

## Does the Resurrection Matter?

**1 Peter 1:1 ESV (Pg. 588)** Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **2** according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. **3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, **4** to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, **5** who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

- I. The Bible says that on the first day of the week, as dawn was breaking, a group of women who had followed Jesus approached his tomb in order to embalm their deceased friend and master. But when they approached, they found that the massive stone that had sealed the mouth of the grave was rolled away, the soldiers assigned to guard it, had been knocked out cold, and that the tomb was empty! Angels, in shining robes, spoke these words to the shocked women: "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."
  - A. No one can call themselves a Christian denies the actual, physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. All true believers accept it as historical fact. If someone claims to be a Christian, but tries to deny the resurrection of Christ, or interprets it in mere philosophical, metaphorical or mythical terms, that person is not, in any sense of the word, a Christian.
    1. To believe Christ literally rose from death doesn't make you crazy, and you should never speak of it in embarrassed whispers. The resurrection has as much credibility as any other event in all of recorded history.
      - a) Thomas Arnold, one-time chair of Modern History at Oxford University said, "I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and "...I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by any better and fuller evidence of every sort...", to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God has given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead."
      - b) Volumes have been written on this subject by Christian and Secular writers; both by intellectual saints and frustrated skeptics.
        - (1) Oftentimes they have been written by skeptics who, trying to refute the historicity of Christ's resurrection, were converted into saints!
        - (2) Read the books of Simon Greenleaf, former agnostic and one of the founders of Harvard Law School, or Josh McDowell, also a former agnostic, who became a man dedicated to defending the resurrection as historical fact.
      - c) As our gift to you today, we have free copies of Josh McDowell's "More Than a Carpenter" in the foyer (one per family, please).

2. But to those who are the elect, chosen by God, a far more sure and reliable testimony than even apologetics and historical / legal arguments has been given to us; that of the indwelling Holy Spirit who testifies from inside of us that he is risen, that we are his, and that he dwells within us!
- B. While all believers embrace the resurrection as a vital theological, and irrefutable historical fact, my fear is that many believers underestimate the fact that Christ is risen. What I mean is that while we assert the fact that he is risen, we may not be able to articulate why that fact is a big deal.
1. For example, if I were to ask most of you, “Why are you saved?”, your reply would almost certainly be, “Because Christ died for me.”
    - a) And this is true! The whole basis of our faith is that the cross of Christ satisfied the just wrath of God by allowing all of our sins to be placed on Jesus’ innocent shoulders, that he should be punished and not us.
    - b) But we might not have considered that, had Christ only **died**, he would have been proven to be an impostor, and you and I would still be shackled to our guilt and sin.
      - (1) Though he worked miracles, and taught amazing truths, if he is dead, he was no Messiah! No Savior! No God! It is an unsustainable cop-out to say that Jesus was a “good teacher”, but did not rise. If this is true, as C.S. Lewis famously pointed out, most all of what he said has to be categorized as either outright lies, or the ravings of a madman.
      - (2) The life of a dead messiah holds no inspiration or value, just embarrassment, disappointment and well-deserved mockery.
  2. And for us who have trusted him, followed him, and given up all for him; the situation is much more dire! **I Corinthians 15:17 ESV (Pg. 560) And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.**
- C. But the Bible asserts in the strongest terms possible that he **is** risen! When the New Testament writers spoke of the cross, an empty tomb was always assumed. For example in the verse we read earlier, Peter says in verse 2 that we are saved by “sprinkling with his blood”, but in the very next verse he says that we are “born again...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”
1. Which is it? Both! Or, more accurately, in the minds of the apostolic writers the death and resurrection of Christ constitutes one radical, holistic, saving event, not two separate ones that have differing theological implications.
  2. Further, Paul wrote to the Philippians of his desire to know Christ in **both** the “power of his resurrection” and the “fellowship of his sufferings”. He assumes that they go hand in hand, and that experiencing one is impossible without experiencing the other.
- D. Because we have looked only to the cross, and not understood the deep implications of Jesus’ rising from the dead, we have inadvertently neglected the preaching of it.
1. We have reserved but one day of the year to get dressed up, and gather with our families to commemorate Christ’s resurrection, and focused on the ridiculous cutesy symbolism of fluffy bunnies and pastel-painted eggs instead of celebrating it as the day of the greatest day of deliverance in

history! It is the day when the powers death, hell, sin, the devil and the Law were slaughtered once and for all, by the appearance of conquering Savior in unapproachable light!

2. For those of us who are in Christ, the resurrection should never be an annual celebration, but should have unceasing top-of-mind awareness, causing our hearts to spontaneously explode in worship January - December!
    - a) Spurgeon said that this neglect of the resurrection had filtered into the preaching of his day, and because of this, the preaching of his day was radically different than that of the Apostles found in the book of Acts.
    - b) "The Apostles, when they preached, always testified concerning the resurrection of Jesus, and the subsequent resurrection of the dead. It appears that the alpha and omega of their gospel was the testimony that Jesus Christ died and rose again from the dead according to the scripture." -Charles Haddon Spurgeon
  3. He said this in 1856! Have things improved in our day? How many preachers insist on framing their messages around the truth that Christ is risen? How many best-selling books at the Christian bookstore are anchored in the fact that he is not entombed, but has risen?
- II. What I'd like to do is examine some of the sermons of one particular Apostle (Peter) from the book of Acts and see if Spurgeon was right. I'd like to see what truth we can mine out of several of those sermons from Peter, to see if we can answer the questions, "Does the resurrection matter?" and "If so, why?"
- A. We begin in Acts 2. 120 of Christ's followers had gathered in the upper room, obeying Christ's instructions to wait there for the promise of the Father. After a 10-day prayer meeting, every one of them are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin speaking in languages they had never learned before. When this attracts the attention of the crowds gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Day of Pentecost, Peter begins to preach to them.
1. His preaching focuses on the ministry, trial and execution of Jesus, current events that everyone in the city would have been aware of.
    - a) But he also repeatedly declares that God raised Christ from the dead in fulfillment of Old Testament scripture. He even contextualizes the miracle that the crowd just witnessed in the light of the resurrection:
    - b) **Acts 2:32 ESV (Pg. 531) "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing."**
  2. So the resurrection matters because by it, Jesus has now been exalted to the throne. There he has received the Holy Spirit, along with the authority to pour him out upon his bride, the church, empowering her with a promise of heavenly power, and his eternal presence. This would not be possible if Christ were still in the grave!
- B. Next, in Acts 3, Peter and John are used to heal a lame man as they are walking into the Temple to pray. After the miracle, they begin to preach Jesus to the crowd.

1. **Acts 3:15 ESV (Pg. 531)** "...you killed the Author of life, *whom God raised from the dead*. To this we are witnesses. **16** And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all."
  2. Peter is saying that Jesus has not only dealt with sin, but by his resurrection, has power over its **effects** (sickness, disease, etc.)! By faith in not just the crucified, but the **resurrected** Christ, we have access to these benefits.
- C. This miracle raises a huge stink with the Jewish authorities, who thought they had already dealt with the "Jesus problem"! So they arrest Peter and John and hold them overnight. When they ask them by what power they have healed the lame man, Peter's answer is priceless!
1. **Acts 4:10 ESV (Pg 531)** "...let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, *whom God raised from the dead*—by him this man is standing before you well. **11** This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. **12** And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."
  2. Peter here identifies the risen Lord as not only the one who has the power to heal broken bodies, but as the one who is the only hope for salvation of the souls of people as well.
    - a) The one they rejected and crucified, God has raised from death and exalted to become the cornerstone of the people of God.
    - b) They thought they could snuff him out, but now, because of his resurrection, rightly relationship with God is utterly dependent upon him!
- D. Well, wouldn't you know it, even though they let him go, Peter and the rest of the Apostles can't stop talking about the risen Christ! So in Acts chapter 5, we find them arrested, only to be busted out of jail by an angel. When the authorities find them preaching in the Temple the very next day, they are once more dragged in to account for themselves. Peter once again speaks up.
1. **Acts 5:30 ESV (Pg. 532)** "*The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.*"
  2. By his resurrection, Jesus is not only declared to be the Savior, but Israel's Savior! Not the law, the temple, the sacrifices, or the earthly king. Only Jesus. It is he who will sovereignly grant repentance and forgiveness to those who believe in his Name, freeing all people from every other religious system and obligation.
- E. Lastly, in Acts chapter 10 God uses Peter to do something that had been long prophesied would happen: the proclamation of God's good news to those outside of Israel, the gentiles.
1. A godly Roman Officer named Cornelius has had a vision of an angel telling him to send for Peter so that he might preach the gospel to him.

- a) God gives Peter a divine dream to prepare him to go and do what he (as a good Jew) would not otherwise do; visit a Gentile's home!
  - b) When Peter arrives, he is amazed as he hears what has transpired on Cornelius' side of this equation and he preaches the fullness of God's word to him and his entire household, saying:
    2. **Acts 10:39 ESV (Pg. 536)** "And we are witnesses of all that (Jesus) did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, **40 but God raised him on the third day** and made him to appear, **41 not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead."**
    3. By the resurrection of Christ Jesus, we are commissioned ("commanded") to preach the gospel as Christ's witnesses testifying to his kingly authority! For Peter, this meant expanding the message of the gospel of the kingdom to the once despised Gentiles! Where are we call to expand it's reach?
- III. For one last truth to be revealed about the meaning of the resurrection, let's shift our attention to another Apostle...Paul. Paul had written a letter to the church at Corinth to correct a whole slew of doctrinal misunderstandings and practical missteps. One of those he addresses in 1 Corinthians 15 arises when several of the people in the church are saying that, although Jesus saves us and gives us meaning in this life, there is no resurrection of the dead awaiting us at the end.
- A. Paul begins that chapter by asserting that they had been taught a gospel that includes the death and resurrection of Christ. He finds the thought of being a Christian without firm belief in the resurrection to be an absolute absurdity!
    1. How can we be saved if the grave has not been conquered? How can we have meaning if only "to dust we shall return"? That would be a pretty weak and meaningless "salvation", would it not?
    2. He goes on to say that the Christian life *minus* the hope of resurrection is a horrible, miserable existence! **1 Corinthians 15:18 ESV (Pg. 560)** **If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.**
  - B. But he says in the clearest possible way that not only has Christ been raised (Paul had seen him!), but that now, by his resurrection, Jesus is the "firstfruits" of all who die as believers. His meaning is that Christ's resurrection is a promise that, if he is raised, then we too will most assuredly actually, physically rise!
    1. Adding to that glorious truth, he describes the types of bodies we will be given when we rise. He uses the adjectives "imperishable" and "immortal".
    2. That clearly means that no sickness, death, futility or sin awaits you or I in our amazing future! The older I get, the more glorious this truth becomes!
  - C. So today we have discovered that the resurrection, according to the Bible, means that we have access to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit; that we have the promise of being saved not only from the power, but the effects of sin as well; that the risen Christ alone is the only hope of salvation; that his life rescues us from the obligation to religion and the law; and that by his rising we are commissioned to proclaim his good news authoritatively and expand the reach of his kingdom.

- D. But most of all we see that because he lives, we can rest in the promise that death truly has no power over us and that we will one day rise just like he did and join him forever! Does the resurrection matter? You tell me!
- IV. One closing thought. Have you ever noticed that the crucifixion **alone** had no positive effect on the Apostles? They had scattered in fear when the soldiers arrested Christ. Peter hung out on the edges and even denied he knew Christ 3 times during that awful night before Jesus crucifixion!
- A. Of all the disciples, only John was present at the cross. Most of them hid behind locked doors after the death of Jesus for fear of the Jews. Some of them, like Thomas, flat out went temporarily AWOL!
1. But when they saw the risen Christ and were filled with the Holy Spirit! Peter became the de facto leader of the church and preached the first gospel sermon to a huge crowd!
  2. All of them were arrested, beaten and horribly martyred, but no one of them recanted their belief in what they had seen - a once dead, now alive, sin and death-conquering Savior! It took more than Christ's dying to accomplish that in them. It took his rising from the dead!
- B. What effect is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ having on you? Does the resurrection matter, not just theologically, but does it matter to you **personally**?
- C. **1 Peter 1:3 ESV (Pg 588)** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead