
Exploring the Resurrection -2- Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

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Over many years of church ministry I have asked literally hundreds of people whether they believe in life after death. One of the most common responses I have received is, "Well, no one has come back to tell us" Surprising as it may seem to some people, it is the belief of millions, and has been for 2,000 years, that not only did someone rise from the dead, but that someone is alive today and it is possible to have a very real, personal relationship with him. I refer, of course, to Jesus Christ.

Whether this is true or not has tremendous implications. How is it that over the last two millennia hundreds of thousands of criminals, addicts, prostitutes and other ne'er-do-wells have experienced what Christians are accustomed to call 'conversion', and have had their lives transformed into useful, productive citizens - to say nothing of countless somewhat more 'decent' folk who would claim a similar experience. If this belief in the resurrection of Jesus is true, and he is still in the business of "seeking and saving the lost", then we have an explanation. If it is not true, then this multitude of people have been mistaken and we have to look for some other psychological explanation for this phenomenon.

If this belief is true, then it explains why multitudes have been willing to proclaim it and to live in service to humankind at great personal cost, often of life itself. If it is not true, then as Paul says in a letter to fellow believers, "we are worse off than anyone else" (I Corinthians 15:19).

If it is true, then physical death has been decisively conquered. This has implications, not only for the meaning of the next life but for this life as well. If it is not true, then we are still left with mere guesses as to the meaning of it all.

If it is true, then Jesus must be the key to understanding the significance of our relationship to God, the purpose of life and our future destiny. After all, along with many other remarkable things he said, he claimed on a number of occasions that he would be crucified and be raised from the dead on the third day. If it did not happen, can we believe anything else he said?

The purpose of this booklet is to examine the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus from a historical perspective and to look at its implications.