



CONFIDENT IN THE HEART OF OUR FAITH

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

VIEWS OF DEATH TODAY

➤ atheism

Bertrand Russell: 'When I die I shall rot, and nothing of my ego will survive... There is darkness without and when I die there will be darkness within. There is no splendour, no vastness anywhere: only triviality for a moment, and then nothing.'

➤ spiritualism

➤ universalism

VIEWS OF DEATH IN THE FIRST CENTURY

➤ Greek

- immortality of the soul, separate from the body

➤ Jewish

- mainstream expectation of resurrection at the end of history Daniel 12:1-3; cf. John 11:23-24
- resurrection was *bodily* 2 Maccabees 14:45-46

2 MACCABEES 14:45-46

45 Still alive and aflame with anger, [Razis] rose, and though his blood gushed forth and his wounds were severe he ran through the crowd; and standing upon a steep rock, 46 with his blood now completely drained from him, he tore out his entrails, took them in both hands and hurled them at the crowd, calling upon the Lord of life and spirit to give them back to him again. This was the manner of his death.

VIEWS OF DEATH IN THE FIRST CENTURY

- Greek
 - immortality of the soul, separate from the body
- Jewish
 - mainstream expectation of resurrection at the end of history Daniel 12:1-3; cf. John 11:23-24
 - resurrection was *bodily* 2 Maccabees 14:45-46
 - *Sadducees* mocked the idea of resurrection Mark 12:18-23
- Corinthian
 - v 12 denial of resurrection to come
 - v 35 denial of resurrection *of the body*

VIEWS OF DEATH IN THE FIRST CENTURY

- Greek
- Jewish
- Corinthian
 - v 12 denial of resurrection to come
 - v 35 denial of resurrection *of the body*
 - resurrection already past? 2 Timothy 2:18
 - implications of the Corinthian view(s)
 - immoral sexual behaviour 1 Corinthians 6:12-20
 - looked down on others 1 Corinthians 8; 10

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

- What it is
- Why it is important 1 Corinthians 15:12-19
- Why it is reasonable to believe it
- What it implies 1 Corinthians 15:20-50

WHAT THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS IS

- not the immortality of the soul
- not a 'spiritual' resurrection
- life after 'life after death' (Tom Wright)
- bodily resurrection = transformation by God
 - But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (Philippians 3:20-21)
 - If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:11)

WHY THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS IS IMPORTANT

- Paul's argument put negatively 1 Corinthians 15:12-19
 - he shows what's wrong with the Corinthian view by pointing out its dire consequences
 - no resurrection means Christ was not raised vv 13, 16
- first set of consequences vv 14-15
 - the message they were told is empty, because untrue v 14a—and what's the point in living by something untrue?
 - their faith is also empty v 14b
 - Paul and his colleagues are telling lies about God v 15
 - their view of God is too small

WHY THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS IS IMPORTANT

- second set of consequences vv 17-18
 - their faith is futile v 17a
 - their sins are not forgiven v 17b—look back to vv 3-4
 - solidarity with Adam leads to death vv 21-22
 - Paul says, 'Christ was raised', i.e. by God—the resurrection is God's vindication of what Jesus did on the cross
 - there is no hope for dead believers v 18
 - Paul says believers 'fall asleep' (not as NRSV 'died'), by contrast with Jesus, who 'died' in full sense v 3
 - Christian faith is a complete waste of time v 19

WHY THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS IS IMPORTANT: QUESTIONS FOR US

- Everything in the Christian faith hinges on the resurrection of Jesus
- Does our faith in the resurrection make the kind of difference that it is attractive to non-believers?
- The place of rational thought and the mind in Christian discipleship

WHY IT IS REASONABLE TO BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

- Approaching the question
 - looking for widely-agreed evidence—not assuming the inspiration or reliability of the Bible
 - remember we're looking at multiple witnesses in the New Testament—it's not just one book

WHY IT IS REASONABLE TO BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

- Approaching the question
- Four key pieces of evidence
 - Jesus died by crucifixion
 - People claimed to see him after he died
 - Those who claimed to see him were changed
 - Jesus' tomb was empty

JESUS DIED BY CRUCIFIXION

- recorded in all four Gospels
- recorded by Paul, our earliest source, e.g. Galatians 6:14
- recorded by non-Christian sources
 - Josephus, *Antiquities* 18:64 c.AD 90
 - When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified...
 - Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44 c.AD 115
 - Christus, from whom the name [Christian] had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus.
 - Lucian of Samosata, *Passing of Peregrine* 11-13 c.AD 150
 - The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account.



'Alexamenos worships his god'

Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=9677414>

PEOPLE CLAIMED TO SEE JESUS AFTER HE DIED

- They claimed they saw Jesus
 - Cephas (Peter) and 'the twelve' 1 Corinthians 15:5
 - James the brother of Jesus 1 Corinthians 15:7
 - Paul 1 Corinthians 15:8 'like an abortion'
 - the women in the Gospels
- They believed they saw Jesus
 - they suffered for their belief Acts; 2 Corinthians 11:23-33
 - we have no record of these eyewitnesses giving up their faith under suffering
 - this shows that they were not deliberately lying
 - and rules out that they stole the body

THOSE WHO CLAIMED TO SEE JESUS WERE CHANGED

- Peter and the rest of the twelve
 - Pentecost seven weeks after Jesus' death
- James the brother of Jesus
 - named in Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3
 - sceptical during Jesus' ministry Mark 3:21, 31-35; John 7:5
 - changed later Acts 1:14; 1 Corinthians 15:7
- Paul: from persecutor to evangelist Galatians 1:22-23
 - based on personal appearance of Jesus to him 1 Corinthians 15:8; Galatians 1:11-17
 - testimony of an enemy of the Christians

JESUS' TOMB WAS EMPTY

- If the body were still in the tomb, how could the Jesus movement have got going in Jerusalem?
 - An attempt to explain the empty tomb Matthew 28:11-15
- The testimony of women seen as untrustworthy

But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex, nor let servants be admitted to give testimony on account of the ignobility of their soul; since it is probable that they may not speak truth, either out of hope of gain, or fear of punishment. Josephus, *Antiquities* 4:219; cf. Luke 24:11

WHY IT IS REASONABLE TO BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

- Four key pieces of evidence
 - Jesus died by crucifixion
 - People claimed to see him after he died
 - Those who claimed to see him were changed
 - Jesus' tomb was empty

TO REFLECT ON IN GROUPS

- What was
 - something surprising or a fresh insight?
 - something you'd like to do something about?
 - something you'd like to ask about?
- Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-58
 - What implications does Paul draw from the resurrection of Jesus for the believers in Corinth, and for us?
- Make a note of key issues (especially questions) on your flipchart page and bring that back when we reassemble

DRAWING THE IMPLICATIONS

➤ I Corinthians 15:20-23

➤ Jesus as 'firstfruits' v 20 cf. Leviticus 23:10-11

Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For the Messiah, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth. I Corinthians 5:7-8
But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost. 16:8

DRAWING THE IMPLICATIONS

➤ I Corinthians 15:20-23

➤ Jesus as 'firstfruits' v 20 cf. Leviticus 23:10-11

➤ Jesus' resurrection the *guarantee* of our resurrection

➤ Jesus' resurrection the *model* of our resurrection v 48b

➤ the prototype: a 'spiritual body' v 44 NIV, NRSV

➤ *psuchikos* versus *pneumatikos*

➤ ordinary human life versus life animated by the Spirit

➤ life comparing seed to full flower vv 36-37

➤ imperishable vv 42-43

➤ Christians do not go to heaven when they die
e.g. Revelation 21

RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS

➤ Jesus didn't die on the cross

➤ Roman soldiers were very effective executioners

➤ Cause of death by crucifixion was normally asphyxiation because of difficulty of exhaling

➤ hence breaking legs John 19:31-33

➤ Blood and water John 19:34-35—rupture of pericardium and right atrium or right ventricle of heart

➤ Could such a Jesus get out and convince his followers that he was the Lord of glory?

➤ what about the change to James (and Paul)?

RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS

➤ Jesus didn't die on the cross

➤ The disciples went to the wrong tomb

➤ Does not account for the disciples' belief that they saw Jesus

➤ Why did the authorities not produce the body? The tomb's location was known

➤ No-one thought of this in the first 1800 years

RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS

- Jesus didn't die on the cross
- The disciples went to the wrong tomb
- Someone stole the body
 - Why would the disciples suffer for a known lie?
 - If someone else, the empty tomb alone was not why the disciples believed

RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS

- Jesus didn't die on the cross
- The disciples went to the wrong tomb
- Someone stole the body
- The disciples had hallucinations
 - hallucinations are normally individual and private
 - hallucinations do not account for the empty tomb
 - what about the change to James (and Paul)?

RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS

- Jesus didn't die on the cross
- The disciples went to the wrong tomb
- Someone stole the body
- The disciples had hallucinations
- The story is a legend which grew gradually
 - but this needs a long period of time, not 50 days

RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS

- It was 'just' a story to explain their devotion to Jesus
 - the empty tomb
 - what about Paul and James?
 - ancient people were not gullible: they knew historical and non-historical 'story' writing
 - the claims that Peter made suggest the opposite—contrast with David who was buried Acts 2:22-32
 - early critics of Christianity saw the story as an historical claim, e.g. the Jewish leaders
 - Why would the disciples suffer for a known lie?
 - If someone else, the empty tomb alone was not why the disciples believed

FURTHER READING

- On the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus
 - Gary R. Habermas & Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004) [also available for Kindle]
- Two big books on the resurrection of Jesus
 - N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003)—a masterful wide-ranging study of the whole New Testament
 - Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (London: Apollos, 2010)—focused on why we can reasonably believe it, engaging very thoroughly with academic debates about evidence and history