

## The Impact of the Resurrection Act 1

As a young Christian in college, the conversation with skeptics was often over the reality of the resurrection. Josh McDowell had a best-selling book entitled, "Evidence that Demands a Verdict." It challenged skeptics to consider the historical evidence for the resurrection of Christ. It helped many believers as they sought to defend the faith, and I'm sure it opened the eyes of many who had doubts.

That was over 40 years ago. Now the conversation has shifted.

We live in a "post-Christian" world in which many don't even know what the "Christian" part refers to. Latest polls indicate that many professed church Christians have a lot in common with professed atheists – neither group seems to think that the question of God is of any real significance. They aren't arguing over the evidence or the reality of the resurrection. Today the issue is,

"Ok, Jesus rose from the dead. SO WHAT? What, if any, difference does it make?  
You believe in life after death, so do millions of Hindus and Muslims. What is so great about Jesus?"

If we go back to the Pre-Christian world, we know that it had a high level of interest in religion and God, but it was rocked by the arrival of the Christian faith.

What made this new faith so transformative? Warm feelings when thinking about Jesus? Attempts to try hard and do better while trying to live up to the teachings of a dead Jewish itinerate rabbi?

Was it simply the belief in life after death among early Christians that made it so dangerous and subversive that it warranted persecution?

The pre-Christian world of Jesus offered two hurdles for the apostles:

**1 Cor 1:23 22 Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,**

First, they had to convince the Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah. They would stumble over the offense of the Messiah being cursed by hanging on a tree.

Second, they had to convince the Greeks (Gentiles and Romans) that Jesus was the one True God. The Roman worldview included multiple gods, including the emperors, so the stumbling block for them was the foolishness of God in the Flesh, who was the only God to be worshipped.

Since it is Easter, you all know what I'm going to say, right?

**Personal and cultural Transformation of the Roman Empire was fueled by a Resurrection**, not self-motivation, or self-actualization.

The resurrection displayed the power of God that the Jews expected in the Messiah, and in its supposed foolishness it confounded the wisdom of the Greeks.

**1 Cor. 1:24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.**

In Romans 1, Paul explains that those who claim to be wise are actually foolish about spiritual things.

**What if the Evidence that Demands a Verdict REALLY DOES Demand a Verdict?**

There is a Russian proverb that is probably more famous in translation than in its original language. "Trust, but verify" It was used extensively in various international negotiation settings, and continues to be trotted out as needed. It's not a bad idea. Trust is good; proof that your trust is well founded is even better.

Where does that apply in the life of a people of faith? Some people equate faith with the phrase from Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street: "Faith is believing in something when common sense tells you not to" or, as Mark Twain is reputed to have said, "Faith is believing in what you know ain't true." Mark Twain had a way with words, but that definition doesn't "hold water."

I've never met a person of Christian faith who has said, "I know it's not true, but so what? It can't hurt." That is the language of superstition, not Biblical faith.

There is nothing to be gained in clinging to myths and lies. Our culture has enough misinformation and fake news as it is. When life gets off track, gritty, and even tragic, what we want and need is stability grounded in real truth, even if it pushes us out of our comfort zone.

The proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus pushed the Jews and the Greeks out of their comfort zones. It did the same for the apostles. Even though Jesus had told them what was to happen, they weren't ready.

**LUKE 9: Then Jesus said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God."**

**21 And Jesus strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, 22 saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."**

But on that Sunday morning after the death of their leader some of the women went to the tomb and were surprised because it was empty. The apostles were also surprised when they heard the news.

Note something in Matthew Chapter 28:2. It does indeed say that an angel came and rolled back the stone, but to our surprise, it does NOT say that "then Jesus walked out of the tomb"! The angel informs the women who have come to visit the tomb that "he is not here" v.6. and, in fact, is already on his way to Galilee ahead of them v.7.

In Walker County terms, Elvis had already left the building! Jesus did not have to wait for the angel to move the stone to let him out...he was a real, physical being but one who could pass through grave clothes without disturbing them, as well as through locked doors. He would not have needed angelic help to get out of the tomb.

Why, then, roll away the stone at all? Without an open visibly empty tomb, the resurrection was not verifiable. People who claimed to have seen the resurrected Jesus could have been hallucinating. After all, the body was still in the tomb, wasn't it? Even knowing what Jesus had predicted, on that morning, nobody expected to see NO BODY.

We can see that **the stone needed to be rolled away NOT to let Jesus out, but to let the disciples and US in! Trust, but verify.** The resurrection needed to be verified by eyewitnesses, who could testify to the empty tomb and empty grave clothes. The stone was rolled away so that we might have Evidence that Demands a Verdict.

Ours is a faith founded on an event that took place in space, time, and history, and it began with an angel politely opening the tomb so that we could look into the empty space and see that he was no longer there.

2000 years later, we need to be reminded of the true truth of the resurrection. It does matter. As we face a culture that is less and less inclined to care, we find ourselves in a situation that is more and more similar to the early Christians.

What was the key to their transformed lives that shook the Roman Empire? THE RESURRECTION OF Christ.

If we look through the Book of Acts we see how the early church was deeply rooted in the reality and the proclamation of the Risen Christ.

Acts 1 3

1 The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when He was taken up *to heaven*, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. 3 To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of forty days* and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

There is a key word in this text, “proofs”. How often do you hear that in relation to religion? Christianity is found upon convincing proofs. That is why the disciples were transformed from fearful to fearless. The apostles and early followers were willing to die for their faith. They’d seen too much that they could not deny. Their faith was not blind hope in something they knew was not true. It was not a fuzzy feeling as they remembered Jesus.

In the first sermon after the departure of Christ, Peter cites the OT witness to the resurrection...Acts 2 29 “Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, 31 he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. 32 This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.

In Acts 3, Peter and John were going to the temple and a lame beggar asked for money. They healed him in the name of Jesus instead. As the man held on to them a crowd gathered and Peter began to preach (again):

Acts 3:14 But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses.

Again, the focus is on the resurrection of Christ and their role as witnesses. A witness is one who called to speak forth the truth. While we haven’t seen Jesus in the same way, if we know Him by faith, we too are called to bear witness to His saving life, death, and resurrection.

Acts 4 tells us of how the resurrection was the basis of the healing power of Peter and John and it was a key reason why they were arrested by the temple guard- they were preaching about Jesus and his resurrection from the dead. They were jailed, questioned, threatened, and warned to no longer speak to anyone regarding Jesus.

4:19 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; 20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

We could go on to talk about Stephen in Acts 6-7 or Saul in Acts 9 who spoke of seeing or encountering the Risen Christ through visions. Saul who persecuted the church had an encounter with the risen Christ and became known as Paul. He became the leading voice of the church and of the resurrection. The testimony of the resurrection continues from the followers of Jesus throughout the book of Acts.

In Acts 25-26 Paul has been arrested and turned over to the civil authorities who were a bit bewildered by “the charges of some points of disagreement about their own religion and some dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive.”

After telling his story of persecuting the church, then meeting Christ, Paul explains that repentance is for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. It was all based on the OT promises regarding the Messiah, or the Christ. 26:22ff

I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; 23 that the Christ was to suffer, *and* that by reason of *His* resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles.”

The disciples weren't motivated by warm fuzzy feelings of nostalgia in remembering what Jesus said or did. They were captivated and commissioned by the Risen Lord. They wanted to proclaim light in a world of darkness. They proclaimed Good News of Christ and the kingdom of God. With the good news was a call to repent, which didn't always go over to well. People don't like to admit that they are wrong. WE don't like to admit it. The flip-side of faith in Christ is repentance, not just of the “sin” we were doing, but of being our own arbiter of truth, of being our own God.

**At the core of what we call unbelief isn't unbelief at all. It is a competing belief, a belief in self.**

The resurrection of Christ shows that there is one greater than us who is worthy of our trust and worship. The Christ followers acknowledged their need for a savior, not just another good example to follow. In walking with Christ they'd seen too much, they knew too much to deny.

The lives of the early disciples were transformed because they saw Jesus die and come back to life again.

**ANDREW PETERSON – I've Seen Too Much –**

And I've seen too much, too much to deny  
I've seen too much, too many points of light  
I know too much, I saw the scars and touched His skin  
That's how it was, and I cannot hold it in

I've seen so much that cannot be explained  
And I realize it's a mystery of faith  
But my friend was dead and He walked out of the grave  
And I knew the world would never be the same  
I saw too much, when I looked into the eye  
Of the One I love and the One who loves me  
And there was nowhere left to hide

If you are a believer here today, it's because there were faithful followers 2000 years ago who had seen too much to deny. They had seen the King who invaded this world to announce and inaugurate His kingdom. We call it Good News, the Gospel. But it is also a threat because His kingdom will threaten our own kingdom.

-When Herod heard about this infant kingdom he arranged a massacre of innocent babies to get rid of r.  
-When the Jewish leaders heard about this kingdom that was based on grace for Jew and Gentile, they plotted to kill Jesus.

-When the Roman leaders heard the false charges against Jesus they went along with the plot and took Jesus to be crucified.

The true believers heard and went forth into all the world, at the risk of their own lives. They were seen as a threat because they proclaimed another king, Jesus.

Because Jesus is a king with another kingdom, the resurrection relativizes our patriotism as believers, no matter what country we call home. It won't last, and its values may easily conflict with the values of the kingdom of God.

If this world lasts for another 2000, 200, or 20 years, will there be those who will look back and say, “We're in church today because of the faithful obedience of Highlands Church?” I HOPE SO. That is at the top of the list of Jesus' priorities for us today.

## HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

Jesus didn't just rise from the dead for show. He rose and came back to give his disciples their primary mission, what is known as the Great Commission –

Matthew 28:18-20 “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

This command, given by the resurrected Christ became the focus of the early believers. It is to be our focus today as well.

If you know Christ, then you've seen too much to deny; so go tell it.

We all know that we often need a passport to legally travel from one country to another.

There is talk of a vaccine passport in certain states or certain areas of business.

One day those issues will come to an end for us, either by our death, the total breakdown of society or the return of Christ.

Ultimately, the one passport that is needed is a Resurrection Passport, which is stamped on the hearts of those who trust Christ alone for eternal life.

Have you trusted Him?

- The ABC's of a Trust Transfer –
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- A - Admit that you can't save yourself and that you need grace – That means there is GOOD NEWS FOR YOU
- B- Believe that Jesus is the only Wisdom and Savior who can forgive your sin and heal your heart
- C- confess to God that you want to trust Jesus as your savior and Lord.

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