

INTRODUCTION

Easter is the most important holiday in the Christian tradition. We don't make as big a deal about Easter as much as we do about Christmas and even sometimes as we do some non-Christian holidays such as the 4th of July or Halloween. Yet, without Easter, there is no Christianity. Without Easter, Christmas loses its power. We celebrate Christmas because Jesus came. We celebrate Easter because Jesus came to die...and to rise from the dead. This rising from the dead is the central event in Easter. Jesus didn't just come to die. Which He did, and brutally...taking the punishment for sin that you and I deserve, but He came to defeat death by rising from the dead.

Jesus is the only religious leader that has been raised from the dead. His resurrection is what sets Christianity apart from all other religions. You're all tuning in today because of the resurrection. This is why we celebrated Easter last week. This is why we worship on Sundays. Every Sunday is a resurrection Sunday. Because of the resurrection, we have hope for this life and for eternity. But our hope is not an aimless hoping. It's something we can be sure of.

We hope for many things. "I hope it doesn't rain today. I hope my team wins. I hope they like me." But our hope is never certain though. Maybe it will rain. Maybe we'll lose (just kidding! There are no sports being played right now...) Maybe they won't like me and will recognize me for the doofus that I am. We hope for so many things, but our hope is never certain. That's not the type of hope that comes with Christianity, though. It's not hope-so hope. It's know-so hope.

Well, how can we be sure? If our hope is because of the resurrection, how can we be sure that Jesus really rose from the dead? How can we know the resurrection is true? How can we know that Jesus didn't just rise some 2,000 years ago, but that He's still alive today? Well, let's put the resurrection on trial. Today, we are going to put the resurrection on trial and observe *some* of the evidence that Jesus rose from the dead.

I was reading the post-resurrection accounts this past week, and knowing what I was going to be preaching on this week, this verse stood out to me like a neon light. Acts 1:3 - *"He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs,¹ appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God."* This morning we will be observing just some of these proofs. You will be the jury, observing the evidence, and by the end, I can assure you, your hope will be certain, Jesus is still alive!

The passage we are about to study, many scholars believe to be the earliest source we have within our New Testament. It is an oral testimony, a creed, passed down between believers in a culture that spread things by word of mouth. Sources say it dates anywhere from 8 months to 8 years after the events of that first Easter.

¹ τεκμήριον (tekmérion) – a marker (sign-post) supplying indisputable information, "marking something off" as unmistakable (irrefutable).

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 (ESV)

1 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

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

BODY

So, to begin our evaluation of the evidence of the resurrection, the first thing we must observe is this: **Jesus really died**. You cannot resurrect if you are never dead! Jesus actually died – professional killers killed him. Romans had perfected this form of execution...crucifixion. This is where we get our word excruciating from, showing the brutal nature of this type of death. God could have come at any time in history, past or future. Galatians 4:4-5 says, *“⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”* Jesus didn't come today when He would get lethal injection if He was sentenced to death. No, He came during Roman rule, where He would face gruesome, tortuous death. And this was God's plan.

This creed we read shows us not only that He died, but also the purpose for which He died...for our sins, in accordance with the Scriptures (vs. 3). We are sinners. God is perfectly holy. A sacrifice must take place in order to pay our sin debt. The Old Testament shouts this out...the slaughter of the lamb at the Passover...the whole sacrificial system.

Hebrews 9:22 sums it all up perfectly...*“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”* Verse 26 shows how the sacrificial death of Jesus was different from all the other sacrifices. *“He would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”* It was even prophesied that Jesus would die like this for this purpose. Isaiah 53:5-7...*Like a lamb to the slaughter...upon him was laid the sin of us all...*

To bring the courtroom scene back to the forefront, “that Jesus died for our sins” is theologically referred to as penal substitution. We should have been the ones sentenced to death by that court...we should have hung on that cross...but He took our place.

So, Christ died...for our sins...according to the Scriptures. Let's look at the next piece of evidence that goes along with this one: **Jesus was buried.**

We tend to downgrade this one, Jesus' burial. We often overlook its significance. "That he was buried," functions to verify the reality of his death. This early creed is evidence that a dead corpse was laid in a grave, so that the resurrection that follows will be recognized as an actual reality. Nobody argues that Jesus was never in the tomb. Actual opponents make up a reason as to how the tomb was empty, but they never say what would be the easiest lie, that He was never put in the tomb.

It was a sealed tomb, and Roman guards guarded it. There is indisputable, early historical proof that Jesus lived and was crucified and buried by non-Christian and even anti-Christian sources. History tells us that Jesus was real and really died.

Josephus

"He was the Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those who loved him at first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day" (Antiquities, XVIII, III).

Tacitus (early second century)

"Hence to suppress the rumor, he was falsely charged with guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also" (Annals, XV, 44).

Lucian (second century Greek satirist)

"The man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world . . . Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they were all brothers one of another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshiping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws" (On the Death of Peregrine).

The Talmud (Jewish collection of writings)

"On the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshu (of Nazareth) and the herald went before him for forty days saying (Yeshu of Nazareth) is going to be stoned in that he hath practiced sorcery and beguiled and led astray Israel. Let everyone know aught in his defense come and plead for him. But they found naught in his defense and hanged him on the eve of Passover" (The Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a, "Eve of Passover").

Let's look at another piece of evidence now: **Jesus was raised.**

If someone dies and is buried, what do you expect? A body. With Jesus, there is no body. The accounts state that the tomb was empty, even by the lie that the Jews were spreading that the disciples stole His body.² Now, I doubt the disciples could have stolen the body even if they tried. These normal men would have had to turn into ninjas overnight and sneak past and overpower the guards. Plus, they had no motive to do

² Matthew 28:13 - "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.'"

this. Each one of them suffered and died for their own belief in the resurrection. People don't die for a lie. Many wouldn't even die for the truth!

Also, if Jesus, bloody and beaten, had rolled the stone away in a bout of Herculean strength, that is a miracle in itself. And when He appeared to His disciples, they fell down and worshipped Him, not bringing bandages to Him, trying to help mend His wounds. No, they saw Him as gloriously resurrected, not having barely escaped and clinging to life.

This is just *some* of the evidence of how the tomb was empty. It reveals that these things could not have occurred, so the only evidential outcome of why the tomb was empty is the greatest miracle of all time: **Jesus rose from the dead.**

Now, let's look at one more piece of evidence that we'll cover to show this more clearly: **Jesus appeared.**

Though there is tons of proof of Jesus' resurrection in the previous points and more that I didn't cover, the next point is most convincing and would hold up well in a court of law. There were more than 500 eyewitnesses, in which Paul is inviting the readers to go ask about the resurrection (vs. 6). It could not have been mass hallucination. People don't share dreams. You don't wake up near someone and say, "Man, that dream was cool, huh? When we rode that unicorn through space. Yeah, that joke you told in that dream was super hilarious." No, people don't share hallucinations the same way people don't share dreams. It could not have been Group Think, where a group wanted so bad to believe something that they actually believed it. Even some nonbelievers saw Him.

The disciples were scattered and scared and then became bold and fearless. Each one died for their faith in the resurrected Jesus. Who would die to cover up a lie? Who would endure painful torture to promote a myth? Few would even do it for the truth!

If you're in a court of law, the evidence is overwhelming!

A District Attorney told me that one credible eyewitness is enough to convict someone of murder. This Scripture says there were 515. To cross examine them for 15 minutes a piece, it would take 5 straight days. That's a lot of eyewitness testimony.

The evidence is in...give some sort of indication online, like thumbs up or thumbs down emoji, or click like or angry face...if you were in a court of law, would there be sufficient evidence FOR the resurrection if you are the jury? The verdict is in...BREAKING NEWS...the resurrection is true!! Jesus rose from the dead!

Now, why does this matter? Verse 17 – **"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."** Our whole faith and eternity hinges on this one fact. But, there's more proof to the resurrection...proof of what it does.

Look at the first part of the creed. **“Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.”** Scripture shows that a sacrifice must be made – a debt must be paid for our sins. The resurrection is proof that the debt has been paid. The resurrection is proof of God’s incomprehensible love. The resurrection is proof of God’s mercy...His grace... That our sins are not counted against us. The resurrection is proof that our debt has been paid in full. It is the receipt saying, this is good, this is done, this is paid for. The resurrection is proof that death doesn’t have the final word. That eternity is a certain reality. The resurrection is proof that the worst that life can throw at us, God is greater. The resurrection is proof that the pain or hardship you are facing right now is light and momentary in comparison to eternity. The resurrection is proof that Satan has been defeated and death itself has died. The resurrection is proof that your hope can be sure.

Why does all this matter? Verses 19-20a reveal, **“If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead...”** Hope Lives...in Jesus. In Jesus, we have hope! **Hope lives because Jesus lives!**

In Jesus we have...**Hope for this life**, that faith isn’t just a crutch and that joy, truth, and grace are really real (vs. 12-19). **Hope that He is above all and that He’s totally in control** (vs. 20-28). **Hope in eternity**, that we will rise again, if we believe in Jesus and what He’s done, and we will be resurrected to new life (vs. 35-41). **Hope that we don’t have to suffer the effects of sin for all eternity** (vs. 42-49). **Hope that gives us comfort as we endure loss** (vs. 50-57). **Hope that fuels us to be faithful Christians** (vs. 58) In Jesus we have...spiritual hope, eternal hope, physical hope, emotional hope, and hope in action. In Jesus we have hope! **Hope lives because Jesus lives!**

CONCLUSION

There is hope in the resurrection. It doesn’t matter how good of a person you are...if your hope is not in Jesus, you have no hope. But, there is hope for you in the resurrection. Hope lives because Jesus lives. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in you and in your life if you are in Him. This hope fuels and empowers the rest of your life.

If you can’t deny the resurrection, the only thing you can do is accept it. Today, this Sunday after Easter, this Resurrection Sunday, I’m asking you to accept the hope of the resurrection.