

Evidences of Christ's Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

BI: The promise of our resurrection is grounded in the resurrection of Christ, and the evidence of Christ's resurrection is overwhelming.

We learned last time that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the centerpiece of the Christian worldview. All of the biblical promises relative to our future resurrection and eternal life in the presence of God hinge on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The problem in the church of Corinth was that some in the body were teaching that there is no resurrection. The philosophical idea that at the point of death the human soul would become one with the eternal spirit and that the body would simply decay into nonexistence, found fertile ground among some in the church. But this was a pagan view of man. As Christians, who claimed to believe in the resurrection of Christ, these men should have known better.

The fact is, if there is no such thing as resurrection then our faith is worthless. If there is no such thing as resurrection, we have nothing to look forward to after death. We simply die and rot in the ground. What began as dust returns to the dust and our existence is forever forgotten.

So why do Christians believe that one day we will be resurrected to eternal life? What evidence is there that there is such a thing as resurrection? The answer is this: We believe in the resurrection because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead.

A skeptic will ask, "How do you know? Do you have any proof?" To which the apostle Paul responds, we have more than enough proof.

I. The Testimony of Scripture:

1. Notice what Paul says in verses 3-4 (Read 15:3-4).
2. Paul is not giving any new revelation here. This is the simple truth that had been proclaimed since the day Christ rose from the dead. In fact, he says in verse 1 that he was simply reminding them of what he had already preached. Nothing is more basic than this. It is the foundation of the gospel.
3. In verse 3 he calls it *protois* - the first thing; or that which is most important. This passage was so important to the early church that it became an early Christian Confession. Just as many in our day recite the Apostle's Creed whenever they meet for worship, the earliest Christians recited this text. The truth contained herein is of "First importance."
4. But, again, this was not something Paul simply made up. In fact, he was not the first to preach about the resurrection of Christ. This is a truth that he "received." It was given to him by the other apostles who had actually been eye witnesses of the resurrected Christ. But then again, this truth didn't originate with the apostles either. Before Jesus was raised, the promise of resurrection had already been revealed. The first testimony of resurrection comes not from Paul

or the apostles. The first testimony of the resurrection comes from the O.T. Scriptures.

5. Paul says, “I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*.” In other words, God’s plan that Christ would die for the sins of men was taught in the O.T. Scriptures.

6. “Scriptures” here is *graphe* (“writings”). It was a reference to the O.T. Jesus died according to the prediction of the O.T. You say, where in the O.T. do we find a prediction that Christ would die for our sins? That’s a good question. Turn with me to Isaiah 53. (Read v. 3-9)

7. You see, friends, the death of Christ was no afterthought. This was God’s plan all along! Why? Because there was no other way to save the people He loved! Our only hope was that God would be so gracious as to become a real man and bear the punishment of our sins in His body through death.

8. Consider also that much of the sacrificial system in the Old Testament pointed to the sacrifice of Christ as our substitute and Savior. The annual Day of Atonement (Lev. 16) was celebrated every year in conjunction with the Passover. The centerpiece of that feast was the sacrificing of a spotless lamb for the sins of God’s people. This is why Jesus was called the “Lamb of God.”

9. “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” More than that, however, verse 4 says, “that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day *according to the Scriptures*.”

10. Turn back with me to Isa. 53. (Read 53:10-12)

11. The idea here is that even though He died, the Messiah would live to see the fruit of his sacrifice. He would see the many made righteous.

12. We see another O.T. reference to the resurrection of Messiah in Psalm 16:10. Turn with me to Acts 2:22-32. (Read Acts 2:22-32)

13. We should remember too, that Jesus Himself pointed to the O.T. in reference to his resurrection. In Mat. 12:4 he says, “*An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; ⁴⁰ for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*”

14. It is a great confirmation of our faith in the gospel to see how it corresponds with ancient types and prophecies of the O.T. Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again according to the Scriptures.

15. So the first piece of evidence for the resurrection of Christ is the O.T. Scriptures. Through them God told us that all of this would happen, and so it did. The second piece of evidence is...

II. The Testimony of Witnesses:

1. Read 5-7.
2. Cephas here is Peter, and “the Twelve” was the common term used for the apostles even though Judas was no longer among them. Peter was not the first witness, but he was the first male witness and first among the apostles. You will remember Mary Madeline and others and others saw Jesus immediately after the resurrection. In fact, Jesus made ten different appearances; sometimes to one individual, sometimes many.
3. He let one apostle, Thomas, touch him to verify that he was truly risen. He ate with some of the disciple on the beach one morning after they had fished all night. He met privately with James, the half-brother of Jesus who would become the leader of the Jerusalem. Then, Jesus’ ascension into heaven from the Mt. of Olives was apparently witnessed by some 500 people. The strength of this witness lies in the fact that the majority of them were still living when Paul wrote this letter, probably only 25 years after the resurrection.
4. This was no theoretical evidence. The law of the day required that every fact be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. In the case of Jesus’ resurrection there were hundreds of witnesses!
5. So first we see the testimony of the O.T. Scriptures. Then we see the testimony of the eyewitnesses. Now we come to the final testimony...

III. The Testimony of Paul:

1. Read v. 8
2. “Last” here is *eschatos*. Jesus was already ascended when Paul had his encounter with Christ. Acts 1:21-22 tells us that this was a requirement of being a true apostle. Only one who had seen the resurrected Christ with his own eyes could qualify as an apostle.
3. When did Paul see Jesus with his own eyes? When he was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians. (Read Acts 9:1-6)
4. One might think this would become a point of pride for Paul, seeing how he was the only one to see Christ after the ascension (except Stephen, who saw him in the heavens just as he was being martyred). But for Paul, it was a point of great humility. He considered himself the “last” of the apostles and one who was “untimely born.”

5. “Untimely born” here means “abnormal birth,” “miscarriage.” Paul considered himself abnormally born because he lacked the “gestation” period of having been with Christ during His earthly ministry (cf. Acts 1:21-22). He was, as it were, the “runt” of the litter.

6. Paul not only considered himself the “Last” of the apostles, but also the “least” of them. (Read v. 9).

7. “Least” here means smallest, or of “least importance.” Least and “not fit to be called an apostle.” Why? “Because I persecuted the church of God.”

8. There is a lesson for us here beloved. We live in a day when we are told to forget about our failures and to never think on past mistakes. But the apostle Paul never forgot who he was before Christ changed him. He never forgot! To the contrary, the memory of his past sins drove him to a deep and humble worship of Christ. When he thought about of who he was before Christ it drove him to the cross.

9. It was Paul in Romans 5 who wrote, “Where sin abounded grace super-abounded” (20). He gloried in the reality that “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Jesus said of the adulterous woman who wept at his feet and poured perfume over his head that “Those who are forgiven much, love much” (Lk. 7:47).

10. Paul was humbled by his encounter with Christ. And God was committed to keep keeping him humble. 2 Corinthians 12:7–9 “Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! ⁸ Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. ⁹ And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”

11. Paul always kept his weaknesses and past sin within easy remembrance. It is what kept his heart humble before God and made him glory in His grace.

12. Do you lack motivation to worship and pray? Consider who you were before Christ. Consider who you were before the love of God reached down with effectual power and drew you irresistibly to Himself. Consider how much you have been forgiven and let your blind eyes be revived to see how glorious the grace of God in Christ truly is.

13. Listen to what Paul wrote to Timothy (1 Timothy 1:12–17):

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, ¹³ even *though I was formerly a blasphemer*

*and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; ¹⁴ and **the grace of our Lord was more than abundant**, with the faith and love which are *found* in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ **It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.** ¹⁶ Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus **Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience** as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. ¹⁷ **Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.***

14. Too many of us think that when we were saved, God got a pretty good deal. Is it any wonder we struggle with loving him, adoring Him, fellowshiping with Him, worshiping Him, and obeying Him? Our view of ourselves is so high it casts a shadow and hides the glory of Christ.

15. Not true with Paul. Though he was the great apostle to the Gentiles, the man through whom God would author most of the N.T. and through whom God the gospel changed the world; yet He always considered himself the “least of the apostles” and the “chief of sinners.”

16. Paul saw his whole life through biblical spectacles. Through one lens he saw his sin to keep his heart humble. Through the other he saw grace to keep his heart encouraged. In v. 10, he says, “But by the grace of God I am what I am.” Paul was a former persecutor of the church and an accomplice to murder. What are you?

Former drug addict?

Former adulterer?

Former thief?

Former drunkard or homosexual?

Former mom who aborted her baby?

Former self-righteous church attender

Former wife-beater?

If you are in Christ, all of you is in Christ - your past, your present, and your future. By the grace of God you are what you are. Your life is no longer *defined* by your past sin or present “supposed” righteousness, but by the grace of God. By grace you are now a Christian - a follower, worshiper, disciple and slave of Christ. That’s how Paul saw himself. He remembered his past sin not in such a way that debilitated him, but in such a way that drove him to worship Christ because of His super-abounding grace by which Paul was saved.

17. And it was the wonder of this grace that drove him to work harder than any of the other apostles in proclaiming the excellencies of Christ to the nations (v. 10).

18. This is Paul's gospel. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ whose resurrection was foretold by the O.T., witnessed by hundreds of people, and brought about radical change in the life of a self-righteous Pharisee-turned-Apostle.

19. This is what the apostles preached. And this is what we believe.

20. You see, beloved, there is more than enough testimony to substantiate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And because Christ has been raised, we too will one day be raised. This is our confidence. This is our hope. This is what motivates us to live in a manner worthy of the Lord.