

Easter Sunday 2005

1 Corinthians 15:13-20 [13] But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: [14] And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. [15] Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. [16] For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: [17] And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. [18] Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. [19] If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. [20] But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

IF/THEN statements – Christianity literally hangs on Christ's resurrection!

What is so important about Easter? It proves that Jesus was who He claimed to be – He was God in the flesh! Of all the claims that Jesus made, the claim that He would rise from the death was the most audacious ... and He made it several times. Sometimes He said it subtly, sometimes He said it outright ...

John 2:19 Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

Matthew 20:18-19 Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.

It was Jesus' claim to be the Son of God that offended the Jewish religious hierarchy. That's why they had him arrested. Jesus actually went through six trials that night – before Annas, Caiaphas (high priest), the Sanhedrin (religious Supreme Court), Pilate (governor of Jerusalem), Herod (governor of Galilee), then back to Pilate. What did they find to accuse him of? Nothing! They even brought in people with phony charges, but those didn't stick. Finally they convicted him on one count: claiming to be the Son of God. That's why Jesus went to the cross!

Everyone who has ever been presented with Jesus has already made some kind of decision about who he is. You either believe he's a liar, or a lunatic, or Lord. It can't just be: "I believe he was a good teacher." He couldn't be just a good teacher, because then He would not say, "I'm God, and I'm the only way to heaven." A good person would not say that unless it was the truth.

Jesus allowed himself to be put on trial and crucified just so there would be no doubt about who He was. When He was hanging on the cross, the skeptics and critics mocked him, "If you're the Son of God, why don't you just come down from that cross and show that you're really God?" Jesus had something more spectacular planned – "I'm going to let you bury me for three days, then I'll come back to life to prove I am who I said I am."

Matthew 27:40 And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

Easter is the good news about Jesus Christ our Lord, who died for our sins and then rose from the dead. Four historical records say he showed himself to 500 people at one gathering. Can you imagine witnessing his death and then seeing him walking around Jerusalem three days later? That clinched it! The city of Jerusalem was the very last place on earth Christianity could have started if Jesus' tomb remained occupied!

Harvard law professor Simon Greenleaf, who lectured for years on how to break down testimony and determine whether or not a witness is lying, said: "The annals of military warfare afford scarcely an example of [such] heroic constancy ... and unflinching courage. It is therefore impossible that [the disciples] could have persisted in affirming [these] truths ... had not Jesus actually risen from the dead, and had they not known this fact as certainly as they knew any other fact."

Anyone can claim to be God, but how do you prove it? You prove it by rising from the dead! When Jesus came out of the grave, that one act validated everything else He ever said about himself. The founders of other religions said, "Follow me – and I'll show you the way to truth." Jesus said, "Follow me – I AM the way, the truth and the life!"

Romans 1:4 And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:

IF Jesus rose from the dead THEN Christianity is true!

IF Jesus rose from the dead THEN life does not end at the grave!

IF Jesus rose from the dead THEN you need to do something about Him!

In one sense, Jesus Christ is still on trial. He's on trial in the heart and mind of every person who has not yet acknowledged him as God, and as the Savior of the world.

What's your verdict? Easter really boils down to only two issues. One, is Jesus who He says He is? (Lord, lunatic, or liar) Two, if He is who He says he is, when are you going to do what He says to do?

What's your verdict? Today, you sit in judgment of Jesus Christ. You must decide whether He was who He said or not.

Matthew 27:22 Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified.

Are you willing to gamble your life that He was wrong?

TOMBSTONE INSCRIPTION:

"The first date records when he entered into time. The second date marks his exit. The children he raised, the education he attained, the goals he reached, and the people he affected are all encapsulated by one hyphen between two dates. All the things he overcame, all the men and women he motivated, all the laughter, all the tears, all he accomplished is now seen as a simple little slash between two dates."

The life we have is a hyphen locked between two dates. It's a gap between two appointments. The question is not how long that gap is, the question is answered by what is in the gap between the dates.

Jesus says in Luke 12:15 that a man's life doesn't consist of the abundance of possessions he owns. He said that because He understood man's feeble attempt to fill in the gap would eventually lead to things that didn't matter.

We say, "He who ever dies with most toys wins." I promise you when you meet your appointment with that second date you are not going to care how many toys you have. It won't matter what kind of car you drove. You won't be concerned with the size of your office or the title on your business card. All these things become meaningless on that day.

When you stand before God and He shines his light on your life another name will appear on that little blank between your two appointments ... and the name that appears will be the master you served. People spend their lives filling that blank with many unimportant things.

But for some people the blank is filled with the precious name of Jesus. It is a name written in blood that fills up the blank between the two dates that mark our lives. It is a name that supersedes death, hell and the grave and a name that entitles you safe passage into the presence of God, and citizenship in a place called Heaven. It is a name that marks you as a friend and not an enemy, as family and not a foreigner.

It is the name of the only person that has ever had dominion over death. His name is Jesus ... and He is risen!