

# RISEN FOR REAL

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## The Key

The resurrection of Jesus—His return from the dead—is a key element of the Gospel message. It was central to the preaching of the apostles. Their credibility—indeed, their lives—stood or fell on the resurrection.

When it was time for their mission to begin, Peter stood in their midst and said, *“So now we must choose a replacement for Judas from among the men who were with us the entire time we were traveling with the Lord Jesus—from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus’ resurrection.”* (Acts 1:21-22)

Do you see? This is how they identified themselves and their mission: “as a witness of Jesus’ resurrection.” Paul, an apostle of Christ who had experienced a dramatic conversion to faith, wrote (1 Corinthians 15:3-4): *“I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and He was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.”* The substitutionary death and subsequent resurrection of Jesus are still what makes the message both *good* and *news*.

Jesus’ resurrection was key for at least three reasons: it was a miracle, it was a fulfillment of prophecy, and it was a promise to those who would trust in Him.

## A Bona Fide Miracle

Among all the miracles cataloged in the history of humankind, the resurrection of Jesus is the Mount Everest. Even the magicians of Egypt’s Pharaoh could duplicate some of the miracles of Moses (though not all), but no one else has ever risen from the dead by his own power.

And though some have predicted their own resurrection, only Jesus Christ has ever pulled it off. The Buddha, Confucius, and Mohammed are all still in their tombs. Jesus’ grave was emptied, in just three days, exactly as He had predicted. This was a unique miracle.

Because of its uniqueness, Christ’s resurrection has been the target of much disdain. Many have risen to oppose its validity, only to succumb to their own mortality and eventually be silenced. One of America’s Founding Fathers, Thomas Jefferson, had such an aversion to all things miraculous that he designed his own Bible, with every mention of miracles, especially

Jesus' resurrection, deleted—leaving the form of morality, but lacking its compelling and sustaining power.

A Christianity stripped of the miraculous, particularly the resurrection of Jesus, is only the husk of religion—ethics and morality that is more dependent on man than on God, with only a shadow of hope—and is really no better than any other religion. The distinction of Biblical Christianity is not simply that miracles happen, but particularly that Jesus Christ died for us and yet lives today, and is able to bend natural law to suit His purposes.

Death is the natural end of human beings. We will all die. It is more certain than taxes. There are no loopholes, and no extensions. But Jesus Christ has the command even of death. It could not conquer Him. It need not conquer you.

A Church without the Miracle Worker (Jesus) and His miracles is not the Church that Jesus is building, and not a people with Good News to tell.

In the Book of the Revelation (1:18), Jesus said, *"I am the Living One. I died, but look—I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave."* THAT is good news!

### **Prophecy Fulfilled**

This wondrous event did not take place in a vacuum. Angels even appeared to announce it after the fact, but before it took place, it was firmly anchored to written prophecies, both ancient and contemporary—predictions to which people were not afraid to sign their names.

A contemporary of Abraham, the father of the Hebrew people, whose name was Job, experienced horrific trauma in his life—suddenly losing his family, his holdings, and his health—courageously persisted in his faith, because, as he put it (Job 19:25-27), *"As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and He will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! I will see Him for myself. Yes, I will see Him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought!"* If Job could get through all that, you can get through your troubles, too, with a similar courageous persistence of faith!

The Old Testament hymnwriter, King David of Israel (who himself prefigured the Messiah who was to come) sang this verse (quoted by both Jesus and Paul): *"For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your holy one to rot in the grave. You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever."* (Psalm 16:10)

In another place (Psalm 49:15), he wrote: *"But as for me, God will redeem my life. He will snatch me from the power of the grave."* And also (Psalm 71:20), *"You have allowed me to suffer much hardship, but you will restore me to life again and lift me up from the depths of the earth."*

Thus, physical resurrection was not a new theme for the Jewish people in Jesus' day. Of course, even then, there were some who struggled with or refused to subscribe to a God of such miracle-working power. Perhaps that was at least part of the reason that many followers turned away from Jesus when He began to speak of His impending death, since, in their minds, that was a fate from which there could be no recovery.

Just imagine a man who can speak freely of his own death with certainty, with clarity, with specificity, and with hope! Even today, after 2,000 years of Christian influence, such a one would be hard to find.

But Jesus did not dance around the subject.

Matthew recorded His predictions (as did each of the Gospel writers). He began with veiled imagery: *"For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights."* (Matthew 12:40) But later He spoke clearly: *"From then on Jesus began to tell His disciples plainly that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem, and that He would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day He would be raised from the dead."* (Matthew 16:21) (Also in 17:23, 20:19, and 26:32)

Paul went so far as to describe Jesus' resurrection as the *proof* of His deity. To the people of Athens he said, *"For He has set a day for judging the world with justice by the Man He has appointed, and He proved to everyone who this is by raising Him from the dead."* (Acts 17:31) To the church in Rome he wrote, *"He was shown to be the Son of God when He was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit"* (Romans 1:4). Marvin Vincent, in his scholarly *Word Studies in the New Testament*, explains that the Greek word that Paul used to express "shown to be" literally means "was openly designated." In other words, Jesus' resurrection was powerful evidence that He was (and is) the Son of God, the Messiah—God in human form—fulfilling Biblical prophecies and providing divine salvation.

## **Great Promise**

The resurrection of Jesus was more than an historical event—it was a transition, a threshold in time. The condition of the human race and its destiny were different in the moment before and the moment after Jesus was raised.

Listen, as I read the narrative from Matthew's account (28:1-10, 16-20). Try to look beyond the factual events—miraculous as they were—to see their impact and their import:

<sup>1</sup> *Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb.*

<sup>2</sup> Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. <sup>3</sup> His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. <sup>4</sup> The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint. <sup>5</sup> Then the angel spoke to the women. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying. <sup>7</sup> And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Remember what I have told you."

<sup>8</sup> The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel's message. <sup>9</sup> And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to him, grasped his feet, and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid! Go tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there."

<sup>16</sup> Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted!

<sup>18</sup> Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth.

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

A great earthquake. Glistening angels. Fainting soldiers. An empty tomb, where just hours before a dead body had been sealed and guarded.

It was all too much to take in! Too much to believe!

Did they really see what they thought they saw? Did they hear what they thought they heard? Oh, the wonder! They worshipped Him, though some doubted.

Jesus' resurrection was a promise from God for us, sealed with power, witnessed by multiple eyes and ears for almost six consecutive weeks.

It is a promise of the extension of God's power to us. Therefore, Paul earnestly prayed for his readers: "I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 1:19-20)

It is a promise of our own resurrection in the future. "God will raise us from the dead by his power, just as he raised our Lord from the dead." (1 Corinthians 6:14)

It is the promise of a new life here and now. "Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives." (Romans 6:4)

Our hope as Christians is tied to this reality; without the resurrection of Jesus, we have no hope. *“If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins.”* (1 Corinthians 15:17)

But Jesus *did* rise. And your faith is *not* useless. And you have been acquitted, for Jesus paid your debt. The One who is the Resurrection and the Life now says, *“Peace to you.”*

*Again he said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you”* (John 20:21).

You have been sent with a message. You may not have a credential to preach. You may not have a formal position in the church. But you have been sent. And you must give an account for your commission. And you may do so with peace.

Have you embraced the *miracle* of the resurrection of Jesus?

Have you recognized that He fulfilled *prophecy* by rising from the dead, proving His divine Sonship and authority?

Have you received the *promise* and hope of His resurrection (and yours!)? Are you living like one who has already died and returned to talk about it?

The resurrection of Jesus is what makes the message we bring both *good* and *news*. So I ask you, *“What is the character of your message—the message of your life?”* Is it good? Is it news? Are you good news to your world?