

Welcome to Christianity Explained week 3.

This talk is entitled "The Resurrection - The Christian Hope"
or "You can't keep a good man down"

The handout gives you a summary of this talk and some of the passages that I will be using and others that you can look up when you get home.

At our Easter service a few weeks ago we began with the following:

Lord Jesus we greet you
Risen from the dead

We thought that your love had reached a dead end
Now we see it is the way of life

We thought that your life was wasted
Now we see it is raised in glory

We thought your suffering was in vain
Now we see God's purpose in it all

We thought that death was the end of you
Now we see life triumph over death

We thought that this life was pointless
Now you have given us hope

Lord Jesus we greet you
Risen from the dead

These statements I think sum up the feelings of the disciples both before and after the resurrection.

They go from meeting behind locked doors, afraid;
to now boldly proclaiming the good news of Jesus the risen Lord.

They go from living in fear of the Jewish authorities
to standing in front of them charging them with murdering Jesus.

Something very dramatic must have happened to change these people in a period of about 7 weeks.

So what does the Bible tell us ?

In Mark 14:50 we see the disciples deserting Jesus when he is arrested, then in verses 66 to 72 Peter publicly disowning Jesus.

John 20:19 tells us that the disciples met behind locked doors for fear of the Jews.

The disciples are afraid.

They do not want to be associated with this Jesus character - it's life threatening.

They are also confused.

Jesus had been proclaimed as the Messiah, God's promised King who was to be God himself. We see Peter making this bold claim in Mark chapter 8.

In Mark chapter 11 we have Jesus making his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, we celebrate this as Palm Sunday and in verse 10 the people are proclaiming the coming kingdom of David.

People are looking forward to, they are expecting Jesus to usher in God's kingdom any moment now. **Out** go the hated Romans, **here** comes God himself!

Unfortunately, the disciples and everyone else have put Jesus into a box.

They expect him to do certain things **and** in a certain way.

When he doesn't they either reject him or rebuke him or question him or are stunned into silence.

Jesus on a number of occasions asks his disciples "Don't you understand?"

Now with their friend, their King, their God, dead and cursed on a tree, they just don't get it.

John 20:9 tells us that even after seeing the empty tomb for themselves, they still did not understand. And this is after spending 3 years as Jesus' closest friends, his confidants.

This tells us something fundamental about God. He will **not** fit inside a box.

We can never know God enough to be able to put him into a box.

If we can then what we have in the box is **not** God.

There are 3 basic facts concerning the Resurrection:

Firstly, the tomb was empty

Secondly, the body had disappeared

and thirdly, Jesus was seen.

Turn with me now to Mark 16:1-8 on page 1024. READ MARK 16

Here Mark gives us the first 2 facts and this is where Mark leaves us.
The question on everyone's lips is "Where's the body?"

If the Jews or the Romans had taken it then why did they never produce it?
After all here are a bunch of people going round claiming that the Jesus that **they** crucified was alive.

We know that the Jews wanted this dangerous sect rooted out and destroyed.
We have the story of Saul recorded in the book of Acts persecuting the early Church.

If they had it then they could so easily have crushed this movement by producing the body and showing that the disciples were **lying** about the resurrection.
But they never did.

If the disciples had taken the body, then they all died for a lie, knowing it to be a lie.
People will die for a lie if they believe that the lie is the truth,
but nobody would willingly die for a lie knowing that the lie was a lie.

Indeed, they were all tortured and martyred for this lie because they all absolutely swore that Jesus had risen.
They could not deny the truth.

When I was a child I used to get up to mischief, I did a few things I knew to be wrong.
I have a brother who for the most part did things right.

So when something happened I would usually get the blame instead of him and that was okay because it was normally me, and I would grudgingly accept my punishment knowing that I fully deserved it.

But on occasion I would get accused of something that I hadn't done, and I would keep protesting that it wasn't me, I hadn't done it.
My father would threaten me, and I would keep saying that it wasn't me.

"Don't lie to me", my father would say, "Don't make your punishment worse."
"But it wasn't me, I didn't do it" I would cry.

My father would smack me. "Stop lying to me and tell me the truth" he would shout.
"I am telling the truth" I would shout back, "I didn't do it".

My father would then reluctantly accept that yes I had been telling the truth after all.
All through the confrontation I had maintained my innocence, not simply because I didn't want to get a smack, but because it was the truth.

I could not deny the truth and neither could the disciples.

So what other evidence does the Bible give us?

Well, Jesus is seen 11 times in the Gospel accounts.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth telling them that over 500 people saw Jesus at one time, many of whom were still alive. And Paul says that if you don't believe me then go and ask them yourself.

There's doubting Thomas towards the end of John's Gospel, who upon seeing Jesus exclaimed "My Lord and my God"

There is more evidence that I'm not able to cover in such a short talk but they are all looked at in the book Who moved the stone? by Frank Morison.

More on this book later.

The resurrection is an event in history which also points to a future event - The Day of Judgement.

The resurrection means that death is not the end.

If Jesus can get through death, then he can get **you** through death.

Jesus died, Christians will die.

Jesus rose to life, Christians **will** rise to life.

In his 1st letter to the believers at Thessalonica Paul calls death, sleep.

The worst of enemies, the best of names.

Why?

Because Jesus has risen, the Christian hope for the future is grounded here in the certainty of the past.

Here is an interesting statistic: Life is 100% fatal.

So if life is 100% fatal, what have we to look forward to as Christians?

Well, in the days of the early Church there was a Christian who died for his faith, called Justin Martyr.

This is an excerpt of what he said shortly before he died:

The Roman Prefect said to him, "You are said to be a learned man and think you are acquainted with true doctrine. If you should be scourged and beheaded are you persuaded that you will ascend into heaven? Do you think that you will ascend into heaven and receive certain rewards?"

Justin replied, "I don't think, I know and am fully persuaded"

For Justin and all Christians, the resurrection of Jesus makes heaven a certainty.

No more wondering am I good enough, have I done enough?

I know.

So what will heaven be like?

We don't know for certain but John's vision of heaven recorded in the book of Revelation outlines 4 characteristics for us.

1. **Intimacy** (21:6-8. "He said to me: It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars - their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.")

Heaven will be like the intimacy of a father - child relationship or a husband - wife relationship.

That is how well we will know God. Indeed, there will be a feeling of ecstasy when we see Christ face to face.

The relief will be like quenching your thirst when you are totally dehydrated.

2. **Community** (22:2. "On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing 12 crops of fruit, yielding it's fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.")

Heaven won't just be God and me. Heaven is not a individualistic place.

There will be glorious cultural diversity and cosmopolitan harmony.

All the rivalry between nations will be healed and we will live in unhindered love and fellowship because we are all now like Jesus.

3. **Security** (John tells us that the city had a great high wall with angels guarding the entrances.")

As human beings we have a great yearning for a place of our own.

When you first moved away from home, you may only have had a tiny room in a hall of residence, but the first thing you did was to make it your own.

Well heaven will be our place and these great walls tell us it will be totally secure.

Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust and thief can not get in.

Totally secure.

4. **Perfection** (John continues with his description of the heavenly city, telling us that the 12 gates were made of a single pearl and the great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.")

Heaven will be a place of overwhelming beauty.

It will be like nothing you have ever seen or could really imagine.

Perhaps you have had the experience of seeing a magnificent view and of being left speechless and awestruck by it.

Well heaven will be so perfect that it will leave us speechless.

So heaven will be an experience of intimacy, community, security and perfection.

It will be utterly fulfilling and Christ's resurrection guarantees that **he** will take us there.

But with this hope there is also a warning.

For the Christian, the Bible holds the answers to life and death through the resurrection. Here a dead man is raised to life and here is clear proof that there **is** life beyond the grave.

Turn with me now to Acts 10:39-43 on page 1105.

Here Peter is talking with Cornelius, a Roman centurion, telling him what Jesus himself commanded Peter and the other disciples to preach.

READ ACTS 10 : 39 - 43

Those passages contain 4 warnings:

1. All people will be raised (Verse 42)

Jesus is the judge of the living and the dead.

You can't judge a dead person, so the dead will have to be raised to judgement.

This tells us that this world is not all there is, there is a world to come.

2. All people will be judged (Verse 42 again)

There is going to be a day of reckoning, the Day of Judgement, which we must **all** face.

Some of you may not like the sound of that, but it's actually a very good thing because the alternative if it is true, does not bear thinking about.

Let me give you an example.

You may have seen the film Schindler's List, and you may remember the scene where a mother and child are brutally murdered in full view of a tiny toddler dressed in red.

The book, on which the film was based, says this. "Later in the day after he'd absorbed a ration of brandy, Oscar understood the proposition in it's clearest terms: they (the S.S. guards) permitted witnesses, like the toddler in red, because they believed that all the witnesses would perish too."

The guards did what they liked because they thought that they would never have to give an account.

They did what they liked because as far as they were concerned there would be no day of reckoning, no judgement.

Would you want to live in a world where evil does not matter?

The promise of this verse is that no-one will escape justice, they will not get away with the evil that they have done.

3. **The risen Christ will be the Judge** (Again in verse 42)

And there can be no better judge for 2 reasons:

Firstly, he is man, he knows what it is like to be human, he will be able to sympathise and understand with what we have been through.

Secondly, he is God so he will be in full possession of the facts, unlike my father punishing me because he thought I was lying when I wasn't.

God will not be like that because he knows everything we say, do and think.

4. **People will be divided into 2 groups** (Verse 43)

Those who believe in Jesus receive forgiveness of sins (note the present tense) whilst those who do not believe will not receive.

So the decision that is before you tonight is this,

Are you going to allow Christ to pay the price and receive his forgiveness or are you going to pay the price yourself ?

Some of you may be thinking that you need some time to think about it, which is fine.

But how much time do you have to decide?

Well, you have until you die or until the 2nd coming.

That's how long you've got, the problem is we don't know when either of these events are going to happen.

You could be sitting there thinking "I want to know exactly what it is I'm letting myself in for before I decide." This is fine too.

But Jesus says, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul?"

Believing is a step of faith.

Remember last week as we looked at the cross that God must love **you** very much for him to send his son to **die** for you.

Forgiveness is a gift, you can't earn it, it's like receiving a cheque; my life for your sins signed Jesus.

Let me show you that forgiveness in action.

I want you to see that we can all be forgiven, no matter what we have done.

Mark 16:7 says "tell the disciples **and** Peter"

Now why say it like that?

Why mention Peter at all, he is after all one of Jesus' disciples - isn't he?

It's almost as if Peter is no longer considered a disciple.

But is this a reasonable assumption to make?

Well, Peter was a disciple, he did proclaim Jesus as the Messiah, but he had publicly disowned Jesus not just once, but 3 times.

Jesus had previously stated that anyone who disowned him in front of men, he would disown in front of God.

Which is precisely what Peter had done that fatal night in the courtyard.

But then in John chapter 21, we see Jesus seeking out Peter, going to Peter, meeting him where he was, forgiving him and commanding Peter to follow him once more.

He did that for Peter, he did it for me, and he **will** do it for you.

The question you should be asking is this - Am I going to trust Jesus to pay the price for my sinfulness, or not?

Receiving and unwrapping this gift of forgiveness is **at** the very heart of the Christian faith.

You don't have to wait until Easter 2001 to claim the hope that the resurrection gives you. Every day, our lives should be a response to the risen Lord.

No Cross, No Resurrection.

No Resurrection, No Christianity.

No Christianity, no Hope in the face of death.

That may sound arrogant and intolerant but in raising Jesus to life God has revealed his power and has put this power to work in Christ and **only** in Christ.

"I am the way, the truth and the life" says Jesus, and he proves it by the cross and resurrection.

The pain and the evil of the cross speak to us of God's loving and creative capacity to take human evil and to turn it into the means of divine blessing.

Both the cross and resurrection tell us of God's judgement upon evil.

The Resurrection shows us 3 great attributes of God:

His Power,
His Judgement,
and above all, His Love.

Let me illustrate the challenge of the resurrection to you.

In the late 18th century reports began to come from Australia of a bizarre new creature. It was a furry mammal about the size of a rabbit, but with webbed feet and a bill like a duck. Most extraordinary of all it reproduced by laying eggs unlike any other mammal.

The duck-billed platypus was so utterly unlike any other known creature that even when the 1st skin was sent back to Europe, many zoologists regarded it as a hoax.

It wasn't until a female platypus was shot just after laying an egg and found to have another egg still inside her body that the experts had to concede that the duck-billed platypus really was unique - an egg laying mammal.

The problem with the platypus was that it contradicted peoples presuppositions. People preferred to dismiss it despite the wealth of evidence in it's favour, rather than admit that they were wrong and change their theories.

It's the same with the resurrection. Many are unwilling to take the evidence seriously, because to admit that it actually happened would be too challenging and too demanding.

They want to keep God in his box.

There are 3 basic tenets, or core beliefs, which you must believe to be called a Christian:

Firstly, that Jesus is the Son of God, we looked at that 2 weeks ago
The Cross, which we looked at last week
and now the Resurrection

You may still have a number of questions about the evidence for the Resurrection. In such a short time I can't cover all of them, so for those who want an in-depth study of the evidence there are 3 books that we recommend in this course:

The Evidence for the Resurrection by Sir Norman Anderson
which are available at the back for you to take.

The Case of the Vanishing Corpse by Kel Richards

and Who moved the stone? by Frank Morison.

Frank Morison was someone who set out to disprove the resurrection and ended up being brought to faith instead.

Let me read you the preface to his book. READ THE PREFACE

It really is a compelling book, and I certainly found it helpful working through the evidence when I became a Christian, so I can wholeheartedly recommend it.

Christianity is unique in a number of ways, 2 we've seen tonight:

God actively seeking out the lost, in our case Peter, to bring them into the right relationship with himself

and bodily resurrection which gives us our hope and a warning.

Next week we look at another:

Being saved by God's Grace and not by **our** works.

So let me end where I began.

Lord Jesus we greet you
Risen from the dead

We thought that your love had reached a dead end
Now we see it is the way of life

We thought that your life was wasted
Now we see it is raised in glory

We thought your suffering was in vain
Now we see God's purpose in it all

We thought that death was the end of you
Now we see life triumph over death

We thought that this life was pointless
Now you have given us hope

Lord Jesus we greet you
Risen from the dead