

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We are, of course, still in the Easter season. For seven weeks we rejoice in the fact that Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! But seven weeks? Really? Isn't that a bit long? Why not move on to something else? Last week we heard a reading from 1 Corinthians 15 that if Christ has not been raised, then our faith is futile, and we are still in our sins. Theologian Gerald O'Collins put it this way, "In a profound sense, Christianity without the resurrection is not simply Christianity without its final chapter. It is not Christianity at all." Why spend 7 weeks on the resurrection of Jesus? Because without his resurrection the other 45 weeks would completely be meaningless.

So today, we want to take some time and talk about the evidence we have for the fact of Christ's resurrection. If the fact is so vitally important and Christianity falls apart without the fact, then we can't doubt it. We need to be convinced. So today we consider the evidence. We'll mostly limit ourselves to Luke 24:36-49, but understand the Bible provides much more evidence than just this! But even if this one verse was all we had, we'd already have a compelling case. Let's take a look:

First the setting. It's the day of Jesus' resurrection. Luke already related the events at the empty tomb that morning. And just before the part we're going to look at, he tells the story about the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Two men were walking along talking about Jesus and his death and the reports of resurrection. They couldn't make sense of it all. They didn't understand or believe the obvious: that Christ had indeed risen from the dead. Then, Jesus came up and walked next to them, but they didn't recognize him. He explains Old Testament Scripture to them so they could understand that everything that happened was exactly as the prophets said it would. When they arrived at their destination, Jesus went in and broke bread with them. When they recognized him, he disappeared. They immediately went back to Jerusalem. They found the other disciples and began to share this amazing story to assure them that Jesus had risen from the dead. And then this:

Luke 24:36-49 While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

Okay, we already have evidence to consider. Two men are giving an account of what they saw. Suddenly, Jesus stood among them, and calms them with his word of peace. What is the nature of this evidence? It's physical evidence! They see him with their own eyes. But wait! Our eyes can play tricks on us! I've seen weird things myself in that half-awake half-asleep state. They must have been exhausted. Maybe they were seeing things. Well, they heard him speak as well. "Peace be with you," he said. They recognized the voice. This was Jesus.

So we have the sense of sight. We have the sense of sound. This is already convincing stuff. But wait, multiply this by however many disciples were gathered in that locked room! There were multiple witnesses. Everyone saw and heard the same thing. This wasn't just the witness of one. This wasn't just the witness of two, this was the witness of a whole group of people! Later when Jesus left, I have to wonder if they didn't talk about what happened, saying, "Did you see what I saw? Did you hear what I heard? Oh good! I wasn't the only one, was I? We all had the same experience?" They did.

They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.

Sometimes we see what we want to see. We wish so badly that something is true, our mind thinks it's there. But note that although they didn't want Jesus to die, neither did they expect that he would rise. They were startled and frightened. You might expect shouts of joy and high fives all around. But the only thing they could think of was that they were seeing a ghost.

He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?"

Jesus clearly sees their lack of faith and that they were hard time accepting what was obvious, namely, that he had risen from the dead. As if sight, sound and multiple witnesses weren't enough, he adds more evidence:

Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.

It's not all that unusual to have a case of mistaken identity, is it? When we were at my brother-in-law's church for Thanksgiving this past year, we were standing in their fellowship hall waiting for church to start. Someone approached from behind me and started rubbing my back. I turned to see who it was, and was surprised that I had no idea this lady was. She looked at me and was equally surprised, and started apologizing profusely. "I'm so sorry! You're shirt and build are similar to my husband's! I thought you were him." Mistaken identity happens all the time. Maybe the disciples thought it was Jesus, but they were mistaken!

No! First of all, Jesus assures him he's not a ghost. He has flesh and bones. This is Jesus in the flesh. Second by telling them to look at his hands and feet, he is proving to them that it is he. He is the one who was crucified on the cross, who died, whose side was pierced with a spear. And who was buried. And now his physical body was alive again. There's no mistaken identity here. It's Jesus in the flesh!

And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?"

Now they're starting to get it. Fear is starting to give way to joy. Whereas at first they were so afraid they couldn't believe, next they don't believe because of joy. When something seems too good to be true, your mind holds back acceptance of the good news until there is certainty.

he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.

Some were still thinking he might be a ghost, so he took one more step to convince them. He ate. Ghosts don't eat. And even if they were collectively imagining Jesus, later they could count the fish or look at the fish skeleton left from the fish Jesus ate. It was physical evidence... evidence that would still be there after he left.

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

And this we would say is the documentary evidence. Everything in the Old Testament Scriptures had foretold what would happen with the promised Savior. Incredible details about him were given in the Psalms, in Isaiah, and other Old Testament books. Jesus taught them again and showed them how from Scriptures, everything had to happen exactly the way it did.

Jesus came, was rejected, suffered, died and rose again. This was God’s plan to forgive all our sins! Jesus accomplished the plans exactly as the Old Testament said he would! This is the documentary evidence.

More evidence: There is more evidence of course besides Luke Gospel. Add together all the witness and you find there were hundreds. In fact, if every witness recorded in Scripture were interviewed, or put on a witness stand for just 15 minutes each, it would take 129 hours to listen to all the testimony. How can this not convince us?

And remember this: anyone who doubted during the first 30 years or more after Christ’s resurrection could have done first-hand research to see if it was true. They could have interviewed these people and considered all their testimony. They could have debunked this resurrection myth once and for all. But they didn’t. It is true. And it’s the truth that gave Christianity the escape velocity to escape the 1st Century and to escape Palestine. Christianity became a worldwide religion because Christ truly is risen. He is risen indeed.

This may have all sounded somewhat like an academic exercise. But let me share with you now why it is so vitally important that we be convinced of the resurrection of Jesus.

Gary Habermas is a Bible scholar and the author of multiple books about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In his books, he makes many logical arguments for Christ’s resurrection, and demonstrates that just based on the evidence, a logical, reasonable person ought to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. A man named Lee Strobel interviewed him when he was writing his book, “The Case for Christ.” After hearing Habermas’ intellectual and rational arguments for the truth of Christ’s resurrection, Strobel ended the interview by asking about the importance of the resurrection... what difference it really makes that Christ is risen. Habermas’ demeanor changed, and he told a very personal story.

It was a story about when his wife Debbie slowly was dying of stomach cancer in 1995. Let me read this to you:

"I sat on our porch. My wife was upstairs dying. Except for a few weeks, she was home through it all. It was an awful time. This was the worst thing that could possibly happen. But do you know what was amazing? My students would call me - not just one but several of them - and say, 'At a time like this, aren't you glad about the Resurrection?' As sober as those circumstances were, I had to smile for two reasons. First, my students were trying to cheer me up with my own teaching. And second, it worked.

"As I would sit there, I'd picture Job, who went through all that terrible stuff and asked questions of God, but then God turned the tables and asked him a few questions. I knew if God were to come to me, I'd ask only one question:

'Lord, why is Debbie up there in bed?' And I think God would respond by asking gently, 'Gary, did I raise my Son from the dead?' I'd say, 'Come on, Lord, I've written seven books on that topic! Of course he was raised from the dead. But I want to know about Debbie!'

"I think he'd keep coming back to the same question-'Did I raise my Son from the dead?' 'Did I raise my Son from the dead?' until I got his point: the Resurrection says that if Jesus was raised two

thousand years ago, there's an answer to Debbie's death in 1995.

And do you know what? It worked for me while I was sitting on the porch, and it still works today. It was a horribly emotional time for me, but I couldn't get around the fact that the Resurrection is the answer for her suffering.

I still worried; I still wondered what I'd do raising four kids alone. But there wasn't a time when that truth didn't comfort me. Losing my wife was the most painful experience I've ever had to face, but if the Resurrection could get me through that, it can get me through anything. It was good for 30 A.D., it's good for 1995, it's good for 2012, and it's good beyond that." Habermas locked eyes with his interviewer. "That's not some sermon," he said quietly. "I believe that with all my heart. If there's a resurrection, there's a heaven. If Jesus was raised, Debbie was raised. And I will be someday, too. Then I'll see them both."

Friends, what is it that you are struggling with today? What is it that causes you to doubt that God's love and power are at work in you and for you? What struggles with your faith are you facing? God is coming to you today with a simple question... a question I want you to hear and answer in your mind over and over again the rest of today and the rest of the week? "Did I raise my Son from the dead?" God's asking you the question. You know the answer. And the answer gives you a whole new perspective and new hope, whatever you deal with in this sinful, dying world. Did God raise his Son from the dead? You know it. Don't doubt but believe. He is risen. He is risen indeed. Amen.