

Did he?

It is an important question. Why? Because if he was not raised our faith is futile. And so too is all preaching. So says Paul (*1Corinthians 15.14*).

What evidence is there? There must be some, for it is not unreasonable to believe. In fact the evidence is so compelling it demands a verdict.

Predictions

Three strands may be identified. Individually each is strong. Intertwined they provide a convincing foundation upon which we may safely and securely build.

First there are *the predictions given over many years*. These may be found in both parts of the Bible. In the first section, commonly called the Old Testament, we find the resurrection of Jesus Christ foretold by prophets.

Isaiah provides the most obvious example. Chapters 40 - 53 are often called the chapters that describe the Suffering Servant of God. They clearly

do. The most obvious place to look is chapter 53. Verse after verse points to the horrendous suffering he would face.

He would be, we are told, 'despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows acquainted by grief' (*verse 3*). He would be 'stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted... Wounded for our transgressions; ...crushed for our iniquities...' (*verses 4f*). 'Like a lamb' he would be 'led to the slaughter' (*verse 7*). 'By oppression and judgment' he would be 'taken away' and 'cut off from the land of the living' (*verse 8*). And his grave would be made with 'the wicked and a rich man in his death' (*verse 9*).

But, very significantly, we are also told that, though crushed and put to grief by God, 'he shall see his offspring', 'he shall prolong his days', and 'the will of The Lord shall prosper in his hand' (*verse 10*). In those words we have a threefold prediction that for him death would not be the last word. The one who would die an horrendous death is the one who would live again to live a triumphant victorious life.

Isaiah puts flesh on the bones of the prediction given to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden after their rebellion against God. Although mankind is under God's curse because of disobedience, there is hope for those who are lost and perishing and destined for hell. That

hope is found in no-one less than the 'offspring' of the woman. He, we are promised, 'shall bruise' the head of Satan. All Satan would ever achieve against him - hate him though he does - would be the bruising of his heel (*Genesis 3 verse 15*).

Victory - victory over sin, Satan and death - is foretold. The evidence for it will be resurrection. The suffering servant, who dies, will live again. He shall be raised. He shall prolong his days.

The prediction of the Old Testament is also found in the New. Most obviously we may turn to the predictions made by Jesus Christ himself.

At a Passover festival, after overturning the money-changers tables and driving them out of the temple, he made an amazing claim. He informed the Jews who challenged his behaviour that if they destroyed the temple of his body on the third day he would raise it up! (*John verses 18-21*). It may be an oblique reference to his resurrection but prediction it is. That was something his followers later appreciated (*verse 22*).

It may have been as many as three years later, as Jesus travelled on the road to Jerusalem with his followers, he gave another prediction. He took the twelve disciples aside and told them

what would happen to him. 'We are going to Jerusalem' he said, 'and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit upon him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise' (*Mark 10 verse 33f*).

Claims

Secondly we may consider *the claims made*. These represent a second strand of the threefold cord of evidence for the resurrection.

Our starting place is the claims of Christ himself. During his years of public ministry he did amazing things and made amazing claims. For example, he raised the dead. At least three such events are recorded.

In the town of Nain, he raised from death the only son of a widow. We are told when the dead man sat up and spoke 'fear seized' all who witnessed the miracle. They recognized someone special from God was among them (*Luke 7 verses 11-16*).

In the vicinity of the western shores of Galilee, Jesus raised from the dead the daughter of Jairus, a synagogue ruler. She was twelve years of age. When Jairus first approached Jesus for help his little girl was seriously ill. Whilst Jesus

went to his house she died. But, on going into the house, he took her by the hand and told her to arise. Immediately she got up and walked, and was given something to eat. Again, the witnesses to the event were amazed (*Mark 5 verses 23f, 35-42*).

In Bethany, a village to the south east of Jerusalem, Jesus raised the brother of Mary and Martha. Lazarus, like his sisters, was a friend of Jesus. He was taken ill. Jesus was called but, before he arrived in Bethany, Lazarus died. He lay in a tomb no less than four days. Nonetheless Jesus ordered the stone to be removed from the grave. Once done he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus come out'. He did (*John 11 verses 1-44*).

These incidents illustrate the power of Christ over death. They are signs of what he will do for his people. Though they die, yet shall they live. But they are also signs of his resurrection. He who has power over death will himself rise.

This truth is to be found embedded in teaching Christ gave near the tomb of Lazarus. As well as predicting the raising of Lazarus, he asserts he is 'the resurrection and the life' (*verse 25*). All who die and believe in him shall live and never die (*verse 25f*). He can only raise the dead after his death if he lives. If he remains dead there is no way he can

raise the dead. That is something the dead simply cannot do. Thus his claim to be the resurrection and the life implies that he will rise.

We may also consider the claims of the apostles and other followers of Christ. Mary Magdalene and her fiends, Cleopas and his friend, Peter and John, the disciples without Thomas, the disciples with Thomas, and 500 more all testified they met the risen Christ. And then, when we turn to the Acts of the Apostles, we discover the one-time persecutor Saul met the risen Christ as he traveled to Damascus. Saul the persecutor became Paul the preacher.

Testimony

Thirdly, we may consider *the testimony of the early believers*. This is the third strand of the threefold thread of evidence for the resurrection.

We have the evidence of the gospel writers. Two, John and Matthew, were apostles. Mark was close to the apostle Peter. And doctor Luke carefully sifted the evidence and presents the findings. Each asserts the bodily and physical resurrection of Jesus.

Then there is the testimony of Paul. His message was that the Christ who died for sinners is the Christ who lives. His rescue work was done on the cross. The evidence that it is complete is his

resurrection. Death could not hold on to him. Thus on the third day God raised him from the dead.

We should also consider the testimony of the Holy Spirit. He is the promised one given to all who believe (*Acts 2 verse 38; see also John 14.16f*). His work is to take the things of Christ and show them to believers (*John 15 verse 26 and 16.7-15*). Thus it is that believers come to know and be assured of Christ's resurrection.

Boldness

Did Christ rise? The evidence is compelling and persuasive. It is evidence that demands a verdict. We can safely assert the evidence is risen. It is as at least as compelling as the standard of proof demanded of judges and jurors in a criminal court of law. It is more than the mere balance of probabilities (the civil standard of proof). The threefold cord of evidence we have clearly meets the standard of the evidence being beyond reasonable doubt. That being so all people everywhere may not just be called to consider the claims of Jesus Christ. They may also be invited to put their trust in him.

Those who do will find themselves made bold. They are made bold to preach Christ crucified and risen. They are made bold to speak confidently of their hope of heaven. And they are made

bold to know they will be raised and transformed on the last day. Like Christ they too will inhabit eternity in resurrection bodies.

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