

The Resurrection of Jesus

By R. Keith Loftin

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, students will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read the comments related to 1 Corinthians 15:14 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: Why is the resurrection of Jesus so important for Christians? Why might people be skeptical that Jesus truly was raised from the dead?

Assignment Two

Read the comments related to 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: How do these postmortem appearances support the truth of the resurrection account? Were all those who saw the risen Jesus already believers at the time? (*Postmortem* refers to appearances of Jesus to people after He died and rose again.)

Assignment Three

Read the comments related to the reliability of the postmortem appearance reports under **It's in the Book**. List some reasons people might reject the postmortem appearance reports. Prepare to share your list with the group. (*Postmortem* refers to appearances of Jesus to people after He died and rose again.)

Scripture to Memorize

"If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain." 1 Corinthians 15:14

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand Jesus's postmortem appearances as evidence of His resurrection.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Imagine you are a detective who's looking into a cold case. You open the dusty file and find, amid other evidence, some old witness statements. *It'd be great if I could talk to these witnesses myself*, you think, *but they're long gone*. What criteria will you use to judge their reliability?

Regarding the case of the resurrection of Jesus, who were the witnesses? Do their statements contain any telltale clues of truth or falsity? They each claim that Jesus appeared alive numerous times after His death. What theory best explains their claims?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, 14 out loud.

Studying the Passage, vv. 1–4

Verses 1–4. The gospel . . . first importance . . . according to the Scriptures. In these opening verses, Paul reminded his readers of the core elements of the Christian gospel. All Christians are familiar with Jesus's death and burial in order to pay for our sins, which was a fulfillment of Old Testament teaching. Alongside these elements is Jesus's resurrection. The resurrection is the reason the gospel story matters—the reason the gospel is *alive*. And therein lies its brilliance: the resurrection is not a random anomaly of history but rather an integral element of God's intentional plan for redemption.

Assignment One Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now report on the importance of the resurrection for Christians and reasons for skepticism about the resurrection in the culture.

On Your Own

As you think about Jesus's willingness to die for your sins, consider the importance of the fact that He didn't remain dead. Tell Him that in prayer right now.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:5–8 out loud.

Studying the Passage, vv. 5–8

Verses 5–8. He appeared to. In verses 3–7 Paul was reciting an early Christian creed his disciples had taught him. This creed reports that after Jesus was killed and buried, He appeared *alive* to various persons on multiple occasions. The list is not meant to be exhaustive. If this report is truthful, then Jesus must have been raised from the dead. But are these appearance accounts trustworthy? Like a detective we must look for clues to their truth or falsity.

Our first clue is the *timing* of the creed itself. Scholars have found that the creed Paul recites dates to within three years of Jesus's death. By historical standards that is extraordinarily early, certainly early enough for the witnesses to remember what happened. Our earliest accounts of the life of Alexander the Great (those written by Arrian and Plutarch) are from more than four hundred years after Alexander's death in 323 BC. Despite such a sizable time gap, historians are confident we have a reliable picture of Alexander.

Our second clue is the *identity* of the witnesses. Most of the witnesses are people who followed Jesus during His earthly life, but not all were. Neither James (Jesus's brother) nor Paul were believers before they saw the risen Jesus. In fact, Paul hated Christians! This is important

because it means neither of them were predisposed to any “wishful thinking” about Jesus’s rising from the dead. Certainly they wouldn’t have lied to help promote Christianity.

Yet James became a leader in the early Jerusalem church, and Paul became a Christian missionary. Both of them eventually were put to death for their faith in the risen Jesus. Why would James and Paul be willing to die for preaching the resurrection? Their dramatic changes of heart suggest trustworthiness.

Verse 6. more than five hundred brethren . . . most of whom remain until now, although some have fallen asleep. The information mentioned by Paul in verse 6 is not irrelevant. The fact that Paul includes this detail means he is familiar with a number of these people. He probably interviewed some of them himself. By noting that most of them were still alive, Paul was inviting anyone who doubted his story to go interview the witnesses for themselves, something he would never have done if his report were a fabrication.

Assignment Two Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now report on how the postmortem appearances support the historical accuracy of the resurrection.

On Your Own

Imagine being in the crowd of “five hundred brethren” to see the risen Jesus. How would you react? How would that experience impact your thinking about Jesus’s claim to be God? In the space below, write a few of your thoughts.

Hallucinations?

Our third clue is the *nature* of the witness testimony. First Corinthians 15:3–7 is an excellent witness report on Jesus’s postmortem appearances, but it’s not the only one we have.

The four Gospels mention appearances Paul does not record:

On the road to Emmaus, Luke 24:13–15

To the women at the empty tomb, Matthew 28:9–10 and John 20:11–17

The four Gospels also confirm Paul’s testimony:

The appearances to Peter, Luke 24:34

The appearances to the twelve disciples, Luke 24:36–43 and John 20:19–20

Such confirmation raises our level of confidence in their testimony.

When we read the Gospel accounts of Jesus’s appearances, we learn a key detail: they were decidedly physical in nature. These appearances were not vague or wispy, ghost-like apparitions. Jesus’s postmortem appearances, rather, were markedly *physical* in nature.

In addition to being visible, Jesus walked and talked with people, touched people, and even ate meals with them. Remember that Thomas initially did not believe his friends had seen the risen Lord, yet he came to believe after *touching* Jesus (see John 20:27). This means the witnesses could not have been hallucinating. Besides, if all the witnesses were really hallucinating, then Jesus’s body would’ve still been in the tomb, and the Jewish leadership would have squashed the resurrection story by producing His corpse. But they didn’t because they couldn’t.

Assignment Three Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now report on reasons a person might reject the postmortem appearance accounts.

Discussion Questions

How well do the objections listed in **Assignment Three** handle the clues presented in the lesson? How does the truth of the postmortem appearance accounts impact your thinking about the resurrection?

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven.

Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart (the real you) for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something in your life for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit says to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

At Home: Nail It Down

The historical accuracy of Jesus's resurrection is integral to the Christian faith. As the apostle Paul writes, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain" (1 Corinthians 15:14). Jesus's postmortem appearances offer some of the best historical evidence we have. These accounts are reliably documented and simply cannot be explained away as hallucinations.

Two passages were explored in this study.

- First Corinthians 15:1–4, 14 makes clear that the resurrection of Jesus is essential to Christian faith.
- First Corinthians 15:5–8 presents a list of numerous appearances of Jesus alive, to both believers and nonbelievers, after His death. This is amazing evidence that Jesus was, in fact, raised from the dead in victory over death.

The *timing* of the detailed reports of Jesus's postresurrection appearances is important. The report presented by Paul came only three years after those appearances. Scholars tend to view such reports as reliable.

The diverse *identity* of the witnesses also strengthens their reports. Several witnesses did not follow Jesus during His days on earth and thus carried no "wishful thinking" about Jesus's rising from the dead.

The *number* of witnesses adds additional support. More than five hundred individuals were available to tell whether they had seen Jesus after the first Easter.

The *physical* nature of Jesus's appearances also make them more believable. These appearances were not vague or wispy, ghost-like apparitions. In addition to being visible, Jesus walked and talked with people, touched people, and even ate meals with them. This means the witnesses could not have been hallucinating.

If Jesus had not risen from the dead, His body would've still been in the tomb, and the Jewish leaders would have squashed the resurrection story by producing His corpse. But they didn't because they couldn't.

Disciples adore and follow a living Messiah. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. And His resurrection is the proof and the testimony.

Parent Question

Why is the resurrection of Jesus so important to Christian faith, and how are Jesus's postmortem appearances evidence for His resurrection?

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