

Easter - The Resurrection

Sign Title: The Resurrection

April 24, 2011

Good morning Faith Church. It is great to celebrate Easter together! He has risen! (He has risen indeed!) If you're new, my name is Kurt and I am one of the pastors. Since it is Easter, I thought we should talk about the resurrection. The question we are answering this morning is this, "Is Jesus just as alive today as the person sitting next to you?" Just so you know, how you answer that question is a big deal. It is a make it or break it deal for every one of us. So I am going to pray and we will get right into this.

Heavenly Father, We want to begin by thanking you for being so great and loving. We acknowledge that sin and death have come into human history not just through Adam, but we continue to usher it in with our own lives every day. We acknowledge that apart from Christ there is no forgiveness of sin or hope for tomorrow. It is my prayer that as we study, the person, work and ongoing ministry of Christ, it would actually be believed by everyone here today. I ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Let me begin by telling you that apart from the resurrection of Jesus, there is no Christianity. Some people see Jesus as a great teacher, and it is true, he was a great teacher. But the Christian faith is not built upon Jesus' teachings. Others see Jesus as a great man of compassion and love for the poor. But the Christian faith is not built upon acts of charity toward those in need. I am not minimizing those things but you can see Jesus as a great teacher or a great man of compassion and still not be a Christian.

The distinguishing feature of what it means to be a Christian is that you believe Jesus rose from the dead. That is why 1 Corinthians 15:17 says...

**And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.
1 Corinthians 15:17 (ESV)**

It is just foolish to trust in Jesus, to be a Christian, to confess your sins to Jesus, and believe there is hope after life through Jesus *if Jesus is still dead*. Jesus must be alive today or we have nothing. So today, I want to help you know for sure that Jesus is just as alive as the person sitting next to you.

What is a resurrection?

Let me straighten this out as we begin. Resurrection is not believing our spirit, continues to exist after death. Let me explain resurrection in three steps. Step one is being alive, look at the person next to you. That is what alive looks like, it is step one. Step two is when a person dies. I couldn't get any volunteers to show us what that looks like this morning. Step two is not passing out. It is not a near-death experience. It is death. It is a cold body. It is decaying flesh. It is pull the sheets over the head and dig a hole in the ground dead. Step three is resurrection. It is back to life again. Back to a full *physical* life of eating, walking, skipping, laughing, playing soccer and smelling flowers. Except, there is a difference between our life now and resurrected life then. A resurrected body is a indestructible, glorified body. It is like our body but without all the sickness and pain.

Some of you are wondering where I learned this. It is found in our Bible. It is found when we look at Jesus and his resurrection. His resurrected body is the prototype for our resurrected bodies. Was it his earthly body that was resurrected? Yes, it was his old body that rose from the grave, that is why the tomb was empty. But his old body was transformed. It was in a perfected state because Jesus could walk through walls but yet he could still eat fish and talk

and hang out with people in a real physical way. That is what resurrection means. It is “the real me, body and all, back from the dead. But my body is in a perfected and vastly improved state.” That’s what resurrection means.

Is there biblical evidence for Jesus’ resurrection?

Jesus predicted his resurrection.

saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.” Mark 10:33–34 (ESV)

This is one of many times Jesus told his disciples that he would die and after three days he would be back.

What happened? How did things transpire? Luke 24 tells us how it unfolded.

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, Luke 24:1–10 (ESV)

So the women tell the guys that Jesus is alive. The guys think the women are being emotional so they figure they need to check things out for themselves.

But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened. Luke 24:12 (ESV)

So Peter is marveling about this. That means he is really perplexed by the resurrection. It doesn't happen every day. Peter doesn't know what to think about a resurrected Jesus until Jesus, in his resurrected body, visits Peter and others all over town. Jesus is eating with people, hanging out with old friends, doing breakfast. Paul describes it this way in 1 Corinthians 15.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas,(that's Peter) then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 (ESV)

What is Paul saying? Lots of people saw Jesus resurrected and fully alive. Paul says that if we don't believe him, just go ask some of them, they are still around. Text them. E-mail them. Skype them. Take them to Starbucks.

Paul says that Christ's resurrection and his appearances were not events he made up. It is something he gave them of *first importance* and it is something he also received as *an essential piece of truth*. The literal resurrection is not something just thrown in to add a twilight zone ending to the Jesus story. It literally happened. You could talk to eyewitnesses to verify it. Peter saw Jesus. James saw Jesus. The disciples saw Jesus. Upwards of 500 people were with the resurrected Jesus at one time. Go check it out for yourself. The resurrection of Jesus is a well attested fact.

There were unlikely believers.

There are some highly unlikely believers who claimed a resurrected Jesus was alive.

For example, two half-brothers of Jesus, James and Jude, are unlikely believers. Both of them wrote books in our New Testament. Jesus' personal resurrection appearance to James was mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15. Let's think about this. What would it take for someone to convince their own brothers they are God in the flesh? I have two boys and I don't think one brother would get very far at convincing the other he is god. There have been too many rug burns, wrestling matches and fights over whose turn it is to clean the ferret cage for either of them to even remotely look like God.

Now imagine you come from a devout Jewish family. You may not know what a devout Jew is like, think Muslim fundamentalist. They take their religion very seriously. What would it take to get those kind of brothers to worship you as God knowing that if they are wrong they would spend eternity in hell? The Bible tells us Jesus' brothers didn't believe he was god when he was on earth even after seeing his miracles. What convinced them he was God after he was crucified? The only thing I can think of that would change their mind would be something as amazing as the resurrection.

How about Paul? He is another unlikely believer. He was the Osama Bin Laden of his day. He was totally opposed to Christianity. He is totally opposed to Jesus until he gets a personal visit from the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus and it flips him around. He becomes a Christian, a pastor, a church planter and he suffers and actually dies because he swears the resurrection of Jesus is true.

That is very compelling biblical evidence that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead.

Is there any circumstantial evidence to support the resurrection?

The disciples were transformed.

The disciples would not have been good cage fighters. They were cowards. After Jesus died, they went into a room, locked the door and hid. Even Peter, one of the most outspoken among them, found himself cowering in the presence of a junior high girl when she simply said to him, “Weren’t you with Jesus?” He was claiming he never knew the guy. These were not courageous men.

After they saw Jesus resurrected from the dead, they become extremely bold and courageous. Eleven of the twelve disciples died a martyrs death. Peter was hung upside-down. John was boiled in oil but didn’t die. How do you explain these absolute cowards turning into courageous martyrs for Jesus? They no longer feared death the way they did before because they saw Jesus come back from the dead.

People began worshiping Jesus as God.

The first of the ten commandments says there is one God, worship him alone. People began worshiping Jesus as God. If they were wrong, they would go to hell forever. There is no way to account for people suddenly worshipping Jesus as God unless he actually rose from the dead and did something only God can do.

The tomb was not enshrined.

One archaeologist says in that day there were over one hundred tombs of holy men enshrined in the region. We know how this happens. If someone famous dies, we memorialize the grave site. Everyone puts flowers and candles around the grave. Somebody plays a guitar and sings like a basset hound in agony. That never happened. Why? People were having lunch with Jesus at the Bistro down town.

What is the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus?

I will give you one quotation from Josephus. He was a well-noted historian in the ancient world who worked for the government. He was NOT a Christian.

Now there was about this time 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 received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ, the anointed one of God. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross those that loved him at first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again on the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold." (Josephus, AJ, 18.3.3)

Josephus says the reason people stayed loyal to Jesus was because he came back to life! Remember, this guy is a non-Christian historian working for the government.

What are the primary objections to the resurrection?

I am sure some of you have these objections or you have friends who have these objections so let me think through them with you.

Jesus just passed-out on the cross.

Christian Science teaches this. Think about this. Jesus was flogged, most men die from that. He was crucified. Crucifixion was not meant to make you pass out. It was meant to kill you. The whole point of the cross was to be the most torturous way to die. A Roman cross was not meant to be a relaxing way to watch Sunday afternoon sports. It was meant to kill you!

Who oversaw the crucifixion? A guy whose job it was to kill people. If people came off the cross and they weren't dead, he lost his life. Do you think he was motivated to make sure people were dead? The Bible says the executioner stabbed a spear through Jesus side into his heart. We can all agree on this, if somebody puts a spear through your heart, you are done. I have watched enough movies to know that if someone is shot in the heart, they are dead.

Next, they take him down, wrap him with 100 pounds of spices and strips of cloth so he is like a sealed mummy with no air. They stick him in a tomb for three days. You tell me how he unwraps himself out of the cocoon, pushes back a stone weighing several thousand pounds, overpowers guards and runs back to town to tell everyone he is alive except for the gaping hole in his heart.

The resurrection was a hallucination.

The idea that the resurrection was a hallucination has been popular at various points in church history. Just think about this. His mother hallucinated? His brothers hallucinated? His enemies hallucinated? More than 500 different people had the exact same hallucination that he was alive at the same time?

I know some of you have done drugs. Some of you have experienced wild hallucinations. But I am sure they were private things. If 500 people have the same hallucination, by definition, it is not a hallucination, it is an experience.

Also, hallucinations don't just mysteriously end after 40 days. It is not like hundreds of people are having the same hallucinations and then, presto, it is Tuesday, hallucinations are over. The appearances of Jesus stopped after 40 days because Jesus went back to heaven.

The resurrection was a borrowed or stolen concept.

Some modern scholars think the resurrection didn't really happen but it was a borrowed concept from the culture of the day and it was written into the Jesus story. Let me give you some history. First of all, the Jewish people did have the concept of resurrection. It came from Daniel 12:2

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Daniel 12:2 (ESV)

The Jewish concept was of one mass resurrection of everyone at the end of history when everybody got their bodies back. Some to be with God forever, others to be in hell forever. So the Jewish concept of resurrection was never individual or personal in the middle of history. It was always corporate and located at the end of history.

It also wasn't an idea borrowed from paganism. In NT Wright's book, "The Resurrection of the Son of God", he says that as far as the non-Jewish world was concerned, it's concept of the afterlife came from Homer. This is what Homer says about life after death.

Once a man has died and the dust soaked up his blood, there is no resurrection.

So they didn't borrow the idea from Homer. How about Plato and Aristotle? We studied their view of life after death last summer in our Mysteries of Heaven series. We learned they believed the spirit was good, the body bad. They believed at death your spirit was liberated from the body, which they thought was a great thing. The idea that *you would get a body back* was totally repulsive to them.

In summary, there is good evidence, both biblical, historical and logical that Jesus really did rise from the dead and the best attempts at explaining away the resurrection aren't credible.

Jesus is alive!

I share all of this evidence with you to tell you Jesus Christ is alive. Right now, he is just as real as the person sitting next to you. Where is he? He ascended back to heaven. He is seated on a throne. He's ruling as King and Lord and God and Savior. Because he is alive, he hears your prayers. Because he is alive, he saves people. He knows all about you. He is coming again. He is preparing a place for us.

Who is Jesus? He is God and man irrevocably fused together in the womb of Mary. He lived without sin, died in our place on the cross, was buried, three days later arose from the grave. He ascended into heaven and he is returning again to judge the living and the dead and to establish an eternal Kingdom. That's Jesus.

At Faith Church, we absolutely believe this. What I want you to know is that this is not something you can afford to be neutral on. Some of you say,

“There are so many different religions out there, how can I say Jesus is the only one?” Only Jesus died and came back to tell us about what lies beyond the grave. Show me any other religion where the leader came back from the grave?

Do I believe Jesus is just as alive and real and tangible as the person sitting next to me? Have I trusted him to be my savior? That is what it means to be Christian.

What is the hope of the resurrection?

Why this matters so much is Jesus speaks of hell more than anyone in the Bible. Jesus is clear that on the other side of death is judgment. John 5:22 tells us that Jesus is the judge.

Let me explain to you how things unfold. After we die, our bodies will go into the ground. Our souls continue to exist, either in a place with God, where we are blessed, or in a place separate from God where we are cursed. There will be a time when all of us will experience the rejoining of our spirits, with our physical resurrected bodies. We will all stand before Jesus. We will all be judged by Jesus. Those who are Christians will receive a judgment of rewards based on how we have lived for Christ. Likewise, non-Christians will also face judgment, but not for rewards, for the just punishment and sentencing their sins deserve. Everyone, apart from the forgiveness of Christ, will be sentenced to a just punishment in hell that is eternal, conscious, and physical as they exist forever in their non-destructible bodies.

I'm not supposed to tell you that because it is unpopular,... but it is true. I know some of you are thinking there are plenty of other religions that disagree

with that. Yes, they are religions all founded by dead guys who never came back from from the dead and right now they are being tormented apart from God as they are awaiting their final judgment before Jesus.

Be very careful what you believe about Jesus. What happens is people think they have forever to consider Jesus and they consider Jesus on the same level as deciding whether they should buy a puppy. I am sorry, what you decide about Jesus is much more important than if you should purchase a puppy.

I don't want any of you to walk out of here this morning and miss this. Everyone will get a physical and indestructible body. Everyone will bow down to Jesus. Everyone will be judged by Jesus. We will either have Jesus as our delight because he is our king and savior, who saved you from everything we deserve and gave you everything we don't deserve; or we can be one of those hard-hearted unrepentant people who bow down because we have to bow before Jesus from hell. Ask yourself, "Do I belong to Jesus?" Do I believe he really beat death? Is he my Lord and Savior? Has he taken away my sin or am I still trying to manage it?

The resurrection changes the way I face death.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says that apart from Christ, death is an enemy. You know what? I'm not scared to die. I am not excited about the process of death but dying is OK. I have a beautiful wife and 3 great kids. I love this church. I love you. I love what God has me doing. But when it comes to death, I'm not worried about it. You know what happens? When I die I will be with Jesus. I am confident about that. Not because my faith is so strong but because

my Jesus is so great. The Bible says in Philippians that for me to be absent from the body is to be present with the lord, which is better by far.

Eventually, God will even give me my body back and it will be in perfect working order, no tiredness, no sickness, no flu and 104 degree fevers making me hack my brains out like last week. My body will be perfect. As a Christian, no matter what happens, life only gets better.

The resurrection changes the way I think about creation in the future.

The reason we celebrate the resurrection in the spring is because it is the time of year when all of the dead plants come to life. It reminds us that one day, this entire creation will be renewed, just like our resurrection bodies.

We have people working in the health care profession. They are doctors and nurses who try and stave off the affects of sin upon our bodies. One day, they will be unemployed on the new heavens and earth. We have people who work on racial reconciliation and save the whales and all kinds of efforts to restore the planet. Those are good things, just don't get too excited over them. They will only make limited progress. One day, when Jesus is in charge, and he recreates everything, only then will the world work the way it is supposed to.

The resurrection of Christ is the anticipation of that promise of a new heaven and earth that Christians will live on with Jesus as the center of everything. When Jesus is the center, things work work just right. If you long for that kind of world, you need to know that desire came from Jesus. But unless you have trusted in Jesus's death on the cross to pay for your sin and believe his resurrection is real, you will never experience what you long for.

What do I want you to go home with? First, I want you to know, with confidence, that Jesus is just as real and alive as the person you are sitting next to this morning. Secondly, I want you to gain hope from the resurrection. Some day, through Christ, we will not only have new bodies, but we will have a redeemed and vastly improved creation to live upon with Jesus as the center of all things. Let's pray.

Prayer

Father God, I thank you for my friends. I pray they would trust in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus, you are alive! We are meeting on Easter Sunday because you rose from the dead. We have hope in our heart and a song on our lips because you have defeated death and sin. We know that though we die, just as real as your resurrection body, will be our own. I pray Lord that everyone in this room would trust you as their savior and believe you are their king and they would meet you to receive a reward, not their judgment.

Conclusion

This morning, if you decided to trust in Christ, or if you are sick or struggling or would just like somebody to pray with you, I will be up front to talk with you after the service.

Have a great Easter, Jesus is alive!



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the EFCA. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics of study are ancient rhetoric and preaching. Feel free to contact him at ktruck@gmail.com or visit his web at www.christ2Rculture.com

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