

## We Can Believe

### Part 8

#### **Text – I Corinthians 15 : 1 - 8**

**Intro** – A little boy and his father were driving down a country road on a beautiful spring afternoon. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a bumblebee flew in the car window. Since the little boy was deathly allergic to bee stings, he became terrified. His father quickly reached out, grabbed the bee, squeezed it in his hand, and then released it. But as soon as he let it go, the son became frantic once again as it buzzed by him.

The father, seeing his son’s fear, once again reached out his hand, but this time he pointed to his hand. There, stuck in his skin was the stinger of the bee. “You see this?” he asked. “You don’t need to be afraid anymore. I’ve taken the sting for you.”

The Christian does not need to be afraid of death because Christ has taken the sting out of death and sin by his death on Calvary and resurrection from the grave.

**As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 15:55-56:** “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.”

As we make our way through the study of apologetics, we come to an exciting subject: **the resurrection of Christ**. Did Jesus bodily and literally rise from the dead as the Bible claims?

Let’s find out!

#### **I. Why does the Resurrection Matter?**

- **Verses 3-8 of I Cor. 15** can be understood as a “**creed**.”
  - It predates Paul as he states that he “**received**” this from others.
  - It is believed this creed came from the very early Church, originating within **5 years of Jesus’ death and resurrection!**
- Let’s take a closer look at the reasons why the Resurrection matters:

##### **1. If Jesus’ Resurrection is not True, the Believer’s Assurance of His Own Future Resurrection is Lost –**

- Paul says this in **I Cor. 15:19** – “If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.”
- If Christ is not risen, then we have no hope of any future resurrection.
- The Resurrection points out that God has placed His “seal of approval” on Christ’s work, therefore, guaranteeing the promises of Christ for our resurrection are also secured.

## 2. If Christ did not rise from the Dead, Christianity is a Fraud and a False Religion –

- The importance of the Resurrection is summed up in the words of the late Bible scholar, **Henry Morris**: “The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the crowning proof of Christianity. If the resurrection **did not** take place, then Christianity is a false religion. If it did take place, then Christ is God, and the Christian faith is absolute truth.”
- Paul states in **I Cor. 15:15** – “Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.”
  - Paul is saying, “If the Resurrection of Jesus didn’t happen, I’m nothing more than a false teacher.”
- The glorious truth of the Resurrection is summed up with Paul’s words in **I Cor. 15:20-22** – “But now Christ **has** been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.”

## 3. If Jesus did not Rise from the Dead, our Preaching & Faith is Vain –

- Listen to Paul’s words in **I Cor. 15:14** – “and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.”
- If Christ is not resurrected, our preaching and faith in this Christ are also useless.
  - **What use is a dead Savior?**
- Without a literal and bodily resurrection, we have no hope. We are still in our sins and bound for a Christless eternity without hope.

## II. What the Bible and History Teach Us About the Resurrection of Jesus –

- Let’s consider **7 proofs of Jesus’ Resurrection**:

### 1. The Bible tells us that Jesus was crucified by Roman authorities who were compelled by the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem -

- All four of the Gospels record the death of Jesus.
  - Even beyond the Gospels, other N.T. writers present the truth of Jesus’ death.
- Even beyond the Biblical account, other ancient historians such as Josephus, Tacitus, Lucian, and the Jewish Talmud all reference the death of Jesus.

## 2. Jesus' Burial –

- Common sense tells us that for a tomb to be found empty, it once had to be previously occupied.
- Most reputable scholars tell us that Jesus was crucified and that He was buried in a tomb.

## 3. The Empty Tomb –

- The empty tomb is crucial to the claim that Christ rose physically. If the body of Jesus were still in the tomb, then the Resurrection is disproven from the start. **The evidence from Scripture is that no one disputed the empty tomb, just that some desired to suppress the knowledge of it.**
  - Furthermore, there is no historical documentation ... that even suggests that a body could be produced.
- Let's go a bit deeper and look at some other reasons for the validity of the empty tomb:

### A. Jesus was crucified and buried in Jerusalem –

- If Christians began proclaiming the resurrection, and Jesus' tomb was **NOT** empty, then Christianity's opponents would have capitalized on that fact.
- In other words, as soon as the disciples began preaching that Jesus was raised from the dead, their enemies would have jumped on that false claim with both feet.
- Again, there is no historical documentation ... that even suggests that a body could be produced!

### B. The enemies of Christianity acknowledged that the tomb was empty and then accused the disciples of having stolen Jesus' body –

- Listen to **Matt. 28:11-15** – “Now while they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.’ And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble.” And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, *and is to this day.*”
- As you can see from the passage, the question of the empty tomb is settled.

- These dastardly people were just trying to change the narrative.
- Interestingly enough, Justin Martyr, who lived 100 years later, wrote that the Jews were still circulating the rumor of Jesus' disciples stealing His body.

#### 4. The Disciples Claimed to Have Had Experiences with the Resurrected Christ –

- Throughout the Gospel accounts, the disciples claimed to have seen Jesus after He resurrected.
- These appearances were not all at the same time, or at the same places, or even to the same people.
- Following is a sample of these recorded experiences of seeing Christ after His resurrection: Matt. 28:8-10 & 16-30; I Cor. 15:6; Lk. 24:13-32; John 20:19-23; & Acts 9:3-9.
- Four Thoughts on these encounters:

**A. Jesus appears not only to isolated individuals, but also to groups and even to at least one large group of about 500.**

**B. Jesus appeared not just to His close friends and followers, but also to his half-brother and skeptic, James, who did not believe in Jesus' identity as Messiah prior to his crucifixion and death.**

**C. Jesus appeared to Saul (later called Paul) in Acts 9, who at the time, was a persecutor of the Church.**

**D. The appearances of Jesus were absolutely physical in nature.** Remember Jesus invited Thomas to touch his hands and side to demonstrate that He had risen.

#### 5. The Disciples are Transformed –

- If you remember, Jesus' disciples scattered like sheep without a shepherd.
  - The only disciple present for the crucifixion was John.
  - Peter had denied the Lord 3 times after Jesus was arrested.
  - John 20 tells us that the disciples were gathered in an upper room with the doors locked out of fear of the Jews.
- From the fearful and fleeing disciples arise men of passion, boldness, and power.

- For example, in Acts 4, Peter and John are ordered to stop preaching about Jesus.
- Instead of being intimidated, these men respond much differently: “But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.’” (Acts 4:19-20)
- Critics may point to the fact that martyrs die for their causes every day.
  - What you need to keep in mind is this: “People will die for a lie they believe to be true; but people do not willingly die for something they know to be a lie.”

## 6. The Birth of the Church in Jerusalem –

- Jesus was arrested, tried, crucified, and buried in Jerusalem.
- Where was the birth of the Church? Right, Jerusalem.
  - This is recorded for us in Acts 2.
- One of the central messages of the early N.T. Church was the resurrection of Jesus.
  - If Jesus had not resurrected, why on Earth would the early Christians choose Jerusalem of all places, to preach a message that would have easily been challenged and proven a lie?
  - The early chapters of the Book of Acts report the rapid growth of the early Church in Jerusalem.
    - It was not until persecution began that the church was forced to leave Jerusalem and spread out to other areas of the Middle East and beyond.

## 7. The Early Christian Worldview –

- The earliest followers of Jesus were predominantly Jewish.
- The key apostles, Peter, James, John, and Paul were all devout Jews.
- However, as they were forced to wrestle with Jesus: His life, ministry, death, burial, and resurrection, they were led to change their views.
- This is seen in two significant ways:

### **A. Jews were emphatically and unswervingly monotheistic in the midst of a polytheistic and idolatrous world –**

- Those early Christians immediately acknowledged and worshiped Jesus as Lord and God.

- Those Christians continued to identify as Jewish but held that Jesus was coequal with God.

**B. Early Christians began gathering to sing hymns and share meals together.**

- Those meetings were not held on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, but rather on Sunday, the day that Jesus rose from the dead.
- By the time the Book of Revelation was written, around AD 95, Sunday was known as “the Lord’s Day.” (Rev. 1:10)

**INVITATION** – **From Voddie Baucum** – “The last time I checked; the death rate was one per person. I didn’t check today, but I’m sure it didn’t change. It is appointed to man to die once, then face the judgment (Heb. 9:27). So everyone everywhere is asking or will ask the same question: How can I avoid being defeated by that last enemy? You can’t beat him. You can’t buy him off. You can’t appease him.

You can’t outrun him. You can’t exercise enough or eat well enough. There is nothing you can do to avoid being overtaken by this enemy. But the resurrection says you can overcome this enemy: “O death, where is your sting?” You see, when you stand over a believer, it’s not the same as standing over an unbeliever, because when you stand over a believer, you know that because of his union with Christ, his federal head, he will rise just as Christ rose from the dead. There is a resurrection coming. So this sting is gone; death’s victory is gone.”