

14. Christ in His Resurrection

Article contributed by www.walvoord.com

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the fundamental truths of Christian faith. As Robinson writes: “A renewed emphasis upon the resurrection is, however, relevant at this time. In Latin Christianity, the profusion of crucifixes focuses the eye upon the crucified, dead Jesus, leaving to the Evangelical Church a special responsibility for proclaiming the risen, living Lord. In American Protestantism, the weight of old liberalism still swings many from the bodily ‘physical’ resurrection of Christ witnessed in the New Testament to a kind of ‘spiritual resurrection’ at death, one befitting Plato’s society of souls in an idealistic universe. European scholarship is disentangling the biblical from the Hellenistic man, recognizing the body as also the handiwork of God, and the unity of the whole inner and outer man both in this life and in the age to come. Yet the influence of existentialism leads some of these scholars to present the death of Christ as the sole factual event of the kerygma, with the resurrection as an expression of the eschatological significance of the cross, a myth whose meaning is ‘real’ only in faith. The pessimism, resulting from inadequate presentations, can be lifted only by the proclamation of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as factual occurrence, an act of God’s self-disclosure in truly divine dimensions.”¹

The early disciples were impelled to bear their testimony for Christ because of their belief that Jesus Christ had actually died and rose bodily from the grave. James Orr has made the following comment: “A first fact attested by all witnesses is that *Jesus died and was buried*. St. Paul sums up the unanimous belief of the early Church on this point in the Word: ‘That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried.’ The reality of Christ’s death, as against the swoon theories, was touched on before, and need not be re-argued. No one now holds that Jesus did *not* die!”²

From the standpoint of an apologetic for Christian theology, belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God stands or falls with the question of His bodily resurrection. As Paul expressed it in [1 Corinthians 15:17](#), “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.” The resurrection, therefore, is properly considered a proof of the person of Christ, His deity, Messiahship, and His power to save from sin. Upon the resurrection hangs the value and effectiveness of all His work in the past, present, and future. The

resurrection of Christ is also related to the proper fulfillment of prophecy concerning its resurrection in both the Old and New Testament, and is demanded by the concept of the infallibility of the Scriptures.

The doctrine of the resurrection of Christ is also strategic in that it is the first step in a series in the exaltation of Christ: (1) His resurrection; (2) His ascension to heaven and return to His preincarnate glory; (3) His exaltation in being seated at the right hand of the Father and the Father's throne; (4) His second coming to the earth in power and glory; (5) His occupying the throne of David as ruler of the millennial earth; (6) His exaltation as judge of all men at the great white throne; (7) His exaltation in the new heaven and the new earth.

From the standpoint of the ministry of Christ, the resurrection is the introduction to a new phase of His work on behalf of the saints. Resurrection was preparatory to His return to glory and to His present ministry as our intercessor at the right hand of the Father. All His future work stems from His second coming and events related to the millennial kingdom. Few doctrines of the Christian faith are more necessary to the whole structure than the doctrine of resurrection. It is for this reason that evangelical Christians through the centuries, including the apostles, have placed such emphasis upon this doctrine. her ([John 20:11-17](#); cf. [Mark 16:9-11](#)).

6. After she had seen the risen Lord, Mary Magdalene returns to report the appearance of Christ to her ([Mark 16:10-11](#); [John 20:18](#)).

7. The second appearance of Christ was to the other women who are also returning to the tomb and see Christ on the way ([Matt 28:9-10](#)). The best texts seem to indicate that the phrase "as they went to tell his disciples" is an interpolation, and they were actually returning after telling the disciples.

8. The report of the guards watching the tomb concerning the angel rolling away the stone is another testimony to the resurrection of Christ from unwilling witnesses ([Matt 28:11-15](#)).

9. The third appearance was to Peter in the afternoon of the resurrection day. Concerning this there are no details, but it is most significant that Christ sought out Peter, the denier, first, of all the twelve ([Luke 24:34](#); [1 Cor 15:5](#)).

10. The fourth appearance of Christ was to the disciples as they walked on the road to Emmaus. Due to supernatural withholding of recognition, Christ was able to expound to them the Old Testament Scripture concerning His death and resurrection, and was not known to them until He broke bread ([Mark 16:12-13](#); [Luke 24:13-35](#)).

11. The fifth appearance of the resurrected Christ was to the ten disciples ([Mark 16:14](#); [Luke 24:36-43](#); [John 20:19-23](#)). The Mark account refers to them as the eleven, but it is obvious from the context that only ten were there, as Thomas was absent. After the departure of Judas, the remaining disciples were often referred to as the “eleven” even if all were not actually present. In a similar way, Paul refers to the “twelve” as witnesses of the resurrection ([1 Cor 15:5](#)), but as a matter of fact Judas Iscariot was already dead.
12. The sixth appearance was to the eleven disciples a week after His resurrection. At this time Thomas was present ([John 20:26-29](#)).
13. The seventh appearance was to seven disciples by the Sea of Galilee ([John 21:1-23](#)). It was on this occasion that he talked so significantly to Simon Peter following the miraculous catch of fish.
14. The eighth appearance was to five hundred and is recited by Paul as an outstanding proof of His resurrection ([1 Cor. 15:6](#)).
15. The ninth appearance was to James, the Lord’s brother ([1 Cor 15:7](#)). There is some evidence that James was not a believer prior to the resurrection ([John 7:3](#)), but immediately after the resurrection he is numbered among the believers ([Acts 1:14](#); [Gal 1:19](#)). He later became one of the outstanding leaders in the apostolic church.
16. The tenth appearance was to eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee. On that occasion he gave them the great commission to preach the gospel ([Matt 28:16-20](#)). A similar commission is given in [Mark 16:15-18](#) which may have been the same instance or an earlier appearance.
17. The eleventh appearance occurred at the time of His ascension from the Mount of Olives ([Luke 24:44-53](#); [Acts 1:3-9](#)). This is the last appearance of Christ to His disciples prior to His glorification in heaven.
18. The twelfth appearance of the resurrected Christ was to Stephen just prior to his martyrdom ([Acts 7:55-56](#)).

19. The thirteenth appearance of Christ was to Paul on the road to Damascus as he was about to continue his work of persecuting Christians ([Acts 9:3-6](#); cf. [Acts 22:6-11](#); [26:13-18](#)). It was on this occasion that Paul was converted.

20. The fourteenth appearance seems to have been to Paul in Arabia ([Acts 20:24](#); [26:17](#); [Gal 1:12, 17](#)). This appearance is not clearly stated but may be implied from [Galatians 1:12](#). Some believe that the instruction to Paul, which he mentions in [Acts 26:17](#), were given to him in Arabia, not at the original appearance on the road to Damascus. There is no record of the precise revelation given to Paul in [Acts 9](#) or [Acts 22](#). In [Acts 22:10](#), he is promised a later revelation which would give him the necessary instruction.

21. The fifteenth appearance of Christ was to Paul in the temple when Paul is warned concerning the persecution which was to come ([Acts 22:17-21](#); cf. [Acts 9:26-30](#); [Gal 1:18](#)).

22. The sixteenth appearance of Christ was to Paul while in prison in Caesarea, when it is recorded that “the Lord stood by him,” and told him that he would bear witness in Rome ([Acts 23:11](#)).

23. The final and seventeenth appearance of Christ was to the Apostle John at the beginning of the revelation given to him ([Rev 1:12-20](#)).

Taken as a whole, the appearances are of such varied character and to so many people under so many different circumstances that the proof of the resurrection of Christ is as solid as any historical fact could be in the first century.

The empty tomb as a witness to the resurrection of Christ. All the evidence that exists concerning the tomb after the resurrection of Christ indicates that it was empty. This was the testimony of the disciples who carefully examined the tomb when they found the stone rolled away. The guard that was stationed at the tomb, according to Matthew’s account, also reported that the tomb was empty. Only three explanations are even possibilities: (1) It has been suggested that the disciples may have chanced upon the wrong tomb. This, however, is refuted not only by the presence of the angels, but by the Roman guard who certainly would not have been guarding the wrong tomb. (2) The soldiers themselves made the suggestion that someone had stolen the body while they slept. If this had been the case, the guard would have been summarily executed. Instead, according to Matthew’s account, they were given money to spread the false story that someone had stolen the body. This was obviously an attempt at bribery to

prevent the truth being told and was gladly accepted by the soldiers as it also assured them of intervention with the Roman authorities so that they would not be executed. (3) The complete lack of evidence for any alternative leaves the account of the resurrection of Christ the only plausible explanation. If it were not that this were supernatural and so intrinsic to the whole Christian faith, it would not even have been questioned. When the evidence for the empty tomb is added to the many other arguments for a bodily resurrection of Christ, it forms additional proof of the genuineness of the entire narrative. There would have been no motive on the part of the disciples to steal the body in the first place, and if the enemies of Christ had taken the body it would have been to their interest to have produced it when the accounts of the resurrection began to be circulated. There is no evidence, however, that the enemies of Christ made any effort to try to find the supposedly stolen body of Christ. The empty tomb remains a silent but eloquent witness to the fact of the resurrection.

The character of the human witnesses to the resurrection. It is clear from the accounts given in the Gospels that the witnesses to the resurrection of Christ were quite reluctant to believe their senses concerning this important event. Only when overwhelming proof was presented did they at long last accept the fact of His resurrection. The disciples certainly could not have been fooled in identifying Christ, as they knew Him well. They themselves, however, demanded tangible evidence such as Thomas required when he was not present at the first appearance of Christ to the eleven. There does not seem to have been any expectation on the part of the disciples that Christ would rise from the dead, even though He had told them plainly that this would be the case. Once the evidence was produced that Christ had actually been raised from the dead, no amount of persecution could make them waiver in their testimony. They repeatedly showed willingness to die rather than give up their faith in Christ as their resurrected Lord. The reluctant testimony of the soldiers as well as the grudging admission of the leaders of the Jews add a touch of reality to the fact of Christ's resurrection.

The dramatic change in the disciples after the resurrection. One of the impressive arguments for the genuineness of the resurrection of Christ was the contrast in the disciples before and after the resurrection. Scripture indicates that the disciples before the resurrection were utterly disheartened, were meeting in fear in obscure places, and were dismayed at the death of Christ. There is no indication in any of the narratives describing the disciples prior to the resurrection that they entertained any real hope that Christ would be restored to them in resurrection. On the day of resurrection itself, there is no evidence that they were credulous or accepted the testimony of the resurrection of Christ without requiring definite proof. It was evidently hard for them to believe their senses when they actually saw Christ risen. Once they were convinced, however, the disciples were joyous and fearless and, as illustrated in the case of Peter, bore a public testimony to the fact of the resurrection, challenging their hearers to consider the evidence. In their attitude before the resurrection Christ as well as in their subsequent renewed hope and faith, their experiences followed a normal pattern and there is no indication of accepting the fact of the resurrection apart from the solid proofs which were theirs in the postresurrectional appearances.

The disciples experience of divine power in the postresurrection period. The book of Acts cites the evidence of the supernatural power of God in the ministry of the apostles. It is, in a sense, the acts of the Holy Spirit, rather than of the apostles themselves. The predicted power of the Spirit that would come upon them on the Day of Pentecost was fulfilled in chapter 2 and in the subsequent experience of the church. Jews and Gentiles are transformed under the power of the gospel as they believed in a Christ who had died for them and arose again. The gospel was attested by supernatural acts of healing, by the divine judgment of Ananias and Sapphira, by the supernatural appearance of Christ to Saul, and numerous other events in which the supernatural power of God was evident. The book of Acts would have been meaningless and impossible if it had not been for an actual resurrection of Christ from the dead. The transforming power of Christ witnessed to by Christians through the ages is likewise without explanation if Christ did not actually rise. The book of Acts, therefore, can be considered a massive confirmation of the doctrine of resurrection.

The evidence of the Day of Pentecost. Outstanding in the book of Acts is the support of the resurrection afforded in the events of the Day of Pentecost. This event in itself is a demonstration of the power of God, but is attended by human phenomenon which would be without proper explanation if Christ had not actually arisen from the dead. The Day of Pentecost, occurring only fifty days after the death and resurrection of Christ, was the occasion for the sermon by Peter on the doctrine of resurrection as thousands gathered to hear. Those who listened to Peter had access to the garden where the tomb was located, and had undoubtedly investigated the reports of the resurrection of Christ which was commonly discussed in Jerusalem. As Peter declared the resurrection of Christ there was no contradiction from the multitudes, and the record indicates that instead of offering rebuttal to his assertion three thousand people, who were in a position to know the facts, believed that Jesus Christ had actually been raised from the dead. It is evident that Peter's confident assertion that Christ actually arose in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of David, as recorded in [Psalm 16:10-11](#), must have stemmed not only from his own personal conviction that these were the facts, but also from confidence that there was no one competent to contradict them. The events of Pentecost would be left without a reasonable explanation if Jesus Christ had not been raised from the dead.

The evidence in the custom of observing the first day of the week. Early in the apostolic church, it was the custom of believers to gather on the first day of the week and observe it as a special day of worship and praise. On this day they observed the Lord's Supper and would bring their offerings ([Acts 20:7](#); [1 Cor 16:2](#)).

Orr states: "It is the uncontradicted testimony of all the witnesses that it was the *Easter morning*, or, as the Evangelists call it, 'the first day of the week,' or *third day* after the Crucifixion, on which the event known as the Resurrection happened; in other words, that Jesus rose from the dead *on the third day*. The four Evangelists, whatever their other divergency, are agreed about this. The Apostle Paul, who had conversed with the original witnesses only eight or nine years after the event, confirms the statement, and declares it to be the general belief of the church."³

From the first century, the great majority of Christians have continued to observe the first day of the week as a special day of religious significance. The only explanation that has a historic foundation of this change from the seventh day of rest to the first day of the week as a day of worship was that Christ rose from the dead on that day. The historic custom fully attested by the history of the church is therefore another compelling argument that Christ actually arose from the dead.

Milligan shows the convincing character of this change in custom: “We have the institution of the Lord’s day, of which there are traces within a week of the Resurrection, and of which no one will dream of denying was expressly designed to commemorate that event. Surely there must have been a depth of conviction as well as an amount of power difficult to estimate, in a belief that could lead to such an institution. Nor do we see the full force of this until we remember the totally different conceptions which the Sabbath and the Lord’s day express,—the one the last day of the week, when man, weary of the work of the world, he sought the joyful strength of God in which to face it; the one commemorating the close of the old creation, the other, the beginning of the new.... It was believed that Jesus rose from the grave on that first morning of the week. It was this fact that made the difference, and a more powerful testimony to men’s conviction of the truth of the event within a week after it is said to have happened, it would be impossible to produce.”⁴

The origin of the Christian church. The existence of the Christian church from the first century historically is explained as stemming from the belief in the resurrection of Christ. Only such definite proof of the deity of Christ would have given the church the convincing power that it needed in the gospel witness. The dynamic which characterized the early church can be explained only on the basis that Christ actually arose from the dead. In the years since, millions of believers have been blessed and transformed by faith in Jesus Christ as their risen Savior and Lord. If the resurrection is a myth, there is no adequate explanation for the power of the early church in its witness and the willingness of its adherents even to die rather than renounce their Christian faith. The continuity of the church through the centuries, in spite of ignorance, unbelief, and erosion of doctrine, would be difficult to explain if there were not a solid basis for its origination and continuation in the historic resurrection of Christ. Those who investigate the facts concerning the resurrection of Christ as contained in the Scripture have certainly an abundant evidence on which to rest their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and God.

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¹ William C. Robinson, “The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ,” *Bulletin of Columbia Theological Seminary*, Decatur, Georgia, July 1957, p. 3.

² James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 92.

³ Orr, *Ibid.*, pp. 114-15.

⁴ William Milligan, *The Resurrection of Our Lord*, pp. 68-69.

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