

Many people will say, *"I believe in the resurrection; I just don't understand it."* Pollster George Gallup said even 84% of people who never go to church believe Jesus rose from the dead. It's a historical fact. It wasn't done in secret. The whole city of Jerusalem and the whole Roman Empire knew about it. It was news. If the media had been there, they'd have had it live...and it wouldn't have been "fake news."

There are at least 15 historical references to Jesus meeting people, touching people, and talking with people after He was crucified. One time He cooked breakfast for some people. One time He talked to about 500 people after He had risen from the dead. A lot of people saw Him.

Jesus did rise from the grave. He is who He said He was. He has the power He said He had. He keeps the promises He makes. So what? Does the resurrection matter? What difference does it make? It matters for three reasons.

**My past can be forgiven.** Have you ever been halfway through a project and wished you could start over? Many times we feel that way about life. We get halfway through and wish we could start over. We've all done things we wish we hadn't done, said things we wish we hadn't said, and thought things we wish we hadn't thought. We all have regrets...lots of them. We all feel bad about things. All of us have guilt. One pastor received this letter:

*I'm 31 years old and divorced, though I fought the divorce bitterly. I feel bad. I have no hope for my future. Often I go home and cry, but there's no one holding me when I cry. Nobody cares. Nothing changes, and I continue to fail. I'm stressed out emotionally, and I feel I'm on the verge of a collapse. Something is very wrong. But I feel so hurt and embittered that I can scarcely react or relate to others anymore. I feel as if I'm going to have to sit out the rest of my life in the penalty box.*

Do you know someone like that? They can't get on with the present or the future because they're stuck in the past. Guilt or regret ties them down. Sometimes they let a former relationship mess up their current relationship. They say, "I guess I'll just have to live with this the rest of my life."

But here's the good news. Colossians 2:24 says, *"He has forgiven all our sins and canceled every debt we owe. Christ has done away with it by nailing it to the cross."* This is God's pardon program. Jesus nailed it all to the cross. He paid for my guilt. That means I don't have to pay for it. He was hung for my hang-ups. Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross, so I can quit nailing myself to the cross. He wants to forgive your past. He wants to cancel every debt you owe—emotional debts, relational debts, all your sins. All canceled.

**2. My present problems can be managed.** One of the biggest complaints that you hear from people today is: "My life is out of control." *I feel powerless to change the situation...I feel powerless to break a bad habit...I feel powerless to save a relationship...I feel powerless to get out of debt...I feel powerless to manage my schedule.*

What they need is a power greater than themselves. We were never meant to live this life on your own power. God wants to have a relationship with you. Here's the good news. Ephesians 1:19-20 says, *"and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places."*

The same power that enabled Jesus to rise from death will help you rise above your problems. The same power God used at the Resurrection 2,000 years ago can be used in your life right now. You don't know what the future holds. I don't either. I don't know what's going to happen next year, next month, next week, even next hour.

Two old friends met each other on the street one day. One looked sad and almost on the verge of tears. His friend asked, "What's happened to you, my old friend?" The sad fellow said, "Let me tell you. Three weeks ago, my uncle died and left me forty thousand dollars." "That's a lot of money," said his friend. "But you see," the sad man continued, "two weeks ago, a cousin I never knew died, and left me eighty-five thousand dollars, free and clear." The friend replied, "That sounds like you have been very blessed." "You don't understand!" the sad fellow interrupted. "Last week my great-aunt passed away. I inherited almost a quarter of a million from her."

The friend was really confused and said, "Then, why are you so sad?" "This week I didn't get anything!"

Isn't that like us? Always looking for something more. Looking for the second shoe to fall. I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow and neither do you. But it doesn't matter, because even though it's out of my control, it's not out of God's. He will give me the power to face it. Philippians 4:13 says, *"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."*

God says, "I want to help you out." Maybe you came crawling in here this morning. You've had a tough week. God wants you to hear Him say to you: "Don't give up."

No problem is too big for God. No situation is hopeless if you'll turn it over to him.

This isn't, "I am ready for anything through the power of positive thinking"? It's also not, "I am ready for anything because I psyched myself up"? No.

It's "I am ready for anything through the strength of Christ, who lives in me."

**3. My future can be secure.** Have you heard these famous last words? *"I wonder if it's loaded. I'll look down the barrel and see."* *"I can beat it!"* *"Look at this wire hanging down into the street! I'll throw it to one side."* *"I wonder how much electricity these wires carry. Let me touch this one and check."* *"I wonder whether this rope will hold me!"* *"Listen! That's the train whistle. Step on the gas, and we'll beat it across."* *"That firecracker must have gone out. I'll light it again."* *"Watch me skate past the 'danger' sign. I'll bet I can touch it."* *"It's no fun swimming here. I'm going out beyond the life lines."*

One of the universal problems we've all got is death. Everybody dies. I'm going to die someday and so are you. Only a fool would go through life unprepared for something he or she knows is inevitable. It doesn't make sense. But sometimes we get so busy in the here and now, we don't stop to think about what's going to come.

People don't like to talk about death. If you don't believe me, invite your friends over, sit them down, serve them some coffee and pie, and say, "Let's talk about death." See what happens.

*U.S. News & World Report* ran a cover article called "The Rekindling of Hell." It says more people believe in heaven and hell than ever before in American history. *Why?* Because people are wondering, "What's going to happen?"

There are a lot of misconceptions about heaven. Most of them come from movies with bad theology: *Heaven Can Wait; The Sixth Sense; All Dogs Go To Heaven; Always*. These are cute little ideas of what somebody thinks heaven is going to be like. But what is it really going to be like?

We need to check it out with the Source. When you go to the Bible, what does God say it's really going to be like in heaven and hell?

Number one, heaven is a perfect place. Total love, total peace, total joy, total perfection. No sin, no mistakes, no evil, no bad, no errors. It's perfect in every area.

The second thing the Bible says is that in order for you to go there, you have to be perfect, because only perfection can exist in heaven.

You say, "Well, thanks a lot. That leaves me out." Yeah, it leaves me out too. You say, "I'll never make it if I have to be perfect." Right! That's the point. Neither will I. Neither will any of us, because none of us is perfect; we've all messed up.

There are only two ways the Bible says you can get to heaven. Plan A is to earn it. That's the performance plan. To earn it you only have to do this: never sin and always do what's right for the entire time that you live. Just be perfect.

Since none of us qualify for Plan A, God came up with Plan B, which is this: You trust Jesus Christ when He says, *"I am the way, the truth and the life"* (John 14:6). Jesus was the only perfect person who ever lived, because He was God. He came so we could know what God is like. By trusting and establishing a relationship with him, you get in on His goodness.

Ron Dunn (**picture**) a preacher from Texas told about taking his young son to a carnival for his birthday. His son picked six boys to go with him, so Ron bought a roll of tickets. Every line he'd come up to, he'd pull off seven tickets and give them to all the kids. When they got to the Ferris wheel, all of a sudden there was this eighth little kid with his hand out.

Ron said, "Who are you?" The kid said, "I'm Johnny." Ron said, "Who are you, Johnny?" Johnny said, "I'm your son's new friend. And he said you would give me a ticket." Then, Ron asked the question:, "Do you think I gave him one? Absolutely."

When you get to heaven, you'll say, "God, I can't get in on my own effort. The only way I can get into heaven is because I'm a friend of your Son, Jesus." John 17:3 says, *"This is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."* It's what the Bible says. Jesus has already paid your way to heaven. This is news you can use.

**Conclusion:** Some of the greatest skeptics of all time have been convinced by the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. These include literary geniuses like C.S. Lewis, lawyers like Simon Greenleaf, cold case detectives like J. Warner Wallace, historians like Will Durant, journalists like Lee Strobel, and many more.

The historical evidence for the resurrection is remarkable enough to persuade some of the greatest minds in history. But the resurrection of Jesus is not just some historical event from 2,000 years ago. The truth of the resurrection has power for your life today (Philippians 3:10). Three closing thoughts and we're done.

***Jesus' resurrection offers answers for doubters.*** Doubt isn't a sin. Even some of the apostles of Jesus doubted (Matthew 28:17). The book of Jude encourages us to be merciful towards those who doubt (1:22). I went through a

period of deep doubt in my early twenties. The evidence for the resurrection was significant in helping me maintain my faith.

Part of what motivated Dr. Michael Licona (**picture**) to research and write his massive book on the resurrection, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*, was to find answers to his own doubts. Knowing and experiencing the truth of the resurrection can help those who doubt.

**Jesus' resurrection offers hope for grievers.** Like taxes, death is inevitable. We have all lost loved ones. For the Christian, the resurrection offers us hope in our grief. The Apostle Paul writes: *"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words"* (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

**Jesus' resurrection offers forgiveness for sinners.** Guilt is a universal human experience. Naturalists try to explain it away as some vestige of Darwinian evolution. It's a trick, some claim, to get us to live in peaceful relationship for the sake of propagating the species.

The Christian has a different perspective: we feel guilty because we are guilty. Guilt isn't illusory. We've wronged God, and have wronged other human beings. The solution is not to deny the reality of guilt, or to rely upon human effort, but to embrace the forgiveness only Jesus offers.

As the Apostle Peter said: *"The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging Him on a tree. God exalted Him at His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins"* (Acts 5:30-31). It's Jesus' resurrection that offers answers for doubters, hope for grievers, and forgiveness for sinners.

If you're not a Christian yet, will you at least consider the evidence for the resurrection? You might be surprised by its strength. More importantly, you'll see how the truth of the resurrection truth can transform your life.

One final word and I'm done. Maybe you've seen the billboard with a picture of Jesus hanging on the cross. Underneath the picture are three words: *"It's your move."* Jesus died on the cross. It's your move now. Jesus rose from the dead. It's your move now.

God has answered your deepest questions with the simplicity of an empty tomb. On this Easter morning I declare to you that Jesus Christ is alive.

What will you say? What difference does it make to you? Will you give Him your heart and your life? Will you trust Him as Lord and Savior? ***It's your move...***