

When I began my first call to ministry, I followed a pastor who had been removed due to misconduct. He was deeply loved by the congregation — truly a “son of the church.” But beyond his moral failures, there was something even more troubling: he openly admitted that he did not believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The very foundation of our faith — “the whole coming back from the dead thing,” as he called it — made no sense to him. I can only imagine what his Easter sermons must have sounded like. Years ago, when I worked for the State of Ohio in downtown Columbus, one of the great perks was access to the State Library. I made full use of it — especially when I discovered the journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, the missionary who established the first Lutheran denomination in America.

On those same shelves, I stumbled upon something remarkable: The Jefferson Bible. Thomas Jefferson, one of our nation’s greatest minds, utterly rejected the supernatural. When he read Scripture, he couldn’t accept miracles — so he quite literally cut them out. With a razor blade, Jefferson removed every passage that hinted at divine power. In The Jefferson Bible, you’ll find moral teaching and historical narrative — but no virgin birth, no Lazarus raised from the dead, no walking on water, and no resurrection. Jefferson’s version of the Gospel ends at the grave. For Jefferson, the story of Jesus concludes with a tomb — not an empty one, but one still sealed. A six-year-old boy once complained to his mother that his stomach hurt. She said, “That’s because it’s empty — you’ll feel better once there’s something in it.” Later, when the pastor visited, he mentioned that his head hurt. The boy quickly replied, “That’s because it’s empty too — you’ll feel better when there’s something in it!” And yet, that’s exactly our condition without a risen Savior. Without resurrection, our faith is empty — hollow — meaningless. If Jesus is still dead, I have nothing worth preaching, and you have nothing worth hearing. Sometimes people say things they don’t mean. Consider these actual advertisement slips printed years ago: Antique desk for sale — suitable for lady with thick legs and large drawers. Earring special — have your ears pierced and get an extra pair to take home. Illiterate? Write today for free material. Dry Cleaners — we never tear your clothing with machinery; we do it carefully by hand. Men wanted for work in dynamite factory — must be willing to travel long distances. Words can miss their mark — but my family in the faith, the message of Easter NEVER does. There was once a man in Los Angeles known as “the human fly.” He scaled skyscrapers without ropes, using only window ledges and tiny cracks in the bricks. Crowds gathered, holding their breath as he climbed story after story toward the sky. Near the top of one massive department store, he reached a ledge — the final stretch. But the next handhold was just beyond reach. Determined, he stretched his arm, leapt slightly, and caught it — or so he thought. Moments later, he plunged to his death. When rescuers opened his hand, they found he had been holding not brick or stone — but the crust of a spider’s web. If Christ is not risen from the dead, our faith too is no more solid than a spider’s web. What gives meaning to the birth of Christ is the life of Christ. What gives meaning to the life of Christ is the death of Christ.

But what gives power to all of it — birth, life, death — is the resurrection! As glorious as the manger is, as wondrous as His miracles were, as redemptive as the cross remains — it is the empty tomb that makes Christianity unlike any other faith. Confucius died and was buried. Lao-tzu, the father of Taoism, wandered into the wilderness and died. The Buddha succumbed to food poisoning and decayed. Muhammad died in 632, and his body was laid in the ground. But Jesus Christ — He is risen. On that single truth hangs the hope of all humanity — in this life and in the life to come. A Buddhist man in Africa once converted to Christianity. When asked why, he replied: “It’s simple. If you’re walking and you come to a fork in the road, and there are two men there — one dead and one alive — whose directions would you follow?” That’s the question of faith. You may choose to follow a dead Confucius, a dead Buddha, a dead Muhammad, or a dead Lao-tzu. But as for me — I choose to follow the One who conquered death and lives forever. And His name is Jesus.

See you in church! Pastor Fogle