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# SEARCH PROGRAMS

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*Topics subject to change without notice*

## **APRIL 4 – GOD RAISED HIM UP**

Did God raise Jesus from the dead? We're exploring some strong reasons to believe God raised Jesus up "bodily" from the dead. Our faith in a resurrected Lord Jesus is built upon the evidence.

## **APRIL 11 – HE APPEARED**

The risen Lord Jesus appeared to His disciples over a forty-day period with many convincing proofs. We're examining the testimony of the eyewitnesses to His bodily resurrection to see what convinced them.

## **APRIL 18 – THE BEST EXPLANATION**

Through the years several have offered theories of what they think happened that caused people to believe in the resurrection. We're going to examine those theories with the evidence presented in the New Testament.

## **APRIL 25 – BECAUSE HE LIVES**

Since the evidence found in the New Testament provides a basis for believing Jesus arose bodily from the dead, what difference does it make? How does the resurrection of Jesus from dead affect our lives?

# God Raised Him Up

Did God raise Jesus from the dead? Today, we're exploring some reasons to believe that God raised up the body of Jesus from the dead. We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. Searching for the Lord's way is a search for the truth. We want to know what God says about every matter. We also want to give sufficient reasons for believing what God says in the Bible is true. We're not here to spread half-truths, legends, or myths. This month we're taking a close look at the historical evidence for the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our faith is not a leap in the dark but rests on strong evidence. It's only right that we provide reasons to believe and to become a Christian. Just as our Father in heaven desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3-4), and we think that way too.

Many people reject the idea of a resurrection, because they deny a miracle can happen. Obviously, evidence for a miracle is more demanding than for normal events like the crucifixion of Jesus. Can miracles happen? Many who deny miracles are the same people who believe the universe, life, and consciousness of human beings just popped into existence and they don't know how. No amount of science or experimentation can tell us how or why it happened. Science cannot explain how one-celled animals became multi-cellular, how cold-blooded animals became warm-blooded, how spineless creatures developed backbones, how fish developed the ability to breathe underwater, how other animals developed lungs, or how birds developed the ability to fly.

It takes more faith to believe that everything we know came from nothing than it does to believe God raised Jesus from the dead. Just because we don't know how something happened does not mean we must deny that it happened or to deny that a miracle could happen.

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to Matthew 28:1-7 verses.

Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you."

Here is one of the early instances of Jesus, and how He has risen from the dead. We learn this from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It encourages our hearts. Let's devote ourselves to the Lord Jesus.

Let's pray together. "Father, we're thankful for these ancient stories of truth, these ancient Biblical accounts of eyewitnesses that help us to understand that Your son Jesus truly did arise from the dead. Help us to listen to Him, to serve Him, to obey Him and to love Him. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Some people say that Jesus never existed, but this view ignores the historical record both inside and outside the New Testament. Several Romans spoke of Jesus in the first two centuries: Tacitus, Suetonius, Lucian, Pliny the Younger, the Emperor Trajan, and the Emperor Hadrian. Jewish writers Josephus and Mara Bar Serapion also mention Jesus. Historian and scholar Gary Habermas in The Historical Jesus presents a significant case for believing Jesus actually existed from resources beyond the twenty-seven documents of the New Testament: "We have examined a total," he says, "of 45 ancient sources for the life of Jesus, which include 19 early credal, four archaeological, 17 non-Christian, and five non-New Testament Christian sources. And from this data we have enumerated 129 reported facts concerning the life, person, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus, plus the disciples' earliest message."

Habermas adds: "Much of ancient history is based on many fewer sources that are much later than the events that they record.... While some believe that we know almost nothing about Jesus from ancient, non-

New Testament sources, this is plainly not the case. Not only are there many such sources, but Jesus is one of the persons of ancient history concerning whom we have a significant amount of quality data. He is one of the most mentioned and most substantiated lives in ancient times.” Suggesting then, that Jesus was a mythical person and invented by people in later centuries ignores the evidence of the eyewitnesses of the New Testament and the circumstantial evidence that rests from His life.

The philosopher and apologist William Lane Craig in his excellent book, The Son Rises, said, “If it can be shown that the tomb of Jesus was found empty, that He did appear to His disciples and others after His death, and that the origin of the Christian faith cannot be explained adequately apart from His historical resurrection, then if there is no plausible natural explanation for these facts, one is amply justified in concluding Jesus really did rise from the dead.” Here are some reasons that we want to suggest to you to believe.

First, the idea that Jesus would rise from the dead was not such a strange idea to Jews who believed in prophecy. The Old Testament actually predicts the resurrection of Jesus Christ. David, a thousand years before Jesus, said, “For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay” (Psalm 16:10). Peter quotes this very verse in Acts 2:27 and Paul does so in Acts 13:35. Even more impressive is the numerous times that Jesus predicted His resurrection.

It is said of the Lord Jesus, “From that time on Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matthew 16:21). He gets more specific in Matthew 20:18-19, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up.”

To predict that you will die is not unusual, but to predict that you will rise again from the tomb and predict on which day is beyond bold. If Jesus failed to rise again when He said He would, then Jesus would be a false prophet. Moses revealed the test of a prophet, “When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him” (Deuteronomy 18:22). Jesus dared to speak about His resurrection. If He didn’t know this truly would happen, we would think of Him as a liar or crazy. His disciples wouldn’t have followed Him, if Jesus had failed to rise again on the third day as He predicted. There would be no Christianity and no church, if Jesus had failed to rise. But Jesus did rise! If He spoke the truth about the resurrection, we can believe everything He says is really true!

The Lord Jesus said that He would rise on the third day. He makes this specific, “For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40). If Jesus died on Friday afternoon and rose Sunday morning, that’s only 37 hours in the tomb; but in Jewish thinking, we need to understand it a little differently. Three days and three nights would be 72 hours, if you measure time the way that we do today; but first century Jews measured time differently. Their days began at sundown not midnight, and they counted a part of a day as if it were the whole day. So, Friday up to sunset was day one, Saturday from sunset to sunset was day two, and sunset to sunrise on Sunday was day three. The Jews never questioned this; only in later centuries did those who counted time differently question the three days.

Second, Jesus’ suffering reveals that He actually died. Jesus endured more than one beating in addition to enduring a scourging. Scourging was often enough to kill a person. Scourging left the victim so badly beaten that he wouldn’t have enough strength to fight back at the crucifixion. Scourging was a severe beating that left the shoulders, back, and legs bleeding profusely. Some of the cuts and wounds were deep enough to expose a bone. Scourging left Jesus so weak the Romans had to press a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, to carry His cross up to Golgotha.

Crucifixion involved nailing the hands of Jesus to a cross, lifting the cross so that he was hanging by the nails and perhaps by a large peg on the cross for him to sit upon to help bear the weight. The crucified person was left there to die of exhaustion. Breathing in and out was difficult because one had to lift himself up on the nails to catch a breath. Pressure on the heart after all the bleeding created tremendous stress and a buildup of fluid around the heart. The heart of Jesus gave out.

When the soldiers came around to break the legs of the three crucified men to speed up their deaths, they found Jesus was already dead. Roman soldiers were experts when it came to executions. John 19:33-34 says, “but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they didn’t break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.”

The eyewitness testimony of blood and water coming out is conclusive post-mortem evidence that Jesus died by heart failure due to shock and constriction of the heart by fluid. The wrapping of the body by Joseph of Arimathea in linen cloths with a lot of myrrh and aloe would seal the body up from the air. Beatings, scourging, crucifixion, the heart pierced with a spear, and the linen wrappings assure one that Jesus truly died. The fact that the priests and scribes asked Pilate for a guard (in Matthew 27:62-66) meant the enemies of Jesus knew that He was dead.

Third, the women who came to the tomb found it empty. That the tomb was empty three days after the death of Jesus is unquestioned by most critical scholars. A very large stone covered the entrance to the tomb, and a group of soldiers were guarding the tomb, and the governor’s seal was fixed to the stone. How the tomb became empty is no small matter. The New Testament says that angels came and rolled away the stone, frightened the guards, and spoke to the women who came to anoint His body.

The Jews who asked Pilate for a guard knew that Jesus could work miracles. They knew that He had raised Lazarus from the dead just days before according to John 11:47-48. They thought that sealing the tomb and placing guards would demoralize the disciples and end any support for Jesus Christ, but the tomb was empty, and on the third day He was raised, just as He prophesied.

Fourth, when the women arrived at the tomb they were surprised to find the stone away from the entrance, and the angel sitting on top of it. “His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, „Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell the disciples that he has risen from the dead.”” The women heard the angel and looked into the tomb for themselves. Jesus wasn’t there.

We must wonder if the guards heard what the angel said to the women. The guards saw the angel move the stone and later reported to the Jews “all that had happened” up to that point (Matthew 28:11). This is why the Jews began a rumor that the disciples came and stole the body, while the soldiers were sleeping, which is a false idea from the beginning. The Jews had to bribe the soldiers to keep them from telling the truth about what they saw and heard. Of course, the penalty for soldiers sleeping on watch was very, very severe.

Fifth, when Simon Peter and John heard Mary Magdalene’s report, they wanted to see the tomb for themselves. John 20:4-8 says, “The two (Peter and John) were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he didn’t go in. And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed.”

If the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus, why would they unwrap Him in the presence of the guards? Why would they leave the linen wrappings and fold up the face-cloth? Because the guards were soldiers charged with making sure no one tampered with the tomb, time would be precious! They couldn’t

afford to waste time moving the stone, unwrapping the body, folding the face cloth and getting away undetected. Pilate would severely punish the guards if they failed in their duty to guard the tomb from the disciples. Sleeping on duty could mean death! Do you really think the disciples would have frightened the guards? The angel in dazzling apparel moving the very large stone out of the way of the tomb caused them to tremble and become like dead men!

You ask, why are we discussing this? The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the most important events in history. They affect every aspect of your life. They touch on your heart, your attitudes, your morals, and your destiny. Nothing, nothing, is more valuable than examining the evidence for these events. Jesus is the risen Lord of all creation, and the evidences for His resurrection show these things are not some leap in the dark. John 20:30-31 says, "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

Let us pray. "O, Father, help us to have faith in the record that you have left for us in the New Testament, and those eyewitnesses who taught about Jesus, His death burial and resurrection from the dead. And Father, help us to love and to serve You always. In Jesus' name, Amen."

The apostle Thomas wasn't present the first time that Jesus appeared to the disciples, and he said he wouldn't believe until he saw for himself. He said, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (John 20:25). Eight days later Jesus responded to Thomas' request. He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus didn't avoid Thomas' challenges. He wanted the disciples to be fully convinced of His resurrection and of His deity. If Jesus had not presented a living, active body to the disciples, He couldn't have convinced them that He was raised from the dead. Jesus "presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

If Jesus rose from the dead as He said, He is a true prophet; and we should listen to Him. Since He arose, His words carry God's authority! We should believe in Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God. We should turn from sin to righteousness in repentance, just as He demands. We should confess His name and be baptized into His death, to be buried, and be raised with Him to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4) and we need to enjoy it by being baptized, our sins being washed away (Acts 22:16). If you're not yet a Christian, I hope you'll become one today!

Focus your heart on God today by worshiping at church. Everybody needs a church family. There's probably a church of Christ in your area. If you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one.

## He Appeared

The risen Lord Jesus appeared to His disciples over a forty-day period. Today, we're examining the eyewitnesses of Jesus after His resurrection. God has not been silent. He revealed His written word in both the Old and New Testament. He also revealed Himself through the person Jesus, who is called the "Word." John 1:1-3 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. And all things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." Jesus Christ has always existed and is divine! It's easy to see how He rose again. Surely, the One who made the world could overcome death.

We're looking at the historical record of the appearances of Jesus after His resurrection. Jesus presented Himself alive by many convincing proofs to His disciples. If we were to question these eyewitnesses whether Jesus really rose from the dead, the record reveals that they were fully convinced of His resurrection and were willing to suffer and to die preaching the gospel message of His death burial and resurrection. They wouldn't take it back!

We'll also briefly explore whether Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are credible witnesses. Can we trust them? We'll see why we can trust their independent accounts of His resurrection. We're certainly not the first to do this, and we'll see how historians and legal scholars have handled the ancient evidence. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ have been the most investigated events in history. No stone is unturned. The facts of the first century writers still remain the most important witnesses to the resurrection. We'll see what conclusions scholars and investigators have made.

Our reading today comes from I Corinthians 15:3-8. Paul writes this epistle to the church at Corinth, in 54 A.D., and it is regarded as the first written evidence of the resurrection and the appearances.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

An undeniable evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ came in the responses of those who followed Him and knew Him best. Virtually all critical scholars recognize an unmistakable change in the disciples after Jesus "presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

Before the appearances and proofs of His resurrection the disciples had lost hope; they were depressed, afraid, and doubting. Though the women brought back word of the empty tomb and what the angel said about His resurrection, Luke 24:10-11 says, "But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they didn't believe them." John 20:19 speaks of the apostles hiding in an upper room with the doors locked, for fear of the Jews. Thomas said in John 20:25, "Unless I see in his hands the marks of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." It's evident these disciples required convincing before they would believe Jesus fulfilled His prediction. Even though they had seen many miracles, they couldn't grasp how God would raise Jesus up.

The risen Jesus Christ, however, did prove Himself to His disciples. The New Testament provides numerous appearances of the Lord Jesus to the people who knew Him best. He first appeared to Mary Magdalene weeping outside the tomb in the garden. When she realized Jesus was speaking to her, she grabbed hold of Him. Jesus sent her to tell the disciples. Later that day Jesus appeared to Peter, to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and to the apostles without Thomas. Later He appeared to Thomas and invited him to feel the mark in His hands.

Jesus appeared to seven disciples while they were fishing at the Sea of Galilee and enjoyed a breakfast of fish and bread with them. Jesus appeared to “more than 500 brethren at one time.” He appeared to James. Matthew records His words telling them to make disciples of all the nations. Last of all He appeared to the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus. Paul later received many revelations from the Lord. The book of Revelation in chapter one reveals how Jesus appeared to John.

Lee Strobel, interviewing Gary Habermas, put the number of witnesses to the resurrection appearances into perspective in his book, *The Case for Christ*, he wrote: “Without question, the amount of testimony and corroboration of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances is staggering. To put it into perspective, if you were to call each one of the witnesses into a court of law to be cross-examined for just fifteen minutes each, and you went around the clock without a break, it would take you from breakfast on Monday until dinner on Friday to hear them all. After listening to 129 straight hours of eyewitness testimony, who could possibly walk away unconvinced?”

The apostles are convincing to us because they themselves were convinced. The disciples, after the forty days of convincing proofs of the Lord’s resurrection, were a very different group of men than they were just days before. No longer did they lack faith or hope. No longer were they unsure. No, they were a bold and outspoken band of witnesses who couldn’t hold back their message. You can hear it in the words of Peter at Pentecost:

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it (Acts 2:22-24). The twelve declared that they were witnesses of the resurrection (Acts 2:32). This public declaration was exactly what the Jewish leaders wanted to prevent. Interestingly, they knew the stone was moved and the tomb was empty. Now they know Jesus appeared to the disciples.

We can see their boldness continuing: “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 3:13). When the Jewish Council charged Peter and John not to teach any more in the name of Jesus, Peter and John answered them, “Whether it’s right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:18-20). Later, “the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison” (Acts 5:17-18). When the high priest told them not to preach in Christ’s name, Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him. Well when they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them” (Acts 5:27-33).

Later, “when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus” (Acts 5:40-42).

The New Testament reveals how the Jewish leaders with anger stoned Stephen and began persecuting the church. Acts 8:1-3 says, “Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, and he would put them in prison.” In those days, to be a Christian meant there was a price to pay, in those days and for some even today there is a price!



The Scripture records Stephen's death by stoning in Acts 7 and the beheading of the apostle James in Acts 12. Ancient tradition provides how the apostles and other leaders died for their faith. Though these are human sources and may be flawed, they reveal what the early church recorded about these martyrs. Matthew suffered death from the sword in Ethiopia. Mark was dragged through the streets in Alexandria, Egypt. Luke was hanged in Greece. John was sentenced to the mines on the prison island of Patmos. Peter was crucified upside down in Rome. Accounts about James the Just, the brother of Jesus, differ. Some say he was thrown from the pinnacle of the Temple, while others say that he was beaten to death. Bartholomew was whipped to death or crucified in Armenia. Andrew was crucified in Patras, Greece. Thomas was stabbed with a spear in India. Jude was killed with arrows. The Emperor Nero had Paul tortured and beheaded outside Rome.

These men remained faithful to Jesus and were committed to preaching the gospel, even if it cost their lives. One cannot dismiss their faith and total commitment. One must attribute their unquestionable loyalty to the truth that they preached. They wouldn't have suffered death for a fraudulent lie. Paul expressed his conviction, "But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). We must take this radical change into account!

You may ask, "Phil, how can we trust the four gospel accounts as historical?" Gary Habermas, a recognized university professor and historian, in his book *The Historical Jesus* recorded and examined 45 ancient sources for the life of Jesus outside the New Testament. Some were Christian, but many were non-Christian, and some were archaeological. He found 129 reported facts revealing the life, person, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He noted that Jesus is one of the most mentioned and most substantiated lives in ancient times.

The early church fathers, who lived in the second and third centuries, quoted the New Testament an astounding 36,289 times; and one can reconstruct the entire New Testament from these quotations with the exception of eleven verses. If the life, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus were simply a myth without credibility, one must wonder why so many writers within such a short time wrote about Him, quoted the witnesses, and regarded the New Testament testimony as the ultimate, divine authority for life and godliness.

Dr. Harvey W. Everest in his classic textbook, *The Divine Demonstration*, lists some criteria used to test historical evidence. When the criteria are met, we can judge the testimony to be the truth. First, the evidence is credible when the witnesses are honest, competent, and have the opportunity to know. The apostles and disciples were honest witnesses.

Second, evidence is credible when the witnesses agree in general statement, although they may differ on minor points. This is exactly the case with the four gospel accounts. They all note the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They all say the tomb was empty and the stone rolled away.

Third, evidence is credible when there is no known motive for imposture or faking. The apostles and preachers who witnessed Jesus didn't become rich or powerful because of their testimony.

Fourth, the testimony is reliable when the facts recorded are strongly against the well-being or interest of the narrator. Since most suffered martyrdom for their preaching, one cannot question whether they believed what they preached. God raised Jesus up!

Fifth, the testimony is reliable when such witnesses are numerous. More than 500 people saw Jesus alive, and some saw Him numerous times.

Sixth, the testimony is reliable when the recorded facts and the existing facts are related as cause and effect. One can substantiate the lives of many New Testament people in history. Geographical and historical references are to be correct.

Seventh, the testimony is reliable when recorded facts are sustained by existing documents, coins, games, or other public institutions. The existence of the church, their meeting on the first day of the week (that is, the resurrection day), the taking of the Lord's Supper, and baptizing penitent adults in water uniting them with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection are direct results of the life, teaching, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Since the testimony of the New Testament meets these criteria, one can have confidence that these Biblical books are credible! For the earliest disciples, the Lord's resurrection was not a "leap in the dark"; there were too many witnesses who knew the truth!

Simon Greenleaf, professor of law at Harvard, and author of a three-volume classic work, *On A Treatise on the Law of Evidence*, wrote a small work about the Testimony of the Evangelists. He concluded, "Let [the Gospel's] testimony be sifted, as it were given in a court of justice on the side of the adverse party, the witnesses being subjected to a rigorous cross-examination. The result, it is confidently believed, will be an undoubting conviction of their integrity, ability, and truth." He believed the gospel accounts could hold up in a court of law!

First Corinthians 15:1-2 speaks of the gospel message; Paul defines that message as the good news of the Lord's death, burial and resurrection. Paul wrote, "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain." They believed the message of Christ's resurrection and took their stand on it! As long as they held to their faith and conviction, they were saved by it!

Those who lived at the time saw Jesus alive and knew the truth. They touched and ate with Him. Their preaching of His death, burial, and resurrection cost them dearly, but they were willing to suffer to proclaim the gospel message. They sacrificed their lives, because the message is true.

What about you? Do you believe the message is true? Will you hold fast? The salvation of the Lord comes to those who make a total commitment! Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Luke 9:23-24)

Your love for and faith in Christ must lead you to repentance, turning from sin to righteousness, from the world to following Jesus. Repentance is necessary; Jesus said that unless we repent, we'll perish in Luke 13:3. Peter follows up in Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Won't you repent and be baptized today?

Focus your heart on God today by worshiping at church. Everyone needs a church family. There's probably a church of Christ in your area. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one.

## The Best Explanation

People who deny the resurrection of Jesus from the grave have offered alternative explanations. Do those explanations fit the facts? We know the Scriptures are unlike any other book in the world, ancient or modern. We know that they accurately reveal what God wishes for us to know about the Lord Jesus, about morality, and about salvation and eternal life. We don't want to settle for anything less than the truth, so we turn to the Holy Scriptures. We can trust them.

After the death and burial of Jesus, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to the governor Pontius Pilate and asked for a guard to secure the tomb. They were afraid of a conspiracy; they imagined the disciples would steal the body and tell everyone Jesus arose from the dead on the third day like He predicted. Pilate told the Jews, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how" (Matthew 27:65). They were determined that He would stay buried. They wanted to make sure His prediction failed, so no one would believe in Him. They even started a rumor that they knew was false rather than admit the truth.

Their plans, however, failed. Nothing could hold Jesus in the tomb. God raised Him up, and all the authorities and armies could not stop God. Psalm 2 reminds us that the rulers and the kings of the earth took their stand against Jesus Christ, God's anointed. God laughed and scoffed at these men. God Himself installed Jesus as King upon Zion on the day of Pentecost. Peter declared, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36).

Our reading today comes from 2 Peter 1:16-21, where Peter talks about hearing God, and how important the message is.

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, „This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased“— and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

When people deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ, they must find an explanation for the events reported by eyewitnesses and recorded during their lifetime. In recent centuries, several have tried to explain what they think happened rather than believe the eyewitnesses that Jesus rose from the dead. After serious study of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, scholars and truth seekers haven't found the alternate theories denying the resurrection to be convincing. While they focus on certain aspects of the resurrection account, they lose sight of other relevant testimony from the eyewitnesses. One can hardly imagine these theorists many centuries after the events and showing no proof should be trusted over the first century eyewitnesses who saw the events first-hand.

Let's examine some of these theories to see if they could have happened. First, we'll look at the swoon theory. They say Christ didn't die but He merely fainted from exhaustion. When he was laid in the tomb he revived and later showed himself alive to the disciples. The idea that Jesus survived the crucifixion was first put forth by a deist, Peter Annet in 1768. In recent years Hugh Schonfield in *The*

*Passover Plot*, theorized that Jesus, believing Himself to be the Messiah, plotted to fake His death, intending later to sweep triumphantly into power.

Nearly all the historians and medical doctors who have researched the evidence of the New Testament agree that Jesus Christ died as a result of a brutal, Roman crucifixion. The belief that Jesus survived the crucifixion is a convenient myth, while His death on the cross finds solid footing among those who have searched for an answer from the eyewitnesses and from the historical records.

Jesus was in a weakened condition from a loss of blood due to the scourging before He was crucified. He suffered six hours upon the cross. When the soldier pierced His side, blood and water came from the wound. John 19:34 talks about that and it's a sure sign that He actually did die. The Roman soldiers were experts in executing and they knew when a man was dead. Pilate, surprised at the news of his death, had a centurion to reassure him of the death. The Romans practiced crucifixions, and they did it to kill. They were expert, well-practiced executioners. They knew how to use this form of torture and they made sure it killed their victims.

Some have suggested that Jesus took a drug that caused Him to lose consciousness, but this wouldn't account for the flow of blood and water from having His side pierced. It wouldn't account for how He survived alone in the tomb. Jesus' body had gone through preparations for burial. Jesus' body was wrapped in about a hundred pounds of cloth and spices, and placed in a sealed tomb until the third day (according to John 19:39-40, and Matthew 27:60). If Jesus had not died from his previous torture, he would have died in the tomb from a lack of food, water, and medical treatment.

If Jesus awoke in the tomb, how did Jesus remove the burial wrappings in such a weakened condition? How could Jesus alone have moved the huge stone in his weakened condition, considering it would take several men to move it? How did He move it unnoticed by the guards?

After the 40 days of appearances, how did Jesus disguise himself as a fit Conqueror of Death and keep up the hoax for the rest of his life? One who was so brutally beaten and crucified on a Friday would not appear well enough to do much of anything on the following Sunday.

If Jesus' resurrection was a hoax, why didn't the disciples disavow him? Why did they suffer and die for their faith in the resurrection?

Second, some suggest the resurrection was merely a vision or a hallucination. Since the disciples were expecting to see Jesus, it would seem only natural for them to think that they did. They say that the vision took the form of a bodily appearance. David Strauss made popular a more detailed statement of the hallucination hypothesis in the 19th century. He didn't believe it was possible for a person to revive after being dead for three days and therefore proposed that the disciples, and later Paul, experienced "hallucinations" or "subjective visions".

A vision is a miraculous event; it's an encounter with God. This theory really just substitutes one miracle for another and doesn't help the theorist's case at all. Where is the evidence from the eyewitnesses that it was only a vision? In Acts 10:10 Peter fell into a trance, which he called a vision in verse 19. The early disciples surely knew the difference between seeing Jesus for themselves and a vision. Peter and John say they were eyewitnesses (John 20:24 and 2 Peter 1:16).

Why did the disciples testify that they witnessed a physical body? Jesus, in his appearances, could speak, hear, eat, touch and be touched (according to 1 John 1, and Luke 24). Jesus proved himself alive by "many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3). How could the same hallucination occur to more than 500 people at one time? Hallucinations are individual matters.

The vision theory doesn't explain what happened at the tomb. What happened to the body of Jesus? What frightened the guards? Who rolled away the stone? Why were the linen wrappings left

behind? While this theory sounds intriguing, it falls far short of explaining all the other evidence for these events.

Furthermore, the disciples didn't expect to see Jesus prior to His appearances. Despite His prophecies, the crucifixion and burial of Jesus caused the disciples to be skeptical, doubtful, hopeless, and unbelieving according to the New Testament. A vision alone would have not given the disciples sufficient reason to accept the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. It would not have led them to the full commitment that they made to His cause. No, hallucinations don't do that.

Third, some suggest the disciples really did steal the body. Of course, the chief priests wished this conspiracy to be true. The Roman soldiers came to the chief priests to tell them what happened. They saw the angel move the stone and declare that Jesus had risen from the dead. Matthew 28:12-15 reports: "And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, „You are to say, „The disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.“ „And if this should come to the governor's ears, we'll win him over and keep you out of trouble."" They took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day, according to Luke.

It wasn't the disciples who conceived a conspiracy; it was the Jewish elders who paid to make this story known! Stealing the body to produce a fraudulent narrative is certainly out of character for the timid, fearful, unbelieving, and hiding disciples. To go up against the trained and armed Roman soldiers at the tomb to steal his body would be most difficult. They were hiding because they feared jail for themselves (John 20:19). This small band of Jews would have been so frightened of the soldiers who were under punishment of death if they failed in their duty to protect the tomb. This kind of idea just doesn't make sense. What could a few, poor fishermen do against a disciplined and well-armed group of soldiers? If there had been an altercation, why didn't the report that someone was wounded or killed in this attempt to steal the body, go out to everyone?

If the disciples stole the body, how could they have enough time to roll the stone away, take off the grave clothes, and leave undetected? Why would they undress the body? Why did they leave the grave clothes? Why did they leave the clothes orderly, rather than just thrown? What did they do with the body?

It's impossible to believe that all the guards fell asleep at the same time. The Jews were permitted to make the tomb as secure as they knew how (Matthew 27:65). So there were probably several soldiers at the tomb. The soldiers were either awake or asleep. If they were asleep, how did the soldiers know the disciples stole the body? If they were awake, why would they allow the body to be taken? Let's remember that a Roman soldier would be brutally killed if he were caught sleeping on the job. Herod put Peter in prison and chained him between two soldiers. When the angel of the Lord rescued Peter from Herod's prison and he could not be found, Herod ordered "that they (that is, the soldiers) should be put to death" (Acts 12:19).

If the Jews really believed the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus, they would have pursued them for this crime. If they wished to thwart the preaching of the apostles, why didn't the Sanhedrin apprehend the apostles on Pentecost and imprison them until they confessed? Why didn't they search for the body and expose the lie? This shows the Jews didn't really believe their own lie.

Fourth, some suggest that Mary Magdalene and the women who went to the tomb early in the morning on the first day of the week went to the wrong tomb. Kirsopp Lake, who first offered this theory, assumed the women who reported the body missing had mistakenly gone to the wrong tomb.

If this is so, then Peter and John, who went to check upon the women's report, must have also gone to the wrong tomb. We may be certain that Jewish authorities, who asked for a Roman guard to be stationed at the tomb to prevent Jesus' body from being stolen, would not have been mistaken about the location. Nor would the Roman guards, for they were there! If the resurrection-claim was merely because of a geographical mistake, the Jewish authorities would have lost no time in producing the body from the proper tomb, thus effectively quenching for all time any rumor of resurrection.

Matthew reported the guards were there at the tomb in the sight of all, when the women went to the tomb. The women who visited the tomb knew where the guards were. The guards may well have heard what the angel said to the women. Since the tomb was in the garden adjoining Golgotha, and the women likely stayed with His body as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus dressed the body, they surely knew the exact location of the tomb and were not mistaken.

None of these alternative theories explain why James the brother of Jesus was convinced of the Lord's resurrection and converted. In the end they are misleading and false. None of them explain why the persecutor Saul of Tarsus left his old life and became a defender of Christianity and willing to suffer repeatedly for his faith. The apostle Paul gave the earliest written, biblical report of the resurrection of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15. Since several people witnessed the resurrection of Jesus, no one could offer some radical theory of what happened unchallenged by the disciples. Once the disciples saw, heard, and touched Jesus for themselves, they would laugh at silly theories that some have claimed.

The alternative theories that deny the miracle of Christ's resurrection go against the historical accounts of the eyewitnesses. They fail to deal with all the evidence and offer only faulty explanations. They merely offer a skeptic's excuse, something he convinces himself in order to justify his own assumptions. He imagines that if he can offer some other explanation—however absurd it may be—that he can avoid the truth. The truth is: Jesus really did arise from the dead bodily and appeared to many people with convincing proofs, just as Acts 1:3 says. If this were not so, there would never have been a church and the New Testament would never have been written and become the most published book of ancient times.

When people really want to believe something, they cherry pick ideas that support their view and dismiss anything that may show it to be false. People often lie to themselves when they don't want to admit the truth. People often say something is morally acceptable, even though God calls it sin. People who condemn others for some sin often permit themselves to commit that very sin. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" These alternative views, which deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus, fall into that category.

Although our hearts may deceive us, they cannot deceive God. We may try to excuse and justify our sins and our faulty beliefs, but God sees through our deception. God said in the next verse, Jeremiah 17:10, "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds." You may lie to yourself, but God sees and knows the truth. God is testing your heart. What does God see?

To be right with the Lord we must be honest about our sins. God must forgive them, and He does so when we place our faith in the Lord Jesus and obey the gospel. We obey Him by lovingly repenting of our sins, confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and by being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2:38). Early Christians baptized or immersed penitent believers in water so their sins would be washed away (Acts 22:16). When we're baptized into Christ, we're born again and begin a new life. Have you been baptized? It's not enough to be born again, we have to continue to walk in the way of the Lord throughout our lives. We've got to love and live for the Lord.

## Because He Lives

Since the New Testament provides a basis for believing Jesus arose bodily from the dead, what difference does it make? Today, we're considering how the resurrection of Jesus affects our lives. Because Jesus arose bodily from the dead, we can know that our life on earth is not the end. We'll live on beyond this life. Our bodies die, but our spirits live on. At death our spirits go back to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The Lord Jesus said at His death, "Father into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46). His resurrection on the third day, the first day of the week, means His prophecy proved true. Truth matters; no one wants to be deceived about their eternal destiny. Only the Son of God, who never deceives, can be trusted about our salvation and eternal destiny.

The Lord Jesus came to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead; Lazarus had been dead for four days. His loved ones were grieving. He told Martha, Lazarus' sister, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26. I'm asking you what Jesus asked Martha, "Do you believe this?"

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, some witnesses "went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done" (John 11:46). The chief priests and the Pharisees, who were the enemies of the Lord, convened a council and talked about this event. They said, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs (that is, miracles). And if we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him" (John 11:47-48). Even the enemies of Jesus knew His miracles, that they were real and undeniable.

Our reading today comes from 1 Corinthians, chapter 15. The apostle Paul is shocked that there are some who are denying the resurrection.

Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover, we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

Let's pray together. "Father, we're thankful for all the evidence that Jesus Christ did indeed rise from the dead, and for the hope we have of being able to live with You forever and ever, when You come for us and raise us from the dead. And Father we pray that we'll live faithfully, lovingly and obediently to Your will. In Jesus' name, Amen."

If Christ is not raised from the dead there will be no general resurrection, our preaching is vain, our faith is vain, we are false witnesses to preach it, our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins, the dead in Christ have perished, our hope in Christ is for this life only, and we are of all men most to be pitied. If the resurrection account of Jesus is not true then Christianity would be founded upon a lie. Christianity is based on the historical evidence concerning the claims and life of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Scripture explicitly stakes its validity and its hope on the historical fact of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

But God did raise Jesus from the dead! There will be a general resurrection. Our preaching and our faith is not in vain. We are not false witnesses to preach it. Our faith is precious and priceless. We are

saved from sin. The dead in Christ are now with the Lord. Our hope extends beyond this life. We are of all men most to be congratulated and thankful for our blessings and inheritance in Christ. When one considers the evidence, he realizes Jesus is unique, and He's unique when it comes to a resurrection. The resurrection of Christ is essential to our faith and shows credentials, which no other religious leader possesses. While every other religious leader has died, Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and reigns as Lord!

The resurrection should make a difference in our personal lives. For the early disciples, the crucifixion was devastating; they lost their master and friend. Their hope of Jesus being the Messiah had been crushed. How they changed from hopeless to hope-filled? How did they have the courage to preach at Pentecost, fifty days later? It was because the disciples truly came to believe that God raised Jesus bodily from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus changed everything. Jesus was now in their hearts and their lives and He was the risen Lord and Christ to them!

Here is why the resurrection matters. First, because Jesus arose He is Lord. In the first gospel sermon Peter preached, "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. And being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, „The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”“ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:29-36). To be Lord means that He is ruler of all, that every person is under His authority. To be "Christ" means He is the Messiah and now reigns as the King of His people.

Because He has risen and is Lord He speaks with authority. His words are binding upon all people everywhere. We must listen to and obey Him. The Lord Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, „Lord, Lord,“ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, „Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?“ And then will I declare to them, „I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness“" (Matthew 7:21- 23).

The Lord Jesus explained clearly, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it didn't fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it" (Matthew 7:24-27).

What the Lord Jesus says matters. He is the Lord who makes the rules about what we should believe and how we should live. No one can overcome Him or change His teaching! He will have the last say on judgment day. People deceive themselves thinking that they can change what He taught about spiritual matters and about morality. The Lord Jesus said, "The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day" (John 12:48). Don't imagine the grace of God will somehow turn what Jesus said was immoral into something that is moral, that won't happen. Don't imagine that our worldly and sinful culture can rewrite what God said to suit themselves. The words of Jesus are settled in heaven and cannot be changed!

Since Jesus is risen we know that His teaching and His promises hold true. He alone has the answers to where we came from, why we're here, what life is about, and what will be facing us after we die. When He teaches that we were created, we can believe it! When He promises to forgive our



sins, we can believe Him! When He says we can have an abundant life and eternal life, we should have no doubt. Second Corinthians 1:18-20 says, “As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it was always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. And that is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.” When you believe the words of the New Testament, you are believing the Lord Jesus Himself. His words are trustworthy because they come from Him, and we can trust Him!

Since Jesus arose, He will one day raise the dead. The Lord Jesus promised, “Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28-29).

The apostle Paul wrote, “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by the word from the Lord, that we who are alive, and who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of a trumpet, the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

When we face the death of our loved ones, a faithful Christian, we can face it with hope, knowing that this loved one will one day rise again. For nearly fifty years I’ve conducted funerals, often for people that I love dearly. I know what it is to grieve as Mary and Martha did for Lazarus. The resurrection of Jesus and His promised return give me hope of being with loved ones in heaven. This promise also reminds me to remain faithful to the Lord. Are you living a faithful and godly Christian life? Are you “in Christ”?

Death is the separation of the body from the spirit (James 2:26). Resurrection is the rejoining of the body and spirit. After we are resurrected from the dead, our fleshly bodies will be changed so that we can live with God in heaven. Paul explains, “I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:50-53).

Our bodies will not be like they are today. They will die, but we will never die because our bodies will be changed like the glorified body of Jesus, and that body will live forever. Philippians 3:20-21 says, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state (the one that we have now) into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” This humble body that gets sick and dies will be transformed to be like the Lord’s immortal, imperishable body.

Because God raised up Jesus and He is Lord, we know that He will judge us all on the last day. Second Corinthians 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

Revelation 20:11-12 tells us more about the judgment: “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Because Jesus lives, faithful Christians have a home in heaven. The Lord Jesus promised, “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3). The apostle Peter explained, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4). I pray, I hope, I wish, I want for you to be living a faithful and godly life that’s devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ. His resurrection ought to make a difference to you, how you live and how you think. It ought to make a difference in how you pray and how you treat other people. The resurrection is not simply a doctrine to be believed. It’s a way of life, of being like Jesus in everything we do, and everything we say.

Let’s pray together. “Father, we’re so grateful for Your love, and we’re thankful that You raised Jesus from the dead. Help us to devote ourselves to Him, and to You, with a loving heart filled with faith and obedience to Your will. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Since Jesus rose from the dead, since Jesus is Lord, since Jesus speaks with authority, since Jesus will judge us at the end of time, since heaven and hell are real, since His promises are true, and since He is coming again one day, shouldn’t you take the Lord seriously and turn your heart and soul to Him? Jesus is everything that He claimed to be! Take a long look at what He did on the cross. He loved you enough to bear the brutal penalty of death for your sins on the cross. No one can free you from sin or bring you to God but Jesus Christ (John 14:6). No one can assure you of eternal life except the Lord Jesus who arose from the dead.

No matter what your past has been, you can come to Christ for salvation. Set your heart on the Lord who loved you enough to die for you. Take hold of the gospel that you’ve heard and take your stand on it. Hold fast to God’s Word, and don’t believe in vain. Believe in the Lord who died for your sins and rose again so you might have eternal life. Repent of your sins, turn your heart and life toward the Lord Jesus.

It’s not enough merely to say that you believe or to pray a simple prayer. Saul of Tarsus prayed fervently for three days (Acts 9:11); but he didn’t have his sins washed away until he was baptized calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16). First Peter 3:21 says, “Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Won’t you have your sins washed away too?