

"I believe that when I die I rot and nothing of me ego will survive. I am not young and I love life. But I should scorn to shiver at the thought of annihilation." So wrote Bertram Russell in 1925 in an essay called "What I Believe." At this Easter Day, it is just as important to ask the question of each one of us: What do we believe? What do we really believe about life after death? More pointedly, What do we believe about the resurrection of the flesh? For we gather on this Easter Day to remember, to celebrate and to consider the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, to remember his resurrection of the flesh.

1 Avoiding the Evidence for the Resurrection

It's impossible – it can't happen. There is no such thing! Dead men stay dead.

Not part of my experience, I don't believe in history. It's just what people who write history want us to believe.

No-one can ever know anything about the past with any certainty.

* **It would make Christianity distinctive** - no other religion claims that its leader actually died and rose again, to rule the world and live forever. Other religions have the idea of hope and new life and chocolate and eggs. Can't we just put them all in the same basket? To claim that Jesus was the Son of God who died on the cross and conquered death would contradict "All religions are the same" For many people that is a God given presupposition. Therefore the resurrection must be ruled out or made into some sort of memory story. He is with us as we remember him, and tell his story, or myth.

* **I prefer to believe that the soul is immortal** and longs to be free of the physical constraints of the body. This is a Greek idea that everyone has a soul. IN this case it would be that everyone is given an ongoing spiritual existence, but the resurrection of the flesh is out of the question.

* **Basically, lots of people want to say that the disciple got it wrong:**

-Wish fulfillment, he lives in their memory, wrong tomb, didn't look carefully, Jesus was revived and later died, and perpetuated a lie – all of which is totally inconsistent with Jesus' statement that he is "the way, the truth and the life." IN recent times there have been a number of literary attempts

to discredit the Bible, through works of fiction. The aim has been to cause believers to doubt their faith and to give unbelievers excuses for avoiding the evidence of the scriptures. We can think of the Da Vinci Code, the Gospel of Judas and not long ago, the documentary called the Lost Tomb of Jesus, discredited by academics years ago, but designed to be broadcast just before Easter. They and other works of fiction are popularized for profit. They are designed to denigrate the Scriptures as the Word of God. There are even people who would claim the name of Christian who have lost touch with the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh. If one were to assume that the Editorial in the Sydney Morning Herald was written by someone from the Christian camp, then we can say that not all Christians hold to the teaching of the Bible that says that Jesus rose bodily. (v16)

"If Christ is not risen, then your faith is in vain." But then goes on to say that "belief in the Easter story is a matter of faith. And the truth of faith is not the truth of science." "...the Easter faith has nothing to do with the fate of the physical remains of Jesus, much less the details of his private life.

Belief in his resurrection and belief in his empty tomb are different orders of truth." All we are left with is a vague hope for the future in the midst of despair. But as we come to look at the scriptures

as the Word of God, we want to ask: What does the Bible say about the resurrection of the flesh?

About Jesus and about the resurrection of believers? What evidence is there? What reasons are there to believe it?

2 Accepting the Evidence for the Resurrection

* **God who made the heavens and earth from nothing.** He is the Creator – from nothing he can cause a man to rise from the dead

* **The first time something happens it is a breakthrough.** The fact that it has not been done before should not limit our minds to future possible outcomes. If we all felt like that no-one would have come up with the wheel or light globes or medical breakthroughs. The resurrection of Jesus is anticipated in the history of the people who were raised to life in the Old and New Testaments.

* **The predictions were on the lips of Jesus** – Mark 8:31

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and **after three days rise again.** (Mark 9:31) For he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, **after three days he will rise.**"

(Mark 10:33-34) **If this is not true he becomes a false prophet.** If he did not rise from the dead physically then he has not told the truth. We note that this is in conflict with the teachings of the Muslim faith which teaches that Jesus did not die on the cross and therefore did not rise from the dead. Since they are in contradiction with one another, they cannot both be right. We have to decide between one or the other. If one is true, the other cannot be true.

* **The evidence of reluctant eye witnesses**

The disciples and the women were depressed and distraught when Jesus was crucified. They laid him in a tomb and were going back on the Sunday morning to put more spices on the body. They were going there to bury him properly. This was not a wish fulfillment or self delusion. **Matthew** tells us that Jesus appeared specifically to Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus. Later he records Jesus speaking to the 11 disciples, some of whom found it hard to believe. **Mark** describes the empty tomb and the angel who spoke to the women about Jesus being risen. The angel told the women to tell the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee. **Luke** tells about empty tomb, about Peter and John going in to the empty tomb and seeing the folded grave clothes. Jesus also walked with two disciples to the town of Emmaus, and later invited the disciples to touch him and make sure in their own minds that he was really risen from the dead. John records Mary of Magdala seeing the empty tomb and then talking with Jesus in the garden, the appearance to the disciples without Thomas and then with Thomas, who also came to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. He took a little bit longer to convince. John also tells us about Jesus appearing to the disciples beside the Sea of Tiberias and cooking them breakfast. Paul gives us a summary of the appearances of the risen Lord Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 The women, the disciples, the 500, Paul himself. They are all eye witnesses. In Acts 1 Jesus told his disciples to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. And we read that this is exactly what they did in the book of Acts. (Acts 2:32, 3:15)

* **A presupposition should not rule out the logic of the evidence**

i.e. Resurrection of Jesus contradicts the presupposition: "All religions are the same". **History may be a thing of the past** but it still has valuable lessons for the present and the future. The resurrection must be regarded as part of history. It took place and there is the evidence of reliable witnesses to testify to the fact. Listen to this assessment from Sir Edward Clark, a British High Court judge who conducted a thorough legal analysis of the first Easter day "To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. As a lawyer I accept the gospel evidence unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate." (Page 320 "The Case for Christ" Lee Strobel.)

3. The Nature of the Evidence

* **A physical body**, seen and recognised by the disciples, he ate fish, he showed them his scarred hands and wounded side (See 39 [Articles](#))

* **Essential part of the Christian faith** (v12-17) Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

Paul is combating some false teaching that proclaimed that there was nothing to look forward to, because Jesus has not really risen from the dead. But it is vital to our understanding of the character of our salvation that we see the Jesus has truly died and truly risen from the dead.

* **NB that the resurrection** is God's stamp of approval, his official receipt his Statement of Acceptance. The cross is his victory His resurrection is his vindication. i.e. Jesus' death was the full payment for the sins of the world. Both yours and mine.

NO Resurrection → NO forgiveness: available.

4. The Significance of the Evidence

* If it did not happen, faith in Jesus has been a waste of time and effort (v18-19) Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished We may as well pack up and go home, or join those who say they are "here for a good time, not a long time". If Jesus has not been raised to new life forever, there is no way that there is a brighter future ahead for any of us! (v20-23) "First fruits" – i.e. the sign of things to come the future resurrection of those who put their faith in Jesus to understand and believe that Jesus has changed the course of history forever. Adam brought death – forever – this was our destiny until Jesus Christ opened the new and living way – eternal life! This is available for one and all. But only the individuals who take it on board by faith actually gain the benefits.

Through Adam we are all prone to sin. We are all guilty of lawlessness and defiance of God's right to run our lives. Therefore we each deserve the same fate, the same destiny of God's wrath and judgement. The only escape route is trust in Jesus, his righteous life, his innocent death in our place and his glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven.

Have we come to that point in our lives where we have admitted our rebellion, turned around, given up the fight. Admitted our fault and determined to trust in Jesus for forgiveness And committed our future into his hands?

Paul introduces the idea that Jesus will be coming back. This is something that Jesus himself taught in the gospels. The risen Lord Jesus will return in power and glory one day. He has risen physically, and ascended into heaven, and from there he is ruling the world. As Christian believers

we seek to bend every part of our wills and our lives in subjection to his will. And we keep on praying that more and more people will also come under his loving rule. He is the living Lord, Jesus. When he does come back he will be the judge of the living and the dead. No-one will escape coming before his judgement throne. (v24-28) For all of us who have given our lives over to him

there will be wonderful new bodies, imperishable and glorious.

We will be part of his new heavens and new earth. (v42-43) Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. (v49) We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed (v51-53)

We have a great history to look back on: Jesus has died in our place. Jesus has been raised to life.

We have a great future to look forward to: We will be raised with Christ. He will bring to kingdom to completion.

That is Resurrection Power: Power to raise the dead, power to overcome sin and Satan, power to live forever.

That same power is the power of God at work in us and through as we pray. God is able and willing to give us glimpses of resurrection life as he graciously answers our prayers in ways that are often above and beyond our wildest imaginations. Take for instance the people who have written to some of our members who prayed with them last January. Take for instance the answer to prayer that I shared with people last Thursday night – in January 2004 two men were lost at sea for three days. Many of us here tonight can testify to the resurrection power of God at work in our lives, bringing about answers to pray that have defied other people's expectations...

Now we seek to honour and obey him in all that we do, knowing that however much these present bodies are wearing out. We have new bodies waiting for us when Jesus returns. We shall share in Christian fellowship with all other fellow believers.

With such a great future, how can we keep it all to ourselves? As we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. May we look for opportunities to share the good news with those around us?

Bertrand Russell was asked what he would say if he died and found himself confronted by God, demanding to know why Russell had not believed in him. "Not enough evidence, Not enough evidence" was Russell's reply. How can anyone say that? When there is so much historical material showing us that Jesus is risen. He has risen indeed.

If you are someone who does not yet believe in God, or you are not yet convinced that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead, let me encourage you to have the courage to look at the evidence with an open mind.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the history of Jesus' life death and glorious resurrection. Strengthen our understanding of the importance of his rising from the dead. Help us to look forward to our resurrection bodies too. Give us strength and faith to live for you day by day and share the faith with others, so that they too might share your new heavens and new earth.

Father, for those of us here today who are not yet convinced, open our eyes and help us to see Jesus. Lead us along the path of true faith to eternal life.

In Jesus name Amen