

## THE FACT OF THE RESURRECTION

THE BIBLE IS A HISTORICAL BOOK. It is not a book of sayings. It is not a book of teachings. It is not a prayer book. It is not a mythological book. From its first sentence – “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” – the Bible reveals history. Every historical event in Scripture really happened – creation in six days, the global flood, manna from heaven, water from a rock, all of Jesus’ healings and miracles, and, most wonderful of all, Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. We read about the historical accounts of Jesus’ resurrection in all four Gospels:

- Matthew 28:1-10
- Mark 16:1-8
- Luke 24:1-12
- John 20:1-9

Let’s read Luke’s account, since it’s the longest.

[Luke 24:1-12](#)

### **Luke 24:1-12 2016 ESV**

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary

Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

All four Gospels agree in the broad details. Critics will say that the Gospels contradict one another, but that's simply not true. They complement one another, they don't contradict one another. The details are different, but not contradictory.

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**THE WOMEN.** For instance, all four Gospels speak of women at the tomb. Matthew names Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" (Mary was a very common name for women). Mark names Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James (probably the mother of Jesus), and Salome. Luke names Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, along with "other women." And John names Mary Magdalene. None of the Gospels say "these women and ONLY these women came." There is no contradiction here; the Gospels complement one another.

**THE DISCIPLES.** Matthew and Mark don't tell us any disciples came to the tomb. Luke says that when the women came with the news, Peter rose and ran to the tomb. John tells us that Peter and "the other disciple," probably John himself, ran to the tomb. Again, there is no contradiction here; the Gospels complement each other.

**THE CRITICS.** Critics complain that each Gospel tells the story a little differently. If the disciples had agreed upon a single, word-for-word story, and that story was in each Gospel, then the critics would complain that the disciples obviously

made up a story, and were careful to get it exactly the same. It's clear that the disciples never felt that it was necessary to create a single, agreed-upon story.

**EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY.** These are the kinds of testimonies that truthful eyewitnesses give about an event. Which one is right? They are all right. None of them are the complete story; even if we put them all together we wouldn't have the complete story. But the God-breathed Scripture gives us the historical information we need for faith; it gives us every reason to believe.

**IMPOSSIBLE TO BELIEVE.** But it's impossible to believe that a dead man, especially a crucified man, rose from the dead. [Matthew 27:50-53](#) says this,

[Matthew 27:50-53](#)

**Matthew 27:50–53 2016 ESV**

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

This sounds like a horror movie; Jesus yields up His spirit, and dozens or hundreds of dead people briefly come back to life. He remained alive, but they returned to their graves before long. Oddly enough, there are no non-biblical records of this taking place. You would think that this would have been written down and talked about by everyone, but no – there are no other records. Why not?

**NO INDEPENDENT RECORDS.** It's obvious, isn't it? It's insane! It's like the nightmare scene in *Fiddler On The Roof*, when Tevye sees all of his dear departed dancing and singing in a graveyard. Who would believe such a story? No one in their right mind. Some commentators believe that "saints" simply refers to

faithful Jews who had died. Others believe that it was men like Moses and David, and women like Sarah and Rebekah. Either way, you can't just go around and tell people that DEAD people came back to life!

**THE APOSTLES BELIEVED AND PREACHED THE IMPOSSIBLE.** But here's the thing: this is exactly what the apostles did after the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost – they went around and told people that Jesus, the Christ, from Nazareth, died on a Roman cross, was buried for three days, and rose in perfection and glory on the third day. What's more, they told people that if they now trusted in and followed Jesus Christ as though He were alive, they would be born again, saved from their sins, declared righteous by the Father, filled with the Holy Spirit, granted power to live in holiness and righteousness, given hope in the darkest circumstances, have peace in the midst of turmoil, be able to love the hateful and pity the shameful, and have their hopes set on eternal life and joy.

**THE APOSTLES WERE NOT EAGER BELIEVERS.** I want to make sure that you understand that the apostles were not eager to believe in the resurrection; they had to be convinced. John writes that they didn't yet understand that Jesus would and had to rise from the dead. Thomas flatly refused to believe unless he could physical touch Jesus and put his hand into His wounds. They didn't make themselves faithful heroes in the Gospels; they reveal their doubts and confusion and unbelief; they told the truth. They were not eager or even willing to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead.

**THE APOSTLES WERE CONVINCED.** But they were convinced by the risen Lord of Glory. They did proclaim the news of His crucifixion and resurrection as far and as wide as they could. They claimed to be eyewitnesses to His resurrection - not the event itself, no one saw that – but to Jesus being alive and in a perfect and glorified state. And empowered by the Holy Spirit, they preached that message until they died.

## THE PREACHING OF THE APOSTLES

**THE FIRST SERMON IN ACTS.** The very first message preached in the book of Acts was given by Peter. He started out explaining why he and the others were speaking in foreign languages – it was the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy of the Holy Spirit being poured out.

But he quickly moved to the heart of His message:

[Acts 2:22-24](#)

**Acts 2:22–24 2016 ESV**

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

A lot of modern evangelism is based on the idea of selling the Gospel like you were selling encyclopedias door to door. You focus on the upside, like how cheap they are and how much information they contain. You don’t focus on the downside, like how much they weigh, and how many times you actually need an encyclopedia.

But Peter finishes with these words:

[Acts 2:36](#)

**Acts 2:36 2016 ESV**

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Peter clearly makes no attempt to convince these men and women that they could have their best life now, or that God loves them and has a wonderful plan for their lives. Instead, he tells them the truth – they are guilty of the death of Jesus Christ – and lets the Spirit of God do the work of persuading them.

It’s only after the people are cut to the heart, convicted of their sin by the Spirit of God, that Peter says,

[Acts 2:38](#)

**Acts 2:38 2016 ESV**

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

There are several other sermons in Acts. In [Acts 10](#) Peter is speaking to Gentiles. Notice the order of things:

[Acts 10:38-43](#)

(1) God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. (2) He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. (3) And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. (4) **They put him to death by hanging him on a tree,** (5) **but God raised him on the third day** and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. (6) And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that (7) **he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.** To him all

the prophets bear witness that (8) **everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.**" (Acts 10:38-43).

The example of apostolic preaching emphasizes that the historical Gospel doesn't begin today, when someone realizes they have a sin problem. It begins with the incarnation, the Son of God taking on human flesh. He lived a sinless life, and earned complete righteousness. He gave His life, crucified on the cross, as a substitute for those who would believe. He was buried in a borrowed tomb. He rose on the third day, glorious and glorified. He showed Himself to a chosen number of people, and commissioned them to preach a single, two-part message: judgment is coming against all for their sin, and, forgiveness is possible but only through the name of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul preached the very same Gospel. On their first missionary journey Paul and Barnabas entered the synagogue in Psidian Antioch and preached about Jesus Christ:

Acts 12:28-39

And though they found in [Jesus] no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. **But God raised him from the dead**, and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children **by raising Jesus**, as also it is written in the second Psalm, YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU. And as for the fact that **he raised him from the dead**, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY AND SURE BLESSINGS OF DAVID. Therefore he says also in another psalm, **YOU WILL NOT LET YOUR HOLY ONE SEE CORRUPTION**. For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption,

but **he whom God raised up** did not see corruption. Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man **forgiveness of sins** is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who **believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses**. (Acts 12:28-39).

Jesus was crucified and died; He was buried; He rose on the third day; the promises of God to the Fathers are fulfilled by Jesus' resurrection; forgiveness is available through the risen Jesus Christ; through faith in Christ comes true freedom from sin and the condemnation of the Law.

When you read the preaching of the apostles in the book of Acts, it becomes clear that the **primary** theme of their message was the historical crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and **only then** the provision of forgiveness of sin and repentance and salvation through Him.

Let me put it differently. The apostles expected that the news of the crucifixion and the resurrection, and the pronouncement of the guilt of the sinner, would produce a desire within sinners to be forgiven their sins and saved from the judgment to come. The Good News is so good because the Bad News is so bad.

## BRINGING IT HOME

There is probably no better way to empty the Gospel of its true power and meaning than by minimizing or completely eliminating the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. That happens when the focus is on meeting some temporary need in the sinner's life, or when we begin with their so-called "felt needs."

Now, if evangelism is a purely human act, selling the Gospel makes perfect sense. If the ultimate goal is to convince this person to accept Jesus Christ as



Lord and Savior, and you must do the convincing, then you need to make the Gospel as inoffensive and happy as you can. Be positive! Focus on the upside. Leave the fine print alone for the time being.

But, of course, evangelism is not a purely human act; in fact, it's a primarily divine act. We have a single job to do in evangelism: to speak the Gospel clearly, plainly, and fully. We are to share the facts of the Gospel, and that's all. We aren't responsible to talk anyone into believing, or to try to figure out how to make THIS person or THAT person hungry for the Gospel. That's the job of the Holy Spirit. He grants them new life, faith, and repentance.

Beloved, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the very foundation of biblical truth. In Him we have forgiveness, atonement, adoption, salvation, justification, sanctification, glorification, and every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places – but only because Jesus Christ rose from the dead. And because Jesus Christ rose from the dead, we have these blessings in full and with the guarantee that they will be ours for all eternity.