

- ***READ I Corinthians 15:3,4/PRAYER*** I'm sure if we all had just a couple of moments to think, we could come up with some things that are absolutely essential to something working or being operational. For example, you can't play soccer without a soccer ball. No ball means no game. You can't drive a car without the engine or something to propel it. You can't fly a kite with the string. In much the same way, there is something within Christianity that is of the utmost importance. Without this thing, the whole faith falls apart.
- What is this all important piece of the Christian faith that we cannot do without? It is undoubtedly the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now, do I say this from my own understanding? The truth of the matter is that I can come to know the importance of the resurrection based upon the Text that we read together just a few minutes ago. In **I Corinthians 15:1-4**, Paul firmly states the importance of the resurrection. He says that he delivered to these disciples that thing which was of **"first importance."** What was the thing that was important above all other things? Paul says that it was the fact that Jesus came, died, and was raised from the dead, and that all of this was done in accordance to the Scriptures. Let me suggest that the resurrection of Jesus can make a tremendous case for God and His existence. But I must also be honest and state that the lack of a resurrection does nothing but prove the opposite concerning God. This means that we must consider the evidence of the resurrection and come to a decision concerning its validity and then come to decide what we will believe concerning God.
- This morning, as we consider another piece of evidence for the God of heaven, we will consider the resurrection of Jesus from a couple of different perspectives. Firstly, we will consider the ramifications of there being no true raising of Jesus Christ from the dead. There are some serious consequences that must be acknowledged. But then after considering those we will look at why we can have confidence in the resurrection as having truly taken place. The faith of Christians rises and falls with the validity of the resurrection, so let's consider how that is the case this morning.

I. If there was no resurrection:

A. The Bible is not God's Word.

1. Meaning that the book that claims there was a resurrection when in fact there was not cannot come from the mind of an all knowing God. The fact that the Bible claims to be from the mind of the God of heaven who is all knowing can't be true if something within it is incorrect.
2. Paul states that all Scripture is **"inspired by God."** (**II Timothy 3:16**). However, if what was recorded was in fact not true then either this book is not actually from the mind of God, or the God that this book puts forth does not truly exist and this book is only a product of the mind of men.
3. Peter also writes concerning those things recorded in Scripture in **II Peter 1:20,21**. Here Peter states that the disciple needs to know **"first of all"** that the those things recorded in Scripture, particular those things that were prophetic, were not a product of the mind of men, but they were given to them through the Holy Spirit who spoke to them from God. The resurrection was a matter of prophecy. The Messiah was not going to be held down by the gates of death according to the prophecy of Jesus (**Matthew 16:18**), but if the Messiah was never raised then the book got it wrong.
4. A book that claims to be from the all knowing mind of God, yet is not able to accurately predict the future or record accurate history cannot be a book that can be trusted much less truly be a book that was miraculously given to man through the Spirit of God.

B. Jesus is not the Messiah.

1. Speaking of Jesus...if He was not raised from the dead then He could not and is not the Messiah that is to save the world from its sins. If Jesus was not raised then He is nothing more than a con artist and a liar.
2. He would be a con artist because He portrayed Himself as being sent from God for the people. In **John 7:28,29**, as Jesus is in the Temple, He cries out and declares that **"I am from Him, and He sent Me."** The "Him" in these verses is God. Therefore, Jesus is making the claim that He has been sent from God...yet if He was not raised then He and God are both called into question.
3. Go back to **Matthew 16:18** for just a second. Consider that Jesus insinuates here and then begins to teach beyond this point that He would be killed and raised after three days. (**Matthew 16:21**) But if the resurrection did not take place then Jesus is made a liar because of His predictions. The perfect and sinless lamb of God cannot be a liar, so therefore if the resurrection did not happen, then Jesus was not and is not the Messiah sent to save the world. He is not worthy of our worship.

C. Our faith is worthless.

1. Then very practically speaking, the faith that we possess and live by is actually worthless. Paul was an honest man, and he recognized this as being the case. (**I Corinthians 15:12-17**) He was willing to concede that without the resurrection, our faith was worth nothing and we are wasting our time living as we do.

2. But why is our faith worthless? It is worthless because we have committed our lives to, as we have established, a fraud and a liar. We strive to be like Jesus, but if He was not sinless and godly in all ways then we are striving for something that isn't desirable.
3. Also, if there is not resurrection then we have no hope that we too can be raised in the last day. Again, Paul recognizes this and he knew that those who had died were to stay dead and that when we die we would have no hope of raising again one day. Without the resurrection, we have no hope of heaven or anything beyond the grave. Our faith holds no value and does nothing for us.

As we can see, the consequences of Jesus having not been raised from the dead are enormous. Truly, if the resurrection did not take place then we must really consider what that means for us going forward. However, let me suggest that there is substantial evidence that pushes us towards believing in the resurrection of Jesus and therefore our faith is valid and our hope is secured. Let's finish up by considering three evidences for the resurrection of Jesus. We'll look at this evidence and allow it to lead us to the most logical conclusion.

II. We can have confidence in the Resurrection:

A. Because of historical secular evidence.

1. There are a number of secular historians that record things that line up extremely well with the writings of Scripture.
 - a) *"Nero fastened the guilt ... on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of ... Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome...."* (Tacitus, Annals 15.44, cited in Strobel, The Case for Christ, 82.) *Tacitus was non-sympathetic towards the Jews and Christians*
 - b) *"About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he ... wrought surprising feats.... He was the Christ. When Pilate ...condemned him to be crucified, those who had . . . come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared ... restored to life.... And the tribe of Christians ...has... not disappeared."* (Josephus, Antiquities 18.63-64, cited in Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament", 212.)
2. We just simply don't have time to list all of the secular writings available to us, but at the bare minimum, these two writings show us that a man named Christ did live and He was killed...and as Tacitus notes, it was done in the more extreme way possible in the crucifixion. These men were not Christians themselves and they had no reason to write such things to try to persuade people to believe in Jesus. They just wanted to report what had happened. So we can believe that Jesus lived, was a real person, and was put to death. But what about His resurrection itself?

B. Because the tomb was empty

1. The fact that the tomb was empty demands that we determine how it was made empty. Notice with me that the Jewish Leaders remembered that Jesus said He would raise on the third day and they took special precautions to make sure that no one did anything nefarious to propel the cause of Jesus forward. **(Matthew 27:62-66)**
2. The Jewish Leaders did everything they could to make sure that Jesus's body stayed in the grave, but the work of God wouldn't and couldn't be hindered by unbelieving men. **Matthew 28:1-4** details how an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and rolled back the stone that covered the grave of Jesus. Those guarding the tomb would understandably freaked out and froze in fear. The angel then appears to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary who had come to the tomb and shows them that Jesus was no longer in the grave, but He had risen and was on His way to Galilee. **(Matthew 28:5-7)**
3. Both the guards and Mary saw that the tomb was empty. The guards at the very least recognized that something miraculous had taken place, and we have to assume they and the Jewish Leaders would have gone to check on the tomb and see if it was in fact empty. Upon recognizing that something had happened, they concoct a plan to tell everyone that the disciples can come and stolen the body away. They knew this wasn't the truth because they had to bribe the soldiers with money. Matthew notes that this false story had spread among the Jews even to the day of his writing of his Gospel account. **(Matthew 28:11-15)**
4. The disciples acknowledged that the tomb was empty, but so did the enemy in the Jewish Leadership. Again, considering the minimal evidence given here we must come to the most logical conclusion. Would the disciples actually steal away the body of Jesus? Honestly, that just wouldn't make very much sense. Very soon after the resurrection we see the disciples of Jesus suffering for their faith. The truth is that people don't suffer for something they believe or know to be a lie. It wouldn't make logical sense for them to do so. And we also know that the Jewish Leadership wouldn't have done anything that might give anyone the idea that Jesus was true in His prophecies. Therefore, based upon these reasonings and the evidence for prior miracles surrounding the man Jesus, it is most logical to believe that He did in fact raise from the dead. But let's consider one more piece of evidence in conclusion.

C. Because of the change in the Apostles' demeanor.

1. The major change in attitude and action of the Apostles must point us to the belief that they had actually seen their Lord alive after seeing Him put to death. Go back and think about where the Apostles were at or right before the death of Jesus. Peter had just denied the Lord three times and had run away ashamed and weeping. **(Matthew 26:69-75)** The other disciples were at the foot of the cross and had seen the spear pierce the side of Jesus. They had seen my hanging lifelessly from the cross.
2. So where did that put them after Jesus had been laid in the ground? They found themselves all gathered together hiding away behind locked doors because they were scared of the Jews coming down against them because they had been with Jesus. **(John 20:19)** Not only that, but after others had told them that they had seen Jesus alive, they did not believe them. **(Mark 16:9-14)**
3. No one would consider the Apostles to be in the strongest of mindsets at this point, so how is it that they went from being as they were to having them stand in front of thousands of people on Pentecost in Jerusalem and condemn the murderers of Jesus for killing the Son of God and calling them to repentance? Again, considering the evidence, we must come to the most logical conclusion. It must be that these men had truly seen Jesus raised from the dead. If not, then why would they be willing to preach that message and even suffer for it? **(Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-42)** These men did what they did because they had seen a dead man alive and it proved Him as the Son of God.

So what conclusion will we come to based upon the evidence? We must recognize that absence of Jesus's resurrection destroys all things concerning the Bible and the claims found within it that are the source of our faith. The Bible can't be true, Jesus can't be the Messiah, and our faith is worth nothing at all. However, we must also recognize that there is substantial evidence that can help us to have faith that Jesus did live, did die, and was raised. Historical, secular, Biblical, and logical evidence all point us to faith in Jesus and His resurrection which gives us reason to hope in God and hope for the home that He has promised us if we would serve Him faithfully. May God help us to be strong in our faith and be diligent to show others the valid reasons for them to put their faith in Jesus. His resurrection means that we too can and will be raised. Let's not be one of those who will miss out on that most glorious of days.