyewitnesses themselves were skeptical at first. They weren’t expecting a resurrection and had to be convinced. The disciples were hiding behind locked doors when the risen Lord appeared to them. **“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.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement he asked them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.” Luke 24:37-43**

Luke writes in his gospel, **“After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God..” Acts 1:3** The disciples had to be convinced he was risen, that he wasn’t a ghost. He gave them convincing proofs he was alive. He ate with them, talked with them, spent time with them, cooked breakfast for them. I would call that convincing proof. He convinced them he was alive. This wasn’t a one-time vision or a dream. This wasn’t a hallucination. Five hundred people, or even eleven people, can’t all have the same hallucination. They weren’t hypnotized into believing it. He was alive.

The disciples were convinced, I mean utterly, completely convinced, they had seen the risen Jesus. He was alive, risen indeed! So fifty days later they were preaching and proclaiming this in the streets of Jerusalem. Peter declared, **“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead...God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of the fact...Let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ.” Acts 2:22-36.**

Some argue the idea of Jesus’ resurrection came along years later. It evolved along with the idea he was God incarnate, but the biblical account shows fifty days after the resurrection Peter is telling them, “we are eyewitnesses to his resurrection and he is both Lord and Christ.” Peter goes on to tell them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Only weeks after his death and resurrection, Peter is telling them salvation and forgiveness for sins is to be found by trusting in Jesus, the risen Lord! So much for an evolving doctrine or the idea Paul or the church councils created the idea of a resurrection and made Jesus into deity years later. This is what we really know: Christ is risen indeed!

The resurrection rocked their world. It changed the life trajectory of everyone associated

with Jesus. Take his brother James. We refer to him as Jesus' half brother, the son of Mary and Joseph, or at least a step-brother, a son of Joseph. James didn't believe in Jesus. He wasn't a disciple. The bible records, **“Jesus brothers said to him, ‘You ought to leave here and go to Judea...No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.’ For even his own brothers did not believe in him.” John 7:5**

James and the rest of the family were saying, “If you want to be a teacher, if you think you are some special rabbi, give it a shot. Move to Jerusalem where you can get a greater audience. Show yourself to the world.” But they didn't believe in him. They weren't there at the crucifixion. Jesus asked the disciple John to look after his mother, perhaps because she believed in Jesus while James and the other siblings didn't. It may have been a source of contention in the family. But something happened. In Acts 1 we read the names of some who gathered in the upper room in prayer after Jesus' ascended into heaven. It mentions Mary the mother of Jesus along with his brothers. Later in Acts we read of James, the Lord's brother, as being the head of the church in Jerusalem. What happened? I'll tell you what happened.

Paul writes **“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...then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles and last of all he appeared to me also...” 1 Corinthians 15:3-8**

The risen Lord appeared specifically and personally to James and it was the resurrection that made a believer out of him. The resurrection forever changed James. He would die as a martyr, thrown from the temple and stoned, but he never doubted for he had met the risen Lord!

And what about Paul. First known as Saul, a persecutor of the church and a fierce opponent of this supposedly resurrected rabbi from Galilee. But it was the resurrected Jesus that convinced him. Let me read part of Paul's testimony before King Agrippa in Acts 26:4-23.

Something changed James and Paul into men willing to die rather than deny their belief in Jesus. It was their encounter with the risen Lord. It's hard to argue with a resurrection! Paul tells us in Galatians 1 that after his conversion he eventually went to Jerusalem and met with Peter and with James the brother of the Lord. Paul and James must have had plenty to talk

about. "I didn't believe it either, but suddenly I was talking to Jesus after I knew he had been dead and buried. I couldn't deny what I saw. I can't deny what I know."

The resurrection changed James and Paul, and Peter and the disciples, and the women that saw him, and the five hundred that saw him and everyone that's heard the gospel since and believed. The passage we read from 1 Corinthians 15, that's the gospel Paul received. It was a creed proclaimed, perhaps even sung by the church, scholars believe within the first two or three years after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. This was first importance. This is what they knew and what they staked their life on: Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures, he was buried, he was raised on the third day and he began to show himself, literally, physically to those who knew him, verifying that God had raised him from the dead, verifying that God had accepted the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, verifying that Jesus was in fact Savior and Lord.

I believe in the resurrection. Have I seen the risen Lord? No, but I trust the validity of these eye witness accounts. I trust the message of those disciples who laid down their lives as martyrs rather than deny the truth of the resurrection. They didn't die for an idea, a principle, a conviction. They died because they were absolutely, positively, convinced because they had seen and talked to and eaten with and been with the risen Lord. They couldn't deny what they had seen, what they had been told and neither can I.

I believe in the resurrection. I haven't seen him, but I know him. I believe in the resurrection because nothing else can explain the countless lives that have been changed and have found hope and life and salvation and deliverance and joy and peace when they put their trust in Jesus. Only a risen Savior can change a life like that, from brokenness to wholeness, from despair to hopefulness, from bondage to sin to a new life of freedom. Jesus the risen Lord does that. Has he saved you? Has he changed you? Healed you? Delivered you? A risen Savior can do that. We saw a miracle happen to Paula's mom this week. A risen Savior does that!

Convinced of the resurrection, these 500-600 believers changed the world. Persecuted, ridiculed, suffering privation of all kinds but convinced of the resurrection, they took this gospel to the world. They died rather than deny what they knew, Jesus was risen from the dead. In one city their enemies said, "these that have turned the world upside down have come here as well." I'm convinced! And because of that, we can turn our world upside down or rightside up, as well. He is risen and all things are possible. He is risen and we can live our lives in confidence,

serving the Lord with boldness and gladness, not fearing death because Jesus turned death into a doorway. We can live with hope. We can face death and loss with hope. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.

Would you like to meet a risen Savior? He is still changing lives today. Ask Him!