

The Necessity of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

By Alfred B. Davis
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Back in the late 1980's there was a battle for control of the Southern Baptist Convention between the conservative and liberal factions. One conservative pastor summed up the difference between the conservatives and the liberals by saying, "If they could absolutely prove, beyond any shadow of doubt, that the resurrection of Jesus never took place, come the next Sunday the conservatives would all close their churches, stay home, or go fishing. The liberals, on the other hand, would get up the next Sunday morning and go to church as if nothing had happened."

Here is what this pastor is saying. He is saying that conservatives look to the Bible as their final authority in all manner of faith and practice; the ultimate reason for what they do and believe. Liberals, on the other hand, do not. Liberals look to the Bible as a collection of moral ideals and teachings from which they pick and choose, no better or worse than any other collection of religious or inspirational writings. Consequently, destroy the integrity and reliability of the Bible and you destroy not only the faith of the conservatives but the very reason and basis for their church services and activities. Not so with liberals. Destroy the integrity and reliability of the Bible and they just continue as before because they never looked at the Bible as the ultimate reason for what they do and believe in the first place.

Consider what the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:32:

If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die.

When Paul mentions the dead rising not, he is talking about the necessity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ to our faith. This is made clear earlier in the chapter where he writes in verses 12-19:

¹²Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: ¹⁴And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. ¹⁵Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. ¹⁶For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: ¹⁷And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. ¹⁸Then

they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. ¹⁹If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

The conservative, reading this passage notes the necessity of the resurrection of Christ. Without it, our preaching is vain, our faith is vain, our witness is a lie, and we are yet in our sins. The liberal looks at the same passage and sees merely a noble concept of dedication and commitment. This is the difference between the two. And this is the reason that the conservative agrees with Paul, that if the dead rise not – meaning no resurrection – we may as well forget about church, sleep in, go fishing, or just “eat and drink; for to morrow we die,” and the liberal does not.

Here's why. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to Christianity. Without it, Christianity is largely no different than any other religion (which is what the liberals already believe anyway). Take away the resurrection and you destroy Christianity.

Now, that may seem a bit extreme, but is it? Consider what Jesus said in Matthew 12:38-40:

³⁸Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. ³⁹But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: ⁴⁰For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

In this passage, certain of the scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus to prove that He was sent from God by giving a sign. While Jesus reproached them for their lack of faith and unwillingness to accept the things that He had done and said as evidence of His Divinity, there was also another challenge hidden in their demands. In Deuteronomy 18:22 we read about the test of a prophet:

When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

When Jesus said to the scribes and pharisees that He would be three days and three nights in the heart of earth, He was speaking prophetically of His coming death, burial, and resurrection. Consequently, had He not risen from the dead He would have been branded a false prophet and totally discredited as the Messiah. In fact, Matthew 27:62-66 records that after His death they went to efforts to ensure that Jesus stayed in the grave:

⁶²Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, ⁶³Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. ⁶⁴Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. ⁶⁵Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. ⁶⁶So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

And, when they realized that they had been unsuccessful in preventing Jesus from rising from the dead, they went to even greater lengths to discredit the resurrection. In Matthew 28:11-15 we find that they resorted to lies and bribery in a desperate attempt to defame Jesus as a false prophet:

¹¹Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. ¹²And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, ¹³Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. ¹⁴And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. ¹⁵So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

Take away the resurrection and Jesus becomes a false prophet.

In addition, in John 2:19, Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." He said much the same in John 10:17-18 where He claimed to have the power to both lay down His life and take it up again. To make such a bold claim without actually having the power to do it would make Jesus a liar. And if Jesus is a liar He could not be God manifest in the flesh because the Bible tells us that God will not lie (1 Samuel 15:29), that He cannot lie (Titus 1:2), and that it is impossible for Him to lie (Hebrews 6:18). Therefore, if Jesus is a liar then He would be the Son of, not God in heaven, but the god of this world:

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. (John 8:44)

Take away the resurrection and Jesus becomes a liar.

Moreover, if the resurrection of Jesus did not take place, then God the Father did not do what the Bible clearly tells us that He did do in Acts 3:26:

Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

And, if that were the case, it would invalidate the entire message of the Bible. After all, in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, Paul writes:

¹Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; ²By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. ³For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; ⁴And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: ⁵And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: ⁶After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. ⁷After that,

he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. ⁸And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 15:20-22, Paul continues:

²⁰But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. ²¹For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. ²²For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

Take away the resurrection and you take away the very foundation of the gospel message. Take away the foundation of the gospel and it becomes a lie. Make the gospel a lie and the Bible becomes nothing more than a collection of myths, morality tales, and noble ideas, balanced on a series of false prophecies, lies, and half-truths.

I don't know about you, but I cannot base my eternal salvation and live my life based on lies and false prophecies no matter how noble they may sound. The truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so central to my faith, so crucial to my salvation that it is an absolute necessity. Without it, I, like Paul, say, "let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die."

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