



Part 5: I believe in Jesus' resurrection | Pastor Joe Wittwer | Feb. 15, 2009

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

The resurrection of Jesus is the most startling event in history. Twenty centuries later, people are still debating the resurrection because if it happened, it changes everything. And if it didn't happen, the Christian faith is bogus. Simply put, Jesus' death and resurrection are the big deal!

1. He descended into hell.

What happened to Jesus between His death and resurrection? The Creed says, "He descended into hell." Another version reads, "He descended to the dead." Jesus died and joined all those who had died before Him. Where did His spirit go when He died? To His Father. On the cross Jesus prayed, "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*" (Luke 23:46). Psalm 139:7-8 says, "*Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.*" "The depths" is *Sheol* in Hebrew: the shadowy place where the dead go to await judgment. Even in *Sheol*, God is there. The sketchy information we're given in 1 Peter 3:18-19 and Ephesians 4:7-10 about what Jesus did during His death makes for good debate amongst Bible scholars, but what is certain and *essential* is that Christ fully experienced death, and His death and resurrection had a cosmic effect that reached from the lowest depths to the highest highs in the universe.

2. The third day He arose again from the dead.

A. The factual nature of the resurrection. The New Testament presents the resurrection as a historical fact. It is not a myth, a legend, a parable, a metaphor, a fable, or a lovely idea. It really happened on "the third day." [Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 together.] The evidence for the factual nature of the resurrection is compelling: the body was gone, the tomb was empty, the grave clothes were undisturbed, Jesus was seen, and the disciples were changed.

B. The foundational nature of the resurrection. The resurrection is the foundation of the Christian faith. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:14, 17-19, "*And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. . . . [Y]our faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.*" Paul says very clearly that if Jesus didn't rise, then our prayers are futile, all our attempts to share God's good news are in vain (forget Find, Tell, Bring), we're still stuck in our sins, the dead are lost and gone, and we're the most pitiful people on earth for believing a lie. Our faith rests on the foundation of the resurrection. It matters.

C. What the resurrection means for us.

1) Jesus is alive. All through the New Testament, the first Christians knew and followed a living Jesus. When Stephen was being stoned, he saw a living Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father. When Saul was on the road to Damascus, it was a living Jesus who appeared to him. When Peter healed Aeneas, he said, "Jesus Christ heals you." Jesus isn't a dead religious hero; He is a living Savior! Because Jesus is alive, we can know Him and follow Him and have a relationship with a living Jesus.

2) We are saved by believing in Jesus' resurrection. How important is it to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead? Romans 10:9 says, "*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.'
It changes everything!

3) There is life after death. Jesus' resurrection is the proof that there is life after death, and it guarantees ours. **1 Corinthians 6:14** says, *"By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also."* Death has been defeated and is not to be feared. So many people fear dying. When we die, we are going where He has already gone and come out alive! This is why Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 15:54-55**, *"Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"*

4) There is life before death. Jesus' resurrection means that we have a new life now. This is the meaning of baptism and is pictured in the act of immersion. We died with Christ and were buried with Christ: we're put all the way under. Then just as Christ was raised from the dead, we were raised to live a new life. This new life is described in **Romans 6:4**, *"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."* We are dead to sin, but alive to God (**Romans 6:11**). This is the new life or, as Jesus called it, the abundant life or life to the full. Jesus rose from the dead not only to guarantee that we'd live after we die, but to make sure that we live *before* we die—alive to God, fully alive for the first time!

5) Go all in. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 15:58**, *"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."* Give yourself fully because you know it won't be in vain. There's a resurrection coming.

C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. The Bible doesn't have a lot to say about the part of the Creed on "descending into hell." But what it does indicate is that God did not "abandon" Jesus to the grave. [Read **Acts 2:27, 31**, in which Peter quotes **Psalms 16:10**.] How are these verses a comfort?
2. Read **1 Corinthians 15:1-8**. What is the unambiguous meaning of what Paul has reported, and what kind of evidence does it give for the resurrection? Here are the major pieces of biblical evidence: the body was gone, the tomb was empty, the grave clothes were undisturbed, Jesus was seen, and the disciples were changed. Why is the resurrection the best explanation for these individually and collectively?
3. Jesus took on the sins of the world, died for us, and was resurrected. How does that change your hope for this life, not just the afterlife? How should we respond to Jesus' sacrifice? What does it look like for you to be "dead to sin, but alive to God"?
4. Since Jesus is alive: what steps can you take to invest in your relationship with Him? Are you "all in" in your relationship with Jesus? If not, what's holding you back? Read **1 Corinthians 15:58**. Since Jesus' resurrection frees us from the fear of death (**Hebrews 2:14-18**), how are you released to "always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord"?

D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes)

- Recite the Apostles' Creed from memory, or practice memorizing it.
- Schedule PBJ (Prayer, Bible, Journal) time daily this week to prioritize time with the Lord. On one day, focus in particular on **Romans 6** and what it means to be alive to God!

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Thank God for Jesus' resurrection, His sacrifice and His forgiveness of our sins.
- Ask God to show you ways you can be "all in" with Him in your daily life.
- Pray for God to identify people in your life who are ready to receive the gospel.
- Bring any other praises and requests before the Lord that arose during your discussion.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth,

and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:

Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,
whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church, the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.

For further reading on Christian doctrine:

- *The Faith: What Christians Believe, Why They Believe it, and Why it Matters*, Charles Colson and Harold Fickett, Zondervan, 2008.
- *Christian Basics: An Invitation to Discipleship*, John Stott, Baker, 1991.
- *Basic Christianity*, John Stott, InterVarsity Press.
- *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*, N. T. Wright, Harper, 2006.
- *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis, Macmillan, 1952.
- *Christian Theology in Plain Language*, Bruce Shelley, Word, 1985

For further reading on the Apostles' Creed:

- *The Apostles' Creed*, William Barclay, Knox, 1998.
- *I Believe: Exploring the Apostles Creed*, Alister McGrath, Intervarsity Press, 1997.
- *Affirming the Apostles' Creed*, J. I. Packer, Crossway, 2008.
- *Credo: Believing in Something to Die For*, Ray Pritchard, 2005.