THE JESUS WHO ROSE AGAIN

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Dead people stay dead. But if one person didn't actually stay dead, then the whole world is a different place to the one we think we are living in.
Category: Observations

I recently read about an academic study group who were looking into which bits of the Gospels they believed to be historically accurate. They called in an expert, a mortuary technician, to help them think about the resurrection of Jesus. This expert told them that Jesus couldnâ€™t have risen again because â€œdead people stay deadâ€ .

No one doubts this. Dead people do stay dead. But the Bible argues that in one crucial case, this otherwise excellent rule was broken. Jesus died and he rose again.

> *Early on Sunday morning,Â while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance.Â Â She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, â€œThey have taken the Lordâ€™s body out of the tomb, and we donâ€™t know where they have put him!â€*
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> *Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb.Â They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.Â He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didnâ€™t go in.Â Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there,Â while the cloth that had covered Jesusâ€™ head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings.Â Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believedâ€”Â for until then they still hadnâ€™t understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. Then they went home. (John 20:1-9 NLT)*

The simple story is that the Bible claims that Jesus tomb was empty and that he had risen again. Iâ€™m not going to try and prove the case, there has been plenty written down through the years arguing for the truth of the resurrection. But let me just make one point.

Jesus was dead. It is sometimes argued that Jesus wasnâ€™t really dead or that the primitive people of his day didnâ€™t really understand the realities of life and death the way that we do. However, professional Roman soldiers executed Jesus; they knew all about killing. If they said Jesus was dead, he was dead. As to the people being primitive and not understanding things as well as we do. The people of Jesus day knew far more about death than most modern people. They saw it all around them; they knew what dead people were like and they knew that dead people stay dead. Death was much more a part of their daily reality than it is of ours. But still they believed in the resurrection!

In passing, nothing apart from the resurrection can satisfactorily explain the change that came over the disciples.

But it is not so much the fact of the resurrection that I want to talk about, it is the implications of what it means for us today.

Bodies Arenâ€™t Bad

Jesus rose again in a human body; and he ascended into heaven that way. Itâ€™s true that this body was subtly different to the way it was before he rose again. People didnâ€™t always recognise him (John 20:10-18) and it seemed that he cold pass through walls (John 20:19,20). However, his body was substantially the same as it had been; he even bore the scars from the crucifixion. When Jesus took on human form as a baby at Bethlehem, it wasnâ€™t something he just did for a few years; his identification with humanity, with his creation is forever. There are a couple of implications of this.

In the long term, it gives us an insight into what our life will be in eternity; we will have bodies. Albeit bodies that are subtly different to our current ones; (1 Cor. 15: 35-44) but we will have bodies.

There wonâ€™t be any of that tedious floating around in nighties that is so beloved of cartoonists. Eternity will be a gutsy, real human experience.

In the short term, it also reminds us that bodies arenâ€™t bad. There is a long history of Christians basically believing that anything that is flesh is bad and the spirit is good. This has led to all sorts of mistakes; not least the idea that sex is bad because it involves our bodies and isnâ€™t pure and spiritual. There is a Greek name for the basics of this spirit: good; bodies: bad philosophy, itâ€™s called Gnosticism. But whether you give it a Greek name or not, itâ€™s tripe. Jesus has a body, so bodies canâ€™t be bad in and of themselves.

Jesus Rose: So We Will

> *But tell me thisâ€"since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead?Â For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either.Â And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless.Â And we apostles would all be lying about Godâ€"for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that canâ€™t be true if there is no resurrection of the dead.Â And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised.Â And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins.Â In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost!Â And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.*
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> *But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.*
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> *So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man.Â Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.Â But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be*

> *raised when he comes back.*
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> *After that the end will come, when he will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, having destroyed every ruler and authority and power.Â For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet.Â And the last enemy to be destroyed is death.Â For the Scriptures say, â€œGod has put all things under his authority.â€ Â (Of course, when it says â€œall things are under his authority,â€ that does not include God himself, who gave Christ his authority.)Â Then, when all things are under his authority, the Son will put himself under Godâ€™s authority, so that God, who gave his Son authority over all things, will be utterly supreme over everything everywhere.*
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> *If the dead will not be raised, what point is there in people being baptized for those who are dead? Why do it unless the dead will someday rise again?*
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> *And why should we ourselves risk our lives hour by hour?Â For I swear, dear brothers and sisters, that I face death daily. This is as certain as my pride in what Christ Jesus our Lord has done in you.Â And what value was there in fighting wild beastsâ€"those people of Ephesusâ€"if there will be no resurrection from the dead? And if there is no resurrection, â€œLetâ€™s feast and drink, for tomorrow we die!â€ Donâ€™t be fooled by those who say such things, for â€œbad company corrupts good character.â€ Â Think carefully about what is right, and stop sinning. For to your shame I say that some of you donâ€™t know God at all. (1 Cor. 15:12-34 NLT)*

The passage is self-explanatory. If Jesus rose from the dead, then so will we. If he didnâ€™t rise from the dead, then we are wasting our time completely. The logic is simple and clear.

This doesnâ€™t mean that death is unimportant. When his friend Lazarus died, Jesus wept at his grave. Death is still horrible, it brings suffering, loneliness and separation, but it isnâ€™t the end of the world.

Nor does it mean that life isnâ€™t important. There are those who seem to imply that since we are going to heaven, this earth doesnâ€™t really matter. â€œItâ€™s not my home; Iâ€™m just passing through.â€ Our time on earth may be short in the light of eternity, but itâ€™s pretty long while you are living it; and we still have the call to love God and our neighbour and to make disciples across the globe. This isnâ€™t just a waiting room for heaven, it is the first part of our eternal life and we must live it to the full.

> *So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless. (1 Cor. 15:58)*

A New World Is Here

When Jesus rose again, the world changed. Up until that point, death ruled on the earth. Dead people stayed dead. But Jesus defeated death and it is no longer in charge. Everything about this world is now different. Death isnâ€™t in charge any longer, Jesus has conquered it and life rules OK.

Yes we still struggle and it is still difficult being a Christian, but we know that ultimately we are on the winning side. We win some battles and we lose some; but the trend is in the same direction.

Jesus will build his church and the gates of hell will not stand against it (Matthew 16:18). What does this mean for you as you step into this New Year?