

What Is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Today is Resurrection Sunday—Easter Sunday, the day that we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Many of us have heard dozens of messages on the importance of Jesus' resurrection. Yet I would suggest that there are some things about the resurrection of Christ that we probably don't know or understand.

Today I want to define as closely as I can exactly what the resurrection of Christ was. We've all heard messages about things related to Jesus' resurrection but perhaps not too many specifically focused on the resurrection itself. I hope to fill in some gaps in our understanding of this important topic today.

This is an important topic for several reasons.

First, it's important because the word of God asserts that it is true; it's a historical fact. Since it's true, we are obligated to affirm it and try to understand it.

Second, it's important because Jesus could not be the savior if he had not risen from the dead. Our faith would be empty and we would be most miserable if Jesus had not risen from the dead. We would have no hope of salvation or eternal life in heaven without Jesus' resurrection.

Third, it's important because salvation depends on a personal belief in Jesus' resurrection. We must confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that he has risen from the dead if we want to be saved. You can't be a Christian if you don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

So this is an important topic, and we should strive to understand it as thoroughly as possible. Resurrection Sunday is a good day to talk about the resurrection of Jesus.

What is the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

I. Resurrection is a “standing up.”

- A. The biblical word “resurrection” (ἀνάστασις) is built on the word “to stand.” Perhaps the most literal way to understand the term is “to stand up, to stand again.”

In the Bible the word has the general sense of “to raise up,” “to awaken,” or “to recover.”¹

- B. Resurrection as typically used in the Bible refers to rising from the dead.

1. We find resurrection in the OT.

The oldest book in the OT—Job—mentions resurrection.

Job 19:25–26 For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God,

Other OT authors assert the resurrection.

Isaiah 26:19 Your dead shall live; Together with my dead body they shall arise. ... the earth shall cast out the dead.

Daniel 12:2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.

2. But of course most of our information about resurrection comes from the NT.

a) During his earthly ministry, Jesus raised several people from the dead, e.g., Jairus’ daughter and Lazarus.

b) Jesus predicted his own death and resurrection several times before those events happened.

¹ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 60.

Here are a few predictions of Jesus' resurrection (just from Matthew):

Matthew 16:21 ... *Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.*

Matthew 17:23 *and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up.* ...

Matthew 20:19 *and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again.*”

Matthew 27:63 *saying, “Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise.’*

The gospel accounts record many examples of Jesus foretelling of his own death and resurrection: Mark 8:31, 9:9, 31, 10:34, 14:58; Luke 9:22, 18:33; John 2:19–21

The NT records that Jesus fulfilled these prophecies; he “stood up” from the dead. His dead body was laid in a tomb after the crucifixion, and a short time later, his living body came out of the tomb.

In fact, one of the reasons we believe in Jesus is that he fulfilled these prophecies. What he said would happen did happen; that’s an indication that he was telling the truth.

Trans: Resurrection is rising from the dead, a teaching we find in both the OT and the NT. Jesus said that he would rise again after his death, and he did.

II. Resurrection is the restoration of physical life from death.

- A. Resurrection is a *physical* experience. In resurrection, a dead body comes back to life.
- B. Jesus' resurrection assumes that he actually, physically, literally died. His physical life came to an end.

One of the most often repeated claims of the NT is that Jesus died. In fact, the death of Christ by crucifixion is likely one of the most well-attested facts from ancient history. Even atheistic, secular historians have to admit that all the evidence points to the fact that Jesus died when the Roman soldiers crucified him. You really cannot dispute that historical fact.

- C. What people do dispute, of course, is the idea that Jesus rose from the dead.
 - 1. We must admit that, when Roman soldiers crucified someone, the victim *normally* died and remained dead.
 - a) Roman executioners were fairly good at their jobs; they knew how to kill people. Only one time, in all recorded history, did a person who died through crucifixion come back to life.
 - b) And Jesus' burial was rather unusual. The Romans typically left the dead body on the cross until it decomposed and fell to the ground. Then wild animals would dispose of the decayed body and it would eventually disappear.
 - c) Part of the humiliation of crucifixion was that the dead body would not have the dignity of burial. The dead body would be treated with contempt by allowing it to decay above ground.
 - d) Of course, we know that that did not happen to Jesus' body. Joseph of Arimathea requested the body of Jesus, took it down from the cross, and put it in his own tomb.

2. Some people try to redefine Jesus' resurrection. They deny the *physical* resurrection of Jesus and affirm a different sort of resurrection—a symbolic or spiritual resurrection. They suggest that Jesus' disciples kept his teachings or his moral standards alive. Jesus' resurrection was not a physical, bodily resurrection but a continuation of his teachings.

Of course, that is not at all what Jesus meant when he said that he would rise from the dead. He was not talking about a spiritual or symbolic resurrection or the continuation of his influence after his death.

3. The NT is clear that Jesus' resurrection was physical; it was a bodily resurrection. Jesus' dead body came back to life and left the tomb. This fact is one of the main teachings of the Gospel.

1 Corinthians 15:3–4 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures

4. Many people saw Jesus after the resurrection. The NT includes about 15 such appearances. Hundreds of people saw Jesus alive after his death, including hostile opponents to the Gospel, such as Paul. People conversed with Jesus and even touched him after the resurrection.

Trans: So it's simply wrong to claim that the resurrection was not physical. Jesus resurrection was not merely the continuation of his teachings or his influence after his death. Jesus' resurrection was physical life returning to his dead body. Anyone who denies the literal, physical resurrection of Jesus is simply not a Christian.

III. Resurrection is a victory/triumph.

- A. When Jesus died, it looked as if he had failed. It looked like death had conquered him; he was a *victim*, not a *victor*. His death on a cruel Roman cross seemed to have brought all his claims to nothing. It seemed to have proved that he was a fraud.

Lu 24:21 *we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. ...*

Jesus' followers had believed that he was the promised Messiah. They believed that he would bring in a kingdom. The disciples were hoping to sit at Jesus right and left hand in his kingdom. They had high hopes that Jesus would be the one to fulfill all those OT prophecies about the restoration of Israel.

All their hopes and expectations came crumbling down when Jesus died. They were exceedingly sorrowful and disappointed after the arrest, crucifixion, and death of Jesus.

Quote: A perfect life characterized by divine claims end[ed] in its prime in a cruel and shameful death.²

And had Jesus' remained on the cross or in that tomb, that would have been the end of Christianity. We would not be here today. Jesus' life would have ended in pain, sorrow, humiliation, and disgrace. We never would have heard anything about him. There would be no church, no NT, probably no western civilization.

- B. Jesus' resurrection was a victory/triumph over death.

1. All those hopes and dreams came back to life when he rose from the dead. His resurrection proved that he was whom he claimed to be—the Messiah, the king of Israel.

John 20:20 *[Jesus] shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.*

2. Death has lost its sting because of Jesus' resurrection. Death is a defeated foe.

Isa 25:8 *He will swallow up death forever, And the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces; ...*

² ISBE

1 Co 15:54–57. ⁵⁵ *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?* ⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.* ⁵⁷ *But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Re 20:14 *Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.*

John Donne, in his famous poem, *Death, Be Not Proud*, says this:

One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

We have the hope and confidence that death shall die because of Jesus' victorious resurrection.

C. Jesus' resurrection was a victory over the devil.

Colossians 2:15 *Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.*

Heb 2:14 ... *through death [Jesus destroyed] him who had the power of death, that is, the devil*

1 John 3:8 ... *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.*

Quote: There is no tribunal so magnificent, no throne so stately, no show of triumph so distinguished, ... as is the [cross] on which Christ has subdued death and the devil.³

Trans: If Christ was not raised from the dead, he was merely another one of the thousands of people crucified by the Roman Empire. But if he rose from the dead, he is the *victor*, not a *victim*, a *conqueror*, not a *casualty*. We affirm again today, as all Christians have for nearly 2,000 years, that Jesus was victorious over death and the devil, as proven by his resurrection.

³ John Calvin, commentary on Col 2:13-15.

IV. Resurrection produces a glorified body.

A. The NT records several occasions on which Jesus raised people from the dead. On those occasions, a dead body was restored to normal physical life. E.g., Lazarus or Jairus' daughter—they experienced a limited, purely physical resurrection. They had the old physical body brought back to life.

B. But Jesus' resurrection was a bit different. His resurrection was not merely the restoration of his physical life. After his resurrection, Jesus had a glorified body. I.e., it was physical, but it had supernatural properties.

C. Jesus' resurrection was the first of its kind. No one else has been resurrected in the same manner that Jesus was.

1 Corinthians 15:20 *But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become **the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.***

Colossians 1:18 *And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, **the firstborn from the dead**, that in all things He may have the preeminence.*

D. In the future when all believers are resurrected, it will not merely be a restoration of physical life. We will have a glorified body—a perfect physical body but one that also has supernatural properties.

Philippians 3:21 *[He] will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, ...*

E. The resurrection body is one that is fit for the eternal state; it's a heavenly body. It's a body adapted to eternal life, life in heaven with God. That's the kind of body that Jesus had after his resurrection, and that's the kind of body all believers will have after our resurrection.

1 Cor 15:42f *... The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. ... 49 And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.*

F. We should note before going on that unbelievers will also experience a resurrection, but it will not be a resurrection unto eternal life. Their bodies will be eternal, but they will be suited for eternal judgment, not eternal life.

Daniel 12:2 *And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.*

Which resurrection will you experience?

V. Resurrection completed the earthly work of Jesus Christ.

A. As I mentioned earlier, Jesus prophesied that he would go to Jerusalem, be shamefully treated, be killed, and then rise again.

Mark 9:31 *For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day."*

Mark 10:34 *and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."*

Part of God's plan was that he would "rise the third day." Jesus' death was not the end of God's plan. The completion of the plan required the resurrection.

B. You may remember that Jesus said, "It is finished" shortly before he died on the cross. What was finished was Jesus' payment for our sin. Our debt was paid in full by the sacrificial death of Christ.

C. But the resurrection was the final act in Jesus' earthly ministry. Without it, we would assume that Jesus was not whom he claimed to be. Without the resurrection, we would not even know that Jesus had paid the price for our sin when he died on the cross.

D. The resurrection proved that Jesus' claims were true.

Romans 1:4 *[Jesus is] declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*

No doubt, there are more things we could say about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But the things I've mentioned today are, I think, very significant facts about Jesus' resurrection.

Most importantly for us, we can be saved because of Jesus' resurrection. Rom 10:9
And we are here today especially to affirm and celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. He did not stay on that cross. He did not remain in that tomb. The tomb is empty. We serve a risen savior. That gives us confidence for today and a living hope for the future. He is risen; he is risen indeed.