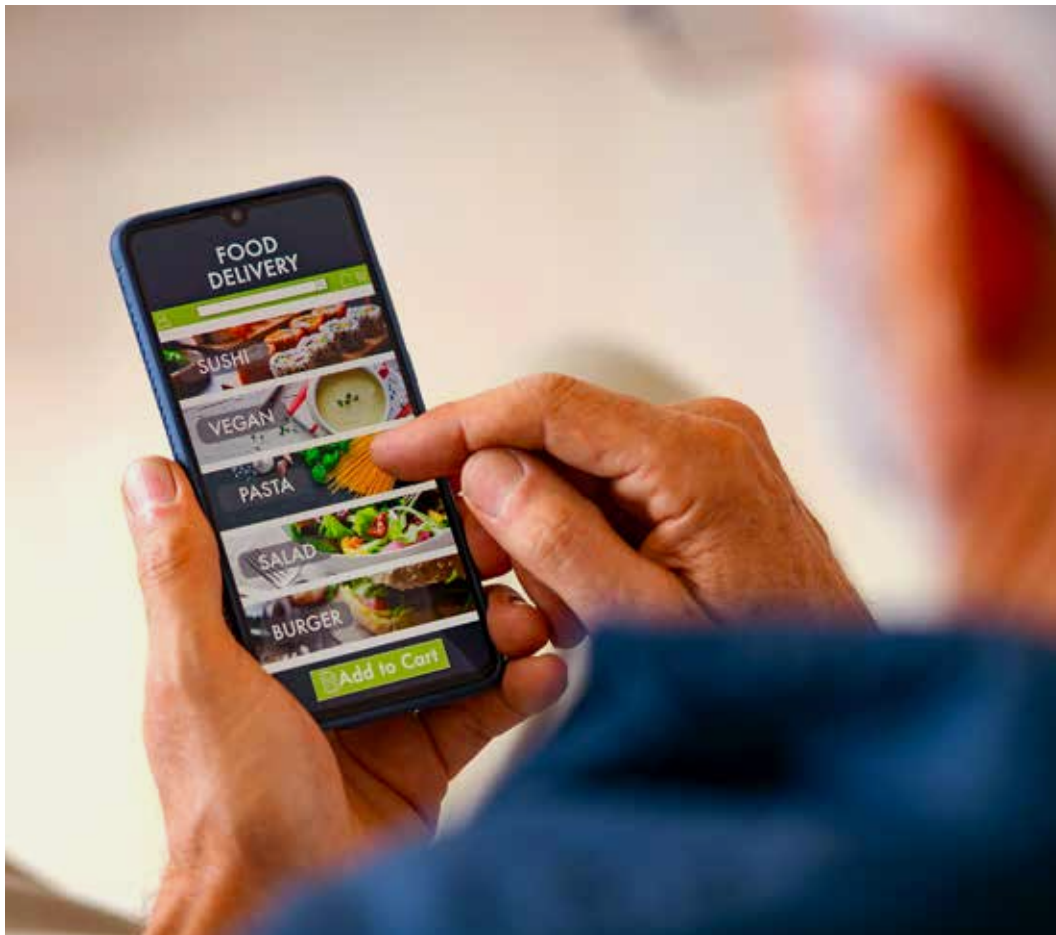


SESSION 5

The Resurrection of Jesus



QUESTION 1:

What are some things once thought impossible that have become a reality?

THE POINT

New life is possible when we trust in the risen Christ.

THE PASSAGES

John 20:3-9,19-23,27-29

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

The idea that people could communicate without being in the same room seemed impossible—until Samuel Morse showed what an electromagnetic telegraph could do in 1837.¹

The idea that those telegraph messages could be transmitted without a wire seemed impossible—until Guglielmo Marconi demonstrated wireless telegraphy in 1895.²

The idea that voices, not just dots and dashes, could be transmitted without wires seemed impossible—until Reginald Fessenden did it in 1906.³

I could go on and on about how people have taken these inventions and innovations to the next seemingly impossible level. Today we are using smart phones—tiny computers that fit in our hands—that will instantly transmit our voice and data all the way around the world.

While we might marvel at science and the amazing things we once considered impossible, one thing remains impossible for us: to raise a man to life who has been dead for days after enduring an agonizing execution, horrific wounds, and extreme loss of blood. But what is impossible for us is not impossible for God. God performed this “impossible” miracle, and with it, He gave us something far greater than the most technologically advanced smartphone!

John 20:3-9

3 Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.

4 So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.

5 And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in.

6 Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie,

7 And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.

8 Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed.

9 For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.

Facts are funny things. By their nature, they're completely true. But facts, by themselves, can be little more than a useful piece of trivia. Consider some of these totally true facts:

- ▶ Antarctica is the only continent on earth that does not have a McDonald's.
- ▶ Baked beans aren't actually baked—they're stewed.
- ▶ On Mars, sunsets are blue instead of red.

These might be useful during a game of trivia; beyond that, however, we might easily forget these facts by tomorrow.

Some facts, though, can make a difference for us. A woman was suing another person because of injuries she claimed she had sustained in a car accident. It seemed to be an open-and-shut case until the defendant's lawyer presented a photo the woman had posted on Facebook the day after the accident. She was smiling and happy with none of the injuries she claimed to have. This fact changed the course of the lawsuit—and not in her favor.

John 20 is about facts, too. One fact in particular: Jesus was dead, and then, three days later, He wasn't dead anymore. This is the most important fact in all of human history.

Probably no empire on earth has been better at executing people than the Roman Empire during the first century. The Romans did not invent crucifixion, but they perfected it. A criminal, usually already bleeding, was hung on the cross with his arms extended out until he ran out of strength in his limbs; he typically suffocated under the weight of his upper body. The soldiers were charged with ensuring the victim was dead, and they did their job in making sure Jesus was dead (John 19:33-34).

Jesus' death is rarely contested. It's what came next that is incredible. Jesus died on Friday afternoon. On Sunday morning, several women came to the tomb to finish preparing Jesus' body for burial, but much to their surprise, the tomb was open and completely empty. The other Gospel writers describe a group of women, but John focused on the words and actions of Mary Magdalene. The other Gospel writers also tell us Mary ran to tell the disciples, but John focused on Peter and himself. Mary told them she thought that Jesus' body had been stolen (John 20:1-2).

Both Peter and John were surprised by Mary's announcement and went to the tomb to investigate. When John, the beloved disciple, entered the empty tomb, he "saw, and believed." Although Jesus had repeatedly told them He would rise again and pointed to prophecy in Scripture, "as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead." John had to stand in the empty tomb and see with his own eyes before he could believe.

That Jesus died is not a question, but if He had stayed dead, we would have no reason to continue talking about Him today. The empty tomb proves Jesus is alive. The fact that God raised Jesus from the dead speaks to our lives today in two ways:

1. **Justification.** Jesus' resurrection means believers are justified in God's eyes. "[He] was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25).

2. **Eternal life.** “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom. 8:11). Since the Father can raise Jesus from His death, He can do the same for us and He will! The moment you believe what the empty tomb tells us—Jesus is alive—His Spirit will live, forever, inside of you.

QUESTION 2:

What evidence has helped you believe in the historical accuracy of Jesus’ resurrection?

John 20:19-23

19 Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

20 And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the LORD.

21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

23 Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

From 1949 to 1957, Clayton Moore played the “Lone Ranger” on TV. Moore had a distinctive voice and mannerisms that brought the character to life. One day as I flipped through the channels, I stumbled on an episode of *The Lone Ranger*. But when I heard the character

speak, I immediately knew Clayton Moore was not underneath that mask. In that episode, an imposter was playing The Lone Ranger!

Some skeptics think an imposter was playing the resurrected Jesus. This man was a lookalike—someone meant to trick the disciples into thinking Jesus had come back from the dead.

It's true the disciples didn't fully know what to do with the reports that Jesus was alive. They saw the empty tomb, but something was still missing. On the evening of the resurrection, they all had gathered behind a locked door. For all they knew, the Jewish leaders would come for them as they had come for Jesus, but the real topic of conversation was the reports of Jesus' resurrection (Luke 24:34-35).

And then, without warning, Jesus was there—inside the locked room. To calm their fears, Jesus spoke a simple but profound phrase: "Peace be unto you." The disciples heard His familiar voice, saw His hands and feet, and they knew—this was no imposter. The disciples knew Jesus' voice. They saw His wounds. He was physically in front of them! He even ate some fish to prove He was real and not a ghost. Jesus' very presence was definite proof that He is alive.

Jesus gave His disciples a commission: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." Jesus was sending them to spread the word, to tell people they had seen the risen Christ. These apostles used their various skills to do just that—some wrote it down, some stood and preached—but all of them understood that this extraordinary resurrection would demand something extraordinary of them. It was their turn to be the proof of Jesus' resurrection to a world that was becoming increasingly hostile toward Him.

QUESTION 3:

How has Jesus brought peace to your life?

John 20:27-29

27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

I'm sure many people could fill in the blank: "Oh, don't be such a doubting _____." Thomas is well known as the doubting disciple—the one who didn't believe. But this story is different than that. Instead of seeing a "doubting Thomas" when we see him interacting with Jesus, we should see a man grieving over the loss of his friend. Here was Jesus actively seeking out Thomas so that He could remove his unbelief.

QUESTION 4:

When have you experienced doubts about your faith?

Let's go back just a little bit. The first time we really get to know Thomas is in John 11, when Jesus was getting ready to raise Lazarus from the dead. When Jesus told the disciples His plan, they all reminded Him that might not be the best idea; after all, the last time they were in Judea the religious leaders tried to kill Him. Thomas likely shared their opinion, yet he was willing to follow Jesus even into a bad situation. He said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). Thomas was courageously committed to Christ.

Then on the night of Jesus' arrest, Jesus told His disciples He was going away to prepare a place for them. When Jesus said, "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know" (14:4), the disciples

sat in stunned silence. Thomas spoke up on behalf of the group. “Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” (v. 5). It was an honest question, aimed at seeking and understanding truth. When everyone else sat dumbfounded, Thomas stepped up. He was not content to remain in the dark; he wasn’t afraid to step forward and ask.

These two instances paint Thomas in a particular light. He was contemplative and sensitive; he wrestled with facts and thought through the implications of what it truly meant to follow Jesus. Thomas was not a man full of doubt, but one who was wholly sold out for Jesus.

We don’t know why Thomas was not with the other disciples at the first encounter with the risen Jesus. I can only speculate, but I think Thomas may have been too heartbroken over Jesus’ death. Considering that Thomas was fully committed to Jesus and ready to follow Him into death, perhaps he was heartbroken and couldn’t even bring himself to gather with the others. When the other disciples told him they saw Jesus, he may have thought, “Please don’t get my hopes up. I can’t afford that. I will only believe it if I can put my fingers in the holes in his hands.”

A week later, Jesus provided the exact, specific proof Thomas needed to believe. The words Jesus spoke to Thomas speak to us too. “Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”

We have not seen Jesus in the flesh, but He is the same Jesus who walked this earth two thousand years ago. He is yearning for us to believe in Him just as Thomas believed. When we choose to believe the truth about Jesus’ resurrection, we will be blessed—both now and for eternity.

QUESTION 5:

Why is the resurrection of Jesus an essential element of the gospel?

ENGAGE

Because He Lives

Choose one of the following life circumstances listed below and write a response to this question:

How can believing the truth of Jesus' resurrection breathe life into ...

... Jackie, who never has really understood the gospel or had much to do with the church?

... Conrad, whose wife has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's?

... Alice, whose husband died recently and she is moving into an assisted living facility?

... Edward, whose granddaughter has rejected the gospel teachings and morals she was raised to believe?

WHY THE RESURRECTION MATTERS

See the article by Mary Jo Sharp on pages 70-73 for an explanation

of how a worldview based on the Bible and the good news of the resurrection impacts what we believe and how we live our lives.

LIVE IT OUT

What will you do with the truth that new life is possible because Jesus is alive?

- ▶ **Trust.** If you have never trusted Jesus as your Savior and Lord, give your life to Him now. Talk to your Bible study leader or read the inside cover of this book.
- ▶ **Prepare.** Write out your testimony of how you came to trust in Christ. As you write, take note of how Christ has given you a new life.
- ▶ **Proclaim.** Identify someone in your life who has not trusted Christ. Invite the person for coffee or lunch and have an intentional gospel conversation with him or her.

Salvation is only the starting line of your Christian life. The abundance of the Christian life is just beginning for you—and it is all because Jesus rose from the dead.



END NOTES

1. Mary Bellis, "The History of the Electric Telegraph and Telegraphy," *ThoughtCo.*, (updated) October 13, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-history-of-the-electric-telegraph-and-telegraphy-1992542>.
2. "Guglielmo Marconi," *History*, December 2, 2009, <https://www.history.com/topics/inventions/guglielmo-marconi>.
3. Sam Sattel, "O Holy Night: The Father of Radio and the First Radio Broadcast," *Autodesk*, <https://www.autodesk.com/products/eagle/blog/father-radio-reginald-fessenden/>.



WHY THE RESURRECTION MATTERS

By Mary Jo Sharp

I was once a public school teacher. My principal thought it would be a great idea to place me on the Religion in the Curriculum Committee after an incident in which our district was sued for having a Nativity scene in a Christmas musical performance. He knew I was studying apologetics and thought I'd offer good insight. One requirement of this committee was to receive training by an educational consultant from Washington, D.C., on matters of tolerance and religious ideas.

As the trainer spoke, she commented on the CHARACTER COUNTS!® program in schools. She said, "Each school chooses which values it wants to promote in the curriculum."

I asked her, “Where do those values come from?”

She said, “That’s the beauty of the program. Every community gets to decide for themselves what matters.”

I responded, “What if I, as a parent, do not agree with the values our community wants to promote?”

She repeated that the communities choose what they value.

I explained that if there is no point of reference for what constitutes value, then these values are just subjective, and there wouldn’t be any reason, or obligation, for individuals to promote the teaching of these values.

She responded, “Well, that’s just stupid.”

I tried to engage her further but noticed my administrator in the room had put his face in the palms of his hands. In other words, it was time for me to let it go.

What I learned from that encounter was that there is a current cultural mantra that stipulates individuals, and/or the society in which they live, can determine what is good and what is evil for themselves. Therefore, there would be no external, transcendent authority on the matter; no point-of-reference by which we could say what is good and evil or right and wrong. In such a view, there would be no need for a Savior, nor for salvation. Nothing would be inherently right or wrong. There would only be subjective, individual preferences, rather than objective moral values and duties. However, the Christian understanding of the resurrection of Jesus stands in stark contrast to this cultural understanding of good and evil.

Jesus’ death on the cross acknowledges that there is such a thing as objective evil in this world, something that is not subjective to every individual viewpoint. Let’s think about why Jesus endures the cross. He goes to die. *Why does He go to die?* Jesus’ death is a real

consequence of something actually wrong. Jesus doesn't die for the subjective viewpoints of some individuals. Rather, He dies for the sin of mankind, which means that all of mankind is engaged in something wrong ... something evil. As the Scriptures quote Jesus, "No one is good except God alone" (Luke 18:19).

In the Christian worldview, what God made was good, and humans have used the goodness of God's creation in ways that have corrupted it. Humans did what was evil. There's a way things are supposed to be, and we call that the good. Deviations from the way things are supposed to be are privations of the good, a lack of goodness. We call this evil. Since humans are participating in evil, they have brought destruction on God's good creation. Yet, God's creation was good in its original intent (see Gen 1:31), so God doesn't leave it to its own destruction. Rather, He does what is good: He restores His own creation by redeeming it. Where there was death as a result of evil, Jesus overturns the

consequence of evil and restores the creation to life. There's only one way to overturn death ... that is through life. The resurrection is a clear demonstration that life is objectively good, and we are meant for it.

Contrary to this Christian view of objective good and evil is the atheist view of the world. Atheist biologist Richard Dawkins has stated, "In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. ... DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music."¹ If Dawkins' assertion about the universe were true, then his assertion of everything in the universe would also be true, which would mean that there is no such thing as good or evil, right or wrong. If we

In the Christian worldview, what God made was good, and humans have used the goodness of God's creation in ways that have corrupted it.

think pain and suffering are not the way things should be, we should remember that this is just the way things are in a universe void of good and evil. There would be no rhyme or reason to any of it, which would also mean that there would be no salvation, no redemption, and no second chances. As atheist Julian Baggini of *The Guardian Journal* states, "Lives can go terribly wrong in ways that can never be put right."² This view betrays a hopelessness based in a meaninglessness of our lives.

To the contrary, the resurrection of Jesus not only acknowledges that our lives have meaning, and therefore significance, but also reminds us that the world hasn't always been subjected to evil, and so this isn't the way it always has to be. When Jesus rose from the dead, He offered to us a redeemed life that is no longer enslaved to our own evil in a fallen world. He brought the redemption of resurrection to

us here and now. So though evil is objectively real and has real consequences, we can be the bearers of goodness through the power of Christ's resurrection. We are not enslaved to the hopelessness of the subjectivity of good and evil, which is the end result of beliefs such as the Washington, D.C., consultant who came that day to teach us that there is no such thing as right or wrong, good or evil.

1 Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 133.

2 Julian Baggini, "Yes, Life Without God Can Be Bleak: Atheism Is About Facing Up to That," *The Guardian*, March 9, 2012, theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/mar/09/life-without-god-bleak-atheism.

MARY JO SHARP was raised without religion in the Pacific Northwest. She is now an assistant professor of apologetics at Houston Baptist University and the founder of Confident Christianity Apologetics Ministry. Mary Jo is the author of *Why I Still Believe: A Former Atheist's Reckoning With the Bad Reputation Christians Give a Good God*.