

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

Proclaiming the Resurrection

Some have commented that it seems strange to celebrate Easter this year on April 1 – otherwise known as April Fool’s Day, an annual celebration of playing practical jokes and spreading hoaxes. The origin of the term Easter is obscure. Supposedly, the word comes from Eostre, an Anglo-Saxon goddess to whom sacrifices were offered in April. Since the resurrection of Christ is celebrated in the spring, many of the traditional non-Christian springtime symbols of the renewal of nature became attached to our Christian celebration. The only mention of Eostre comes from a passing reference in the writings of the Venerable Bede, an 8th century monk and historian. There is no hard evidence that such a goddess was ever worshiped by anyone, anywhere. So perhaps the linking of the name for our annual celebration of the resurrection of our Lord with a pagan goddess is just another hoax – an April Fool’s joke meant to demean Christians for celebrating the resurrection. However, it is true that Easter might as well have pagan origins, since today it has been almost completely commercialized.

The Bible does not reveal the specific date that Christ rose from the grave. We do know that Jesus was crucified at the time of the Jewish Passover. This Hebrew feast starts on the 15th of Nissan on the Hebrew calendar. However, the Hebrew calendar sometimes adds a month to even out the days of the year unlike the western or Gregorian calendar we use today. Since we match our Resurrection celebration to the Passover, the Resurrection date varies due to the calendar differences.

What is important is the reason for our celebration, which is our Savior conquered death and is alive, making it possible for us to have eternal life. **Romans 6:4 (ESV)** ⁴ *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.* The greatest April Fool’s hoax ever played will be on those who make the mistake of believing Satan’s lie that the resurrection of Jesus was not real.

The Good News of Christ’s Resurrection

Corinth was a Greek city. Greeks did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. When Paul preached in Athens, Greece declaring the fact of Christ’s resurrection, some actually laughed at him (**Acts 17:32**). We recently studied the differences between core doctrines, convictions, and preferences within our faith. Belief in the resurrection is a core doctrine of Christianity. The resurrection is not a debatable issue. Apparently, a group in Corinth was denying the physical resurrection of Jesus. Although, most in the church did believe in the resurrection, Paul wanted to lay out the fundamental truths to avoid dangerous confusion. He presented three proofs concerning the resurrection to assure his readers that Jesus Christ indeed had been raised from the dead.

PROOF #1 – Their Salvation

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-2 (ESV) ¹ *Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*

If Jesus did not come to life out of the grave, there is no hope for us to stand again. The Greek term for resurrection, *anastasis*, literally means, “to stand again.” In the pagan world, resurrection was associated with the survival of a “spiritual part” of a person after death. Because of Jesus standing up again from the dead (and He is still standing), resurrection has come to mean the restoration of body and spirit by Almighty God.

When Paul came to Corinth, he preached the gospel – the good news of Jesus, they believed and their lives were changed. Paul told them that their standing firm was proof that their faith was genuine. Verse 2 does not mean that some who had believed the gospel might lose their salvation. Paul is saying that their continued faith was the evidence of their salvation. We do know that it is possible to give lip service to the gospel, join a church and be baptized and never experience a work of grace in the soul. This is to believe in vain.

PROOF #2 – The Old Testament Scriptures

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (ESV) ³ *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,* ⁴ *that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*

The gospel is the most important message that the church ever proclaims. Recently, even our government is encouraging churches to get more involved in assisting with social issues. Although helping with social causes is a good work, it is not the most important work of the church. Sharing the message of Christ is our most important ministry ever! Let’s consider Paul’s three major points of the gospel:

(1) *Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.* Many people were crucified by the Romans but only one was crucified for the sins of the world. **Isaiah 53:7 (ESV)** ⁷ *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.*

(2) *that he was buried* – The Old Testament foretold of the coming Messiah’s burial. **Isaiah 53:9 (ESV)** ⁹ *And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.*

(3) *that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.* – **Psalm 16:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ *For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, [hell] or let your holy one see corruption.* Concerning His own resurrection after three days in the grave, Jesus said in **Matthew 12:40 (ESV)** ⁴⁰ *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.* Even in the Old Testament, Scripture revealed we will rise again too! **Isaiah 26:19 (ESV)** ¹⁹ *Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.*

PROOF #3 – Christ was seen by witnesses.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:5-11 (ESV) ⁵ *and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.* ⁶ *Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.* ⁷

Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

By making such a public statement and even giving names, Paul provided critics a chance to verify his words. It is significant that Peter (Cephas) who was so scared that he openly denied knowing Christ three times during His trial later boldly proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus to a huge audience on Pentecost. Peter eventually gave his own life in the process of sharing the gospel. While many will die for what they believe to be the truth, few if any will die for what they know is a lie. That psychological fact is important because Jesus' followers did not die for a hoax. All but the Apostle John were martyred for their faith.

James, the half brother of Jesus, did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God (**John 7:5**). To James Jesus was only his half brother. However, after Jesus had risen from the dead and James literally saw Jesus, he knew beyond a shadow of doubt that his half-brother was the Son of God.

Paul added his own personal testimony of the resurrection to the others. As an unbeliever he was soundly convinced that Jesus was dead. He stood by consenting to the stoning of the first Christian martyr, Stephen. The radical change in Paul's life testified to the resurrection.

The Importance of Christ's Resurrection

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 (ESV) ¹² Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

We have the proofs of Christ's resurrection: (1) The witness of the Presence of His Holy Spirit dwelling within us. (2) The 'scarlet thread' of redemption that runs throughout scripture. (3) The record of credible witnesses testifying to the truth that He died, was buried, then resurrected, and ascended into heaven. All of these proofs are life altering. If Christ did not rise from the grave, we are wasting our time. I might as well live to please myself in the here and now. If the disciples did move the dead body of Jesus, like the Jews were paid to say, I would be freaking out every time I turn on the news and most certainly when losing a loved one to death. But, I don't freak out because I know that Christ did conquer death and that He has a long-range plan that includes an eternal home in heaven for those who accept His salvation!

The Guarantee of our Resurrection

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 (ESV) ²⁰ *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.* ²¹ *For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.* ²² *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.* ²³ *But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.* ²⁴ *Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.* ²⁵ *For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.* ²⁶ *The last enemy to be destroyed is death.* ²⁷ *For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him.* ²⁸ *When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.*

Paul had just made this sad conclusion: *If in Christ we have hope in **this life only**, we are of all people most to be pitied.* Then, he provides three images to attest to the truth that we do have HOPE in Christ. For centuries the Israelites celebrated the Feast of Firstfruits. During this celebration when the priest waved the first sheaf of the harvest before the LORD, it signified that the entire harvest was His. When Jesus was raised from the dead as the firstfruits of all who sleep, it was God’s guarantee to His children that we too will be raised in His future harvest.

You remember that in the beginning of human history, it was the man called Adam who originally brought the sorrow of death to the human race. Some families experience disease brought to them through genetic disorders. We all inherited a deadly genetic disorder from Adam – our sin nature and it brings the ‘kiss of death’. We need not fear. There is a cure for this deadly inherited sin disease from Adam. Jesus provided the antidote through the blood He shed on the cross for us. All we have to do is accept Christ’s antidote – no matter how the disease has ravaged our body and spirit. This life-giving antidote heals us and secures our eternal destination.

Paul’s final image is of God’s kingdom. We read in **Revelation 11:15 (ESV)** ¹⁵ *Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”* God has allowed His enemy, Satan, to rule this earth as the *prince of the power of the air.* (**Eph. 2:2**) Nevertheless, that old deceiver’s final judgment is certain. **Romans 14:11 (ESV)** ¹¹ *for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”*

Paul says, *The last enemy to be destroyed is death.* Oh, how joyous it will be when death is no longer an issue in God’s eternal kingdom. **1 Corinthians 15:55 (ESV)** ⁵⁵ *“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”* Think of the joy when death is longer an issue in life everlasting!

There is a recent movie called the Justice League. It is a fantasy concerning the resurrection of Superman from the grave and how Superman and other superheroes join together in a Justice League to save the world. That story is fiction. But the story of Jesus is life and truth. There is a Justice League comprised of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Three in One will bring justice to this earth. Do I believe in resurrection? Certainly, because I believe in Jesus! **John 11:25 (ESV)** ²⁵ *Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,*