

# Jesus Christ is Risen from the Dead!

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Paul had been preaching “*Jesus and the resurrection*” (Acts 17:18) at Athens, and people wanted to know what it was all about. Read Acts 17:22-34. Here Paul proclaims his gospel message to the Gentiles. Several were converted, including two who became prominent enough to be named. The crucifixion is not mentioned, nor is Jesus actually named. The core message is that the God who created the heavens and the earth raised Jesus from the dead, to become the coming righteous judge. “*God commands all men everywhere to repent*”, i.e. change their attitude to God. It is not optional, nor an invitation, but a **command** to be obeyed.

Why? Because God is the **Living** God - the One who **does** things - and Jesus, who was dead, is therefore now alive! The Christian message centres on the transforming power of God to make alive what was dead. Jesus Christ has become the **life giver** (1 Corinthians 15:45).

If you read Acts you will find that the apostles' witness to Jesus's resurrection is consistently the heart of their initial presentation of the gospel both to Jews (Acts 2:22-36; 13:28-34) and Gentiles (Acts 10:34-43; 17:22-34). The crucifixion is mentioned, if at all, just as the necessary prelude to the resurrection. (The apostolic gospel in Acts is discussed in more detail in my paper “[resurc6v2\\_The\\_Resurrection\\_of\\_Jesus\\_Christ\\_RH\\_Johnston.pdf](#)”). Unbelievers must make a personal response to the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord - that is as Messiah, Ruler and Judge! Those who responded were commanded to repent and be baptised (Acts 2:38 etc.) to “wash away their sins, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16).

Paul confirms that the resurrection of Christ is the **core of his gospel** in Romans 10:8b-10. “*The word is near you, on your lips and **in your heart** (that is the **word of faith** which we preach); because, if you confess with your lips and **believe** [aorist = point decision to believe] **in your heart that God raised him from the dead**, you will be saved [future]. For man believes [present = ongoing believing] with his heart for justification, and he confesses with his lips for salvation.*” Our becoming righteous depends first on our **heart attitude** to the fact of Christ's resurrection. The cross is not mentioned, just that God raised Jesus from the dead.

1 Corinthians 2:2, so often used to justify concentrating on the crucifixion, actually has the same emphasis, being literally translated “*For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, this One having been crucified*”, or, idiomatically, “*the One who had been crucified*”. Paul says he is preaching

Jesus, not just any Jesus, but the specific Anointed One (the Christ, the Messiah) who had been crucified, but now (by implication) no longer dead but alive. This fits Paul's fuller account of his preaching at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. Although Christ's dying for our sins and burial was included, the resurrection of Christ, and the witness testimony to it, were at least equally important. But Paul's recorded preaching (Acts 13:30-39; 17:18, 31) suggests the resurrection dominated gospel presentations, because **Christ's resurrection is what is most essential to believe** (Romans 10:9). Everything else follows from that. (Eastern Orthodox churches retain this properly Biblical emphasis on the resurrection and on our growing participation in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:3-4; 2 Corinthians 3:18). Unbiblical teaching about hell, derived from pagan sources, as luridly portrayed in Dante's *Inferno*, terrified the medieval world so that all the western churches (whether Catholic or Protestant) became overly preoccupied with the sin problem, and consequently now focus almost exclusively on the crucifixion.)

Unless you believe **in your heart** - really believe without doubting (James 1:6-8) - that God raised Jesus bodily from the dead you are not righteous, not being saved and not a Christian.

### **The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ**

Jesus Christ's bodily resurrection is the central historical fact of Christianity, not a "myth"- resurrection myths were common in the cults of the ancient world - but testable historical fact.

God requires everyone to respond to the apostolic testimony to Christ's resurrection. This always provokes resistance and opposition. Everyone "knows" that once someone is certainly, thoroughly and undeniably dead, they will not live again. Christ's bodily resurrection attacks everyone's fundamental belief system, whatever their background, because it is "impossible".

Speaking of Christ's death does not make the same uncomfortable impact on the belief systems of unbelievers as His resurrection - death is natural and commonplace, and happens to everything that lives. Noble death and self-sacrifice are commonly found in other religions. Nor does theology: theories about sin and atonement are "untestable" religious ideas that can be discussed and debated. Indeed for many, both in ancient Athens and today, "sin" is a meaningless concept, and hence a poor basis for evangelism. But who can miss the impact of a claim of resurrection from the dead?

Unlike the crucifixion, which often provokes complex emotional reactions to its gruesome character, thinking about the resurrection of Christ does not engage our emotions. So we can test the apostles' claim of Christ's bodily resurrection

dispassionately as a fact of history. We either really believe it, or we don't: there is no middle ground.

1 Corinthians 15:12-26 (read) makes clear that if Christ did not rise, then Christianity is false, our faith a futile delusion. Christianity depends on Christ's resurrection being true! No other religion lays its credibility on the line by depending absolutely on the truth of an historical event, still less on one that is, humanly speaking, incredible.

It was also a bodily resurrection (read 1 Corinthians 15:42-50). This speaks of two kinds of body of different natures, first the present perishable physical body, then its resurrection as an imperishable spiritual body. That is the body Christ got, and what we get at the resurrection.

There is no room for fudging - any ghostly apparition theory to explain Christ's resurrection appearances that leaves Christ's physical body on the earth will not do. It does not fit the Biblical facts. Christ certainly died. He was certified as fully and thoroughly dead. The scourging which Christ received before the crucifixion was often fatal, which explains why Simon of Cyrene had to carry Jesus' cross. The centurion, who had seen many such deaths, was certain that Jesus was dead. For absolute certainty, a sword was thrust into the side of Jesus, and blood and water had flowed out separately, indicating certain death. Christ was bound with grave clothes, which prevented anyone reviving naturally from freeing himself (John 11:44). The grave entrance was sealed with a heavy stone.

That Christ's body had left the tomb was never disputed. Before he was taken up into heaven (Acts 1:9-11) many saw Christ after He rose (1 Corinthians 15:5-7), with a different sort of body, a "spiritual" body, but definitely not a "ghost". Jesus was resurrected through the binding grave clothes, with a new kind of body, beyond the natural physical body we know. Christ's body had become spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:44) and could appear and disappear (Luke 24:31) and pass through walls (John 20:19). Christ's original physical body had left the grave in order to become a spiritual body, and Christ was now bodily present, and touchable. The disciples' initial reaction was to think they had seen a disembodied spirit (Luke 24:37), but Jesus encouraged the disciples to handle him and check for themselves that he had flesh and bones, unlike any apparition (Luke 24:40). Unbelieving Thomas was likewise invited to touch (John 20:27). And yet Christ's spiritual body could still engage normally with the physical world (e.g. John 21:13), and eat normal physical food (Luke 24:43). Frank Morison author of "Who Moved the Stone" initially intended to disprove the resurrection, but found the evidence supported the biblical story. (This useful summary of the evidence for the resurrection was published in 1930, but is still in print (2nd edition published in paperback by Faber and Faber Ltd in 1958. ISBN 0571032591))

Christ's resurrection reveals the character of the true God, as the God who does what is humanly and naturally impossible. God is creative and recreative (Acts 17:22-31), working all things according to the counsel of His own will (Ephesians 1:11). He created the heavens and the earth for a purpose, from nothing, and he will roll them up like a garment (Hebrews 1:12) when His purpose for them is finished. He judged the Earth in the judgement of Noah's Flood, and he will judge the Earth in righteousness through Jesus Christ at the end. Jesus and His resurrection is God's proof of their truth (Acts 17:31), and the rock against which men will stumble (Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:8).

### **New life for the Christian**

What does it all mean? The prime problem of the human condition is death, separation from the life of God, not our sins. We die because we are deprived of access to the "tree of life" (Genesis 3:22-24, compare Revelation 22:2), because of the sin of Adam. We needed saving from death.

God is faithful to His covenant promise with Jesus, sealed by His death on the cross. We enter into the blessings of that New Covenant if we trust in Jesus Christ, and believe he rose from the dead, and so receive the Holy Spirit Who gives us a new heart and new spirit (Jeremiah 31:33-35; Ezekiel 36:25-31). Peter says, "*By his great mercy we have been born anew to a **living** hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*" (1 Peter 1:3).

The Good News is that Jesus conquered death (1 Corinthians 15:22,51-57) to give us life: "*The last Adam (i.e. Jesus Christ) became a life-giving spirit*" (1 Corinthians 15:45). Jesus is the life giver. To have Christ **in us** is to receive His life (Colossians 1:27). "*For this is eternal life, that they may know you the one true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent*" (John 17:3) "*I am come that they may have life and have it abundantly*" (John 10:10). "*I am the way, the truth and the life*" (John 14:6). "*I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me shall live even if he dies*" (John 11:25). Whoever believes in Jesus shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). The gospel restores our relationship with God, we are made alive to do what pleases Him (Eph 2:5-10).

Romans speaks of resurrection life: "*the gospel concerning his son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.*" (Romans 1:3-4). (See also Acts 13:32-33 "*And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus*". This is supported with quotations from Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 55:3 and Psalm 16:10. The good news is that we aren't going to stay dead!) "*The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death*" (Romans 8:2). We are to be forward looking and positive about

our new life in Christ. We are commanded to seek what is heavenly with Christ (Colossians 3:1-3), and think only about what is good and true (Philippians 4:8). We become whatever or whomever we set our minds upon, and reap accordingly (Romans 8:5-6). We are to forget the past (Philippians 3:13-15), which includes our past sins. If the Christian dwells on the crucifixion, and his past sins and shortcomings, he is unwittingly setting his mind on the flesh (which leads to death), on things that are on earth, on the past, on himself, on his sin and failure, and on death - all ugly. Christ is now at the right hand of God (e.g. Ephesians 1:20), not on the cross: His work on the cross is finished. We must behold the Lord of glory (2 Corinthians 3:18), and set our minds on the Spirit, which leads to life and peace (Romans 8:6).

Jesus Christ is our Passover lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7), necessarily sacrificed for us. In Exodus 12 the lamb was killed to provide the blood for the doorposts as a sign to the destroyer, but equally importantly to feed the Israelites on their hasty journey out of Egypt. The people were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea (1 Corinthians 10:1-5), and they became partakers of the covenant of Sinai through Moses. But they must not simply stand on the shore of the Red Sea and go on looking back, "enjoying their deliverance" from the destroying angel. Exodus was much more than just being delivered from the destroyer, or even from Egypt. They had left Egypt, but the Exodus was not complete until Egypt had been removed from them through the trials of the wilderness, and they had entered fully into the Promised Land. They had continually to press forward towards the promised goal, yet sadly only two entered. Jesus is the way (the way out, or exodus) (John 14:6), and the mediator of a better covenant (Hebrews 8:6), and we too must press forward (Philippians 3:14). Forgetting what is past (Philippians 3:13), we must move on beyond the elementary teachings (Hebrews 6:1-2). Forgiven what is past, we have been given the Holy Spirit in order to **live in the power of God's covenant promise**. **Choose life** (Deuteronomy 30:19, compare Luke 4:18-19 and the new Exodus teaching of Isaiah 40-66).

This life is not purely for the future. It really is ours now. God sent the Holy Spirit for the whole church (Acts 2:38-42) so we live lives that are **fully pleasing** to God. (1 John 3:6-10). Christ is at the right hand of the Father and we are in Him (Ephesians 1). God "*remembers our sins and misdeeds no more*" (Hebrews 10:1-18). Freed (Galatians 5:1) to concentrate on doing good works as Jesus did (John 14:12), we now have the power of the Holy Spirit, to live the life God intended, a life of action, of doing exploits - God's "good works" which he has prepared for us to walk in (Ephesians 2:10) - just like the men of Hebrews 11.

*"His **divine power** has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who has called us to his own glory and virtue... that through these you may escape (=Exodus) the corruption that is in the world (=Egypt) through desire and become **sharers of divine nature** (=Promised land)."*

(2 Peter 1:3-4) We receive Christ's likeness and nature by beholding His beauty, changed by the Holy Spirit from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:17-18, compare Psalm 27:4), so experiencing the power of Christ's resurrection (Philippians 3:10). One day this will be completed. "*Beloved we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*" (1 John 3:2).

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This paper supports ministry to Cody Christian Fellowship on 23 March 2005.

(The Cody Christian Fellowship do not necessarily endorse the opinions expressed in this paper, which are entirely the responsibility of the author)

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(v2 23.3.2005, v3 3.9.2018) © R H Johnston, 2005.