

Assurance of the Resurrection
John 20:1-9; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28
April 1

The resurrection of Jesus is central to Christianity. John wrote the Fourth Gospel in the context of first century religious pluralism. He highlighted seven signs performed by Jesus that signified his identity – the Word became flesh. John highlighted these signs to convince people to receive Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, the Son of God, and the only one in whom people experience eternal life (John 21:30-31). In Jewish thought, the eight in a series indicated the climax, conclusion, and the dawn of God's new action. For example, God created in seven days; the eighth day, therefore, emphasized a new beginning. The resurrection of Jesus serves as the eighth and final sign (signpost) to the status of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. This climactic eighth sign means that newness characterizes the life people receive through Jesus because of His resurrection.

What is the message of the Fourth Gospel in the context of our culture that also expresses incredulity to the message of the resurrection of Jesus?

First, believers gain assurance because of followers of Jesus lacked an expectation of the resurrection of Jesus (John 20:1-2). Mary expressed her devotion to Jesus through expensive loyalty. At the threat of peril to her own life, Mary, along with other women, walked to the tomb of Jesus to complete the preparations of the body of Jesus for burial. Since Mary witnessed three crucial events, she functions as a link or connection between the truth of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

The role of Mary as witness to the resurrection gives credence for the historical resurrections of Jesus. Jews, unfortunately, often downplayed the value and role of woman as legal witnesses. All four gospels point to the role of women as first witnesses. If John and the other Gospel authors “created” the story of the resurrection, then they would not have made up the story of the women's testimony.

Second, believers gain assurance of the resurrection as they examine the evidence for the resurrection (John 20: 3-8). Critics of the resurrection often suggest that the expectancy of the disciples created their belief in the resurrection. Despite the prophecies of the Old Testament (v. 9) and the teachings of Jesus, the disciples exhibited an incredulity about the resurrection. The evidence of the resurrection conquered the questions and doubts of the disciples. Peter and “the other disciple” (John) actively pursued the evidence

available to them. The placement and neat folding of the facial cloth pointed to an explanation other than grave robbery. Lazarus came out of the grave clothed with burial cloths (John 11); yet, the resurrected Jesus had no need for burial cloths so he neatly folded the cloths. The empty tomb and the placement of the burial cloths brought John to believe without seeing the physical body of the resurrected Jesus. The Bible, however, does proclaim the importance of the appearances of Jesus as irrefutable evidence provided to skeptical disciples.

Third, because of the resurrection of Jesus, believers have assurance of their future bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20-28). Paul provided assurance of a future resurrection for believers on the basis of Christ resurrection and believers union with Christ. “Firstfruits” was a religious celebration of God’s provision of the harvest (Lev. 23:9-14). Worshipers presented the “firstfruits” as a thanksgiving offering in anticipation. The worshipers offered the “firstfruits” of the harvest in anticipation of additional harvest. Christ was the “firstfruits” of the resurrection, thus, assuring additional resurrections in the future. Furthermore, believers gain assurance on the basis of the temporal nature of death. Death is like sleep in that death is restful and temporary. (Paul did not mean that believers pass into a state of unconsciousness by means of the analogy of sleep.)

Paul gave assurance to believers through a comparison/contrast of Adam and Christ. Adam and Christ represent the beginning of two types of humanity. All people in union with Adam and his sin (“in Adam”) die now. All people in union with Christ (“in Christ”) will live in the future. Humans united with Adam and his choice of disobedience die. Humans united with Christ through faith live.

Third, the truth of the resurrection demands personal testimony (John 20:17-18). Every resurrection appearance of Jesus recorded in the Bible concludes with a challenge to tell others of the good news. The risen Jesus, then, expects His followers to teach the reality of the resurrection to others. While we have not seen the resurrected body of Jesus, Jesus commanded each believer to bear testimony to our encounter with the resurrected Lord. The best way to celebrate Resurrection Sunday is to proclaim the resurrection every day.