



Behind Enemy Lines Training Saints

Written by an Inmate

The Importance of the Resurrection

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What is more important in the Christian faith: Jesus dying for our sins on the cross or His resurrection on the third day afterwards? Of course, they're both equally important. It's like asking which is more important to living: your heart or your lungs? But for a long time, I might have easily said that His death is the most important thing. I mean, His sacrifice is what atoned for our sins, so that has to be the most important thing, right? Our sins would be paid for even if He didn't walk out of that tomb. So why did He do it? Why is it so important that He did? And how do we know it really happened like the Bible says? That's a lot to fit in around 10 minutes, but I'll give it a try. Let's start by reading **1 Corinthians 15:3-8** and **12-20**:

³For I [Paul] delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵and that He appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. ⁶Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared also to me. ...

¹²Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. ²⁰But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Without the resurrection, there would be no Christianity. The disciples would have scattered and returned to their prior lives. All was lost after the crucifixion. Three years wasted on a false Messiah. He didn't usher in His kingdom. He didn't drive out the Romans. He died! And Christianity would have died with Him before it was even born. So, without the resurrection, there'd be no faith. There'd be no hope.

Universalists believe Jesus' sacrifice saves everyone no matter what – no faith required. Yes, His sacrifice is more than enough to save everyone, but faith is required. And that's why He rose again.

He also did it to prove who He is – the one and only Son of God. **Romans 1:4** says, "[He] was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the

dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.” He did it to show His ministry was ordained by God. And He did it as both a fulfillment and promise of the future resurrection of believers, so that we may know we have eternal life in and through Him.

As Paul told us, Jesus is the firstfruits of the resurrection. The firstfruits are the first sample of crops that are now ready to be harvested. Like the firstfruits guarantee the upcoming harvest, Jesus’ resurrection guarantees our own.

When Christ died, it was on a Friday, the 6th day – the day God completed His work of creation. **Tetelestai**: It was finished. So on the 7th day, the Sabbath, when God rested, Jesus’ body rested in the tomb. It was the next day after the Sabbath of Passover that Jesus rose. This day is one of the feast days laid out in **Leviticus 23**. It’s called the Feast of Firstfruits. On that day, the sheaf/bundle of the firstfruits was presented to the LORD as a holy offering to make the whole harvest holy. Jesus’ resurrection is the firstfruits of our resurrection – part of the same harvest – still to come. This feast day represented new life, new beginnings – the official end of winter and beginning of spring. Jesus’ crucifixion was the end of the old ways, the old covenant, the law of sin and death. Whereas His resurrection is new life, a new covenant coming into the world. The Light of the World set on Golgotha, but that Light rose again bringing in the dawn of a new day, a new life for anyone who believes.

What’s the biggest difference between Christianity and other religions? Our Savior, Jesus Christ, is alive! The prophets of all others are dead and buried. God signed off on who to believe by this culminating miracle.

So let’s look at some of the evidence we have for the resurrection as well as some of the attacks against it. First and foremost, we have the Bible. We have eyewitness testimony included in all four gospels. Matthew and John were direct disciples of Jesus. Mark was very likely (and according to church tradition) a disciple and scribe for Peter. And Luke was a disciple of Paul. Paul told us in the reading about the more than 500 witnesses that were mostly still around when he wrote that letter only about 20 years after. All the apostles (except John) were martyred for their beliefs and never recanted even when facing being burned alive, beheaded, crucified, or stoned. These were of the same lost flock that was too scared to leave their locked room for fear of facing the same fate as their Lord.

Some say the gospels were corrupted or changed. And they say this hundreds (if not thousands) of years after the fact and with no evidence. The gospels (and the rest of the Bible) are actually the most substantiated ancient historical documents in the history of mankind. We have thousands of manuscripts/copies from all over the Roman Empire (Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Italy, etc.), and they all agree. They all have the same historical, cultural, and geographical knowledge of Israel that couldn’t be faked. If the gospels were corrupted and changed, there should be many different versions out there that show how and approximately when it happened. But we have none of that. Every time we find another older manuscript, it shows the same thing: that great care was taken to make sure these sacred texts were preserved to the best of their ability. And they all agree that Christ was raised from the dead.

Many people today reject the resurrection before even looking at the evidence because they have already rejected God and the supernatural. To them, only the material/natural world that we can see exists. But often, at the same time, many will believe in things like karma, luck, magic, ghosts, demons, and other supernatural, unexplainable phenomenon. Why then reject the notion of God outright? It’s simple – man doesn’t want to be held accountable and under authority of an all-powerful deity. We are made in His image, and since eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we want to be our own gods of our own little worlds. This is the fallen nature of man and cannot be overcome without God intervening on our behalf. He opens our eyes to the truth so that we might be saved.

When we look for evidence of the resurrection, we can just look to the empty tomb. Even the Jews didn't dispute this! The body was definitely gone. So the Jewish leaders spread the "stolen body theory" (as mentioned in **Matthew 28: 11-15**) that claimed the disciples came and stole the body while the Roman soldiers slept. This is easily dismissed as false for a bunch of reasons:

- 1) How would the guards know who stole the body IF THEY WERE ASLEEP?
- 2) Their failure would mean a literal death sentence, so they were highly motivated and would not want to admit failure.
- 3) I already mentioned the disciples' state of mind after the crucifixion – they were scared, mourning, and in hiding.
- 4) Could the disciples really pull off a covert 'op' against the military elite of the age without them knowing? Especially when they would have to move the giant stone?
- 5) If someone stole the body, why leave the expensive linens (& herbs & aloes) and take the time to fold the cloth?

There's a few other common theories like

the "swoon theory" that claims He just fainted, re-awoke in the tomb, moved the stone Himself, and evaded the guards

and

the "hallucination theory" where all the disciples and the 500+ other witnesses all hallucinated the same thing at different places and times.

I won't go into more detail, but they all have one major thing in common – they deny the miraculous. They deny the power of God!

Besides the Biblical evidence, there are writings from Greece, Roman, and Jewish historians (like Tacitus, Thallus, Phlegon, and Josephus) that confirm a lot of what's in the Bible. Even in cases where they are speaking against Christianity, they end up confirming that the story back then is the same as it is today! Christians back then believed in the resurrection, and we believe it today. Some also wrote about the unusual "eclipse" and earthquakes that had occurred around that time – confirming the Biblical account of the crucifixion.

Finally, as proof of who Jesus is and what He did we have you. We have our testimonies. The lives that have been changed. The addictions that have been broken. And the hearts that have been healed.

Let us pray ...

Heavenly Father, as we approach Easter, help us to be thankful for Your sacrifice as well as Your resurrection. Help us to dwell on Your miracle and understand all it means. I pray that anyone who doesn't know You comes to know You soon so they may know with certainty that they will be a part of the resurrection of the saints to come. Help us to know Your promises are true and trustworthy and to live each day to give You glory through all we do. In Jesus Christ's holy name we pray.

Amen.