

At Easter it seems to make sense for us to take a look at who Jesus Christ is and what he has done. It is all too easy for those of us in the church to hear the claims of Jesus Christ so often that we become used to them and tune them out, so sometimes it is helpful for us to take a step back and see how incredible and shocking the claims of Jesus Christ really are.

Because I did not use a written text when delivering my Easter Sunday homily a full length version of it is not available online. What follows is a relatively brief summary of it's main points. For anyone who wishes to dive deeper into these subjects please check out the notes for a talk I gave entitled "The Reality of the Resurrection and the Reliability of the Bible." These can be found here:

<http://www.sspeterandpaul.net/giftsoffinestwheat.htm>

Shorter articles on the historical reliability of the New Testament can be found here:

<http://www.sspeterandpaul.net/evangelization.htm>

Some of the main points I raised in my Easter Sunday homily are

- Many cultures have stories about some sort of hero or god who dies and then in some way triumphs over death. But these stories are always set in a mythological past. For someone to claim that a contemporary of theirs was a divine figure who had died and risen from the dead is something unique to the early Christians.
- This claim is so extraordinary that many people wonder if these 1st Christians were lying. But they faced persecution, rejection, jail, torture, and death for claiming that Jesus had risen from the dead. If they were lying they would have admitted it to avoid suffering these things.
- So they really believed this claim, but maybe they were somehow just delusional or had hallucinated that they had seen the risen Jesus. But when we look at how many people claimed to have seen the risen Jesus, on so many occasions and at so many different locations, it becomes clear that is extremely unlikely that this was a delusion. Hallucinations just don't work that way. It takes more faith to believe that the 1st Christians were delusional than it takes to believe that they really had seen the risen Jesus.
- We should respect the goodness and truth that can be found in other religions, but we also should recognize that the historical claims of Christianity are of a different nature than those which can be made by other religions.
- The Buddhist and Christian scriptures were both written in the 1st century AD. But while Jesus lived in the 1st century the Buddha lived during the 6th century BC. Clearly the historical nature of the Christians scriptures is categorically different than those of the Buddhist texts.
- Both the Koran and the texts of the New Testament came into existence in their current form shortly after the lifetime of the figure who is at the center of each text. As the Koran tells us about Muhammed and the New Testament tells us about Jesus we encounter the claims that both men lived, taught, claimed to be

messengers of God, gathered followers, and died. But here's the thing. Muhammed stayed dead. Jesus did not.

- The resurrection of Jesus provides the strongest possible vindications of his claims.
- Jesus claimed "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) In other words he is the only means by which we can receive salvation, be united to God, and enter into eternal joy.
- Jesus made it very clear on many occasions, Matthew 25:31-:46 and Luke 16:19-:31 are two particular passages that stand out, that some people will spend all of eternity separated from God, from all that is good and holy, and from all that can bring any type of joy.
- On the other hand, some people will receive life, joy, and glory as they spend all of eternity rejoicing in God's presence.
- We can hear about Heaven, resurrection, salvation, and eternal joy just enough that we manage to tune these things out and take them for granted. We must not allow this to happen. We must recognize what Jesus has offered us and how incredible it is. We must not lose sight of the truth of who Jesus is and what he has done for us.