

Buzz King
buzz@BuzzKing.com
BuzzKing.com
303 437 7419

John 11:25–27, ESV.

²⁵ Jesus said to Martha, “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?” ²⁷ She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

Every Day Is Easter: *We Can All Rise.*

We’re going to look at Easter from a few different perspectives today, to try and fully appreciate just how fundamental it is to who we are as people of faith. We will see that Easter represents a lot more than what we have been taught from a literal perspective. The resurrection is at the core of what we are as people of the Christian faith, perhaps from a deeper perspective than you might have thought.

But first, let me introduce a woman I visited with a while back. She was in her nineties. She had just been moved to comfort care, meaning that the goal was no longer to treat her disease, but rather to keep her free of pain and anxiety, and to let her pass away in the presence of her family in a peaceful fashion. But her only family, a couple of adult children, were out of the country and couldn’t get there quickly enough. That’s why I was with her. She was very calm, very accepting of impending death. She told me that there was a very

special reason why she had no fear whatsoever of dying – and that it had to do with Easter. We'll call this woman Molly. I'll get back to her story.

There are multiple perspectives that we can take on the defining day of Christianity, the day that above all others represents the core of our faith. To that end, we're going to go on a little biblical tour today. We'll see that by taking more than just a literal view of Easter, we find something that transforms every day of our lives into Easter. Let's start with a classic Easter passage from the Gospel of Luke. It begins in Chapter 23 and continues into 24. I have edited this for brevity:

*⁵⁰ There was a man named Joseph from the Jewish town of Arimathea. ⁵² He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³ Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. ⁵⁵ The women who had come with him from Galilee saw the tomb and how his body was laid. ⁵⁶ Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. **24** 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 the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but has risen." Returning from the tomb, 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.*

This gives us our literal perspective. During the time of Jesus, only very wealthy people were buried in tombs cut from rock. Jesus would certainly not normally have been a man who would have been honored in this way. But a man

named Joseph from a town called Arimathea donated a tomb. This was no temporary gift, as many people have thought. A person was typically left in the tomb for about a year, laid out on a ledge cut from the rock inside the tomb.

Then when all that was left were the bones, they were placed in a box called an ossuary. This box was then placed deeper back in the tomb so that the ledge could be used for someone else. Importantly, once a member of one family had used a tomb, only members of that family could ever use the tomb again.

Remember what was said about this tomb cut in stone: *where no one had ever yet been laid*. So, it was an extremely expensive, permanent gift. No other family could ever use that tomb. After Jesus had been in the tomb for some days, with a huge, circular stone rolled through a trench and placed blocking the entrance, a handful of women visit the tomb. They include Mary Magdalene, a woman named Joanna, and a woman named Mary, who is the mother of someone named James. They discover two angels who tell them that Jesus is no longer among the dead. He has risen - they tell the women. Later, Peter verifies these facts.

Because of the dramatic significance of the resurrection of Jesus, this miraculous event is one of those Bible stories, perhaps the most significant one, that pits faith against science – at least in the minds of nonbelievers. People use reason and logic to argue against the resurrection. They tell us that the dead do

not rise and come back to life. Death is final and cannot be overcome. People who want to discredit the literal story have come up with theories to explain the resurrection and make it jibe with modern science. One theory is that the three women who went to the tomb, along with Peter, had terrible senses of direction, so bad that we would assume that they couldn't possibly have found their way out of an outhouse: after all, they must have gone to the wrong tomb. That's why Jesus wasn't there. They had entombed him around the corner on Maple Boulevard, but because they got lost, they went looking for him in a tomb on Pleasant Hill Road. Another theory is that Jesus was never dead, that he had just passed out or fainted. That would strongly suggest that people today are radically smarter than people were back then. Apparently, a pile of Roman soldiers, along with all of Jesus' associates, couldn't tell a dead guy from a living guy, even after handling the body for a significant period of time. Keep in mind that the authorities wanted Jesus to go away, so they were careful to make sure he was very dead. And don't forget that he wasn't just crucified: they stuck a sword in his side, too. Another theory is that the Apostles stole Jesus' body so that it would look like he had been resurrected, then they sent the women, who were dupes and weren't in on the stunt, to the tomb so that they could put up a ruckus. But also keep in mind that people like Peter, along with the other Apostles, went on

after this and preached the Word for decades, in fact, for the rest of their lives, and many got themselves martyred. Peter, we believe, was crucified. Would they have done all this for a religion that they were faking? My favorite theory is the “hallucination” theory. It says that the people who found the open tomb, and more importantly, all the people who saw Jesus after he was resurrected, all suffered from some wild delusion. This includes all the Apostles, Jesus’ family, folks who knew him well, and in fact, approximately 500 people. They all would have had to have been hallucinating to think they had seen him risen and alive.

But we, as believers, know the correct response to all these theories: they sidestep the real point. People who read the biblical stories of the resurrection and then try to make it all mesh with their agnostic or atheist beliefs aren’t addressing the real issue. The point is we have faith. We do believe in things that cannot be proven. We also know that if science was the final arbitrator of whether Jesus truly rose from the dead, we’d be in big trouble. Science is not very reliable – and in fact, it’s designed to be mistake prone because of its iterative nature. The way science works is that we witness a bunch of related phenomena. Then we create a theory that fits them all. We believe that theory until we encounter some phenomenon that cannot be accounted for with the theory. We then ditch that theory and invent a new one that can account for the

new piece of information, along with all previously observed data points. In other words, science is by its very nature rarely fully finalized. Long periods of time go by where we accept a theory as fact, but in the backs of our minds we know that someday, we may have to abandon it. There are lots of theories that, over the course of history, have been believed until something contradicted them. People once thought that we were all born with blank minds and that all knowledge was learned. We know now that we inherit basic instincts. We used to think that the universe was static; even Einstein believed this. But the universe is in constant motion. Until the early 1920s people thought that our galaxy was the entire universe. We now think there could be billions of galaxies. Early astronomers thought they saw canals filled with water on Mars. They aren't there.

Here is my point. The next time someone tells you that science does not back up the tenets of your faith, specifically the resurrection of Jesus, tell them this. First, the scientific method has a record that is extremely far from perfect, and in fact, by its very nature it is highly error prone. And second – and this is far more important - it doesn't make sense to pit science against faith. The reason is that faith is far beyond what is encountered with science. The resurrection of Jesus is outside the imaginable, the expected, the possible. Science is limited by the human senses like sight and touch, and by our clumsy ways of reasoning

about the world. Science is also limited by accepted formal models of taking facts and inferring new ones or proposing ones that might be true. Faith allows us to use a gift given to us by God, and that is the ability to feel God's presence without having to prove it with limited, earthly conventional methods. We all have this ability. God created us in God's image – so we can indeed do things that seem beyond the normal abilities of humans. This is what we mean by the Holy Spirit: God's presence within us gives us an ability to see beyond the here and now. You recognize the risen Christ in your life – and you acknowledge God's presence.

From a literal perspective, Easter is the defining Christian holiday. Christmas tells us that Jesus was born on Earth as a human. Easter tells us that he overcame death, that he rose from the dead, that he is not simply a human but also our God. We can, however, become too preoccupied with this literal defense of the resurrection. There's a more personal perspective. It is at the heart of who we are spiritually, at the heart of what it really means to be a Christian.

Let me get back to Molly. Molly said that she had lived a long life, that her husband had died over two decades before, but that she had gone on with her life, spending time with her children and grandchildren, traveling with friends, and learning to play the guitar. She said that something happened to her when she was 70, and that was why death did not scare her. She said that when she was

70, she was trying to explain to one of her grandchildren just what Easter is – when something incredible occurred to her. I'll get back to Molly's story.

There is something about Easter, other than the literal perspective of Jesus the Messiah overcoming death. Consider an incident in the Gospel of John - Jesus bringing Lazarus back from the dead. This is from Chapter 11, from the ESV:

¹⁷ Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 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?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

First, there is a subtlety in this story. Notice that we are told that "*Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days*". There was an ancient Israelite tradition that the soul stayed in the body for three days, so if someone was dead for four days, there was no doubt that they were totally dead. But here is the real point of the story of Jesus bringing Lazarus back from the dead. Martha initially is angry with Jesus because Jesus didn't come quickly enough. Lazarus is long and fully dead. Jesus says that he will rise again, and Martha, perhaps sarcastically

says, yeah, I know he'll rise again - at the end of time. But Jesus has a *double entendre* in mind, and neither one has to do with the End Times. First, he's going to bring Lazarus back to life right now. Second, and more importantly, anyone who believes in Jesus has already risen from spiritual death.

That's what Molly told me. When she was struggling to tell a grandchild about Easter, she realized that as a believer she had risen from a spiritual death. She said it wasn't until she was 70 years-old that it struck her that she could live a new life, one that defied death. She would one day die physically, but she could never die spiritually. Her granddaughter apparently already had been taught about the End Times, when all the faithful rise again. But Molly told her that there was something more important, and that was that believers have already risen. Easter is when we celebrate Jesus' physical resurrection, but it is also when we celebrate our own rise from a great darkness into the brilliant light of faith.

Let's finish with two quick Bible quotes. Scientists vary on how much longer they think the universe will survive. Some estimate 22 billion years. Here is a bit of Psalm 102, 25–27, from the ESV:

²⁵ *Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.*

²⁶ *They will perish, but you will remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.
You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away,*

²⁷ *but you are the same, and your years have no end.*

The Bible and science certainly agree on one thing: the earth and the heavens will perish someday. But God and the risen Christ – their years will have no end.

When we rise from a spiritual death as believers, that new life lasts forever.

Finally, here is a bit from Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians, 15:20-22:

²⁰ *Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.*

Paul is drawing a parallel between Adam and Jesus. Adam represents the fact that we all tend to drift into spiritual darkness. Jesus represents the fact that all believers are alive for eternity. We have forever risen from a spiritual death.

Molly eventually drifted off. I started to leave. But I think she heard me my chair move and she opened her eyes long enough to ask me to stay a bit longer and to pray with her. I sat back down and I took her hand. I asked God to let Molly feel God's presence like never before, to make her transition to eternity calm and joyful. I told God that a risen believer was on her way – and that I was thankful for the opportunity to meet her. Molly mouthed the words "Thank you," and then she closed her eyes and leaned back on her pillow. She grew very still. I stood up and walked away as quietly as I could.