

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ: A Study on Romans 1:4

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Is there life after death? Is there a resurrection of the body after this temporal existence? Skeptics say it is make-believe. Secularism calls it a phantom. Materialism ignores it. The scorner discounts it. Yet, in the inner recesses of every man's heart a still, small voice asks the question about life after death. Would God have placed this desire to live after death so deeply in the human heart if it were only a myth? Christianity says there is life after death, and a resurrection of every man's body.

Jesus Christ, through his own resurrection from the dead, came to assure men that there is life after death and that all men are to receive a resurrected body. Assurance of resurrection is directly related to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!

In a world of atheistic science, philosophical confusion, and religious superstition, does the Christian have any objective basis to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Is it intellectually sensible to believe in the resurrection, or is it just an emotional, religious spree, a hopeful myth with no reality? Every Christian must face this honestly.

The Bible teaches that Christianity rests upon the resurrection of Christ from the dead. The resurrection will stand up to the most rigorous and exacting examination and remain unshaken.

One scholar said, "The resurrection is the best attested fact in history." Anyone who wishes to throw doubt upon the fact of the resurrection may do so, but in so doing he will reject all acknowledged standards of historical proof and doubt the trustworthiness of all historical records. In all history a certain amount has to be taken upon trust. Some sources have to be accepted, otherwise there can be no history. As a historical source, the New Testament record qualifies without prejudice. Even if a person does not acknowledge the inspiration of Scripture, he must, if he is intellectually honest, recognize the New Testament as reliable history.

THE FACTS OF THE RESURRECTION

The proofs of the resurrection will not convince an unbeliever of the truth of Christ. He will not accept the resurrection until he is converted. The proofs, however, can help the believer be strengthened in his faith.

The Old Testament prophesied the resurrection. “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption” (Psalm 16:10).

Christ told His disciples that He would rise again:

“And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31).

As the God-man, Christ had to keep his word concerning his resurrection. If he deceived his disciples, he could not be trusted. If we cannot accept his words concerning his resurrection, then we cannot accept anything else Christ taught.

On the first Easter morning, the body of Jesus was not in the grave — the tomb was empty. Some explanation must be given for this fact. The one piece of evidence which would have squelched the faith of the early Christians in the risen Christ was not produced by the world: the dead body of Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 24:38-43, the resurrected body).

It is one thing to reject the resurrection fact; it is quite another to try to explain away the biblical record. Men have tried to explain the empty tomb in a number of ways:

The “wrong tomb” theory: Some say that the women who found the tomb empty were at the wrong tomb. There were four women. Did they all make the same mistake? Mary Magdalene went to the same tomb later that morning and she made no mistake. If the ladies made a mistake about the tomb, then so did the angels, for they were in the tomb.

The “swoon” theory: Some say that Jesus only swooned on the cross, and was not really dead when placed in the tomb. The soldiers and the centurion pronounced Jesus dead, and Pilate was convinced that he was dead. Jesus’ side was pierced with a spear to assure death. Is it logical that Jesus, after having been beaten to a pulp and crucified with a horrible wound in his side, could have survived for thirty-six hours in a cold, damp tomb with no food, water, or medical care? Would He have had enough strength to wiggle out of a mummy-like burial wrapping and remove the heavy rock covering of the grave? It would take more faith to believe these things than to believe the resurrection!

The “disciples” or “stolen body” theory: Some say that Jesus’ disciples took the body of Jesus away. How did they get past the guards? The disciples were skeptical and in unbelief. They had no real reason to steal the body. Would the disciples later preach a lie? Would they be beaten, jailed and martyred for what they knew to be a fairy-tale?

The “spiritual resurrection” theory: Some who want to retain the Bible but to dismiss the resurrection argue that the resurrection was only spiritual. To say this, however, these scholars generally do one of two things: 1) they reject the Bible’s explicit claims of the resurrection in favor of speculative reconstructions about the Bible’s development; or 2) they engage in dishonest exegesis. To suggest that the resurrection was only spiritual is to deny the Bible’s historicity and/or its clear teaching.

These arguments are the best that non-Christians have to offer, but they fail to satisfy normal human intelligence and reason.

According to John 20:5-7, the grave clothes were found lying completely intact. We are told in John 19:39-42 that Christ’s body was wrapped with linen and spices weighing about one hundred pounds. It was customary to wrap the body from the feet to the shoulders and to place a napkin around the chin and head, leaving the neck and face open. The spices were of powder and sticky ointment, and would harden the wrappings when they dried, making it impossible to unwrap the linen clothes. The napkin about the head was wrapped together in a place by itself. This could be translated “twisted up” in a place by itself. It may well be that the napkin was still in the rounded shape as it had been about the head

Christ appeared to people at least fifteen times after his resurrection. He appeared to individuals and groups, to men and women separately and corporately. He appeared in different geographical locations and under various circumstances. He even appeared to five hundred people at one time. A lawyer, practicing today, would have no trouble winning a case if he could produce such an array of witnesses.

The changed lives of the disciples after the resurrection attest to the reality of the resurrection. After Christ’s death on the cross the disciples were despondent, disillusioned, and at the point of despair. Yet later, as recorded in Acts, they had become men who endangered their lives for the person of Christ and went everywhere teaching the death and resurrection of Christ. Doubtful Thomas became a missionary to India. Peter, who had denied Christ, became a staunch believer who died a martyr’s death. This can only be explained by the resurrection. Skeptical brother James was not even converted until after the resurrection, but he became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. These men were convinced that what Christ said was true!

The fact that there is a church today that is made up of believers all over the world shows that people have experienced the resurrection power of the living Christ. If someone had tried to run a business down through the years as the church has been operated, it would have passed out of existence long ago! The fact that the church is here today is evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Three thousand souls were saved on the Day of Pentecost. Had any of these doubted the resurrection, they could have walked a short way and examined the tomb or they could have talked to the Jewish leaders or the disciples. The disciples proclaimed the resurrection with authority.

The Lord was resurrected on the first day of the week, and so the day of worship for Christians was changed from Saturday to Sunday. If the resurrection had been a hoax, the day would no doubt have reverted back to Saturday. Every Sunday is resurrection day for the Christian.

Church history is also evidence of the resurrection of Christ. From the earliest days, the resurrection was depicted on Christian tombs, in drawings found in the catacombs, and in the writings and hymns of Christians. It is a part of every historic Christian creed.

THE RESURRECTION AND THE NON-CHRISTIAN

God is going to judge the world by Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead:

“Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:31).

All men are going to be raised from the dead. Those who have done good by believing in Christ will be resurrected to eternal life; those who have done evil and rejected Christ will be resurrected unto eternal damnation:

“The Father . . . hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:26-29).

This resurrection of the dead and the judgment of God is also described in Revelation 20:11-15.

THE RESURRECTION AND THE CHRISTIAN

Our salvation depends upon the death and resurrection of Christ — he was raised for our justification: “Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification” (Rom. 4:25).

John 5:29 (quoted above) states that those who have believe on Christ will be resurrected unto eternal life.

The resurrection of Christ guarantees the Christian’s resurrection:

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming” (1 Cor. 15:20-23; see also 1 Cor. 15:12-18).

CONCLUSION

The thought that there is existence after death belongs to every man, but the assurance that there is eternal life and a bodily resurrection unto life belongs only to the Christian.

Men who have scoffed at death, and put up a bold front about it, have often had quite different thoughts on their deathbeds:

Voltaire, the French skeptic, said on his deathbed, “I am abandoned by God and man! I shall go to hell! O Christ! O Jesus Christ!”

On his own deathbed, Tom Paine, a great mocker of the Christian faith, said, “I would give worlds, if I had them, if the *Age of Reason* had never been published. O Lord, help me! Christ help me! Stay with me! It is hell to be left alone!”

Death can never be such a terror to the Christian. He knows that Christ has taken the sting out of it. By his resurrection Christ has “abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” Here are the testimonies of some Christians at death:

Michelangelo said, “I die in the faith of Jesus Christ, and in the firm hope of a better life.”

David Brainerd said, "I am going into eternity; and it is sweet to me to think of eternity; the endlessness of it makes it sweet. But O! what shall I say to the eternity of the wicked? The thought of it is too dreadful!"

Augustus Toplady testified, "The consolations of God to such an unworthy wretch are so abundant that he leaves me nothing to pray for but a continuance of them. I enjoy Heaven already in my soul."

What a sense of joy and triumph comes to the Christian when he knows that at the end of this temporal existence there is resurrection to eternal life with Jesus Christ forever!

Do you know that your sins are forgiven? Do you know that you have eternal life? Do you have the assurance that you will be resurrected to eternal life? To believe in Christ's death for sin and his resurrection for justification is to have forgiveness, eternal life, and assurance of future resurrection to live with Christ forever.