

The Apostles' Creed

The Third Day He Rose Again from the Dead

Selected Texts

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Introduction

As we continue our series in *The Apostles' Creed* I would like to examine today what it means that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. Please listen as I recite the Apostles' Creed:

*I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.*

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand
of God the Father Almighty.
From there he will come to judge
the living and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

It was late Monday afternoon. The phone rang. I picked it up. "Hello, Freddy. I have some bad news. Don just died about an hour ago."

All of us have had similar news at one time or another. We have all received news of the death of someone we knew personally or at least knew about. Some of us have had a close relative

who has died. Others of us have received news in the past few months of a close relative or friend who has died.

This past week we saw pictures on TV and learned about the path of destruction taken by Hurricane Charley. At least 23 people died as a result of Hurricane Charley.

We have all felt the sting of death. But for those of us who believe in Jesus Christ, there is a balm. A sweet balm. And that sweet balm is . . . the resurrection.

The resurrection is all we have to cling to when death has stripped a loved one from our arms. It's the solace of a soon-coming spring in the bitter breeze of death's darkest winter. Without the resurrection, our lives would have no meaning.

Lesson

Today I want to talk about the hope we have because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church and clearly demonstrated that Christ had risen from the dead. Listen to how he put it in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8:

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Apparently, however, some in the Corinthian church believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead, but they doubted the res-

urrection of men and women. So Paul asked in 1 Corinthians 15:12, **“But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”**

Then he suggested several consequences if there was no resurrection of the dead. Listen to how he put it in verses 13-19:

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 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. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

Paul questioned the contention of some that there cannot be a resurrection of the dead. He suggested seven consequences if the resurrection of the dead is false. Paul stated that if the resurrection of the dead is false, then . . .

1. Christ has not been raised (15:13, 16)
2. Our preaching is useless (15:14a)
3. Our faith is in vain (15:14b)
4. We are false witnesses (15:15)
5. We are still in our sins (15:17)
6. Dead believers are lost (15:18)
7. We are to be pitied more than all men (15:19)

Let's examine each of these consequences more fully.

I. Christ Has Not Been Raised (15:13, 16)

First, Paul stated that if the resurrection of the dead is false, then Christ has not been raised.

Denying the resurrection of our bodies requires also a denial of the resurrection of Christ. This is what Paul says in verses 13 and 16: **“If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.”**

But if some deny the resurrection of Christ, there are a lot of unanswered questions, such as:

- How do they explain the empty tomb?
- Why has no one ever yet found the body of Christ?
- Why were the Roman soldiers guarding Christ’s tomb bribed to lie about what happened to his body?
- What about the fact that he appeared to different people on eleven occasions, and to more than 500 people on one of those occasions?

People who deny that we will be resurrected must somehow deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the face of the overwhelming evidence, however, the only conclusion a person can reach is in fact that Christ’s resurrection is true and not false.

In 1930 a young journalist named Frank Morison wrote a book titled *Who Moved the Stone?* The strangeness of the resurrection story had captured his attention, and, influenced by skeptic thinkers at the turn of the century, he set out to prove that the story of Christ’s resurrection was only a myth.

But in the process he discovered that the facts forced him to conclude that Christ’s resurrection was no myth after all.

He said that instead of writing about the *myth* of the resurrection, he found “himself compelled by the sheer force of circumstances to write another”¹ book in *support* of the resurrection of Christ.

And so it is with everyone who examines the evidence for the resurrection of Christ; the inevitable conclusion is that Christ rose from the dead.

¹ Frank Morison, *Who Moved the Stone?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Lamplighter Books, 1958), 8.

II. Our Preaching Is Useless (15:14a)

Second, Paul stated that if the resurrection of the dead is false, then our preaching is useless.

Like dominoes, Paul's second argument joins the force of the first to topple a wrong view of the resurrection of the dead. He says in verse 14a, **“And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless. . . .”**

Without the resurrection of Christ, the Good News is no news at all. The gospel message would have no validity because it would be based on just another good man who lived and died for just another good cause. Author John Stott puts it well:

Christianity is Christ. The person and work of Christ are the rock upon which the Christian religion is built. If he is not who he said he was, and if he did not do what he said he had come to do, the foundation is undermined and the whole superstructure will collapse. Take Christ from Christianity, and you disembowel it; there is practically nothing left. Christ is the centre of Christianity; all else is circumference.²

Some time ago, a United Press release in a Midwestern city told of a hospital where officials discovered that the firefighting equipment had never been connected. For 35 years it had been relied upon for the safety of the patients in case of emergency. But it had never been attached to the city's water main. The pipe that led from the building extended 4 feet underground—and there it stopped! The medical staff and the patients had felt complete confidence in the system. They thought that if a blaze broke out, they could depend on a nearby hose to extinguish it.

But theirs was a false security. Although the costly equipment with its polished valves and well-placed outlets was adequate for the building, it lacked the most important thing—water!

² John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 2d ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1971), 21.

Similarly, our preaching would be useless if the resurrection were not true.

III. Our Faith Is in Vain (15:14b)

Third, Paul stated that if the resurrection of the dead is false, then our faith is in vain.

Without the resurrection, not only is our preaching useless, but so is our faith. Paul puts it this way in verse 14b: **“And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Without it you and I have no hope for this life or for the life to come. Our belief in the resurrection of Christ is not based upon some religious feeling or upon an unfounded idea about what may have happened in the past. Nor are we talking about an isolated rumor, but about a historical fact with solid evidence to support it.

In the early part of the 19th century, a group of lawyers met in England to discuss the biblical accounts of Jesus’ resurrection. They wanted to see if sufficient information was available to make a case that would hold up in an English court of law. When their study was completed, they published the results of their investigation. They concluded that Christ’s resurrection was one of the most well-established facts of history!

In his little book, *Countdown*, G. B. Hardy has given us some thought-provoking questions about the resurrection. “There are but two essential requirements: (1) Has anyone cheated death and proved it? (2) Is it available to me? Here is the complete record: Confucius’ tomb—occupied. Buddha’s tomb—occupied. Mohammed’s tomb—occupied. Jesus’ tomb—empty! Argue as you will, there is no point in following a loser.”

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a reality. Countless numbers of changed lives testify that it’s a fact—not a fable!

IV. We Are False Witnesses (15:15)

Fourth, Paul stated that if the resurrection of the dead is false, then we are false witnesses.

In verse 15, Paul knocks the position of the skeptics like bowling a strike in a bowling lane: **“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.”**

If the resurrection were false, everyone who claimed to have seen the resurrected Christ would have been a liar. This means that Paul, Peter, the rest of the apostles, some of the women, and more than 500 people were all liars if Christ were not raised from the dead. Even Christ would be a liar if there was no resurrection because he predicted his own resurrection (cf. Mark 8:31).

In the late 1800's and early 1900's, Alexander Whyte pastored a large church in Edinburgh. During that time, a salesman by the name of Rigby would travel to Edinburgh regularly just to hear him preach. Over the course of many years he often invited other businessmen to accompany him to the services. One Sunday morning he asked a fellow traveler to go to church with him. Reluctantly, the man said yes. When he heard Whyte's message, he was so impressed that he returned with Rigby to the evening meeting. As the preacher spoke, the man trusted Christ as his Savior.

The next morning, as Rigby walked by the home of Pastor Whyte, he felt impressed to stop and tell him how his message had affected the other man's life.

When Alexander Whyte learned that his caller's name was Rigby, he exclaimed, “You're the man I've wanted to see for years!”

He went to his study and returned with a bundle of letters. Whyte read Rigby some excerpts—all telling of changed lives. These were the men Rigby had brought to hear the gospel.

But if the resurrection were not true, then Rigby would be a false witness. And so would Whyte. But the resurrection is true.

That is why so many lives were changed, and even today lives are being changed because of the resurrection.

V. We Are Still in Our Sins (15:17)

Fifth, Paul stated that if the resurrection of the dead is false, then we are still in our sins.

Paul adds another point to his argument in verse 17: **“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.”**

If Christ were still in the tomb, we would still be in our sins. There would be absolutely no remedy for all of the sin and evil in this world.

In the third century, Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage, wrote to his friend Donatus: “It is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and good people who have learned the great secret of life. They have found a joy and wisdom which is a thousand times better than any of the pleasures of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are Christians. . . and I am one of them.”

Cyprian could only say this because the resurrection of Jesus Christ is proof that the penalty for our sins has been paid by Jesus Christ. Because of the resurrection of Christ, our sins are forgiven and we live new and transformed lives.

VI. Dead Believers Are Lost (15:18)

Sixth, Paul stated that if the resurrection of the dead is false, then dead believers are lost.

If the resurrection were not true, then all those who have died believing in Christ’s resurrection are lost. Paul says in verse 18, **“Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.”**

Notice the stark contrast between **“in Christ”** and **“are lost.”** Together they are incongruous. They are paradoxical. A person cannot be **“in Christ”** and **“lost.”**

How many times have you, after the death of a loved one, found comfort in the fact that he or she is with Jesus, where there is no sorrow, no pain, no sickness, no death?

Without the resurrection, this hope is a mere myth.

Joseph Bayly, in his book *The View From A Hearse*, tells of what he said to offer hope to a woman whose small son was dying.

“It's good to know, isn't it,” I spoke slowly, choosing my words with unusual care, “that even though the medical outlook is hopeless, we can have hope for our children in such a situation. We can be sure that after our child dies, he'll be completely removed from sickness and suffering and everything like that, and be completely well and happy.”

“If I could only believe that,” the woman replied. “But I don't. When he dies, I'll just have to cover him up with dirt and forget I ever had him.”

Without the resurrection of Christ, we would all be lost. We might as well cover our lost ones up with dirt and forget all about them.

But, because the resurrection of Christ is in fact true, we have hope. Hope not only for this life, but also hope for eternity.

VII. We Are to Be Pitied More than All Men (15:19)

And finally, Paul stated that if the resurrection of the dead is false, then we are to be pitied more than all men.

The bleak list continues. Paul says in verse 19: **“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.”**

Paul's reason is captured by commentator David Prior:

If Christ was not raised from the dead any expectation of life beyond death with evaporates. We are then left with a pseudo-gospel which purports at least to give some meaning to our life here on earth. This presumably takes the form of doing the best we can to follow the example of Jesus Christ, assuming that we select him as our mentor in preference to countless other teachers, wise men and leaders. Paul sees this attitude to Jesus as pitiable and pathetic: if there is no such thing as resurrection, much of Jesus' teaching falls to the ground and he is revealed to be a liar. Yet the Corinthian Christians had set their hope on Christ as Lord of life, death and eternity. If he was not raised from the dead, he is not Lord of anything. If life here on this earth is all there is, it makes no sense to base our hope on the groundless promises of one who made empty assertions about eternity. If the Christian faith is thus based on an empty gospel and a fraudulent savior, "anybody is better off than the Christian."³

Conclusion

But, friends, the resurrection of Christ is true! And the gospel is indeed full of power to change lives. Because the resurrection of Christ is true, we have hope for eternity.

In the early 1920s, Nikolai Bukharin was sent from Moscow to Kiev to address a vast anti-God rally. For an hour he abused and ridiculed the Christian faith until it seemed as if the whole structure of belief was in ruins. Then, questions were invited.

A priest of the Orthodox Church rose and asked to speak. He turned, faced the people, and gave them the ancient Easter greeting, "Christ is risen!"

Instantly, the whole vast assemble rose to its feet, and the reply came back like a crash of breakers against the cliff, "Christ is risen indeed!"

This Sunday morning, I want to assure you that Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! And because of that we have hope for eternity. Amen.

³ David Prior, *The Message of I Corinthians: Life in the Local Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 265.

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