

Main Street Church - Life Group Guide

EASTER WEEKEND 2023

Speaker: Shawn Vandop



Connect

“Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime.” – Martin Luther

1. EASTER ENGAGED (15min)

- a. How did you or your family engage the Easter Weekend (Good Friday, Easter Sunday...)? Share highlights... How were you *encouraged, challenged or changed* through the Good Friday & Easter Sunday Messages?
- b. How has your personal understanding and engagement with the Easter Story changed over the years? Briefly Share 1 or 2 examples.

2. P.R.A.Y. (15min)

📖 **Read** [Isaiah 53](#) (as we did last week) Share the reading as a group & use this scripture as a guide for prayer.

🙏 **Pray** – Take 10min to P.R.A.Y. together. Leader – time & transition to each component.

-- Pause (be still & listen. 2min)

-- Rejoice & Reflect (praise & thanks. 2min.),

-- Ask (invite & request 4min.)

-- Yield (surrender & trust. 2min)

Discussion (45min)

1. WORD -- Read 📖 [1 Corinthians 15](#).

*As you share the reading of this Scripture, consider (and discuss) these questions:

- a. What do we learn about *God, humanity, life, death, resurrection and eternity* through this passage?
- b. Why does the Resurrection of Jesus Christ carry so much weight for the Apostle Paul and the early Christians? What should this mean for us as Christ-Followers today?

2. “E” IS FOR EASTER

*Share the reading of this [article by Stephen S. Jordan](#) as group and then discuss it together.

Consider: Which “evidences” connect with you the most? What do you learn? What encourages or challenges you?

Christianity begins with Easter. Without the resurrection, there is no Easter.

According to the apostle Paul, “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and our faith is in vain,” meaning that if the resurrection of Jesus never happened, then Christianity as a whole crumbles (1 Cor. 15:14).

How can we know that the resurrection of Jesus actually happened?

Is our faith in Christ firmly placed and supported by evidence, or is our faith misplaced and in vain?

In an effort to demonstrate that our faith is well-placed in Christ, I will share **9 brief evidences for the resurrection of Jesus -- each of which begins with the letter “E.”**

9 EVIDENCES

1) Early accounts.

The majority of scholars believe that the crucifixion of Jesus took place in 30 A.D. The four Gospels were written within just a few decades of the death of Jesus (70-95 A.D. according to critical scholars). Most of Paul's letters were written prior to 60 A.D. Additionally, Paul records an ancient creed in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, which notes the appearances of Jesus to individuals and groups; this creed can be traced all the way back to within a few years of the resurrection itself (this creed dates to 30-35 A.D.).

The sources for Jesus are remarkably early, especially in comparison to sources for other ancient historical figures. For example, consider Alexander the Great, one of the greatest leaders and military minds in ancient history. The earliest sources for Alexander are nearly 300 years after his life; the best sources (Arrian and Plutarch) are even later (400+ years after his life), yet they are still considered trustworthy. With Jesus, we have sources within 10 years of his life, and a number of other sources within 20-70 years.

2) Eyewitness accounts.

According to 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, over 500 people saw Jesus alive, in addition to Peter, James, Paul, and the rest of the disciples. At the time Paul reported these events around 55 A.D., many of the individuals Jesus appeared to were still alive and could be interviewed (this was roughly 25 years after Jesus' death and resurrection). In addition to the people who saw Jesus alive after his crucifixion, eyewitness testimony is foundational for the New Testament as a whole, with every book either being written by an eyewitness or by someone under the direction of an eyewitness. One of the greatest examples of this is 2 Peter 1:16, which reads, "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty." In other words, Peter wasn't just reporting news that he heard, but rather something he *saw with his own eyes*.

3) Extra-biblical accounts.

The events surrounding the resurrection of Jesus are mentioned by numerous individuals (Christians and non-Christians) from outside the New Testament. For example, the crucifixion of Jesus is referenced by more than ten ancient sources (Tacitus, Josephus, Mara-Bar-Serapion, Lucian, Talmud, Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Barnabas, Justin Martyr, etc.). The disciples' experiences with the risen Jesus are reported by several extra-biblical sources as well (Josephus, Ignatius, Justin Martyr, etc.).

4) Embarrassing details.

When dealing with historical events, one piece of evidence that lends credibility to an account's authenticity is the inclusion of embarrassing details. All four Gospels mention that several women were the first to find the tomb empty, which makes them the primary eyewitnesses (Mt. 28:1-8; Mk. 16:1-8; Lk. 24:1-10; Jn. 20:1-2). This is significant because in first century Jewish and Roman cultures, women were looked down upon by men and their testimony was frequently regarded as untrustworthy. If the writers of the Gospels were making up a story that they wanted people to believe, they would have stated that men were the first to find the tomb empty. Why didn't they do that? Because they wanted to tell the truth (women were *really* the first to find the tomb empty).

5) Enemy attestation.

Even Jesus' enemies didn't deny that the tomb was empty. They had an alternative explanation for how the tomb became empty (the disciples stole Jesus' body; Mt. 28:11-15), but they acknowledged that the tomb was empty nonetheless. Enemy attestation is a powerful form of testimony that involves an enemy stating something in favor of the opposing view. Enemies have nothing to gain when they do this. In the case of Jesus, the enemies of Jesus certainly didn't have anything to gain by reporting that the tomb was empty – but they did so anyway.

6) Empty tomb.

There are a number of reasons to believe that the tomb was empty, [\[4\]](#) one of which involves its location in Jerusalem. The Romans, Jews, and Christians knew where Jesus was buried; the location of his tomb was no secret. When Christians began spreading the news (in Jerusalem) that Jesus had risen from the dead, the Romans and/or Jews could have simply removed the body of Jesus from the tomb and displayed it in order to shatter the "hoax." However, Jesus' body was never produced; if it was we would have certainly heard about it from the critics of Christianity, particularly the second century skeptic, Celsus, who wrote against the resurrection.

7) Emergence of the church.

No historian would deny that thousands of people began following the life and teachings of Jesus in the first century shortly after his "alleged resurrection" (Acts 2:41). This number continued to grow rapidly throughout the remainder of the first century (Acts 2:47). There are several extra-biblical accounts to verify the emergence of the early church (Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Trajan, Suetonius, etc.). How can the sudden emergence of Christianity be explained apart from the resurrection of Jesus?


8) Entirely changed lives.

Prior to Jesus' death, and for three days while he was in the grave, the disciples were skeptical and afraid (Lk. 24:21; Jn. 20:19). However, after Jesus' resurrection, the lives of the disciples were entirely different; all of them were persecuted and many were martyred as a result of their belief in the risen Christ. James (the brother of Jesus) and the apostle Paul experienced radical conversions as well. Like the disciples, James and Paul also subjected themselves to persecution and martyrdom because they were convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Skeptics may comment that the transformation of these individuals (the disciples, James, and Paul) is insignificant, since it is normal for people to convert from one set of beliefs to another. However, the *cause* of these conversions is different. People usually convert to a particular religion because they *hear* the message of that religion from a secondary source and believe the message. The reason for the transformations of the disciples, James, and Paul is quite different; they are the result of what they actually *saw* with their own eyes: the Risen Jesus.

9) Expected event.

On numerous occasions throughout his ministry, Jesus predicted that he would die and rise again (Mt. 12:39-40; 16:21; Mk. 8:31; Lk. 9:22; Jn. 2:18-22; 10:17-18). In fact, Jesus predicted these events so frequently that his predictions actually became common knowledge (Mt. 27:62-64; 28:6). It's one thing to make a prediction; it's another thing to predict something that actually happens. Jesus' predictions regarding his own death and resurrection suggest that he really is the Son of God and risen Lord. Despite the amount of evidence provided above, let's remember that the resurrection is more than a fact to be proven; it's the culminating event in God's redemptive plan on behalf of mankind – and it has incredible implications for our lives today. The shed blood of Jesus and his resurrection from the dead are not distant events in history, they are present realities that make it possible for us to be forgiven of our sins (Heb. 9:22), experience and enjoy an intimate relationship with God (1 Pet. 3:18), undergo radical transformation (Gal. 1:23), and carry out all that God has called us to do in our lives (Mt. 28:20). The resurrection of Jesus also gives us hope for the future – since death was not the end for Christ, we have hope that it won't be the end for us either (1 Cor. 15:22, 35-58).

3. **BIG IMPACT** -- Read  [John 11:25-26](#) - Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this?"

"No matter how devastating our struggles, disappointments, and troubles are, they are only temporary. No matter what happens to you, no matter the depth of tragedy or pain you face, no matter how death stalks you and your loved ones, the Resurrection promises you a future of immeasurable good. Few people seem to realize that the resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone to a worldview that provides the perspective to all of life." – Josh McDowell

- a. What are couple of ways the *Life, Death & Resurrection* of Jesus Christ has changed the history of the world?
- b. What are a couple of ways that the *Life, Death & Resurrection* of Jesus Christ has changed you personally?
- c. How can we present and share the truth of this Gospel (Good News) to our culture, friends & family today?
How is it still relevant and essential? How can we initiate, invite, and engage a conversation on this?

Prayer (15min)

*In response to the *Life, Death & Resurrection* of Jesus Christ:

1. How can we Pray for you personally today?
2. Who are 1 or 2 people in your life that need to know Jesus personally?
> Pray for one another and the people you've shared.

Resurrection Resources

- * <http://www.openbible.info/topics/resurrection>
- * <https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/what-is-the-evidence-jesus-rose-from-the-dead>
- * <https://www.moralapologetics.com/wordpress/2019/4/21/9-evidences-for-the-resurrection-of-jesus>
- * <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/10-concise-pieces-of-evidence-for-the-resurrection/>
- * <https://www.crossway.org/articles/4-points-of-evidence-for-the-resurrection>
- * <https://g3min.org/biblical-apologetics-study/lesson-5-the-resurrection-of-christ>
- * <https://www.str.org/w/what-convicted-james-his-brother-was-god->
- * <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/historical-evidence-for-the-resurrection>
- * <https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/core-christian-beliefs/resurrection-evidence.html>
- * <https://blog.tms.edu/resurrection-according-to-scriptures>
- * <https://www.communicatejesus.com/post/40-quotes-life-changing-power-resurrection>
- * [Dr. Gary R. Habermas](#) – who has dedicated his professional life to the examination of the relevant historical, philosophical, and theological issues surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus. www.garyhabermas.com