

Bunnies, Chocolate, and the Resurrection of Jesus
1 Corinthians 15:12-20, 55-57
(Grace – Easter, April 4, 2010)

I. Introduction

One lady wrote in to a question and answer forum. "Dear Sirs, Our preacher said on Easter, that Jesus just swooned on the cross and that the disciples nursed Him back to health. What do you think? Sincerely, Bewildered.

Dear Bewildered, Beat your preacher with a cat-of-nine-tails with 39 heavy strokes, nail him to a cross; hang him in the sun for six hours; run a spear thru his side...put him in an airless tomb for 36 hours and see what happens. Sincerely, Charles.

Contributed by: A. Todd Coget

People have a lot of different ideas about Easter.

For businesses it is another opportunity to sell chocolate and Easter baskets. And believe me, it is easier to sell things relating to bunnies than it is to sell things relating to death and resurrection.

For many others it is another reason to get together with family, have the little ones hunt for eggs and share a meal together. While it is good that families do this – Jesus is often absent from these affairs.

Even for many Christians, like the preacher in the joke above, there is confusion over what Easter is really all about – listen to this quote from Wikipedia: "Some Christians believe that Jesus was resurrected from the dead three days after his crucifixion. Many Christian denominations celebrate this resurrection on Easter Day or Easter Sunday."
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter> - April 1, 2009)

"Some" Christians? But what does Paul say to the Corinthians?

*"For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. 14 And if Christ was not raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your trust in God is useless...17 And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless, and you are still under condemnation for your sins...20 But **the fact is** that Christ has been raised from the dead. He has become the first of a great harvest of those who will be raised to life again."* (1 Cor 15:13-14,17,20, NLT)

The apostle Paul considered the resurrection of Jesus to be a **fact**.

Now we may say as many others say, "How can we know that? It was so long ago. I think Jesus was a good teacher or perhaps even some kind of a prophet, but I could never believe that he rose up from the dead!"

While there are numerous reasons to believe that Jesus truly rose from the dead, let me briefly touch on just one.

One of the reasons I am convinced of the resurrection is that I do not think anyone in their right mind would die for a condemned criminal.

I mean if Jesus simply taught some pretty cool stuff, but in the end was crucified after making all sorts of claims concerning a coming kingdom that He would be king of – who would follow, much less die for, a person like that?

Yet that is what all but one of the disciples did – they sacrificed their lives (literally) to proclaim the message that Jesus Christ was not dead, but alive, and that by believing in His life, death, resurrection and message our sins would be forgiven and we would obtain eternal life!

And not only the twelve proclaimed this message, but look with me at 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul states: *“I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me — that Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. 4 He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said. 5 He was seen by Peter and then by the twelve apostles. 6 After that, he was seen by **more than five hundred** of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died by now.”* (verses 3-6, NLT)

Are you going to tell me that 500 people agreed together to give their lives to a lie? These 500 people claimed to see Jesus and a significant number of them were put to death or severely persecuted for their faith in the resurrected Christ.

If this was all a lie, don't you think one of them would have cracked? That before they were killed and they were given the opportunity to deny Jesus at least one of them would have said, “OK, I admit it it was all a hoax?”

But there is absolutely no evidence that any of those who claimed to see the resurrected Jesus ever denied that what they claimed was absolutely true.

“...if Christ was not raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your trust in God is useless.”

Many have lived over the centuries that have **claimed** to be sent from God, and there are a few others that have founded major religious movements. But there is only One that claimed to be the Son of God, and this claim was verified by the fact of His resurrection.

This is why when it comes down to bunnies, chocolates, or the resurrection, I'll take the resurrection.

II. What are the implications of the resurrection for you and me?

A. It is the resurrection that has made eternal **life** possible.

While there could be no resurrection without the death of Christ, and while it was absolutely necessary for Christ to die on the cross so we can be forgiven of our sins – all of this would mean nothing if He was not raised from the dead.

Now please hear me – we would not know what it means to be forgiven if Jesus had not laid down His life for us.

And it is true that we must take hold of His **death** in our own lives. For what does the Bible teach us?

“So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual sin, impurity, lust, and shameful desires.” (Col 3:5, NLT)

Paul acknowledges his need to lay down his selfish self-centered life in order that he might live for God.

“I have been crucified with Christ. 20 I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:19-20, NLT)

And again: *“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there.”* (Galatians 5:24, NLT)

But death is only **half** the story. In fact, death is what leads us to the resurrection.

In other words, we give up our selfish desires and our determination to go our own way in order that we might receive life.

“Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised as he was. 6 Our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. 7 For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. 8 And since we died with Christ, we know we will also share his new life. 9 We are sure of this because Christ rose from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. 10 He died once to defeat sin, and now he lives for the glory of God. 11 So you should consider yourselves dead to sin and able to live for the glory of God through Christ Jesus.” (Romans 6:5-11, NLT)

Do you realize what great news this is? If you put your faith in Christ, you are given power to be **free** from all that stuff that makes your life miserable and you are given life. Not just a future hope of eternal life, but you can experience the life of Christ right now, **today**.

Let us not be so preoccupied with trying to stop all the bad things we struggle with – in fact, Scripture makes it clear that those who put their trust in Christ *have crucified* the sinful nature.

That work has been done – the call of God is to enter into eternal *life*.

“So I advise you to live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.” (Galatians 5:16-17, NLT)

B. If Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, then we are faced today with a **choice**.

When Jesus came to us He lived His life, He taught the people and He performed many miracles.

His claims and teaching were so radical that He was a threat to the religious leaders of His day and they sought to put Him to death. Only to do so meant that they had to have a trial.

But what did they find to accuse Him of? Nothing. He had not done anything wrong. They brought in people to make up phony charges, but those didn't stick. Finally they convicted Him on one count: claiming to be the Son of God. That's the sole reason Jesus went to the cross. They didn't like that claim.

Everyone who has ever been presented with Jesus has already made some kind of decision about who He is. You either believe He's a liar, or you believe He's a lunatic, or you believe He's the **Lord**. It can't just be: “I believe he was a good teacher.” He couldn't be just a good teacher, because a good teacher would not say, “I'm God, and I'm the only way to heaven.” A good person would not say that unless it was the truth.

III. Conclusion

Jesus said, *“I am the resurrection and the life.”* (John 11:25). He also said, *“I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly.”* (John 10:10)

Do you believe this to be true? Are you then truly experiencing eternal *life*?

The message is clear: we too can be **resurrected**. Christ shares his resurrection with us. He rises, and so can we. We too can have new life. We too can make a new start. We too can rise out of those tombs that try to imprison us!

The witnesses have once again been called upon. What is your verdict today? Is He who he says He is?

Easter really boils down to only two issues.

One, is Jesus who He says he is? Is He God? Or is He a lunatic or a liar?

And two, if He is who He says He is, are you going to start following what He says to do with your life?

Today, you sit in judgment of Jesus Christ. Just as Pilate asked, “What shall I do then with Jesus who is called the Christ?” you also must decide whether He was who He said or not.

Are you willing to gamble your life that He was wrong?