

Read also Psalm 98. Check out the service, which is recorded on www.fpcd.org.

O happy Resurrection! “For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, FOREVER!” That’s exciting stuff. When you think of Christianity, do you think of it as where you learn certain principles you need to know to live successfully, sort of living to be good? Then why would we be shouting and going out of our way to come here each week, and singing songs that say over and over *Alleluia!* Why would we call it “good news?” I mean, if it’s just duty, doing the right thing, I personally would seek another job and let you work that out on your own! But this resurrection thing seems to be more. Let’s see what it is all about. Hear the Word of the Lord: READ Matthew 28

It’s a fantastic story! I absolutely love this story! The whole book culminates in this story – well, almost. The end of the Bible gets even better!

But some people says this story’s not true, just like the plot of the priests and elders – that the disciples really stole the body and just claimed He rose from the dead.

There’s also the “swoon” theory—Christ suffered from shock, pain, and loss of blood on the cross. But instead of actually dying, He only fainted. His disciples didn’t notice when they buried Him. The coolness of the tomb revived Him. He got up, ripped off His grave clothes, pushed the stone away, fought off the guards, and shortly thereafter appeared to His disciples as the Lord of life.¹

Then there’s the “hallucination” theory, that everyone who saw him really only supposed they saw Him. That’s over 500 people. How did so many have hallucinations? Was it in the water?

The next is the “impersonation” theory. Jesus had an impersonator. This is substantiated by the fact that when Jesus appeared, sometimes people didn’t recognize Him at first. Now imagine the disciples, who were not expecting the resurrection, and were hesitant to believe. So when Jesus appeared to them if it were an impersonator, why would he say ‘take a closer look?’ “Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see.” (Lk 24:39-40) And later to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side.” (Jn 20:27)

It’s kind of hard to fake wounds that go all the way through your hands and feet.

How about the “spiritual resurrection” theory, which is the belief that Christ’s resurrection was not a real physical one, but rather a spiritual resurrection, which is all it takes to encourage us about our own spiritual resurrection. If that’s true, then **WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BODY?**

Finally, there’s the “unknown tomb” theory. The disciples could not find the empty grave because Jesus was tossed into a common pit and was not allowed to be buried. But the Bible states that Pilate allowed Joseph of Arimathea to take the body; and that Joseph buried Jesus in his own private tomb, not a public mass burial ground. And, the women sat opposite the tomb

¹Josh McDowell, *The Resurrection Factor*, 98.

and watched while Jesus was buried. Pilate ordered the tomb sealed and guarded by soldiers. (Mt 27:57-66)

All these theories deny what the Bible says. But as we learned this past week, all that happened to Jesus was predicted in the Bible.

There's an explanation for all these theories. As we look at the story, I believe it will come to light.

We have in this story several groups of characters: the two Marys, the guards, and the disciples. Let's classify them. Let's call

- the women – the Brave-hearts
- the guards – the Worldly
- the disciples – the Hesitant

The women were the last to leave the tomb on Friday and the first who went to see the tomb on Sunday morning. They were there for the earthquake. They saw the angel and looked into the tomb. Then, they ran—fearful, yet full of joy—to tell the disciples. But suddenly Jesus met them! He said, “Hi!” They came to Him, fell to their knees, embraced his feet, and worshiped.

Jesus was tangible. Jesus was a real person. Jesus was here! He reassured them all was going as planned. He would be in Galilee soon.

So, two witnesses and two pieces of evidence: the empty tomb and the living Jesus.

The guards also experienced the same earthquake and the same angel. And those men of valor were so frightened they fainted! Their whole purpose for being there was to keep the body from being stolen and what did they do? They concocted a story that it was stolen!

If you experienced these supernatural occurrences that were so great you fainted, wouldn't you rethink your belief about Jesus? Wouldn't you have at least taken a peek inside the tomb? They didn't. They thought of only one thing: their own hides. “He was taken while we were sleeping,” so the story goes—*are soldiers on duty supposed to sleep?* Their bogus tale persists even to today.

Those who believe it prefer the here and now. They avoid the supernatural. Their worldview pertains to this world only. That's like people who say now, “Jesus was a good teacher.” But they won't say, “Jesus is divine.”

So it depends on your perspective. You can experience Jesus as the women – alive and present. Or, you can sort of live in a dead faint, oblivious to His reality.

Jesus was in Galilee when the disciples arrived. Some saw Him and worshiped, like many of you would. Others doubted—or hesitated, like some of you would. Maybe they hesitated because they had failed Him; like Peter, who denied Him even with a curse. And Thomas, who just couldn't believe. Or Philip, who had a hard time comprehending that Jesus was God's Son.

But they were all there, just like you are here despite your shortcomings and doubts and failures. And Jesus was there to greet them, just like He is here to meet you.

And Jesus didn't even mention their sin or their failure or anything that they had done wrong. Other gospels say He tried to help them overcome their doubt.

So if you have been at odds with Jesus for a while, if you feel you have failed Him and you want to come back, He embraces you with grace. He fully forgives you when you ask, letting bygones be bygones, accepting you with joy.

See, some people say, the purpose of religion is to be good, to do your duty – to follow a good teacher, like Jesus. That is the purpose of many religions. But that's not the purpose of Christianity. The purpose of Christianity is to be restored to God. The purpose of Christianity is to bridge the breach caused by your doubts and sinfulness. It's like being reconciled to a friend after a great long fight and afterward no one remembers the fight anymore. Jesus forgives so you can believe again; and restores the relationship as it was meant to be. Jesus has been given that authority.

He is quite simply unlike any other human being.

This is entirely unique; not like any other religion.

Then Jesus told the disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth." What does that mean, *all authority*?

Once, when Jesus was tempted, Satan offered him rulership of the world. But had Jesus accepted Satan's worldly authority, it would not have followed God's ways of mercy and justice. It would not have made Jesus a humble king. It would not have included a cross. It would not have set us on the road to eternal life.

"All authority in heaven and earth" is cosmic authority. That means Jesus is equivalent to God. There's not a problem you can have that's beyond His ability. No confusion that He Himself cannot clarify. No boundary He cannot cross. No heart's desire He cannot fill. No mess that He cannot fix.

"All authority has been given to me, He says." There's something final and all-encompassing about this authority. There's something universal about it and this is good news – good news for everyone.

Do you know anyone who needs good news? Who needs to find forgiveness and hope? Perhaps it is you. If so, God throws open His gates for you to enter in through Christ. And, Jesus asks that you throw open your arms to others and extend His invitation.

Therefore, *throw open the gates with joy and love*. Paul tells us to extend Jesus' invitation, not in judgment, but ready for every good work, speaking evil of no one, avoiding quarrels; being gentle and completely courteous to everyone. (Ti 3:2)

Do you represent Jesus in this way to people you encounter each day?

Is Jesus the only way to heaven?

- ~ His resurrection declares it.
- ~ His cosmic authority confirms it.
- ~ His grace to forgive supports it.
- ~ His power to heal anything authenticates it.
- ~ His promise that "I am with you every moment" assures it.
- ~ His eternal kingdom ushers in that reality.

"The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ."
And he shall reign FOREVER AND EVER. Halleluiah!

O happy Resurrection!

AMEN