

What if They Found the Corpse of Jesus? • By Dr. David O. Dykes
1 Corinthians 15:12-22

INTRODUCTION

I read a book entitled *A Skeleton in God's Closet*, a Christian novel called a theological thriller written by Paul Meyer. Archeologists discover a sarcophagus in Israel at a place called Rama. They open the sarcophagus and find a skeleton that obviously had been crucified. And inside the sarcophagus, they find a sign that was on the cross that said Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews. And it was written in Latin and in Hebrew and in Greek. The entire world is thrown into turmoil as they face the possibility that there was no resurrection.

What if they found the corpse of Jesus? What if you had gone out in front of your home this morning and gotten your Sunday morning paper and splashed across the front page were these headlines: Body of Jesus found in Palestinian Tomb? Page after page describes how respected pathologists and archeologists had determined unquestionably that the corpse found in Israel was that of Jesus of Nazareth. What would it do to your Christian faith? Would you keep on coming to church? Would you keep on being a Christian? There's a religion professor in Georgia who wrote these words: "If they found the body of Jesus in a tomb today, it would make absolutely no difference to my Christian life or to me. The physical resurrection of Jesus is absolutely unimportant."

I don't believe I could agree with him. A liberal preacher in our nation's capital on Easter preached these words. He said, "Jesus' body lies in a nameless Syrian tomb, but his deathless spirit marches on." He tries to kind of make it look real nice. He just doesn't come out and say, "Jesus is dead as a hammer." He tries to make it seem like his spirit is living on.

Is that all there is to the Christian life, or was there a literal and physical resurrection? Now to me, the resurrection is the key. If there's no resurrection, everything else falls apart. Like a house of cards. I heard the story of two demons that had been assigned to guard the tomb where Jesus was buried between the crucifixion and the resurrection. And these two demons were trying to guard the tomb because they knew that Jesus had promised to come back alive. And one demon said to the other, "I hope he doesn't come back alive because if Jesus comes out of that tomb, hell help us all. Heaven's going to break loose!" That's the truth...because of the resurrection, heaven has broken loose.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul poses the question: "What if they found the corpse of Christ?" First Corinthians 15:12-22 says:

¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been

raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. ²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

I. WHAT IF JESUS IS REALLY DEAD?

If Jesus is dead, there are several negative consequences. Let me name five negative consequences.

1. Our founder is a failure

We could even take it a step further. Not only is he just a failure, he's a fraud. He's a fake because all the other world religions can continue without a living founder. For instance, you're familiar with Buddhism. Buddha is dead and buried and everybody knows he's dead and buried, but Buddhism continues on. What about Islam? Islam was founded by Muhammad who lived about 400 years after Jesus. He's dead and buried there. His bones are in Medina, the second most holy place for those who follow Islam. Those religions continue on, even though their founder is dead, but the whole basis of Christianity is based upon the prediction and promise of Jesus. He said in John 2:19, "destroy this temple [meaning his body], and in three days I'll build it up." In Matthew 12:40 he said, "...as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, even so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Jesus predicted that he would be killed, and he would come back to life. If they found the body of Jesus, that would make our founder a liar. And, as Paul says, we all become liars. We're false witnesses about the resurrection of Jesus. As I've said before, you cannot merely say that Jesus Christ was a wonderful moral religious teacher on the same level as Confucius, Buddha, or Muhammad. You have to say he was a liar, because he said he was going to come back alive. And if they found the body of Jesus, that makes him a liar. Or maybe he was a little bit deranged, a little bit deluded. Maybe he had deceived himself into thinking he was going to come back to life. You know, maybe his elevator didn't go to the top floor. Maybe he had room for rent upstairs, unfurnished. But when I read what Jesus said, and when I see what Jesus did, that doesn't sound like a liar or a lunatic.

The only other viable option is that he's the Lord. He is who he said he was. If they find the body of Jesus, I'm outta here. I promise you. I'm going to burn that book. I'm walking out of here. I will not continue to be a Christian if they find the body of Jesus, because it all falls apart. Our founder would be a fraud of faith.

2. Our faith is foolish

Paul says if there's no resurrection, all preaching is pointless. Now I'll be frank with you. Even with the resurrection, some preaching is pretty pointless at times, right? I heard about two ladies talking about the preacher's sermon after church. One said, "What'd you think about the preacher's sermon?" She said, "Well, I thought three things. Number one, he read it. Number two, he didn't read it very well. And number three, it wasn't worth reading in the first place."

Even with the resurrection, some preaching is pretty bad and I've heard many of it and done some of it. And so have you. But Paul says if there is no resurrection, all preaching is pointless. It would mean for the last 27 years that I've been preaching I've been wasting my time. It would mean that four years of college were wasted. Seven years of seminary were wasted. For me, it would mean that the thousands of dollars of books I have, my library is totally waste. We might as well pile them up and burn them. If there was no resurrection of the dead, not only is this true for me, but for every other preacher. For the last 40 years in America, there's only been one man who has appeared on every list of the most admired men in America. People come and go on that list. But you know the one man and the only man who's been on it for 40 years is Billy Graham. He has preached to more people than anybody in the history of the world. But if there's no resurrection, I'm here to say respectfully that Billy Graham's entire life has been wasted, and I'm wasting your time. And I'm wasting my time. Who's the bigger fool? Me or you? Are you getting all dressed up and coming down here and sitting and listening to a fool? If there's no resurrection, let's just call the whole thing off. Our faith is totally foolish. You see faith by itself is absolutely no good. Faith has to have an object. You can have a lot of faith, but if it's not in the right object, that faith is totally foolish.

I mean, you could jump out of an airplane without a parachute and all the way down you could say, "I'm going to be okay. I'm going to be okay. I sincerely believe with all my heart that I'm going to be okay." But when you hit the bottom, it's going to ruin your whole day. It's not faith in faith; it is the object of your faith that counts.

I read about a man out in Southern California. He had the nickname the human fly, not because he showed up at picnics, but because he had a habit of climbing up buildings. He wore special gloves and special shoes. And he could just scurry up the side of a building by putting his hands and feet in all the cracks.

One day he publicized that he was going to climb a 40-story building in LA, and the policemen were there controlling the crowds. And they watched as he climbed

up, going from this ledge to that ledge and this crack to that crack until he got almost to the top. But the top of the roof was just a little bit beyond his grasp. And he started looking around and saw what he thought apparently was a crack in the face of the building. He thought he was home free, but when he grabbed the crack, he fell to his death 40 stories. When they pried his hand open, they found a spider web. He had sincerely believed that that spiderweb was an opening in the rock. And he put his faith in it, perfect faith. But the object of his faith failed him.

You know what Paul is saying? He's saying, if Jesus is dead, putting your faith in Jesus is worthless. You might as well be putting your faith in the wood of the cross. If there's no resurrection, faith is totally foolish.

3. Funerals are final

Everybody at one time or another has attended a funeral, either the funeral of a friend or the funeral of a loved one. In verse 18 Paul says if there is no resurrection, when you went to that funeral, that is the final ultimate end of any kind of relationship you'll have with that person. You might as well say goodbye because you'll never see them again. When I laid my dear daddy in the grave in Florida, if there's no resurrection, that's it. And then beside him, I laid my, my mother. If there's no resurrection of Jesus, and he didn't come back from the dead, I'll never see my mom again. I'll never see my dad again. How about that dear precious child that you laid in the grave years ago? If there was no resurrection, that's it; you'll never see him or her again. You remember when you put your grandmother or your granddad in that grave and you thought, "I'll see you again"? No, friend, if Jesus did not come back from the dead, you will never see them again. Paul says they are lost forever. Every funeral is totally final.

I was reading not long ago about the life of Madame Curie. Marie Curie, along with her husband, Pierre, discovered radium around the turn of the century in 1903. They received the Nobel Prize for physics, for the discovery of radium, which led to the x-ray and radiology. Madame Curie was not a Christian. In fact, she was an avowed atheist. In 1906 her husband was on a Paris street and a runaway buggy ran over him and tragically killed him. Marie Curie was devastated by grief, and in her biography she wrote about how after the funeral, she clung to his body. She kissed the face of the corpse time and time again. Every day until her death years later, she wrote him a letter in her diary. And she wrote the same letter every day, over and over again. You know what she wrote to her husband? Listen to the hopelessness. She said, "Your coffin was closed and I could see you go down into that deep, dark hole. They filled the grave with dirt and put flowers on it. Now everything is over. It is the end of everything, everything, everything." Can you imagine the hopelessness if there's no resurrection? If Jesus didn't come back from the dead, that ought to be your attitude toward every person that you have ever buried—all our funerals are final. If there's no resurrection, the dead are lost.

4. Forgiveness is a fable

In verse 17 Paul says if Jesus is not raised from the dead, then you are still in your sins. We all have a sin problem. Every one of us. But the good news is God offers forgiveness. Isaiah 1:18 says that though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow though. Although they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. In other words, God is saying sin is kind of like dirt. It soils you, it stains you. Maybe you've gotten really dirty, whether you were working out or maybe working out in the garden. Isn't it a refreshing, exhilarating experience to stand in the shower and just let all of that dirt be washed off of you? That's a picture of forgiveness. When you come to Jesus Christ, he totally forgives your sins past, present, and future. You know what? If Jesus is discovered to be dead, forget it. The Bible says you're still in your sins. You're still as dirty and filthy and as rotten and guilty as any sinner in the history of the world.

When we were in Jerusalem a couple of weeks ago, we attended the Memorial to the Jewish Holocaust during WW2. We saw hideous pictures of how the Nazis put to death 6 million Jews. They used cruel medical experiments to kill 1.5 million children. I really do think that the darkest, deepest, hottest places in hell are reserved for the people who hatched that scheme and carried it out. But if there's no resurrection of Jesus, you're just as guilty as Hitler. And I'm just as guilty as Hitler and all the others. We are just as guilty as the worst rapist, the worst serial murderer, we're all guilty. If there is no resurrection, that's what Paul says. You're still in your sins.

5. Our future is futile

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the only thing that makes our future count. Otto van Bismarck was a German leader and he wrote these words: "Without the hope of the resurrection, this life is not worth the effort of getting up and getting dressed in the morning." If Jesus is found to be dead and they find his body, life is nothing but a tragic, dirty joke God played on us. Life is nothing but a game of Russian roulette. And we don't know which day holds the fatal bullet. Life is nothing but a dead-end street. And we spend all our lives bouncing in the potholes of despair, desperation, and destruction if Jesus is dead.

II. WHAT IF JESUS IS ALIVE?

Verse 20 says, "...but Christ has indeed been raised from the dead." If Jesus is alive, all those negatives become positives. Our founder is Lord. Our faith is real. Our funerals are only temporary. Our forgiveness is real. Our future is full of hope. But let me give you three additional positive benefits of the resurrection of Jesus.

1. Our Lord can be trusted

He is who he said he was, if he is alive. In Revelation 1:18ff Jesus said, "I am the living one. I was dead and behold I am alive for forever and ever. I hold the keys

of death and Hades.” You see, all of us have a problem with death. All of us have a problem with the threat of hell. And Jesus said he was the only one who's got the key that can unlock the chains of sin and death and hell that binds every one of us. Jesus said, “I've got the keys and I'm alive and you can trust me.”

If Jesus is still dead, everything else he said is invalidated and untrue. It was a lie. But on the other hand, if Jesus is alive, everything he said is valid. It is authentic and you can believe him. What do you think the greatest discovery the world has ever made is? When Columbus discovered the new world? Would it have been when Madam Curie discovered radium? When they discover the cure for cancer or AIDS? I believe the greatest discovery was made on the morning they discovered nothing. When they went to the tomb on that first Easter morning, Peter and John and the women found it was empty. Nothing was there because that discovery changes everything. The tomb is empty, but it's full of significance for you and for me.

2. Our sins can be forgiven

Now let me get theological with you for just a moment. The death of Jesus was the payment for our sins. And sometimes we think that the resurrection was just a nice little result of it, but no, there is a deep theological implication to the resurrection. Romans 4:25 shows the impact of the resurrection. “He, that is Jesus, was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” It says without the resurrection, the cross would have been a waste of time. The cross is meaningless without the resurrection. Plenty of people were crucified, and plenty of people died as martyrs for good causes. But it is the resurrection that validates the cross. Let me illustrate it. You know, back in Bible times, they had a way that they would sell and buy things. Let's say you walked up to someone who was selling their goods, and you pointed to something that you wanted to buy. Well, the owner would take it down and set it before you. And even if you couldn't speak his language, you could carry on business.

And this is what you would do. You would take out a certain amount of money and lay it down beside that item. Or you take another item to barter or trade for it. And the owner would look at the item for sale and would look at what you're offering. And if he did nothing, that meant that your offer was not accepted. You either had to up the ante or just withdraw your offer. But if you gave some more cash or if your initial offer was accepted, you know what the owner would always do. This was a universal sign of acceptance. He would simply raise his hand. And when the seller raised his hand, that meant the transaction is complete. When Jesus died on the cross, he was offering the price of his very life for our sins.

But it was not until the resurrection that the Father lifted up his hand and said, “I accept the payment that Jesus has made.” We sing that song that says “Jesus paid it all...” Well, how do you know he paid it? The resurrection, the empty tomb, is

God's receipt of acceptance for the death of Jesus. Your sins can be forgiven because of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. We're all sinners, but there is forgiveness.

3. Life can be exciting

First Peter 1:8 says, "Though you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him, now, you believe in him and you are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy." What's that saying? Because of the resurrection, life is full of joy. Life really is exciting. Don Francisco sings, "He's alive, he's alive, he's alive. And I'm forgiven. Heaven's gates are open wide." After members of the Heaven's Gate cult committed suicide, over two million people had visited their website.

Whether they were morbidly curious or spiritually seeking, I don't know. People are curious about heaven. But you don't have to visit the website. I've got a shortcut for you. It is www, which means the wonderful witness of the word dot J E S U S period. Jesus is the only gate to heaven. He's the only heaven's gate. He himself said, "I am the door. No man comes in but by me. I am the way the truth and the life, no man goes to the Father but by me." He alone is heaven's gate. And if there's no resurrection, don't believe it. But if he is alive, you better believe it. And life can be so exciting and full of joy.

Some of you are still bought into this whole idea about religion. It's still religion to you. But religion only kills. What's happening in Northern Ireland between the Catholics and the Protestants is what religion does. What's happening in Bosnia between the Serbs and the Croats, that's what religion does. What's happening in the Middle East between the Palestinians and Israelis, that's what religion does. But I'm not talking about religion. And Jesus wasn't either. He talking about a living relationship with him and I get so excited about it. Sometimes I really do have to backslide to go to sleep! Somebody said, "I saw you sitting at a red light the other day in your car, just singing along with the radio." But I wasn't listening to the radio! I was just singing praises to the Lord.

Do you have that excitement? Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, everything's going to be okay in life. It gives you a reason to get up in the morning.

CONCLUSION

You've got to decide: is he dead or is he alive? What would happen to you if they found the corpse of Christ? Trust me, they're not going to find it, but do you have a living relationship with him? Well, here's your final exam? And I do mean final. This is going to determine where you spend eternity. It's three questions and, by the way, it's pass, fail. No D-minus or C-plus.

Do you believe Jesus is alive? That's the first question. Do you believe Jesus is alive? Romans 10:9 says that if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and

believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you'll be saved. It's interesting that God doesn't say you have to believe in the virgin birth to be saved. You don't say you have to believe in the substitutionary atonement to be saved. You don't have to believe in a certain theory of eschatology to be saved. But you do have to believe God raised Jesus from the dead.

Does Jesus live in you? You can believe intellectually in the historical nature of the resurrection and die and go to hell. You can believe historically that Jesus was raised from the dead. Just like you believe that George Washington sailed across the Delaware river. But if it's not something that you have internalized, if you haven't experienced it, it's worthless. You see John 1:12 says, "But as many as received him, to them he gave the power to become the sons of God. Even to them that believe on his name." Is he living inside your heart today? Yes or no.

Has this happened to you? If you don't know, that's kind of like saying you can get married and not really know what marriage is. It's yes or no. It's happened or not. A friend of mine's son had a third-grade teacher who was not very sympathetic to Christianity. One day he said, "I want everybody to write down on a piece of paper who you believe is the greatest individual living today. And we'll talk about it" Some kids said the president. Some said Michael Jordan. And my friend's son wrote Jesus. "Who wrote that?" the teacher asked. He sheepishly raised his hand. And the teacher said, "Son, you misunderstood the assignment. Although Jesus was a great man, I wanted you to write down the name of somebody who was alive." The little boy said, "Sir, I didn't misunderstand the assignment. I believe Jesus is alive." The teacher got upset and said, "How do you know that?" The boy didn't know anything about apologetics or arguing or anything like that. And he was quiet for a moment. And then he just remembered a song he sang in church last Sunday. He said, "You ask me how I know he lives...he lives within my heart."

And all those little third-graders stood up and clapped. That's all it takes to believe that Jesus is alive and living in you. Here's the third and final question: Are you giving him your life, loyalty, and love? If he is alive, it ought to make a tremendous difference in your life. And he deserves your life. He deserves your loyalty. He deserves your love.

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