

The Resurrection

That You May Believe: A Series on Apologetics, Part 4

1 Corinthians 15:1-11, 14, 17, 19

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The most important reason to be a Christian: Christianity is true.

- Why are you a Christian?
 - For those of you who are Christians - why?
 - For those of you who are not a Christian, what would make you become a Christian?
- Many people come to different conclusions.
 - I was born into Christianity. My parents raised me in the church.
 - I like the community Christianity brings.
 - I like the teachings of Jesus and Christianity.
- The most resounding answer should be this: **The claims of Christianity are true.**
- If the claims of Christianity are not true, you should not be a Christian. But if the claims of Christianity are true, you should be a Christian. If Jesus really did raise from the dead that changes everything. You should follow Him.
- “If [the resurrection] happened, it changes our lives completely.”
 - Tim Keller - “If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all he said; if he didn’t rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead.”¹
 - Tim Keller - “That is how the first hearers felt who heard reports of the resurrection. They knew that if it was true it meant we can’t live our lives any way we want. It also meant we don’t have to be afraid of anything, not Roman swords, not cancer, nothing. If Jesus rose from the dead it changes everything.”²
- If it’s true, you can not ignore it. It can not not make a difference to you
- You can not be indifferent to the message of Jesus.
 - C.S. Lewis’ trilemma: liar, lunatic, Lord³
 - You can not say that Jesus is merely a good moral teacher. A good moral teacher would not make the claims Jesus made. If Jesus was not resurrected, he was a lunatic (on the level of a man who says he’s a poached egg) or a liar. But if the resurrection is true. He is Lord.
- If the resurrection is true, everything changes.
- Tonight we’re going to reflect on the resurrection. We will look at a passage of scripture that shows the centrality of the resurrection to the Christian faith, and we will look at some reasons for why it is reasonable to accept the resurrection as a historical event.

¹ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 210.

² Keller, *The Reason for God*, 210.

³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 1952), 52.

1 Corinthians 15:1-11, 14, 17, 19

- 1 Corinthians 15 is an amazing chapter that discusses the centrality of the resurrection.
 - In *1 Corinthians 15:3b-5*, Paul is probably quoting some sort of early Christian confession. The church at Corinth would have been aware of what Paul is writing. This predates Paul. This is key for us to understand what the core message of the earliest Christians was.⁴
- This message is something we need to be reminded of. (*15:1*)
- This message is at the core of the gospel, the good news. (*15:1*)
- This message is where we stand. (*15:1*)
- This message is by which we are being saved. (*15:2*)
- This message is of first importance. (*15:3*)
- The core message of the gospel is this:
 - Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures. (*15:3*)
 - Jesus was buried. (*15:4*)
 - Jesus was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures. (*15:4*)
 - You can summarize the gospel succinctly: the gospel is the good news of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.
- Jesus appeared to...
 - Cephas (Peter) (*15:5*)
 - The twelve (apostles) (*15:5*)
 - More than 500 people (*15:6*)
 - Many of these folks are still alive, though some have died.
 - James (his brother) (*15:7*)
 - Paul (*15:8-10*)
- If there's no resurrection, our faith and ministry is useless. (*15:14*)
- If there's no resurrection, we're still in our sins. (*15:17*)
- If there's no resurrection, since Christ is our only hope, we should be pitied. (*15:19*)
- The resurrection was immensely important to the early church. If the resurrection were not true, the faith is useless and foolish. But if the resurrection is true, Jesus is Lord, we have an amazing hope, and resurrection is very good news.
- Next I will discuss some reasons for why it's reasonable to believe the resurrection is true.

Why it's Reasonable to Believe the Resurrection is True

Burden of Proof

- Many skeptics say that believers of the resurrection have the burden of proof to prove the likelihood of the resurrection.
- That's partly the case. Christians do have some responsibility.

⁴ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 255.

- But skeptics must provide a feasible explanation for the birth of the church--how it began.⁵
 - There are some agreed upon facts, and if the resurrection is not true, the skeptic must provide reasons for all of these facts.

Where there is unanimous agreement with both skeptics and Christians

- There was a rabbi in Palestine named Jesus.
- Jesus was crucified.
- The tomb was found empty.
 - If there was a body, Jesus' corpse could have easily been produced.
- Hundreds of people believed they saw the resurrected Jesus.
- The message of the resurrection spread like wildfire across the Roman Empire to both Jews and Gentiles.
 - What began as a Jewish sect, soon became a majority Gentile religion.
- The earliest followers of Jesus who claim to have seen the resurrection were willing to die for their new faith in Jesus.

Did Jesus really die?

- In order to be resurrected, you must have been death.
- "Swoon theory" or "swoon hypothesis"⁶ states that Jesus didn't really die on the cross. He just passed out. And three days later he woke up. (
- The Koran states that Jesus never really died. He fled to India.⁷
- "Crucifixion is essentially an agonizing slow death by asphyxiation."⁸
- The Roman soldiers were professional killers. They wouldn't make a mistake.

The texts documenting the resurrection were recorded shortly after the resurrection.

- Many resurrection skeptics claim that the gospel and resurrection accounts occurred decades or generations after the supposed resurrection.
- This isn't the case. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 says that Jesus' resurrected body appeared to over 500 people. Though some have died (15:6). This means that at the time the church at Corinth had received this letter, some people were still alive that witnessed the resurrection. Paul would not have written this if it was written generations after the resurrection. The people receiving the letter could go and meet eye witnesses. (Some perhaps did.)
 - Keller says that "Paul was inviting anyone who doubted that Jesus had appeared to people after his death to go and talk to the eye witnesses if they wished...[the challenge] could be taken up, since during the *pax Romana* travel around the Mediterranean was safe and easy."⁹

⁵ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 210-211.

⁶ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 257.

⁷ Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 256.

⁸ Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 265.

⁹ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 212.

The earliest disciples were willing to die for their faith in the resurrection.

- Many people would lie for personal gain.
- No one would lie for poverty and death.
- Pascal said, “I believe those witnesses that get their throats cut.”¹⁰
- The disciples were not very courageous before the crucifixion. But after they witnessed the resurrection they were very bold.
- Virtually all the apostles and early Christian leaders were persecuted and died for their faith.

Women Witnesses

- Women were the first ones to see the resurrected Jesus.
 - Every gospel asserts this: *Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10; John 20:1*
- “Women’s low social status meant that their testimony was not admissible in court.”¹¹
- If the earliest disciples were to fabricate a story like the resurrection of Jesus, they would not choose women to be the first ones to witness it. Women eyewitnesses was of no advantage and, in fact, undermined the credibility of the testimony.
- “The only possible explanation for why women were depicted as meeting Jesus first is if they really had.”¹²

The Resurrection was Unexpected

- “To all the dominant worldviews at the time, and individual bodily resurrection was almost inconceivable.”¹³
- This was true for both Jews and Gentiles¹⁴
 - Gentiles
 - Gentiles in the Greco-Roman world thought the soul was good and the body and material world was bad.
 - The hope was *liberation* from the body.
 - Resurrection was *undesirable*.
 - Jews
 - There was a hope for the resurrection for all righteous people one day.
 - But there was no expectation for an individual to be resurrected.
 - There was also no expectation at all for the Messiah/Christ to have been crucified.
 - Jews would have never considered a person to be divine either.
- Since an individual resurrection was unexpected, the only plausible reason for there to be such a turn in worldview from both Jews and Gentiles was if the resurrection actually happened.

¹⁰ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 218.

¹¹ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 213.

¹² Keller, *The Reason for God*, 213.

¹³ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 215.

¹⁴ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 215.

Did the people who claimed to see the resurrected body of Jesus hallucinate?

- Some say that they just imagined that they had saw Jesus.
- There was no category or expectation of individual resurrection for the disciples.
- Even though there have been documented group hallucinations, there have not been multiple group hallucinations.
- Hallucinations do not take into account the eating and touching of Jesus.

The Birth of the Church

- Other messianic movements
 - Other so-called “messiahs” were killed. Their followers disbanded.
 - When Jesus, our messiah was killed, the number of his followers grew like wildfire.
- As mentioned earlier, there was no expectation or even category for an individual death and resurrection of a group’s leader. What else would explain the rapid growth of the church in both the Gentiles and Jews.
- What else would explain the willingness to sacrifice boldly for the

We should want the Resurrection to be true.

- As I close, think about the resurrection and its implications. Don’t you want the resurrection to be true?
- The Resurrection means that there is hope after death. This world matters. Jesus is really Lord.
- Tim Keller - “Each year at Easter I get to preach on the Resurrection. In my sermon I always say to my skeptical, secular friends that, even if they can’t believe in the resurrection, they should want it to be true. Most of them care deeply about justice for the poor, alleviating hunger and disease, and caring for the environment. Yet many of them believe that the material world was caused by accident and that the world and everything in it will eventually burn up in the death of the sun. They find it discouraging that so few people care about justice without realizing that their own worldview undermines any motivation to make the world a better place. Why sacrifice for the needs of others if in the end nothing we do will make any difference? If the resurrection of Jesus happened, however, that means there’s infinite hope and reason to pour ourselves out for the needs of the world.”¹⁵
- N.T. Wright says, “The message of the resurrection is that this world matters.”¹⁶
- There is no more hopeful or good news than the resurrection.

¹⁵ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 220.

¹⁶ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 221.