
Exploring the Resurrection -3- No Christianity without the resurrection

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The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is central to the message of the New Testament - it doesn't make sense without it. After a thorough survey of its teaching, Biblical scholar, G. E. Ladd, concludes:

The entire New Testament was written from the perspective of the resurrection. Indeed, the resurrection may be called the major premise of the early Christian faith. "The gospel without the resurrection was not merely a gospel without a final chapter; it was not a gospel at all"

M. Ramsey

The Gospels tell us a lot about the remarkable things that Jesus said and did during his three years of ministry. However, it is interesting to note that in the rest of the New Testament these things are hardly mentioned again. All the emphasis is on his death and resurrection which are referred to about 100 times. Much of the message of the New Testament - our present relationship with the living Jesus, his presence and transforming power in our lives, the final defeat of evil, our future hope - is related to the resurrection. In later Christian writings it is the same. The cross and resurrection are central to virtually all known forms of early Christianity. It follows, therefore, that if the resurrection never happened, we are left with the alternatives of either proclaiming a message that is based on a lie, or radically altering what the early Christians were on about. Michael Ramsey, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, has said:

For the first disciples, the gospel without the resurrection was not merely a gospel without a final chapter; it was not a gospel at all.

Or as John S. Whale put it in Christian Doctrine:

Belief in the resurrection is not an appendage to the Christian faith: it is the Christian faith. The Gospels cannot explain the resurrection; it is the resurrection which alone explains the Gospels.

Anyone has the right to preach a religion that has something to do with Jesus if that is what they wish to do. However, if the resurrection is not somewhere at the heart of it, then it is misleading to call it Christianity. It is not the message of the New Testament or of the major Christian creeds. Neither is it what the majority of Christians have believed down the ages.