

## He Rose! 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

For many the Easter story sounds like a fable or something too good to be true. This is not unlike some people in the early Church. The believers at Corinth did believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ but were having a problem believing that they and other believers would also be resurrected and have eternal life; so Paul started his argument with that fundamental truth that Jesus was resurrected. He presented three proofs to assure his readers that Jesus Christ indeed had been raised from the dead.

Proof #1—their salvation (vv. 1–2). Paul had come to Corinth and preached the message of the Gospel, and their faith had transformed their lives. But an integral part of the Gospel message was and is the fact of Christ’s resurrection. After all, a dead Savior cannot save anybody. Paul’s readers had received the Word, trusted Christ, been saved, and were now standing on that Word as the assurance of their salvation. The fact that they were standing firm was proof that their faith was genuine and not empty.

Proof #2—the Old Testament Scriptures (vv. 3–4). The Gospel is the most important message that the church ever proclaims. While it is good to be involved in social action and the betterment of humankind, there is no reason why these ministries should preempt the Gospel. “Christ died... He was buried... He rose again... He was seen” are the basic historical *facts* on which the Gospel stands (1 Cor. 15:3–5). “Christ died for our sins” is the belief the church gives to these historical facts. Many people were crucified by the Romans, but only one “victim” ever died for the sins of the world.

When Paul wrote “according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3) he was referring to the Old Testament Scriptures. Much of the Old Testament pointed to the sacrifice of Christ as our substitute and Savior. The annual Day of Atonement (Lev. 16) and prophecies like Isaiah 53 would also come to mind.

But where does the Old Testament declare His resurrection on the third day? Jesus pointed to the experience of Jonah (Matt. 12:38–41). Paul also compared Christ’s resurrection to the “firstfruits,” and the firstfruits were presented to God on the day following the Sabbath after Passover (Lev. 23:9–14; 1 Cor. 15:23). Since the Sabbath must always be the seventh day, the day after Sabbath must be the first day of the week: the day of our Lord’s resurrection. This covers three days on the Jewish calendar. Apart from the Feast of Firstfruits, there were other prophecies of Messiah’s resurrection in the Old Testament: Psalm 16:8–11; Psalm 22:22ff; Isaiah 53:10–12; and Psalm 2:7.

Proof #3—Christ was seen by witnesses (vv. 5–11). On the cross, Jesus was exposed to the eyes of unbelievers; but after the Resurrection, He was seen by believers who could be witnesses of His resurrection (Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32). Peter saw Him and so did the disciples collectively. In the earliest account of the Resurrection story, the word of the messenger in the empty tomb is, “Go, tell his disciples and Peter.” (Mark 16:7). In Luke 24:34 the disciples say, “The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon.” It is an amazing thing that one of the first appearances of the Risen Lord was to the disciple who had denied him. Others might have hated Peter forever, but the one desire of Jesus was to set this erratic disciple of his upon his feet. Peter had wronged Jesus and then had wept his heart out; and the one desire of this amazing Jesus was to comfort him in the pain of his disloyalty. Love can go no further than to think more of the heartbreak of the man who wronged it than of the hurt that it itself has received.

James was a brother of Jesus who became a believer after the Lord appeared to him (John 7:5; Acts 1:14). It is quite clear from the gospel narrative that Jesus' own family did not understand him and were even actively hostile to him. Mark 3:21 tells us that they actually sought to restrain him because they believed him to be mad. John 7:5 tells us that his brothers did not believe in him. One of the earliest of those gospels which did not succeed in getting into the New Testament is the Gospel according to the Hebrews. Only fragments of it remain. One fragment, preserved by Jerome, reads, "Now the Lord, when he had given the linen cloth unto the servant of the priest, went unto James and appeared unto him (for James had sworn that he would not eat bread from that hour wherein he had drunk the Lord's cup until he should see him risen again from among them that sleep)." So, the story runs, "Jesus went to James and said, 'Bring ye a table and bread.' And he took bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it unto James the Just and said unto him, 'My brother, eat thy bread, for the Son of Man is risen from among them that sleep.'" We can only conjecture what lies behind this. It may well be that the last days turned James's contempt into wondering admiration so that when the end came, he was so torn with remorse for the way in which he had treated his brother that he swore that he would starve unless he came back to forgive him. Here once again we have the amazing grace and love of Christ. He came to bring peace to the troubled soul of the man who had called him mad and who had been his opponent.

The 500 plus brothers and sisters all saw Him at the same time (1 Cor. 15:6), so it could not have been a hallucination or a deception.

But one of the greatest witnesses of the Resurrection was Paul himself, because as an unbeliever he was soundly convinced that Jesus was dead. Paul included himself in the company of all believers when he spoke of receiving the truth of Christ's death and His resurrection on behalf of sinful people. Because he was the

last, like a runt, untimely born, Paul could call himself the least of the apostles and a prior opponent and persecutor of the church (cf. Acts 22:4; 1 Tim. 1:15-16) which he now served (2 Cor. 4:5).

The radical change in his life—a change which brought him persecution and suffering—is certainly evidence that the Lord had indeed been raised from the dead. Paul made it clear that his salvation was purely an act of God's grace; but that grace worked in and through him as he served the Lord. Paul was without peer in his devotion (cf. 9:19-27). The history of the church confirms that his devotion was not without effect. He had worked harder than any of the other apostles, as he traveled more, suffered more opposition, wrote more New Testament epistles, and founded more churches. Yet Paul knew and ministered with the recognition that it was not his power but God's (2:4-5) which produced results (3:6).

In the final analysis it was not the messenger but the message which was important (cf. 1:18-4:5), and in that regard the apostolic message was that the crucified Christ became the resurrected Christ, which message Paul did preach and the Corinthians believed.<sup>1</sup>

Paul gave us the heart of the gospel: Christ died for our sins and He was raised. Christ came as a man, truly human, and experienced all that we experienced, except that He never sinned. If there is no resurrection, then Christ was not raised. If He was not raised, there is no Gospel to preach. If there is no Gospel, then you have believed in vain and you are still in your sins! If there is no resurrection, then we have no hope.

The fact that Jesus was buried verified His death, and the fact that He appeared to others verified His resurrection. The conclusion is obvious: Why be a Christian if we have only suffering in this life and no future glory to anticipate? The

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<sup>1</sup>Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:542

Resurrection is not just important; it is “of first importance,” because all that we believe hinges on it.<sup>2</sup>

Life makes many attempts to take away our faith. Things happen to us and to others which baffle our understanding; life has its problems to which there seems no solution and its questions to which there seems no answer; life has its dark places where there seems to be nothing to do but hold on. Faith is always a *victory*, the victory of the soul which tenaciously maintains its clutch on God. To reject bodily resurrection invalidates “the gospel” and makes faith useless. Believing the gospel includes holding firmly to belief in Christ’s resurrection. Unless we hold firmly, our belief is “in vain.”<sup>3</sup>

Thanks to God for His great love for us. Jesus is risen!

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<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Co 15:1

<sup>3</sup> Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letters to the Corinthians*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 141