



grow. pray. study.

March 31, 2024 *The Past, Future and Present of Easter*
Mark 16:1-7 NIV

The truth of Jesus' widely witnessed resurrection

MONDAY 4.1.24 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

Paul's driving passion was to build up the church. His letters were one of his main ways of guiding the new churches he planted throughout the first century Greco-Roman world. Today's passage led off the longest, climactic chapter of 1 Corinthians, and made two crucial points: 1) Jesus' resurrection is Christianity's defining characteristic, and 2) Jesus' resurrection is a historical fact.

- First-century people knew (without modern science) that dead people don't come back to life. Paul didn't just say **he** believed Jesus was a unique exception. He knew of 500+ eyewitnesses who said it happened (verses 5-7). It is history, not opinion, that the earliest Christians believed Jesus' resurrection was real. Our choice is whether to share the unshakeable belief they were willing to die for. How does the first Christian eyewitnesses' belief in Jesus' resurrection shape your faith?
- Scholar N.T. Wright said, "Paul wants to be clear that the resurrection is rock-bottom reality for the Christian. It isn't a strange idea that he's dreamed up himself... The only point in being a Christian at all is if this message continues to be the solid ground on which you stand." * Jesus' resurrection is a past event you believe as a Christian, but it's also a present and future fact you can count on. What area(s) of your life need resurrection power today? Bring those to God in prayer. Count on the life-changing promise of Jesus' resurrection.

Prayer: Living Lord, you are just that—LIVING. Christ's resurrection can be hard to wrap my head around, but it's my ultimate source of hope. Help me trust the promise of your resurrection power today. Amen.

* Wright, N. T., *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 204). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

The Resurrection is central to Christian faith

TUESDAY 4.2.24 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

Paul's question in verse 12 ("How can some of you say, 'There's no resurrection of the dead?'") was not hypothetical. "Paul's careful argument in this section is designed to show the Corinthians, starkly, what would follow if you were to declare that there is no resurrection. Since this is what virtually all ancient pagans believed, the best explanation for why some in Corinth were denying the resurrection is that it made no sense within their surrounding world-view." *

- "Rhetoric used repetition to reinforce points; Paul dwells on an important point here, repeating "if" six times." ** Knowing some Christians in Corinth wanted to harmonize his preaching of Jesus' resurrection with Greek philosophy that totally denied the possibility of bodily resurrection (cf. [Acts 17:30-32](#)), Paul stressed that denying the resurrection undercut all Christian faith. Review his six "if" statements. How much of the Christian message would survive if Paul (or you) agreed with those "ifs"?
- "We need to be clear about what the word 'resurrection' meant for Paul and his hearers.... It meant, very specifically, that people already dead would... return to an embodied life." That was essential to the good news. "The fact that there is a new world, that it's already been launched in Jesus' resurrection, and that all God's people will be given new bodies to share in it, is basic to everything he has said." *** How does that help you grasp that Easter is "our defining story" as Christians?

Prayer: Living Lord Jesus, you walked into the darkest reality we face—into death itself—and came back, fully alive and victorious. Keep me on course to end this earthly life secure in the faith of Paul and the first Christians. Amen.

* Wright, N. T., *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 209). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

** NIV, *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* (p. 10084). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

*** Wright, N. T., *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 204-205). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition. (Later, Paul's friend Luke wrote about the resurrected Jesus's "flesh and bones"—cf. [Luke 24:36-49](#)).

“In fact, Christ has been raised from the dead”

WEDNESDAY 4.3.24 1 Corinthians 15:20-26

Paul laid out the stark reality of human life for the Corinthians: “Death is the last enemy to be brought to an end.” Sometimes, trying to be kind, people say “Death isn’t so bad—it’s nothing to be afraid of.” But **only** Jesus’ resurrection, showing the truth of God’s promise of eternal life, robs death of its “sting” (cf. [1 Corinthians 15:55-57](#)). “Mortality, which is connected to human sin (see 1 Corinthians 15:56; Romans 5:12), is humankind’s final and unwavering enemy until the resurrection.” *

- Paul contrasted “resurrection” with “death” as the core of the good news he preached. “To say that death is anything other than an enemy is to deny the goodness, beauty and power of God’s good creation. The point of resurrection is that it is the *defeat* of death.... since death is the unmaking of God’s creation, resurrection will be its remaking. That, and nothing less, is the Christian hope.” ** How can death’s defeat fulfil the promise that “The LORD God will wipe tears from every face” ([Isaiah 25:8, Revelation 21:4](#))?
- In verses 21-22, Paul summarized the “plot” of the Bible’s sweeping story of redemption. “*Death came through a human being*: See [Genesis 3:17-24; Romans 5:12-14](#). *the resurrection of the dead came through one too*: See [Romans 5:15-18](#). *** Only as a human could Jesus go through death and thus defeat it. How does that truth link Christmas with Easter in your faith?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as the saying goes, death may be as sure as taxes. But by defeating death at Easter, you made eternal life a sure reality for me, and all who trust in you. Thank you. Amen.

* Charles A. Wanamaker, study note on 1 Corinthians 15:26 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 330 NT.

** Wright, N. T., *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians* (The New Testament for Everyone) (pp. 214-215). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

*** Charles A. Wanamaker, study note on 1 Corinthians 15:21 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 330 NT.

The day Jesus' victory over death and evil became clear

THURSDAY 4.4.24 Romans 1:1-5

Paul started his great letter to Roman Christians with not only his credentials, but with “in its most essential outline the gospel which he preached.” * He said the good news is about God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. With that, “Paul implies that the Roman emperor **isn’t** God’s Son,” ** which was what Rome claimed for its emperors. And “we know Jesus is Messiah [“Anointed One,” “Christ” in Greek], and we announce him as such, *because* he’s been raised from the dead.” ***

- In addition to divine sonship, Rome declared its emperor the world’s “Lord.” Easter showed us that “the ‘good news’ is not, first and foremost, about something that can happen to us.... The ‘good news’ Paul announces is primarily good news about something that has happened, events through which the world is now a different place. It is about what God has done in Jesus, the Messiah, Israel’s true king, the world’s true Lord.” **** Who/what rivals Jesus as your world’s Lord today?
- Paul said God had promised the pivotal events in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection “through his prophets,” in passages like [Psalm 2:7](#). But Jesus’ resurrection was the event that set him apart from all the brave martyrs who had served God, that made Jesus’ identity as God’s Son, Messiah, and Lord unmistakable. How does the Easter event shape your faith and trust in Jesus?

Prayer: Living Lord Jesus, Paul trusted that however imposing Rome looked to human eyes, you were a bigger deal. Help me keep learning to trust you above all the seemingly bigger deals in my world. Amen.

* William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans (Revised Edition)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, p. 14.

** Michael J. Gorman, study note on Romans 1:2 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 277 NT.

*** Wright, N. T., *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 208). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

**** Wright, N. T., *Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part One: Chapters 1-8* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 1).

Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

God's power at work in Jesus' Resurrection

FRIDAY 4.5.24 Ephesians 1:18-23

“His body, the church, is the **fullness** of Christ”—strong words! Yet that was the apostle Paul’s description of Christ’s church. (In his day “church” didn’t mean mainly buildings or policies, but deeply committed people who served God and their community together. Ideally, it still means that today.) As it lives out its divine purpose, the church is where God’s people can live into God’s power more fully—the breathtaking cosmic power at work on Easter as Christ rose from the dead (verse 20).

- In verses 18-19, Paul prayed that “the eyes of your heart” will be able “to see what is the hope of God’s call, what is the richness of God’s glorious inheritance among believers, and what is the overwhelming greatness of God’s power that is working among us believers.” How would seeing that kind of hope and power at work daily in your life change your worship and your workdays? How did your Easter celebration attune you more fully to God’s awesome power?
- Christ “fills everything in every way” (verse 23). Christian thinker Dallas Willard said the Greek word mainly translated “heaven” (which we see as very far away) was often plural— “heavens.” “Heavens” (i.e., skies) took in the very air around us. He wrote, “The Judeo-Christian witness sees space as full of God.... God occupies and overflows space.... we should assume that space is anything but empty.” * When, if ever, have you sensed God near you? In what ways can Easter help you see God, not as distant, but as close as the air you breathe?

Prayer: Dear God, you are awesomely great and wonderfully good. Your great power and gracious goodness are on my side, offering purpose and life. I thank and praise you! Amen.

* Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering our Hidden Life in God*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1997, key phrases excerpted from a longer section on pp. 73-77.

The power of Jesus' resurrection at work in Paul's life

SATURDAY 4.6.24 Philippians 3:7-13

As we've seen this week, the apostle Paul closely linked Jesus' resurrection with the resurrection of all those who put their trust in him ([1 Thessalonians 4:14](#), [Romans 6:5](#), [1 Corinthians 15:22-24](#)). That was never abstract for him—it was a powerfully personal reality that shaped his life and his ministry. He expressed it at the heart of today's reading: "The righteousness that I have comes from knowing Christ, the power of his resurrection." As elsewhere, other teachers followed Paul into Philippi, telling the new Christians their salvation depended on obeying ancient rituals. Paul wrote if we could save ourselves by religious performance, he'd be glad to put his record up against anyone (cf., [Philippians 3:3-6](#)). But that would mean trusting in his own power, not the power of Jesus' resurrection. He chose to "write off" those human claims, and trust in Christ's resurrection power to guide him through this life and into the next with Jesus in eternity.

- Paul used an accounting metaphor. He said he already owned all the spiritual "assets" the false teachers wanted the Philippian Christians to accumulate. But he didn't see them as "pluses" at all, not when compared to Jesus, his risen Savior and Lord. What human accomplishments or status symbols do you take the most pride in? How easy or hard is it for you to find your ultimate identity and confidence in your status as a child of God, even if that means "writing off" the human credentials as central to your value and uniqueness? Methodist scholar Maxie Dunnam wrote, "It is not the external things that count, but what has happened and is happening inside.... Paul chose not to boast except about what Christ had done for him." * What has Christ's resurrection power done for you? In what ways has it reshaped your external behaviors, not by your own teeth-gritting effort, but as a Spirit-driven change coming "from the inside out"?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I join Paul in focusing all my love, all my confidence, all my faith on you. Be the eternal "power source" in whom all my trust resides. Amen.

* Maxie Dunnam, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 31: Galatians / Ephesians / Philippians / Colossians / Philemon*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982, p. 287.

Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer