

Evidence of Resurrection

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 January 2018

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] So you'll know that next week I'll be doing a student mission in Belfast and they've given me a whole list of talks and so I'm working through them at the moment. I thought I'd do one on you tonight and you can all pretend to be students again. So the title I've been giving is a delusional story. How can anyone believe Jesus rose from the dead? A delusional story. How can anyone believe Jesus rose from the dead? Let me tell you a story about a vicar who was asked to look after his neighbours' pets while they were away. They had a dog and a cat and a rabbit outside who lived in a hatch. And on the first day he went round and he walked the dog and fed the animals. On the third day he said I'll let the dog into the back garden and I've got time to walk it properly so I can do what's necessary. He let the dog into the garden and he'd go on with feeding the cat. He went to the back door, he opened it and there was the dog coming up the garden with the rabbit in its mouth. With the rabbit looking very much like it wouldn't need feeding. So the man panicked. What are you to do? What was he to do? What was he to do with this precious animal? This jet black rabbit that was in the dog's mouth. And so he thought to himself I could have to confess to this or I could lie. And so he went for lying. He went to the pet shop and he purchased a brand new jet black rabbit that looked identical to Sooty. And the neighbours got back. And a couple of days later there was a phone call. The phone call he was dreading. Hi Phil.

How was your holiday? He said nervously. Great, great. We just wanted to argue about the animals. Oh what is it as Phil begins to sweat and thinks they know it. It's just about the rabbit. I think I should have chosen one more carefully. It's just this. The rabbit died three days before we left. And we buried it in a hole in the bottom of the garden. And we've tried to explain to the children why Sooty is now alive and well in the house. Now for a lot of people the resurrection of Jesus is about as realistic as my story of Sooty the rabbit. And yet the claim of Jesus of Nazareth that he rose from the dead, if it is false, it does mean that the rest of what Jesus came to do falls flat. That he is totally irrelevant to us.

all my good teaching, all the promises of forgiveness, all those wonderful miracles, it goes out of the window. Because the whole story was made up. It's a lie if the resurrection didn't happen. It's made up by a bunch of co-artists and myth makers. On the other hand, if the resurrection is true, Jesus is utterly unique. And he is compellingly relevant to every human being. He's unique for one thing, because he is alive.

[3 : 32] Confucius died peacefully in his sleep, aged 72. Buddha died from eating contaminated pork, aged 62. Muhammad died unexpectedly from a heart attack, aged 62. Only Jesus Christ said that he was going to die and that he would rise again. And he is utterly unique in fulfilling those claims.

And why is that relevant? That is relevant because only Jesus can offer you hope in the face of death. And can offer justice to our world. And most of all, can offer forgiveness from God. Now what I want to do in this talk is I want to show you some of the reasons why I think it's perfectly rational to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. And then I want to show why it's relevant for you today.

So, lots of people, for centuries, have dismissed the resurrection of May. They've said, dead people don't rise.

So I say today, people say to me, I've never seen a dead person alive again. Have you? If you have, I'd love to judge you afterwards.

[4 : 49] I've not seen it. I've not seen it, therefore it did not happen. That's how the argument goes. The problem with that argument is that it doesn't actually fit with the rules of logic.

Limited observations don't establish fixed laws. Just because you haven't seen something doesn't mean that it can't happen.

So if you told a medieval man in England, or woman in England, that the earth was round and not flat, they would deny it. They would say, I've not seen that.

But through the centuries, through scientists and observation, we have come to believe that the earth is round. We've learnt that limited observation doesn't prove things wrong.

It does help you to know what to expect. But those expectations need to be compared with the evidence. So what is the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus?

[5 : 56] Is it reasonable? Is it rational to believe in the resurrection of Jesus? Can you be a rational human being and believe that Jesus rose from the dead?

And there are three types of evidence broadly. The first is the empty tomb. The first piece of evidence is the empty tomb. That is a fact almost beyond any doubt.

Even the most cynical non-Christian scholars who are anti-Christianity and anti-Jesus, they will not deny now that Jesus' tomb was empty on that first Easter Sunday.

And there are three reasons to support that claim. We know that there was an empty tomb, because in the weeks after Jesus' death, he was proclaimed publicly as risen from the dead. By his first followers in Jerusalem. If the tomb was not empty, it would have been very easy, wouldn't it, to go back to the tomb of the prominent politician, Joseph of Arimathea, open it up and go, no, he's still dead.

[7 : 05] There he is. Jesus' followers could not have gone away with that bold claim if Jesus' body could have been produced. Let's think of a celebrity who's recently died.

I was trying to think of one, something I couldn't remember. Can somebody shout out a celebrity who's recently died? Don't be ashamed. George Michael. Relatively recently. Let's say, I said to you this afternoon, I've had coffee with George Michael, and we went out for lunch, or he came to our family home, and we've been hanging out together.

You could very, very easily refute that claim, wouldn't you? You could go to his gravesite. You could go to the cemetery. You could dig down, you could crack up in the coffin, and you could say, no, he's dead.

The disciples were making claims about Jesus' resurrection three miles away from where he was buried, within a couple of weeks of his death. It would have been very, very easy to produce a body if there wasn't.

Secondly, Jesus' tomb didn't become a holy site after he died. It was common practice if you had a founder of a religion, especially in those days, that you went back and you venerated their grave.

[8 : 28] But no one turned up at Jesus' grave. No one put flowers or lit a candle at Jesus' grave.

Because they were convinced that he wasn't there. And not even the Jews and the Romans who opposed Jesus claimed that he hadn't risen from the dead.

They opposed that claim. That wasn't the way that they attacked the message of Christianity as it started to spread. They could have easily done so, but that wasn't what they said.

Now there are, of course, other counter-arguments to that. Some people insanely have claimed that Jesus didn't die on the cross. Some Muslims believe this, although Muslims now will distance themselves from this claim.

But you won't find many people that will say that Jesus didn't die on the cross. What would it mean for Jesus to not have died on the cross? Well, it would mean that when he was flogged within an inch of his life with the lead embedded on the whip, that then he carried his cross and he stumbled on his way to the place of execution because he was so exhausted.

[9 : 43] And when he got to the place of execution, nails were driven through his wrists and his ankles and he hung there for six hours. And he convinced some professional executioners who would have lost their own lives if he hadn't died.

He convinced them that he was already dead and then in the cool of the tomb he revived. Two days later, he got up and he moved the stone aside.

And then he overcame some guards. And then he walked to his disciples and he told them that he was risen from the dead. It's utterly impossible that Jesus didn't die. The Romans were very good at killing people.

But truly, what about the disciples? Isn't that the claim they stole the body? That is what some of the Jewish people claimed very shortly afterwards. Truly, the disciples just stole the body to verify this

story.

Well, that would be believable, wouldn't it, if the disciples had become rich and famous for their story, but they didn't. Most of them were persecuted. Some of them were executed.

[10:49] for the claim that Jesus rose from the dead. And they wouldn't deny that claim. They would rather die first. So there's the empty tomb, but there's also, secondly, the witnesses.

Those accounts of Jesus raising from the dead. And they weren't written over many, many years.

The accounts that we have of Jesus' resurrection were written within a lifetime of Jesus' death.

So that is like you and I looking back on the 1980s. For some of you, you might think that the 1980s was history. But for many of us, it's still current affairs, isn't it?

It's that sort of length of time, the 80s. It's not that long we have. And Jesus was seen on many different occasions, on one occasion by up to 500 people.

The Apostle Paul records, and he's saying, if you don't believe this, if you don't believe that he is alive, go and ask one of these people that is still here today who were there and saw him with 500 other people.

[11:55] Some of the witnesses to Jesus' resurrection were women. It's actually probably the most compelling evidence in that it verifies the genuineness of the account as well.

because at that time, historically, women did not have the same rights to legal testimony in the justice system. So if you were going to make up a story of resurrection, the very last people that you would want witnessing Jesus rising from the dead would be women.

There is evidence after evidence as witnesses to Jesus of Nazareth. But then there is the way that history changes.

It's supporting evidence how the disciples are transformed. Those first disciples, they must have known, mustn't they? They must have known if the Resurrector was true or not.

These guys, they followed him around, they must have known if it was true or not, and yet they went to their deaths knowing and refusing to deny it.

[13:14] In the space of a few days, they go from being a group of people that are cowering in fear, that are clueless about what has happened to the religious leader they're following, they go from that to being people who stand and boldly proclaim that he's risen from the dead.

And you might say, that argument doesn't hold up, what about suicide bombers? Suicide bombers profoundly believe that giving their lives in the way that they do will mean that they achieve heaven or paradise.

But there is a difference. The suicide bombers, what they believe, they believe is absolutely true.

They believe it. But those first disciples, if they were willing to die for the resurrection, are you saying they would be willing to die for something they knew to be a lie?

That they knew to be a hoax? And rather than admit it, they died for it? There's other people who are transformed, doesn't there? There was the Apostle Paul who writes about two-thirds in the New Testament.

He goes from being a man who persecutes Christians and has been put in prison and put to death to claim that he's met the Lord Jesus and becomes the primary exporter of Christianity in the first 30 years.

[14:33] Then there's the change, isn't there? That occurs in thousands of Jews just a week, a few weeks after Jesus' death. They start to abandon their Judaism, which wasn't something that they believed at the time.

They see that their Judaism sees its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ. And it was against, wasn't it, their entire cultural heritage to know and to claim that Jesus, their Messiah, was the Messiah and that they were going to follow him.

And it wasn't just within a local area like Jerusalem. The message described by wildfire throughout the first century across the Mediterranean region.

Despite persecution, despite opposition. One man, when he died, did a handful of terrified followers who largely abandoned him.

Suddenly, is the biggest news in the Mediterranean region. One writer said this, the massive spread of Christianity in the first century rips a massive hole in history.

[15:43] A hole the size and shape of a resurrection. The consequences of Jesus rising from the dead might be very uncomfortable. And the claim might be extraordinary.

But I want to say to you, the evidence is convincing that Jesus rose from the dead. Arthur Conan Doyle put these words into the mouth of Sherlock Holmes that when you eliminate it to the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.

So you might say, big deal. Big deal. That's great. But why is it relevant to me? What's it going to do with me tonight? What's it going to do with my work colleagues? Well, it's got a lot to do with us today because it addresses the question that's at the heart of our lives.

Questions that have haunted us for ages. The Hollywood director Woody Allen famously said to me, he said, I'm not afraid of dying. I just don't want to be there when it happens.

And a lot of people, maybe you, face life with a constant fear of it coming to an end. Or you just insulate yourself from that truth. But the Bible claims that actually the resurrection is the answer to what happens after death.

[17:09] Is this world all there is? Is it nothing after? And these verses that were read to us in Acts are taken from the early history of the church straight after Jesus has arisen from the dead.

And the verses in Acts 10 are from a talk given by Peter, an early Christian, to a group of people who wanted to ask some questions about the Christian faith. So turn with me, if you will, to Acts 10. Acts chapter 10. And I want us to look at verses 39, 41. And there's three reasons why I want to say to you that the resurrection is important for you tonight.

Acts 10, which is on page 919. The first great hope that the resurrection brings is that death is not the end.

Death is not the end. I read an article this week by a guy called Henry Marsh. He's at Top View Resolution. He's written a book about accounts of his operations.

[18:15] And in the magazine article it said this, It's an account of his mother's death. Rather movingly, within the dying room, in a body invaded by cancer cells, she was still there.

Even though she was now refusing even water. I'm clearly anxious not to prolong her dying any longer. And now all those brain cells are dead. And my mother, who in a sense was a complex electrochemical reaction of all these billions of new mothers, is no more.

In neuroscience it is called the binding problem. The extraordinary fact that no one can even begin to explain that mere root matter can give rise to conscious sensation.

I had such a strong sensation as she lay dying that some deep, real person was still there behind the death mask.

the resurrection says to you that you are not a set of, let me quote, electrochemical reactions of all these millions of neurons.

[19:29] That is not who we are. That's not who you are. we are a people created by God for relationship with him forever.

You matter. And death is not the end. the Bible claims that we can have that relationship with God by coming to trust in his son, the Lord Jesus.

And for those who trust in Jesus, they will enjoy life after death. As he enjoyed life after death. In fact, the Bible says that that resurrection life is what people will have forever.

And it's not some ethereal place where there are spirits floating around the sky. It's actually this world made perfect. And so we will eat and drink and enjoy life without any of the suffering in this world.

There is hope after death and that's not just for old people, is it? You know it's not just for old people. Three boys waiting at a bus stop in case. There's a man who drives you fast amongst the curb.

[20:36] He plows into three of them. I've got the bus from that bus stop. Everyone needs this. Everyone needs hope in the face of death. It's not just for old people but the resurrection offers to you if you will take the Lord Jesus hope in the face of death.

Secondly, verse 42, let me read it to you. And Peter says, and he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to judge, to be the judge of the living and the dead. Secondly, justice will be seen.

I don't know what you make of words like judgment, judgment by God, but the Bible says to you and I that that is great news because it means that there will be justice in this world.

No crime will go unpunished. The man who ran from that car whose photo has been released today in Hayes, he will not escape justice.

In the film Schindler's List, I expect students probably want to see it with it, but they probably showed it in GCSEs, probably the film in GCSEs, but who has seen Schindler's List here?
[21 : 53] There's one scene that everybody remembers in that film. There's one thing. That's exactly it. That's exactly it. The red coat. It's the only bit of colour in the whole film, isn't it?

And what is so horrific in the film is that she witnesses the Nazi guards killing the people around her and yet they ignore her being there. And she walks through the scene. Thomas Carmeli writes in the book that Oscar Schindler speaks about his experience of seeing that girl later in the day after he had absorbed a ration of Bramley, Oscar understood the proposition in its clearest terms. They permitted such witnesses as the red toddler because they believed all the witnesses would perish soon. They did what they liked because they thought they would never have to give an account.

But the Bible is crystal clear. They will have to give an account. Everyone who has ever lived will have to give an account because Jesus will judge the living and the dead. And the proof of that is that he's risen and he rules and everyone will rise to face his judgment.

But here's my problem with that. I think it's a great world, it would be a great world where there'd be no injustice. Wouldn't you like a world like that? A world with no locks. A world with no insurance.
[23 : 14] A world with no fear of walking home at night. It'd be a great world. But here's my problem. There's much in my life that I'm ashamed of. In fact, if I was honest with you and if you were honest with me, I think we would admit to each other that we're ashamed of our behaviour lots of the time.

And therefore, I actually don't want to stand before God and have my life exposed because I know I've not lived up to my own standards, let alone his. And the Bible calls my failures through that sin. I've lived for myself, therefore I don't deserve anything of a perfect world in the future. And I really like the idea of other people facing justice. And I love the idea of other people facing justice, I just don't like the idea of me facing justice.

And that's why I need the third consequence of the resurrection and that is that forgiveness is possible. Look at verse 43. To all the prophets, to him, all the prophets, that's all the Old Testament, bear witness that everyone who believes in him, that's the Lord Jesus, receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Before Jesus died, he said, I've come to die. And I've come to give my life as a ransom for many. In other words, I've come to die in place of people who deserve, when God comes to judge the world, not to be welcomed as innocent people in his new perfect world.

[24 : 34] I've come, says Jesus, as a ransom for people like you and people like me. And the problem is, how can we know that that is the case? If Jesus had died, well, that would be the end of the story.

But the resurrection is gospel proof of that claim. It is God proclaiming Jesus is innocent. It is God saying Jesus didn't deserve to die, because he lived a perfect life.

But he died to pay the price for your sins so that you can be forgiven. He had no sin. But he took into his own body our sin, and how we've treated each other, and how we've treated God, and he died for it.

And the resurrection is like God's stamp of approval. It is like God's receipt, which says the price is paid, the debt is done. And what Jesus Christ has done on the cross is accepted.

It's why Easter Sunday morning is a day of great celebration in the Christian calendar. day of day of day of day of day of day of life. God's love from God. He comes in the person of his son, and on that first good Friday, the Lord Jesus takes upon himself the mess that we've made of life in failing to love God and one another.

[25 : 54] And he dies, and on Easter Sunday, God raises his son from the dead, and says the job is finished. He was innocent.

so you can enjoy forgiveness, now and forever. And so those who accept this gift of forgiveness can face final judgment knowing that Jesus suffered the ruin that was theirs.

And so you can experience a life that was his because he experienced the punishment that was yours. And you can experience eternal life forever in a new world.

As a loved child of God forever. The resurrection isn't just relevant for your life, it is relevant for eternity. Let's pray.