

# Incredible?

People react in different ways to the challenge of Bible truths. Some may mock them; others may find them interesting but avoid giving them serious thought. Those who give them genuine consideration will sooner or later find them a compelling reality.

In the first century, the Apostle Paul spoke publicly in Athens, debating with the philosophers there. He talked about the certainty of a moral reckoning at the end of the world, and about resurrection; the mix of responses was as we might expect:

*When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed (Acts 17:32–34).*

Paul was not put off by this, and the resurrection continued to be at the heart of his message. He would continue passionately preaching the glorious message of the gospel (the good news, or glad tidings) summarized like this:

*The things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12).*

In fact, he challenged the highest authorities in the land when he was on trial for his life. He asked:

*Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead? (Acts 26:8).*

It was King Agrippa who heard that question, and heard Paul confirm the

truth that Jesus Christ had indeed been raised from the dead (v23). It shook him to his very core, and he confessed:

*You almost persuade me to become a Christian (v28).*

## **A Cornerstone of Christianity**

Christianity is not a man-made collection of fables, but God's message to mankind, proven by history and experience.

One of its foundations is life after death by resurrection from the grave; this is the true Christian hope of everlasting life in the kingdom of God – on this earth. And it will happen only when the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, returns to the earth to establish that kingdom.

Paul emphasizes this in his First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15, which is full of evidence and explanation of resurrection.

*Now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive (v20–22).*

In fact, Paul makes a challenging statement which leaves us in no doubt as to the importance and truth of this teaching:

*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 (v13–14).*

If there were no resurrection, then faith would be pointless, worthless and all who have put their trust in God would have made a huge mistake. His Son, Jesus, lived an absolutely perfect life. Could it be that after he was crucified, died and was buried, that was all?

## **A Hard Reality**

All his life, Jesus trusted that his Father would not leave him in the grave to corrupt, as promised in the Psalms:

*For You will not leave my soul in Sheol [the grave], nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption (Psalm 16:10).*



We may marvel how Christ's mother kept her hands off the soldiers as one of them pierced her son's side with a spear as he hung on the cross (see John 19:34). It seems almost incredible that God, Jesus' Father, watching the tragedy on Golgotha should have done nothing. But we read that *"these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled"* (v36).

And on the third day, Jesus Christ did rise from the dead. His faith in God was justified, vindicated, proven true by the remarkable fact.

## **The Defeat of Sin**

If Jesus had not been raised from the dead, then as Paul writes, there would be another terrible consequence:

*And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! (1 Corinthians 15:17).*

Without his resurrection, then Bible teaching about forgiveness would all amount to mere mockery. The prophet Isaiah spoke about resurrection and forgiveness and put it like this:

*You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back (Isaiah 38:17).*

If the cross had been the end, Christ's brave attempt to be a Saviour would have failed. Then his opponents, selfish, wicked, sinful people, would have had the last word after all. Not only this, we would all be left subject to sin and death, without hope of reconciliation to God or a place in His kingdom.

But Jesus Christ did rise from the dead, sin is defeated, and we have everything to live and hope for in him, *"who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification"* (Romans. 4:25).

## **The Defeat of Death**

The last consequence which Paul suggests, if Jesus had not risen from the dead is that after death we would have had no hope:

*Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished (1 Corinthians 15:18).*

In other words, if Jesus never rose from the dead, why should they? If the one perfect life that has ever appeared on earth failed to overcome sin and death, how could anyone else? If that was the case, then they would have perished, died permanently, without hope for the future.

But as we have seen, Jesus was raised, and he was raised to an eternal life of power. This means we can have confidence in life after death for his followers:

*Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead (2 Corinthians 1:9).*

*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).*

## **The Triumph**

So, with Paul, we have looked at the grim prospects and consequences if Christ had not been raised from the dead.

We also saw the apostle's burst of triumph: *Now Christ is risen from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20).*

How did Paul know? We have the answer in verses 5–8 of this chapter. Paul had spoken to many of the people who had met Jesus after his resurrection: Peter (Cephas), the twelve apostles, over 500 people at once, and James. Finally, Paul himself had met Jesus on the road to Damascus.

Paul was inviting his readers to do the same, to meet and talk to these eyewitnesses and hear the proof for themselves. We are 2000 years too



late to do this ourselves of course. However, what we do know is that these witnesses were not disproved. Rather they gave faith to those who spoke to them, and despite terrible torture and death, they refused to deny what they knew to be true. We can share Paul's confidence. Jesus rose victorious over death:

*I am he who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen (Revelation 1:18).*

The living Christ now sits at the right hand of God, waiting to return to earth to raise and judge the dead, and grant immortality to the faithful. He is God's evidence that death is not necessarily the end. His resurrection is also God's guarantee that He will carry this out:

*He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:31).*

Through baptism into Jesus' saving name we access the promise of resurrection and immortal life, a promise and a life which nothing can ultimately destroy. We can have a permanent personal relationship with him who said:

*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live (John 11:25).*

**Claud Lamb**