

Today, is a very special day. Can anybody tell me what's special about today?

Yes, it is Easter Sunday, but it's also another special day: It's April fool's day.

The day where pranks are played and practical jokes are made, and you've always got to be weary of what you believe (even if you hear it on the news), because somebody might be 'pulling your leg' ... And if you're a little bit gullible, and prone to believing the unbelievable, you may very well find, that the joke is on you, when you hear those mocking words, – “April fool!!!” ...

Has anybody been caught out yet today?

Well, Easter Sunday (also known as “Resurrection Sunday”).... .. – who's the April fool???

Those who are wise by worldly standards, would say “The joke's on you. You Christians are a bunch of fools. To believe, that Jesus was raised from the dead – April fools!!!”

Who's the fool???

When Jesus was put to death on a Roman cross of crucifixion, and his body was laid in a tomb, and a large stone was set there to seal the entrance... And then a Roman guard was placed there, to make sure that the body couldn't be stolen away... “You disciples of Jesus – you April fools – there's no way you're going to be able to claim that Jesus is risen from

the dead, because we're going to make sure that you cannot steal the body, and claim that He has..."— You can't fool us....

But then, their plan was all turned on its head. On that very first resurrection Sunday, the two Mary's went to the tomb, and guess what... It was empty. Who were the fools then?

You think you can prevent the Lord God almighty, from raising Jesus from the dead???? April fools...

Who's the fool???

The credibility of the whole concept of Christianity – Whether the Gospel is an outright con, or whether it's the most important truth this world has ever been told, depends completely on the truth or fiction of the claim, that Jesus rose from the dead.

Both the men's Bible study group, and the Ladies' bible study group recently took a bit of time out to watch the movie "The Case for Christ". It's a true story of an atheist journalist, Lee Strobel, and his quest to disprove the resurrection. He knew, all he had to do, was to discredit the resurrection, and that would demolish the very foundations of Christianity – it would negate any value, that could be found in the Gospel.

*And yet this avowed atheist, as he sought to build his case against the resurrection (and therefore against the validity of Christianity itself), found **himself** having a very real struggle, because he found there was more evidence **for** the*

resurrection than against it. In fact, he couldn't find any valid evidence against the resurrection...

*And so, he had set out to objectively **disprove** Christianity, but the opposite happened. As soon as he started looking at it objectively, he found he had no choice, but to become a believer himself.*

There's pretty much no argument that Jesus was born.
There's pretty much no argument that Jesus was executed.
What the world cannot handle, is that Jesus has been raised from the dead. Because if it is true, that Jesus was raised from the dead, that has serious ramifications on how we have to respond to Jesus.

If Jesus is dead, then he's just another world figure, who lived and died.

But if Jesus is risen, that means Jesus is Lord. That means everything He said is true. If Jesus has risen, it becomes an absolute necessity, for us to bow our knee before Him, and surrender our very lives to Him, forsaking all else.... Our eternity depends upon it...

The whole Gospel, hinges on the resurrection. If **it's** not true, **none** of the Gospel has any value.

This is why Paul outlines the most important foundations of the Gospel.

1. Firstly, **Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the Scriptures.** It was no accident that Jesus

died. It was no hurriedly put together “Plan B”. It was **always** God’s plan. It was foretold in the Old Testamentⁱ. And there was a purpose in Christ dying – so that we could be forgiven of our sins.

2. Secondly, **He was buried....** There was nothing fake about the death of Jesus. The Romans were experts in killing. These seasoned soldiers, were very confident that He was dead. But even then, they lanced Him with a spear to make sure.
3. Thirdly, **He was raised on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures.** The resurrection shouldn’t have been a surprise either. It also, was foretoldⁱⁱ.

These are the things that Paul considers “**as of first importance**”. Everything hinges on the resurrection of Jesus.

And to prove the resurrection, he produces a witness list.

What’s the proof of the resurrection? Eye-witnesses:

- Jesus appeared to Cephas (Jewish name for Peter);
- Then to the 12 (meaning his close group of disciples) (Obviously Judas was dead by then, but he could still refer to them as “the twelve”, because there were more than 12 disciples.
- Then he appeared to more than **500** brothers at one time, and at the time of writing this, most of those were still alive (although a few of them had died)
- Then He appeared to James
- Then he appeared to **all** the apostles
- And then last of all, he appeared to Paul himself. At that stage, Paul was still going by his Jewish name “Saul”,

and he was persecuting those who followed Jesus. He refers to himself as “**the least of the apostles**”, and “**as to one untimely born**”... That’s a nice way of saying, “I’m an abortion of an apostle”. It literally means “a miscarriage”...

Why did Paul feel he was so inadequate? Because in his eyes, he never deserved to be an apostle of Jesus. He persecuted God’s church. How could **he** deserve God’s mercy? Well he couldn’t (none of us deserve God’s mercy), but by the grace of God, Paul became an apostle of Christ. Once he’d met the risen Lord Jesus, there was no going back for him. He gave up all, to serve Christ with every part of his being.

What could take a man from being a persecutor of Christians, to being a leader of Christians? A risen Saviour – that’s what.

But Paul lists all of these people, who were eye witnesses, to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. And even then, it wasn’t an exhaustive list. He didn’t even mention the women, who were the first to **see** Him. He doesn’t mention the disciples on the road to Emmaus... But I think in any court of Law, 500-odd witnesses would be enough to prove that Jesus wasn’t dead, even though his execution was considered, a success.

So, what’s the consequences of Jesus being alive or not alive? If Jesus wasn’t raised from the dead, what difference would it make?

Well firstly, if Jesus wasn't raised from the dead, we can't be raised from the dead. If Jesus didn't conquer death, there'd be no such thing as eternal life.

But because Jesus was raised from the dead, He has become (what's called) the firstfruits of the resurrection.... Because there is **proof** that Jesus **is** raised, Disciples of Jesus Christ, can have every confidence, that we also, will be raised to eternal life.

But if He wasn't raised, Paul says: **“¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.”** If Jesus hasn't risen, we'll just become tucker for worms, and that's all we'll ever be.

2.

Secondly, if Jesus wasn't raised, then the whole Christian faith is a sham. Preachers of the Gospel, would be nothing other than disillusioned conmen... I would either be deceived, or a liar.

Paul says: **if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.** (It's all pointless)

3.

Thirdly, if Christ has not been raised, [our] **faith is futile** and [we] **are still in [our] sins.**

What do you consider to be, the greatest need for humanity? Some would say food; shelter; medicine; love; a teenager might say “a smart phone”...

I'll tell you what the greatest need for humanity is: To be set free from sin. More important than food; more critical than shelter, is the release from guilt and shame... And that only comes through Jesus. If Jesus hasn't been raised, He hasn't overcome sin. And we would still be dead in our sin.

4.

And fourthly, Paul says: ¹⁹ *If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

Why would he say that? I'll tell you why: Disciples of Jesus, don't live for this life – We live for eternity.

- While the world pursues physical and financial gain in this life, Disciples of Jesus give to the poor, and needy. They care for those who have no-one to care for them, knowing that we have a reward in Heaven.
- While the world pursues pleasure and do whatever makes them feel good, Disciples of Jesus deny themselves, to follow Him.
- While the world give themselves over to whatever is the prevailing principle of the day, Disciples of Jesus, are imprisoned, tortured and executed, because they will not deny Christ....

But if Jesus did not rise, why would we do that???

If the resurrection didn't happen, denying ourselves in this life, and living for eternity, would be pointless.

But here's the thing. Today is resurrection Sunday. We celebrate the fact that Jesus is alive. Christ has **risen**. In the resurrection:

- He conquered sin;
- He conquered death;
- He proved His Lordship;
- He gives us assurance of the hope of our salvation;
- He encourages us to live for eternity
-He gives life;

Everything hinges on the resurrection. If Jesus wasn't raised from the dead, you might as well go home. Don't worry about that church stuff anymore. Don't worry about what the preacher has to say – he's just a conman... As a famous atheist once said, "There's probably no god, so stop worrying and enjoy your life..."

But if Jesus was raised from the dead, then that changes everything... That means God has a valid call on your life and mine. It means Jesus is Lord, and He demands our loyalty, and He deserves it. And he will not take "No" as an answer...

If Jesus is alive, and I know that He is, the day to respond to Him, is today.

Let's pray:

Oh Lord, how wonderful it is that you are raised from the dead.

Just as, in the sin of Adam, all humanity enter into sin,
And are condemned by sin,
And all humanity die,
So too, through the risen Lord Jesus Christ,
Your Disciples, shall be made alive.

Lord, we want to thank You, for the gift of life.
We thank You, for the gift of eternal life.

Lord, in the light of the resurrection,
It cannot be argued against – that You are Lord.
You deserve our allegiance.
You deserve our love;
You deserve, to be served by every part of our being.

And yet we don't do it out of compulsion,
But as an act of love and worship, to You, our risen Saviour.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.

ⁱ Egg. Isaiah 53

ⁱⁱ Isaiah 53:10–12 (ESV)

¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;
he has put him to grief;
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,

and he shall bear their iniquities.

- 12 Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,
because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Psalm 16:10 (ESV)

- 10 For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.