

April Fool's and the Resurrection

By Pastor Kelly Sensenig

On this Easter day in 1700, English pranksters begin popularizing the annual tradition of April Fools' Day by playing practical jokes on each other. Although this day (April Fool's Day), also called All Fools' Day, has been celebrated for several centuries by different cultures, its exact origins remain a mystery. Some historians speculate that April Fools' Day dates back to 1582, when France switched from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar, as called for by the Council of Trent in 1563. People who were slow to get the news or failed to recognize that the start of the new year had moved to January 1. These people continued to celebrate beginning of the New Year during the last week of March through April 1 became the center of jokes and hoaxes.

Historians have also linked April Fools' Day to festivals such as Hilaria, which was celebrated in ancient Rome at the end of March and involved people dressing up in disguises. The Romans actually celebrated this festival on the 25th of March, in honor of Cybele (sibilee), the mother of the gods. There's also speculation that April Fools' Day was tied to the vernal equinox, or first day of spring in the Northern Hemisphere, when Mother Nature supposedly fooled people with changing, unpredictable weather.

Whatever the origin of this day, we know that some people still use this day as a time when they try and make others look like fools. In fact, this year, Easter falls on April Fool's Day and some will surely try and make Easter the center of jokes and call the resurrection of Christ nothing but a hoax.

So, on this Easter Day, I want to prove that the Resurrection of Christ is NOT FOOLISH and no Christian is a fool who believes in the resurrection of Christ. Actually, just the opposite is true. You are foolish if you reject the historical and Biblical record of Christ's death and resurrection. Of course, there are those who will tell you that they don't believe in the inspiration of the Bible and the record of Christ's resurrection. However, this makes no difference whatsoever regarding the FACT of Christ's resurrection.

There is overwhelming evidence that the New Testament is an inspired, accurate and trustworthy historical document. This is because of its internal evidence (the Bible has a consistent and coherent message), archeological evidence (proving the Bible corresponds to historical reality), and manuscript evidence (copies of Scripture written hundreds of years apart by different authors present the same truth and message), and the miraculous evidence of the fulfillment or prophecy regarding the birth of nations and the birth of Christ. Despite all of the evidence, many people are still reluctant to believe what it says unless there is also some independent, non-biblical testimony that substantiates the resurrection of Christ.

When I know the Bible is true; I also know the resurrection is true. Well, it should be noted that even secular writers and historians who lived close to Christ's day talked about Christ's resurrection. For instance, even a Roman historian named Tacitus and a Jewish historian named Josephus reported Jesus' death by crucifixion and resurrection. Probably the most important reference to Jesus outside the New Testament is the reporting on Emperor Nero's decision to blame the Christians for the fire that had destroyed Rome in A.D. 64.

The Roman historian Tacitus (56AD – 120- AD) wrote:

“Nero fastened the guilt . . . on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus (Christ), from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty (the cross) during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of . . . Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment (the resurrection of Christ), again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome.”

Historians suggest that Tacitus is here bearing indirect testimony to the conviction of the early church that the Christ who had been crucified had risen from the grave.

Perhaps the most remarkable reference to Jesus outside the Bible can be found in the writings of Josephus, a first century Jewish historian. Josephus wrote: “About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he . . . wrought surprising feats. . . . He was the Christ. When Pilate . . .condemned him to be crucified, those who had . . . come to love him did not give up their

affection for him. On the third day he appeared . . . restored to life. . . . And the tribe of Christians . . . has . . . not disappeared.'

Jesus rose from the dead. His death by crucifixion, along with accounts of His resurrection, appear in the writings of non-Christian historians of this period. In fact, Paul's conversion in the Road to Damascus, when seeing the resurrected Christ, is reported by early sources and eyewitness sources.

The claim of Jesus' disciples that Christ had been raised and had appeared to them is preserved in an ancient oral tradition that predates all of the New Testament writings and can be traced with certainty to the Jerusalem Church within just a few years of Jesus' crucifixion. Although these historical sources and others did not believe in the resurrection, their records demonstrate that the resurrection was certainly embraced and practiced by early apostolic Christianity.

I believe the resurrection of Christ is supported by the conclusions of historical investigation. Of course, the evidence the Bible gives is overwhelming evidence that He rose from the dead and is the only evidence I need! As we get into our study, let us remember that the resurrection of Christ sets Christianity apart from other religions. Friend, we are not a fool when believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.



It is not foolish to believe that Christ rose from the dead.

This is evident in four ways.

1. Because Christ's tomb was empty.

Matthew 28:1-10

“In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead *men*. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.”

Apparently the women did not know that the Sanhedrin had posted a guard at the tomb. They evidently went there to remember Jesus and also to anoint Jesus' corpse (Mark 16:1). They must NOT have known that it had been sealed either.

Please note that the angel did not roll back the stone to leave the Son of God out of the tomb. He had already risen from the dead. He did not need the stone rolled away to exit the tomb with his resurrection body.

John 20:26

“And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: *then* came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace *be* unto you.”

Jesus did not need to have the stone rolled away to exist the tomb. The angel rolled the stone away to prove that Jesus was no longer in the tomb.

Matthew Henry put it like this: “The angel's sitting upon the stone, after he rolled it away, shows a secure triumph over all the obstructions of Christ's resurrection. There he sat, defying all the powers of hell to roll the stone to the grave again.”

Matthew 28:6 records these words:

“He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”

These words have been treasured in the hearts of Christians for centuries. They have given us the reassurance that Jesus is alive. We not only know this from the RECORD of Scripture but from REALIZATION of His presence in our hearts and lives. Jesus rose from the dead to verify that He was our God, our Savior, and the only One who could give us everlasting Life in Heaven!

Some bones from one of Buddha’s fingers were sent as a gift to the emperor of China during the Tang dynasty. They were later forgotten about and then found in 1981. The finding was a sensation to Buddhists everywhere, and the bones are now visited by many Buddhists. If someone claimed to find a finger that belonged to Christ no Christians would believe him because our faith is founded on the fact that there is no finger to find since Christ rose from the dead. The TOMB was EMPTY!

Abraham Lincoln’s casket was opened in 1901 because it was feared that his body was not there. In a similar way, Christ’s tomb was opened to prove He is not there. Now what did they see in the tomb? The people saw the grave clothes lying on the stone shelf, still wrapped in the shape of the body.

John 20:5-7

“And he stooping down, *and looking in*, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.”

Jesus had passed through the graveclothes and left them behind as evidence that He was alive. They lay there like an empty cocoon. There was no sign of struggle, the graveclothes were not in disarray. Even the napkin (which had been wrapped around His face) was folded carefully in a place by itself. Of course, this discredits the theory that someone had stolen the body of Jesus. Robbers would not take time to fold a napkin and have the tomb in perfect order. Jesus’s dead body was wrapped in linen cloth containing aromatic spices mixed with a gummy substance called myrrh. The myrrh would have adhered closely to Jesus’ body, making it almost impossible for anyone stealing Jesus’ body to remove the linen.

As Reverend Michael Green says,

“No grave robbers would have been able to enact so remarkable a thing. Nor would it have entered the robber’s head. He would have simply taken the body, graveclothes and all.”

Matthew 28:11-15

“Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him *away* while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.”

It’s here where we read about a concocted plan or scam to try and discredit the resurrection of Jesus. It’s interesting that while the women were running to find the disciples and tell them of the Resurrection, another group was moving rapidly to counteract the truth. Satan immediately tried to counter and discredit the truth of Christ’s resurrection. The Jewish religious leaders who were against Christ gave the soldiers, who had guarded the tomb, a large sum of money and told them what to report to their superiors. The fabricated lie was that the disciples of Jesus had come during the night and had stolen away the body of Jesus while the soldiers were asleep. Of course, such a report would not have been well received by the officials for a soldier who fell asleep on guard duty would be put to death (Acts 12:19).

Nevertheless, this story was widely circulated among the Jews, even during the time of this writing, and many believed the disciples had really stolen Jesus’ body (Matt. 28:15). But the logic of the explanation does not hold up. If the soldiers were asleep, how would they have known what had happened to the body of Jesus? And why would they admit “sleeping on the job” if it met their death? Also, the disciples’ courage during this period was not sufficient to carry out such a plot. They were afraid and had scattered when Jesus was arrested. To execute this kind of plot was beyond their ability.

In spite of the impossibility of such a plot, the lie was propagated abroad and many believed it. This reminds us that the truth is often harder for a person to believe than a lie.

2 Thessalonians 2:10 declares:

“And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.”

Even today, many still swallow the lie that Jesus did not rise from the dead! The Jewish leaders took extra precautions: they ensured that Jesus’ burial site, a new, unused tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea, was guarded by a unit of highly trained Roman soldiers. This guard unit, of four to 10 men, knew they faced severe punishment — even death — if Jesus’ body went missing under their watch. So, to think these soldiers didn’t take their orders seriously, and diligently police the tomb around the clock is preposterous. Quite frankly, you would have to be a FOOL to believe in this theory that the disciples stole the body of Jesus.

There have been other theories such as the swoon theory. Jesus never really died in the first place and the spices in the tomb revived Him. How could someone survive crucifixion?

- Roman law even laid the death penalty on any soldier who let a capital prisoner escape in any way, including crucifixion. It was never done.
- The fact that the Roman soldier did not break Jesus' legs, as he did to the other two crucified criminals (Jn. 19:31-33), means that the soldier was sure Jesus was dead.
- John, an eyewitness, certified that he saw blood and water come from Jesus' pierced heart (Jn. 19:34-35). This shows that Jesus' lungs had collapsed and he had died of asphyxiation. Any medical expert can vouch for this.
- The body was totally encased in winding sheets and entombed (Jn. 19:38-42). How could a half-dead man escape from this?
- How could a swooning half-dead man have moved the great stone at the door of the tomb?

You are FOOLISH to believe in these types of theories instead of accepting the factual claims of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Oftentimes people will express disbelief in Jesus' resurrection, providing intellectual and foolish objections, when the real reason concerns their own human will. They simply don't want to believe in the truth about the resurrection. Beloved, the tomb was empty!

Acts 2:24 says this of Christ:

“Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.”

The best news the world has ever received came from a cemetery near Jerusalem—the tomb was empty! “I know that my redeemer liveth” (Job 19:25).

Let's take a moment and rehearse the major Christian seasons. Christmas is the PROPHECY that Jesus came to die in the sinner's place (Isa. 7:4. 9:6; Matt. 1:23), Good Friday is the PROMISE that Jesus paid sin's penalty for our pardon (John 19:30; Eph. 1:7), Easter is the PROOF that Jesus's sacrifice was approved by the Father (Rom. 4:25).

The British minister, W. E. Sangster, began to lose his voice and mobility in the mid-1950s. He had a disease that caused progressive muscular atrophy. He recognized the end was near, so he threw himself into writing and praying. In the midst of his suffering he pleaded, “Let me stay in the struggle, Lord. I don't mind if I can no longer be a general, but give me just a regiment to lead.”

Sangster's voice eventually failed completely, and his legs became useless. On Easter morning just a few weeks before his death, he took a pen and shakily wrote his daughter a letter. In it he said, “It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice with which to shout, ‘He is risen!’—but it would be still more terrible to have a voice and not want to shout.”

2. Because Christ resurrection has viable witnesses.

Acts 1:3 declares: “To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”

These infallible (credible and convincing) proofs are those who have witnessed Christ after His death. 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 confirms the many “infallible proofs” regarding the resurrection. It speaks about the credible eye-witnesses of Christ post-resurrection appearances.

In 1998, Lee Strobel, a reporter for the Chicago Tribune and a graduate of Yale Law School, published “The Case for Christ: A Journalist’s Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus.” Strobel had formerly been an atheist and was compelled by his wife’s conversion to evangelical Christianity to refute the key Christian claims about Jesus. Paramount among these was the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection, but other claims included the belief in Jesus as the literal Son of God and the accuracy of the New Testament writings. Strobel was unable to refute these claims to his satisfaction, and he then converted to Christianity as well. His book became one of the bestselling works of Christian apologetic (that is, a defense of the reasonableness and accuracy of Christianity) of all time.

We cannot deny what happened, what was taught, what was seen, and what has changed the lives of untold millions of people. Jesus rose from the dead!

3. Because Christ’s resurrection is necessary for salvation.

Romans 10:9-10

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus (literally - Jesus as Lord), and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

Dear friend, do you know that Jesus died and rose again for you personally? Without His death and resurrection, you cannot be saved from hell and go to Heaven when you die. If you want eternal life, you must believe in the death and resurrection of Christ for your salvation.

In Romans 10:8, confessing with the mouth that Jesus is Lord is mentioned first to conform to the order of the quotation from Deuteronomy 30:14. Paul follows this order in Romans 10:9. However, the true order is given in verse 10 as it speaks of the importance of the resurrection: “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness” and is justified (literally - “it is believed unto righteousness”), and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (literally - “it is confessed unto salvation”). The heart believes in the resurrection of Christ (the WAY of salvation) and the confession then follows (the PROOF of salvation).

According to verse 10, confession of the resurrection of Christ comes after faith, and is the PROOF that we are saved (“with the mouth confession is made unto salvation”). Jesus as Lord means that we acknowledge that He is Lord of all – king of kings, and lords of lords. He is God of very God!

“He is Lord, He is Lord!
He is risen from the dead and he is Lord!
Ev'ry knee shall bow, ev'ry tongue confess
That Jesus Christ is Lord.”

Confession is a doctrinal understanding. It’s a confession that “Jesus is Lord.” The term “Lord” is a title ascribed to God and deity. Therefore, this confession means that we acknowledge that Jesus Christ is God incarnate.

Belief is committing one’s faith to Christ (“believe in thine heart that God has raised him from the dead”). You will notice that in order for a person to be saved, he must believe that Jesus rose from the dead. You cannot be saved if you reject the literal and bodily resurrection of Christ. Belief in the resurrection is the WAY of salvation. The result “thou shalt be saved” dogmatically emphasizes that a person must embrace the truth about the resurrection of Jesus Christ to be saved. It is necessary to believe that Jesus is God and has risen from the dead in order to be saved and prove that one is saved. A dead Christ cannot save anyone! If Christ remained in the grave, then we would have no hope of salvation from hell. The death of Christ alone could not be the end of the story regarding our salvation. Christ had to rise from the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:17

“And if Christ be not raised, your faith *is* vain; ye are yet in your sins.”

Romans 10:9-10 clearly reveals that a person cannot be saved without believing in the resurrection of Christ. This means a person must REPENT of their false ideas and ideologies about Jesus Christ before they can be saved. When you repent, you not only change your mind that you are a sinner before God, you must also repent or change your mind that Jesus is God, that He has risen from the dead, and that He is the only way to Heaven.

Nobody goes to Heaven without believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is because the resurrection is part of the Gospel or good news that saves us from hell and gives us everlasting life.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”

Folks, there is no GOOD news or Good Friday without the resurrection of Christ. There is only BAD news. We are all going to hell without Christ’s resurrection. It’s the resurrection that promises life – new life and everlasting to us.

John 14:19

“Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.”

I’m not a fool for believing in the resurrection of Christ.

Have you ever heard of a man named Harry Houdini? Many of you have. He died in October of 1926. But his claim to fame was that he was a magician that specialized in spectacular escapes. As a matter of fact, he was said to have laughed at locks, sneered at fetters. They said of Harry that he had the flexibility of an eel. He had the lives of a cat. They did all kinds of things to try to incarcerate him. They would seal him in coffins. He would escape. They riveted him into a boiler. He escaped.

They sowed him up in canvas bags. He escaped. They locked him in a milk can. He escaped. They sealed him in a beer barrel. He escaped. They put him in maximum-security prison. And old Harry somehow got out.

But then in October 1926, old man death laid his hands on Harry Houdini and put him in a grave and he is yet to escape. As a matter of fact, he told his wife, if there is anyway out, I will find it. If there is any way out, I'll make contact with you and we'll do it on the anniversary of my death. For 10 years she kept a light burning over his portrait. At the end of 10 years she turned out the light. Death had Harry and he couldn't escape. Here is the point; if Jesus has not risen from the dead, we too, could not escape death, hell, the grave. We would be overruled by it and lost forever in hell.

4. Because Christ's resurrection is the basis for judgment.

Acts 17:30-31

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

This is a sad and solemn verse. But it is true. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead gives us the assurance that a Judgment Day is coming that you cannot escape, if you reject the Gospel and the only way of salvation through Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Christ from the dead necessitates the judgment of Jesus Christ of the dead that are raised by Him on Judgment Day.

This judgment is called elsewhere, the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20).

Revelation 20:15

"And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

This is the time when all of the unsaved dead are resurrected to stand before Jesus Christ, the risen Christ from the dead, and they will be judged according to their sins and evil works. I'd rather believe in the resurrected Christ for my salvation instead of face the resurrected Lord in judgment someday. Don't be foolish! Don't delay. Place your faith in Jesus Christ on this Easter morning and you can leave this church knowing that you are going to Heaven. It's not foolish to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

A story is told of an African Muslim who became a Christian. His friends asked, "Why have you become a Christian?" He answered, "Well, it's like this. Suppose you were going down the road and suddenly the road forked in two directions, and you didn't know which way to go. There at the fork were two men, one is dead and one is alive—who would you ask which way to go?"

Dear friend, Jesus is alive and He said in John 14:6:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

This is not an April Fool's joke! Jesus Christ is alive and He is the only way to Heaven.

"Up from the grave He arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes,
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,
And He lives forever, with His saints to reign.
He arose! He arose!
Hallelujah! Christ arose!"