

# Essential Christianity: The Resurrection

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[ 0 : 00 ]     Amen. This morning in our Old Testament reading, we read a longer section of Scripture.! We read a longer section of Scripture.!

And the larger number that comes before the colon is a chapter. So chapter 20, verses 1 through 10. This is God's Word. Now on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, They have taken the Lord out of the tomb. We do not know where they have laid him.

So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together. But the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there.

But he did not go in. And then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded up in a place by itself.

[ 1 : 28 ]     Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed. For as yet, they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

Then the disciples went back to their homes. Let's pray. Lord, we're thankful for your testimony regarding the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We pray that you might use that same spirit that raised him from the dead to speak now to our hearts. Allow us to see the truth of your word, that Christ is risen, and that he is risen indeed.

And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Recently, I was shopping in a Walmart, and I was in a hurry. I was rushing because I was going to something else, and I needed to grab a few things.

And I was going to go right in and then go right out. That chance, right? It's Walmart, after all. It's chaos in there. It's anarchy. My home is anarchy.

[ 2 : 29 ]     Walmart is definitely anarchy. And as I walked through, I grabbed those few items that I needed. I was going to something, so I needed something for this and something for that.

And I was only going to be in there for a minute, so I didn't get a cart, and I didn't get a basket. And so I grabbed in my arms, and I made my way to check out. And as I did, I bypassed the checkout line because I was in a hurry.

And I went to one of those self-checkout kiosks. And I got all my stuff, and I paid for it. And then I went to grab the receipt. And guess what? It was out of paper.

I don't have time for this. I made my way from the kiosk and went straight to the door. And at Walmart, and like some other grocery stores, what do they have at Walmart? They have a guy that stands there, or a gal, that stands there and checks to see if you have the receipt.

I didn't have time to wait around. And as I saw that man at the entryway, there were a bunch of slow walkers in front of me. And so what did I do? I made my way really quickly around those people.

[ 3 : 32 ] And remember, I didn't have a basket. And I sure wasn't going to pay the 10 cents for the plastic bag. So I'm in my gym clothes, my hands full of stuff, running towards the door.

So what does the man do, sir? Let me see your receipt. Now, I'm not sure if it was all those factors combined, or he just didn't like the way that I looked.

But as I explained myself, that very politely, I might add, that the receipt machine was broken and out of paper. He did not believe me. And as he did not believe me, he kept going on not believe me.

I explained to him that, sir, it was out of paper. Check the cameras. Still, he did not believe me. And then I said, well, look at the transactions.

Go talk to customer service. Look at the video feed. I don't know. I didn't steal these items. I was emphatic. And my desperation was raising so much so that I just started to blurt things out.

[ 4 : 40 ] And every time, he matched my intensity with a promise to go get the police officer right outside. And I'm thinking to myself, I have kids.

I drive a minivan. I'm not going to steal anything. He did not care. Let alone the fact, who steals a loaf of Italian bread, a bottle of spaghetti, shirt starch, and windshield wiping fluid?

Nobody. If I'm going to steal something, it's not going to be something that totals like \$14. It did not matter. And then I had the bright idea, I'm going to pull up on my phone and show him the transaction seconds before from this exact Walmart.

It did not matter. He was unconvinced. And so I said, I'm going to appeal to Caesar. Get your manager. The manager came up, and thankfully, cooler heads prevailed.

But in the midst of that, I said, I'm a trustworthy person. Surely, this man will know that. I'll even show you my driver's license.

[ 5 : 49 ] Except for if you are from certain areas of the country, namely the state of South Carolina, and you show your driver's license, it looks like it was made at a copier out back.

And it did not help my case. But the manager came to his senses after the driver's license debacle and said, okay, you can just go.

I needed that receipt. I needed proof. I needed confirmation that I had paid for the item. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is confirmation of the gospel.

Doubt. Surety. Questioning things. It's something that we all struggle with. We do it in every arena of the life.

Whether it's things that are big, things that are small. Think of when you're in school and you take tests. Math. You don't know if the answer is going to work out. You don't know how that test is going to go.

[ 6 : 52 ] What about things that are a little bit bigger? Parents. We know that the struggle is real. We don't know if we've done enough. We don't know what the result is going to be when that child leaves your home.

What about health challenges? Maybe you've gotten test results and you don't know what it means.

We don't know to be sure what's going to happen. Whether it's those things that seem small or seem a little bit larger. What about ultimate things?

If you believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ, you need to be sure. Because if not, you are one most of all to be pitied because you've staked your life on something that's a lie.

You have to be sure. But yet we all struggle. The resurrection provides confirmation that Jesus is who he says he is.

[ 7 : 54 ] It's confirmation of his death, that he achieved what he achieved. It seals the gospel. And this morning we're going to look at the reliability of John's witness to the resurrection.

We're going to look at the reason for the resurrection. And then in the midst of that, we're going to talk about struggling through that. Because that question of surety and doubt that we all face, no matter what arena, great or small, is there.

It's there. It's there. And that's okay. And as we walk through those things, hopefully the resurrection will provide us that surety.

The reliability of the resurrection. Now there's much to be said about the reliability of the scriptures. And when we come to a section of scripture like this, of John's gospel, we want to talk about all those things.

We want to talk about how the New Testament is truthful. How the scriptures are truthful. We don't have time for that this morning in that level of detail.

[ 9 : 01 ] But if you're interested in that, come talk to me. I'd love to talk to you about that. But John's gospel, specifically this section of John's gospel, is reliable.

Now if you know this, the Bible has a number of gospels in it. They're just history kind of books about Jesus. But in writing them, or reading them, you'll notice that the writers have a number of differences.

And as they have differences, they differ not just in content, but they differ in style, in nuance, in the purpose they're writing for, and to whom they're writing to.

All of that makes each of them slightly unique. But in that, they're eerily similar. And as we think about the gospels, we're going to talk about some of those differences, especially that arise here in this text.

And in doing so, we're going to see that they actually work together. Verse 1 starts with the first day of the week. That's pretty innocuous. Except when we start comparing it to all the other gospels.

[ 10 : 12 ] We realize that every gospel has that. The first day of the week. Of course. The writer wants to tell us what day of the week it's on. Except, whenever Jesus talked about what was going to happen after he died, he never talked about the day.

He would always talk about, what? The third day he would rise again. And yet, in every gospel, it begins with very much the same language. And then, that's where the differences begin.

Who is it that appears in that first verse? It's Mary Magdalene. And the differences start there. The differences involve the number of people.

John's gospel records just Mary Magdalene. The other gospels say there's a bunch of women. John actually shows there's actually much more harmony in that than we at first might realize.

Because how does Mary speak in the very next verse? She says, we do not know. Mary's the only character that's presented.

[ 11 : 20 ] But John actually shows us that Mary is there with other people. So that apparent contradiction is actually settled when we look at verse 2. John might not have included them.

But it's clear there's more than just one, and he knows it. Now, if John was making up a story and knitting something together so that we might believe, that's his purpose in this, right?

He wouldn't use Mary Magdalene. Why? He wouldn't use her because she's a woman. Now, remember, this is a male-dominated society. She couldn't even have been a reliable witness.

And let alone, not Mary Magdalene. You're not picking her. She's a woman of ill repute. And in doing so, John, the actions of John show that he's more concerned with truthfulness than acceptance.

He's more concerned with the reliability of what's gone on rather than crafting a story. Her testimony wasn't even admissible in court.

[ 12 : 27 ] Another writer has put it this way. If this is not the work of a historian, it is very strange a more competent witness could not be found.

Literally, John, you could pick anybody else, and we'd be good in court. And then pick another guy, and then we'd have two witnesses, and then we'd be awesome. But instead, he picks a group of women, and he picks that woman to name.

If you're building a conspiracy, I wouldn't pick Mary Magdalene. Seeing that's happened, John then records what her thoughts are, or her actions, or what she's thinking about when she goes and tells other people.

At the end of verse 1, she only sees that the stone has been rolled away. So in verse 2, she runs to retrieve all the disciples and inform them what? Not that he is risen, but his body has been taken from the tomb.

You see, in those days, grave robbing was actually a big issue. So much so that if you move the stone, the Roman emperor had decreed that, hey, you're going to face the death penalty.

[ 13 : 39 ] And she assumed that the body had been moved. Now, this is where it gets interesting. Mary is a follower of Jesus. She should have known that Jesus had said over and over and over again that he was going to rise from the grave.

And yet, this picture is one of kind of confusion, doubt, maybe not even fully getting it.

Instead of claiming that he had risen from the grave, she says that they had taken his body. Why would John include this if he was making up a story?

It surely doesn't make her, or as we'll see in a minute, him look all that great. Now, if Mary and the other women came to Peter and then to John or to a group of disciples, we don't know.

The way it's phrased, it looks like that Mary went first to Peter and then she went to John. We get that even through the English. We don't know, but we do know that they respond by running.

[ 14 : 46 ] And apparently, the foot race doesn't go well for Simon and Peter. He loses, right? But what actually seems like a selfish detail shows the hallmarks of the work of a historian.

But either way, Peter, in Peter fashion, comes charging through the open tomb of his own accord, as verse 6 kind of tells us.

Simon and Peter came following him and went in the tomb. And what do they find? John finds cloths lying on the ground. And then Peter sees not just the cloths, but some of them neatly folded.

If Jesus' body had been taken by robbers, would they have left the most valuable things, this linen cloths and the spices on them? Surely not.

And if they had left them in their haste, would they have taken time to fold them neatly? It's like if someone entered into your house, robbed you blind of all your electronics, and then folded your laundry.

[ 15 : 48 ] I'd say thank you, but it's not very likely. So what are we to make of this?

What is, really, what is John, what are John and Peter's responses in the midst of this? If John is making up this story about a man being raised from the dead, he'd probably try to make it look like the other raising from the dead that's in the Gospel of John, just a few short chapters before this.

Lazarus is raised from the dead. But he doesn't look like Jesus. He's still wearing his cloths, right? It's very different. What's their response to this, though?

Their response is what verse 8 tells us. The other disciple who had reached the tomb first, that's John. John does this weird thing where he only refers to himself in kind of the third person instead of saying, I.

The other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in. He finally goes in. And he saw and believed. For as yet they did not understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead.

[ 17 : 03 ] And then the disciples went back to their homes. Their response in all of this is somewhat belief, but it's also confusion. If you see in verse 9 and 10, they don't put all the pieces together.

In fact, I don't even know if Peter believes at this point. He might not. He's at least confused. So think about this. If John is building a conspiracy, his star witness is someone that can't be trusted.

And then the people that are supposed to go and change the whole world look a little bit like bumbling idiots. It's not this picture of this roaring lion, faithful disciple.

It's very different. It's not the picture you want of your most faithful followers that are confused. The picture is more like oddballs, weirdos, whose testimony that they don't even really believe, and then they act like a bunch of chickens.

That's not how you want to build a conspiracy. In fact, the recordings here of John is very much like the work of a historian.

[ 18 : 21 ] They're not exactly the same as every other gospel, and they're excruciatingly painful in detail. Think about the foot race. What does that accomplish in this narrative? It doesn't show us anything other than John won, and then he was too scared to go in.

But Peter won, and then he barged right in. And then Peter was confused. The record is painful in detail and oddly specific. And to top it all off, it doesn't make anybody really look good at all.

Why would he use a woman who is unreliable? Why would he make himself, why would he make Peter look just the same? The account of the gospel of John is reliable.

I have a family member who studied law at Oxford, or he's not from North Carolina like me, so he says, I read law at Oxford. And in doing so, he was trained to be a lawyer.

And he visited me one time, and we spoke about the accounts of the gospels, and he said, yeah, they kind of read like eyewitness testimony, but I don't believe it.

[ 19 : 26 ] I don't believe it, but it reads like it. Surely this must be some kind of cover-up. After all, we're modern people. The government might lie to us.

The news might lie to us. Maybe the weatherman probably lies to us, if we're honest, after this last week. But in doing so, we try to trick ourselves, and we're actually not that well acquainted with a cover-up.

But the man, Chuck Colson, was. If you know that name, he was a senior staffer in the Nixon administration. He had been a military officer, and then he worked for President Nixon. He was known as Nixon's hatchet man, because he would step over his own grandmother to get Nixon into office, is what he said.

He said that about himself. Definitely not a Christian. He spent time in prison for his role in the Watergate scandal. But in the midst of all of that, as he was waiting for trial, he met with this man who was recently converted to Christianity.

And Colson mocked this man. When he did, the man gave him a challenge. He said, read this. And he gave him a C.S. Lewis book.

[ 20 : 38 ] And Colson realized that all of his objections to Christianity were actually not that well thought out. And he realized that his objection to the Christian faith did not stand.

And Colson will write in his autobiography about his participation in the biggest cover-up of all time. He says, these men, the most powerful men in the world, if you think about it, their cover-up didn't stand.

And they were only threatened with jail time. And yet, some allege that the Christian faith is a cover-up. Think about these people.

They're not the most powerful men in the world. The time frame is thousands of years. They faced death, and some did even die. And it's endured.

John didn't write as part of a cover-up. But he falls in line with the whole purpose of this letter. The whole purpose of Scripture is to remind and tell the story of Jesus.

[ 21 : 48 ] It's to tell of what he has done. It's to answer the question, Who is Jesus? And his work on the cross? That story, that old, old story.

But not just that question, but what do you think of Jesus? How do you respond to those events on that Good Friday and Easter Sunday?

It's what he says of himself. It's what he says of his death. It's what he says of the resurrection.

Is Jesus' testimony reliable? Is John's testimony reliable? It is because it's confirmed by the resurrection. The Easter story, the resurrection of Jesus is reliable.

But what's the reason for the resurrection? What does it accomplish? It accomplishes this. John 20 doesn't stand alone. It comes after John 19. Of course. It's the final act in the death of Christ.

[ 22 : 53 ] One that begins a few chapters earlier, and then continues as Jesus is betrayed by those closest to him, sentenced unjustly, and then dies on a cross.

He truly died. And chapter 20 confirms for us that Jesus did defeat death. That's the part that Mary and Peter and John and none of them got at this point.

Verse 9. For as yet they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead. The gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, is that God has sent his son, both man and God in the same person, to die a death he didn't deserve because he was sinless, so that he might pardon sin and that any of us that would have faith in him wouldn't face death.

It confirms that the gospel is true. The resurrection seals the gospel of Jesus Christ, that message. The gospel also does something else.

It actually depends upon the resurrection. Paul will say later, he's an apostle, a follower of Jesus many years later, will say that if the resurrection is not true, then the whole thing falls apart.

[ 24 : 20 ] The theologian J.R. Packer says this, Christianity rests on the certainty of Jesus' resurrection as an occurrence in history.

All four gospels highlight it, focusing on the empty tomb and resurrection appearances. Acts insist upon it. And Paul regarded the resurrection as indisputable proof that the message about Jesus as judge and savior is true.

The resurrection confirms his message and the resurrection confirms his death and it confirms his rising and it confirms salvation for Christians.

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you're still in your sins, Paul will write. Your faith rests on the resurrection.

It's essential to the Christian faith. No resurrection, no salvation. No resurrection, no guarantee. No resurrection, no pardon for sin.

[ 25 : 26 ] No resurrection, no right standing before God. It's essential. I wish I had known when I became a father that all of my life would be preparing for the furied, frenzied, night before events, putting things together.

It doesn't matter whether it's Legos, which sometimes happen the day after, whether it's Christmas morning or even putting stuff in an Easter basket to give children. I find myself the night before trying to assemble various things and if you've ever put together a Lego set and ripped open the bag and heard that terrible sound of that one piece hitting the floor and then going who knows where.

But when you assemble that Lego, whether it's an Avengers spaceship and you realize it's not all black, but I've had to borrow a Kelly green piece from another set to assemble it so it's all black and then there's one green piece.

Or a small kitchen where I've dropped a screw and lost a screw. Instead of them being silver, there's one that's copper instead. Maybe you've even lost that screw and you've held that thing together with tape and you present it and say, it still works.

That kitchen might work, but the gospel doesn't work if we pull out the resurrection of Christ. It is essential. We cannot pick and choose what we discard and what we believe.

[ 27 : 02 ] It's very tempting though. We want all the benefits of Christ. We want all the sayings, the example, the love, the kindness, the gentleness, all of that. And we want to throw away the weird stuff.

And if we're honest, the resurrection is a little bit of the weird stuff. We can rally behind helping others, being humble, as long as we're talking about other people. We can get behind that stuff.

We don't get any of that without the resurrection. It's essential. If we agree with the critics who wrote, a historical fact which involves the resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable.

We parrot back the question, do we really need the resurrection? Do we really want the resurrection? We know magic doesn't exist. We don't need mythologies.

But remember, without the resurrection, there's no gospel at all. That's why we need the resurrection. The French reformer that you were supposed to learn about in high school, John Calvin, said this, the resurrection is the most important article of our faith.

[ 28 : 14 ] Without it, the hope of eternal life is extinguished. No resurrection, no gospel. No resurrection, no faith.

No resurrection, no hope. The resurrection is reliable. We need it because all of Jesus' actions, everything that he said, and everything that we hold dear in the Christian faith depends upon it.

But if we're honest, that doesn't minimize the fact that we all struggle with doubt and we might wrestle with this. We might wrestle with the resurrection. The beauty of the gospel of John, if you spend time reading it, is you realize that it's raw and it's honest.

It doesn't whitewash people. John paints himself in not the best light. He refers to himself as the beloved disciple because he doesn't want to insert himself because he wants us to focus on what Jesus has said and done.

But that doesn't minimize the fact that John struggles himself. Think about how he's written about himself. He lost the foot race. He was scared.

- [ 29 : 27 ] He didn't understand. And then he believed but didn't understand. how all of scripture came to this moment. It's a struggle for him. It's a struggle for us if we're honest.
- If you're new to Christianity or exploring the claims of Christianity or you got roped into here with the promise of a lunch afterwards, I'm sorry. I hope your lunch is good. But I stand with you.
- I remember what it was like to not believe the Christian faith. And sometimes when we come to something like this, we can sing these songs and we don't know them.
- We don't know the words. We don't know the tunes. We don't know the men, women part. That might seem odd to us. All of this might seem weird and confusing. We're glad that you're here. Know that Christianity is not a thing that just you do because your parents did.
- It's not a club that you enter into. But you have to wrestle with the resurrection yourself. It's okay to ask questions. It's okay to be honest about doubts.
- [ 30 : 34 ] It's okay to look out and say, hey, I'm not sure the Christianity thing is actually going to benefit me. I've been there with you. There's real cost.
- Both in your family, in your job, your neighborhood, people might think it's weird. Remember that that doesn't matter if it's true.
- If it's true, it demands everything and we can't explain stuff away. Yeah, maybe we struggle with those doubts. Maybe it might seem irrational.
- But is it irrational to think that Jesus fell asleep and then in his emaciated state dehydrated, he rolls away a stone? Is that rational?
- Is it rational to think that the Roman soldiers would face the death penalty to help out a bunch of oddballs? Is it rational to think that the Jews would steal the body?
- [ 31 : 33 ] In fact, they should have brought the body out and held it before everyone to say, he's really dead. It's all a lie. Is that rational? What about if it wasn't really him?
- It was just some other guy. Is that rational when then John records he comes back to Mary who doesn't look so good in this text and says, that's really you or Thomas.
- I'm not really going to believe but recognizes it's him and says, I won't believe until I can touch with my own hands. It's okay to struggle with doubt. It's okay to struggle with that. It's okay to ask questions.
- It's okay to wrestle with it. The Christian C.S. Lewis writes, there's a tendency in our day to only believe something is good and something is true.
- But what if it was both? What if it was good? The resurrection secures the good news. What if it was true? May we believe it as John will say.
- [ 32 : 39 ] The resurrection of Jesus Christ confirms the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word on this Resurrection Sunday.
- We ask that you might work faith into our hearts to believe it. Whether we've believed it for a long, long time or we're struggling with doubts this morning, may you show us by the power that raised Christ from the dead that now lives in your people to believe your word and to see the truth of John's testimony to the resurrection.
- We pray in Christ's name. Amen.