

The message this morning is one of the most fundamentally important things that you will ever hear. It's not because it is my message, but the message of our Creator to mankind in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus did not die and then rise from the dead, Christianity would be one of the greatest deceptions in history. (1Corinthians 15:14-15) If He did die and rise from the dead after so many hours in a tomb, then it is the most important account in all of human history.

**Did Jesus really die?** There are those that claim He only fainted or that He took some kind of drug that made it appear that He died. What historical evidence do we have that would assure us that He really did die on the cross?

When the rulers of the Jews pronounced the death sentence on anyone, there was an official delegate assigned to observe the execution and certify to those leaders (the Sanhedrin), that the convicted person had in fact died. The Romans also required that the officer in charge of an execution certify to the Roman authority that the execution had been carried out. This is why that in spite of the appearance of death, the Centurion, who had seen hundreds of deaths, still required his soldier to pierce the heart of Jesus with a spear to be certain. (John 19:34) The soldier in charge of the execution could be sentenced to the same judgment if his prisoner escaped. They did not take any chances of that happening and had most likely seen every trick man had come up with to survive. They knew how to be certain.

The soldier in charge of the execution was to make every effort to see that the prisoner survived to endure the torture of their sentence. That is why Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry the cross. (Matthew 27:32) The scourging had brought Jesus so close to death that the Centurion was concerned that He would not make it to the crucifixion. It was in an effort to keep Jesus alive to experience the agony of crucifixion that Simon was forced to assist Jesus.

It would have been miraculous to fool both the delegate from the Jewish leaders and the seasoned Roman Centurion. Would this man Jesus, of amazing teaching and miraculous deeds, have fooled everyone? Would He have assigned the care of His mother to John? (John 19:27) It's possible, but it is not remotely probable. He would have been going against His own teachings regarding "truth". (John 17:17) And if He did survive, why does He disappear from the scene 50 days later? People who fool others do so for their own personal gain. If a man fooled the world, they would capitalize on it and gain as much as possible from the deception. There is no evidence of that. Knowing the historical circumstances, it would take as much or more faith to believe that He fooled everyone than it would to believe the Gospel accounts.

**Commented [Paul1]: 1 Corinthians 15:14-15 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.

<sup>15</sup> 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.

**Commented [Paul2]: John 19:34 (ESV)**

<sup>34</sup> But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.

**Commented [Paul3]: Matthew 27:32 (ESV)**

<sup>32</sup> As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross.

**Commented [Paul4]: John 19:27 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

**Commented [Paul5]: John 17:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

**Did Jesus really conquer death?** First let us look at the string of eyewitnesses. They are one of the greatest confirmations of the account of the resurrection. The resurrection is one of the most important cornerstones of the Christian faith. In fact, if there were no resurrection, there is no reason to hold Christianity as unique.

The Bible records ten resurrection encounters: The first was to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18, Mark 16:9); the second to the women returning from the tomb (Matthew 28:9); the third to Peter (Luke 24:34, 1 Corinthians 15:5); the fourth to the two on the Emmaus road (Luke 24:13-45, Mark 16:12); the fifth to the ten in the upper room (Luke 24:36-40, John 20:19-20); the sixth happened a week later to the eleven, this time with Thomas present (John 20:26-29, Mark 16:14); the seventh to the 500, all together (1 Corinthians 15:6, Matthew 28:16-17); the eighth was to James (1 Corinthians 15:7); The ninth was to seven of the disciples on the shores of Lake Tiberias in Galilee (John 21:1-23) and the tenth was near Bethany, on the Mount of Olives, to a great crowd of his followers (Luke 24:50-52, Acts 1:6-12). The apostle Paul also considered himself one of the number who had seen the Risen Savior.

Most of these appearances were close up face to face encounters. Though some are reported not to have believed (Matthew 28:17), this only adds to the veracity of the record. If the disciples were making this up they would never have included a statement like that. They wouldn't have had the women as the first to see Jesus as their culture did not value the testimony of women. They would not have said they doubted the women. (Luke 24:11)

Imagine if you were writing a story to try to deceive people into joining your cult. You would be the great hero who was the first to be greeted by the resurrected Jesus. You would have been waiting at the tomb because of your great faith in Jesus' prediction of rising on the third day. We would have Jesus declaring how great our faith was to have believed His words. That is not at all what was recorded.

What if all these people just got together and collaborated on the story? Considering the number of people involved, is that even likely? And when they started dying for their faith, and most of them did, don't you think some of them would have said, "Wait a minute, don't kill me. We made it all up. Caesar is lord." Something happened that convinced these people to go from cowering behind locked doors to bold witnesses that risked their lives. (John 20:19)

When thousands of Christians were sent to the cross in Rome, the philosopher Seneca around the year 63 AD said of one:

**Commented [Paul6]: Mark 16:9 (ESV)**  
<sup>9</sup> [Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons.]

**Commented [Paul7]: Matthew 28:9 (ESV)**  
<sup>9</sup> And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.

**Commented [Paul8]: Luke 24:34 (ESV)**  
<sup>34</sup> saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"

**Commented [Paul9]: 1 Corinthians 15:5 (ESV)**  
<sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

**Commented [Paul10]: Mark 16:12 (ESV)**  
<sup>12</sup> After these things he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country.

**Commented [Paul11]: Luke 24:36-40 (ESV)**  
<sup>36</sup> As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!"  
<sup>37</sup> But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.  
<sup>38</sup> And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"  
<sup>39</sup> See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."  
<sup>40</sup> And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

**Commented [Paul12]: John 20:19-20 (ESV)**  
<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."  
<sup>20</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

**Commented [Paul13]: John 20:26-29 (ESV)**  
<sup>26</sup> Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."  
<sup>27</sup> Then 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."  
<sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"  
<sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

**Commented [Paul14]: Mark 16:14 (ESV)**  
<sup>14</sup> Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and ... [1]

**Commented [Paul15]: 1 Corinthians 15:6 (ESV)**  
<sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ... [2]

**Commented [Paul16]: Matthew 28:16-17 (ESV)**  
<sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ... [3]

**Commented [Paul17]: 1 Corinthians 15:7 (ESV)**  
<sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

**Commented [Paul18]: Luke 24:50-52 (ESV)**  
<sup>50</sup> Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ... [4]

**Commented [Paul19]: Matthew 28:17 (ESV)**  
<sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.

**Commented [Paul20]: Luke 24:11 (ESV)**  
<sup>11</sup> but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

**Commented [Paul21]: John 20:19 (ESV)** ... [5]

"In the midst of his suffering he made no complaint at all; no, he begged no mercy for himself; on the contrary, he even smiled, smiled with a joyful heart."

A church historian estimated that in the first centuries of Christianity, 10 million believers died as martyrs at the hands of civil and religious persecutors.

But **what about historians**, that is non-Christian historians? After all, Christians might be biased and report what they want to believe. Personally, I wonder why the skeptics never turn that same logic around on themselves or on secular historians.

The Samaritan-born historian Thallus writing around the year 52 AD also refers to this. At the moment of Jesus' death, at three o'clock in the afternoon, a miracle happened which is spoken of by all the synoptic gospels (Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38 and Luke 23:45):

"The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life . . . and they appeared to many people."

He also suggested that the darkness was due to an eclipse.

Josephus also wrote of Jesus in a section in Book 18 dealing with various actions of Pilate, the extant texts refer to Jesus and his ministry. This passage is known as the *Testimonium Flavianum*:

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians so named from him are not extinct at this day.

Tacitus, the Roman historian mentions in his writings that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius Caesar. The Talmud, a Jewish collection of sayings of the Rabbi and their commentaries, refers to Jesus in a negative light. However, recent renowned Jewish scholars of the New Testament (David Flusser and Pinches Lapide) refer to Jesus' resurrection as "an indisputable historical truth."

We also have the evidence of the Apostles' message. After Judas died, one of the main criteria for a potential replacement was to have seen the risen Lord. (Acts 1:22) The Apostles were "teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead". (Acts 4:2) This was the main thrust of their message. "...with great power they

**Commented [Paul22]: Risto Santala, THE MESSIAH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT IN THE LIGHT OF RABBINICAL WRITINGS**  
Translated from Finnish by William Kinnaird

**Commented [Paul23]: Matthew 27:51 (ESV)**  
<sup>51</sup> And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.

**Commented [Paul24]: Matthew 27:51 (ESV)**  
<sup>51</sup> And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.

**Commented [Paul25]: Luke 23:45 (ESV)**  
<sup>45</sup> while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

**Commented [Paul26]:** <http://www.bede.org.uk/Josephus.htm>

**Commented [Paul27]: Acts 1:22 (ESV)**  
<sup>22</sup> beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection."

**Commented [Paul28]: Acts 4:2 (ESV)**  
<sup>2</sup> greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was with them all" (Acts 4:33). Paul's way of reaching out to his fellow Jews was to "reason from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead" (Acts 17:2).

**Commented [Paul29]: Acts 4:33 (ESV)**

<sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

**Commented [Paul30]: Acts 17:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

That is the climactic message of all of Scripture. The Law said that the soul that sins must die. (Ezekiel 18:4) It declares that the one hung on a tree is cursed. (Deuteronomy 21:23)

**Commented [Paul31]: Ezekiel 18:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.

**Commented [Paul32]: Deuteronomy 21:23 (NIV)**

<sup>23</sup> you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.

On the cross Jesus was cursed that we might be blessed. This mystery dawned one day on the son of a rich Jewish family, whose Rabbi had had him thrown out of his home on account of his Christian faith. While tramping the streets of London the words of Galatians 3:13 suddenly flashed meaningfully into his mind: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.'" Through this realization the man, a well-known Jewish Christian, found immediate peace.

**Commented [Paul33]: Risto Santala, THE MESSIAH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT IN THE LIGHT OF RABBINICAL WRITINGS**

Translated from Finnish by William Kinnaird

**Commented [Paul34]: Acts 10:36 (ESV)**

<sup>36</sup> As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all),

This is why the Easter message is so critical. There is only one way to know peace with God. (Acts 10:36) It is to accept that Jesus took the curse of sin that was yours and mine upon Himself. He bore the wrath of God for us on the cross. Unimaginable grace from God, and yet so many refuse to accept it. Why? Because we don't want to admit they are fallen beings who are evil in the sight of a holy God.

**Jesus died and was raised from death! So what does that have to do with us?** You see, accepting this great grace that comes from God comes instinctively with an obligation. The peace that the Jewish man experienced comes with the duty to respond. You can't welcome the greatest love into your life and not do anything about it. It's an invitation to a whole new life centered around that love. In fact, Jesus said the Great Commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. (Matthew 22:37) That's much more than a Sunday service and an offering in the plate.

**Commented [Paul35]: Matthew 22:37 (ESV)**

<sup>37</sup> And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

Jesus wants you! He died to make it possible to have you in His presence forever. He rose to give you the power to live a new life, free from the destructive power of evil. That is the final proof of Jesus' resurrection, the transformation in your own life. When you surrender to His life, He changes your desires. He makes all things new!

I was talking to a young man the other day who used to live for video games. It's a real problem today because it is an alternate world in which you can find success and value, but in reality it is just consuming your life with meaninglessness. The Lord had begun to transform his heart, and now his desire was to read the Word and know Jesus.

The death and resurrection of Jesus is much more than church on Sunday, Christmas and Easter. It's about a new life. It's about resurrected life that transforms our hearts. The Old Testament calls it a new covenant. (Jeremiah 31:31-33) We enter into life, real life, the life of Jesus. The old self dies and we find it is Christ that lives in us, that speaks through us, that loves through us. (Galatians 2:20) He pours out His grace through us. The more we experience it the more we want to experience it. This is true success and true value, being found in Jesus, not having a righteousness of our own but the righteousness of the One that loved us and gave Himself for us. (Philippians 3:9) We literally become a new creation in Him. (2Corinthians 5:17)

**Are you done with the old life?** Many of us have to get to the point where we are done with the unfulfilling pursuit trying on our own to fill the void in our heart with things, relationships, and acceptance by the world. Nothing but Jesus can fill it. We think the cost of surrender will be too great, but surrender is wonderful because of who it is you are surrendering to.

This is the time of year we really focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus, but the issue isn't whether or not it happened. I don't think anyone can look at the facts surrounding it and honestly doubt that it happened. The issue is whether or not we will die with Jesus and be raised in Him to a new life, an all-consuming life of being in Jesus. It's a life of loving Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. It's when life becomes about Him.

That's the real reason our culture is becoming anti-Christian. It's because our culture is about loving self with your all. That only leaves you emptier than when you started. Look at the end of the life of people that openly lived with the goal of self-gratification. Then look honestly at the end of life that was lived in Jesus, not just a religious person, but someone who truly loved God and others. There is the final evidence, the fruit in the life, the reaping of what was sown, as in the report of the death of that martyr by Seneca.

Are you an Easter and Christmas Christian, or even a Sunday Christian? There is so much more. There is life in Jesus, resurrection life! Jesus really did die. He really did conquer death. He really did say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6 He really did say, "Live in me and I will live in you!" (John 15:4) He really did say, "I have come that you might have life and that you might have it to the full!" (John 10:10) Will you take Him at His word and die with Him and live in Him.

#### Questions

1 Why should we believe Jesus really died?

#### Commented [Paul36]: Jeremiah 31:31-33 (ESV)

<sup>31</sup> "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,  
<sup>32</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.

<sup>33</sup> But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

#### Commented [Paul37]: Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

#### Commented [Paul38]: Philippians 3:9 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

#### Commented [Paul39]: 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

#### Commented [Paul40]: John 15:4 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

#### Commented [Paul41]: John 10:10 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

- 2 How would you have written the story?
- 3 Why is it highly unlikely that Jesus fooled everyone?
- 4 Who saw Jesus after His resurrection?
- 5 Which historians wrote of Jesus?
- 6 What do Jewish scholars today say of Jesus' resurrection?
- 7 What is the testimony of Jesus' followers?
- 8 Based on the evidence, what do you believe about the resurrection?
- 9 What should our response be?
- 10 Do we act like we believe Jesus?

**Mark 16:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.

**1 Corinthians 15:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

**Matthew 28:16-17 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

<sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.

**Luke 24:50-52 (ESV)**

<sup>50</sup> Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them.

<sup>51</sup> While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

<sup>52</sup> And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy,

**John 20:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."