

## In Court with the Resurrection

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In 1173 the Italian architect Bonnano Pisano began work on what would become his most famous project: A separately standing eight-story bell tower for the Cathedral of the city of Pisa. The tower was to be eight-stories and 185-foot tall. There was just one "little" problem: builders quickly discovered that the soil was much softer than they had anticipated, and the foundation was far too shallow to adequately hold the structure!

And sure enough, before long the whole structure had begun to tilt... and it continued to tilt... until finally the architect and the builders realized that nothing could be done to make the Leaning Tower of Pisa straight again.

It took 174 years to build the Tower and during that time many things were done to try and compensate for the "tilt." The foundation was shored up; the upper levels were even built at an angle to try to make the top of the tower look straight. But nothing worked. The tower has stood for over 800 years, but it leans 18 feet away from where it should be (10 degrees from the vertical, for all the engineers).

One day, experts say, “It will fall and all because it wasn’t built on the right foundation.”

And this may very well happen! Buildings do crumble and fall especially if they don’t have the right foundation. But it’s not just buildings that crumble and fall. It’s also true that entire message of the Gospel and Christianity crumbles if Jesus did not rise from the dead! This Easter study is going to center upon the proof of Christ’s resurrection. It did happen and we are going to look at the evidence for this. In fact, we are in one sense going to court with the resurrection. We are going to see if the resurrection can be proven to be true in a court or law. In other words, we are going to provide evidence that will confirm the validity and truth that Jesus Christ did rise from the dead!

It can be proven in a court of law that Jesus rose from the dead.

There are three convincing proofs that Christ rose from the dead.

### **1. Empty Tomb**

We find evidence from Matthew 28:1-6 that Jesus rose from the dead.

We want to break down this point. Consider:

#### **a. The Day**

Matthew 28:1

“In the end of the Sabbath (Saturday), as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week (Sunday), came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.”

Sabbath officially ended with sundown on Saturday. Therefore, Jesus rose early on Sunday and it was beginning to become daylight on this eventful Sunday morning. This is why early apostolic Christianity began to worship on Sunday. It would be the day of remembrance and celebration of Christ’s resurrection.

John 20:19

“Then the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace *be* unto you.”

Acts 20:7

“And upon the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.”

Sunday eventually became known as the “Lord’s Day” by the early Christians.

John revealed in Revelation 1:10

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.”

The Sabbath worship instituted under the Mosaic was eventually done away with for Sunday worship in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ. The disciples and early church were worshipping on this day because this was the day that Jesus came forth from the grave. Every Sunday when God’s people come together it becomes a reminder to us of Christ’s resurrection from the dead!

Philip Henry used to call the Lord's Day (Sunday) the queen of days, the pearl of the week, and observed it accordingly. His common salutation of his family or friends, on the Lord's day in the morning, was that of the primitive Christians - "The Lord is risen, He is risen indeed." Philip Henry made it his chief business on this day to celebrate the memory of Christ's resurrection and he would say sometimes, "Every Lord's day is a true Christian's Easter day."

Strict Sabbatarian’s will deny that Jesus rose on Sunday, but the Scriptures cannot be twisted to support such a notion. Sabbatarian’s actually will tell you that it was Constantine or the Roman Catholic Church that changed worship from Saturday to Sunday, but this is a silly and absurd conclusion. Historical records show that Christians were meeting on Sunday from the first century AD! There are hundreds of quotes of the early church fathers who lived soon after the apostles and they clearly talk about Sunday worship. This was long before the Roman Catholic Church

allegedly made this change. The practice of Sunday worship grew out of early apostolic Christianity – not the Roman Catholic Church.

b. The destruction

Matthew 28:2 goes on to say:

“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.” This is the second earthquake associated with Christ. The first earthquake took place in connection with Christ’s death on the cross.

Matthew 27:51

“And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom (indicating God tore and took down the veil that opened up the presence of God to redeemed sinners); and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent.”

There was an earthquake that occurred after Christ’s death. The taking away of the veil which hid people from God’s presence was an indication that through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, believing sinners could now be accepted in God’s presence forever.

Hebrews 10:19

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest (the holy of holies of God’s presence) by the blood of Jesus.”

The other earthquake took place in commemoration with Christ’s resurrection. Why these earthquakes? They were sent at appropriate times to get the attention of the people and let them know that something important and miraculous had occurred. First, Jesus Christ paid the penalty for sin (earthquake #1) and secondly Jesus Christ rose from the dead (earthquake #2) to prove the penalty for sin was paid in full and accepted by the Father. You see, the two earthquakes were an indication and confirmation of the Gospel – Christ died for our sins and rose again!

So, this second earthquake took place to confirm Christ’s resurrection. We don’t know how much destruction this earthquake caused but we know that it must have caused a great shaking for it resulted in fear overtaking the hearts of people. This second quake may have been more confined to the immediate area around the grave.

When the Bible says an angel supernaturally “rolled back the stone from the door” it was not to let Jesus out! Jesus was already gone!! Jesus could rise from the dead without any angelic assistance and without some old stone being rolled away. The angel rolled back the tomb to let the women and the apostles inside and see that Jesus had risen from the dead.

c. The dismay

Matthew 28:3-4

“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*.”

The people were filled with dismay, In other words, distress and fear was aroused in their hearts! This is because the Bible records that the angel’s “countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow.”

All of us have been through storms which produced severe lightening. I recall hearing stories from some people how lightening cam in through the telephone line and crossed the floor right beside the person who was sitting on a chair. Lightening can be a scary matter. Well, this angel’s facial appearance seemed to be like lightening. I don’t blame them for being scared out of their wits! Something supernatural was occurring before their eyes. The appearance of a lightening-like, snow white angelic being would bring overwhelming fear and dismay into anyone’s heart. But it was not the appearance of the angel that was important – it was the message. This brings us to our next point.

d. The declaration

A threefold declaration is given by the angel.

- a. Calmness – “Fear not ye for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified” – Matthew 28:5

The angel sought to bring comfort and calmness into the hearts of the women.

- b. Cheer – “He is not here: for he is risen, as he said” – Matththew 28:6a

With great delight and joy the angel declared that Christ had risen from the dead. Here is proof positive that Jesus rose from the dead. The grave was empty! Jesus was not there! What more proof do you need? Any courtroom would uphold this evidence, among many other evidence, such as the folded napkin separate from the clothes.

John 20:7 records:

“And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.”

Some suggest that the body of Jesus was stolen by thieves. However, no grave robbers would ever take time to fold a napkin cloth and place it all alone somewhere.

c. Confirmation – “Come, see the place where the Lord lay” – Matthew 28:6b

Today we also need to come and see for ourselves. The Bible provides strong evidence for the empty tomb. We need to see Jesus lying dead in the grave and then see Him rising from the dead on that Easter Sunday morning long ago. What a day it was! It was the day of all days! It was the day that changed the world!

There are really two empty things that relate to Easter, and they are an empty cross and an empty tomb. Both need to be empty to complete the Gospel story and truth of our salvation! The angel mentions both things. There is the cross for the angels said: “for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified” (Matt. 28:5b). This reminds us that Christ had to die and pay sin’s penalty. The empty cross means that the work of redemption and salvation is finished. Jesus cried on the cross “It is finished” (John 19:30) This is why we should not put Christ back on the cross again as Roman Catholicism does in its Mass ceremonies. Christ can never be re-sacrificed. The penalty was paid in full. Thank God it was! The cross is empty! Jesus “was crucified.” It’s all in the past! It’s done!

The angel also spoke about the empty tomb - “he is not here: for he is risen, as he said” (Matt. 28:6a). There was an empty cross and now there is an empty tomb! But what about the empty tomb and resurrection? Why is it so important to Christianity? The resurrection has been compared to the receipt that God gave to

the world to prove that He had accepted His Son's sacrifice on the cross and that sin's penalty was paid in full.

Romans 4:25 speaks of this very important theological matter:

"Who (*Jesus*) was delivered for our offences (*the payment was made*), and was raised again for our justification" (*the guarantee was made*).

The resurrection provides the confirmation and assurance that we have justification (legal acceptance) before God which was based upon Christ's death ("justified by his blood" - Rom. 5:9). Our justification is based upon the death of Christ but confirmed by the resurrection of Christ. In other words, right now Jesus Christ is alive representing us before the Father's throne in Heaven as fully acquitted, righteous, and eternally saved from sin's penalty (Heb. 7:25).

Romans 8:34 asks:

"Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

In God's courtroom the resurrection becomes the EVIDENCE and PROOF that the Father has accepted the Sons' sacrifice on the cross. It's the GUARANTEE of our justified (legally righteous) position before God. It's the guarantee of our salvation. Jesus was raised from the dead to secure or guarantee our justification before God by representing us in Heaven as forgiven and justified on the basis of His death upon Calvary's cross. It's in this sense that He was "raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). The resurrection assures us that justification has been applied to every Gospel believer and that God now accepts them as fully, finally, and forever in His presence. The resurrection of Christ seals the deal!

We must understand that without the resurrection of Christ there could be no certainty of redemption, justification, or salvation from sin's penalty which is Hell. Jesus had to rise to prove before everyone that God the Father had accepted His sacrifice and that He had triumphantly defeated death, Hell, and the grave to give to His followers the promise of eternal life in Heaven.

Friend, in any court of law it can be proven that the tomb was empty! And it's still empty! This is the message of Easter! It's the message that Christ rose from the

dead to secure our salvation, redemption, and justification and give us the hope of everlasting life.

Jeremy was not a normal child. He had a terminal illness which affected both his body and his mind. Still, his parents had tried to give him as normal a life as possible and had sent him to a Christian elementary school. At the age of 12, Jeremy was only in second grade, seemingly unable to learn. He was a frustration to his teacher and to all the children in the class.

Springtime came, and the children talked excitedly about the coming of Easter. Their teacher told them the story of Jesus, and then to emphasize the idea of new life springing forth (like Christ's resurrection life), she gave each of the children a large plastic egg with this assignment: "I want you to take this home and bring it back tomorrow with something inside that shows new life. Do you understand?"

All the children responded enthusiastically, "Yes, Miss Miller!" All of them, that is, except for Jeremy. He just listened carefully, his eyes never leaving the teacher's face. Had he understood what she had said about Jesus' death and resurrection? Did he understand the assignment? The teacher thought perhaps she should call his parents and explain the project to them, but she should call his parents and explain the project to them, but she got busy and forgot.

The next morning, 19 children came to school, laughing and talking as they placed their eggs in a large wicker basket on Miss Miller's desk. After they completed their math lesson, it was time to open the eggs. In the first egg, Miss Miller found a flower. She said, "Oh yes, a flower is certainly a sign of new life. When plants peek through the ground, we know that spring is here." A small girl in the first row waved her arms. "That's my egg, Miss Miller," she called out.

The next egg contained a plastic butterfly, which looked real. The teacher held it up. She said, "We all know that a caterpillar changes and grows into a beautiful butterfly. Yes, that is new life, too." Little Judy smiled proudly and said, "Miss Miller, that one is mine!"

Next, the teacher found a rock with moss on it. She explained that moss, too, showed life. Billy spoke up from the back of the classroom. "My daddy helped me!"



Then the teacher opened the fourth egg. But the egg was empty! Surely it must be Jeremy's, she thought, and, obviously, he didn't understand her instructions. If only she hadn't forgotten to phone his parents. Because she did not want to embarrass him, she hadn't forgotten to phone his parents. And because she did not want to embarrass him, she quietly set the egg aside and reached for another. Suddenly Jeremy spoke up. "Miss Miller, aren't you going to talk about my egg?" A bit flustered, the teacher said, "But Jeremy -- your egg is empty!" He looked into her eyes and said softly, "Yes, but Jesus' tomb was empty, too!"

Truly, the greatest symbol of new life is found in an empty tomb! Jesus rose from the dead with a new life and His resurrection became the hope and basis of our new spiritual life, justification, and future resurrection life.

"He is not here; for He is risen, as He said."

## **2. Eyewitnesses**

Eyewitnesses are very important in a court case. The more witnesses the more validation the attorney has to make a valid case. After declaring the Gospel of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-3), Paul confirms that there were many eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:5-8

"And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."

Why does the Bible mention the eyewitnesses of the resurrection Christ after declaring the message of the Gospel? It's because the Gospel stands or falls on the resurrection. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then we are all going to Hell.

1 Corinthians 15:17

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

In other words, our sins cannot be forgiven, and we cannot be justified before God without the resurrection of Christ. We have absolutely no hope of eternal life if

Christ did not rise from the dead. We are in deep trouble if Christ has not risen from the dead!

Jesus revealed himself after His resurrection to many people to validate and confirm the genuineness of His resurrection. You could do an entire study on the resurrection appearances of Jesus. Eyewitnesses are important in any court of law and these eyewitnesses validate and confirm the truthfulness of Christ's resurrection.

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.”

The expression “infallible proofs” speaks of credible and convincing evidence which is based on its own merits. In other words, Jesus proved to all people of all time that He rose from the dead by appearing to multitudes of people after His resurrection, who could in return validate the truthfulness of His bodily and physical resurrection from the grave.

I think many people are afraid to examine the evidence about the resurrection! They are afraid of what they might find! They are afraid that what they thought was NOT true just may be true after all. Jesus really did rise from the dead! When all the evidence is in nobody can logically or rationally reject that Jesus Christ existed, died on a cross, and rose from the dead. Someone might say, “I don't believe in the supernatural or miraculous.” This is what Ronald Reagan's son said at Nancy Reagan's funeral. He clearly said that he did not believe in a hereafter or anything supernatural. The only “absolute” with people who reject the miracle of Christ's resurrection is that they are absolute fools!

If miracles (like the resurrection) get in the way of your intellectual mind, then take another look at the formation and birth of a baby. How do you think a baby is put together in a mother's womb? It is nothing less than a miracle! Take another look at space and the universe as we know it and see it today. The very fact that we do not explode into oblivion is a miracle. The existence of the universe is a miracle. You cannot explain it away by chance mechanisms. There are miracles all around us, so don't allow the physical and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ to become a

stumbling block for you. It was a miracle, I can believe in miracles, for I believe in God!

The resurrection is the supreme miracle of Christianity - it's at the very heart of the Christian faith. If it never happened, Christianity collapses into mythology and billions of people have been deceived. If it did happen (and it did!), it authenticates everything Jesus did and said, and believers have the guarantee of forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

It was on Feb. 27, 1991, at the height of Desert Storm, that Ruth Dillow received a very sad message from the Pentagon. It stated that her son, Clayton Carpenter, Private 1st Class, had stepped on a mine in Kuwait & was dead. Ruth Dillow later wrote, "I can't begin to describe my grief & shock. It was almost more than I could bear. For 3 days I wept. For 3 days I expressed anger & loss. For 3 days people tried to comfort me, to no avail because the loss was too great."

But 3 days after she received that message, the telephone rang. The voice on the other end said, "Mom, it's me. I'm alive." Ruth Dillow said, "I couldn't believe it at first. But then I recognized his voice, & he really was alive." The message she had received was all a mistake! She said, "I laughed, I cried, I felt like turning cartwheels, because my son whom I had thought was dead, was really alive. I'm sure none of you can even begin to understand how I felt.

No, most of us could not understand what went through her mind and heart. But some who walked the pages of the New Testament would have understood how she felt because they experienced the same emotions themselves. One day they watched their Lord, their best Friend and Teacher being nailed to a cross. They witnessed His pain as He cried out, "I thirst!" & "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" They listened as finally He bowed His head & said, "It is finished!" and "Father, into thy hands I commend (commit) my spirit."

They watched as His body was taken from the cross & buried. All their hopes & dreams were buried with Him. It all seemed hopeless until "the first day of the week, early in the morning," when some women made their way along the path that led to His tomb, wondering who would roll away the stone for them. But when they arrived, they found that the stone had already been rolled away! And an angel

told them, "You're looking in the wrong place. You're looking for Jesus among the dead. He is not dead. He is alive. He is risen! "He is risen!"

That is what we celebrate on Easter morning. When all the evidence is in we can be absolutely convinced that Jesus is alive. He is risen from the dead.

Someone said:

"Nothing matters if Christ has not risen from the dead. Everything matters if Christ has risen from the dead."

### **3. Emancipated lives**

Changed lives are one of the outstanding proofs that Jesus Christ is alive today.

Philippians 3:10 speaks of our transformation through Christ's resurrection:

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."

Christ's resurrection graphically demonstrated the extent of His own power. By rising from the dead, Christ as God displayed His power over both the physical and spiritual worlds. All the hosts of evil were determined to keep Christ's body in the tomb. But God's mighty power defeated this army of wicked spirits by raising the Lord Jesus from the dead on the third day. This same power is placed at the disposal of all believers and should be appropriated by faith. This power is available to us today through our union and identification with Christ's resurrection life. In other words, it's not only the power displayed at the time of Christ's resurrection but the power that comes out of it, the power which can be applied to our daily lives today through Christ's risen presence within us.

The Expositors Bible Commentary explains Paul's teaching in this way:

"He is not thinking only of the divine power that raised Christ from the dead, but of the power of the resurrected Christ now operating in the believer's life. This power enables believers to 'live a new life' (Rom 6:4) because they have been 'raised with Christ' (Col 3:1; Eph 2:5, 6)."

Here is the point. The power that Christ displayed when coming forth from the dead now operates in believer's lives since they have been "raised with Christ" (Col. 3:1)

and therefore share in His own resurrection power today. The implication of our identification with the risen Christ is astonishing. We share in the same power that raised Christ from the dead by means of our union with Him.

Paul is talking about the resurrection power of Christ being lived out in us that changes our lives as His people. The Bible teaches that we share the life of the risen Christ. He lives within us to share His own resurrection power with His children. Imagine this! The same power that caused Jesus to rise from the grave exists on the inside of us in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ lives within to give us the divine enablement to live a life that honors God and one that reflects true Christian values.

Galatians 2:20 echoes the same truth:

*“I am (have been) crucified with Christ (I have shared Christ’s death which defeated sin and Satan and grants me victory): nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me (I share today the very resurrection life of Jesus Christ – His presence and power): and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God” (trusting in Him to give me victory), who loved me, and gave himself for me.”*

If I live in defeat it’s because I’m living beneath my privileges! The resurrection power and life of Jesus Christ gives us the promise that I can overcome any sin, any temptation, any wicked spirit.

“His pow’r can make you what you ought to be;  
His blood can cleanse your heart and make you free;  
His love can fill your soul, and you will see  
'Twas best for Him to have His way with thee.”

The victory chapter of Romans 6 reveals the same truth about Christians sharing in Christ’s resurrection power so they can live victoriously.

➤ Romans 6:4-5 = the doctrinal truth

“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (*because we share Christ’s resurrection life*). For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death (*we shared in Christ’s death which defeated the power of sin over our life*), we shall be also *in the likeness of his*

resurrection” (*we share Christ’s resurrection life which enables us to draw upon His power to live victoriously today*).

Sharing in Christ’s risen life and power enables us to live a new way of life. This is called our spiritual identification with Jesus Christ. This is an important theological, positional, and union truth. The Holy Spirit baptizing us into Christ at the time of conversion brings us into a saving and sanctifying union with Christ, whereby we share His resurrection life and power. But now we must get down to where the rubber or shoe leather meets the road.

➤ Romans 6:12-13 = the practical result

“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead (*we are made alive from spiritual death, regenerated, born again, and have been given Christ’s resurrection life to live victoriously*), and your members (*of the human body*) *as* instruments of righteousness unto God.”

When we allow sin to overtake our lives and ruin us, we are in some sense mocking the resurrection of Jesus Christ! Why? It’s because Jesus rose again to give you new life, His life, a life that is free from enslavement to sin. Defeated Christians mock the resurrection of Christ! They cast a shadow on the resurrection of Christ. When I sin and keep on sinning against God, I am not testifying that Jesus rose from the dead to give me new life. I am testifying that Jesus is still dead and in the grave! We need to get on the victory side today and stop living in the defeat! Jesus Christ is alive and He lives within you today! Live a resurrection life this week. Beloved, let others see Jesus’ resurrection life being displayed through your own life.

I have known hardened sinners, who cursed God and wanted nothing to do with Him all their life, call me on the telephone and say, “Pastor Kelly, I got saved today and I just wanted to let you know.” And I heard a man who previously cursed God and possessed a dirty, foul-mouth praising God! How can it be? How can you explain it? There is only one way to explain it. Jesus Christ is alive, and He comes to live in the hearts of people and begins the lifelong process of transforming their lives. It was Christ resurrection life which came into that man’s spirit and began changing his heart, tongue and life. Changed lives is one of the greatest proofs or

evidences that Jesus Christ is alive today. He lives within His people to transform them and make them more like Himself.

The evidence is in. No legitimate courtroom could overlook the evidence that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and is alive today. Of course, I know that Jesus Christ is alive because I talked to Him this morning!

Someone wrote:

“How Do I Know He Lives?  
How do I know that Christ has risen?  
What proof have I to give?  
He touched my life one blessed day,  
And I began to live.  
How do I know he left the tomb  
That morning long ago?  
I met Him just this morning,  
And my heart is still aglow.  
How do I know that endless life  
He gained for me that day?  
His life within is proof enough of immortality.  
How do I know that Christ still lives,  
Rich blessings to impart?  
He walks with me along the way  
And lives within my heart.”

This is another way of saying, “You ask me how I know He lives – He lives within my heart!”