

(04-20-25) Easter Sunday

Resurrection of Jesus: The Gospel Message Fulfilled
Luke 24:1-12

When I was in seminary, I vividly remember a moment in my New Testament theology class that left a lasting impression on me. One day, a student raised his hand and asked our professor, “When we read the Gospels, each one mentions different women who went to the tomb of Jesus. So who actually went there?”

It was a thoughtful question. In Matthew, it’s Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. In Mark, we read about Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. In today’s passage from Luke, the women include Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women. And in John, Mary Magdalene is mentioned alone.

Our professor gently replied, “What matters most is this: Jesus Christ rose from the dead. That is the consistent and central message across all four Gospels, even if the names of the witnesses differ.”

Indeed, Jesus Christ is risen. And yet, how often do we lose sight of that powerful truth by getting caught up in secondary details? May we keep our hearts centered on what truly matters.

As we celebrate Jesus Christ’s resurrection today, let us delve into the following two things this morning. First, was Jesus Christ really resurrected? Second, what is the meaning of Jesus Christ’s resurrection?

I. Was Jesus Christ really resurrected? How have Christians believed in Jesus’ resurrection as a true historical fact?

1. The Empty Tomb & Women Witnesses

First of all, the Gospels commonly report that Jesus’ tomb was found empty by a group of women or a woman.

“They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen.”” (Luke 24:2-6 NRSV)

However, women were not regarded as valid legal witnesses in both the Old Testament and in Jesus’ time. If the disciples of Jesus intended to fabricate the

story of Jesus' resurrection, they would not have chosen women as the first witnesses. This means that they simply recorded the events as they happened.

2. Jesus' Post-Resurrection Appearances

Secondly, Jesus appeared alive to many after his resurrection. Mary Magdalene, other women, the disciples, and the two on the road to Emmaus encountered the risen Jesus. Apostle Paul said that Jesus appeared to more than five hundred people at the same time.

"After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep." (1 Corinthians 15:6 NIV)

3. Transformation of Jesus' Disciples

Jesus' disciples were so frightened by his arrest and crucifixion. They scattered in fear. But after Jesus' resurrection, he came to them and restored their relationship, reminding them of his teachings. They then boldly proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus Christ in public.

"While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came to them, much annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead." (Acts 4:1-2 NRSV)

They preached Jesus' resurrection, risking their lives. Despite the suffering, crucifixion, and death of Jesus on the cross at the hands of religious leaders in Jerusalem, they fearlessly proclaimed Jesus' resurrection.

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20 NIV)

Apostle Paul identified himself with Jesus. He longed to participate in Jesus' suffering and recognized Jesus' loving and sacrificing presence in his heart. After approximately 30 years of ministry since his conversion, as the Apostle Paul approached the end of his life, he confessed, **"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst."** (1 Timothy 1:15 NIV)

4. Rapid Growth of the Church

After Jesus' resurrection, his disciples enthusiastically engaged in evangelism and the church was growing rapidly.

"about three thousand were added to their number that day ... many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand ... Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord"

and were added to their number ... So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.” (Acts 2:41, 4:4, 5:14, 16:5 NIV)

If Jesus was not resurrected and his disciples lied about his resurrection, I don't think the church would have been able to experience its rapid growth.

Let me show you a table on the screen.

| Year | Number of Christians | Percent of Population |
|------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 40 | 1,000 | 0.0017 |
| 50 | 1,400 | 0.0023 |
| 100 | 7,530 | 0.0126 |
| 150 | 40,496 | 0.07 |
| 200 | 217,795 | 0.36 |
| 250 | 1,171,356 | 1.9 |
| 300 | 6,299,832 | 10.6 |
| 350 | 33,882,008 | 56.6 |

This table was created by Rodney Stark, a professor of sociology at the University of Washington, in his book *“The Rise of Christianity.”* The table shows that there was a 40 percent growth in the Christian population per decade from AD 40 to AD 350. He says, “Many scholars have characterized the growth of Christianity with terms such as ‘inconceivable rapidity’ and ‘astonishing expansion,’ and have expressed agreement with Augustine’s claim that ‘Christianity must have reproduced itself by means of miracles, for the greatest miracle of all would have been the extraordinary extension of the religion apart from any miracles.’” (Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (1996), 14).

As we seek evidence of Jesus’ resurrection through the Bible and church history, we must remember two important things.

First, consider this: When I first met the resurrected Jesus as my Lord and Savior, I didn’t know any of the evidences I’ve shared with you today. Jesus came into my life, and I became deeply aware of my sinfulness. The Holy Spirit compelled me to ask God for forgiveness, and I spent two hours confessing all my impurities. I strongly felt that my sins were cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

After that encounter, my relationship with my father changed dramatically. He was the only non-Christian in our family. When I came to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, I also began to embrace all the commands of the Bible as my lifeline - believing that through obedience, I could stay connected to God.

We can use the evidence of Jesus' resurrection that I shared today both to strengthen our faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to share it with those who need to hear His message.

Second, you and I are living evidence of Jesus Christ's resurrection. Though our love is not yet perfect, our efforts to reflect God's love and holiness to those around us are a powerful testimony. Our transformed lives—becoming more like Jesus Christ—are the very evidence the world longs to see in us.

II. What is the meaning of Jesus Christ's resurrection? In other words, why is Jesus' resurrection so crucial to our faith?

1. The Gospel

The resurrection of Jesus is a part of the Gospel message. Then what is the Gospel? The Gospel is the message about the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which He proclaimed to us and which we are called to share with the world.

2. Jesus' Victory Over Sin and Death

In Jesus' suffering, the punishment of the cross was the most torturous, painful, shameful, and cruel form of capital punishment, illustrating the urgency and seriousness of addressing our sins. Jesus took our sins as his and died on the cross, which is the ultimate result of our sins. However, that is not the end of the story; He was resurrected and became the first fruits of our resurrection. This means that Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God, signifying Jesus' victory over sin and death. Only Jesus Christ is the answer to our problems. Only the Gospel message is the key to the healing and restoration of humanity. That is Jesus' victory over sin and death.

3. Guarantee of Our Resurrection

Let us read the Scripture on the screen.

"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins ... But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died." (1 Corinthians 15:17, 20 NRSV).

This means Jesus has become the guarantee of our future resurrection.

4. Motivation for Mission

As we hold onto and share the resurrection of Jesus, we will experience God's grace more abundantly, and this grace will continually motivate us to participate in Jesus' mission in the world. That will never dry up our motivation for participating in Jesus' mission in the world.

“With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.” (Acts 4:33 NRSV)

Billy Graham visited Korea in 1952, at the height of the Korean War. In the shadow of conflict and destruction, he brought a message of hope, preaching the Gospel to a nation in deep need of encouragement. He returned to Korea two decades later to lead what would become the largest Crusade of his ministry. On June 3, 1973, an astounding 1.1 million people gathered in Seoul to hear him preach. Please see the picture on the screen.



The Billy Graham Library has fittingly titled this historic moment **“The Impact of the Gospel – Seoul, Korea 1973.”**

No one can deny that it was due to Billy Graham’s Crusade that Korean churches experienced a period of rapid church growth. He preached the Gospel message to the Korean people again in 1984. News reporters asked him, “What changes are in your message?” He said, **“No changes. The Gospel is the same. The Bible has the same message. The human heart does not change – it is very deceitful and wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). But the Gospel is always the same in every generation.”**

We have to remember that we cannot truly be compassionate Christians without sharing the message of the Gospel, especially if we genuinely understand what the Gospel entails. So, we should pay close attention to Paul’s emphasis on the seriousness of the Gospel. **“For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16, NIV)**