

Why do we celebrate the Resurrection and did Christ really rise from the dead?

As the Easter season quickly approaches, it is beneficial to take a moment to reflect on why we do what we do as a Church. Asking ourselves this question keeps us from simply going through the motions and even potentially missing out on opportunities to participate in things that are significant and eternal. So why do we commemorate Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday (or Saturday if you are an FSater!)?

A good place to start is Luke 24:5b-9 where the angels appeared to the women at the empty tomb and said, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen. **Remember** how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." And they **remembered** His words and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.

Regularly celebrating an event helps us remember its significance. We put birthdays on our calendars so we remember the special people in our lives and don't forget to send them cards and gifts. We celebrate Thanksgiving Day every November so that we remember all that we have been blessed with and give thanks to God.

So too, the most important week in all of history needs to be remembered and celebrated. The true King, who existed before all time entered Jerusalem and was heralded with shouts of praise and the waving of palm branches. He will also be worshiped into eternity (see Rev. 7:9-10, again palm branches!). The remembrance of that event helps put into perspective and prepares us to remember Good Friday. It wasn't just some man on the cross, it was the King!

Why Good Friday? Well, it was the single day when a provision was made for the greatest need of all humanity. Think about that! Greater than broken relationships, greater than health problems, greater than hunger and financial needs! Our sin was placed upon Jesus and He satisfied the righteous demands of a holy God through his death on the cross. His blood cleanses us (see Heb. 9). Hallelujah! Maybe we should call it Great Friday!

So where does our hope lie? In the resurrection of Jesus! 1 Cor. 15 is such an exciting chapter of Scripture. It begins with a clear explanation of the Gospel. "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures . . ." Paul then goes on to describe why the

resurrection of Christ is so important to our faith. Without it we are hopeless and foolish. With it, we have the victory in Christ over sin and death!

Now, should we not celebrate these things every day and even every moment of our lives? Certainly! However, setting aside a week every year to gather as a local body of believers who are also part of a universal body of believers, the Church, is very significant. We are a part of something bigger than just ourselves. Through faith in Jesus Christ God welcomes us into His family; something that He has been doing for over 2,000 years. By gathering to remember and celebrate Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday we are proclaiming our hope in the Gospel. We are telling one another and the world (and even the angelic realm – see Eph. 3:10) that Christ, the King, has paid the price for our sin and He is risen. We join with the women who first heard the good news and with them, in wonder and awe, we proclaim what we have seen and heard.

This Easter season, let's prioritize gathering together for this purpose. For our Palm Sunday weekend services, wave those palm branches in celebration of our King. At our Good Friday services, as we proclaim Christ's death and celebrate communion together, we remember the body of Christ broken in our place and the blood of Christ that was shed to cleanse us from all our sin. Resurrection weekend services, gather with us as we proclaim, "He is risen, His risen indeed!"

P.S. – Is the resurrection true? Well, the Bible certainly proclaims that to be the case; and the eyewitnesses of the resurrection testify to its validity; and the changed lives of Jesus' disciples proclaim it. Listen to the words of Chuck Colson, special counsel to President Richard Nixon and founder of Prison Fellowship Ministries:

We celebrate because we as Christians know that our Lord is risen from the dead—and in His resurrection is our hope of everlasting life with God. Indeed, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, the historical fact of Christ's resurrection is the only basis of our hope. Without the resurrection, our faith is futile. This is why critics of Christianity often try to explain away the empty tomb. They claim that the disciples lied—that they stole Jesus's body themselves and conspired together to pretend He had risen. The apostles then managed somehow to recruit more than 500 other people to lie for them as well, to say they saw Jesus after He rose from the dead. But just how plausible is this theory?

To answer that question, fast forward nearly 2,000 years, to an event I happen to know a lot about: Watergate. You see, before all the facts about Watergate were known to the public—in March 1973—it was becoming clear to Nixon's closest aides that someone had tried to cover up the Watergate break-in. There were no more than a dozen of us. Could we maintain a cover-up—to save the president? Consider

that we were political zealots. We enjoyed enormous political power and prestige. With all that at stake, you'd expect us to be capable of maintaining a lie to protect the president. But we couldn't do it. The first to crack was John Dean. First, he told the president everything, and then just two weeks later he went to the prosecutors and offered to testify against the President. His reason, as he candidly admits in his memoirs, was to "save his own skin." After that, everyone started scrambling to protect himself. What we know today as the great Watergate cover-up lasted only three weeks. Some of the most powerful politicians in the world—and we couldn't keep a lie for more than three weeks.

So back to the question of historicity of Christ's resurrection. Can anyone believe that for fifty years that Jesus' disciples were willing to be ostracized, beaten, persecuted, and all but one of them suffer a martyr's death—without ever renouncing their conviction that they had seen Jesus bodily resurrected? Does anyone really think the disciples could have maintained a lie all that time under that kind of pressure? No, someone would have cracked, just as we did so easily in Watergate. Someone would have acted as John Dean did and turned state's evidence. There would have been some kind of smoking gun, or a deathbed confession. So why didn't they crack? Because they had come face to face with the living God. They could not deny what they had seen. The fact is that people will give their lives for what they believe is true, but they will never give their lives for what they know is a lie. The Watergate cover-up proves that 12 powerful men in modern America couldn't keep a lie—and that 12 powerless men 2,000 years ago couldn't have been telling anything but the truth.

-from "Watergate and the Resurrection: 12 Men Can't Keep a Lie for Long" by John Stonestreet and Chuck Colson

Are we convinced of the truth of the resurrection in a way that changes our lives?  
May this Easter season convince us once again of the hope we have in Christ!