



Is the Resurrection Real?

Easter Sunday

Scripture: Matthew 22:23-33

Sermon Series: *Matthew*

Topic: Jesus, Resurrection

Matthew 22:23-33 (ESV)

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²⁹ But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ³¹ And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: ³² I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living." ³³ And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

Introduction

We gather this morning to celebrate Resurrection Sunday. This day marks the day that, according to Scripture and the eyewitness testimony of his closest friends and followers, Jesus was resurrected from the dead.

But did that really happen? Is the resurrection of Jesus fact or fiction?

The topic of the resurrection has been a controversial topic for a very long time. Primarily because it is rare event. But if the resurrection is real, then wouldn't you want to know about it? And if the resurrection is real, wouldn't you want to know how you could participate in it?

There have always been those who say that the resurrection is not real. Even in Jesus' day there were those who thought the idea was absurd. However, Jesus has something to say about the topic of the resurrection.

The Case Against the Resurrection

Those who denied the resurrection in Jesus' day were the Sadducees. Jesus ran into them on the Tuesday before his crucifixion and they had a conversation about the resurrection. Jesus experienced opposition and hostility from both political and religious enemies. The Pharisees and the Herodians¹ had tried to trap him in a political controversy regarding whether or not to pay taxes to Caesar. Jesus avoided that trap, but now the attack comes from a different religious sect, the Sadducees.

Matthew 22:23-28 (ESV) ²³ The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, ²⁴ saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.' ²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. ²⁶ So too the second and third, down to the seventh. ²⁷ After them all, the woman died. ²⁸ In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her."

Who are the Sadducees?

Jesus has lots of enemies and now we see a direct attack by the Sadducees.

That same day (v.23). Jesus had quite a tricky Tuesday.

The morning started with "*the chief priests and elders*" confronting him and demanding to know by what authority he had the day before cleared out all the money changers and sellers of sacrifices from the temple courtyard. Soon the **Pharisees** joined in the attack.² Jesus answered this attack by these religious leaders that with a series of three parables that served as a warning to him.

The Pharisees then **plotted** to attack Jesus by sending "*their disciples along with the Herodians*" to embroil him in a controversial conversation about taxes. Jesus avoided the trap, but the day was not over. There was still time for a third attack, only this time it was the **Sadducees** turn to take the lead. The attack on Jesus is relentless.

Sadducees came to him (v.23.). The Sadducees were a very conservative minority sect within Judaism. They "were a priestly, aristocratic party whose locus was the temple in Jerusalem and whose influence on the populace was considerably less than that of the Pharisees."³ The high priest, Caiaphas—before whom Jesus would soon be judged—was a Sadducee. They were religious fundamentalists who were very wealthy, powerful, and theologically rigorous. They

¹ Matthew 22:16.

² Matthew 21:45.

³ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 302.

only accepted the Pentateuch⁴ as divinely authoritative. They rejected the rabbinic oral Torah (i.e. teaching) and all midrash (rabbinic commentary on law).

Who say there is no resurrection (v.23). The most important point of their doctrine, which Matthew highlights, is that that *"say there is no resurrection."*⁵ The first century Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus (c.A.D. 37 - 100), tells us that they believed that "souls die with the bodies."⁶ In short, "they rejected every idea of an after-life."⁷ This is what they mean when saying *"in the resurrection."* This phrase, when used by them, refers to the whole notion of an eternal existence of the soul after the death of the body.

Since they only accepted only the first five books of the Bible, this may explain why they rejected the idea of a resurrected spiritual after-life, since, according to them, this doctrine is not explicitly taught in the Pentateuch. Thus, they believed this life is all there is. There is no eternal existence of the soul after the death of the body. There is no final future judgment, nor is there a heavenly kingdom to come. When you die, the lights go out and your existence is over. When the body dies, so also does the soul. Thus, they tenaciously sought to maintain their own power and position in this life, since this life is all there is.

The Sadducees concluded that the notion of an eternal existence after death was absurd. And they thought they had come up with a case-study that would prove their point. So they went to Jesus and *asked him a question*.

Case-Study Against the Resurrection: Levirate Marriage

The Sadducees cite the OT teaching of Moses (Dt 25:5-10) that states that if a married man dies childless, then the brother of that man is marry his sister-in-law in order to provide for her and raise up children by her in order to carry on the deceased brother's name. This became known as *levirate marriage* because the Latin word for 'brother-in-law' is *levir*.

The case in question relates to a *woman who married a man who had six brothers*. Her husband died childless. She was then subsequently married by one brother who later also died childless. Eventually all five other brothers do the same, each of them dying childless. Finally, the woman dies. Thus, the question is, *"in the resurrection"*—in this supposed eternal realm of existence after death, whose wife will she be since all seven men had at one point been husband to her?

You can only have one husband, but if the dead are resurrected in the after-life, then how can it be that one woman can be married to seven men? At best this is adulterous and at worst it is incestuous! Or is there polygamy in the resurrection? They think they've got Jesus on

⁴ The first five books of the law.

⁵ See Mark 12:18; Acts 4:1-2; 23:6-8.

⁶ Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 477.

⁷ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 302.

the horns of a dilemma. There can't be an eternal resurrected state of being after death, since it would necessarily be a sinful place.

Their fundamental assumption is that the future eternal state would be the same as the present temporal state; relationships would be the same, the nature of that realm is fundamentally the same, the rules and purposes of God would be fundamentally the same, and the notions of embodiment would be the same. Notice, their conception of a what a future eternal state would be like are being governed by their own present experience with this temporal world. They were essentially saying a resurrected state cannot exist because we cannot imagine it.

Thus, their conclusion is, there is no life after death. There is no eternal heaven nor eternal hell. There is no eternal conscious existence after death. There is no raising up of body or soul. When the body dies, the soul is extinguished with it. That is simply the end of all things. This is their case against "the resurrection."

The Case For the Resurrection

Jesus now offers an answer to their question and we see in his answer a case *for the resurrection*.

Matthew 22:29-32 (ESV) ²⁹ But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ³¹ And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: ³² I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not God of the dead, but of the living."

You are wrong (v.29). How amazing it is to hear these words from Jesus. He clearly believes there is a objective right and an objective wrong, no matter what a particular individual believers. Consider for a moment how our culture at large refuses to state that there is right and there is wrong. There is that which is true and there is that which is false. These Sadducees are wrong in their thinking. Jesus now explains where they have gone wrong.

What the Sadducees Were Missing

These Sadducees had missed something. Jesus explains that they had missed two things.

You know neither the Scriptures (v.29). Jesus plainly tells them that they did not know the Scriptures. They did not *truly* know the word of God. Now certainly they had *read* the word of God, for they quote from it. The example of the levirate marriage came from the Scriptures.⁸ But Jesus says that they did not *know* the Scriptures. The word 'know' (οἶδα *oida*) means, "to

⁸ Deuteronomy 25:5-10.

comprehend the meaning of something, 'to understand.'"⁹ They saw the words of Scripture with their eyes, but they did not *understand* the Scriptures with their heart. Their eyes had passed over the words of Scripture, but true comprehension of those words had not passed into their hearts.

Jesus may also be indicting them for rejecting the rest of the OT canon. The Sadducees only accepted the Pentateuch and they did not accept as divinely inspired the wisdom literature, the historical books, nor the major and minor prophets.

They were missing the point of Scripture and they were even missing much of God's word by rejecting the latter Scriptures. They had only a small fraction of the holy Scriptures that God had given to his people, thus they were missing truth, which caused them to be wrong.

Nor the power of God (v.29). The second thing they were missing was **the power of God**. Because they were missing the word of God, they were also missing the power of God. The word of God gives testimony to the power of God. The Scriptures repeatedly point to God's great power. The Scriptures open with the amazing account of the creative power of God. God is so powerful that the universe came into existence by the simple verbal command of God. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of other examples throughout the Scriptures of God's great and amazing power. Yet, the Sadducees have missed this. They have missed God's power. *Evidently their own human reasoning had become more reliable to them than was the power of God revealed through the Scriptures*. So Jesus reminds them of the power of God with the mention of angels.

For in the resurrection they... are like the angels (v.30). First, note that according to Jesus, *the resurrection is fact, not fiction*. There is an after-life. Jesus publicly affirms and openly teaches that there is an eternal future state that endures after the body has passed away. Jesus believes "in the resurrection," and the reality of angels is evidence in favor of holding this belief. If Jesus is a "good teacher," then note carefully what he is teaching. If there truly is no eternal state, then Jesus is not a "good teacher," but rather a bad one for teaching as truth what is in fact a lie (if there is no future resurrection state).

Second, note that angels are an example of the power of God. God created everything that exists. Angels are among those beings whom God created. Angels are powerful beings. They are exponentially more powerful than human beings. Almost without fail, every time an angel appears in Scripture, human beings fall flat on their faces. One angel killed an army of 185,000 soldiers in one evening.¹⁰ One angel on one night took the lives of the first born of every man and animal in Egypt. One angel destroyed 70,000 Israelites during the days of David's reign.¹¹ Angels are incredibly powerful, this is true, but One infinitely more powerful than angels created angels. If created angels are fearfully powerful, then how much more powerful is God who created them. Dear Sadducees, how can you miss the power of God?

⁹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 379.

¹⁰ 2 Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36.

¹¹ 1 Chronicles 21:12, 14-16.

How can you fail to consider the power of God in your thinking about whether or not there is a future resurrected state.

Third, having now reminded them of the power of God by the mention of angels, Jesus now instructs them to *avoid thinking that the resurrected reality is exactly the same as this present reality*. God dwells in the resurrection realm and in that realm his power is undiluted and undiminished. His glory is undimmed. That realm operates under an entirely different set of rules. In that realm there is no darkness, no tears, no sadness, no sin, and no separation. Relationships in that realm are perfect, pure, and powerfully intimate. Relationships in the resurrected realm are perfected in their sweetness, therefore there is no longer any need for marriage. Marriage is the God's purpose for this world, but not for the next. All the good that marriage brings in this world will be eternally magnified in the next and therefore there is no need to feel that those who are now married will lose anything by its absence and neither will those who are not now married suffer any loss for the lack of marriage here and now. Heaven will be a place of perfect contentment and relational unity because we will be near to and enjoy the company of our Creator and Savior and with one another. All things will be perfected in heaven. The power of God will see to that.

As for the resurrection of the dead (v.31). Notice, again Jesus repeats the reality of the resurrection. The Sadducees have asked about "the resurrection" and now for the second time Jesus affirms the reality of the resurrection and the wrongness of the Sadducees for disbelieving. The resurrection of the dead is a reality that every human being will experience whether we believe in it or not.

Have you not read what was said to you by God (v.31). Pay attention to Jesus' perspective on Scripture. First, "the Scriptures" (v.29) are the words of God. The written Scriptures are the graphical record of the spoken words of God. Jesus teaches us that the words of Scripture, written down by men, are actually the very words that God himself spoke, and "breathed out."¹² The breath of God—the wind (Heb. *rûah*) of God—is the Holy Spirit of God and He helped fallible men to write infallible words of Scripture.¹³ The Bible we hold in our hands, is not merely the corrupted words of men, but rather it is the trustworthy word of God accurately translated and handed down through thousands of years. The Scriptures are the true words of God.

Second, through those true words of Scripture, ***God is speaking to you!*** Jesus says to the Sadducees, "*have you not read what God said to you?*" Jesus is telling these Sadducees that God was presently speaking to them. God has "*said to you,*" Jesus tells them. God has the power to presently speak, through his word, to those who have ears to hear him. What is he saying to them?

"I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Issac, and the God of Jacob" (v.32). Jesus is here quoting from Exodus 3:6. Remember the Sadducees only believe the Pentateuch (the first five

¹² 2 Timothy 3:16.

¹³ 2 Peter 1:20-21.

books of the Bible) to be divinely authoritative. So Jesus goes to a passage from within one of the books they claim to believe in and he quotes from it to prove them wrong. More than that, Jesus is saying that through these words, spoken by God Moses, some 1400 years earlier, God was actually speaking to them. Through these words to Moses long ago God was speaking today to these Sadducees who stood before Jesus.

He is not the God of the dead, but of the living (v.32). Knowing the rules of grammar can help shape an accurate theological framework and save your soul.

Jesus is arguing that the sentence he just quoted says something true about the souls of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob which reveals the reality of the resurrection. Because God spoke to Moses in the present tense, saying, "**I am** the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," Jesus concludes that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were *all presently alive* at the time God spoke those words to Moses. If they were not alive and God was not presently their God when he spoke those words, then he would have used the past tense. Since God said, "**I am** the God of Abraham..." and not "**I was** the God of Abraham...", Jesus concludes that the all three of these guys were alive at the time God made the statement, because "**God is the God of the living, not the dead.**"

Even though Moses was a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and he could gone to visit their graves—in the cave of Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, in the land of Canaan, in the former field of Ephron the Hittite¹⁴—yet, their souls were alive at the moment that God was speaking with Moses, thus proving that the resurrection, an existence after death, is real.

Four Reasons to believe "in the Resurrection"

The Sadducees come to Jesus thinking that they they can demonstrate the absurdity of the notion of life after death, or an eternal existence of the soul, by this hypothetical case study of one women who was married by seven brothers. Jesus answers them by offering four reasons to believe "in the resurrection," or that there is a realm in which the soul continues to exist after the death of the body.

1. **Believe in the resurrection because Jesus believes "in the resurrection."** Anyone who claims to be a Christian should embrace the beliefs of Chris. We are followers of Jesus. He is our Teacher. A good teacher does not teach falsehood. If our Teacher teaches that the soul continues to exist after the death of the body, then we also ought to believe in the reality of the resurrection. Since Jesus believes in the immortality of the soul, we too should believe it as fact and not fiction.
2. **Believe in the resurrection because of the power of God.** God is powerful enough to create any world he wills to create. If God willed to create souls that exist for eternity, then he has the power to create such a realm. We ought not to think that the soul is not eternal

¹⁴ Genesis 49:29-32; 50:12-13.

merely because it is hard for us to understand. God is infinitely more powerful than the most powerful of all created beings—angels, thus creating a realm in which the soul outlives the body would not at all be difficult for him.

3. **Believe in the resurrection because of the Scriptures.** The word of God teaches us that there is a realm in which our souls will inhabit that our bodies will not. We see this not only in the OT but also in the NT. Believe in the resurrection because God's word says that there is such a place and that one day each of us will arrive there.
4. **Believe in the Resurrection because God still speaks.** God is still speaking today. He speaks to us through his word, which points to the reality that there is a realm in which he lives. God lives in a realm of life. God is life and before him the souls of "all live."¹⁵

Thus, the notion of "the resurrection," as place of eternal existence is not absurd. It is a real place because of God's word and his great power.

Reasons to believe the reality of the Resurrection Jesus

Some people say that the notion of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is absurd. Let me offer five reasons the notion of his resurrection is not absurd.

1) God said beforehand that he would bring life after death.

God's plan from the beginning was to bring life out of death. God always announces beforehand when he is about to do something magnificent so that when it happens there can be no doubt that the thing is from him and not mere accident or coincidence. Therefore, *God gave many indications that life and salvation would come after death.* Revealing this truth is why God used so many prophets.¹⁶

1) **God's word beforehand to Abraham.**

- A. ***Promise delayed.*** God promised Abraham a son, but he waited until both his body and his wife's body were both "*as good as dead*"¹⁷ before fulfilling that promise. He waited until they 100 and 90 before bringing life out of their old and fruitless bodies. He waited until there was no humanly possible way to have life, so that he could demonstrate that He alone brings life after death.
- B. ***Miracle on a mountain.*** God told Abraham go to a mountain and sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham recalled God's promise to give him many descendants through Isaac. And yet Abraham's obeyed God's strange command, concluding that it was

¹⁵ Luke 20:38.

¹⁶ Amos 3:7.

¹⁷ Romans 4:19; Hebrews 11:12.

God's plan to resurrect Isaac from the dead in order to keep his promise (Heb 11:19). In Abraham's mind, Isaac was as good as dead, as soon as they reached the mountain to which God told them to go. But God intervened and stopped Abraham's hand as he raised it to kill Isaac. And in a manner of speaking, Abraham received Isaac back from the dead.¹⁸

- 2) **God's work beforehand through Joseph** (c.1900 B.C.). Joseph's eleven brothers sought to kill him and in the end sold him into slavery into Egypt. For about a decade Joseph was as good as dead to his family and indeed his father thought him to be dead. When the sons of Israel sought to save their lives during the famine, on their first visit Joseph's true identity remained hidden from them, but on their return Joseph was revealed to them and in a manner of speaking he was resurrected to his brothers and his father.
- 3) **God's word beforehand through Moses** (c.1450 B.C.)
 - A. God said to Moses, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he will speak to them all that I command him." **Dt 18:18** (ESV)
 - B. There is a play on words here. The words "**raise up**" are the used elsewhere in Scripture to refer to resurrection (Is 26:19) or God's control over life.¹⁹
 - C. God said he would "**raise up**" a prophet like Moses.
 - a) Jesus rose up like Moses in that he powerfully and accurately spoke God's words to the people, but he was also like him in others ways.
 - b) Moses' first attempt to deliver his people resulted in his rejection (Ex 2:13-14). The sentence of death from Pharaoh was upon Moses and so he fled into the wilderness and for forty years he was as good as dead to his people. Then, God sent him back to Egypt again and in a manner of speaking, Moses was resurrected to his people and then delivered them from slavery and bondage.
- 4) **God's word beforehand though David** (c.1025 B.C.)
 - A. **Psalm 16:10-11** (ESV) For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the paths of life...
 - B. Peter affirms (Acts 2:29-31) that "holy one" about David was speaking was not himself (because he died and his body decayed in a tomb), but rather David was speaking prophetically here about "**the resurrection of the Christ**" (v.31) as he was granted the ability to foresee what would happen to God's messiah, who is Jesus of Nazareth, whom God raised from the dead.
- 5) **God's word beforehand through Hosea**. (c. 753-687 B.C.)
 - A. As time went on, God's revelation of the details of the resurrection became even more specific. So by the time of the prophet Hosea (later half of the eight century

¹⁸ Hebrews 11:19.

¹⁹ See also Jeremiah 8:4; Amos 8:14; 1 Samuel 7:12; Ezekiel 34:23.

B.C.), he makes it clear that the resurrection of Messiah will happen on the third day after his death.

B. **Hosea 6:1-2 (ESV)** ¹ "Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. ² After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him."

C. Hosea confirms what God has already revealed, being torn precedes being healed; being struck down precedes being bound up; being laid low for two days precedes being raised up on the third day.

- 6) Section summary. The first reason to believe that the notion of the resurrection of Jesus is not absurd is because resurrection to life after death is the way God said beforehand that he would work with his people.

2) Jesus said beforehand that he would die and be resurrected.

The second reason to believe that the notion of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is not absurd is because Jesus—just like his Father—also spoke beforehand saying that he would both die and be resurrected from the dead. In the book of Matthew, six times before his crucifixion, Jesus predicted both his death and his resurrection.

- 1) The sign of Jonah: within the first year of his ministry Jesus said to Pharisees and the scribes,

Matthew 12:40 (ESV) ...just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Being "in the heart of the earth" corresponds to being in the tomb, but then on the third day, he is raised up and returns to light and life.

- 2) The second time Jesus predicted his death and resurrection was in Caesarea Philippi about two or three months before his final journey to Jerusalem.

Matthew 16:21 (ESV) From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

- 3) The third time he predicted his death and resurrection was a short time after the second as he was coming down from the mount of transfiguration.

Matthew 17:9 (ESV) And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

- 4) The fourth time he predicted his death and resurrection he was in Galilee about a little more than a month before his crucifixion.

Matthew 17:22-23 (ESV) As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day."

- 5) The fifth time he predicted his death and resurrection was in the final month of his life while he was on his way to Jerusalem to celebrate his final Passover.

Matthew 20:17-19 (ESV) ¹⁷ And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, ¹⁸ "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."

- 6) The final prediction came after Jesus had arrived in Jerusalem just four days before his crucifixion while he was in the temple court being challenged by the Pharisees, chief priests, and elders. In an indirect way Jesus referenced his own death as he told the parable of the terrible tenants who saw their land owner's son coming to them, they threw him out of the vineyard and then killed him (just as Jesus was thrown out of Jerusalem and killed, Mt 21:33-40).

Jesus did not think the idea of his death and resurrection was absurd. He fully expected that he would be killed and then thereafter resurrected on the third day. He believed this was part of his Father's plan for him and therefore he shared this plan beforehand with his disciples so they would not fall into despair when it happened, but rather would put their faith in "God who raises the dead."²⁰

3) Jesus' followers testified of his resurrection... even to death.

The third reason to believe that the resurrection of Jesus is not absurd is because all of Jesus' followers testified to the truth of his resurrection, even when such testimony meant it would cost them their lives.

It is sometimes claimed that the disciples of Jesus made up the story of his resurrection because they were sad at his death and longed to have him back among them. This is not true, but let's assume for a moment that it is. Sometimes people will die for a lie that they believe to be true, but no one will not die for what they know in fact is a lie. Some people

²⁰ 2 Corinthians 1:9.

may be deceived and choose to die for a lie that they believe to be true, but no one dies for a lie that they *know* to be false.

And if Jesus' disciples did make up the story of the resurrection, certainly at least one of them would have recanted before dying for what they knew to be a lie. And yet not one of Jesus' disciples did so. They were all martyred for their testimony of Jesus, except the John, who survived an attempted execution, and was then exiled to the mines of Patmos to endure hard labor until death. He too maintained the testimony of Jesus' death and resurrection until his final breath. Stephen did the same, as did James, Paul, and hundreds of thousands of Christians around the world. As **Augustine of Hippo** wrote in his book, *The City of God*,

First, it is incredible to believe that Jesus was resurrected from the dead and in his flesh ascended into heaven. Second, it is incredible that people around the world have come to believe something so incredible. Third, it is more incredible that a few unknown men, with no social standing and no education, were able to persuade the world of something so incredible. If there truly was no miracle of Jesus' resurrection..., then we are left with an even greater miracle: the people around the world have come to believe in a miracle without any miracles at all.²¹

If all of Jesus' disciples knew that the notion of his resurrection was absurd, then why on earth did they give their lives for what they knew to be a lie and how on earth were they able to convince so many people that this absurdity was in fact true? Perhaps the miraculous resurrection of Jesus from the dead *is* true and is not absurd at all.

4) The Romans were expert at crucifixion.

Some people claim that Jesus did not actually die. However, the fourth reason to believe the Jesus' death and resurrection was not absurd is because the Romans were uniquely skilled at killing people by crucifixion. No one knew how to kill people by crucifixion more effectively than did the Romans. They used crucifixion primarily as a deterrent to rebellion. Their brutal intent behind public crucifixion is that everyone actually saw the terror of the torture it was. When Rome destroyed the rebellion in Jerusalem that concluded in A.D. 70, according to the Jewish historian Josephus, they crucified so many Jews that they ran out of trees.²²

Pilate personally questioned Jesus and then ordered him to be flogged. After being flogged, Jesus was put in the charge of a centurion who oversaw his crucifixion to ensure that his death sentence was carried out. This centurion remained beside Jesus until his last breath. This man watched Jesus die.

²¹ Timothy Paul Jones, *Did the Resurrection Really Happen* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2025), 27.

²² Josephus, *The Jewish War: Books 5-7*.

Roman soldiers were excellent at carrying out order concerning prisoners because if any prisoner escaped under a soldier's watch, whatever sentence was to be carried out against that prisoner would be then carried out on that soldier.

The centurion in charge of Jesus watched him until he breathed his final breath. This man had no doubt seen hundreds of men die by crucifixion. As he watched Jesus die, he concluded, "Certainly this man was innocent!²³ Truly, he was the Son of God."²⁴

It is not absurd to believe that Jesus actually died. It would be more absurd to think that the a Roman centurion failed to carry out an execution command. Jesus most certainly died at the hands of the Romans, but was he actually resurrected from the dead?

5) The tomb remains empty.

The final reason to believe in the resurrection of Jesus is because *his tomb was found empty*. The body of Jesus has never been found. His body has never been found in any tomb because he was resurrected from the dead.

There is one certain way to destroy Christianity. Produce the deceased body of Jesus of Nazareth. Everyone knows this. Christianity rises and falls upon the claim that Jesus actually died and then bodily rose from the dead. If neither his death nor his resurrection happened, then we are hopeless and we are still in our sin.

1 Corinthians 15:13-19 (ESV) ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵ We have been lying about God..., ...and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

These are the five reasons to believe that Jesus shed his blood to the point of death, that he was then buried in a tomb, and then on the third day God the Father raised him from the dead.

- 1) God promised this
- 2) Jesus predicted this
- 3) Jesus disciples steadfastly proclaimed this, even to death
- 4) Romans purposed to put him to death, and they succeeded in that purpose,
- 5) The empty tomb proves that he was dead, buried, and then resurrected

²³ Luke 23:47.

²⁴ Mark 15:39.

Conclusion

We have seen that there is such a place as “the resurrection.” The realm of the after-life is a real realm. It is the realm in which God lives. It is a realm of eternal life. But how do we get there? How do we enter into that eternity with God? How do we join him in his holy, eternal kingdom? Jesus said that he has the ability to give eternal life to everyone who puts their faith in him.

John 3:16 (ESV) “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

The realm of eternal life is a realm where there is no death. That means there is no sin there because sin always leads to death. Thus, eternal life is a holy realm. No unholy person can enter there. Everyone who has ever sinned—even just once—is unholy according to the word of God. Thus, only those can enter that realm who are holy. Unholy sinners can only be made holy by having their sins forgiven and atoned for. Making atonement for sin requires the shedding of blood.

“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin” (Heb 9:22).

This truth is what all the animal sacrifices in the OT are about; making it possible for unholy people to dwell with a holy God. Thus, entrance into God’s holy, eternal realm, entrance into his holy life, cannot happen without the shedding of blood. If a sinful person is to be allowed into God’s holy kingdom of eternal life, then that person’s sins must be forgiven, atoned for, and washed away. This is why Jesus offered himself. This is why Jesus chose to die. No one took his life from him. He willingly surrendered his life. Jesus chose to die, so that he could give eternal life to all who had faith in him.

John 10:17-18 (ESV) “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

Jesus chose to die. It was God’s will that he die. Jesus did the will of the Father. He laid down his life and then on the third day he took it up again. God gave him permission to do that. That is exactly what Jesus did. He shed his holy and sinless blood, he surrendered his life to death, and he was buried. His body laid quietly in that cold tomb until it was time to prove that he had made sufficient atonement for sin, and then God the Father resurrected him from the grave and then Jesus showed himself to his disciples. They saw him alive after they saw his death. They witnessed God bring life out of death. They witnessed his resurrection and they were willing to give their lives to tell the world that the resurrection of Jesus is not absurd, but rather is wonderfully good news. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is fact, not fiction.

If you believe this and you pray today to the resurrected Jesus and ask him to forgive you of your sins and to give you the eternal life that only he is able to give, then he will forgive you and he will give you eternal life. Hear the words of Jesus,

John 11:25-26 (ESV) "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

In Jesus the hope of eternal life becomes the gift of eternal life.

Do you believe this?

Discussion Questions

Feel free to use these questions to facilitate small group discussion, or come up with your own questions.

1. Who were the Sadducees?
2. What do the Sadducees mean by the term "the resurrection?"
3. Why didn't the Sadducees believe in "the resurrection?" How did they think their example disproved "the resurrection?"
4. What reasons did Jesus give for why the Sadducees were wrong to reject the resurrection?
5. Based upon what Jesus said in vs.29-32, how would you describe the purpose of the Scriptures?
6. When Jesus speaks of "the power of God" (v.29), what might he have had in mind? About what was he thinking when he referenced "the power of God?"
7. Do you believe that Jesus bodily rose from the dead? If so, why? What reasons might you offer a coworker for why you believe in the resurrection of Jesus?
8. Do you think a person must believe in the resurrection of Jesus in order to be a Christian? Why or why not?
9. What does Hope's Statement of Faith say about the resurrection of Jesus? Must one believe in the resurrection of Jesus in order to be a Covenant Member of Hope?
10. Did the Lord "say to you" anything through this passage of Scripture? If so, what?