

Resurrection reality: Special equipping section for Easter 2012

**Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!
Glory, Hallelujah!**

The resurrection as the epicenter of Christianity

“You shall be my witnesses”

Calvin Miller describes the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the epicenter of Christianity – an epicenter that is both personal and universal.

- Epicenter -
- Universal faithquake –
- Personal faithquake –

Read Thomas Oden’s *The Event named Resurrection*

Whatever it was that occurred after Jesus’ crucifixion, one thing is absolutely clear: It was called *resurrection*. Of that there can be no doubt. All who were met by it called it the same thing. However unclear many things may be about alleged meetings with Jesus after His death, there was a consensus in the community that whatever it was that people were experiencing, the correct term for it was *resurrection*.

This foretaste of the first fruits of the reality of heaven empowered the early Christian community with incredible courage in the face of seemingly impossible obstacles and terrifying threats. Why? Because their trust was not in this broken world but in the risen Christ present to them as they sat together “at the Lord’s Table” or as they faced the wild animals of the Roman Colosseum.

The earliest church reasoned it this way: In Jesus’ resurrection the end is already present. Thus the will of God is finally revealed. So, to participate in Christ is already to share in the events of the last days. It all made reasonable sense – after a living encounter with the resurrected Jesus.

We today must learn to think historically in the Hebraic sense if we are to make sense of this central proclamation of Christianity. Seen in this frame of reference, the resurrection is so decisive that the importance of all other theological issues pales beside it. It focuses on nothing less than the final revelation of the will of God in history.

We are searching for the center of the wide circumference of Christian experience. What is the center? Resurrection – as interpersonal meeting with the living Christ. Not resurrection as an idea or even past event – but resurrection as a currently experienced interpersonal encounter.

Something so decisive happened for human history in the resurrection of Jesus that it does not and cannot fit into our ordinary categories of understanding. We cannot rule out the resurrection of Jesus simply on the grounds that nothing like this ever happened to us before. How could it?! The event of which Christianity speaks and takes it stand, like all truly significant interpersonal meeting, is an event without analogy.

The first written account – I Corinthians 15:1-8

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the Gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this Gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of **first importance**:

1. that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
2. that He was buried,
3. that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,
4. and that He appeared
 - to Peter, and
 - then to the twelve. After that,
 - He appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.
 - Then He appeared to James,
 - then to all the apostles,
 - and last of all He appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

It really happened. People really saw Him. He appeared to many, on several occasions, over time. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not a theological metaphor to be embraced by faith, it is a concrete historical reality on which our salvation to eternal life depends.

The Apostle Paul put it simply, “If Christ is not raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” (I Cor 15:14, 17) For the earliest Christians, Jesus’ resurrection was an historical fact every bit as real as His death on the cross. They saw Him with their own eyes, they touched Him with their own hands, they ate with Him, walked with Him, talked with Him. Without the resurrection, Christianity would be ... FALSE: A false religion with a fake God.

Listen to the words of John Updike’s poem on the subject:

*Make no mistake: if He rose at all it was as His body;
If the cells’ dissolution did not reverse, the molecules reknit, the amino acids
rekindle, the Church will fail.*

*Let us not mock God with metaphor, analogy, sidestepping transcendence;
Making of the event a parable, a sign painted in the faded credulity of earlier
ages:*

Let us walk through the door.

*Let us not seek to make it less monstrous, for our own convenience, our own
sense of beauty, lest, awakened in one unthinkable hour, we are embarrassed
by the miracle, and crushed by remonstrance.*

“Gospel” accounts

Matthew 28:1-10
Matthew 28:16-20
Mark 16:1-8
[Mark 16:9-20]

Luke 24:1-12
Luke 24:13-35
Luke 24:36-53
Acts 1:1-11

John 20:1-10
John 20:11-18
John 20:19-25
John 20:26-31
John 21:1-25

Resurrection vs. resuscitation

During His three year ministry, Jesus raised at least three people from the dead. But these resurrections were really miraculous resuscitations. Those whom Jesus raised, at some later point, died again. But the resurrection of Jesus was not a temporary temporal resuscitation. His resurrection does not end in a second death but in ascension into heaven. We bear witness to our belief that Jesus is now corporeally in heaven every week when we recite the Apostle’s Creed: “He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.” It is then in His resurrection from death to newness of eternal life that we have the hope of a life beyond the grave. Christ has promised that death, which could not hold Him in the grave, will also not hold those who believe in Him. When he raised Lazarus from the dead there was a foreshadowing, a glimpse, a foretaste and Jesus declared, “I am the resurrection and the life those who believe in me, though they die, yet shall they live. And those who live and believe in me will never really die.” It is one thing to be given back your life upon the earth – it is another altogether to be granted an eternal life in the world which is to come.

Resurrection = Hope....A call to live as Easter people

The greatest fear of humankind has always been the fear of death. The resurrection of Jesus Christ provides ultimate hope. It removes the power of the grave and it removes the sting of death. Easter is not only an exaltation of the fact that God was able to bring forth Jesus from the tomb – Easter is the exhilaration of knowing that God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, has now paved the way for us to live eternally. The resurrection is hope.

The great hymns of the church express our Easter Hope:

Death could not keep its prey, Jesus my Savior!

He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord!

Up from the grave he arose, with a mighty triumph o’er His foes;

He arose a victor from the dark domain, and He lives forever with His saints to reign

He arose! He arose! Hallelujah, Christ arose!

- Robert Lowry

He live, He lives, salvation to impart!

You ask me how I know He lives; He lives within my heart.

- Alfred Ackley

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow, because He lives, all fear is gone;

Because I know --- He holds the future,

and life is worth the living just because He lives.

- Bill and Gloria Gaither

Taking a closer look: Luke 24:13-35

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus Himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing Him. He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”

They stood still, their faces downcast.

One of them, named Cleopas, asked Him, “Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

“What things?” He asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed Him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified Him; but **we had hoped** that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find His body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said He was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but Him they did not see.”

He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”

And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if He were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So He went in to stay with them.

When He was at the table with them, He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him, and He disappeared from their sight. **They asked each other**, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.”

Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when He broke the bread.

The first disciples recognized the resurrected Christ – it was a reality that changed their lives, changed their destinies, gave them purpose, meaning and ministry. It is the reality that has indeed changed the world. The question remains, has it really changed you? Does the reality of Easter make any real difference in your life? Does that fact that Jesus rose from the dead send shockwaves through your heart and mind compelling you to share with others the truth that gives eternal hope?

For further study:

The Biblical record of the resurrection appearances (not chronological)

Matthew 28:1-10

Mary went to look at the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Matthew 28:16-20

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Mark 16:1-8

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

[**the shorter ending of Mark:** And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.]

the longer ending of Mark 16:9-20

When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.

Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God.

Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

Luke 24:1-12

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.

In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!

Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'

Then they remembered his words.

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles.

But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Luke 24:13-35

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast.

One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

"What things?" he asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but **we had hoped** that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.”

He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. **They asked each other**, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.”

Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Luke 24:36-53

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.

He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?”

Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?”

They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.

He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

John 20:1-10

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to their homes.

John 20:11-18

Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

John 20:19-25

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

John 20:26-31

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John 21:1-25

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

"No," they answered.

He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.

The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.

Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.

Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.

This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."

Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." [Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"]

This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

Acts 1:1-11

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

I Corinthians 15:1-8

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance : that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.