

The resurrection of Jesus (1)

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[0:00] I'm going to think this morning about Easter and the resurrection. The fascination with death and life and life after death had a particular example! I looked this up on the BBC News website, it's also in the New Scientist.

And apparently brains from pigs can partially be revived after death. I don't know whether you saw this on the news. There's a picture of a pig, which was helpfully on the New Scientist website, in case we didn't know what a pig looked like.

And the article talks about a medical procedure that they did with these dead pigs' brains, and then they could measure some brain activity afterwards. And as it goes through, after you get past the sensationalism, you know, pigs revived from death, the question is, does this mean we can bring people's brains back to life after they've died?

And the answer actually is no. Scientists still can't do that. And the writer says, there are only limited signs of individual brain cells surviving and functioning, not the coordinated activity of all the brain cells and structures needed to achieve perception or awareness.

It would be a massive leap to assume such higher functions are possible. This is not a living brain. This is a cellularly active brain, said this person, Nenad Sestan, from the Yale School of Medicine, who's part of the team that did the work.

[1:33] So despite their popular interest, pigs still stay dead when they're dead, and so do people. But the central claim of Christianity is that God can bring people back to life.

And I'd like us to look at that this morning. Number one, to say what is actually being claimed by Orthodox Christian faith. Two, did it really happen?

Three, what does it say about Jesus? And four, what does it say about us? So that's the plan this morning. We'll look at the resurrection under those four headings. What is it? What is claimed? Number two, did it really happen?

Can we honestly believe this? Number three, what does it say about Jesus? And number four, what does it say about us? So that's what the plan is. So what is being claimed?

Now, what is being claimed when we sing our songs, Christ is risen, low in the grave he lay, but he's risen from the dead. What's being claimed?

[2:37] Well, let me say some things it's not. It's not saying simply that his memory lives on. Lots of people's memories live on, but this is saying much more than that.

It's not just his memory lives on. And it's not even saying his spirit lives on. It's not just saying his spirit lives on, that in some sort of disembodied, psychic way, Jesus survives.

It's not saying that. But it is saying that an identifiable human being has been completely and fully dead.

Whatever definition of human death you like to come up with, Jesus was that. And he has been brought back to physical life, meaning with a body, a bodily resurrection, in a new state of deathlessness.

So this resurrection body is not subject like our bodies, but it's different in that it is no longer subject to death.

[3:51] So spelling it out, it's an identifiable human being. So we're not talking about pigs, but people or person. And this person had a location.

He had a life history. He had a character. And he also had a faith. That's the person who we are talking about.

And all those things about him matter. He was properly dead. So the accounts insist on the third day he rose from the dead.

He didn't just sort of come back an hour later. But properly dead. Three days. Physical life. So he subsequently touched people.

They touched him. He had eyes that could see people. And they could see him. He walked around, as you and I do, subject to gravity and the laws of motion.

[4:55] He could walk. He could eat. And he could cook. So genuine, earthly life like ours. Back to physical life.

But, the difference being that Jesus was never to die again. So there's something definitive about his death and resurrection.

He enters a new state, which I've said is deathlessness. He's beyond the realm of death, beyond the reach of death. So his body was like ours, but radically different.

So what is being claimed? That's what's being claimed. The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Okay? Trust that is clear.

Now, did it really happen? Number two, did it really happen? Now, there's no shortage of motivations to disbelieve that it happened.

[5:54] there's lots of motivations to disbelieve. So the ancient Greeks, when Paul was writing to Corinth, had lots of reasons why they would disbelieve in the resurrection.

So in the, just as we have a set of ideas that almost waft around and are assumed by everybody, so the ancient Greeks had a set of ideas that everybody assumed.

And one of those ideas was that matter, stuff like what we're made of, is evil, and that spiritual, that God is interested in things that are spiritual, not things that are physical.

So for them to believe that God raised Christ from the dead physically, they'd say, no, that just doesn't compute. Can't get that.

Can't be right. So they had motivations to disbelieve that. And in the passage that Ben's going to take us through next week, you'll see how Paul argues and says, actually, Christ did rise from the dead.

[7:02] And we have ideas that waft around in our ether, in our minds, in our media. And one of the thoughts is this, that we have a skepticism which is a reducing of the universe to what can be measured with a meter or put under a microscope or repeated to order.

And that mindset says, well, then nothing can exist. It's impossible for anything to exist if you can't measure it with a meter or put it under a microscope. or repeat it to order whenever you want.

Of course, the resurrection isn't like that. So modern thinking says, well, that means it can't have happened. But that's us. That's because we're conditioned to think in a certain way.

And actually, whatever age we live in, it's always inconvenient to our human plans to have this thought of a risen king intruding into our lives, intruding into when we want to be king over our own lives or king over the lives of other people.

And this risen person says, well, actually, I'm king. And I'm king of all kings. And every knee has to bow to me. And that's always inconvenient, whatever worldview you have.

[8:29] So there's many motivations to disbelieve. But let's look. what are the reasons to believe? And please notice, I'm not asking this morning, do you feel his presence in your heart?

I'm not asking a question about your inside or even how you feel about things. I'm asking an objective question. Did he really rise from the dead? That's the first question.

The question's about how that affects us in response. That's the secondary question. The first question is, did it really happen? And as we come and think about the accounts, we are not being humble people if we wrongly think ourselves cleverer than the people who wrote the Gospels.

There is a sort of chronological snobbery which says, oh, well, they were stupid in those days, but we're immensely clever. And that's just not true at all. They were sensible people just as we are.

So to think ancient people were superstitious and ignorant is a big mistake. Let me remind you that when Jesus told his disciples, he'll be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, he'll hand him over to the Gentiles, he'll suffer, and on the third day rise again, rather than saying, oh, yes, we get that, we're very superstitious.

[9:59] They said, well, we don't know what he's talking about. They didn't readily understand the things he said, and sometimes they were too frightened to ask him. And when Jesus was raised from the dead, they weren't gullible, primitive people who said, oh, yes, of course.

They found it difficult to believe that Jesus had truly risen from the dead just as any of us would because we know that doesn't happen. They knew that too.

So when they came to believe it, it was only because they were convinced by compelling evidence. That's how they came to believe it. So without going into a huge amount of detail, if you look through the four Gospels, you get things like this.

The risen Jesus talking to his followers, this is the one when they're walking on the Emmaus Road, if I've got that right, and they're saying, oh, things have gone terribly wrong.

We had so much hope in Jesus. We thought he would redeem Israel. And Jesus is actually walking along with them, but they don't recognize him. And he says to them, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

[11:22] Didn't the Christ have to suffer and thus enter into his glory? And he has to persuade them and they get persuaded. And then they recognize him.

And I always think that must have been a little bit like when you meet somebody who's had their beard shaved off. So Lubo's got a bit of his beard back, actually. But when you see somebody who had a beard, and then you don't see and think, is that the same person?

And I presume something like that with Jesus. I'm not saying about his beard, but just he looked the same but a bit different. And it took them a while to recognize him. Things like this.

Thomas, who goes down in history as doubting Thomas, but I think we could also call him quite sensible Thomas, really, who said he was told that the Christ had risen again.

And he said, until I see the nail marks, until I put my fingers in the hole in his side, I'm not going to believe that. And Jesus appeared, came and stood amongst them and said to Thomas, there you go.

[12:34] You can touch me. You can put your hand in the wound. You can see and believe. So Thomas did so and he then records the high watermark of faith in the New Testament and says to Jesus, my Lord and my God.

And at that point, Jesus sort of puts a line through history and says there's going to be people who see and touch and believe and they're going to record that and write that down and the subsequent generations are going to be blessed, not because they've seen and touched, but because they've believed the testimony that was written down by the first people.

And that's the generation that we're in. We're the people who have the blessing of believing because we believe the testimony that's been given, the things written in the Bible. In 1 Corinthians 15, which we had read to us, the Apostle Paul is at pains to say, I'm not talking about Jesus' memory living on.

I'm not talking about Jesus' spirit living on. I'm saying that he died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

He was buried and he was raised again on the third day according to the Scriptures and people saw him. People physically saw him and he gives a list of them and part of the list is to say there were 500 people at one go who saw him and in principle he says to the writers he says in his writing to the Corinthians you could potentially go and talk to them because they're still alive.

[14:18] It is true that he really did rise from the dead. So this is the testimony that we have. And let me just add one more thing this sort of plug the gap argument which goes like this.

Before Jesus' death the disciples expected him to seize power. They said can we sit at your right and left when you come into your kingdom? And I suppose they must have thought that Jesus would seize power perhaps militarily or that God would back him up in going entering Jerusalem and then just being acclaimed as king.

But that didn't happen and he died on the cross and the disciples were terribly terribly disappointed. And everything that they thought would happen seemed to have gone wrong.

They thought he was totally defeated and everything was wrong and everything was a big mistake. And then historically as a fact at some point later after something and I've left a little gap there they

suddenly started saying he had risen from the dead like Peter did.

You condemned him to death but God raised him from the agony of death and we are witnesses of this fact is what Peter says. suddenly starts saying that and we're willing to suffer and even to die rather than deny what they testified to.

[15:55] So you get expectations that are frustrated and disappointed and then suddenly you get them confidently declaring the resurrection of Jesus Christ and what happened to change that?

What is in this blank in the middle there? Well what is in the blank in the middle there? Well it's a historical question isn't it? What's there? You could say nothing nothing happened which seems totally illogical doesn't it?

People don't suddenly start testifying to something that they knew hadn't happened that would be totally illogical. Was there some sort of mistake? You know people have come up with imaginative theories that they went to the wrong tomb or I don't know some sort of mistake it just seems completely improbable.

Were they telling a lie? Did they know that what they were saying was untrue but they said it in this confident well articulated sacrificial way?

I think that is just impossible human beings don't do that do they? Was there some sort of medical resuscitation? There was a theory I don't know when it came up it was called the swoon theory that Jesus didn't actually die but he was in this tomb he lost huge amounts of blood he was dehydrated and they put him in the tomb suddenly he felt a lot better and after three days he came out and rolled the stone away and said yeah I'm fine now and everybody thought that was the resurrection and I remember a long time ago Minister Roy Clements summing that up and he says if you believe that you believe anything the alternative being it really happened it really happened it's sober truth it's history so number three what does this say about Jesus so we've looked at what is actually being claimed we looked at did it really happen and I've said yes it did really happen so number three what does it say about Jesus what does this tell us if Jesus really did rise from the dead now just thinking about it I'm not doing very detailed looking at particular words from the

[18:19] Bible but just thinking what does this mean if Jesus really did rise from the dead now this isn't just a random blip is it this isn't just one of those funny old things this is absolutely crucial if Jesus did rise from the dead it's not a random meaningless event something is going on there and just to put it in these terms Jesus must be somehow plugged into the source of creation power and ultimate significance mustn't he if he rises from the dead some power has been at work some power has been at work for some reason to take this person and to reverse all the normal laws of physics and biology and medicine for this one person to reverse all that and to rise him from the dead

Jesus is plugged into that creation power and ultimate significance and of course the Bible is going to say absolutely and I can tell you a whole lot more about what that involves that the source of this creation power is none other than almighty God the creator of everything that this God is the creator of everything he's the judge of the world he's the Lord the God of Israel and this is the person who has acted specifically into and upon the life of this Jesus and this being specifically and uniquely endorses this Jesus so the word endorse meaning to approve of to say yes he's right and God has said of this Jesus he's right and we should take notice of what he says about this Jesus

I'm going to spend trying to spin this out in three ways if Jesus really did rise from the dead the creator God endorses him as teacher so God says I'm raising him from the dead I'm saying yes to this Jesus he was a teacher and I'm saying yes to him as a teacher in other words the things that he taught he did not teach falsely and deceptively you can get people who look on the internet you can find people who tell you anything at all probably somebody who tells you that Theresa May is really a Martian probably somebody who believes that somewhere all sorts of wacky things but Jesus taught things and God says no I'm backing him he did not teach falsely and deceptively but he taught truly and reliably so when

Jesus said truly truly I say to you which he often did truly truly I say to you the God who raised him from the dead is saying that's right you listen to him because when he says truly truly he means truly truly and I back him up in his moral and ethical teaching the God who made everything backs him up and endorses him so when Jesus talks about forgiveness and how that works and brings a

way of forgiveness God says that's right listen to him when Jesus talks about sexual ethics of course that's going to be the one that's most controversial today God says you listen to him when Jesus for example teaches about power and humility and greatness and all those sorts of things God says I endorse him you listen to him he's endorsed as a teacher and specifically in his teaching about himself where Jesus notably said these I am

I don't know whether you know these I am I am the good shepherd I am the way the truth in the life things like that Jesus said about himself and the things he said are so stupendous and so huge if he was deceiving surely God would have said I won't raise a liar like that from the grave he doesn't deserve anybody to endorse him to approve of him you lot shouldn't endorse him and approve him and I certainly won't but God did raise him and the Jesus who said I am the way and the truth and the life and no one comes to the father but through me God raised him from the dead and said this is right it wasn't just talk it was truth and when Jesus teaches about the future which he certainly did and talked about his coming to this world to make everything right in future

[23:45] God endorses that too you need to trust him on that also says Jesus that says God the son of man will come back Jesus said a lot of things about that so this is something about Jesus as teacher and that has a matching response from us and the matching response is if you say it Jesus I'll believe it and I will shape my life according to it because you won't shape your life according to it you don't really believe it do you this this is a claim for him as teacher and the response is if you say it I'll believe it and I'll shape my life according to it so a second thing about Jesus God endorses him in terms of his authority now the bible loves to talk about

Jesus as king and king in a certain style in a certain way with a certain heritage part of a certain plan and going along with that as judge the one who has the right to look at your life and mine and say that's right that's wrong with authority and this is what God is endorsing so if one of the other features of the life of Jesus is he did many miracles he did mighty works and signs didn't he fed 5000 and stuff like that he showed his authority over sickness and Satan and what we would call nature stilling the storm and even over people which we'll come back to in a moment and God says that is absolutely right that is him he has authority to do these things and when you draw the conclusion that his authority is almighty authority you are drawing the right conclusion the sort of kingship that he has is described in one of the ancient

Psalms as being the son of God who rules the nations with a rod of iron and you think where's that what's happening well that's what we're told he is doing and he will do and God endorses the Jesus who had that authority and at the end of Matthew's gospel after he's risen from the dead Jesus himself says that same thing all authority in heaven and on earth is given to me and he says to his disciples therefore go and make disciples of all nations but he's saying he has this authority and putting it down to a very nitty gritty level coming back to people when he walked by the side of the lake and he met fishermen and he said to them come and follow me come and follow me!

and that's and the response is to yield to his authority it's not that we can look down and judge Jesus or that we're equals and we can negotiate it that he has the authority and he says to us this is what I want you to do and our job is to say yes third way that the creator God endorses Jesus is as saviour and in a very specific way his death on the cross was said by Jesus to be of a certain nature and in the faith that Jesus was born in the Jewish faith of all the Jewish scriptures Jesus would have said

I'm totally in that stream of things that's how I understand myself that's what I submit myself to including my death specifically that he had died on the cross seeming to be a criminal but actually bearing the sins of his people of the whole world bearing the sins of people like you and me that's what Jesus went to the cross that's how and why he went to the cross and God vindicates and endorses this Jesus so he says things like he went to the cross as if he were a criminal but he's not a criminal and I raised him from the dead in contradiction to the judgment on him that he is a criminal and I raised him from the dead and say he is my dear son he never did anything wrong he bore sins and

[29:37] I'm happy with that he's done that and I give him the name that is above every name he's not a criminal he's righteousness itself and God endorses him and says to die as a redeeming sacrifice and that sacrifice

is okay with me God says that's enough for me this whole load of obnoxious people that he died for and you wouldn't believe how difficult it would be to pay the sins of that lot of people but Jesus did it and he's done it and I'm satisfied with that says God and raises him from the dead it's good news for look how brilliantly he's done he made himself of no reputation he took upon him the form of a servant he became a man he humbled himself to death even death on the cross therefore God highly exalted him gave him the name that is above every name the name of

Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue should confess Jesus Christ his Lord to the glory of God the Father his sacrifice is sufficient it says God raises him up in demonstration of that remember the thief on the cross who looked across at Jesus dying next to him his mate said poured scorn on Jesus but this particular thief said no don't make fun of him we're getting the death we deserve this man has done nothing wrong and the thief looked across at Jesus and said remember me when you come in your kingdom isn't that amazing that he could foresee what God would do to raise him from the dead and install him as king and that dying thief said remember me Jesus and Jesus said I got it yep isn't that wonderful and the response to his saviourhood endorsement of his saviourhood is to believe his promises the vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives my sin oh the bliss of this glorious thought my sin not in part but the whole is nailed to his cross and I bear it no more praise the Lord praise the Lord oh my soul and God says absolutely by raising him from the dead so what it says about Jesus as a teacher and as a king and as a saviour and what does it say about!

Well what does it say about us let me read you a little bit of another sermon that the apostle Paul preached back in those early days of Christianity this time to a Greek audience who didn't know much about the Bible well they didn't know anything about the Bible and Paul says to this Greek audience he says in the past God overlooked ignorance but now he commands all people everywhere to repent for he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed he has given proof of this to all by raising him from the dead so what does it say to us

God it says God has given our world a clear true demonstration of those things and I'm going to spell out a few implications so it challenges our world and says that first of all the narrow world view the sort of skeptical world view is incorrect so to those ancient Greeks who said God isn't interested in matter and bodies the resurrection says no you're wrong the resurrection says God has in mind physical bodies a physical world he's going to remake the whole thing that's what his plan is and the resurrection challenges your narrow world view and of course it challenges the world view of today well

[34:47] I'm perhaps unfairly caricaturing but if we were to be saying well what there is in this life is do the best you can in this life try to be kind to people enjoy the things that you can enjoy be yourself and that's all there is to it the resurrection says no that is too small a view of reality too small a view of reality there's more going on than you've grasped the resurrection challenges us on that here's another challenge it says personal moral rebellion is the wrong place to be do I mean by that well the resurrection says Paul commands all people to repent the resurrection captures and demonstrates what God is saying now he commands all people everywhere to repent repent it doesn't just mean to be sorry it means to turn round 180 degrees to go from one direction to another and the direction that human beings are in by default is to say

I'm king of my own life I do what I want I need to be true to myself and that sort of thing and the resurrection says actually there is a real king and he's not you and there's a real direction for you to go in and it's not just your direction and you are out of order that personal moral rebellion is the wrong place to be because you're not as strong as he is you're not as right as he is he's the right one God has raised him God has established him God has endorsed him and if you're not right with him you're out of order personal moral repellent is the wrong place to be this is an unsustainable position for us to be rebels against him to say no I'm not doing what he says and thirdly and finally the resurrection says to us there is a very viable enviable and possible alternative to living apart

from God distant from God rebellious against

God etc the very fact that God says repent means that there is still time to do that the very fact that he bothers to say it means that he cares about you the very fact that he commands is that he takes it so seriously he's stopping to say to you sort of almost stand in your way and say you need to change and that is absolutely so I say that's what you should do now this minute God says I command you to repent I command you to turn around I care about you that much it's that important I'm telling you this is it he commands people to repent it is viable

God isn't asking you to do something that can't be done it's a viable that could be done it's enviable because moving from a position of estrangement and tension and all of that stuff to a position where God says right you got it now yes you've come home that's an enviable thing and it's possible I know you might think oh well it's alright for Christian people because they're spiritually minded people and sometimes they seem to have faith and I'll never have that but that's completely wrong the people in churches would never have been there except God had made it possible for them to be there and he'd make it possible for you this alternative is viable enviable and possible and it is a possibility of turning to turn towards God maybe you want to just do it a little bit at a time and say

I don't really fancy this very much but I'm just going to turn to you a little bit can you help me if this is true if this is right help me to turn as I should to turn to the risen all powerful one who is waiting inviting and welcoming because this resurrection Jesus is the one through whom God is speaking and the resurrection Jesus is the Jesus of power the Jesus at the right hand of God the Jesus who shed his blood the Jesus who cares about people like you and me and says yeah even you yes you you come to me because I would welcome you I invite you there is a place for you I can do this for you he's waiting inviting and welcoming and the Jesus who says this is of course not a

[40:33] Jesus of impotence and indifference is he because he wouldn't be risen would he he's not a Jesus who is powerless and just sort of gives you some platitudes and doesn't really care but that Jesus is saying this is in the place of almighty power you know if he says he can do something he can do it he says he can do it for you he can do it for you he is in the place of triumph and he is also in the place of compassion because this is the key to the heart of Jesus that he cares about people he wouldn't have bothered doing any of this if he didn't care he cares about you so there is a viable enviable and possible alternative which is coming to him and coming to him brings any of us into the position that Jesus was brought into that is to say connection with the creator connection with the very one who is hope for the future connection with the compassion that's at the heart of the universe connection with power that is beyond death deathless power and to come in relation to

Jesus to hear him call and to come to him is to be brought into that connection personally yeah is to be brought into that connection personally connected with the heavenly father connected with a future connected by compassion connected by a power that goes beyond death and promises huge things for the future and he says you can have that and live your life today in the light of that in fact as Ben and I were looking at 1 Corinthians 15 we noticed that right at the end of it when he's been through all about the resurrection he says therefore let nothing move you let me quote it to you always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain he says you can have this in your life to live your life every day whatever that involves knowing that you're connected with the risen

Lord Jesus so may God bless us all this Easter and let's sing number 723 3