

Memory Verse: Isaiah 53:11 “As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities.”

Weekly Challenge: We serve a Lord who really lived, died, and was raised again after three days. In some small way have you life reflect this truth this week.

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Opening Prayer

Good morning! Welcome to service here at Kasson/Pleasant Corners UMC. I am Pastor Jacob Hanson, and it is my great honor to be the minister here with you this morning. It is hard to believe that it is already the end of April, but it is. With last week having been Easter, we are now in a new phase of the Liturgical (fancy name for church-planned) calendar. Lent is over, He is risen, and now we move from a solemn and somber attitude to one of joy and purpose. Over the next few weeks we will look at the risen Christ's work here on earth before He ascends back to heaven to be seated on His throne. But before we get into talking about those things, we are going to spend this Sunday talking about the risen Christ in a different way. We are going to dip our toes into apologetics this morning, and look at some of the evidence for Jesus's resurrection.

Apologetics is the art of giving an explanation, specifically in relation to Christianity. Think of it as “having an answer” when the difficult questions arise. If there is anything in Christianity that we should have an answer for, it is for the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone for everything we believe in as Christians. Everything else is built around it. Our joy in the Lord, our purpose/calling in life as Christians, the forgiveness for our sins, all of it has deep roots in the resurrection. If Jesus did not actually rise from the dead, then our biggest piece of proof for being Christians in the first place is removed. However, if Jesus did actually rise from the dead, if what we hold to be true is actually true, then everything else we hold as important as Christians falls into place. As Paul puts it in 1st Corinthians 15:16-19 “For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.” In plain words, it is the resurrection or nothing for us as Christians. Now this is where we get into our main points for today: the historical proof for Jesus's resurrection.

There are many, many ways to approach Jesus's resurrection to look for proof, however, we are only going to look at three today. We will cover (very briefly!) the historicity of Jesus's life and death, the empty tomb, and the disciples' lives after Jesus's resurrection. With these three points we will at least get our toes wet in apologetics regarding Christ's resurrection, and the focal point of our faith. Lets begin with historical Jesus.

The first major point in proof regarding Jesus's death and resurrection is the fact that there was in fact a Jesus at all! Most historians, no matter their background or religious affiliation, will affirm that from the evidence it seems that there lived a Jewish guy named Jesus at the beginning of the 1st Century who was crucified by the Romans. There are a handful of historians, largely militant atheist ones, who will argue that there is no historical Jesus at all... but in reality it is overwhelmingly true that there was one. Some of the evidence for this comes from the things scripture gets right long before the historical community does. One example would be that for many years people were skeptical that a guy name Pontius Pilate ever lived... until they found concrete physical evidence that indeed he was the guy in charge in Jerusalem during the time Jesus is thought to have been crucified. Other proof is that the Jews and Romans of the time period in which the Gospels were written, who did not like Christians or Christianity, could not outright refute that Jesus existed. The arguments in Roman and Jewish writings against Christianity always focus on how Jesus was not who He said He was, but they never outright try to deny His existence. The Gospels, which were written as early as within thirty years of the crucifixion and as late as within sixty (depending on how skeptical the person you ask is), would have existed concurrently with people who were actually in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus's preaching/teaching. If Jesus had never taught and preached, or even if He was unknown, then there would have been a massive outcry that the whole story with Jesus was false. However, of course, these people who hated Christians had to concede that Jesus did in fact live and die in Jerusalem. The way in which Jesus dies also plays into the proof for us.

In our first reading for today we read from Psalms 22:14-18. In this scripture from Psalms we as Christians see a clear picture of Jesus at His crucifixion. "They pierced my hands and my feet" from verse sixteen in particular is an accurate description of crucifixion. But also in the rest of these verses we see other statements that talk about Jesus's specific crucifixion. "My tongue cleaves to my jaws" in verse fifteen directly relates to Jesus being thirsty upon the cross, which He plainly states. "They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots" from verse eighteen also is specific to Jesus's crucifixion. While He is upon the cross we read just this last week out of Luke 23:34 "... And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves." If your head is spinning over this, know that there is a real reason for going through and looking at both physical evidence and prophecies regarding Jesus... They lend credence to the claim that Jesus really lived and really died, so that you might believe. This particular Psalm, Psalm 22, was written long before the crucifixion of Christ. In fact, if King David is the writer of this Psalm (which I am lead to believe) then this prophecy predates Christ by about a thousand years. Even the most unbelieving historical folks will put the writing of this

Psalms long before crucifixion existed, let alone long before Jesus was born. The fact that He did live and die in this way is a big piece of proof that what you hold to be true as Christians is real. But of course, it gets deeper than just Jesus's actual existence and crucifixion. Lots of people lived and were crucified by the Romans. Our second piece of evidence regarding our Savior's resurrection is the fact of the empty tomb, and this helps further prove the truth of Christ's resurrection.

In our second reading from the book of Isaiah, we looked at some of the most specific prophecies regarding Jesus's life. We have looked at this prophecy a bunch recently in our services, and there is a reason for that: Isaiah 53 is an important piece in proving that Jesus is the Messiah we believe Him to be. However, we also read here that Jesus is laid in a rich man's tomb. Verse nine reads "His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth." Jesus of course was crucified with criminals and yet was laid in a rich guy named Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. As great as the evidence of Jesus going into that tomb is as it relates to Isaiah 53, the real big proof of His resurrection comes from it being empty three days later. To put it bluntly, if Jesus's body was still in the tomb, then everyone would have known that He was in fact dead and had not been resurrected.

Over the centuries there have been many who speculate why Jesus's body did not remain in the tomb. Some postulated that the women who came to visit Jesus early Sunday morning may have gone to the wrong tomb. That of course is foolish, because they had seen where He lay, the disciples who they told came and looked in (Peter and John) and they would have known of the right tomb, and if the authorities wanted to prove Christ was still dead to kill off Christianity they would have produced the body. So obviously that argument doesn't work. Another argument is that perhaps Jesus swooned on the cross, passed out in a death like coma, and awoke later on. This too is foolish, because the Romans who killed Him were professional killers. Jesus was stabbed with a spear, beaten severely, pierced through His hands and feet, severely dehydrated, etc. Even if Jesus would have awoken later, He would have been in no condition to roll away the stone covering the tomb, let alone find a way to convince everyone around Him that He was resurrected. This leaves us with the final answer that most non-Christians adhere to (which is also what scripture says the Jews told their followers in Jesus's time) which is that the body was stolen by the disciples. However, the disciples would have had to get past the Roman guards who were guarding the tomb. Those Roman soldiers would have been under strict Roman rules, and it would have been death to allow the disciples to steal Jesus's body. Also, all of the disciples with the likely exception of John, would go to their graves proclaiming Jesus's name. They were all killed in horrific ways because they believed Christ had died and rose again. If it was a lie perpetrated by themselves, it is unlikely that they all would have willingly died proclaiming Jesus's name. To be honest as a historian, the most logical explanation for the empty tomb is that Jesus's body was taken away without anyone knowing, without any work being done by an injured Jesus, and in a way where Christ Himself

would be able to appear to His followers in healthy state. That all is evidence for a resurrected Christ as we read about in scripture.

This brings us to our final “answer” in regards to Jesus’s resurrection, and that is the response of the disciples. In our reading from the Gospel of John, we read about the first few interactions Jesus had with the disciples following His resurrection. We read about how Jesus shows Thomas the holes in His hands and side. We read about how Jesus came to several of them who were out fishing, and performed the same miracle of fish catching that He had shown them three years before when He called them. We read how in chapter twenty-one verse twelve that the disciples did not question who He was, that they knew He was the Lord. All of these disciples either went out and conspired together, for no discernable gain in any way, to live a difficult life preaching Christ crucified for which they would ultimately die, OR they really did see a resurrected Christ. There is no way that Christianity would have survived its infancy if the disciples would have recanted under persecution, stating that they made it up. But the fact that they, and many others who saw Jesus (alive, crucified, and raised) were willing to be persecuted shows that they really believed He was resurrected. This, along with the empty tomb and historicity of Jesus’s life, shows fairly clearly that there is evidence for a resurrected Jesus.

Before we close today’s message, I want to reiterate why all this is important for us two thousand years later. There is a real importance in knowing the evidence for a resurrected Savior. If Jesus really lived, died, and was raised again, then everything else in our faith that is built upon that has a firm foundation. We can trust the Bible as true and the Lord’s teachings as good and that we are promised an eternity in heaven. If He didn’t, then our faith means nothing and we may as well just live out our lives as “nice people.” Historically, there is much evidence for a resurrected Christ. The three things we discussed this morning are only the tip of the iceberg in regards to Christ’s resurrection. Hopefully these truths help to strengthen your faith today. Know that your Savior is risen. Go in peace this morning, let us pray.

Closing Prayer