

Resurrection

Part 2 – Is there evidence today that Christ was resurrected?

Part 1 was about the thread of resurrection that weaves its way through the Old Testament, including Christ's resurrection. And it starts as early as **Genesis 3:15** when God tells the serpent, "he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

So, even when it looks like the serpent has killed off God's plan for humanity - **and** sentenced humans to death forever - God is **already** pointing out that the serpent's bite is not fatal. It can inflict a very nasty wound to a heel, yes, but **in return** it gets the whole foot to its head that crushes it to death. So, there's hope here already of resurrection from the dead, because, despite humans bringing death on themselves, God is already comparing that death to a mere wound; it's not fatal. The only fatal death is on evil.

It's good to know, then, right from the beginning of Scripture, that death and evil do not decide human destiny, and that God is already holding out the hope of justice and restoration. Verse 15 also assures us that God knows exactly where the real problem lies: It's not human weakness, it's the cunning of evil, because with humans God only allows the damage to be temporary, but with evil he makes the damage permanent.

Jump ahead to the New Testament, and it's the same message, as we see in Paul's prediction in **Romans 16:20**, that "The God of peace will soon **crush Satan under your feet**," a clear reference back to the serpent's head being crushed under foot in Genesis 3:15. We're also told HOW God crushes evil in **Hebrews 2:14**; it's through Jesus being crucified as a human being, "so that by his death he might **destroy him** who holds the power of death - that is, the devil."

The statement "he will crush your head" in Genesis 3:15, then, is clearly linked to Jesus defeating the devil, and "you will strike his heel" is linked to the devil managing to have Jesus crucified, only to discover to his horror - **after Jesus was resurrected** - that he hadn't killed Jesus after all, and from that point on humans would never need to fear the devil, evil, or death ever again (Hebrews 2:15).

That's why Jesus' resurrection from the dead is so important, because it proved that evil and death do not win. **Without** Jesus' resurrection we'd have no evidence at all that death and evil have been defeated, and there'd be no good news for Christians to preach, then, either. That was Paul's conclusion too, in **1 Corinthians 15:14**, because "if Christ has not been raised our preaching is useless and so is your faith," and in **verse 17**, "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."

For a Christian verse 17 is an immensely important statement, because we are staking our entire reputation and reason for our existence as Christians on our claim and personal witness that we humans are no longer “still in our sins.” We are saying exactly what Genesis 3:15 said, that evil has inflicted a nasty wound and it still causes havoc and suffering for everything God created on this planet - BUT - **the wounds that evil causes are never fatal**. They may hurt horribly, just like a badly bruised or shattered heel, but whatever damage sin has done we are not left permanently “in our sins.” And **the reason for that is the resurrection of Jesus**.

We carry with us the confidence and comfort, therefore, that all the terrible things that have happened to people, and are still happening - like the wrecking of innocent children’s lives by pedophiles, the exploitation of the weak and helpless by arrogant thugs, and the murder of millions by those who justify violence in the name of their gods - **are not a hopelessly permanent fixture of life on this planet**. We are saying flat out, with total brazen confidence, that this world is not controlled by death and evil. It sounds crazy, yes, because the news every day is full of examples of evil destroying the planet and people, but we hold firm in our belief that from the moment Jesus rose from his tomb on the third day sin, evil and death are on the way out. Sin’s impact on this earth is still horrible, yes, but it’s only temporary.

We find ourselves, therefore, in much the same position as Israel in the Old Testament. Like us, Israel was called by God to be his witness and living proof that he is real, he is in total control, and his plan for all creation will be completed. “You are my servant,” he told Israel in **Isaiah 49:3**, “in whom I will display my splendour,” and in **verse 6**, “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may **bring my salvation to the ends of the earth**.”

But how could a tiny nation like Israel bring God’s salvation to the whole world? It seemed like an impossible task. It’s like God asking us Christians today to be witnesses to the whole world that sin and evil are only temporary, when evil is still rampant and suffering continues unchanged. But that’s the way God’s doing it, through little people like Israel in the Old Testament, and through the church in the New. Somehow God is providing clear witness through the church right now that total and permanent salvation from sin and evil is real, and it’s **already** happening.

It doesn’t seem real at all, though, does it? And it didn’t seem any more real to Israel either, because they were up against empires run by thugs of immense cunning and charisma, just like we are. We too are having little to no impact whatsoever on the idols people worship, like perverted sex and violence. And just like Israel, many Christians today are suffering terribly from injustice, humiliating ridicule, the destruction of our places of worship, and even corruption by power-hungry leaders in our own ranks. And somehow, through all that, we’re supposed to stand firm in our belief that God is bringing his salvation to the ends of the earth, and one day all will be fine.

The evidence of an unchanging world, however - plus the inability of Christianity to change the world too - surely tests any Christian's faith that Jesus was resurrected to establish God's kingdom on earth through the church, and he's doing it right now.

But the Jews in the centuries leading up to Jesus' arrival faced the same doubts, because God was supposed to be establishing his kingdom on earth through them as well. They firmly believed that God was actively present in the world in **their** nation and their temple. But the temple priesthood was a mess, and pagan Romans controlled their nation. It didn't seem like God was accomplishing anything through them. And I imagine many Christians feel the same way today - that Christianity is a mess and God isn't accomplishing much through any of us either.

So why do we **continue** in our belief that God is putting this world to rights ever since Jesus was resurrected, when there are no clear signs of him actually doing it for the last two thousand years? We could ask a similar question of the Jews too, because why do the Jews continue to believe their Messiah will bring peace and justice to the whole world through them, when there's still no sign of him coming in power to establish his kingdom in Israel after thousands of years of waiting?

The answer from Paul in **Romans 10:8** is rather simple; it is "the **word of faith** we are proclaiming." We are simply saying: "God promised, so trust him." No matter how bad the world looks, or what suffering we go through, or how many Christians are killed every year, or how long God delays the crushing of Satan under Jesus' feet, we stand firm in our belief that what God promised through his Messiah **he will do**.

Evil, therefore, can chuck whatever it likes at us but, **verse 9**, "if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and **believe** in your heart that **God raised him from the dead**, you will be saved."

By "saved" Paul means God will do in OUR lives what he resurrected Jesus as Lord for. When we believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and made him King of this planet to save us from the consequences of evil, that's when God starts his salvation rolling for us **personally**. And as it starts to happen to us personally, our belief in God's promise to put this world to rights becomes more and more real. Our confidence grows that evil is on the way out, because it's **on the way out IN US**. We ourselves, then, become the living proof and witness that evil isn't permanent or fatal, and therefore we can preach with confidence that evil isn't fatal or permanent for anyone else, either.

Think of all those Dads, then, who caused massive damage to their families through their alcoholic rages, or priests who destroyed the lives of children, or mad dictators who destroyed their countries, or ugly corporations who sucked people dry, or evil people who got away with murder, or broken families that never managed to heal their rifts and reconcile their differences: It means **none of those awful things are fatal**.

What a relief to know that the hurtful things we've said - and were never able to say sorry for before the people we hurt died - are not left hanging over us like a dark unresolved cloud forever. Death no longer ends all hope of reconciliation being possible, or justice being done, either. With the raising of Jesus from the dead, every bit of damage caused by evil and death has **lost its power to be permanent**. The only permanent damage now being done is by God crushing all Jesus' enemies under his feet.

And that is the "word of faith we are proclaiming." We are saying openly and brazenly that because "Jesus is Lord" when God raised him from the dead, all humanity "will be saved" from the poison injected into every aspect of human life by evil. The cure has been found. Every unresolved hurt relationship, therefore, WILL be healed. Every terrible injustice done to innocent, helpless people will be dealt with. Every victim will be restored. Every feeling of hate and revenge that endlessly breaks out into war and murder will be dissolved. Every generational curse that never allows ethnic groups to heal their differences will evaporate. Every stupid thing that human beings have ever said or done will not be a permanent source of guilt, shame, or despair.

And that begins **right now** for "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord," **Romans 10:13**, and for "Everyone who trusts in him," **verse 11**. At the moment we believe that Jesus was resurrected as "Lord of all" to "richly blesses all who call on him," **verse 12**, the floodgates open, and from that point on a process of salvation and justification begins, which is simply another way of saying, "Jesus starts putting us to rights."

Jesus immediately rolls up his sleeves and gets to work on the thoughts **we** could never eradicate from our heads that made us so angry and unforgiving. He digs into the dark corners of our hearts to root out the pride, the arrogance, the condemning attitudes, and the lies we've been telling about ourselves and other people. And yes it hurts - but, **verse 11**, no treatment or cure by Jesus will ever "put us to shame." Never will Jesus make us so ashamed of ourselves, or make us feel so small, that we'll be tempted to give up or commit suicide. He's in the business of saving us, and God didn't make Jesus Lord of all if he isn't **the best** in the saving business too.

But how did we Christians come to believe all this, enabling us to preach it with such confidence? Where does our confidence come from?

Paul's answer to that is in **verse 20**, quoting Isaiah 65:1, "I was found by those who **did not seek** me; I revealed myself to those who **did not ask** for me." Our confidence never came from within ourselves, because, as Paul asks in **verse 14**, why would we "call on the one (we) have not believed in?" It's only because God **gave** us the belief that we had confidence in Jesus' resurrection being the complete and guaranteed solution to every problem in every human head and heart, to every impossible situation we humans find ourselves in, and to every evil that plagues humanity. **It did not come to us naturally.**

But **we believe it now**, don't we - so how did we get to that point? Paul answers that too, in **Romans 10:17**. It comes from "hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." The method by which God gives us our confidence is through the preaching of the gospel - the **right** gospel, that is, "the word of Christ" - meaning a clear explanation of who Christ is right now and what God raised him from the dead for. It is that message, boldly preached and "heard" that ignites confidence, and God isn't using any other method than that. The question remains, though, as to why some people believe the good news about Christ and some people don't, just as "not all the Israelites accepted the good news" either, **verse 16**.

It seems to come down to that little phrase in **verse 20**, "I revealed myself." Evidence suggests that since not all people believe the gospel, then God must have a hand in who believes and when. There are hints of that in **Romans 11** too, in God revealing himself to Israel to give them first chance to believe him - which they didn't - so God switches to the Gentiles, many of whom do believe, and God then uses their belief in turn (verse 11) to get back to unbelieving Israel to save them (verse 26). **The timing is all God's**, and so is the "revealing." So, **none** of us, Jew or Gentile, would believe **if it wasn't for God's intervention**. It's an amazing privilege, then, that he's enabled **us** to believe right now.

It becomes even more incredible that we believe when the evidence of evil's enormous power and influence almost makes a mockery of Jesus being the resurrected Lord of all. How can anyone believe Jesus is saving the world when the world is such a mess? But Scripture shows that God has a thread of people all through the centuries who **believe regardless of evidence**, starting with Abraham in **Romans 4:18**, who "Against all hope, Abraham in hope **believed**."

Even when the evidence was stacked up against him, Abraham "did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God," **verse 20**, and God has maintained that **thread of unwavering belief in him** all through the centuries to Christians today "who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead," **verse 24**. So, when someone asks us, "How on earth can you believe in a loving God when such terrible things are happening?" a Christian can only answer, "Because I do."

But we also know **WHY** we do. It's because God has always provided a thread of believers ever since Abraham, and we're now part of it. That's why Paul calls us "Abraham's offspring" in **verse 16**, because anyone who is "of the faith of Abraham" becomes **part of that living thread of faith** too.

And it really is the faith "OF" Abraham because we share exactly the same faith Abraham had, that **everything will be fine because God promised**. Like Abraham, we believe God will bless the whole world through Abraham's descendants, and that promise remains as real in **our** world as it did 4,000 years ago, because of the death and resurrection of Abraham's greatest descendant, Jesus Christ.

It may not LOOK as though God is blessing the world right now, but yes he is - in those “who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Romans 4:24). That’s where the evidence can be seen - in those who believe that everything will work out just fine **because Jesus is alive right now to make sure of it.**

The GREATEST witness we offer the world as Christians, then, is our faith, the same faith as Abraham, who “Against all hope, in hope believed.” He held onto the hope that what God promised, he would do. And *because* we hold onto that hope, out pops a SECOND witness from us Christians, observed and reported by Paul in **Colossians 1**. “All over the world,” Paul wrote in **verse 6**, “this gospel is producing fruit and growing, just as it has been among you.” So this was something that could be **seen** to be happening as a result of preaching “the word of truth” (verse 5). And the first result was, “we have heard of your **FAITH** in Christ Jesus,” but right alongside it was a clear **second** result too, “of the **LOVE** you have for all the saints,” **verse 4**.

On the heels of faith came love, or “faith expressing itself through love,” as Paul phrased it in **Galatians 5:6**. So in amongst all the evil going on in our world there would be clear evidence of the living, resurrected Christ putting the world to rights. Where? In people whose faith in God raising Jesus would be clearly seen in their love. Instead of being angry and anxious at how horrible the world is, Christians see the world as Jesus did, through eyes of love and compassion, not condemnation and despair. But when you believe that nothing is fatal, and no matter how daft or how horrible people are that all will be fine in the end because Jesus is alive, and there isn’t a sin or mistake ever made that he cannot correct - it does amazing, wonderfully healing things to the human brain. It does away with our selfish worries, and frees us up to love.

And that creates a THIRD witness, because as love is being “made complete among us,” **1 John 4:17**, it “**drives out fear**,” **verse 18**. Christians are noticeably fearless. They have no worries about their own future or the future of the world, because God is love (verse 16). God has no desire, therefore, to do away with our world, or do away with any of us personally. He’d much rather we humans have “confidence on the day of judgment” and no fear of “punishment” (verses 17, 18), which he demonstrated clearly by raising Jesus from the dead to fulfill his promise to Abraham to BLESS ALL PEOPLES, not curse or condemn them. It paints a completely different picture of this hopelessly lost and messy world we’re in, because none of the awful things happening to people - or by people - are either permanent or fatal. Whatever evil has done to people, and through people, is being crushed under Jesus’ feet.

There are three clear witnesses on this earth right now, then, that Christ was resurrected: Those three witnesses are the faith, love and fearlessness of Christians. Together they make Christians into the greatest **optimists** on the planet too, because the raising of Jesus from the dead was God’s clear witness to EVERY human that one day everything - **yes, everything** - will be just fine.