

CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE POSTAL COURSE



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LESSON 19 • THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST

Reading: John 20

Sadly the women made their way to the place where they had seen the body of Jesus laid. They carried spices with them to anoint his body. They did not know how they were going to move the huge stone at the opening of the tomb, but they felt they had to go and anoint the body of their Lord. But when they reached the tomb -
 the stone was rolled away!
 the tomb was empty!
 and angels were there!

"Why seek ye the living among the dead?" the angels asked. "He is not here, but is risen" (Luke 24:5-6).

The women returned and told the disciples that Jesus was alive, but no-one really believed them. Peter and John ran to the tomb to see for themselves. Certainly the tomb was empty - and Jesus' grave clothes were lying there.

Mary Magdalene, one of the women, went back to the tomb, and here she wept. She thought someone had stolen the body of Jesus, although the angels had said he had risen from the dead. Jesus came and talked with her, but she thought he was the gardener (John 20:14-18).

Then Jesus said, "Mary!"

He spoke her name, and suddenly she knew it was Jesus. He was really there! He was a live!

Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

Many people do not believe the Bible account of how Jesus rose from the dead. Here are some of the reasons they give for not believing the resurrection.

1. They say: "Jesus did not die on the cross. It just looked as if he were dead. He recovered later in the cool of the tomb."

But - the Bible says plainly that Jesus did die on the cross (John 19:33). In Mark 15:42-45 we read how Pilate wanted to know if Jesus was really dead. He sent a Roman centurion to check, and the centurion reported that he was indeed dead. Centurions could be trusted to see whether a man was dead or alive.

2. They say: "His disciples stole the body."

But - this is not true. The chief priests and elders did not want people to know that the tomb was empty, and that Jesus was alive again. They paid the men who were guarding the tomb to say that the disciples had stolen the body. Read Matthew 28:11-15, and you will see how this lie was started.

Nothing in the Bible account suggests that the disciples stole the body. The disciples did not believe that Jesus was alive until they had actually seen him. After his death, they were frightened, unhappy and disbelieving. They were not in the mood to go tricking the Jewish leaders.

Later, when they were sure that Jesus had risen, they were changed men. They risked their lives preaching about the resurrection. Some even died for their faith. If they had really stolen the body, and played this trick, they would not have done such things.

3. They say: "He left his body behind, and came back as a spirit."

But - Jesus rose as a body. He did not come back as a spirit. As we have already seen, many people actually saw Jesus. Thomas saw the holes in Jesus' hands and side; and Jesus told him to feel them (John 20:27).

Jesus asked for food, and ate it in the presence of his disciples (Luke 24:41-43). Jesus said to his disciples: "Handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luke 24:39).

4. They say: "The disciples went to the wrong tomb."

But - the Bible tells us plainly, in Mark 16:6, that the women went to the tomb where the body had been, and angels spoke to them there. If Jesus really appeared to the disciples and showed them the holes in his hands, feet and side, then he must have come back from the dead, and the tomb where he lay must have been empty. And no doubt the Jewish leaders would have found the right tomb and shown he was still dead - but they could not, because he was alive.

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It needs faith to accept that Jesus rose from the dead. Even the disciple Thomas did not believe it at first. He was not convinced until he saw Jesus for himself. Jesus said to him:
 "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

Had the time for God's Kingdom come?

When at last the disciples realised that Jesus really was alive again, they hoped that he would set up God's Kingdom right away. For forty days the Lord was with them, teaching them about that Kingdom (Acts 1:3). They said to him:
 "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the Kingdom unto Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

Jesus answered:

"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Acts 1:7).

There was work to be done before the setting up of the Kingdom. The disciples had to go into the world, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. All this happened nearly 2,000 years ago, but the work of preaching still goes on today.

The ascension

While Jesus was talking to his disciples about these things on the Mount of Olives, just outside Jerusalem, he was taken up from them into heaven. As they watched him go, two angels spoke to them. The words of the angels tell us plainly that Jesus will come back.

"And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven"
 (Acts 1:10-11)

Notice how definite this verse is. It does not just say, "Jesus will come again". It says

"This same Jesus" - and just in case there should be any doubt, it says

"This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven".

They saw Jesus go up in bodily form (remember, he was not a spirit).

it will be the same Jesus, and he will come back in the same way as he went. It was a wonderful message of hope that the angels gave to the disciples. Jesus will come again, in bodily form, not this time to die, but to reign as King over the whole earth. Then he will restore the Kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6).

Jesus' resurrection - and our resurrection

In 1 Corinthians 15 the apostle Paul talks about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He says that if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then our faith is in vain, and our sins are not forgiven. Those who have died have perished without hope (1 Corinthians 15:17-19). What a miserable picture!

But, he says

"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

Christ is risen from the dead. He is the first: others will follow.

For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

Death came because of Adam. Resurrection from the dead can only come because of Jesus.

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."

1 Corinthians 15:20-23

Everyone dies, because everyone is 'in Adam'. All those 'in Christ' (belonging to Christ) will be made alive when he returns to this earth.

This means that, if we die before Jesus returns, we too can be raised from the dead. But we will only be given a place in God's kingdom on earth if we are 'in Christ'. We can only belong to Christ if we are baptized into his death (see Galatians 3:27-29).

How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?

That was what people wanted to know in Paul's time (1 Corinthians 15:35). Just as Jesus had a body when he rose from the dead, so those who are raised from the dead when he comes back will have bodies - they will not be spirits. Jesus is alive today - he has been given a body which will never die.

It is quite clear, as you see when you read 1 Corinthians 15, that those who are given everlasting life will have bodies which are changed.

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Our present bodies are subject to death, and we suffer pain, and become ill at times. Those who are given a place in God's Kingdom will have new, undying bodies. They will be made immortal, as we read in 1 Corinthians 15:50-57.

What a wonderful offer God has made to us!

We can have our sins forgiven through the Lord Jesus.

We can rise from the dead like he did.

We can be given immortal bodies.

We can have a place in his Kingdom on earth.

No wonder the apostle Paul says:

"Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

It is a great message of salvation. Jesus told his disciples to preach the message to all men. We too will want to pass it on.

Summary

1. Jesus rose from the dead.
2. He was not a spirit when he rose; he had a body of flesh and bones.
3. Jesus is alive today. He ascended into heaven, where he is now.
4. He will come back to this earth in the same way as he went into heaven.
5. If we belong to Christ, we can be raised from the dead and given immortal, undying bodies when the Lord returns.

Chapters to read: Acts 1

Read also the stories of the resurrection in Matthew 28 and Luke 24

A verse to learn: Acts 2:24

"Whom (Jesus) God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it."