

## At The Cross-Easter

Every time you write a date, you are referring to the resurrection.

Every date in history, including your birthday is dated, in reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Every time you write a date, you are using Jesus as the focal point. When an atheist or agnostic writes a date on a check, they are doing it in reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When a Muslim, Buddhist, or Scientologist writes a date, they are referring to the resurrection of Jesus. When you write April 9, 2023, with a pen, pencil or even electronically, **from what?** From the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

*<sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, our **preaching** is useless and so is your **faith**. <sup>15</sup> More than that, we are then found to be **false witnesses** about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.*

*<sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.<sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your **sins**.<sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are **lost**. <sup>19</sup> If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be **pitied**. (1 Cor 15-NIV)*

The resurrection of Jesus split time and history into AD and BC. And like the series on the death benefits of the Cross, today we are going to look at the resurrection benefits of Jesus Christ rising from the dead. *(Jesus' death benefits of the cross, 60 of them are on the ledge in the lobby if you want them.)*

**The first benefit of the resurrection is, Jesus validated his identity.** Jesus said, "I rise from the dead." I will prove that I am God, by being crucified, then dying, being placed in a borrowed tomb and then I will rise from the dead.

The Older Testament portion of your bible has 100's of prophecies, about how Jesus would die, and then rise again. After Jesus resurrection, Jesus walked around Jerusalem for another 40 days and over 500 people witnessed his resurrection and proof that Jesus is God.

*.. again exactly as Scripture says; that he presented himself alive to Peter, then to his closest followers, and later to more than five hundred of his followers all at the same time, (1 Cor 15-MSG)*

**Jesus also proved by his resurrection that there is also life after death.**

Death is not the end of the story or end of your life, but the beginning of a great and wonderful life with God, that goes on and on. I love the way CS Lewis tells us about life after death and the great beyond.

As C.S. Lewis says, “All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read:

...which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.<sup>1</sup> Heaven awaits. A Father awaits. Christ awaits, those who trust Christ for your arrival in heaven after your death.

Your entry into heaven will either be by your death or the rapture of the church. By the way, I will be doing a series, starting next week entitled, The End?

This Easter it is this 3<sup>rd</sup> benefit of the resurrection that I want to look at. **Jesus provided us a model, an example of how to live each day of your one and only life.** How to handle every event and experience you go through in life.

Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection reminds us that we all experience 3 kinds of days. Friday was a day of pain and suffering. Saturday was a day of confusion and grief. Sunday was a day of celebration and victory.

You mean, I can possess a model, plan, purpose for living my life? Where does it say that? Yes, it is found in *1 Peter 2:21*. <sup>21</sup> *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. (1 Peter 2:21-NIV)*

The word to follow in Jesus’ footsteps is the idea of following in another person’s exact place where they place their feet. To follow closely. Jesus modeled for you, what you should do in the worst and best days of your life. When Jesus suffered pain and agony, when the disciple’s suffered grief and depression, and

when you celebrate victory - all these emotions and experiences are outlined by the 3 days of Jesus death, burial, and resurrection.

Jesus' death, burial and resurrection happened over 3 days.

**Friday was** the day of pain, suffering and agony.

**Saturday was** a day of loss, grief, confusion, misery, and depression.

**Sunday was** a day of joy, celebration, and victory.

Let me say it a little more succinctly.

Friday was the day of pain, Saturday the day of confusion, and Sunday the day of victory.

**Some of you** right now are in a day of pain and suffering.

**Some of you** are struggling with loss and depression. Some of you are saying, I don't know what to do with my life. How do I break out of this pattern? Today's message can help you do that.

**Others of you** are experiencing celebration and victory. In your life, you will go through all 3 of these days. Over and over. Again, and again.

To get to your days of joy, blessing, and victory, you often go through Friday and Saturdays before Sunday can burst forth, like Jesus burst from the grave.

To get to Sunday, Easter Sunday, you will have to ask yourself 3 questions:

1. What do I do in my days of pain and suffering?
2. How do I get through my days of doubt and depression?
3. How can I get to my days of celebration and victory?

No, portion of scripture spells out better, 1 Cor 15, the benefits the resurrection offers to each of us in terms of help and hope while we go through Friday, Saturday, and Sunday's. Over and over. Again, and again. The portion of scripture that offers help and hope to those going through Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, is none other than 1 Cor 15.

One day the most knowledgeable person in the world about the resurrection senses that one of the 1<sup>st</sup> centuries churches (in Corinth), is starting to get a little fuzzy about the resurrection. Here is Paul's own out-of-body experience. A type of resurrection.

*<sup>2</sup>I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. (2 Cor 12:2-NIV)*

Paul can speak with authority about the resurrection because he knew of such an experience himself. In the fuzziness of the Corinthians belief about Jesus' resurrection and our own, Paul takes them task. Paul calls them out. Paul calls us out!

Paul sets them straight, about Jesus' resurrection, the Corinthians' resurrection, and some Kansans' resurrections, and all who hear the sound of my voice.

The Corinthians were starting to devalue the resurrection of Christ. The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, was probably written about 53–54 AD, at Ephesus, Asia Minor. Just 20 years after Jesus' ministry, some believers in the resurrection of Jesus were already beginning to get confused. Misinformed.

So, Paul grabs those Corinthians by their collective collars, or by their ear (as my mom used to do) and he goes to work, and 58 verses later, Paul clears up the theological mess.

Clears up the confusion.

Clears up the fuzziness.

And I would guess, today, Easter 2023, perhaps some of you could benefit from Paul's teaching about Jesus' resurrection.

When Paul is done, he announces I will make it impossible for you ever to disrespect, be confused about the resurrection of Jesus and your resurrection ever again.

Now, this 58-verse rant is found in 1 Cor 15, I am going to read a portion of it. We read it a few minutes ago. Again, you can follow along on the screen or with your notes, let me highlight what Paul is saying.

*<sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, our **preaching** is useless and so is your **faith**.*

Now, Paul is doing this because some Corinthians under their collective breath or in the back of their minds are saying, “Easter is no Big Deal.”

I love how Paul seeks to convince their minds and hearts by siding with them early in the argument. He says, “I know that you don’t think Easter is that big of a deal, so let’s just play that out.”

Let’s see if there are any consequences or implications if Christ did not rise from the dead. Here we go. You need to understand that if Christ did not rise from the dead then every church gathering, where preaching is taking place, in the world, anytime in history is being done in vain.

Every worship song sung. Every prayer prayed. Every act of communion, baptism or engagement with the Holy Spirit is all for not. It is a big waste of everyone’s time.

Paul tells them that if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is just smoke and mirrors.

And Paul goes on to announce, that if Christ is not raised from the dead, then our **faith is useless**. Our faith is a fabrication and big joke, and it falls to the ground like a house of cards.

Next, in verse 15, Paul tells us that if Christ has not been raised, we are spreading outright lies to our family and friends every time we try to share our faith with them. Every time we point someone to faith in Christ.

Paul says that we are false witnesses, we are snake oil salesmen when we try to encourage others to consider Christ. *<sup>15</sup> More than that, we are then found to*

*be **false witnesses** about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead.*

Next, Paul goes on to add, if Christ is not raised then we are still in our sin. <sup>17</sup> *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your **sins**.*

We may think that our pile of sins and wrongdoings, has been forgiven, we may try to convince ourselves that we are washed and cleansed by the blood of Jesus, forgiven through his atoning death,

...but if Christ has not been raised then every sin that we have committed in thought, word, and deed, is still on our moral ledger. Still on our moral record. And that is something we will have to pay for ourselves on judgement day.

We will have to pay for it, the day we stand before a holy God. Or as country music says, “the day we meet our Maker.”

And the next point Paul makes, if Jesus Christ has not been raised, then all your loved ones who you think have gone on to a better place called heaven, or as Amazing Grace sings, when we have been there 10,000 years, or the next reality, your loved ones and friends have not gone to heaven. <sup>18</sup> *Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are **lost**.*

Who knows where they are? Or what type of experience they are in, but if Christ has not been raised, then nobody is in a place called heaven. Not your loved ones and friends and you are not going there either. Nobody is.

Then Paul pounds one final nail into the coffin and says, think about it, and Paul writes this in the days when Christ followers are being beheaded and torn apart in the Coliseum in Rome for sport. Christians slaughtered for sport.

Long before the Hunger Games, the Roman version of Hunger Games was happening. And Paul tells us that if Christ has not been raised, then all are lost. What a waste. Evil triumphs again. Rome won again.

Paul tells the Corinthians we all know people who are paying a huge price to follow Christ these days. We know people who are beaten for their faith, sawed in half, or fed to lions in the Coliseum.

In fact, Paul makes a similar point about fighting a wild beast at Ephesus. What good is the contest or survival if Christ has not been raised from the dead. *(32) If from a human point of view, I fought wild beasts at Ephesus, what did it benefit me? If the dead are not raised,*

Then Paul gives us an option if there is no resurrection. Then we might as well all party. Live it up. *Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. (1 Cor 15:32-NET)*

Paul's final argument comes with an alternative suggestion. Live a hedonistic life, because what good is it, if Christ has not been raised. And Paul makes this point blindingly clear in vs 19.

*<sup>19</sup> If only for this life (nothing for the life to come) we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be **pitied**. (1 Cor 15-NIV)*

What Paul is saying is, "if Christ has not been raised, we are wandering in the dark." If Christ did not rise, then all of this: preaching, faith to live by and die by, pointing others to Christ, sins forgiven, heaven as a home -

...is all big fat hoax, and if we all drank the Kool-Aid, Paul tells us that we are all fools. We are just crazy people. We should be locked up.

Paul wanted that church and this church today, to come to grips with truth of the Christian faith, that not only hinges on the birth of Christ, not just on the merciful and grace filled and forgiving death of Christ, but on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The whole Christian faith hinges on the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection is a big deal. And I believe it to my toes. Our whole faith hangs on this historical event. This human event. This holy event.

How about you this Easter? Is Easter a Big Deal to YOU?

Now, with the final moments remaining, I plan to turn each of these 6 negative implications on their collective head. Thus, showing you 6 proofs of the resurrection that cannot be refuted. Cannot be defeated. Cannot be denied. Ok, let's continue.

If you are an atheist, Buddhist, seeker, or investigator, why don't you do what we did earlier, play a game of imagine with me for a moment.

Imagine that the resurrection is true.

*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead (1 Cor 15:20-NIV).* As I have studied this passage again this Easter. I have fallen more in love with my resurrected Savior! How about you?

If Christ has not been raised from the dead, preaching is a big waste of time. Because Christ did rise from the dead preaching has power. It has the power to save. Power to heal. Power to defeat the enemy.

And because Christ was raised from the dead, every church service is packed full of miracle potential. How many of you would raise your hand and say, God has spoken to me in church service.

God has healed me in a church service.

God has met a need, in a church service.

Jesus' promise in *Matt 18:20*, has come true because of the resurrection, *Whenever even 2 or 3 people gather in my name, I will join that gathering.* This is a miraculous concept in our faith. No other faith has this guarantee.

Jesus tells us that because of his resurrection, any group of Christ-followers that gather, any language, any place in the world, in a church, in a Starbucks, on a train, or in a plane, Jesus announces, I am going to join that gathering and meet some needs with my supernatural power and presence.

If Christ has not been raised from the dead, faith is a fabrication. Let's turn this on its head also.



*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead (1 Cor 15:20-NIV).* Our faith is not a fabrication, but it is a truth, that you can stake your life and death on.

We have a rock solid, historical, and defensible faith. And this faith has withstood a 2000-year time trial. This rock-solid faith has mushroomed, from a few 100 believers to well over well over 2.5 billion believers on the planet. The largest faith in the world.

Christianity is so coherent; it all hangs together. It is comprehensive, it speaks to all the needs that man has. It is radically inclusive. Anybody can come. Any time. Anywhere. In any condition. It challenges its followers to be radically loving followers of Jesus.

Loving indiscriminately. Loving across religious boundaries. Loving across racial boundaries. Loving across sexual boundaries. Across economic boundaries.

When asked if I am a Christ follower? Yes! I don't just give Christianity a head nod because it is something I must do. And I certainly don't do it because I am 'in the business.'

I am proud to be a Christian. Christianity is the most supernatural and extraordinary faith in the world and for all of history, and I am in love with its founding leader-Jesus Christ.

This is why our brand and mantra at Bethel is, All People Matter to God. Question: What other religion has that belief? That core belief?

If Christ has not been raised, we are guilty of being false witnesses. Let's turn this on its head also.

*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead (1 Cor 15:20-NIV).*

Because Jesus was raised from the dead, 1000's watched him and heard him do the work that God sent him to do. You can read about this in the historical and God written books called Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Nobody taught like Jesus taught. Nobody loved like Jesus loved. Nobody healed like Jesus healed. Nobody died like Jesus died. Nobody spoke against corruption and injustice like Jesus did.

Nobody cared more about sinners. Nobody cared more about the sexually broken. Nobody cared more for the poor, the needy and the outcasts.

Then Jesus shoulders all the sins of humanity and takes all of my sins and yours on himself, willingly. Then on top of all of that he conquers death and the grave proving the whole story is true.

If Christ has not been raised, we are still in our sin. Let's turn this on its head also. This is serious business.

*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead (1 Cor 15:20-NIV).*

And since Christ is raised from the dead, we are no longer accountable for our pile of sins. In my case, because my pile of sins is pretty high, this would be terrifying and paralyzing on a day-to-day basis. If I had to carry that on my back every day that I am an unforgiven person, I think I might go insane.

Or do something worse. Anybody who humbly asks God to forgive their sins, they can have their moral past atoned for by Jesus Christ. And that is the best part of Easter. Maybe you have not done this or heard of this. Maybe I can paint you a picture of what God is willing to do for you.

How do we know our sins are forgiven? How do we know that our moral slate is clean? How do we have confidence? The Bible says, it is appointed a man once to die and then the judgement. We are not coming back in reincarnation. So, after you die and you stand before God and give an account of your life, how do we know we can stand with confidence and be welcomed into the family of God by Jesus Christ?

Four verses. Perhaps, this will give you some hope and satisfaction. Anybody like to go outside at nighttime and look at the stars? Anybody got a telescope and you have been mesmerized by the alignment of the planets?

For star-gazers-*as far as the East is from the West, so far has He removed our sins from us. (Ps. 103:12)*

If the universe is still expanding, and God did not close the book on his creation and there are billions, multiplied trillions (and whatever number comes after that) to the trillionth exponent, the galaxy is expanding! Then my sins that have been atoned for as this verse says, continue to move further away from me every single moment, and that is an amazing moral to the story - and that which is happening to me, if you allow Christ to cover your pile of sins, those sins as *(Ps 103:12) says, will be cast as far as the east is from the west. So far has He removed my sins.*

Anybody like snow? Do you like snowboarding? I like mountains. I like snow at high elevations; and I've climbed some high peaks. Here's what *(Is 1:18) says, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall become white as snow."* When I go into the mountains and look at snow, I just think, my heart was pretty evil. My heart was pretty rebellious. My heart was wicked, as guarded, the Bible says, but look at that snow-capped mountain. What a reminder that Jesus Christ has made it. White as snow.

For not just star gazers, the lovers of nature; but for lovers of the ocean, Jesus says *I will bury your sins in the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:19)*. Next time you go out to the ocean, get a depth finder, get out some charts and try to get to the deepest place. Stop the boat right there, and say, note to self, I love my faith. I love my God. Because my sins will never ever from the depths of the ocean surface again.

Now this last one here, I think God is just trying to mess with us. Mess with the agnostic, he's trying to mess with the scientist; messing with the analytical person and the skeptical person; the doubters, the psychologists, and psychiatrists, the philosopher... I think in this last one here, God is just trying to mess with us. *their sins I will remember no more-(Hebrews 8:12)*.

Think about it. How is it possible that a God who is omniscient – all knowing, and omnipotent – all powerful, how is it possible that a God with a brain, who knows everything, says, “their sins I will remember no more.”

Intellectual people, critical thinking people ask the simple question, how is it possible that an omniscient, all-knowing God could ever forget? God's answer for you – well, I mean - for me, "Deal with it." God can do whatever He wants.

If Christ has not been raised, no one is in heaven. Let's turn this on its ear.

*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. (1 Cor 15:20-NIV).*

All pain, all temptation, all suffering is going to be barred at heaven's doors. Check your ibuprofen at the gate. Bend your diabetic needles. Rise out of that wheelchair. Get that new body, one that is fashioned by Jesus Christ himself with no migraines, no ruptured disc, no fibromyalgia, no back pain.

Our loved ones are in heaven. A place where all sin and pain has been removed. *(4b) There will be no more death...or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."* (Rev. 21)

The first thing to be banished from Heaven is sin. With sin's departure goes all effects of pain. As Paul says, "death is swallowed up in victory." The king of all fears is barred from heaven's doors. No family wranglings over life-support. No medical debates as to quality-of-life issues. No need to sing: It is well with my soul, Amazing Grace. No rides in the hearse. No tearful good-byes at the grave side. No dark sunglasses.

If Christ has not been raised, we are all fools to be pitied. Let's turn this on its head also.

*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead (1 Cor 15:20-NIV).*

Because of the resurrection, we don't care what others think. Call us a fool to be pitied all you want. At the end of the age, we will be standing tall. But the truth is that Christ *has* been raised up, the first in a long legacy of those who are going to leave the cemeteries.

The whole Christian faith rises and falls on the resurrection of Jesus. So let me remind you as I often do at Easter. This is just a fact. The death rate in US, is still 100%. Not 99%. Not 99.9%. 100% All countries have the same death rate. Be warned. You will not be the exception.

The oldest living woman - and person - whose date of birth can be authenticated is María Branyas Morera (USA/Spain, b. 4 March 1907), who was aged 115 years 319 days as of 17 January 2023.

Do you think she expects to die? Will her family be surprised when it happens? It doesn't matter how healthy you are or how much money you have, you will not be the exception. You are going to die.

Because Christ has risen you do not have to fear death. *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead (1 Cor 15:20-NIV).*

And to make sure that you don't fear death, I am going to give you some words in the form of a prayer, and you can become a follower of Jesus Christ and a believer who believes in Jesus Christ resurrection. And the Christians that are here are going to say this prayer with you, so you are not alone, and they two are reaffirming their belief in Jesus' resurrection. So, here is the prayer.

*(15) Our (my) firm decision is to work from this focused center: One man died for everyone. That puts everyone in the same boat. He included everyone (me) in His death so that everyone could be included in His life, a resurrection life, a far better life than people ever lived on their own.*

(Today, I claim Christ's forgiveness to cover my pile of sins. And in exchange become born again.) In Jesus Name. Amen.

-2 Cor. 5-Message.

If you became a follower of Jesus Christ and his resurrection, come on down to the I Have Decided Wall and get a Bible. Pastor Jon and I want to congratulate you on your decision and pray for you.

If you are connected to the military in any way, and made that decision, come on down and Air Force Staff Sergeant, Larry King will personally give you a beautiful military Bible and pray for you.