

# Resurrection



**Did Jesus Really Rise  
From the Dead?**

Dick Tripp

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## Foreword

Driving home late at night, I caught a snatch of an interview on the radio. A learned and obviously esteemed man was asked his views on religion. "I suppose that I am almost a Christian," he said. "I find the Sermon on the Mount to be the most sublime passage I have read anywhere. If Christians would just live by this and forget the other emotional and magical bits of the New Testament, then I would be a full-blown Christian." I am sure that central to the

"emotional and magical bits" to which he was referring is the resurrection of Jesus.

The station faded and I fell to thinking, "Was he right? Was the resurrection of Jesus superfluous to the majestic scope of his inspired teaching? By insisting on talking about it again and again, was the Church turning people away who find that this story is not credible?"

However, my life and the life of the world has convinced me that the Sermon on the Mount was not enough. The problems confronting the human race and the pain in individuals' lives, my own and others, is such that nothing but a crucified and risen Saviour will do. The people who stand at the heart of the intractable wars in the world are not short of knowledge of the Sermon on the Mount, or its equivalent in another religion. But this head knowledge of fine sentiments does not lessen their hate or bring them closer to reconciliation. I think of those whom I know personally, who suffer as I write, and I know they need something more than fine words about how to live.

They need someone who can penetrate the very core of their aloneness. They need someone who can meet them in their suffering. They need someone who can walk with them through the valley of death. Some need someone who can guide them out of the hopeless and poisonous maze of hate and self-hate.

Call it "emotional and magical" if you will, but of one thing I am sure; nothing less than a personal confrontation with the radical and explosive force of the death and resurrection of Jesus can possibly meet their needs. More than lofty ideas, this leads to a living relationship - a relationship with a loving God who has faced and overcome all they face, and more. I have found it to be so in my own life and I believe it is true for the entire human race.

Dick Tripp's booklet speaks to me with compelling force. It rings true. It will serve many as an introduction to the central fact of the Christian faith. Readers who grasp this message, or allow this truth to grasp them, will find themselves on the threshold of an exciting new way of thinking and living.

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## **Introduction**

Over many years of church ministry I have asked literally hundreds of people whether they believe in life after death. One of the most common responses I have received is, "Well, no one has come back to tell us." Surprising as it may seem to some people, it is the belief of millions, and has been for 2,000 years, that not only did

someone rise from the dead, but that someone is alive today and it is possible to have a very real, personal relationship with him. I refer, of course, to Jesus Christ.

Whether this is true or not has tremendous implications. How is it that over the last two millennia hundreds of thousands of criminals, addicts, prostitutes and other ne'er-do-wells have experienced what Christians are accustomed to call "conversion" and have had their lives transformed into useful, productive citizens—to say nothing of countless somewhat more "decent" folk who would claim a similar experience. If this belief in the resurrection of Jesus is true, and he is still in the business of "seeking and saving the lost", then we have an explanation for this phenomena. If it is not true, then this multitude of people have been mistaken and we have to look for some other psychological explanation.

If this belief is true, then it explains why multitudes have been willing to proclaim it and to live in service to humankind at great personal cost, often of life itself. If it is not true, then as Paul says in a letter to fellow believers, "**we are to be pitied more than all people**" (I Corinthians 15:19).

If it is true, then physical death has been decisively conquered. This has implications, not only for the meaning of the next life but for this life as well. If it is not true, then we are still left with mere guesses as to the meaning of it all.

If it is true, then Jesus must be the key to understanding the significance of our relationship to God, the purpose of life and our future destiny. After all, along with many other remarkable things he said, he claimed on a number of occasions that he would be crucified and be raised from the dead on the third day. If it did not happen can we believe anything else he said?

The purpose of this booklet is to examine the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus from a historical perspective and to look at its implications, but first I wish to make the point that the message of the New Testament does not make sense without it.

### **No Christianity without the resurrection**

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the central in the message of the New Testament—it doesn't make sense without it. After a thorough survey of its teaching, Biblical scholar, G. E. Ladd, concludes:

*The entire New Testament was written from the perspective of the resurrection. Indeed, the resurrection may be called the major premise of the early Christian faith.*

The gospels tell us a lot about the remarkable things that Jesus said and did during his three years of ministry. However, it is interesting to note that in the rest of the New Testament these things are hardly mentioned again. All the emphasis is on his death and resurrection which are referred to about 100 times. Much of the

message of the New Testament—our present relationship to the living Jesus, his presence and transforming power in our lives, the final defeat of evil, our future hope—are all related to the resurrection. In later Christian writings it is the same. The cross and resurrection are central to virtually all known forms of early Christianity. It therefore follows that if the resurrection never happened we are left with the alternatives of either proclaiming a message that is based on a lie, or radically altering what the early Christians were on about. Michael Ramsey, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, has said:

*For the first disciples, the gospel without the resurrection was not merely a gospel without a final chapter; it was not a gospel at all.*

Or as John S. Whale put it in *Christian Doctrine*:

*Belief in the resurrection is not an appendage to the Christian faith; it is the Christian faith. The Gospels cannot explain the resurrection; it is the resurrection which alone explains the Gospels.*

Anyone has the right to preach a religion that has something to do with Jesus if that is what they wish to do. However, if the resurrection is not somewhere at the heart of it then it is misleading to call it Christianity. It is not the message of the New Testament or of the major Christian creeds. Neither is it what the majority of Christians have believed down the ages.

### **A historical event that can be examined**

It has often been said that the resurrection is the best attested fact in history. Momsen, the great historian of the Roman empire, was among those to make such a declaration. Sir Edward Clarke, K. C., in a letter to the Rev. E. L. Macassey, offered the following perspective:

*As a lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. 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...The Gospel evidence for the resurrection...I accept unreservedly as the testimony of truthful people to facts they were able to substantiate.*

From the perspective of a scholar of ancient literature, B. F. Westcott, one of the ablest of New Testament textual scholars, said:

*Taking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no single historical incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection.*

The evidence has proved convincing to many who have taken time to read the New Testament, even to some who have approached it with scepticism. One of the most notable cases is that of Gilbert West and Lord Lyttelton, two eminent lawyers in 18th century England. West set out to write a book disproving the conversion of Paul, while Lyttelton sought to disprove the resurrection of Christ. Both were

convinced by the evidence and became Christians as a result. They wrote their books supporting the gospel stories.

A more up-to-date example is that of Frank Morison who originally planned to write a monograph on the trial of Jesus. Confronted by the fact of the resurrection he was convinced by the evidence, became a Christian and wrote instead *Who Moved the Stone?* In the first chapter of the book, which is called "The book that refused to be written", he describes how, as he came to examine the material, he found himself, so far from writing the book that he had intended:

*compelled by the sheer force of circumstances to write quite another. It is not that the facts themselves altered, for they are recorded imperishably in the monuments and in the pages of human history. But the interpretation to be put upon the facts underwent a change. Somehow the perspective shifted – not suddenly, as in a flash or insight or inspiration, but slowly, almost imperceptibly, by the very stubbornness of the facts themselves.*

So let's explore the evidence. I will leave it to you, the reader, to judge whether you think the above quotations have a reasonable foundation.

### **Exploring the evidence**

Eleven appearances of Jesus to his followers, in the forty days from his resurrection to his ascension, are recorded in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> Later he appeared to Stephen at his stoning, Paul on the road to Damascus and John on the Island of Patmos.<sup>2</sup> In a separate booklet *Did the Writers of the New Testament Get Their Picture of Jesus Right?* I have looked at the evidence we have for eyewitness testimony in the stories reported in the gospels. As far as the resurrection appearances are concerned this is particularly evident in the stories reported in Luke, chapter twenty four, and John chapters twenty and twenty one. If you wish to consider arguments for the eyewitness nature of these writings then you may like to read this booklet, or, better still, read the accounts in the New Testament and judge for yourself.

There are other arguments, in addition to those I have presented in that booklet, supporting the integrity of these accounts. One is the unvarnished reporting of the weaknesses and unbelief of the apostles in the face of what happened. Wouldn't we expect them, as the first witnesses and founders of the Church to be idealised in an invented story. Notice too the prominence given to the testimony of the women in an age when women were not considered proper witnesses in either Jewish or Gentile law. These things were reported simply because that was the way it happened. C. H. Dodd has pointed out that the gospel narratives are free from the legendary embellishments of later apocryphal accounts. They simply recount the surprise of the

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28; Luke 24; John 20, 21; I Corinthians 15:5-7.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 7:56; 9:3-6; I Corinthians 15:8; Revelation 1:9-20.

empty tomb and the way Jesus' followers only gradually realised its significance after encounters with the risen Christ.

In this booklet, however, I wish to focus on just one line of evidence—that the events that followed that first Easter morning *could never have happened* if Jesus had not risen bodily from the grave.

### **The transformation of the disciples**

It would be hard to imagine a group of people so changed in their goals and outlook as the disciples were in the 50 days between the two Jewish feasts of Passover (when Jesus was crucified), and Pentecost (when the message of the crucified and risen Lord was first preached by them). The picture we have of the disciples before the momentous events of Passover Sunday is that of a fearful, dispirited and defeated group of men and women. The one they loved, and in whom they placed all their hopes for the future of Israel, had been brutally executed. The few who had the courage to venture out had seen the grisly details and some of them had buried him. They kept their doors locked, fully expecting that they would be next on the list. Luke captures their despair vividly in the picture he gives of Cleopas and his companion in Luke 24:13-24.

Fifty days later the picture is dramatically transformed. The disciples have been transformed from a rabble into an effective team for leading the fledging and fast growing church. Peter, who denied and forsook his Master when the crunch came, is now fearless and publicly facing the crowds of Jerusalem, proclaiming that Jesus is the promised Messiah and risen Lord. Questioned twice before the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of the land, he cannot now be cowed by threats, imprisonment, beating or death sentence. Thomas the doubter is now fully convinced that Jesus is both risen from the dead and is God. James, Jesus' brother, who had previously been sceptical of his brother's claims, is now identified with the believers. Later he will become leader of the church in Jerusalem. Mary, who had watched her son's agonising death, instead of retreating into mourning, is now praying with the disciples as they await his promised gift of the Holy Spirit. Nothing could stop them, not even the violent persecution launched by the hostile rabbi, Saul of Tarsus.

What made the difference? They did not change because their circumstances had changed. The situation looked just as desperate at Pentecost as it had at Passover. The Jewish authorities were still adamant in their opposition to Jesus' message. And yet it is obvious that *something* had happened.

Luke, who spent two years in Judea from AD 57 to 59, and who would have known many of the persons involved in these dramatic events, records the reasons the apostles themselves gave for this transformation.

*Peter to the crowds at Pentecost:*

**Men of Israel, listen...Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourself know...you with the help of wicked men, put him to death...God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. (Acts 2:22-32)**

*Peter in the temple:*

**You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. (Acts 3:15)**

*Peter before the High Court:*

**Rulers and elders...It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you completely healed...we cannot help speaking what we have seen and heard. (Acts 4:8-10,20)**

*Peter again before the High Court:*

**The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree...We are witnesses of these things. (Acts 5:30-32)**

*Peter to Cornelius' household:*

**God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. (Acts 10:40,41)**

*Paul in the synagogue at Antioch:*

**God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had travelled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people. (Acts 13:30,31).**

Accusing the Jewish rulers of murdering the promised Messiah would hardly have won friends for the disciples! That they would have so risked their lives for what they knew was a lie is unimaginable. They *believed* that Jesus had risen and that they had met with him.

One thing is clear. The disciples hadn't expected Jesus to rise from the dead, though he had told them several times that he would. Some Jewish beliefs at the time accommodated a view of resurrection, but this idea was of a general resurrection of all the righteous in the future when God's people would be vindicated. The idea of single individual, in whom all the prophecies of old were centred, rising from the dead as the guarantee of a future resurrection, was not part of their world-view. And yet it is equally clear that they were convinced that this had indeed happened.

## **The conversion of Paul**

Perhaps even more startling evidence for the truth of the resurrection is the earthquake that took place in the life of Paul of Tarsus. What transformed a zealous and merciless persecutor of the church into an ardent preacher of Jesus Christ and possibly the greatest Christian missionary of all time? Paul tells us himself: a personal encounter with the risen Jesus.

Before his conversion Paul was a scrupulously faithful Jewish rabbi, a trained theologian, and a rising star in the political world of Palestinian Judaism. He belonged to the strict Jews sect of Pharisees. He calls himself **“a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee”** (Acts 23:6). That a man who had been executed as a common criminal could be proclaimed as the promised Messiah was both folly and blasphemy to Paul. He says, **“I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison”** (Acts 22:4). In the words of his friend and travelling companion, Luke, he **“devastated”** the church (Acts 8:3). The word here is used in Greek literature of the ruin and devastation caused by an army, and in the Greek Old Testament of a wild boar ravaging a vineyard (Psalm 80:13)! And yet Paul could later describe himself as **“a skilled master builder”** laying the foundations of churches around the Roman empire by his preaching of Christ (I Corinthians 3:10).

How was it that one reared in strict Jewish monotheism would come to unhesitatingly call Jesus “Lord” in the same sense in which that title is used for God in the Greek Old Testament? What would persuade someone immersed in the Jewish culture of his day to reject circumcision as the sign of their covenant relationship with God, to eat with Gentiles, to eat non kosher food, or to write, **“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”** (Galatians 2:3-5, 11-16; 3:28; 6:12-15; Romans 14:2,3)?

The personal hostility that Paul’s new stand aroused among former Jewish colleagues was intense. His former career was in ruins. He had to flee for his life on two occasions, first from Damascus and then from Jerusalem itself. And, tirelessly, at great personal cost, he poured himself into the work of preaching this astounding message. To try to explain all this without reference to the resurrection, as someone has put it, is like trying to explain Roman history without reference to Julius Caesar.

Paul’s confidence in the reality of the resurrection was twofold. First, he had personally met the risen Christ. Luke, who became one of Paul's closest friends and travelled with him on several of his journeys, tells the story of that encounter in Acts chapter nine. Later in the book he repeats it twice in Paul’s own words (Acts 22 and 26). It was an event that marked Paul for life.

But his faith is not built solely upon a personal experience, marvellous as it may have been. The testimony of other reliable eyewitnesses is also of the utmost importance to Paul. Scholars are unanimous about the genuineness of Paul's first

letter to the church at Corinth, written in AD 53 or 54. Paul concludes this letter with a long discussion of the subject of the resurrection—first the resurrection of Jesus, and then that of all believers at his coming again. He gives a list of some of the people to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection. **“He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living...Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me...”** (I Corinthians 15:5-8). Peter and James were personally known to Paul, as no doubt many of the 500 would have been. Of the 500 witnesses, William Lillie, head of the Department of Biblical Study at the University of Aberdeen, wrote:

*St. Paul says in effect, “If you do not believe me, you can ask them.” Such a statement in an admittedly genuine letter written within thirty years of the event, is almost as strong evidence as one could hope to get for something that happened nearly two thousand years ago.*

On the basis of his own experience, confirmed by the testimony of numerous others of his contemporaries, Paul, like the original disciples, was convinced that the crucified Jesus was now risen.

It is interesting that Paul experienced Jesus in a reverse manner to the way his other disciples had. Whereas they had known him as a human friend, then had seen him crucified and then experienced him in his resurrected body, Paul began with the resurrected Jesus. From that he worked backwards. His subsequent thinking about the meaning of Jesus’ death and the significance of his human life was coloured by his experience of him as the risen Lord.

### **The content of the Christian message**

A further powerful testimony to the reality of the resurrection is the very content of the Christian message itself. It is significant that after the resurrection, in spite of persecution, hardship and martyrdom, there is not a pessimistic note in the New Testament. A dominant theme is that death has been conquered once for all by the resurrection of Christ. Paul, facing possible execution in a Roman prison, cannot decide whether he would rather live or die, **“I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body”** (Philippians 1:23,24). Writing to Christians in Thessalonica who have lost friends who have died, he urges them not to **“grieve like other people, who have no hope. We believe Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him”** (1 Thessalonians 4:13,14). As far as Paul is concerned Jesus has **“destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”** (2 Timothy 1:10).

The writer of Hebrews declares that Jesus came to **“free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death”** and commends those who **“joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves**

had better and lasting possessions” (Hebrews 10:34). And the apostle Peter says that Jesus has given us **“a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and ... an inheritance that can never perish, spoil of fade— kept in heaven for you”** (I Peter 1:3,4)..

Such confidence comes on page after page of the New Testament. The history of the Roman empire for the next 250 years abounds with incredible stories of heroism and often joy in the face of suffering and often martyrdom. They believed that death, “the last enemy” had been defeated in the death and resurrection of their Saviour. The philosophy that lies behind the old American Civil War song “John Brown's body lies a moulding in the grave, but his soul goes marching on,” applied to Jesus, could not have accounted for such confidence.

Altogether there are about 630 references to resurrection and eternal life in the New Testament. It is the theme that undergirds everything else in the Christian gospel: the forgiveness of sin and guilt; the possibility of living a genuinely human life that is pleasing to God; the ultimate triumph of good over evil; the eternal destiny beyond death of those who trust in Christ.

The ultimate triumph of good over evil is a confident theme of the New Testament. It is in the light of Christ's resurrection that Paul urged the Christians at Corinth to **“always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain”** (I Corinthians 15:58). By his resurrection Christ had conquered death, and therefore evil which is the cause of death. His ultimate victory when he would come again to judge the world was therefore guaranteed. All that had been done sincerely in his name would be rewarded. There are something like 300 references to this event in the New Testament—when he would eliminate evil and establish God's reign of justice and truth.

The new Testament writers saw all these things as the fulfilment of all that the prophets of the Old Testament had been seeking. Peter tells how the prophets **“searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.”** (I Peter 1:10,11). Without the resurrection, the work that God had begun in calling Abraham and Moses, as well as in leading and teaching his people over the centuries, would have been like a great unfinished symphony. Archbishop Ramsey reminds us:

*It must not be forgotten that the teaching and ministry of Jesus [alone] did not provide the disciples with a Gospel, and led them from puzzle to paradox until the Resurrection gave them the key.*

That the early Christians should have been so confident in proclaiming this message, without the absolute certainty that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, goes against all the canons of sound reason.

Simon Greenleaf was the Royall Professor of Law at Harvard University. His famous work entitled *A Treatise on the Law of Evidence*, written in 1842, is still considered one of the greatest authorities on evidence in the entire literature of legal procedure. In his book *An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists by the Rules of Evidence Administered in the Courts of Justice*, written while at Harvard, he reviews the motives the writers of the gospels would have had for *not* proclaiming these truths if Jesus had not risen from the dead and they had not known this fact as certainly as they knew any other fact. He concludes:

*And their writings show them to have been men of vigorous understandings. If their testimony was not true, there was no possible motive for its fabrication.*

### **The rapid growth of the Christian church**

That there was a church at all is also remarkable testimony to the truth of the resurrection. Luke, who was closely associated with people involved in the events he describes, documents the rapid spread of Christianity in the very earliest period. On the day of Pentecost he mentions 3,000 believers and shortly after, 5,000 (Acts 2:41; 4:4). **“More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number”** (Acts 5:14). **“The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith”** (Acts 6:7). All this was happening within walking distance of the place where the crucified and discredited Jesus had been buried, an unlikely place to start a new religion that was based on his resurrection!

From Jerusalem the gospel spread outwards through Samaria and Syria to what is now Turkey, and on to Macedonia, Greece and Rome. The Roman author Tacitus (who regarded Christianity as a harmful superstition) wrote of “a great multitude” of Christ’s followers who gave their lives in Nero’s persecution in Rome only 34 years after Jesus’ death. Around the city of Rome itself there are about 600 miles of catacombs where, during the first three centuries, something like 4 million Christians were buried. There is evidence also that within a generation of Jesus’ death and resurrection the gospel had spread to Egypt and westwards to India and Mesopotamia. And the growth continued. For example, in a letter to the Emperor Trajan about 112 AD, Pliny, the Roman governor of Bythinia (on the south coast of the Black Sea), expressed his concern at the growing number of Christians in his territory.

The birth and growth of the Christian Church from a tiny band of frightened men and women to a world-wide movement is remarkable. Without the resurrection it is inexplicable. It is even more remarkable when you consider that this was a religion that demanded the highest standard of morality and social awareness, as well as a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord. This kind of commitment was

unknown in other religions. It might also involve social ostracism, imprisonment, torture and death.

If we don't accept the truth of the resurrection, what are we going to put in its place? Tom Wright, one of Britain's leading New Testament scholars today, says:

*We know of several Jewish movements of revolt in the first century. In most cases, they ended with the death of the leader. Where such groups carried on, it was because a new leader emerged. No new leader, no continuing movement. Without the resurrection, there is a gaping hole in the middle of the first-century history that nothing else can plug.*

The continued life and growth of the church, and the impact of the gospel on the lives of people over nearly two thousand years, is also a strong pointer to the truth of the resurrection. Professor C. E. B. Cranfield of Durham sums this up well:

*Last of all must be mentioned the continuance of the Christian church through nineteen and a half centuries, in spite of bitter and often prolonged persecution, in spite of all its own terrible unworthiness and incredible follies, in spite of its divisions, and in spite of all the changes which the passing years and centuries have brought. The fact that the church still produces today (as it has produced in all the past centuries of its existence) human beings, who, trusting in Jesus Christ crucified, risen and exalted, show in their lives, for all their frailty, a recognisable beginning of being freed from self for God and neighbour, is an impressive pointer to the truth of the Resurrection.*

It is a fact that more people are becoming Christians today *than at any time in history*, particularly in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

## **Summary**

Sceptics have always been able to come up with alternative theories to the resurrection. For example, it has been suggested that Jesus wasn't really dead and revived in the cool of the tomb. He then managed to remove the stone, evade the guards and convince the disciples that he had conquered death once and for all! Another explanation offered is that the disciples stole the body and spread the story that he had risen (amazingly they managed to turn society upside down and face persecution and death without any one of them letting the cat out of the bag!). A third idea put forward is that the disciples went back to the wrong tomb, found it empty and *thought* he must have risen. For some unknown reason even the authorities couldn't find the right tomb and produce the body! Or maybe this varied group of men and women all had hallucinations of a similar sort which convinced them that Jesus had risen.

I suggest that, in view of the evidence, such theories look rather ridiculous. Whatever changed the disciples must have been something both clear and powerful.

Clear, to make itself felt to people who were in no way predisposed to accept it. Powerful, to remould once and forever their ideas of what the Messiah had come to achieve. Only the resurrection satisfies both conditions.

The Jewish scholar, J. Jeremias, has demonstrated that about fifty tombs were venerated by the Jews before the time of Jesus. In view of such interest in the tombs of holy men, J. Delorme asks:

*In these circumstances, is it possible that the original community of Jerusalem could have been completely uninterested in the tomb where Jesus was laid after his death?*

The disciples were not interested simply because Jesus was not there. The Bible teacher R. A. Torrey summed it up:

*The bodily resurrection of Christ is the cornerstone of Christianity, the Waterloo of infidelity, the Gibraltar of Christian evidences.*

### **Some implications of the Resurrection**

If Jesus did rise from the dead in a real, but now transformed body, as the records declare, there are certain implications which must inevitably follow. I want to suggest four.

#### **Jesus' resurrection substantiates his claims**

Paul says that Jesus **"was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead"** (Romans 1:4). Jesus spoke of his coming death at least sixteen times prior to it happening. On a number of occasions he also included references to his resurrection. Twice he was challenged to give some miraculous sign to prove his authority to act in the way he had. In both instances he indicated in picture language that his resurrection on the third day would be evidence enough (Matthew 12:38-40; John 2:19-22).

On his final journey to Jerusalem he spoke more plainly to his disciples of his coming death and resurrection though they couldn't grasp what he was talking about (eg. Matthew 20:17-19). How could they? None of this fitted their views of the Messiah. That he did rise demonstrated that he knew who he was and what he was about. If he had not risen he would have been proved false.

The resurrection was also the reversal of the verdict passed on Jesus by the Sanhedrin (the Jewish High Court). In terms of Jewish law the only construction that could be placed on the death of Jesus was that he was under the curse of God. He had been condemned as a blasphemer pretending to be the promised Messiah, and such a death was appropriate. But if Jesus was raised from the dead, the verdict of the highest human court was overturned by the highest authority of all. It was the vindication that his words and his works were not of Satanic origin, but the very works of God himself. Noted biblical scholar John Stott says:

*Condemned for blasphemy, he was now designated Son of God by the resurrection. Executed for sedition, for claiming to be a king, God made him 'both Lord and Christ'. Hanged on a tree under the curse of God, he was vindicated as the Saviour of sinners, the curse he bore being due to us and not to him.*

### **Jesus' resurrection guarantees the effects of his death**

The New Testament constantly affirms that the death of Jesus was not merely the death of a martyr in a righteous cause, but a sacrifice initiated by God himself to pay for the sins of the human race. In some incredible way Jesus was making our forgiveness possible. Passages such as these are typical: **"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: 'While we were still sinners, Christ died for us'"** (Romans 5:8); **"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins"** (Matthew 26:28); **"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their sins against them"** (2 Corinthians 5:19).

In raising Christ from the dead God was setting his seal of approval on what Christ had done. In one of his final words from the cross Jesus had cried, **"It is finished"** (John 19:30). The Greek word here has a number of meanings. In the business world it meant the payment of a debt. One could say that the resurrection is the receipt for the payment that had been made. His death and resurrection were part of the one act. Paul says, **"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification"** (Romans 4:25). His sufferings on our behalf make our forgiveness possible—but it is the risen Christ who offers that forgiveness to us and guarantees it for us.

The Roman world was largely unanimous that crucifixion was a horrible, disgusting business. It would not be mentioned in polite society. And yet it has become a symbol beloved by millions. Nothing but the resurrection could have produced this understanding and transformation.

### **Jesus' resurrection guarantees the triumph of good over evil.**

Jesus' resurrection is pictured in the New Testament not only as a triumph over death, but also as a triumph over sin and evil which are ultimately the cause of death. He is heralded as the victor over Satan and all that lies behind the brokenness so evident in our world today.

The victory of the allied forces on the beaches of Normandy on D-day was not the end of the war. However, it did guarantee the final defeat of the German forces. Similarly, the victory achieved by Christ through his death and resurrection on that first Easter morning is the guarantee of God's final triumph over evil. By his perfect life, his death for our sins and his resurrection, it is Christ who has won the right to be the final judge of the human race. Paul, preaching in Athens, put it this way, **"[God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has**

**appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead”** (Acts 17:31). As the prominent American theologian, Carl Henry, aptly says:

*Jesus' resurrection in history's mid-course gave to everyone a public preview of the end-time and its moral implications...The Risen Jesus is unveiled in advance as the future judge of the whole human race.*

**Jesus' resurrection guarantees the believer's share in the final victory.**

At the beginning of each harvest it was part of Jewish tradition to offer the first of their crops in the temple. This offering was known as the “firstfruits”. Using this image, the New Testament describes Jesus’ resurrection as the firstfruits of a greater harvest yet to come. The resurrection is not just something for Jesus, but an experience which all of his followers will share. **“Christ the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him”** (I Corinthians 15:23). Those who put their faith in him are **“co-heirs”** of his kingdom and glory (Romans 8:17). We can barely even begin to imagine all that this will imply, though the New Testament does give us some very meaningful hints. William Fitch expresses it like this:

*When we are drawn to him at his appearing, we will experience the wonder of resurrection nearness and resurrection fellowship...All distance will be annihilated, all shadows dissipated, all fellowship completed, all joy consummated...we shall share the life of his eternity.*

## **Conclusion**

The risen Christ, who lives today, offers people the benefits of his death and resurrection if they will trust in him as their Saviour and submit to him as their Lord. He has demonstrated his love in paying for our sins. He now offers to come into our lives by the Holy Spirit and to restore us to full fellowship with the living God. Joy Webb, a British Salvation Army evangelist, describes the conversion of a young Jew in her book *This is Joy*. Her musical group, *The Joystings*, were performing to a packed hall in Southampton. During the first part of the programme one of the group spoke of what Easter meant to her personally and expressed her belief in the presence of the risen Christ in her life. Towards the end of the programme Joy gave a short message and invited any young people who wished to accept the Christian message for themselves to come forward and kneel at the communion rail. Several did. A hush fell on the audience, and then she noticed another young man come slowly forward to join them. Afterwards, when packing up equipment she felt a touch on her arm. Turning, she saw a local Christian with this young man, whom he introduced as a Jew. She says:

*I'd turned to greet him but the words died on my lips. I've heard older folk, particularly veteran ... Christians, talk about seeing such a change in a person, but frankly, until this moment I had never seen it myself. To say he was radiant would be a complete understatement. He stood there smiling. There was no*

*need for any words; we all knew what had happened. "I feel," he said, "as though I have moved from the Old Testament to the New. When that young lady spoke about the risen presence of Jesus Christ being in her life I knew that it was completely and utterly true and that this is what I had been looking for to give meaning to all the teaching of my faith. I feel wonderful!"*

Not all conversions are as dramatic as this, but the new life in Christ that the New Testament talks about is available to all who desire it. The Bible describes this experience in a number of ways. It is called being "**born again**", "**born of the Spirit**", "**receiving the Holy Spirit**", being "**in Christ**", or "**receiving eternal life**". Sometimes it is spoken of as passing "**from death to life**" (John 5:24) or being "**raised with Christ**" (Colossians 3:1). In its simplest terms it is the risen Christ forgiving my sins, reconciling me to his Father, entering my life by his Spirit and guaranteeing his continued presence through the varying journeys of this life and beyond.

If you desire this relationship with the true and living God, who made himself known in Jesus, may I suggest that you talk to God about it. You may like to use words something like this:

*O God, I am amazed at your generosity. I don't deserve it. I can hardly believe it.*

*I am beginning to sense you are here, and I realise that you came to this earth for me in Jesus Christ.*

*I believe he died for my sins and is alive, so that by his Spirit he can come into my heart.*

*I realise that he wants to involve me in his ongoing work in this world, and I am prepared for that.*

*Lord, here and now I accept in faith this gift of life in Jesus.*

*Please help me stick to this decision, and enable me to always appreciate it and live worthy of it.*

If you make this commitment, then get a good modern translation of the New Testament and find out more about your living Lord. Also find some other believers who can encourage you in this new adventure.

Michael Green, in his book *You Must Be Joking* gives the following useful illustration. In the musical *Godspell* the joy of the resurrection is shown through dance. Members of the audience are invited to come up on to the stage and dance with the cast. They do not become the cast, but they do share the same experience. Now the cast, so to speak, is the first generation of disciples: Peter, James and John and others who saw the risen Christ. We cannot join that cast of eyewitnesses. But we can join them in the dance of Christian experience by committing our lives to the risen Jesus.

Come, join the dance!