

**April 7, 2019**

## Witnesses of the Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,

15:4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

15:5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

15:6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

15:7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

15:8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

### **1. Fact of the Resurrection**

The Bible says that “the first importance” for the faith is “that Christ died and was resurrected.” Most people know that Jesus died on the cross. But many do not know why Jesus died on the cross. They know that “Christians believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” However, they do not admit that it is a fact. They think it is one of legend, myth, or doctrine. However, when the Apostles’ Creed says, “On the third day he rose again,” it does not just say a single topic of doctrines. In fact, it declares that there is salvation in the Cross and the Resurrection because Christ actually resurrected from the dead.

It was because of our sins that Jesus died on the Cross. There are two meanings to that Jesus “died for our sins.” One is that our sins have driven Jesus to death. Horror, hate, betrayal, rebellion, blasphemy, and other human sins and horrible sins drove the Son of

God Jesus to the Cross. And it is not only by the Jewish leaders and people of that time, the Roman governors and soldiers. We, who are living two thousand years after the Cross, also drove him to death. Mizuno Genzo wrote a poem “I Am There.”

People, who requested, permitted, and performed  
to crucify Jesus the Nazarene,  
Among those people I am there.  
(From “My Grace Is Sufficient to You”)

Though two thousand years ago, we were not there, but our sins also made Jesus die.

Even so, Jesus undertook all of our sins that caused him to die and received the punishment for us. The second meaning of the word “for our sins” is “to replace our sins.” First Peter 2:24 says, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”

But if Jesus remained dead, we do not know if we were really saved. So, by the resurrection, Jesus revealed that the salvation for us was achieved. It is said, “For the wages of sin is death,” but Jesus has given us forgiveness of sins and the eternal life by overcoming these sins and death. Those who believe in Jesus Christ receive the love and grace of God, and live in this world with joy and peace. It is by the facts of the history of the Cross and the Resurrection.

Those who deny the Resurrection always say that the Resurrection is “myth created afterward.” Indeed, is the resurrection of Jesus a myth? No. Myths take a long time to be made several generations later. The disciples have confirmed the Resurrection of Jesus, only

three days after the Cross of Friday. Even though it counted three days, the real is two days, only 48 hours. Also, on the 50th day after the Resurrection of Jesus, on Pentecost, the disciples have already preached the Resurrection of Jesus to a large number of people.

The apostle Paul wrote the First Letter to the Corinthians around 55 AD. In this letter, Paul clearly says, “He (Christ) was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” The First Letter to the Corinthians is 25 years after the cross, when those who witnessed the death of Jesus were still alive. It is a time when Jesus’ death on a cruel Cross was in the hearts of people. The myth of resurrection can not be born among such people.

The Resurrection of Christ was believed among Christians from the beginning as a fact. The church preached the Resurrection of Christ from the beginning. Resurrection was a central subject of missions. It is an undeniable fact that the church has had the “faith of the Resurrection” from the beginning. So where did the “faith of the Resurrection” come from? There is no choice but to explain from the fact of the Resurrection. The apostles did not convey the Resurrection as one the doctrines. They preached the fact that “Christ was raised” and revealed the meaning of that fact. Our faith is based on the fact of the fact of “Christ was raised.”

## **2. Peter, a Witness of the Resurrection**

Thus, the record of the Bible prove the Resurrection of Christ. And at the same time those who met the resurrected Christ also witnessed the Resurrection. At the time that the First Corinthians was written, there were at least five hundred witnesses of the Resurrections of Christ.

(verse 6)

Paul named one of the witnesses of the resurrection “Cephas” (verse 5). “Cephas” means “Peter”. Peter was the first of the twelve apostles. However, when Jesus was at the court of the high priest, he feared the Jewish leaders and rejected Jesus saying, “I do not know a man such as Jesus.” I think all of you know how miserable Peter was after that.

But only 50 days later, on the day of Pentecost, Peter said, in the middle of Jerusalem, to the Jewish leaders who crucified Jesus. “This Jesus .... you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death.” (Acts 2:23-24) Where did this change of Peter come from? Why did the Jewish leaders fail to deny Jesus’ resurrection? That is because, Jesus was raised.

The tomb where Jesus was buried was near Jerusalem. After the body of Jesus was stored, the entrance to the tomb was closed with a large rock and sealed tightly, and Roman soldiers protected it. But with the Resurrection of Jesus, the seal was broken and the rock rolled. Jesus has won the death. Even the tombs that devoured all men could not keep Jesus. Since then, the tomb of Jesus is empty. The guru of all religions, whose tombs are cherished, and people come to worship the bodies and ashes of the gurus, but those who come to Jesus’ tombs look at the empty tomb, hearing the word; “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here.” In fact, at the entrance of Jerusalem’s Garden Tomb, this word from Luke 24: 5-6 is placed. If the Jewish leader wanted to stop Peter preaching the Resurrection of Christ, it would have been better to show the tomb of Jesus. But the Jewish leaders could not. Because the tomb of Jesus

was empty. Even the opponents could not deny the resurrection of Jesus.

So the Jewish leaders sifted authority to shut up the apostles. Peter healed a person who was born with polarized feet in the temple, and preached, “But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead.” (Acts 3:14-15) The priests, the chiefs of the guards of the palace, and the Sadducees came and caught Peter and pulled it out before the leaders. But Peter said without hesitation. “Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead--by him this man is standing before you well.” (Acts 4:8-10) “Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.” This word has all the meaning of Peter’s preaching. Peter feared a man only a few months ago and denied Jesus, but so boldly witnessed for Jesus. Where did this change of Peter come from? It is from the Resurrection of Christ. Peter met the Resurrected Jesus and knew the Resurrection facts, so he was able to witness for Jesus boldly in this way.

### **3. Paul, a Witness of the Resurrection**

After giving up the names of other Resurrection witnesses, Paul finally said that he was one of them. Although Paul was a generation of Peter, he was a completely different person from Peter. Paul was born in a wealthy family in today’s Turkish town Tarsus. He was born

to have Roman citizenship. However, Paul, who had pride as a Jew, was not satisfied by Greek studies, but went to Jerusalem and became a student of Gamaliel, who was the best teacher at that time. Paul may have heard of Jesus, but he was not interested. During the three years Peter was following Jesus and learning from Jesus, Paul was under Gamaliel's knee, learning the Jewish tradition, with no side eyes. When the church began in Jerusalem, Paul was one of the leaders of the Judaism and Pharisees and was at the forefront of church persecution.

Paul reached out to the church of Damascus far away. However, Paul met the Resurrected Jesus Christ before entering Damascus. It was a long time after the other apostles met the resurrected Jesus, so in today's passage Paul said, "Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me." (verse 8) Because he believed that "Jesus was not Christ," "Jesus did not resurrection," how big was the impact of meeting resurrected Jesus? From then on, Paul began to think not of his own convictions or theories, but of the fact that he met the resurrection Christ. He must have learned and thought about the knowledge of the Bible so far. And at last Paul became convinced that Christ died for our sins .... was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. It is as the Bible says how much Paul preached Jesus Christ with his own life.

Paul did not talk about the Cross of Jesus Christ and the Resurrection just as one of the teachings. As he says, "What I have told you most importantly is what I have received," (verse three), he became the preacher from the persecutors, by the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ. He presented Jesus Christ to people,

presenting himself as a proof of the Resurrection. The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ can not be conveyed without a “witness.” As we advocate the Apostles’ Creed and confess that “On the third day he rose again,” we want to be witnesses of the Resurrection, not only by words but by ourselves as an evidence of the Resurrection.

**(Prayer)**

God the Father who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, people need the message of the Resurrection. Make us witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ. To that end, fill us with the life and power of the Resurrection. We pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus.