

The Resurrection of Christ (Reprint)

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On the first day of the week following Jesus' crucifixion, the Bible reports, a "nuclear bomb" exploded in the form of a world changing event: **Jesus rose from the dead!** The angel said, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him" (Mark 16:6).

Not everyone, then or now, would believe that an event as unprecedented or seemingly impossible actually occurred. But two parts of the Bible's report address the skeptics' reluctance to believe. First, the tomb was empty. If disciples had made false claims of Jesus' resurrection, the first place to go to dispel the myth would have been the tomb. Second, eyewitness accounts of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances work against the "stolen body" theory (see 1 Corinthians 15:1-8). Sightings by many people work against the notion that someone successfully stole the corpse. Neither of these reports proves to the unconvinced cynic that Jesus rose from the dead, but they do present evidence that discounts skeptics' suspicions.

Clearly the doubters expressed themselves even in the first century. Paul wrote in 1st Corinthians 15 and 1st Thessalonians 4 concerning the importance of the resurrection. He summarized the gospel in 1st Corinthians 15:4, "he was raised the third day." Yet some did not believe in resurrection per se. To these, Paul presented evidence again and adds this strong concession: "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile" (1st Corinthians 15:7). Paul would not permit a "gospel" of mere moral values or honorable, dead teachers. The resurrection was God's sure sign that Jesus had conquered sin and death, and as he led, so His people would follow. "Encourage each other with these words," Paul told the church in Thessalonica (1st Thessalonians 4:18).

"Friday's here, but Sunday's coming!" is a modern way of pointing to the Bible's consistent and revolutionary teaching that "Christ has indeed been raised" (1st Corinthians 15:20). Following the four Gospels, the rest of the New Testament speaks of Christ as conqueror, firstborn among many brothers and sisters, intercessor at the right hand of God, high priest beyond the veil, and coming King. These active descriptors all assume a risen Christ -- a resurrected God-man who was both recognizable yet magnificently different in body and physical capacity. Scholars of the resurrection suggest that when Jesus returns -- "in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye" (1st Corinthians 15:52) -- all His people will be raised in the same form and composite that Jesus exhibited -- "raised in glory...raised in power" (1st Corinthians 15:43; cf. Philippians 3:20-21). Such a body eternally resists decay and never dies.

"Without the resurrection there would not be a Christianity -- Christianity stands or falls with the resurrection, and this single factor makes Christianity remarkably one of a kind." (Steve Kamar)

We should note that nowhere does our future hope permit indifference to injustice, poverty, or ignorance concerning the gospel. Instead, Paul brings his teaching on resurrection to a close by insisting that *"labor in the Lord is not in vain"* (1st Corinthians 15:58). In other words, get busy, serve God eagerly, help people, and spread the word. Jesus taught that his followers must work while we have daylight, for the night comes (John 9:4)! Christ's resurrection should motivate loving, thoughtful, and effortful service.