

What's so Great about the Resurrection?

Luke, Acts, Romans

BI: The resurrection is wonderful because through it God glorified Jesus Christ, and met our greatest needs.

Today is not just The Lord's Day, its also Resurrection Day; the day we commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And it's only fitting that we have such a celebration on a Sunday because the NT tells us that the resurrection happened on the first day of the week (Sunday). Likewise, the fact that the Christian church meets regularly on Sunday rather than Saturday (the Jewish Sabbath) is precisely because Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday.

We love Easter, don't we? We look forward to it every year. We have big family gatherings and take lots of family pictures. We eat great meals and dress in our finest clothes because Easter points to such a monument event in redemptive history. We love Easter, and we love the Easter story; the story of Jesus' resurrection from the dead after three days in the grave.

If you haven't read it for yourself, I have to tell you that even if you are not yet a Christian, you will find the narrative to be a captivating story. Ironically, it begins with death of the hero and the inconsolable grief of His followers. They had been convinced that He was going to become the king of the world. After all the miracles, and healings, and displays of supernatural power even over the creation itself, nothing could have been further off their collective radar than the possibility of His being falsely accused, condemned, and killed in Jerusalem. But now He is suddenly gone.

As you continue reading you will notice how immediately the plot begins to twist and turn. First, we read of the unexpected compassion of a member of the very party of Jesus' enemies who had Him killed. This man asks for Jesus' body, spends an enormous amount of money to care for it and then places him in his own tomb. This was to fulfill what Isaiah the Prophet had said; that he would be buried in a rich man's tomb.

The author then returns to the utter hopelessness of the hero's friends and then suddenly shatters it (their hopelessness) with the appearance of angels with a message from heaven: "He is not here. He has risen!" The hopelessness theme is then emphasized again in a side narrative about two disillusioned disciples who had cut their losses and began heading for home only to meet the risen Jesus along the way.

At one point Jesus suddenly disappears and then begins appearing to others, not as a spirit or a ghost but as a real man whose body still bears the scars of his execution. As each appearance takes place disbelief, skepticism, and despair are quenched by irrepressible joy and an irresistible desire to tell the world what they have seen and heard.

This is a fantastic story. But its one thing to learn about the story, and quite another to read it for yourself. So lets take a few minutes to do just that. Turn with me to Luke's account of the resurrection story beginning with chapter twenty three (23:44).

There are actually four accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus and each author (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) includes things the others leave out, so I commend them all to you. But this morning we are going to focus on the account recorded for us by the beloved physician, Luke.

Luke 23:44–56

It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two. And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." Having said this, He breathed His last.

Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he began praising God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent." And all the crowds who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, began to return, beating their breasts. And all His acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him from Galilee were standing at a distance, seeing these things.

And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man (he had not consented to their plan and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Luke 24:1–53

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? "He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." And they remembered His words, and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened.

And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. And He said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" And they stood still, looking sad. One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see.

And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther. But they urged Him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." So He went in to stay with them. When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon." They began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread.

While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you." But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? "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." And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate it before them.

Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. “You are witnesses of these things.

“And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God.

This, my friends, is the true Easter story. It is the greatest story ever told. And its the story that’s delivered every time anyone faithfully preaches the gospel. A gospel without the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not the true gospel. We see this in Luke’s other book which we know simply as Acts. Its called Acts because it offers the inspired narrative of the Acts of the apostles after the resurrection. More importantly for our purposes however, Acts is the record of the apostles preaching the resurrection.

Over and over again as you read the book of Acts you find the apostles proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was the centerpiece of their gospel. If the gospels offered a Narration of the resurrection, the book of Acts is about the Proclamation of the Resurrection. Let me offer just a sampling by way of illustration.

- (Acts 2:23-24) When Peter preached that great sermon on Pentecost by which 3,000 souls were saved, his main point was this: “this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.
- (3:14-15) Again, when a crowd gathers around Peter and John after they healed the lame man in the temple Peter preached the gospel declaring: “But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses.
- (4:10) Peter and John are arrested for “proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.” When they are dragged before the council to explain by what power or by what name they healed the lame man, they replied (10), “let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene,

whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health.”

- (4:33) Luke summarizes by writing that, “With great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.” And he offers further examples of this in chapters 10, 13, 17, 23, and 26.

Now I suspect that if I were to ask you to explain to me what the gospel of Jesus Christ is, many of us would say something like, “The gospel message is that Jesus died on the cross for our sins.” And of course this is correct, Jesus did die on the cross for our sins. That statement of the gospel is correct but not complete. The gospel of Jesus Christ involves not only the death of Jesus but his resurrection as well. In fact, I will say again what I said earlier, that a gospel without the resurrection is not the true gospel.

That brings us to the salient question: What’s so great about the resurrection? I mean, it does make for a great story, and I’m glad Jesus didn’t stay dead. But what’s the big deal? I thought the death of Jesus on the cross is what we should really be concerned about.

Well, don’t misunderstand. I don’t want anyone to think I am diminishing the death of Jesus or implying that it is somehow less significant or important than the resurrection. It’s not. But I wonder if we really understand the glory of the resurrection!

If the gospels offer the Narration of the Resurrection, and the book of Acts is about the Proclamation of the Resurrection, then the book of Romans offers us a Theology of the Resurrection.

Now, of course, the other NT epistles also reveal important truths about the resurrection. But for the sake of time let’s just think about the book of Romans. If we want to answer the question, What’s so great about the resurrection?, Romans is a good place to start. So what does the apostle Paul teach us about the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the book of Romans.

What so great about the resurrection?

1. (Rom. 1:4) The resurrection reveals that Jesus is the Son of God. “Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, ⁴ who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord.”
 - a. You see, Jesus on many occasions claimed to be God’s Son. Of course, anyone can claim to be the unique Son of God. But Jesus backed up his claim by all the miracles he performed.

- b. Nevertheless, while the miracles Jesus did were powerful evidence of his deity, nothing proclaimed Jesus' Sonship like the resurrection.
 - c. Acts 17:31 [God] has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."
 - d. We know Jesus is the Son of God because of the resurrection
2. (Rom. 4:25) What's so great about the resurrection? Paul explains that because of the resurrection sinners can be justified. "*He* who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and **was raised for of our justification**.
- a. The word "Justification: means "to declare righteous." This is what Romans is about. Its about how to get a righteousness that we desperately need, don't have, and can't earn. The death of Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. But the resurrection took it a step further.
 - b. By raising Jesus from the dead, God the Father was in effect saying that he approved of Christ's work of suffering and dying for our sins. There was no penalty left to pay, no more wrath of God to bear, no more guilt liable for punishment. In the resurrection God was saying, I approve of what you have done, and you find favor in my sight. (Grudem, 615)
 - c. By the same token Paul can say that Christ was raised for our justification. By virtue of our union with Christ God's declaration of approval of Christ is also His declaration of approval of us. The resurrection was the final proof that Christ had earned our justification.
 - d. Just as it was necessary for the high priest of Israel to offer a sacrifice and then present the blood of the sacrifice in the most holy place, so Jesus - our great high priest - offered himself as the once for all sacrifice and then entered behind the veil to present his righteousness before God for our justification.
3. (Rom. 6:4-13) What so great about the resurrection? Because of the resurrection sin is no longer our master. "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that *as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.* ⁵ For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;
- 12 "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, ¹³ and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God *as those alive from the dead*, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God.

- What hope do we have that we can defeat sin our lives? Our hope is that the resurrection of Christ has transformed and empowered us to defeat sin in this life. Here this, beloved! You NO Longer need to be a slave to sin because of the resurrection! Praise God!
4. (Rom. 8:34) What's so great about the resurrection? Because of the resurrection we have a heavenly Mediator. (8:34) "Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. And the author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus "always lives to make intercession for us." He stands before God as our heavenly lawyer pleading our case. No one can separate us from the love of God in Christ because we have a heavenly Mediator, Jesus whom God raised from the dead.
 5. (Rom. 10:9) What's so great about the resurrection? For some of you here this morning the greatest thing about the resurrection is this; that because Jesus rose from the dead you can be saved. Rom. 10:9 "That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God *raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*"

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