



April 5, 33 AD – Day of Resurrection
John 20

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Crucifixion and resurrection are the foundational events of the Christian faith. One horrific, the other miraculous. And both necessary in God's plan.

Based on biblical history, secular history, astronomy, prophecy, and the Bible itself, the best calculated date for the crucifixion of Jesus is April 3, 33 AD.² Of course, knowing the date is not as important as knowing there was a date. The crucifixion was not myth, fable, or fiction. It actually happened.

On April 3, 33 AD, at 9:00 in the morning, the first nail was struck and Jesus was crucified. The Son of God took our place and sacrificed His life for us. He did not merely carry our sin and nail it to the cross, He absorbed our sin and nailed Himself to the cross. And the cross simultaneously demonstrates the holy justice of God punishing sin and the amazing grace of God forgiving sin. And it happened on a certain date on the calendar and at a certain time on the clock.

And so did the resurrection. Three days later, on April 5, 33 AD, at sunrise on a Sunday morning, something miraculously happened. Interestingly, today is April 5, and we celebrate the incredible claim of Christianity – that Jesus Christ rose from the dead proving He is the Son of God and that everything He said is true. We believe in the physical, supernatural, dead-coming-back-to-life resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's the incredible claim of Christianity and today *we affirm our faith, we worship our Lord, and we celebrate!*

A DAY OF CELEBRATION

But the day after the horror of the crucifixion, the disciples were not celebrating. Pilate was celebrating that peace had been restored in the city. The religious leaders were celebrating that the radical Jesus was dead. But the disciples were devastated and afraid. Jesus was dead, and they feared they too would soon be dead.

But what happened next, and what is recorded in all four of the New Testament gospel accounts, and especially in John 20, changed everything.

Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away ... She ran and found Peter and John and told them, "They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" Peter and John raced to the tomb ... John reached the tomb first. He stooped and looked inside and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in. Peter went inside and he also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying to the side. Then John also went inside the tomb, and he saw and believed – until then they did not understand the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. (John 20:1-9, NLT)

“The stone had been rolled away” and Jesus’ body was not there. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, Joanna, and Peter and John all saw the empty tomb. The Bible says they were filled with “fear and great joy.”³ They looked inside the empty tomb and His body was not there, and with a mixture of fear and joy, they dared to ask, “Could it be?! Could it really be true?!”

Then Peter and John ran to tell the other disciples, but Mary stayed behind trying to make sense of it all. And here’s what happened next.

Mary looked inside the tomb and saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot where the body of Jesus had been lying. “Dear woman, why are you crying?” the angels asked her. “Because they have taken away my Lord and I don’t know where they have put him.” One of the angels declared, “He is not here. He has risen, just as He said He would.”⁴ Mary turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him at first. “Dear woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?” She thought he was the gardener. “Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.” (Then Jesus spoke her name), “Mary!” She turned to him and cried out, “Rabbi!” ... Clinging to Jesus, He said to her, “Go find my brothers and tell them you have seen Me.” Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” (John 20:11-18, NLT)

Mary would not be the only one to see Jesus that day. “That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! ... And he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. *And they were filled with joy when they saw the Lord!*” (John 20:19-20, NLT).

When we think of joy, we think of a mother giving birth to beautiful baby. When we think of joy, we think of fans rushing the field after their team scores the winning touchdown. But imagine the joy of the disciples. On Friday, they watched Him beaten, they watched Him bleed, they watched Him die. They were devastated, and now ... He was alive! Jesus was standing in front of them, and He was alive! “And they were filled with joy.” Imagine the scene in that room. Tears, hugs, smiles, laughter. And more tears, hugs, smiles, and laughter. The room was filled with joy!

For us, and for all who believe, today is *a day of celebration*. But let me ask you. Are you observing an Easter service, or are you celebrating who Jesus is and what He did for you? Are you a spectator or is it deeply personal? Even though we did not have the privilege of seeing Jesus alive again, we too are filled with joy.⁵ As Peter said, “Though you have not seen him, you love him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8, NIV).

Today is a day of celebration, so what are we celebrating? We’re celebrating God’s grace. We’re celebrating that we have been forgiven of everything we’ve ever done wrong. We tend to understate the severity of our sin and fail to realize, as the Bible says, that our sin made us enemies of God, separated and estranged from Him. But the good news is that through faith in Jesus, we are acquitted, declared not guilty, forgiven.⁶ All the guilt and shame and regret have been erased,

and the Lord says, “I will remember your sins no more” (Hebrews 8:12, ESV). He not only forgives, He forgets. We’re celebrating a grace we did not deserve. A true Christian sings “Amazing Grace” and means it. “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I’m found. Was blind, but now I see.” Today, we celebrate God’s grace, that He has forgiven us of everything we’ve ever done wrong.

We celebrate peace. Peace within and peace with God. The Bible says, “By faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1, ESV). Never again wondering or worrying about where we stand with God. It also means peace within. A calm that only God can provide. A sense of safety and security that only comes from Him. A peace that rests from worry, anxiety, and fear. Every day we can experience peace within and peace with God, knowing that He loves us and that our lives are in His hands.

We celebrate His love, because the moment we believed in Jesus, we became children of God and He became our Father. “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us,” the Bible says, “that we should be called children of God! And that is who we are!” (1 John 3:1, NIV). Every day, we can enjoy His love and His help. Every day, He walks with us through everything we face in life. We celebrate the promise of a personal, intimate, day-by-day, and moment-by-moment relationship with Him. He is our Father, we are His children, and He loves us.

We also celebrate the hope of heaven.⁷ We no longer dread death because we have the hope and assurance of one day seeing Jesus face to face and living with Him forever in heaven. Easter is not just about His resurrection; it’s about the promise of our resurrection.⁸ The hope of eternal life. And in heaven there will be no more tears, no more struggle, no more pain, and no more death.⁹ Just peace, relief, and joy in the presence of God forever. That’s the promise, and that’s what we celebrate.

Grace, peace, love, hope ... all through faith, and only through faith, in Jesus Christ.

When the disciples saw Jesus alive again, “*they were filled with joy!*” And even though we did not have the privilege of seeing Jesus alive again, we too are filled with joy.¹⁰ As Peter said, “Though you have not seen him, you love him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8, NIV).

A DAY OF DECISION

The incredible claim of Christianity is that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Some believe, and some don’t.¹¹ Denzel Washington does, but George Clooney does not. Mel Gibson does, but Bill Maher does not. Carrie Underwood does, but Jodie Foster does not. Bono does, but Bill Gates does not. Some believe, and some don’t.

Thomas was one of those who struggled to believe, and here’s why. Jesus appeared first to Mary, and later that night to the disciples. Unfortunately Thomas was not there. When the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” Thomas could not believe it, and said, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it” (John 20:24-25, NIV).

Where had Thomas been? Wandering the streets in a daze? Sitting under a tree in despair? Wherever he was, he was devastated. He loved Jesus. He put his hope in Jesus. But it's not fair to label him "Doubting Thomas." What he was feeling was not due to a lack of faith, but due to a broken heart. When Jesus died, he was devastated. So when Thomas returned to the house and was told they had seen the Lord, he couldn't believe it. ***"Unless I see ... I will not believe."***

Admittedly, resurrection is hard to believe. It's not just incredible, it's impossible. But that's exactly what the Christian faith claims. That the dead corpse of the crucified Jesus came back to life. And no one wanted to believe it more than Thomas. "Guys, you know how much I loved Him. You know how much I believed in Him. But come on. I saw what happened to Him. We all saw it. We all saw Him die!"

"A week later the disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them ... and He said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here. See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe'" (John 20:26-27, NIV).¹² Surely Jesus was not rebuking Thomas for doubting, but instead comforting and reassuring Thomas to help him overcome his sadness.

And how did Thomas react when he saw the hands of Jesus? He cried out, ***"My Lord and My God!"*** (John 20:28). That's certainly a statement of theology, but even more, it's an outburst of joy. As the other disciples when they first saw Jesus, Thomas was "filled with joy."¹³

Then Jesus said to Thomas, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29, NIV). Jesus was talking about us. None of us saw Him die and none of us saw Him alive again. As the Bible says, we "walk by faith, and not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7, NAS). We don't believe because we are eyewitnesses. We believe because others were eyewitnesses, and recorded what they saw, and because the message has penetrated our hearts.

Dr. Sy Garte is a biologist at Rutgers University and a modern-day Thomas, who struggled to believe as well.¹⁴

"As a third-generation atheist, I grew up feeling I was missing something. I had a vacuum to fill. So I became a biological scientist and embarked on a career in research, thinking it would provide the sense of wonder I felt was missing.

But the more science I learned, the more I felt that the reality of our world did not fit with the materialistic paradigm of atheism. I became convinced that there might be something more. So I gave up my certainty that atheism was true and spent years wondering about the existence of God.

Then prompted by a friend, I read the Gospels, only to reinforce my atheistic scorn at the stupidity of Christianity, the naivete of the ignorant who believed in scientifically impossible events like the resurrection.

But when I read the Gospels a second time, it confirmed that science was not the only pathway to truth. I saw the figure of Jesus Christ ... and He held out His hands to me. 'So you want to see God?' He asked me. 'Here I am.' And I felt Jesus calling me.

And it was the resurrection that convinced me. But how can a scientist believe in a miracle like the resurrection? I believe in the resurrection of Christ because I believe in God ... And the moment I believed and dedicated my life to following Jesus, that lifelong sense of emptiness was filled.”¹⁵

But resurrection is impossible. How can we believe it? Because “He appeared” (1 Corinthians 15:5, NAS). Eyewitnesses saw Jesus die and eyewitnesses saw Him alive again. The New Testament reports ten different resurrection appearances of Jesus spread over a forty-day period. He appeared in different places and to different people. He appeared to one person, to two, to a dozen, and to more than 500 people at one time.¹⁶ These eyewitness accounts sparked a movement. The birth of the church, people willing to die for their faith, and millions of changed lives throughout history are evidence that something phenomenal happened.

If you’re not a Christian at this point in your life that makes today *a day of decision* for you. Perhaps you’ve ignored Him or rejected Him. Surely you’ve heard the Gospel before, you’ve heard all about Jesus, but you have a lot of questions. That’s fine, we all do. But as you process your questions, think about this.

Here’s why I choose to believe. Here’s the head answer. When I look at the majesty and the complexity of the universe, it all points to a creator. I agree with King David when he said, “The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak, and night after night they make him known” (Psalm 19:1-2, NLT).¹⁷ Just look up, and it all points to a creator. The Bible says, “What may be known about God is obvious, because God has made it obvious. For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made” (Romans 1:19-20, NIV). Again, everything we see points to God as the creator. And if God can create the universe, then He can raise the dead. If God is real, then miracles are possible, and so is the resurrection. I believe the resurrection actually happened, and I believe the resurrection proves that Jesus is the Son of God and that everything He said is true.

Here’s the heart answer. I believe because the story touches my heart. The cross of Jesus convicts me of my sin. It humbles me before God. It makes me want to know this God who loves me so much that He sacrificed His son for me. The Bible verse that pricks my heart most is Romans 5:8, which says, “God demonstrates His love for us, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” I believe He did that for me, and He did that for you.

There is a God, and He is speaking to you. And He wants you to know how much He loves you. But you – like me and like every other person in the world – have made choices and done things that have offended God, have broken His laws, and left you separated and estranged from Him. And it breaks His heart.

It breaks His heart so much that He sent His son into this world to show you how much He loves you. And Jesus loves you so much that He gave His life for you. He died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sin. He died in your place to make things right between you and God. But that’s not all.

Amazingly and miraculously, Jesus rose from the dead proving to be the Son of God and proving that everything He said is true. And what did He say? “That whoever believes in Me shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NAS). He said, “I am the way, the truth, and life, no one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6, NAS).

Consider what Jesus is saying. Consider His offer. He’s standing before you as He stood before Thomas, saying, “See My hands ... This is how much I love you.” He’s standing before you as He stood before Thomas, saying, “Stop doubting and believe.”¹⁸ Because the moment you believe in Jesus, you will be forgiven of everything you have ever done wrong. You will experience peace with God and peace within. The moment you believe in Jesus, you will become a child of God and He will become your Father. And you will have the hope and assurance of one day seeing Jesus face to face and living with Him forever in heaven. The promise is yours if you believe in Him.

But if you ignore it, if you reject it, you forfeit all of that. If you reject Him, there is no forgiveness, and you remain guilty before God. If you reject Him, there is no peace. If you reject Him, there will be no help, and you are on your own. And if you reject Him, there is no heaven, and when you die, you will be eternally separated from Him.¹⁹

Jesus once said to a woman, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me will live, even if he dies.” Jesus was saying even if we die physically, we will live eternally. He was saying, “I can do that for you.” And then He asked her, “Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26, NAS).

He’s asking you the same question. Do you believe this? Because that’s all you have to do. The Bible says, “Confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and you shall be saved” (Romans 10:9, NAS). Believe how? Not just in your head, but “believe in your heart.”

You may know the story in your head, you’ve heard it before, but have you received it in your heart? Let me say it again. The moment you believe in Jesus, you will be forgiven of everything you have ever done wrong, you will experience peace with God and peace within, you will become a child of God and He will become your Father, and you will have the hope and assurance of one day seeing Jesus face to face and living with Him forever in heaven.

CONCLUSION

On April 3, 33, AD, Jesus sacrificed His life on the cross to save us. Then on April 5, 33, AD, He rose from the dead proving to be the Son of God and proving that everything He said is true. So today, we celebrate and worship Him.

Let’s declare our faith and recite Peter’s words together. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance ... reserved in heaven” (1 Peter 1:3-4, NAS).

NOTES

¹ Introduction to the message, meditative slideshow APRIL 5, 33 AD, with instrumental background leading into the song “Forever.”

² Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), page 74. This date is based upon biblical history, because the crucifixion must fall within in a certain range of years when Caiaphas, Tiberius, and Pilate were all three in power. This date is based upon secular history written by historians such as Josephus and Pliny. This date is based upon astronomy. There were only two viable years when Friday fell on Nisan 14, the years 30 and 33 AD. This date is based upon prophecy. Daniel’s 69 weeks prophecy allows us to calculate the date of the crucifixion of Jesus, marking a time from 444 BC to 33 AD, from the time of Artaxerxes to the day of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, and thus the date of His crucifixion. See Zechariah 9:9. See Hoehner, pages 115-139.

³ See Mark 16:8 and Matthew 28:8.

⁴ See Matthew 28:6.

⁵ Jesus said, “(Everything I have said to you is so) that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

⁶ See Romans 5:1-2.

⁷ Paul said, “We are confident ... to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). The moment we die is the same moment we enter into the presence of God. There is no limbo, there is no purgatory, there is no waiting. The moment we close our eyes on earth will be the same moment we open our eyes in heaven and see Jesus face to face. “We are confident of this.” Paul mocked death when he said, “O death, where is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:55). Death is not final. Death is ... relief ... healing ... peace ... joy ... a door to eternity ... and the moment our faith has been waiting for.

⁸ First Corinthians 15 declares that His resurrection is the promise of our resurrection. See 1 Corinthians 15:20, “first fruits” is the promise of our resurrection. See 1 Corinthians 15:22, “In Christ all shall be made alive.” See 1 Corinthians 15:52-55, “O death, where is your victory?” See Ephesians 2:5-6, “made us alive together with Christ ... and raised us up with Him.” See 2 Corinthians 4:14, “He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.” See 1 Thessalonians 4:16, “the dead in Christ shall rise first.”

⁹ See Revelation 21:4.

¹⁰ Jesus said, “(Everything I have said to you is so) that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

¹¹ See Acts 17:32-34 and Acts 28:24.

¹² For an entire week, Thomas had to endure the joy of his friends who had seen Jesus. But for Thomas, the testimony of his friends was not enough to convince him. He had to see Jesus with his own eyes.

¹³ It was a moment Thomas would never forget, and a moment that would change the rest of his life. Non-biblical, historical documents tell us that Thomas traveled as far as India to spread the Gospel. There is a tomb located in Madras, India, believed to be the burial place of Thomas. These same historians claim Thomas was martyred by being run through with a spear.

¹⁴ Watch the testimony of Sy Garte on the podcast Capturing Christianity, “Why This Atheist Scientist Became a Believing Christian.” YouTube link to the interview – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OMBQwGzn_TE&t=82s. Dr. Garte has written the book *The Works of His Hands – A Scientist’s Journey from Atheism to Faith*.

¹⁵ Sy Garte, “Why I Believe in the Resurrection,” PeacefulScience.org, partially paraphrased.

¹⁶ Paul said of those 500, who witnessed the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:9-11), that “most of them remain until now,” that most of them are still alive and could be interviewed. See also Paul Little’s *Know Why You Believe*, pages 55-56, where he refutes the claim that the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus were hallucinations.

¹⁷ David was in awe of what he saw, and even more, he was in awe of the one who created what he saw. Again, with David, I am awestruck by the fact that “the Lord merely spoke, and the heavens were created” (Psalm 33:6, NLT).

¹⁸ See John 20:27.

¹⁹ Jesus was clear when He said, “If you do not believe in Me, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24).