

The Grave Is Empty . . . Jesus Is Risen!

Intro: Easter Sunday marks the day, nearly two thousand years ago, when God raised His Son Jesus Christ from the dead. This morning we can rejoice together and praise our “*God, and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*” (1 Peter 1:3).

Of all the world religions, only one claims that its founder returned from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the very cornerstone of Christianity. Because the resurrection is so central and absolutely essential to the Christian faith, I would like for us to look at the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul provides us with a very early Christian Creed in **1 Corinthians 15:3-8**, one which Christians would recite to summarize their belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. **Look at 1 Corinth. 15:3-8:**

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Peter, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

New Testament scholars are of the opinion that this creed was formulated within a few short years of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. A copy was probably given to Paul after his conversion in Damascus or during his subsequent visit to Jerusalem when he first met with the apostles James & Peter.

This creed presents a four line summary of Christ’ death, burial, resurrection, and numerous post-resurrection appearances recorded in the 4 gospels.

The first line refers to Christ’s substitutionary death for sin (v. 3)

The second line to His burial (v. 4a)

The third line to His resurrection on the third day (v. 4b)

The fourth line to His post-resurrection appearances (vv. 5-8)

Look with me this morning at the evidence supporting Christ’s death, burial, resurrection on the third day, and His numerous post-resurrection appearances.

I. Christ's Substitutionary Death for Sin: Good Friday

Jesus was condemned and sentenced to death on Friday. This day has become known as "Good Friday." We looked at Good Friday last Sunday morning. Friday was the day that God's eternal Son was put to death for the sin of the world. The Apostle Paul explains in **2 Corinthians 5:21**—that "God the Father made Him who knew no sin [Jesus Christ] to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God [through faith] in Him." We can and should rejoice on Good Friday because Jesus died for the sins of the world, that my friends is good news!

The writer to the Hebrews explains how Christ's death on the cross provided the once for all sacrifice for sin. Hebrews 10:10-14—

By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all**. And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; **12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time**, sat down at the right hand of God, **13** waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. **14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.**

Not only was Christ crucified on Friday, He was also buried on Friday:

II. Christ's Burial: Good Friday

Following Jesus' death, Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin and secret follower of Christ, asked Pilate for permission to bury the body of Jesus. Pilate, after ascertaining that Jesus was dead, granted Joseph permission to take Christ down from the cross and bury Him. Joseph, along with Nicodemus, took Christ and prepared His body with linen wrappings and a mixture of myrrh and aloe spices. They laid the Lord Jesus' body in a new and unused garden tomb, presumably Joseph's, and rolled a large stone against the entrance (John 19:38-42). The Gospel accounts also inform us that there were many women who witnessed Christ's burial (Matt. 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55).

III. Christ's Resurrection from the Dead: Sunday Morning

Mark informs us in 16:1-6, "When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the *mother* of James, and Salome, bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. **2** And very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb

when the sun had risen. **3** And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” **4** And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. **5** And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were frightened. **6** And he said to them, “Do not be afraid; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him. **Jesus is Risen, Just as He said!** **7** “But go, tell His disciples and Peter, ‘He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He said to you.’” **8** And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

John informs us in chapter 20, verse 2 that Mary ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, presumably John, and said to them “They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.”

John goes on to report in v. **3** that Peter and the other disciple, ran to the tomb, and v. **5** John arriving first, stooping and looking in, saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. **6** Simon Peter therefore also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he beheld the linen wrappings lying there, **7** and the face-cloth, which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. **8** So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb entered then also, and he saw and believed. **9** For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.

“**Jesus had risen, just as He said.**” Jesus had told His disciples, and the women who traveled with Him, that “He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day” (**Matthew 16:21**; 17:22; 20:18; **Mark 10:32-34**; Luke 18:31-33; Ps. 22; Isa. 53).

IV. Christ’s Post-Resurrection Appearances Validate His Resurrection

1. To Mary Magdalene (Matt. 28:8-10; Mark 16:9-10; **John 20:11-18)**

Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, the woman whom He had delivered from demon-possession. Jesus spoke her name and she recognized Him. He commissioned Mary to go and tell His disciples that He had risen from the dead. I find it interesting that Jesus first appeared to the one who loved Him

the most, Mary Magdalene, the woman He had delivered from severe demon-possession.

2. To Simon Peter, Sunday afternoon (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5)

No details are given concerning this meeting, but we can imagine that Jesus reaffirmed Peter as the Rock who would be used by God to establish the Church, first in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), then in Judea, Samaria, and finally in the Gentile household of Cornelius (Acts 10).

3. To two disciples on the Road to Emmaus, late afternoon (Luke 24:13-32)

The Lord Jesus next appeared to two of His disciples on the road leading to the village of Emmaus, located about seven miles from Jerusalem (v. 13) **Luke 24:14-32**—They were discussing the events that had taken place that day. 15 Jesus Himself approached, and began traveling with them. 16 But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. 17 And He said to them, “What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?” And they stood still, looking sad. 18 And one of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, “Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?” 19 And He said to them, “What things?” And they said to Him, “The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, 20 and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him up to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. 21 “But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, **it is the third day since these things happened.** 22 “But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, 23 and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels, who said that He was alive. 24 “And some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see.”

v. 25—And He said to them, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” 27 And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

Now, you should be really thankful that I didn't choose to begin with Moses and review all that the Old Testament prophets predicted concerning Jesus Christ. Did you know that there are over 600 prophecies recorded in the Old Testament about Christ. **That would make for a really long sermon.**

Anyway, v. 28 As they approached the village where they were going, Jesus acted as though He would go farther. 29 But they urged Him, to stay with them. And He went in to stay with them. 30 And it came about that when He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. 31 And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight.

The disciples' reaction (vv. 32-35) And they said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" 33 And they arose that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, **34 saying, "The Lord has really risen, and has appeared to Simon."** 35 And they began to relate their own experience on the road, and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread.

4. To His disciples, Thomas absent, Sunday night (John 20:19-25)

The disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them "Peace be with you." He showed them both His wounded hands and His side. The disciples rejoiced as they came to realize that Jesus was the resurrected, glorified Son of God; as He had claimed! Thomas, who was not there when Jesus came, refused to accept the testimony of the other disciples that they had seen the Lord.

5. To His disciples, Thomas present, the next Sunday night (John 20:26-31)

Jesus appears to His disciples the following Sunday evening, and directed doubting Thomas to step forward and examine His nail-pierced hands and His spear-torn side. Thomas declared, "**My Lord and my God!**" Jesus said to Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." Christ's point is that believers that would come after He ascended back to the Father would be more blessed for believing in Him without seeing. The reason being, such belief requires a greater faith.

6. To more than 500 believers at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6)

Christ's appearing to more than five hundred believers at one time would have provided a powerful testimony to the validity of Christ's resurrection.

7. To His half-brother James (1 Cor. 15:7)

At some point Christ appeared to His half-brother James, the author of the New Testament Book of James, and leader of the Jerusalem Church.

8. To seven of His disciples at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-24)

Several of Christ's disciples returned to their fishing operations in Galilee. Jesus appeared on the shore early in the morning and asked the disciples if they had caught any fish. "No," they replied. Jesus commanded them to cast their net on the right side of the boat and they would find fish. They obeyed and caught so much fish that they could not haul in the net. When they finally hauled the net ashore, they counted 153 fish. What a gracious provision by the Lord.

Christ provided, prepared, and shared a meal with these seven disciples, and reaffirmed Peter by asking him three times, "Peter do you love Me." Each time Peter responds yes, and Jesus tells him "Then feed My sheep." This threefold reaffirmation parallels Peter's threefold denial of Jesus on the night of His betrayal.

9. To His disciples at various times over a period of forty days (Acts 1:3)

Luke informs us in Acts 1:3-11 that Jesus presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to His disciples over a period of 40 days, and speaking to them of the things concerning the kingdom of God. According to verse 6 the kingdom had not yet been established, for the disciples were asking Him if the time had now come for Him to restore the kingdom to Israel. His disciples were still anticipating His coming Kingdom and glory! Jesus said it was not for them to know the times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority. Jesus promised His disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they would be His witnesses both in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even to the remotest parts of the earth (Acts 1:8).

10. Jesus' final commission and ascension back to His Father in heaven (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:3-11).

Jesus issues His "Great Commission" to His disciples in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8. He calls for them, and by extension all future believers, to be His witnesses. The message concerning salvation from sin and death was to be propagated by believers beginning in Jerusalem, and then spreading outward through Judea, and Samaria, and eventually to the lost people in every nation of the world. Christ promises to participate with His disciples in all that they do, because He is always present with them [us]!

After commissioning them to be His witnesses, Jesus was lifted up into the clouds. He ascended back to heaven to assume His glorious throne at His Father's right hand. "His disciples remained continually at the temple, praising God!" They no longer feared the religious leaders, but testified daily of Christ's resurrection in the Temple!

Application:

Did you know that embracing the resurrection of Christ can help you overcome the everyday problems of life? In Matthew 28:20 Jesus promised His disciples, that He would be with them always, even to the end of the age. The reality of Christ's resurrection can transform your gloom into gladness and your depression into dancing. **Thank God for Easter Sunday, for Jesus is alive.**

CLOSING PRAYER: As we close in prayer I would invite you to examine your heart before God. Confess any sin in your life and ask Jesus to restore you to the joy of His salvation. Do you know God's will for your life, surrender yourself to His Lordship and ask Him to show you His will for your life.

Perhaps you would confess this morning that you have never trusted Christ for salvation. If you have never asked Jesus Christ to forgive you of your sin and to come into your life as your Savior, do it now! Let Easter Sunday 2015 be the day of your salvation. Ask Jesus to forgive and to save you this morning and He will.

Praise God, the Grave is Empty . . . Jesus is Risen!

Closing Song: *Poosum Holler Fiddlers*