



ASSURANCE OF THE RESURRECTION

Believers find assurance for this life and the life to come through the resurrected Lord.

JOHN 20:3-9; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-28

Life in the twenty-first century has proven to be anything but secure. Extremist attacks, escalating violence, and racial tensions have put many of us on edge. Many perceive life today to be more advanced than any time in history, yet we also seem to be more determined to find ways of using those advances in destructive ways.

Do you feel safer or less safe than you did ten years ago? Explain. How is a person's sense of security related to what one is willing to trust for that security?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 19–20; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-58

In some ways, life in the first century was like our own. Various groups in society did not trust one another. The Roman army was often brutal. Justice was meted out by corrupt rulers. Life was not safe and secure for first-century Christians. There was not much that anyone could really be certain of. In other words, human nature has been remarkably consistent when it comes to exploiting others.

Paul was well aware that life is unfair and that little, if anything, in this life is guaranteed. That's why he placed all his confidence in the resurrection of Jesus. In the resurrection, he found a sure foundation for this life and for the life to come. He expressed this hope in terms of the future resurrection of those who have believed in Jesus. In particular, he wanted believers in Corinth to understand the crucial connection between Jesus' resurrection and the coming resurrection of all those united with the Lord Jesus.

John's narrative of the resurrection is one of four Gospel accounts of the same event (Matt 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12). The four Gospel writers have much in common, yet there are some interesting differences between these narratives, as they include or leave out details from the others and emphasize certain things differently for their respective readers. Thankfully, the Lord provided multiple accounts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to strengthen the witness of the gospel. The empty tomb and the resurrected Jesus is the foundation upon which our faith is built.

Arguably the most important defense of the resurrection in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 15 reminds believers of the truth of the resurrection of Jesus and its benefits for those who belong to Christ. The resurrection of Jesus grounds our faith, undergirds our mission, and establishes our hope in the life to come.

Read John 20:3-9 in your Bible. Notice the reactions of the disciples as they entered the tomb. What do their reactions reveal to us about the nature of salvation through faith in Jesus?



EXPLORE THE TEXT

BELIEVING IN THE RESURRECTION (JOHN 20:3-9)

³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. ⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

VERSES 3-4

Jumping right into the narrative, we read that John (*the other disciple*) and Peter *were going toward the tomb*. They *were running together* to get there as quickly as possible, with John outpacing Peter in the footrace.

The news they had received from Mary was startling and troubling, and it could not be overlooked: “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him” (John 20:2). After the Sabbath was over, Mary and a few other women had gone to anoint Jesus' body with spices, only to discover that the stone had been removed from the tomb. At first, the women thought someone helpfully moved the stone so that they could anoint Jesus' body (Mark 16:3-4). But realizing the tomb was empty, Mary was distraught over the thought that someone had stolen Jesus' body, and she had to inform the disciples immediately.

The other Gospels record the appearance of angels who instructed Mary and the other women specifically about what had happened, that Jesus had risen just as He said He would (Matt. 28:5-7; Mark 16:6-7; Luke 24:5-8). Yet, the delivery of this information to the disciples “seemed to them an idle tale” (Luke 24:11); they did not believe it, except for Peter and John.

VERSES 5-7

Mary's news apparently jarred John and Peter so much that they went immediately to check things out for themselves. John took a quick peek in the tomb but did not go in. Perhaps he was overcome with emotion and was trying to make sense of what he briefly saw. But Peter, trailing John a little in the footrace, went right in when he got there.

The **linen cloths** are prominent in this narrative. Peter and John saw them lying there, seemingly where Jesus' body would've been lying. There was something unique and unusual, however. **the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head** was **folded up in a place by itself**. Perhaps John's point by making much of the burial cloths was to show that if grave robbers or enemies of Jesus had taken His body, they would have taken everything or discarded the cloths into a heap on the floor. They wouldn't have taken time to fold them.

How do the details included by John give credence to his account of Jesus' resurrection? Which detail carries the greatest weight or significance for you?

VERSES 8-9

John followed Peter into the tomb, **saw and believed**. But what did John believe? Some might argue that John simply believed Mary's report that someone took Jesus' body. After all, the tomb was empty. But since the cloths were there, John likely concluded something different. Based on John's use of "believe" elsewhere in this chapter and in his Gospel as a whole, it is more likely that he believed Jesus had actually risen. Perhaps in that moment the words of Jesus shot through his heart like a lightning bolt: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). What John saw—and what he didn't see—caused him to believe.

What is interesting is John's clarification in verse 9. Even though John believed, he said they **did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead**. Certainly, Peter, John and the other disciples heard Jesus foretell His crucifixion and resurrection, as the Gospels make clear. But as for understanding the Scripture, this would come later as Jesus opened their eyes to understand what had been written about Him and fulfilled in Him (Luke 24:25-27,44-48).



Later, Paul would make a case that Jesus died, was buried, and raised on the third day “in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). The disciples didn’t fabricate a resurrection scene to match some veiled messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. Rather, the resurrection happened and they believed, only later to understand the Scripture that He must rise from the dead.

What is the connection between seeing and believing? How can a person believe in Jesus without fully understanding?

BIBLE SKILL: *Use a concordance and/or Bible dictionary (either print or on the Internet) to learn more about a feature of Israel’s religious life.*

Use a concordance to find references to “firstfruits” in Scripture. What were the circumstances and regulations for offering firstfruits in the Old Testament? Identify how the New Testament writers took the Old Testament usage and adapted it to apply to believers.

MADE ALIVE THROUGH THE RESURRECTION (1 COR. 15:20-22)

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

VERSE 20

The resurrection of Jesus Christ has massive implications. But the implications flow from the truth and reality of what happened: ***Christ has been raised from the dead.*** If Christ has not been raised from the dead, our faith and preaching are in vain (v. 14), we are still in our sins (v. 17), and there is no hope for those who have already died in

faith (vv. 18-19). How could Paul be so certain of Jesus' resurrection? He was certain because the Scriptures said it would happen, and he himself saw the risen Jesus, along with many other eyewitnesses.

One major implication of Jesus' resurrection is that those who belong to Jesus will also one day be resurrected to life. Jesus' resurrection guarantees ours. Paul referred to Jesus' resurrection as **the •firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep**. Paul's use of the term *firstfruits* is instructive, recalling the firstborn child, animal, or first harvest of a crop that would be considered holy and belonging to the Lord. The firstfruits, as a foretaste of more to come, were offered to God in thanksgiving for His graciousness in providing them. Jesus' resurrection was the pattern of things to come, a foretaste for those who belong to Christ.

VERSES 21-22

All who are **in Adam** (by nature) die physically and spiritually, because death came through him. The sad consequences of Adam and Eve's sin against God affected not only them but us as well. Through Adam's sin came judgment and condemnation (see Rom. 5:16). The good news is that all who are **in Christ** (by faith) **shall ... be made alive** in Him—referring to a future resurrection.

Notice that both verses 21 and 22 begin with **for**, showing a vital connection with what precedes them. Paul's flow of thought is that those who "have fallen asleep" (died) experience the consequential reality of what happened through Adam as a result of his sin. But thanks to Jesus Christ, death is not the end of the story for those who have faith. We will be made alive in Christ, who is Himself "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). So now, having been justified in Christ by faith, we wait for the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:23-25).

What do these verses reveal about the results of Jesus' resurrection? How do the results identified by Paul give hope? Hope for what?

FUTURE FOUND IN THE RESURRECTION (1 COR. 15:23-28)

²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every



rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. ²⁸ When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

VERSE 23

There is an orderliness to the benefits of the resurrection: *each in his own order*. Jesus’ resurrection qualifies Him as *the firstfruits*. Again, He is the pattern and the reason for our future resurrection. Then *at his coming those who belong to Christ* will be made alive and experience a resurrection of their own in Him. What inexpressible joy is to be gained in our future resurrection!

Jesus said He would come again for His followers after preparing a place for us (John 14:1-6). Every generation of Christians has prayed and longed for the return of Christ in their time. At His coming, those who belong to Christ will receive the same powerful, glorious resurrection that Jesus did (Rom. 6:5; 1 Thess. 4:14).

“Then comes the end” ought to be triumphant words of great encouragement to us!

VERSES 24-28

Paul reminded the Corinthian believers not only of participation in a future bodily resurrection but also participation in the eternal reign of God’s kingdom in Christ. *Then comes the end* ought to be triumphant words of great encouragement to us! When Christ returns, the culmination of God’s redemptive plan will be brought with Him. Several profound activities occur as the result of Christ’s victorious resurrection and triumphant return.

First, Jesus will hand over *the kingdom to God the Father*. Jesus taught us to pray that God’s kingdom would come “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). The *kingdom* is the rule and reign of God over all things and all people. Currently, there are still enemies who oppose and disrupt this kingly reign of God. When Jesus returns, all things

will finally be restored as they were originally designed to be before the wreckage of Adam's sin.

Second, Jesus will put ***all his enemies under his feet***. As it stands, ***the last enemy to be destroyed is death***. The truth is, death has been defeated but has not yet been abolished and subjected to Christ (Heb. 2:8). Humanity still languishes under the shadow of death and is “through fear of death ... subject to lifelong slavery” (Heb. 2:15). That's why we need the reminder of these truths from Paul.

Finally, Christ Himself will ***be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him***. God sent His Son to restore what Adam wrecked, which Jesus did. Because Jesus is the true and better Adam, Paul cited Psalm 8:6 as a reminder that ***God has put all things in subjection under his feet***. Of course, it is obvious that He who puts everything under Christ is the exception. The Father is still the Father! In the final analysis, the work of Christ accomplished through His death and resurrection is for the glory of the Father. When Paul said that Christ will *be subject to* the Father, he was not in any way implying that the Son is inferior to the Father. The Persons of the Trinity are equal in essence and glory. The subordination Paul spoke about was one of role or function.

When all is said and done—death is finally abolished and the kingdom is handed over to the Father—all things will be put in their rightful place and order. God's authority over all things will be eternally exercised. There will no longer be an enemy—death or the devil—rising to challenge Him.

How does the promised return of Christ give strength when facing challenges in this life? How can you demonstrate the hope you have in Christ?

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Kingdom*

The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.



IN MY CONTEXT

- Salvation comes through believing in the resurrected Christ.
- Believers find true life through faith in the resurrected Christ.
- Believers can live with the assurance of the resurrection and eternal reign of Christ.

As a group, discuss how the church can bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus throughout the year, beyond the emphasis of Easter. How can your group lead the way?

Reflect on the time when you first placed your trust in Jesus. (If you have not done so, review the information on the inside front cover to find out more about how you can do this.) With whom can you share about your salvation this week?

List some benefits of the resurrection in the believer's life. Which of those benefits do you most need in your life right now? Thank God for providing that benefit through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Prayer Needs
