

Jesus' Resurrection

Reading: Luke 23:50 – 24:9 *Jesus buried and raised again on third day*

Introduction:

Usually, around this time of year (Easter), there is often a lot of discussion in the media by religious people about the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. One of the topics that I have heard discussed in previous years is whether Jesus really did die, and/or whether He really did rise from the dead. Some religious leaders have stated that they feel that it doesn't really matter whether Jesus rose or not – they don't see that as a key issue. They say that what is important is that we follow the teachings of Jesus.

Now I would agree 100% that it is important that we follow the teachings of Jesus. But what about the reality of His death? What about the reality of His resurrection? Are they really critical issues? Does it really matter whether Jesus actually rose from the dead or not?

In this lesson, we will consider what the scriptures have to say regarding the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and to determine whether these things are really important or not.

Lesson

1) Did Jesus really die?

a) His death was prophesied

Isaiah 53 is a Messianic prophecy about the “suffering servant”. It is widely accepted in “Christendom” that this passage is talking about the crucifixion of Jesus, the Messiah, because of how it matches up with the events that occurred when Jesus was crucified. The passage is talking about one who would suffer for the transgressions and iniquities of others (vs.5). This person would be led as a “*lamb to the slaughter*” (vs.7, **John 1:29**). He would be “*cut off from the land of the living*” and “*for the transgressions of My (i.e. God's) people He was stricken*”¹ (vs.8).

Verse 9 says that “*they made His grave with the wicked, but with the rich at His death*”.

Phrases such as “*cut off from the land of the living*” and “*they made His grave with the wicked*” clearly indicate that actual death and burial was involved.

Jesus Himself prophesied that He would be killed. In **Matthew 16:21**² we read that Jesus “*...showed His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things....., and be killed, and be raised the third day*”. His teaching on the matter was plainly understood by Peter, as we can see by his reaction in the next verse.

- His teaching about His resurrection was also heard and understood by the religious leaders of the day (**Matthew 27:62-63**).

¹ All Biblical quotes are from the New King James Version Bible.

² See also **Matthew 17:22-23; 20:17-19**.

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b) The scriptures show that He died

In **Matthew 27:50**, after the account about the sponge of sour wine being offered to Him as a drink, we read that “*..Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit*”. When He “*yielded up His spirit*”, it means that He gave it up (**John 19:30**); He handed it back to the Father (**Luke 23:46**); it left His body.

Note: **James 2:26** tells us that “*..the body without the spirit is dead...*”³.

Both **Mark 15:37** and **Luke 23:46** then say that after Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, “*...He breathed His last..*”.

- in other words, He stopped breathing – He was dead.

c) His death was confirmed by the Romans

Jesus and the two thieves (**Matthew 27:38**) were crucified on the day (Friday) leading up to the Sabbath (Saturday) – **Mark 15:42**; **Luke 23:54**; **John 19:31**. Jesus had died some time around the 9th hour (**Matthew 27:46**), *i.e.* about 3:00pm. Based on the events that followed, it is safe to assume that the two thieves were still alive after Jesus had died.

Because the Sabbath was rapidly approaching, the Jews wanted to have the bodies taken down from the cross and buried. (The Law also required that those who were sentenced to death and executed should not remain hanging overnight – **Deuteronomy 21:23**.) But before they could do that, those crucified had to be dead – the Romans weren't the sort of people to let any prisoners escape (**Acts 16:27**; **27:42**). Sometimes people can take up to a few days to die on a cross – death by crucifixion was usually not immediate. Therefore, in order to speed up the deaths, the Jews “*..asked Pilate that their legs might be broken..*” (**John 19:31**). This would prevent the victims from being able to support the weight of their bodies on their legs. Their bodies would drop, with their outstretched arms taking all the weight.

The Romans, therefore, broke the legs of the two thieves first (**John 19:32**). But when they came to Jesus, they saw that “*...He was already dead..*” (**John 19:33**). Remember, these are soldiers. A part of their “duty statement” would involve killing people – particularly in battle. They were the ones who implemented Roman justice by the sword (**Romans 13:4**). They knew what death was about, and were not likely to be fooled by someone pretending to be dead. But just to be sure, one of the soldiers thrust a spear into Jesus' side (**John 19:34**). Blood and water came out.

Note: The soldiers did not merely “scratch” Jesus with the spear to be sure that He was dead. In **John 20:24-29**, we read about Jesus proving to Thomas that He had indeed risen from the dead. One of the things that He asked Thomas to do was “*..reach your hand here, and put⁴ it into my*

³ In **Luke 8:41 – 56** we read the account of Jairus' daughter who had died. Jesus restored her to life again. We see in verse **55** that it was when her spirit had returned to her body that she arose – alive again.

⁴ “*thrust it into my side*” - King James Version

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side....” In other words, the wound from the spear was big enough for a man’s hand to fit inside.

When Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus, Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus was dead already. (As mentioned above, death by crucifixion was usually not a quick death.) So Pilate checked with the Centurion, an experienced soldier, as to whether Jesus was dead or not (**Mark 15:39, 43-44**). The fact that Pilate allowed Joseph to take the body of Jesus (**Mark 15:45**) implies that the Centurion confirmed to Pilate that Jesus was indeed dead.

2) Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

a) Attempts to prevent the resurrection

During His ministry, Jesus had told people that He would be raised from the dead on the third day (**Matthew 12:40; Mark 8:31-32; John 2:18-21**). The Jewish leaders were well aware of this prophecy, and wanted to take steps to prevent any semblance of a resurrection taking place (**Matthew 27:62-64**). So they asked Pilate to put a guard at the tomb to prevent anyone coming and taking the body. Pilate obliged. A guard was set, and the rock that closed up the tomb was sealed (**Matthew 27:65-66, Mark 15:46b**).

Mankind had done all that was humanly possible to prevent a resurrection taking place.

But God is wiser and more powerful than man (**1 Corinthians 1:25, Psalm 2:1-4**). His eternal plan (**Ephesians 1:4**) was not about to be thwarted by the schemes of evil men.

b) The empty tomb

On the first day of the week, as the women travelled to the tomb in order to finish anointing the body of Jesus (**Mark 16:1-2**), they wondered about who was going to remove the stone blocking the entrance (**Mark 16:3**) – they expected Jesus to still be dead in the tomb. But when they arrived, the stone was already rolled away, angels were present, but Jesus was gone (**Luke 24:2-4, Matthew 28:2-3, John 20:12**).

The body of Jesus hadn’t been stolen. The guards were still there when the women arrived⁵ (**Matthew 28:1-4**). He had been raised from the dead (**Luke 24:5-7**) according to the scriptures (**1 Corinthians 15:4⁶**). In fact, Jesus was nearby in the garden, and spoke to Mary Magdalene soon after (**John 20:11-18**).

c) Many witnesses see Jesus alive after His resurrection

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples on various occasions (**Matthew 28:16-17, Mark 16:14, Luke 24:36-43, John 20:19, 26; 21:1-**

⁵ The guards were present when the angels came to the tomb (**Matthew 28:4**). However, they were bribed by the chief priests to say that the disciples came and stole the body of Jesus (**Matthew 28:11-15**)

⁶ For example, David prophesied about the Christ being raised from the dead (**Acts 2:25-32; Psalm 16:8-11**).

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24; 2:32; 1 Corinthians 15:5). Acts 1:1-3 says that He presented Himself to them “..by many infallible proofs”, i.e. the evidence was irrefutable – there is no way that you could make a mistake about it, or get it wrong.

He appeared to the women as they left the tomb to tell the disciples (**Matthew 28:9-10**).

He appeared to two of His followers on the road to Emmaus (**Luke 24:13-33**⁷).

If that was not enough, Paul says in **1 Corinthians 15:6** that “..He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present...”. In other words, there was a time after His resurrection when Jesus appeared to a gathering of over 500 people, and most of those people (witnesses) were still around to testify to that fact at the time that Paul wrote the letter.

3) How significant is the death and resurrection to our faith?

Some may suggest that it doesn't really matter whether you believe that Jesus rose from the dead or not. But such a view is far from the Truth. Paul continued on in **1 Corinthians 15** to say this;

“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up – if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” (verses **13-19**)

What is Paul saying here?

- a) If Christ is not risen, then all the preaching from the scriptures is pointless, worthless. It is based on a lie.
- b) If Christ is not risen, then our faith is worthless, because at the end of the day, it will achieve nothing.
- c) If Christ is not risen, then he (Paul) and the other disciples are false witnesses – they have been spreading lies about Jesus rising from the dead. They ultimately died a martyr's death for nothing.
- d) If Christ is not risen, then we are still in our sins, and as such, stand condemned before God.
- e) If Christ is not risen, then all of those faithful brethren who have now passed on are not resting in Paradise (**Luke 23:43**). Rather, they have perished, lost forever.
- f) If this life is all there is, then we are men most pitied. All of the cross-bearing and sacrifices we make for the cause of Christ will ultimately benefit us nothing (**Matthew 16:24**).

⁷ **Mark 16:12** is possibly referring to the same incident.

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- There will be no eternal home (**John 14:2**).
- There will be no “*crown of righteousness*” (**2 Timothy 4:8**).
- There will be no reward (**Luke 6:23; Colossians 3:24**).
- Stephen died in vain (**Acts 7:54-60**).
- The killing of James was for nothing (**Acts 12:2**).
- The trials and sufferings that Paul went through were simply an exercise in futility (**2 Corinthians 11:23-28**).

The point is this: If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then we have nothing – we are still in our sins; we have no hope of an eternal life. We may as well “*eat, drink and be merry*” (**1 Corinthians 15:32**), and at the same time, have “*...a certain fearful expectation of judgement..*” (**Hebrews 10:27; 9:27**).

However, Paul re-affirms that Jesus did rise from the dead in the next verse;

“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (**1 Corinthians 11:20**)

i.e. He is the fore-runner of those who have already died in Christ. He is the first to have been raised from the dead to die no more (**Romans 6:9; Colossians 1:18**)⁸.

Conclusion:

Did Jesus really die on the cross? Yes He did, the Bible says so.

Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Yes He did, the Bible says so.

Is it important that we believe that Jesus died and was raised from the dead? Absolutely. To have any doubts about His death and resurrection is to have doubts about your own salvation. Our baptism is intimately linked with His death, burial and resurrection – **Romans 6:3-4**⁹. If Jesus’ did not die; if Jesus was not buried; if Jesus did not rise again on the third day, then our baptism was meaningless – we are still in our sins.

“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (**1 Corinthians 11:20**)

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” (**Hebrews 12:28**)

⁸ People like Lazarus (**John 11:1-44**) and Jairus’s daughter (**Luke 8:41-55**) were raised from the dead prior to Jesus resurrection, However, there is a difference between their resurrection and Jesus’ resurrection. They were to die again at some later point in time – at the end of their earthly life. When Jesus was raised from the dead, He was raised to die no more (**Romans 6:9**). When Jesus comes again, those in the grave will be raised first, then those who are still alive will be caught up with them, and those from both groups will be forever with the Lord (**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:42-44**).

⁹ The certainty of the final judgement (**Hebrews 9:27; Matthew 25:31-46**) also has a link to Jesus’ resurrection – see **Acts 17:31**.