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What's so special about Christmas - Part 3

One Solitary Resurrected Life

Bible Discussion Guide

Everyone is encouraged to participate in the discussions,
but no one is required to talk or read if they feel uncomfortable doing so.
(^{Superscripted text} in scripture passages are from the version's notes.)

ICE BREAKERS

1. What is the best hole-in-the-wall diner you have ever eaten at?
2. Have you ever met someone who looked like nobody interesting but discovered that they were, in fact, a very interesting somebody? What was that like?

OVERVIEW & OUTLINE

As we approach this Christmas season, I'm converting a sermon I preached in December 2013 into a three-part discussion series. The title of the message was "One Solitary Life." In that message, I share three things that set Jesus apart from all other humans and made His birth worth celebrating. I will begin the series with a story from my past and then we will answer this question:

A. What three things about Jesus' life as a man on earth set Him apart from all other humans?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

WHAT SET JESUS APART FROM ALL OTHER HUMANS, PART 3

In the church today, there is a lot of focus on the cross. We wear crosses, get cross tattoos, decorate our churches, our homes, our cars, sometime even our business cards and offices with crosses. We hear sermon after sermon and prayer after prayer about the cross. And we sing "At the Cross," "In the Cross," "Near the Cross," "Beneath the Cross of Jesus," "Down at the Cross," "The Old Rugged Cross," "The Beautiful Cross," "The Wonderful Cross," "The Glory of the Cross," "Kneel at the Cross," "I Come to the Cross," "Room at the Cross," and "Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross." A Hymnary.org search returns 10,000+ public domain hymns about the cross.

News flash – ain't nuthin' special about the cross! The cross was just a murder weapon.

Tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of people have been crucified on various forms of crosses. Crucifixion began with the Assyrians (900-600 B.C.) and Babylonians (1895-539 B.C.) and then the Persians in sixth century B.C. In about 320 B.C. Alexander the Great brought it to the Mediterranean area where for the next 500 years, the Romans "perfected crucifixion." In 4 B.C. the Romans crucified 2000 Jews. It was finally outlawed by Constantine 1 in the 4th Century A.D.¹ Under the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (King of Judea from 103-76 B.C.), 800 Pharisees were crucified in a single day and in about 72 B.C. the Romans ruler Marcus Crassus had 6000 slaves crucified on either side of the Appian Way.²

The process of crucifixion was excruciatingly painful and horribly humiliating. "The victim was stripped and then lashed (scourged). As part of the public humiliation, he/she was led through the streets and

¹ Geggel, L. (2022). *Jesus wasn't the only man to be crucified*. livescience.com. <https://www.livescience.com/65283-crucifixion-history.html>

² Denova, R. (2022). *Crucifixion*. World History Encyclopedia. <https://www.worldhistory.org/crucifixion/>

remained naked. Christian art portrays Jesus with a decent loincloth on the cross, but the nakedness was maintained as part of the humiliation. There was a public plaque (titulus) indicating the crime.”³

John 19:19 (HCSB) The Crucifixion of Christ

*Pilate also had a sign lettered and put on the cross. The inscription was:
JESUS THE NAZARENE
THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

3. If crucifixions were so common, what was special about Jesus’ death?

We tend to focus on the cross, on Christ’s death and His payment for our sins. But it is Christ’s resurrection that validates His death and gives us power over our sin.

Acts 4:1-2,33 (NIV)

¹⁻² The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Romans 6:4 (HCSB)

Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in a new way of life.

1 Corinthians 15 (HCSB) Section titles from HCSB

Resurrection Essential to the Gospel

¹⁻⁸ Now brothers, I want to clarify ^[make known] for you the gospel I proclaimed to you; you received it and have taken your stand on it. You are also saved by it, if you hold to the message I proclaimed to you— unless you believed for no purpose. For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. Then He appeared to over 500 brothers at one time; most of them are still alive, but some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one abnormally born, He also appeared to me.

Resurrection Essential to the Faith

¹²⁻¹⁹ Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say, “There is no resurrection of the dead”? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is without foundation, and so is your faith. In addition, we are found to be false witnesses about God, because we have testified about God that He raised up Christ—whom He did not raise up if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Therefore, those who have fallen asleep in Christ have also perished. If we have put our hope in Christ for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone.

4. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, Paul states as fact the resurrection of Christ and then gives a list of witnesses. Who are some of the witnesses?
5. In verses 12-19 Paul talks about a heresy that has come up which he is trying to make a case against. What is the heresy? How does Paul use Christ’s resurrection to refute it?

³ Ibid.

6. What does Paul say are the problems caused if the heresy is true? What happens with our sin if Christ hasn't been raised?
7. If the resurrection isn't true, what is the fate of those who have died (fallen asleep) who were trusting in Christ for salvation?

Christ's Resurrection Guarantees Ours

20-23 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward, at His coming, those who belong to Christ.

8. Paul reasserts that Christ has risen from the dead. What benefit is that to us?

Resurrection Supported by Christian Experience

29 Otherwise what will they do who are being baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, then why are people baptized for them?

9. Verse 29 is a very troubling verse for many. Why so?
10. How can we understand this in a way that works with the rest of the teachings of scripture?

30-34 Why are we in danger every hour? I affirm by the pride in you that I have in Christ Jesus our Lord: I die every day! If I fought wild animals in Ephesus with only human hope, what good did that do me? If the dead are not raised, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. ^[Isaiah 22:13] Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."⁴ Come to your senses and stop sinning, for some people are ignorant about God. I say this to your shame.

11. What impact does Christ's resurrection have on how we live our lives according to Paul?
12. Paul admonishes those who don't believe in the resurrection calling them "ignorant." Why do you think he did that?

RESOURCES

If you would like to hear the sermon I preached in December 2013 on this topic, the audio is available on my website at www.JimPorterfield.com under the [Media Items](#) menu at [More Than "One Solitary Life"](#).

⁴ A quotation from the poet Menander

PASTORAL BLESSING

Ephesians 3:14-21 (AAT)

For this reason I kneel before the Father from whom every family in heaven or on earth takes its name, and beg him out of his wealth of glory to strengthen you mightily through his Spirit in your inner nature and through your faith to let Christ in his love make his home in your hearts. Your roots must be deep and your foundations strong, so that you and all God's people may be strong enough to grasp what breadth, length, height, and depth mean, and to understand Christ's love, so far beyond our understanding, so that you may be filled with the very fulness of God. To him who by the exertion of his power within us can do unutterably more than all we ask or imagine, be glory through the church and through Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever. Amen.

FOR YOUR PERSONAL QUIET TIME

According to the New Testament writers, our hope is in Christ and takes its power from His resurrection. In Peter's first letter, he writes about how Christ's resurrection brings us hope even while we are going through trials:

1 Peter 1:1-9 (AAT)

¹⁻⁹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are scattered as foreigners over Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, whom God the Father has chosen and predestined by the consecration of the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ, and to be sprinkled with his blood; God bless you and give you perfect peace. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has caused us to be born anew to a life of hope through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, and to an imperishable, unsullied, and unfading inheritance, which is kept safe for you in heaven, and you by God's power are being protected through faith to receive a salvation that is now ready to be disclosed at the last time. Rejoice over this, although just now perhaps distressed by various trials; they are to show that your faith when tested is found to be more precious than gold, which though it is perishable is tested with fire, and they will bring you praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. You must love him, though you have not seen him, but since you believe in him though you do not now see him, rejoice with triumphant, unutterable joy to attain the goal of faith, the salvation of your souls.

1. Thinking about whatever struggles you are experiencing, whether physical, spiritual, emotional, relational, financial, etc., how can God's power, demonstrated in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, bring you hope? What impact does that kind of hope have on your life?
2. How can you be a hope-bearer to others you see struggling around you? An encouraging word? A hug? A bit of gracious hospitality?

God's blessings on you,

