

“Why I Believe”

Luke 24

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

Well, this is the message of Easter...it's the message of the resurrection! Jesus is ALIVE, and because of this, we have been FOREVER CHANGED!

This is the story of so many people in this room today and watching online. We have put our faith and trust in Jesus and in the FACT that Jesus died and rose again. And because we have a personal faith in him and a personal relationship with him, he has FOREVER changed us!

Now, that doesn't mean we are perfect or that we have arrived, but it does mean we have been forgiven of our sin, restored to a right relationship with God and have been guaranteed a future with him.

THIS is what Jesus and his resurrection does for us. Take away TODAY...meaning take away the resurrection and our faith crumbles. As Paul the missionary and church planter wrote in:

1 Cor. 15:17, 20a – “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins...(but then in the first part of v. 20) But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead...”

And it is THIS FACT that changes everything. It has FOREVER CHANGED me, and I want to begin today's message the same way I will end and that is by asking a simple question:

Has it changed you? Have you been FOREVER CHANGED by Jesus and his resurrection?

We have recently been walking through a series here at the church called *FORWARD*. It is a study from a book in the New Testament called *The Acts of the Apostles*. And essentially what it is, is a biography on the early church.

The book details how the church started and how it grew and spread throughout the known world in those early years after Jesus had resurrected from the dead and then ascended back into heaven.

In the latter chapters of the book, the apostle Paul, who we just read, is arrested for his faith and he when given the opportunity to speak, he gives a defense for his faith. In fact, in five of the last seven chapters of the book of Acts, Paul gives a defense for his faith and shares with anyone who will listen why he believes in Jesus and the resurrection.

And that's exactly what I want to do today. I want to give a defense and share with you four reasons why I believe in Jesus and his resurrection.

I'm calling the message today: **Why I Believe**

I want to begin by reading Luke's account of the resurrection story. Luke wrote two books in our New Testament: *The Acts of the Apostles* as well as ONE of the four gospels in our New Testament: Matthew, Mark, LUKE and John.

He writes about that first Easter morning in the very last chapter of his gospel. Let's look at it together:

Luke 24:1-12 – “But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. ⁵ And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” ⁸ And they remembered his words, ⁹ and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, ¹¹ but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹² But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.”

Four reasons why I believe in Jesus and his resurrection. The first reason I believe is **Historical Reasons**.

Did you notice the last phrase in (v. 12) – “he went home marveling at what *had happened*.” The resurrection of Jesus Christ is rooted in historical fact. It really happened!

Illus. Simon Greenleaf - Simon Greenleaf was a lawyer and professor of law at Harvard. He's known best for his work and contribution in the area known as legal or juridical apologetics. He essentially applies a lawyer's work of gathering evidence and making arguments to that of the Christian faith.

Greenleaf was actually an atheist and was challenged by some of his Christian students to apply his skills as a lawyer to disprove the faith.

After researching and doing the hard work to discover the validity of the Christian faith, Greenleaf not only became a Christian, but an apologist for the faith.

Concerning the resurrection as an historical fact, he wrote: **“The foundation of our belief is a basis of fact - the fact of the birth, ministry, miracles, death, resurrection by the Evangelists as having actually occurred, within their own personal knowledge it was therefore impossible that they could have persisted in affirming the truths they have narrated, had not Jesus actually rose from the dead, and had they not known this fact as certainly as they knew any other fact.”**

Regardless of the hypotheses and theories that have been put forward by skeptics down through the centuries, you do the honest research. and what you will find is that the resurrection of Christ has yet to have been discredited in any legitimate way!

Greenleaf wrote: **“A person who rejects Christ may choose to say that I do not accept it, he may not choose to say there is not enough evidence.”**

You get the sense from Luke’s writing that he was extremely smart. We know that he was a physician by trade and an historian. He was highly skilled in his research, and much like a private investigator, he tracked down sources and interviewed eyewitnesses to get the information to write his two books.

One archaeologist examined the references Luke made in the two New Testament books that he wrote (Luke and Acts) and found NOT one mistake out of the 32 countries, 54 cities and 9 islands he cited.

What’s the point? Luke is credible to the core...and the resurrection is:

- NOT Christian propaganda...
- NOT tradition...
- NOT superstition...
- NOT some kind of legend that was created over a long period of time....

The resurrection is rooted in historical fact and if you are looking for proof, what more evidence do you need than an empty tomb?

I find it extremely interesting in studying the resurrection that NOT one person in the Bible or outside the Bible for that matter - I’m talking the most liberal of scholars - there is NO debate about the fact that the tomb was empty on that Sunday morning following Jesus’ death on Friday.

The question is NOT whether the tomb was empty the question is where did the body of Jesus go?

Now, some would like to suggest that the friends of Jesus...that his disciples stole the body, but they couldn’t have done it!

- First, there were guards placed at the tomb...no way could they have overpowered Roman soldiers.
- Second, they wouldn’t have tried in the first place. They were still in hiding in fear of their own lives because of what had just happened to their leader.

If you recall **Luke 24:11** (when they receive the report the angel gave the women at the tomb, they don't even believe it! - **“but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”**

The disciples didn't steal the body of Jesus. And so, if it wasn't them perhaps it was his enemies! Maybe they stole the body of Jesus! The only problem with that theory is, they have no motive!

As a matter of fact, the exact opposite is actually the case...the enemies of Jesus go to the extreme in making sure his body doesn't go anywhere!

Matt. 27:62-66 - **“The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last fraud will be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.” So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.”**

Don't you know if the enemies of Jesus had stolen his body, once the disciples started preaching the resurrection, they would have immediately brought the body forth as proof that the disciples were deceiving others and making this whole resurrection story up!

The fact is...and it's a historical FACT: the tomb is empty. And if that is not enough evidence to convince you that Jesus rose from the dead, then at least take in account the many appearances of Christ AFTER his resurrection!

One of the earliest creeds we have from the early church is found in **1 Cor. 15:3-8** (we're talking early 50's here...within 20 years of Jesus death and resurrection, the Church gathering around this doctrinal statement)– **“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.”**

Paul is saying, “if you don't believe me – that Jesus died was raised to life, then go ask someone else who saw him. There are plenty of eyewitnesses are still alive! Go ask them their story!”

Hundreds of people saw Jesus AFTER he had raised from the dead! This wasn't a ghost...this wasn't an apparition...this wasn't a group hallucination... this is Jesus resurrected in the flesh!

I believe in Jesus and his resurrection for: Historical Reasons, But I also believe because of: **Biblical Reasons.**

Luke 24:13-24 – “That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem,¹⁴ and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened.¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. (Look at v. 16 – KEY. We’ll come back to it in just a moment)¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.¹⁷ And he said to them, “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad.¹⁸ Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”¹⁹ And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him.²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.²² Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning,²³ and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive.²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.”

Now, v. 25-27 is what I want us to hone in on because this leads me to this point of believing in Jesus and his resurrection for biblical reasons:

Luke 24:25-27 – “O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

I believe for biblical reasons. Jesus essentially says, “Guys...this has been forecasted...this has been predicted! Read your Old Testament! For years prophets were speaking of my coming into the world. When I was with you, I predicted exactly what would happen in my suffering and death. You know these things are in the scripture, why are you so slow to believe? Me and my resurrection is what the Bible is ALL about!”

Did you know that scholars estimate there are 330 (give or take) distinct prophecies in the Old Testament that are fulfilled in the life of Christ? The most probable number is 332!

Illus. Peter Stoner - One mathematician by the name of Peter Stoner wrote a book called “Science Speaks”. He was professor of Mathematics and Astronomy at Pasadena City College out in California.

Some use science to try and disprove God! Stoner in his book used the science of probability to rule out coincidences and prove the validity of Christ and the claim of the resurrection.

And so, in using this science of probability, Stoner put these prophecies fulfilled in the life of Christ to the test. BUT, he didn’t do it with all 332, he did it with just 8! What are the chances that just 8 prophecies could be fulfilled in ONE person?

His answer: 1 in 10 to the 17th power...that's a 1 with 17 zeros! (**SHOW IMAGE**) To help us comprehend this, Stoner gave this illustration. He said, take a silver dollar (like the one I have here!) and lay them on the face of the state of Texas. They will cover the state two feet deep.

Now, mark one of those silver dollars...stir the whole mass thoroughly all over the state. Blindfold a man, tell him to travel as far as he wishes, but can only pick up one silver dollar. The chance of that man picking up the marked silver dollar are the exact same chances of just 8 prophecies being fulfilled in one person...and in Christ 332 distinct prophecies fulfilled!

Listen...all of the Bible...ALL of the Bible points to Jesus! It was written:

- over a period of 1500 years...
- by more than 40 different authors...
- in different settings and contexts...
- in different times/moods – i.e. joy, war, tragedy, struggle...
- three continents - Asia, Africa, Europe...
- three different languages - Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic...
- different styles - poetry, narrative, law, prophecy, letters, parables...
- it's survived time - we have the earliest manuscripts of any other ancient literature...
- it's survived...and continues to survive to this day persecution and the threat of being burned and banned...

And yet it has ONE COMMON THEME: Him...his resurrection!

This is why I say I believe in Jesus and his resurrection for biblical reasons!

Because ALL of the Bible points to...pictures...or previews Jesus! THIS is what Jesus was talking these two men through that day on the road to Emmaus.

Can you even imagine what that must have been like...for these two men to finally see the pieces coming together? But, here's the deal: they couldn't put those pieces together on their own...they had to have help.

And this leads me to the third reason that I believe in Jesus and his resurrection and that is for: **Spiritual Reasons.**

Look with me at **Luke 24:28-31** – “So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹ but they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”

I love that little phrase in v. 31 – “and their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.”

Now, you have to read into this statement and ask this question – “Who made their eyes open?” Their eyes were once closed, and now they are open? Who opened their eyes?!

It wasn't them! As a matter of fact, if you look back at **Luke 24:16** – **“But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.”** So, who is this closing and opening eyes?

Spend any amount of time in scripture and you will see the One who is responsible for concealing and revealing spiritual matters is the Holy Spirit of God - this is his job and his role within the Godhead.

It is the Holy Spirit who opens our eyes and hearts so that we may believe. We could not have...and NEVER will come to an understanding of spiritual truth on our own!

In and of ourselves...without the help of the Holy Spirit we are spiritually blind, and we'll never believe this message we're talking about today.

2 Cor. 4:4 – **“In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”**

We could not have...and NEVER will understand who Jesus is and believe in what he did without the help and aid of the Holy Spirit. This is why Jesus calls him our “Helper”.

John 14:26 – **“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”**

John 15:26 – **“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.”**

See, the good news of Jesus Christ truly is too great to comprehend! How can anyone understand and wrap their finite mind around:

- a God who humbled himself and entered into human flesh...
- lived a perfect, sinless life...
- died on a cross as a substitute for us and shed his blood as the payment for our sin...
- and then in three days rose from the grave beating death and hell...purchasing once and for all our salvation...
- and then promises to one day in the future return for those who call upon him as Lord and ultimately right all wrongs...

How are we to believe this? How are we to embrace this message? How are we to leave our life of sin and what we can see, touch and feel for someone we've never seen with our eyes...never heard in an audible voice...never touched physically with our hands? How?

The only way is by God, the Holy Spirit moving in our life...speaking to our heart...unveiling our eyes and allowing us to come to him.

Jesus tells us in **John 6:44** – “**No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.**”

And he draws us to himself by the Holy Spirit! Listen: I believe in Jesus and his resurrection because I was sitting in a church just like you when I was eleven years old. I was just having fun at a summer camp spending time with my friends.

We went to the church service that night and as the preacher got up and preached and it was as if God was speaking straight to me. I can see in my mind's eye exactly where I was sitting.

At eleven years of age, I hadn't committed any evil atrocity. But I'm telling you, God opened my eyes that night to my sin and showed me that in my sin, I was separated from God.

He revealed to me my need for Jesus and that trusting in Jesus – his death, burial and resurrection was the only way I could be in a right relationship with him.

He led me at the moment of invitation...a moment we will have here in just a few minutes to stand and profess publicly my faith in Christ. I was just 11 years old!

- I didn't have all the answers...
- I didn't know everything I was committing to that evening...
- I had no idea what God was going to do with my life, but there was no doubt God through his Holy Spirit was speaking to me and “helping” me to follow him and it has been the greatest decision I've ever made!

I believe in Jesus and his resurrection for historical reasons. The fact that Jesus lived, died and was raised to life is a fact. It really happened!

I believe in Jesus and his resurrection for biblical reasons. I can't get past the prophecies concerning Jesus and how the entire Bible point to Jesus! NO way is it just coincidence!

I follow in Jesus and his resurrection for spiritual reasons. The Holy Spirit took God's Word and opened my eyes and softened my heart to believe, drawing me to himself.

And finally, I believe in Jesus and his resurrection for: **Personal Reasons**.

You keep reading Luke 24 and you see that Jesus appeared to the disciples. He spoke to them...he blessed them...they would all ultimately end up giving their lives for him.

These men knew Jesus...they walked with him...they loved him...and they risked EVERYTHING for him! Each believed and followed him for very personal reasons.

And I too believe in him for very personal reasons. I believe in him because at a time when I needed him the most...at a time when I felt the most scared...when I felt the most alone...he was there! He's ALWAYS been there!

- As an 11-year-old – many of you have heard my story. Sexually abused by a little league baseball coach for a period of four years. Listen to me: Jesus was there.
- As a 19-year-old – when I decided to come forward and tell someone for the first time. Jesus was there. It was his words in Matt. 11:28 that gave me the courage to come forward and share my story.
- As a young parent - When Debbie and I were growing our family and we had a miscarriage. It was a helpless feeling to wake up in the middle of the night to the bed slightly shaking because my wife was crying in the middle of the night, but guess what – Jesus was there and he brought us through.
- And then just take last week – the home we've been living in since arriving in Houston catches fire. By God's grace we had moved out the previous week for some remodeling that was being done. None of us were there when the fire occurred. However, we lost a lot of valuables and memorabilia that you can't replace.

And you know what...through it all, Jesus has been faithful and good. He surrounded us with a loving church family that has wrapped its arms around us and is walking with us through this.

You ask me why I believe in Jesus and the resurrection. It personal with me. He saved me. And he's proved himself faithful to me through the years. He has FOREVER CHANGED me.

I end this sermon, with the same question I started with: Has he FOREVER CHANGED you?

He can in a moment. All you have to do the Bible says is "Call on the name of the Lord". That simply means you pray, and you ask him to live in you...to be your Lord and Savior and change your life.

And if you want to do that, I'm going invite you to pray with me, right now. And with every head bowed and every eye closed, you are here today and you want Jesus to FOREVER CHANGE your life, I want to put a prayer on the screen for you.

Now, to be clear, these words don't save you...it's the posture of humility in your heart and confession of faith that saves you.

“Jesus, I believe you are the Resurrection and the Life. I ask you today to forgive me of my sin. Come into my life and change me. I believe you are the Son of God. I believe you died on a cross for my sins. I believe you were raised to life and I am asking you to save me and forever change my life. Thank you for hearing my prayer and help me to live for you every day. Amen.”

Now, speaking of help, if you prayed that prayer with me, I’m going to ask you to make a decision that’s going to take some courage...and you are going to need to ask the Holy Spirit for some help to do what I’m going to ask.

We do this each year at Easter. If you prayed that prayer with me, in just a moment, I am going to ask you to stand where you are so we can celebrate with you. You may believe in Jesus for personal reasons, but he your faith in him is to be declared publicly!

And if Jesus has forever changed you, that’s worthy of a celebration...that’s worthy of being known!

If you’ve ever been in a Labor and Delivery section of a hospital? It’s the most happening place to be in hospitals – you know why? Because new life is taking place...there is so much joy...so much excitement.

And when you pray and ask Jesus to change you, the Bible calls this “new life”...it’s people who are being “born again” and we want to celebrate without the cigars!

And so here is what I’m going to ask you to do: I’m going to pray and ask God to give you the courage to stand and tell the world you just asked Jesus to live in your heart.

And after I pray, I’m simply going to count to three and ask you to stand...and we’re going to see people stand all over this room. And by standing are saying, I prayed with you, Jarrett and for the very first time, I called on Jesus and asking him to FOREVER CHANGE me.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.