

Easter 2025 Believe

Introduction: All four Gospels document numerous occasions when Jesus made it very clear that He was going to be killed and raised from the dead on the third day. Here's an example from each gospel that highlights the variety of the occasions and the consistency of the message.

One of the examples from Matthew is in chapter 17. Matthew writes,

22 As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, 23 and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day." And they were greatly distressed. (Matthew 17:22-23)

After the Last Supper, Mark tells us this happened,

26 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 27 And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' 28 But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." 29 Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not." 30 And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." 31 But he said emphatically, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." And they all said the same. (Mark 14:26-31)

Prior to Christ's triumphal entrance into Jerusalem, Luke tells of this occasion,

31 And taking the twelve, he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. 32 For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. 33 And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise." (Luke 18:31-32)

Finally, in John's Gospel, we find another occasion,

18 So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body. (John 2:18-21)

The point is that it wasn't a one-time occasion that Jesus told His disciples He was going to be killed, buried, and then rise from the grave on the third day. He consistently told his disciples this was going to happen. It would have been enough if Jesus had just said it once, so why is it important to know other occasions where He said the same thing?

Well, first and foremost, it's meant to ensure we don't misunderstand the purpose of Christ's mission on this earth: His death and resurrection. In all of the mind-numbing swirl of the social media conversations about what Jesus would do or not do in a situation or with a given social issue, as well as the well-intended advertisements about how "He gets us," ironically, few ever seem to want to talk about why Jesus said He came to us; that is why He was born of a virgin, lived a perfect life, and preached what He preached.

Ironically, the roar of conversations in our culture that either innocently or intentionally point away from Christ's stated purpose is not new. As a matter of fact, Peter himself responded the same way at one point. In the Gospel of Mark, we read,

31 And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." (Mark 8:31-33)

So, it turns out that the effort of modern liberalism to point away from and even outright deny what Jesus Himself said so that they can build a different narrative about Jesus and thus create a Jesus in their own image for their own purposes and priorities is not new! It is "**the things of man**" that Peter wanted Jesus to be about, and 2,000 years later, it's still the "**the things of man**" that a lost society and lost "Christian" religious leaders continue to insist that Jesus came to accomplish.

Apparently, Peter wasn't the only one trying to force Jesus into their political and social agenda, because when Jesus was done rebuking Peter, he immediately opened up to the crowd! Mark writes,

34 And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? 37 For what can a man give in return for his soul? 38 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." (Mark 8:34-38)

Verse 38 is a direct rebuke of what Peter had just done with Jesus. Peter told Jesus to stop talking about being killed and resurrected because, at this point, Peter, like most of the Jewish people, was still wrapped up in the idea that the Messiah was coming to rescue them from Roman rule and the corrupt, immoral "Jews" in name only, like Herod, that the Romans ruled them with. When Jesus talked about being killed, it went against everything Peter insisted Jesus was about. It left him with a feeling of shame for being a follower of Christ, something that became very apparent when he denied even knowing Jesus while Jesus was on trial! This getting killed and being resurrected stuff was crazy talk to Peter.

Therefore, Jesus needed to stop it because, from Peter's perspective, it risked ruining the momentum Jesus was gaining with his miracles and other teachings. However, Jesus made it clear that if Peter, or anybody else, can't accept Him as the one who came to die and rise from the grave, then we can't have Him at all, and thus we can't have his offer of eternal life either! It's why Paul, from a positive standpoint, later wrote,

8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:8-9)

You see, it turns out that although the values and behaviors Jesus taught obviously have divine authority, THE central linchpin belief of Christianity is that Jesus is God (Lord) and that He rose from the grave after dying on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins. Over and over again, Jesus called His disciples to these two truths, and over and over again, they wandered from them back into their desire for a cultural hero, so much so that when Jesus died, they assumed everything they had worked for with Jesus over the last three years had been killed with Him. Listen to how the disciples responded to the women who first reported that Christ was alive!

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. (Luke 24:10-11)

The idea of the resurrection seemed to them an "idle tale," which can also be translated as "nonsense."¹ The Greek word implies that they saw the assertion that Jesus was alive with such absurdity that it is unworthy of even mentally engaging with it! In other words, the disciples, which included Peter, James, and John, the three with whom Jesus spent the most time, had no belief whatsoever that Jesus would rise from the grave. They had totally disregarded what Jesus had said about it and now refused to even consider it as a possibility.

But Christ, in His unending patience and love, didn't condemn them to their disbelief, but instead appeared to all of them by day's end, evaporating their disbelief and permanently changing their entire perspective about life and faith! Nothing was the same for those disciples ever again. But it wasn't just a handful of women and the twelve disciples that witnessed the resurrected Christ and, as such, preached His resurrection as the central operative truth of Christianity; but hundreds more, as a matter of fact, more than 500 more! The Apostle Paul wrote,

1 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to

¹ "silly talk; nonsense. Only here in New Testament. Used in medical language of the wild talk of delirium. Wyc., *madness*. Tynd., *feigned things*" Vincent, M. R. (1887). [*Word studies in the New Testament*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 433). Charles Scribner's Sons.

the word I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Corinthians 15:1-8)

The 500-plus people Paul referred to were likely those who witnessed Christ's ascension in Acts 1, and most of them were still alive when Paul wrote this letter and more than willing to talk about it if anybody in Corinth wanted to personally hear from them. Paul was making it clear that we not only have a lot of evidence that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead but also that the resurrection of Christ and, consequently, His ascension are of "first importance" to our faith. Thus, it should be super encouraging that we have this much proof. Everything Christ said hinges on whether or not He rose from the grave, so much so that if Christ didn't rise from the grave, then there is no reason at all to so much as give an ear to anything He said! Paul said it this way,

14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:14)

Now, I know what many of you are thinking, "Austin, I appreciate the reminder, but if I didn't believe Jesus rose from the grave, I wouldn't be here listening to you preach right now, so why the passionate and thorough reminder?"

Well, it's one thing to believe something in our minds, but it's an entirely different kind of thing to believe something in our hearts. To believe in your mind means you agree with the facts, but when we believe something in our hearts, it changes how we act, think, feel, and even see the world and the circumstances we exist in! To believe something in your heart means you are driven and defined by it!

For instance, in a few weeks, Keri and I will be traveling with a team to Africa to teach recently converted Muslim refugees the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that they can return to their refugee camps more grounded in the knowledge of God's Word and better equipped to share the most important news anyone could ever hear—The Gospel! I will be teaching a group of influential men the entire book of Galatians while Keri and the women traveling with us guide a group of recently converted Muslim women through the Creation to Christ Story Cloth. This is an oral strategy that best empowers people who have little to no literacy. They will then share those same stories with other women who are illiterate or functionally so. Illiteracy is a big problem for women in many Islamic cultures around the world.

Some of you may have noticed the vagueness in my description of that trip, specifically in that I didn't tell you where the people are coming from that we are going to be teaching. That was on purpose. If I tell you exactly where these people are coming from, I could put

their lives and their families' lives at risk. For Christians living in Muslim refugee camps, as well as for Christians living in places like Somalia, Libya, Sudan, Gaza, Iran, Afghanistan, and Yemen, and just about every other Muslim nation on the planet, including almost all of the ones who publicly claim to have freedom of religion, it's consequential to be a Christian. In some of those nations, it can very well result in death.² The people we will be teaching in May are very much putting their lives on the line every single time they tell somebody they believe Jesus rose from the grave and, as such, He is the eternal Son of God who fully paid the penalty of sin and made the way for people of every tribe and tongue to be God's children!

Now again, why does it matter for me to bring that up?

Well, first of all, it's certainly not the most dangerous thing Keri, and I could do together in the cause of Christ, but there is obviously an increased risk to life when you travel to a third-world country to do mission work. With that, we have three kids—one in college, one in high school, and one in elementary school- and I would be lying if I denied that both Keri and I had not thought about the risk in that context. I don't want my children to be orphaned. I love my children more than anybody else on the planet, so that's not something I would like to volunteer them for at all. However, if Jesus is alive, then eternal life is real, and that means no matter how many years I have to live on this earth in a relationship with my wife and kids, those years pale in comparison to the ETERNAL life we will have together when this life is over!

Therefore, if I actually believe Jesus rose from the dead, and as such, believe that life is eternal, that in Him I've been guaranteed that eternal life, and finally that because my wife and children have all repented and believed in the risen Christ as well, we will be together forever as brothers and sisters in Christ, then I have nothing at all to fear in getting on that plane in May! I can walk right into whatever God has called me to do with complete confidence that whether I live or die, I will live forever with all those who are in Him!

But listen, that perspective is a very self-centered one that addresses an increased risk of something happening that still has a WAY higher chance of not happening! However, there is no doubt at all that every single person we teach on our trip, including their families, will suffer some measure of persecution for believing in the resurrected Christ and sharing that belief with others. It is not if they will be persecuted but rather how often and to what level. They will suffer loss in this life for believing in and sharing His life. Therefore, I am necessarily putting their lives and the lives of their family members at risk for teaching them what Jesus taught His disciples, the very thing those disciples went and taught the world that I'm standing here teaching you 2,000 years later.

Nonetheless, if they could pay the ultimate price for sharing what I'm going to teach them, it begs the question, "Is it worth it?" I not only have to ask myself if it is worth the very low risk of leaving my kids as orphans to go preach the Gospel in a third-world country, but I

² <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2025/01/christian-persecution-2025-countries-open-doors-watch-list/>

also have to ask the much bigger question: is it worth teaching the Gospel to people that will necessarily be persecuted and potentially even be killed for believing it and sharing it with others?

So, how do you answer that? Well, it's as simple as Easter! If Christ rose from the grave, it's worth it, but if He didn't, it's not ... it's that simple. After writing 57 verses in 1 Corinthians 15 to show why we should not only be confident in the resurrection of Christ but also the eternal life His resurrection guarantees us, Paul concluded the chapter with this verse,

58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:58)

And listen, Paul wasn't writing that to a team of people getting ready to leave for North Korea to go preach the Gospel; he was writing that to Christians living with a relative amount of freedom in a city called Corinth. He wrote it to Christians dealing with the same tests of faith that you and I deal with. He wrote to people with the same default drift to end up living our lives checking the intellectual box that we believe Jesus is God, died on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins, and rose from the dead, but somehow end up not actively living that belief from our heart. The people in Corinth were in the same boat we can find ourselves in as Christians today, and maybe even the boat that some of you are in right now. You believe the facts in your mind, but those facts aren't the defining motive of your life; they aren't inseparable from everything that defines your view of yourself and others; and they don't create the lens on how you interpret your life and circumstances.

Let me be more specific. If we really believe in our heart that Jesus is God, that He died on the cross and paid the penalty of our sin, then rose from the grave, and ascended into Heaven, then we have every reason to believe everything else He says to be true as well, and that includes the following:

- (1) Grace is Real** – He fully paid the penalty of my sin so that there is nothing in the way of me giving my life to God! There's nothing for me to earn and everything to receive if I will just repent and surrender my life to live in obedience to God instead of myself or anybody else! (Matthew 26:28)
- (2) Accountability is Real** - Jesus made it very clear he was coming back to judge every thought and action. I don't know how that works with His kids, but there is no doubt it's real because He said it a lot! (Matthew 24:29-25:46)
- (3) Hell is Real** – Nobody preached about hell more than Jesus. He came to rescue us from it! But He also made it clear that if we don't repent and believe in Him, we will not be saved from the eternal separation from God that is Hell. He didn't come to condemn anybody to hell; we are already in that situation. He came to rescue us from it. So, the idea that somehow Hell isn't real goes against everything Jesus Himself taught! (Luke 16:19-31)

- (4) **Heaven is Real** – Jesus told the thief on the cross beside him, “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). Jesus ascended to Heaven, and when He comes back, He’s coming back to restore the earth to be the perfect eternal dwelling place of God with man where His perfect and eternally righteous love is the only characteristic! (John 3:16)
- (5) **Hope is Real!** - Hope means no matter how bad or good things are, there is something in front of you that is worth the grind. If hope is real, then we have a purpose in living, no matter where we are in life. No matter how successful you are in your career or how big of a flop you are, your purpose is not your career; your purpose is to know and love GOD, and Christ has guaranteed you fully favored access to HIM so that you always can! You may be a huge failure in that purpose, but don’t worry ... hope is real! God loves me, and he’s given me access into my purpose not because of my works but Christ’s. So, no matter how much you’ve failed to live in the purpose He has made every man and woman on this planet to walk in, you need to know HOPE is real and that means today you can repent and start working in your purpose, not in some probational period, but as the fully favored adopted son and daughter of God that Christ has made you to ALWAYS be! (John 14)

The question is, **DO YOU BELIEVE IT?** ... not just a fact to answer a question on a test, but in your heart?

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26)

9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

Our campus pastors will be coming out in just a second to talk with you about how you can make the next step in your belief, but make no mistake, the condition of your heart in relationship to your belief in this central truth is the most important and most defining element of your entire life!