

Week 1

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, 17, Matthew 28:16-17, Luke 24: 10-12, John 20:24-45

Every claim of Christianity rises and falls on the resurrection. If Jesus did not rise from the dead then Christianity is a total waste of time. Jesus interacted with the first believers and met their doubts with grace and love, but also with evidence.

GOD'S
NOT
DEAD

1. The Rapid Change In Worldview

When Jesus' first followers claimed that he had risen from the dead and had been present with them in bodily form, the idea was completely implausible to the Greeks and to the Jews. The culture would have rejected the idea outright and yet those who believed clung to it as truth because they saw him with their own eyes.

- ❖ Q: What does our culture believe that makes it so incredibly difficult for them to accept the resurrection of Jesus as an historical fact?
- ❖ Q: Do you believe in the resurrection because that is what you were taught as a child, or have you actually considered the claims of the early church and been convinced that Jesus was raised from the dead based on good reasoning and evidence?
- ❖ Q: Has your belief in Christ caused you to be radically different to how you were before? If so, what changes have been the most profound and which of those have been at odds with the culture around you?

2. The Eye Witnesses

- How many there were - Paul says that there were over 500 eye witnesses who saw the resurrected Jesus. It is very difficult to argue with that many people who claim to have seen the same thing.
 - Who they were – Jesus appeared to people who were not important in that society, including women. Both Paul and James were confronted by the resurrected Jesus and their lives were radically changed.
 - How sure they were – They had nothing to gain and everything to lose by speaking out what they had seen. Peter initially abandoned Jesus at his greatest time of need, and yet he completely changed and was even crucified for his faith because he had seen Jesus after the resurrection.
- ❖ Q: Why was it significant that Jesus appeared to the women when he rose from the dead? Why does that help support the claim that he rose from the dead?
 - ❖ Q: Are you so convinced that Jesus rose from the dead that you would be willing to lose your life for it?

3. The Empty Tomb

There was no doubt about the fact that Jesus was crucified but in order to account for his missing body and to refute the claim that he had risen from the dead, 2 theories arose. The Romans and Jews claimed that the body had either been stolen or that Jesus had never actually died. They claimed that he had become unconscious and when he woke up the next day, he was able to walk out of the tomb. Both theories are inadequate and self-defeating. The 12 Roman soldiers guarding the tomb would have been able to deal with both situations easily enough. But Jesus was dead and when God raised him from the grave, he walked out of the tomb alive.

- ❖ Q: Why are both of these theories about the missing body self-defeating or inadequate?
- ❖ Q: Why does it make sense that Jesus' tomb was not enshrined like that of the prophets and rabbis of his time?

4. The Growth And Perseverance Of The Church

If this had been a massive hoax or a genuine mistake, it surely should have died out by now. There are however, over 2 billion people on the earth today who claim that it is still true. In China alone, there are 35 000 people per day encountering and following the resurrected Christ.

- ❖ Q: Why is it significant that there are thousands of people in China coming to faith in Christ each day?
- ❖ Q: What makes the growth of the church different to the growth of other religions such as Islam or Hinduism?
- ❖ Q: How do you explain your belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ to those who question why you would believe in something so "unrealistic"? Does the resurrection come up as part of your defence of your faith? Discuss.