

THE TOMB WAS EMPTY—JESUS IS ALIVE!!

IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH... RESURRECTION?¹

Many people are fascinated with what have been referred to as near-death experiences.

- Numerous books and TV programs have explored the stories of those who tell of life beyond death.
- Some people talk about a momentary release from the body as they lay on an operating table while medical personnel frantically tried to revive them.
- Others testify of serious accidents that momentarily seemed to break the grip of this life.

While these stories are inconclusive and arguable, we have convincing evidence that there is life after death—the record of what happened after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

1. What is the Easter event?

Christians for 20 centuries have been declaring that the Easter event is the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave.

- They lived and died believing that they too would someday be brought back from death in a real body.
- This faith changed lives in the past... has it changed your life?
- Millions of *believers* throughout history have chosen to die as martyrs rather than deny their faith in Christ.

Do you believe that the Easter event is a real historical occurrence with great significance for you today?

- Believing or not believing in it is a life-or-death matter—it determines your eternal destiny.

2. What does resurrection mean?

When Christians talk about their future resurrection, they think of coming back from death in a real body, the same person they were when they died but... transformed.

- Our future resurrection is not to be confused with the resuscitation of a corpse... that's what occurred with Lazarus (John 11) and in several other New Testament instances.

The Christian hope of resurrection is also far more than living forever in a ghostlike form.

- Cartoonists often depict the dead as floating about in space, their insubstantial form bearing some resemblance to their physical appearance on earth.

READ... John 11:25-26 "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

What *believers* can anticipate is living again in real bodies, knowing who we are, and recognizing one another.

- Yet this new body, which Christians anticipate, will not be an exact replica of the one we have now.

¹ Based on RBC Ministries, Discovery Series pamphlet by the same title, written by Herb Vander Lugt

- On the basis of what we read in the New Testament, it will possess powers unknown today.
- We won't need telephones to communicate or vehicles to go from one place to another.

The new body will be perfectly suited for life in a new sinless environment—heaven.

We might think of it this way... the God who originated life and invented biochemistry touched the cold, dead body of Jesus with his creative power.

- Jesus body was transformed into a perfect instrument for his immortal human spirit, passing through the grave clothes without unwrapping them and the sealed tomb door without opening it.
- One day, God will again use his creative power to give all of his children a body like the one Jesus received at his resurrection and in which he lives today... *“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.”*²

If this seems too wonderful to be true... let's consider that the Bible tells us that this is precisely what every *believer* can anticipate.

3. Christ's resurrection and our destiny.

The *believer* will be raised to eternal life.

READ... 1Corinthians 6:14 By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.

READ... John 5:28-29 “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”

Jesus Christ came back from the grave in a real body, having defeated “bodily death.”

- That's the essence of what the apostle Paul declared in 1Corinthians 15.
- He dealt with the subject of resurrection with much detail because some church members in Corinth were saying and teaching that Christians should not expect a “bodily resurrection” after death.

Paul set out to correct this wrong thinking... he did so in six steps—which we will take a closer look at, in this and the next messages for our own comfort, understanding and assurance.

- First, he showed them that Jesus Christ did come back from death in a real body. (vv.1-11).
- Second, he explained how important it is to believe in the resurrection—that the denial of the resurrection is a denial of the whole Christian message (vv.12-19. 29-34).

² 1John 3:2-3

- Third, he pointed out the vital connection between Christ’s resurrection and the assurance of the Christian’s resurrection (vv.20-28).
- Fourth, he emphasized the continuity and diversity of *believers’* resurrection bodies (vv.33-38).
- Fifth, he set forth some of the characteristics of our new bodies (vv.39-49).
- And finally, he concluded with a shout of triumph and a ringing challenge. (vv.50-58).

4. A verifiable event

(1Corinthians 15:1-11) *Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.*

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

The first point Paul hammered home was this: “We know that Jesus came back from death in a resurrected body; and since this is a recent historical fact, no one has a right to say that a bodily resurrection is either impossible or undeniable.”

- In this letter to the Church at Corinth he reminded his readers of the message they had heard when they professed faith in Christ.
- The message was that Jesus Christ died, paid the price for sin, was buried, and rose again just as the Old Testament Scriptures had prophesied.

Paul regarded his Damascus-road experience as a valid personal encounter with the risen Christ, not as a mere vision. (See Acts 9:1-19 for Saul’s conversion)

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.

The doubters in Corinth faced with the apostles personal testimonies knew that Paul and the others were not liars.

- They could not produce evidence that the people who testified about their meetings with Jesus after his resurrection were not true.
- They had little choice but to acknowledge that Jesus Christ was resurrected in a real body.
- There were too many people around who could testify that they had seen the risen Christ.

Jesus' ascension was the movement of the Eternal Son, in his assumed and glorified humanity, from earth to heaven in order to sit at the right hand of the Father.

- He returned to his original glory, but not only as the Son of God—he returned to his Father as the Son of Man as well.

The ascension of Jesus stands with his incarnation, his sacrificial death and his resurrection as the foundation of biblical Christian faith.

5. Are you sure that it really happened?

You can be certain because we have the written record of people who were there when it happened.

- First-century people wrote the New Testament—most of who saw Jesus after his resurrection.
- The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a verifiable historical event—the truth is that Jesus did come back from death... and because he lives, so shall we live also.
- Jesus said, *“Because I live, you also will live.”*³ *“He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”*⁴

Where do we go from here?

The cold reality of death confronts us daily. The obituary page of the newspaper is just one of many reminders that we are destined to die.

- Even a nutritious diet, regular exercise, super-vitamins, and the best medical care won't prevent death.
- But will death mean the end of our existence? Or is there a future life?
- And if so, what will it be like? Can we do anything to get ready for it?

My prayer is that this series of messages The Tomb Was Empty—Jesus is Alive will help you to live a more fulfilling life and encourage you to be prepared for what will happen when you die.

- In the final messages of this series we will search out the answers given in the Bible.
- The Holy Spirit—our Counselor and Teacher will reveal to us what death will bring... filling us with *“the peace that surpasses all understanding.”*

³ John 14:19b

⁴ John 11:26