

Because He lives He will come again to set up His permanent kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. Forty days after Jesus' resurrection He ascended to heaven, witnessed by His disciples. An angel said to the, *"Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven. Will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."* (Acts 1:11)

The compelling truth of Easter confronts us with a profoundly important issue; what will you and I do with Jesus? There is no more important decision in all of life. It is the decision that is to have life-altering impact like no other decision. It is the decision that has ramifications for all of eternity. Turn to Him, live for Him, be His person. Respond to the compelling truth of Easter!

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FAITH FILES

Reasons Enough for Belief

#007



The Uniqueness of Jesus

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Series: *Reasons Enough for Belief*

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The Uniqueness of Jesus

The story of Jesus' resurrection of the dead is found in the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It's referenced many other places in the New Testament as well, but at length in Paul's letter to the Christians at Corinth, the book we call 1 Corinthians. But can we trust these documents? Paul writes the Corinthians, *"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. 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. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles..."* (1 Corinthians 15:3-7) He's listing the people who saw Jesus alive again after He had been executed on a cross and buried. There's references include Jesus appearing to individual people, such as the apostle Peter (Cephas) and James, two the twelve apostles at the same time and even to a gathering of some 500 people at the same time. Many, Paul writes, are still alive as of his writing this letter, and could validate the truth of the claim that Jesus was alive again because they had seen Him.

Scholars are agreed that Paul wrote this letter around 55 AD. That's no more, probably less, than twenty-five years after the event, not much time at all. As of the writing of this Easter message I can think back twenty-five years to 1989 and easily recall the Berlin Wall coming down and the environmental disaster of the Exxon Valdez Tanker spilling 11 million gallons of crude oil in the Alaskan waters. It's not that far in the past. This was the case with Paul's words.

In fact, the first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) were written in the 60s or 70s AD, at the latest. This was within forty years of the actual event. Again, many of us have vivid memories of events forty years ago. The last book of the New Testament to be written was the Gospel of John, probably in the 90s, when the writer, John the disciple of Jesus was an old man. All of the New Testament was written within the first century, within sixty years of the events it references of Jesus, including the resurrection of Je-

The Ramifications of Easter

The compelling truth of Easter is that Jesus rose from the dead. It authenticated who He said He was, the Son of God, come to earth as one of us, to die for us on a cross, to be Lord over all.

Because He lives He confirmed who He is, God Himself who has come to save us from our sin. He said *"the Son of Man [His favorite name for Himself] did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* (Mark 10:45) *We are to accept Him as our savior, realizing we can't be right with God based on our own effort and good works. We need Him to save us. Because He lives He is Lord not only over death but over life and has the right to be Lord of our life, for us to live for Him. "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it."* (Matthew 16:25) *Live for Him, not for self!*

Because He lives and we are His we can always have His help in being His person and doing His will. *"If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."* (John 15:5)

Because He lives He is always with us. *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matthew 28:20)

Because He lives He promises to come to take us to be with Him when we die. *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* (John 14:1-3)

seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:26-29)

Then there's the amazing fact that the early Christians, who were almost all Jewish, did the astonishing and unimaginable switching of their day of worship from Saturday, the Sabbath, to Sunday, the day Jesus was raised from the dead. The evidence argues for the truthfulness of the account of Jesus being raised from the dead.

The Uniqueness of Jesus

Who is this Jesus who was raised from the dead? Many people say He was a good teacher, like other great teachers, and leave it at that. No other religious teacher has ever come back to life. What did Jesus teach, particularly about Himself?

Jesus did not teach that he was just another prophet, but that He was the fulfillment of the prophets' messages. *“Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” (Luke 24:44)*

He taught that He existed before He was born, before the ancient patriarch Abraham was born! *“I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I am!” (John 8:59)*

He taught that He was one with God. *“I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30)*

He taught that He had all authority, over everything! *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Matthew 28:18)*

He taught that He was the only way to get to God. *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)*

The great Christian thinker C. S. Lewis put it well in this classic statement of his. “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” (Mere Christianity) Yes, Jesus was either a liar, a lunatic, or He was, and is Lord!

sus. The gospel writer Luke indicates his intention of writing an historically accurate account for a Greek man. *“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.” (Luke 1:1-4)* The apostle John wrote near the end of his gospel, *“Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31)* The apostle Peter wrote, *“For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” (1 Peter 1:16)*

There's no reason to question the historical accuracy and truthfulness of the New Testament documents. So, what do they report concerning the resurrection of Jesus that can give us the confidence it really happened and is not simply a fictitious account?

Evidence of Jesus' Resurrection

One amazing fact is that the first eyewitnesses of Jesus being alive again were the women who came to the tomb, saw it was empty, then encountered the resurrected Jesus. In Jewish culture of the first century women were not allowed to testify in a court of law. Their testimony was worthless. If this story were a fabrication no one would have had women be the first witnesses. The fact that they are the first witnesses, even before the apostles, virtually shouts of its validity.

Then there's the fact that the apostles themselves were hesitant to believe Jesus was alive again. It doesn't show them in a very good light, and the story would have never been written that way, unless that's the way it happened. Particularly, there's the story of the apostle Thomas who wasn't present the first Sunday evening when Jesus appeared to the apostles and, therefore, would not believe them when they later told him they had seen Jesus alive again. A week later he was present when Jesus, again, appeared in their presence. The historical account states, *“A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then 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.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Then Jesus told him, “Because you have*