

Raised for Our Justification

Romans 4:25

Resurrection Sunday 2017

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EVER since the first century, people have been trying to convince themselves and others that Jesus did not rise from the dead.

The False Witness of the Jewish Leaders (Matt. 28)

We see that in our Gospel reading where the Jewish leaders gave the Roman guards at the tomb enough money to convince them to say, **“His disciples came by night and stole him away while they were asleep”** (Matt. 28:13). And lest you think that this is a convenient story for Christians to insert in their Scriptures, verse 14 evidences that it really did happen this way. If you were a Christian author trying to promote a myth, all you would mention would be this phrase. But why does Matthew include this: **“And if it comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble?”** (Matt. 28:14) For a Roman guard to lose the body of criminal he was guarding or the body of a tomb he was guarding was a capital crime. Why include this if it’s just a fanciful story? Because this is what happened! And so down through the ages people have tried to convince themselves and others that Jesus did not rise again. The Qu’ran denies it; John Dominic

Crossan, who you see on every Easter conspiracy show every year denies it; even hymns deny it: “You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.”

The Prophetic Witness of David (Ps. 16)

But the resurrection of Jesus is something God himself promised. We read from Psalm 16 as just one example. Written by David some one thousand years before Jesus, it tells of his trust in the Lord in all the tumult of life. He said **my heart** (literally, “my kidneys”— the personification of the center of human emotion) **is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure** (Ps. 16:9) Why was David so confident? **For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption** (Ps. 16:10). When he died David was confident that God would not leave him. He had a future hope. And eight times in this Psalm he says “I,” six times “me,” and eleven times “my.” But then he says **for you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption**. He’s not speaking of himself anymore. He has confidence that his God will not abandon him in death. But his confidence in that is not that his body would somehow be miraculously preserved in cryogenic freeze for thousands of years until the resurrection on the last day. No, his confidence was that another would be

preserved in death and therefore raised up. And if *that person*—the Lord’s **holy one**—would be preserved then David can go to the grave resting confident. He was speaking prophetically of Jesus! Now, if there was some author in Europe in the year 1017 who said there was going to be a man born of a virgin, in the United States, in the city of Lodi, California, and that he was going to perform miracles, teach like no one else before, die, but then rise, wouldn’t you be amazed? That’s what the Old Testament does!

The Eye Witness of Paul (1 Cor. 15)

But people still have convinced themselves and others that Jesus did not really rise again bodily, but that it was the community that rose again, or that Jesus wasn’t really dead in the first place. There was a book a while back called *The Resurrection Plot* that said Jesus didn’t actually die on the cross but passed out due to blood loss. This has come to be known as the “Swoon Theory.” He “swooned” or fainted on the cross, looked like he was dead, and so when he came out of the tomb—apparently using his Arnold Schwarzenegger-like muscles to move the huge stone—his disciples proclaimed him to be the resurrected Savior.

What did the Jewish rabbi Saul, whom we know by his Roman name Paul, say about the resurrection? **If Christ has not been raised, then our**

preaching is in vain (1 Cor. 15:14). **If Christ has not been raised, then...your faith is in vain** (1 Cor. 15:14). **If Christ has not been raised, then...we are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ** (1 Cor. 15:15). **If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile** (1 Cor. 15:17). **If Christ has not been raised...you are still in your sins** (1 Cor. 15:17). **If Christ has not been raised...then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ** (a euphemism for death) **have perished** (1 Cor. 15:18). **If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied** (1 Cor. 15:19). Then he says, **but in fact Christ has been raised from the dead** (1 Cor. 15:20).

Why does he speak this way? Because the resurrection of Jesus is a part of **the gospel**, that is, the good news of God himself that **save[s] us!** (1 Cor. 15:1, 2; cf. 2 Tim. 2:8) And because it is a part of the gospel it is among those truths of **first importance** that Paul **received** (1 Cor. 15:3). Those truths of first importance are **that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures** (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Did you hear that? **In accordance with the Scriptures.** What does that mean? It means Jesus rose just as God had promised in places like Psalm 16! We believe Jesus rose again

because God says he would—and he did! And because he did, note how Paul lists off those to whom he appeared as witnesses: **Cephas** (meaning Peter), **the twelve apostles, more than five hundred brothers at one time—** whom at the time of Paul’s writing he could say, **most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.** By **brothers** Paul includes all the faithful, as the first witnesses were **Mary Magdalene and the other Mary** the mother of Joseph (Matt. 28:1). By the way, if you were starting a first century Jewish religion among the Roman Empire, you don’t say that *women* were the first witnesses who had to tell the disciples that Jesus rose again! (Matt. 28:7, 10) **James**, who was leader of the Jerusalem church, **then to all the apostles**, meaning, the larger group of all those who saw the resurrected Jesus, and finally **last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me** (1 Cor. 15:5–8). The resurrection was promised in the Scriptures and fulfilled in Jesus; it was eye-witnessed by hundreds of original followers; and then Paul says his own transformed life evidences the truthfulness and the power of Jesus: **I am...unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain** (1 Cor. 15:9–10).

But we still have preachers and people trying to convince themselves and others that Jesus' resurrection is not as scandalous as it sounds. They avoid this language of reality and speak only of being raised spiritually to a new life. They think of Jesus' resurrection as a symbol of the kind of resurrection power-filled lives we can have. Are you without hope? The power of the resurrection can be yours. Are you worried about your family? Christ's abundant power is available. I received a flyer in the mail—as I'm sure you did as well—which said, "Come and experience the renewal that Easter can bring to your life."

What this Witness Means for You

Since Jesus' resurrection is part of **the gospel** of God himself for sinners like us, I can confidently proclaim to you *what this witness means*. Turn to Romans 4 with me. Here Paul is speaking about the ancient Jewish patriarch, Abraham, and his faith in God's promise. Listen to verses 22–25:

**²²That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."
²³But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.**

What's important for us today is to see that Paul is saying what the Old Testament teaches about Abraham's faith was **not written for his sake alone, but for ours also** (Rom. 4:23-24). How so? **It**—meaning, faith—**will be counted to us**—for righteousness—**who believe in him**—meaning, God—**who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification** (Rom. 4:24-25). You and I are sinners. That's why Jesus **was delivered up for our trespasses** of God's holy laws. God must punish us because of our sins. But that's also why he has sent his Son from eternity into our time to become Jesus. And Jesus was crucified **for our trespasses**, on our behalf, in our place. But his death can do nothing unless he was raised. So Paul says he was also **raised for our justification**. He died a death of condemnation so that if we believe in him we benefit with **justification**. Justification is God's declaring us as guilty sinners to be both not guilty and as righteous as Jesus was righteous. In other words, justification is God's acceptance of us into his family. Our sins caused Jesus' death; his resurrection causes us to be freed of the guilt of our sins!

I invite you to believe that today! Stop trying to convince yourself that Jesus did not rise from the dead. Believe! Amen.