

# Can It Be True?

## 1 Corinthians 15:12-20

Here we are today celebrating the life of Jesus Christ. I hope that this morning came with a sense of celebration, hope, newness, anticipation about what the future holds for all of us as we understand that we serve one who has gone ahead of us, who had made a way when there was no way, and who wants nothing more for the development of our lives and character.

People approach Easter with mixed motivations (some sounding very noble, and some sounding completely ridiculous). Ask people what they think Easter is all about and they come up with things like the Easter Bunny who delivers eggs, Easter sales at the mall, or the idea of spending time with your family. Although there is nothing wrong with these things in themselves, the true reason for this day is often overlooked or even explained away.

It is always around this time of the year that the media does all that it can to bring a sense of mystery to the Resurrection story (did it happen or not?). And if we aren't careful we can find ourselves questioning our faith when it is our faith that should determine what we buy into. In fact, Paul wrote in **Ephesians 6:16**:

*In every battle you will need faith as your shield ...*

Although I will not be continuing in our study of the book of Ephesians, I think we need to heed the words "you will need FAITH as your shield." We can't always believe or buy into what the world is telling us. I am not asking you to turn off your brains, but we need to understand that at times there are those who refuse to believe in Jesus Christ who will do all they can to justify their belief instead of looking at the truth or facts.

Paul found himself in a scenario similar to this when he was dealing with the church in Corinth. There were some who were questioning the Resurrection of Jesus and Paul penned these words in **1 Corinthians 15:12-20** (Read this with me):

*2 But tell me this—since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead? 13 For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. 15 And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. 16 And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. 18 In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! 19 And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. 20 But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of those who will be raised to life again.*

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the pivotal point of Christianity. It is the one thing that separates it from any other religion in the world – Our teacher is not lying in a grave somewhere but is alive and living, and according to scripture in **Colossians 3:1**:

*1 Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand.*

Resurrection shows the complete and utter authority of Jesus Christ. No other religion claims resurrection from the dead. And yet in spite of all Jesus ultimate demonstration of power and love, people still refuse to believe. Despite what we know is true and the evidences that we find, people still try to explain it away. **So based on scripture and history what do we know?**

The Bible teaches that after professional executioners crucified Jesus, His corpse was placed in a solid rock tomb. After His body was covered with about 100 pounds of spices, it was extensively wrapped in strips of linen cloth. A very large stone, estimated to weigh about 2 tons, was then rolled in front of the entrance to the tomb.

After this boulder was in place, a group of up to 16 Roman soldiers was assigned to guard the tomb. Some of you may have seen artist renditions of the tomb showing only one or two men standing around in mini-skirts, holding a spear in their hands. Historically however that's not how it was. These men were human fighting machines. These gladiators were trained to protect the area around the tomb against an entire battalion. We read in **Matthew 27:65-66** of further precautions.

*65 Pilate replied, "Take guards and secure it the best you can." 66 So they sealed the tomb and posted guards to protect it.*

In addition to the Roman guards, they put a tamper-proof official Roman seal on the stone. Anyone who happened to make it past the Roman soldiers would then have to break this seal, thus bringing on themselves Roman law and the punishment of death.

In spite of all these precautions – the stone, the soldiers, and the seal – the tomb was empty that first Easter morning! When the first people arrived to peer in, they saw only one thing: the blood-stained burial cloths.

Critics down through the years have not been able to refute the empty tomb -- instead they've come up with other possibilities. Maybe the disciples stole the body? But this seems far-fetched when you consider that they were a group of cowards who would have had to overpower armed soldiers, roll away a two-ton boulder, dispose of the body, and then manufacture a myth about His resurrection -- a myth that they were willing and did die for.

Skeptics have another possibility - that the religious leaders disposed of the body. But, this has some serious flaws as well. If they had removed the body, all they would have had to do is parade the remains through the streets of Jerusalem and they would have

derailed Christianity from the very start. But, they couldn't produce the body because the body was no longer dead -- Jesus had been raised to life again.

We also know that Jesus showed himself to eyewitnesses after his resurrection. The early Christians did not believe Jesus had risen just because of the empty tomb -- they believed because they saw Him with their own eyes. When they talked to others about Jesus, they did not say, "We found an empty tomb," instead, they said, "We saw Jesus alive!" The disciples didn't believe it until they were told by an angel and until Jesus showed himself to them.

The most outstanding proof that Jesus rose from the dead is that more than 515 eyewitnesses saw him on 12 different occasions. We read in **Acts 1:3**:

*3 During the forty days after his crucifixion, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.*

Jesus gave unquestionable proof that He was alive! After His resurrection, He made an appearance to a woman in the cemetery. Later that same day, He walked through a closed door and talked with his frightened followers who were huddled in Jerusalem. In the evening, he walked side by side with two men as they made their way down a road. He appeared to believers and doubters; to tough-minded people and tenderhearted souls.

Several people saw Him on more than one occasion, some alone, and some with large groups; sometimes at night and sometimes during the day. The Apostle Paul said in **1 Corinthians 15:3-8**:

*3 I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. 4 He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. 5 He was seen by Peter\* and then by the Twelve. 6 After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers\* at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. 7 Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him.*

Over 500 different individuals were willing to testify that they had seen the resurrected Christ. When Christianity was launched on the scene, these eyewitnesses were still alive and could be questioned. In effect, the early church could say, "If you don't believe us, you can ask those who saw Him with their own eyes."

Peter, who was one of those eyewitnesses, got up one day and preached his first sermon in the heart of Jerusalem summarizing what the prophets wrote about Jesus, and how Jesus lived, and the details surrounding His death. We read in **Acts 2:32** his conclusion of his message:

*32 "God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this."*

The town of Jerusalem had already been buzzing with the news of Jesus' resurrection. They know that the tomb was empty and that Jesus was appearing to people all around them. Peter later writes in **2 Peter 1:16-18**:

*16 For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw his majestic splendor with our own eyes 17 when he received honor and glory from God the Father. The voice from the majestic glory of God said to him, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."\* 18 We ourselves heard that voice from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain.*

The resurrection is not just an idea or fairytale – it was real, people saw it and experienced it with their own eyes. They saw Jesus, learned from him, and saw him ascend into heaven.

Those who met the Resurrected Jesus had their lives totally transformed. Something happened to radically reorient this original group of followers. After Jesus was put to death, the disciples scattered. The Bible tells us that they were gathered in a locked room on the top floor of a building. They were filled with fear. Their leader had been executed. In **John 20:19-20** we read:

*19 That Sunday evening\* the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said. 20 As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord!*

Something happened to these men. Their fear was replaced with joy. They were no longer the same. Their fear was replaced with joy. Peter was changed from a coward who had denied Christ three times to a man of rock who became one of the pillars of the new church.

Every one of them had come from doubt to determination, from confusion to conviction, from fear to faith. Listen to how they died and see if it sounds like they were just making up the Resurrection:

- Matthew was killed in Ethiopia
- Mark was dragged through the streets until he was dead
- Peter, Simeon, Andrew, and Philip were crucified
- James was beheaded
- Bartholomew was flayed alive
- Thomas was pierced with lances
- James, the less, was thrown from the temple and stoned to death
- Jude was shot to death with arrows
- Paul was boiled in hot oil and beheaded

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not a story or idea, it is a real account of how there is life beyond the grave. Like in the words of Paul in **1 Corinthians 15:12-20** which we looked at the very beginning of my message today, we are either rich beyond this life and into the next or the most pitied group of people alive. We either have a faith that means everything or we have a faith that is empty and useless. We either have forgiveness of our sin or we are still lost in our sin and shame. What is it that you have this morning?

If you believe that Jesus is alive and well, that he is there at the right hand of God pleading for you day and night, going to God with his blood sacrifice he gave for your sin so that you can be rejoined with God again, sending his Spirit to come and guide you through life and God's will, then the same resurrection power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power he sends to you to make you spiritually alive and full of hope. The resurrection of Jesus is what gives us faith, forgiveness, and a future.

For you and me this morning, the living Jesus Christ comes to us and tells us that we can have hope. Today is about a new life. A man by the name Ray C. Stedman, a great bible teacher once said, "The resurrection is not only Good News, it is the best news possible.

**(If there are visitors)**

Who is Jesus to you? Do you believe in this great story of faith, hope and love? Will you embrace this new life that Paul talks about? If you do, believe and then receive his love, life and Spirit today. Let's pray!