

Resurrection in the book of Acts

Craig Crawshaw

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is either the most important event in the history of mankind, or else it is the greatest hoax ever thrust upon mankind. If the resurrection is a hoax, it deserves my most complete rejection. But if the resurrection is fact, it demands my most complete attention.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the ultimate proof of His Deity. But if I consider it as only a proof of His Deity, it confirms my faith in a risen Jesus but leaves my day to day life little affected.

No, it is far more than just a proof. It is the hope and promise of a new and fresh burst of life everyday and in every decision I make. It should affect not just my intellect, but my every action.

Because of the resurrection, my time should be spent differently, my spending different, my reaction to pain and suffering different, my compassion for others different, my purpose in life different.

Jonny Scaramanga is an atheist who claims he was once a follower of Jesus Christ. He makes my point in his internet post:

In claiming the resurrection of Jesus is historically verifiable, a huge amount is at stake. If Jesus physically rose from the dead, I should almost certainly be a Christian. That would change how I live my life. And that's exactly what happened. Partly on the basis of what I was taught as incontrovertible evidence, I lived my life as a fundamentalist Christian. This is a far more critical matter than the age of the universe. It has implications for what I do with my money, who my friends are, what education I receive, what I do with my spare time, and what career I choose.

– Jonny Scaramanga

Because of the resurrection, every morning I wake is a fresh resurrection to have a positive outlook; every encounter is a fresh resurrection to affect someone for good; every decision is a fresh opportunity to get it right.

Brennan Manning, a Franciscan priest and follower of Jesus, said:

“For me the most radical demand of Christian faith lies in summoning the courage to say yes to the present risenness of Jesus Christ.” - **Brennan Manning**

Every day, yes every moment, must demonstrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ in my life – or else I am a hypocrite, or at least a very lazy follower of Jesus.

Brennan Manning also said:

“The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips and walk out the door and deny Him by their lifestyle.”

– Brennan Manning

For the sake of today's consideration of the resurrection, I would restate this to say: “The greatest single cause of spiritual apathy in the world today is Christians who acknowledge the resurrection of Jesus in their belief, but live as though Jesus was dead by their lifestyle.”

If you are one who believes that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important event in the history of mankind, then join me today on a journey through the book of Acts to reenergize the resurrection of Jesus in your day to day life. If you are one who believes that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the greatest hoax every thrust upon mankind, or that is just doesn't matter much to you, then I also invite you join me on a journey that might cause you to rethink your position – or maybe change your life.

The last number of months we at Oaks Bible Church have been studying the Biblical book of Acts – the story of the growth of the Church from the time of Jesus' leaving this earth until the time that the apostle Paul brought the message to Rome.

In this book we read time and time again of the apostle Peter or the apostle Paul giving a message to the crowds. And invariably, the center of their message is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In Peter's message to the crowd at the feast of Pentecost in chapter two, Peter speaks:

Acts 2:23-24, 32 *This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.*

The resurrection of Jesus was at the heart of the message that brought 3,000 to faith in Jesus that day. And just a short time later, Peter was speaking to a crowd gathered in the temple of Jerusalem:

Acts 3:15 *[You] put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses.*

At the conclusion of this message the Scripture tells us the number who believed in and followed Jesus rose to about five thousand.

The gospel message spread from Jerusalem to other cities, such as Caesarea, which was the Roman governmental seat of Judea. There Peter addressed a largely non-Jewish crowd:

Acts 10:40 *And God raised [Jesus] up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.*

And many Jews as well as non-Jews responded to the message that day – the message of new life to be found in Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord.

The book of Acts goes on to record the messages of Paul on his missionary journeys outside of Israel. And the central message of the resurrection remains:

[in Galatia:] Acts 13:30-31 *"He was laid in a tomb, but God raised Him from the dead; and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people."*

[in Thessalonica:] Acts 17:2b-3 *[Paul] reasoned with them from the Scriptures explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead"*

[in Athens:] Acts 17:31 *[God] furnished proof to all men by raising [Jesus] from the dead"*

The renowned Christian author, C.S. Lewis, has written:

"To preach Christianity meant (to the Apostles) primarily to preach the Resurrection. ... The Resurrection is the central theme in every Christian sermon reported in the Acts. The Resurrection, and its consequences, were the 'gospel' or good news which the Christians brought. - C.S. Lewis

Prolific Biblical author, Erling C. Olsen writes:

Whoever reads the New Testament seriously, or gives thought to the impact which the apostles made upon their generation, must acknowledge that one outstanding historic event alone spurred that small band of 11 ordinary men to an amazing task of evangelization in their generation. Defying every obstacle, loss of home, persecution, even death itself, they evidenced the supreme relevance in their ministry of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. - Erling C. Olsen

As you know from American history, Charles Colson, then special Counsel to President Nixon, was found guilty and imprisoned for his part in the Watergate scandals. He later became a follower of Christ and a fierce defender of the Christian faith. Along the same lines as Erling C. Olsen, he writes:

*“I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren’t true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world-and they couldn’t keep a lie for three weeks. You’re telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.” – **Charles Colson***

My contention is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single most important event in the history of mankind. We are seeing that it was the message of this resurrection that grew the early church from a small band of followers to thousands across the then known world – all the way to Rome itself. And recent surveys show that Christianity is today the largest religion in the world, numbering some 2.5 billion, about 1/3 of the world’s population. The central tenant of the Christian faith is the resurrection of Jesus. And this resurrection verifies all that Jesus taught as true. That’s why popular pastor and author Timothy Keller could write:

*“If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn’t rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead.” – **Timothy Keller***

If the issue on which “everything hangs” is the resurrection of Jesus, and this belief has grown the largest religion in the world, then I contend that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important event in the history of mankind. And it demands my most complete attention.

Now there is one more repeated use of the resurrection of Jesus in the book of Acts. Not only was the resurrection the center of the messages of Peter and Paul. In the closing chapters of Acts, we see the apostle Paul put on trial multiple times. And Paul’s repeated claim is that his is “on trial for the resurrection of the dead.”

Acts 23:6 [Before the Jewish Sanhedrin:] *“I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead.”*

Acts 24:21 [Before Roman Governor Felix:] *“For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today.”*

Acts 26:8 [Before Jewish King Agrippa:] *“Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?”*

Now I believe and contend that Paul’s claim then has implication for us today. For if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, then you are on trial for the resurrection of Jesus Christ every day of your life. Either your life gives evidence for the resurrection or it gives evidence to disprove it.

If my life is a positive outpouring of God’s graciousness and love, demonstrating a life that is being transformed into the image of the resurrected Christ, then I am a living billboard for the power of the resurrection. On the other hand, if my life shown little or no evidence of a life that is different and distinct from all the others around me who don’t profess Jesus, I am giving evidence to disprove the resurrected Jesus. My life is indeed “on trial” for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, if I claim to be His follower.

And if a Christian life gives little or no evidence of a transformation from being lost to being found, from being blind to having sight, and from being dead to spiritual things and now alive to God – then I contend that the resurrection is being shown to being a monumental hoax. The world calls this “hypocrisy” – and they are right.

A resurrected life is a CHANGED LIFE

2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*

Romans 6:4 *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

Do your words revolve around the hope found in the resurrection of Jesus? Let us learn from the messages of Peter and Paul that began the greatest spiritual turnaround the world has ever seen, and center our message around the resurrection – the greatest event in the history of mankind.

Does your life reflect transformation from old behavior to new, godly behavior, demonstrating the effect of the resurrection of Jesus on your life? Let us learn from the words of Paul when he was on trial – that our life is “on trial for the resurrection.” And may we show positive evidence for that resurrection!

What “old” behavior in your life needs to be resurrected to the new life found in Christ?

Jesus Christ asked a question long ago that He still asks to you and me today:

John 11:25-26 *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”*

Today could be the beginning of your resurrected life, founded on the resurrection of Jesus Christ for you. He died on the cross of Calvary to pay the price of your sins, satisfying the demand of God. By accepting this death as for you, God forgives your sins and gives you His gift of eternal life. Won’t you put your faith in Him, today on Easter Sunday? The day we celebrate His resurrection could be the day of your resurrected life.

Today, would you realize that as a follower of Christ you are on trial for the resurrection? Your every action and reaction verifies the resurrection power of God in your life or denies its power.

Today, join the billions who have found hope and faith in Jesus Christ.
And join those who are a walking billboard for the power and hope of the resurrection!

Additional resource:

The empty tomb, and not the manger of Bethlehem, is the earthly symbol of the great birth upon which Christianity is founded. Were it not for Bethlehem there could be no Calvary; but, apart from the Resurrection, Calvary were but a stupendous disaster, of which the Cross would be for all time the emblem. - **Sir Robert Anderson**

Job 19:25 *For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.*

1Corinthians 15:3-5 *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*