

## **TTS Foundations 2023/24:** **[S12] "For Our Sake" (P4/5)**

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## [1] Our First Mosaic Piece: Jesus of Nazareth Was Crucified

To begin, I want us to **put on our 'historian caps'**!

I want us to see something – but, like a mosaic, we have to put this together; carefully, piece by piece.

Our First Mosaic Piece:

**We are as certain that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified as we are about any other event in ancient history.**

**[1A] Even staunchly atheist scholars agree on this:**

- E.g. Gerd Lüdemann. Also Bart Ehrman:
  - “Modern scholars of the NT are famous – or infamous – for making claims about Jesus that contradict what most people, especially Christians, believe about him. ... Despite this... there are several points on which virtually all scholars of antiquity agree. Jesus was a Jewish man, known to be a preacher and teacher, who was crucified (a Roman form of execution) in Jerusalem during the reign of the Roman Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea. [This] is the view of nearly every trained scholar on the planet” [Bart Ehrman – *Did Jesus Exist?*]<sup>1</sup>
- **How can we be so sure about this?**

**[1B] The Proclamation of the Cross was Radical**

- Think back to our session on the Power of the Cross.
  - **The Pain of the Cross:**
    - The so-called *summum supplicium* (Paulus).
  - **The Shame of the Cross:**
    - It was “*foolishness to Gentiles*” [1 Cor 1:23].
  - **The Curse of the Cross:**
    - Cursed is the “*one who hangs on a tree*” [Deut 21:22f].
- **LOOK:** Acts 2:23 / 1 Cor 1:23 / 1 Cor 2:7-8 / Gal 3:1
  - **The earliest Christian proclamation centred on the Crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth.**
    - No advantage to this being an invention.

**[1C] The Crucifixion as Primitive Christian Proclamation**

- **DISCUSS:** When were the NT texts written? (N.B. these are **estimates!**)
  - *Pauline Epistles:* 35-60AD.
  - *Catholic Epistles:* 50-90AD.
  - *Gospels and Acts:* 50-100AD. (Markan priority, John last.)
  - *Revelation:* 60-80AD.
- **But we can't stop here:**
  - **LOOK:** Acts 20:35 / 1 Cor 11:23-25 / 1 Cor 15:3

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<sup>1</sup> This is also where Islamic theology comes undone – “They said (in boast), ‘We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah’ – but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them” [Qur’an Sura 4.157-158]

- **The NT texts are old, but they contain material that is sometimes older still!**
- Specifically – when would Paul have received 1 Cor 15?
  - Probably the Council of Jerusalem – Acts 15, c. 35AD!
  - The testimony to Jesus' crucifixion is as early as you're going to get.

### **[1D] The Extra-Biblical Testimony to the Crucifixion**

- **Josephus, c. 62AD:**
  - "About this time there lived Jesus... Pilate had condemned him to a cross, [and] those who had first come to love him did not cease. ... And the tribe of Christians, so-called after him, has still to this day not disappeared" [*Antiquities of the Jews* XVIII.III.3]
    - **NOTE:** the dispute concerning Christian interpolation. (Re: Arabic version discovered in 70s.)
- **Tacitus [Governor of Asia-Minor], c. 116AD:**
  - "Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a deadly superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but also in the City, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world meet and become popular" [*Annals* XX.XLIV.2-8]

So Once Again:

**We can be as sure that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified as we are about any other event in ancient history.**

## [2] Our Second Mosaic Piece: The Example of the Apostles

Our Second Mosaic Piece:

**Although crucifixion was a humiliating and shameful method of execution, Jesus' disciples did not cower or retreat – in fact, they were emboldened, and even made trouble for the authorities!**

We know this in a number of ways:

- **From *outside* the NT:**
  - “Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome...”
    - Suetonius [c. 49AD – *Life of Claudius* XXV.4]
- **From *within* the NT:**
  - **LOOK:** Acts 17:5-7

**BUT ALSO – just look around you!**

*That small, persecuted Jewish sect proclaiming a crucified Messiah did not die, but instead established 2000 years of civilisation!*

**What made them so troublesome?**

**What made them so bold?**

## [3] Our Final Mosaic Piece: The Apostolic Easter Faith

Our Final Mosaic Piece:

**The Early Christians ‘turned the world upside down’ proclaiming a Crucified Messiah. Why? Because, according to them, he had been raised from the dead – vindicated by the God of Israel!**

**LOOK:** Acts 2:29-36

How do we respond to this? We’ve only a handful of options.

1. “The disciples proclaimed Jesus had risen – but they simply hallucinated”
  - a. **EXCEPT it’s stretching plausibility to suggest they shared a hallucination** – with food + public conversation!
2. “The disciples thought Jesus had risen, but they were mistaken – he had merely swooned at the Cross” – **LOOK:** Mark 15:44-45
  - a. **EXCEPT for Jesus to have survived the crucifixion would have been virtually impossible:**
    - i. Hematidrosis → Beaten → Whipped with *flagrum* → Beaten again → Crown of thorns → Forced to carry *patibulum* (which he was unable to do) → Nailed to Cross → Crucified for six hours → Left in cold tomb without medical assistance.
    - ii. “And when I was sent by Titus Caesar with Cerealins, and a thousand horsemen, to a certain village called Thecoa, in order to know whether it were a place fit for a camp, as I came back, I saw many captives crucified, and remembered three of them as my

former acquaintances. I was very sorry at this in my mind, and went with tears in my eyes to Titus, and told him of them; so he immediately commanded them to be taken down, and to have the greatest care taken of them, in order to their recovery; yet two of them died under the physicians hands, while the third recovered" [Josephus – *Life* 75]

**b. AND EVEN IF this had happened:**

- i. The disciples certainly wouldn't have confused this for the Resurrected Messiah!

3. *"The disciples simply lied about Jesus having been raised from the dead"*

**a. EXCEPT many of the disciples are recorded to have been tortured and killed:**

- i. Why endure all this for a lie?

b. **ALSO LOOK:** Acts 2:29 – why didn't they produce body?

- i. They clearly couldn't – **LOOK:** Matt 28:12-15
- ii. This literally couldn't have been written, otherwise.

4. *"The NT documents were written too late to be historically reliable – they're just like Chinese Whispers"*

**a. EXCEPT the New Testament documents were written within a few decades of the events described.**

- i. (Some of these contain traditions dated even earlier.)

5. *"The NT documents have been chopped and changed by monks and scribes – they're unreliable"*

**a. Consider the NT documents:**

- i. Not just 20 copies – *but* 5,700 Gk MSS / 8000 Latin / 9000+ in other languages (e.g. Syrian, Coptic, etc.).
- ii. Earliest dates to around 125AD. (One possibly even earlier, re: Daniel Wallace's Mark fragment.)

**b. By contrast, consider some major works of antiquity:**

- i. Caesar's Gallic War, c.58-50BC – several surviving MSS, only a few of decent quality.
- ii. Tacitus (c. 100AD) – of his *Histories*, only four and a half volumes survive out of fourteen. Of his major works, we depend entirely on 2 MSS dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> + 10<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

**c. THEREFORE – we can be far more confident in the veracity of the NT texts than we can many trusted works of antiquity.**

- i. More manuscripts mean it's easier to determine authorial intention.

**So we're left to deal with three historical facts:**

FIRST: Jesus of Nazareth was crucified.

SECOND: the early Christians proclaimed him the Risen Messiah.

THIRD: the tomb was empty.

**How do we handle these three facts? What do we do with them?**

The most intelligent atheists I know appeal to Humean logic.

(I.e. miracles simply cannot happen. They just can't.)

BUT – that's not a historical argument. That's a philosophical opinion.

Most would look at the history and demand an answer...

## [4] The Resurrection – Our Essential Tenet of Faith

Whether you're a Christian or not, **this** is what we have to deal with.

Despite us living in the ruins of Christendom, despite developing comfortable habits of Church, despite Christianity being so familiar – we are confronted by the reality, revealed by faith and vindicated by history: he actually did it, and all history is cracked in his wake!

*"But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power" [Acts 2:24]*

- **Death is dead! Death is dead!**

- *"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" [1 Cor 15:55]*
  - *"By the Gospel of Christ death is abolished: He has abolished death, not only weakened it, but taken it out of the way, he has broken the power of death over us; by taking away sin he has abolished death (for the sting of death is sin)... Death, once an enemy, has now become a friend; it is the gate by which we pass out of a troublesome, vexatious, sinful world, into a world of perfect peace and purity. The power of death is broken, for death does not triumph over those who believe the Gospel, but they triumph over it. O death! Where is thy sting? O grave! Where is thy victory?" [MH on 2 Tim 1:10]*
    - (Re: Ps 116:15 – *"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful ones"*)

**LOOK:** 1 Cor 15:12-14

- **A solid case can be made for this centrepiece of the faith.**
  - The Resurrection is the essential tenet of Xian theology.
    - Without it, Jesus' bones are rotting somewhere.
    - "When one wants to preach the Gospel, one must treat only of the resurrection of Christ. For this is the chief article of our faith. ... The greatest power of faith is bound up in this article of faith. For if there were no resurrection, we would have no consolation or hope, and everything else Christ did or suffered would be futile" [Luther – *The Catholic Epistles*]
      - (If Jesus is dead, then we are horrible people.)

**BUT – have you ever wondered about this?**

I.e. WHY exactly is it so important? WHY is it central?

**My suspicion – the Church often finds it hard to 'place' the Resurrection.** We know that Jesus had to die. But why did he have to rise? If the Cross was the 'main event', then what's left for the Empty Tomb? Was it simply Jesus' biggest and best miracle? (Laz x1k! Cana x10k!) Was it just about Jesus showing he's boss, even over death?

**BUT LOOK:** 1 Cor 15:17 / Rom 4:23-25

What's going on here...?!

Why is the Resurrection linked to our justification and redemption?  
 Why is the Resurrection at the heart of the Apostles' evangelism?  
 Why is the Resurrection described as the essential part of our faith?

**My suggestion: the Church struggles to 'place' the Resurrection because we've lost our sense of the drama of Scripture.**

- It's often left to Xian authors + poets to describe what we mean.
  - So many examples in pop fiction.
    - A recurring trope.
- What's the point here? Moments like this move us, but not when they're considered in isolation.
  - BUT RATHER when they're the culmination of everything.
    - Considered in isolation, they don't really work at all.
    - We might appreciate the power. We might even be impressed by the majesty. But we wouldn't 'get it'.
- BUT we resonate *very* deeply with victory being 'snapped from the jaws of defeat'.
  - Tolkien called this 'eucatastrophe'.
    - KEY POINT: for him, the greatest example is the Res.
    - "I coined the word 'eucatastrophe': the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears (which I argued it is the highest function of fairy-stories to produce). And I was there led to the view that it produces its peculiar effect because it is a sudden glimpse of the Truth, your whole nature chained in material cause and effect, the chain of death, feels a sudden relief as if a major limb out of joint had suddenly snapped back. ... [And the] Resurrection was the greatest 'eucatastrophe' possible in the greatest Fairy Story... Of course I do not mean that the Gospels tell what is *only* a fairy-story; but I do mean very strongly that they do tell a fairy-story: the greatest. Man the story-teller [had] to be redeemed in a manner consonant with his nature: by a moving story" [Tolkien – Letter 89 to Christopher, 7-8<sup>th</sup> Nov 1944]

Considered in isolation, we struggle to truly 'get' why Jesus had to rise.  
 We might appreciate the power and be impressed by the majesty.  
 BUT – it wasn't just 'any old chapter' in the story. Not just a miracle.

**The Resurrection of Christ was the great 'eucatastrophe' – the great dramatic conclusion to the Triune God's war against SSDH!**

**LOOK:** 1 Cor 15:12-19

**REFLECT:** What stands out?

## [5] Following 1 Cor 15 – On the General Resurrection

**RECALL:** 1 Cor 15:13

*"If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised..."*

The Resurrection of Christ cannot be understood in isolation.

Paul clearly has something else in the background here.

It is inextricably connected to the general resurrection of the dead.

### [5A] On Sheol in the Old Testament:

- **The Christian doctrine of heaven and hell is not as fully formed in the OT –** at least not as the NT would later articulate it.
  - Remember – Christian theology suggests God has progressively revealed himself throughout history.
    - *"Kings and prophets longed to see what you see..."* [Luke 10:24]
- **BUT there is this notion of *Sheol*:**
  - **LOOK:** Job 7:9-10 / Ps 6:5 / (Re: Gen 37:34-35 + Ecc 9:10)
    - Humans go down to the dark pit as 'shades'.
    - The translators of the Greek OT (the Septuagint) rendered it as 'Hades' – the underworld.
    - Hence the Witch of Endor – *"bringing up"* Samuel's shade from the pit [1 Sam 28].

### [5B] The Beginnings of Resurrection Theology in Genesis:

- Slowly – over time – **there were sparks or flickers of God's wider truth, beginning even in Genesis**, suggesting that he was nothing less than the God of Resurrection.
- **LOOK:** Gen 15:5 / (Re: Gen 17:19 + Gen 21:12)
  - God's covenant with Abraham – many offspring.
- **LOOK:** Gen 22:1-2 – why did Abraham obey?
  - **AND LOOK:** Heb 11:17-19 – a savvy observation!
    - Abraham trusted in the God of Resurrection.

### [5C] The Theology of Resurrection Revealed Further:

- **LOOK:** 1 Sam 2:6 / Job 19:26 / Ps 49:15 / Isa 26:19 / Dan 12:2
  - **This was then developed further in the inter-testamental literature:**
    - *"The King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws"* [2 Macc 7:10]
    - *"And it shall be, that those who have been destroyed in the desert, and who have been devoured by the fish of the sea, and by wild beasts, shall return, and trust in the day of the Elect one; for none shall perish in the presence of the Lord of spirits, nor shall any be capable of perishing"* [1 Enoch 60:7]
- By the time of Jesus' ministry, **the Sadducees were notable for *not* believing in the resurrection of the dead.** [Cf. Matt 22:23]



**REFLECT:** What does all this teach us about Christ's Resurrection?

- I'd suggest three things:
  - **FIRST: people were prepared for the idea of Resurrection.**
    - Specifically, a general resurrection at the end of days.
  - **SECOND: people were not *at all* looking for a singular resurrection.**
    - One that comes in advance of the everyone else's.
    - "Those first-century Jews who expected the resurrection saw it as a single event, the raising to new bodily life of all at the very end. ... [Nobody] expected the Messiah to be raised from the dead, for the simple reason that nobody in Judaism at the time expected a Messiah who would die, especially one who would die shamefully and violently" [N.T. Wright – *The Resurrection of Jesus*]
  - **THIRD: the Resurrection of Jesus is teeming with eschatological significance.**
    - It's the breaking in of the end-times.

## [6] Following 1 Cor 15 – On Christ the First Fruits, Second Adam

**LOOK:** 1 Cor 15:20-23

- *“For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ...”* – two important themes.
  - **[1] Christ the First Fruits.**
    - NOT revivification, BUT resurrection!
    - **BUT ALSO – RECALL:** Deut 26.
      - The end times harvest has begun!
      - (Re: Deut 26:2+9 – God with us, milk + honey.)
  - **[2] Christ the Second Adam.**
    - Re: Eph 2 – one new humanity in Christ!
      - *“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”* [2 Cor 5:17] – cf. Rev 19.

**LOOK:** 1 Cor 15:24-26

**DISCUSS:** Thoughts / Impressions?

- *“Then comes the end... The last enemy to be destroyed is death”*
  - Again, the Resurrection isn’t ‘just’ a great miracle.
    - It is the final invasion of the King.
    - It’s the culmination of ALL that God was doing in Christ – **LOOK:** Isa 25:6-10
  - Through it, God declared: “I’m coming”
    - *“The appointed time has grown short”* [1 Cor 7:29]
    - *“Where is the promise of his coming?”* [2 Pet 3:4]

**LOOK:** 1 Cor 15:26-28 / **DISCUSS:** Thoughts/ Impressions?

The Resurrection is not the coda to the climax of God’s redemption.

It is the very climax of this great drama – the first fulfilment of Isa 25.

It’s the glimpse at God’s final victory – re: Jesus’ ‘exaltation’.

It’s the apotheosis of human history. The first swallowing-up of death.

It’s what everything has been building up to.

The Triune God going to war – exalting the Son.

The vindication of Christ – the theme for all eternity.

When human history changes forever – eternity breaks in.

(Why did Jesus have to rise? Because our Father finishes stories.)

“They took the body down from the cross and one of the few rich men among the first Christians obtained permission to bury it in a rock tomb in his garden; the Romans setting a military guard lest there should be some riot and attempt to recover the body. There was once more a natural symbolism in these natural proceedings; it was well that the tomb should be sealed with all the secrecy of ancient eastern sepulchre and guarded by the authority of the Caesars. For in that second cavern the whole of that great and glorious humanity which we call antiquity was gathered up and covered over; and in that place it was buried. It was the end of a very great thing called human history; the history that was merely human. The mythologies and the philosophies were buried

there, the gods and the heroes and the sages. In the great Roman phrase, they had lived. But as they could only live, so they could only die; and they were dead.

On the third day the friends of Christ coming at daybreak to the place found the grave empty and the stone rolled away. In varying ways they realised the new wonder; but even they hardly realised that the world had died in the night. What they were looking at was the first day of a new creation, with a new heaven and a new earth; and in a semblance of the gardener God walked again in the garden, in the cool not of the evening but the dawn" –

G.K. Chesterton [*The Everlasting Man* II.3]