

## The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction

The purpose of this paper is to answer a straight forward question. Can a modern person believe that Jesus of Nazareth actually rose bodily from the grave? Can he/she believe that the resurrection reports are not fabrications nor the product of wishful thinking and that they are not merely psychological experiences emerging from the over active imagination of the early church. All four Gospel writers and the apostle Paul wrote that his tomb was unexpectedly discovered empty and that subsequently he appeared to some women first, then to the disciples, and according to Paul, about five hundred other people. Are these credible reports that provide us with a compelling reason to believe that Jesus did, in fact, rise 'bodily' from the grave?

Even those who doubt the resurrection's historicity (actual/material/a real event/historical/public/material) must assume that something very unusual happened otherwise there would be no need for anyone to explain the resurrection faith of the apostles and the early church. What would be the point of explaining something which never occurred? Why theorize and rationalize the testimony of the early church that he did, in fact, rise from the grave and encounter them in his resurrection body on several occasions if the resurrection is a fabricated story, vision, or a dream sequence. If the account is factually untrue from the very beginning there is no need to explain what did not happen.

Tonight I want to address several questions in an effort to show that the hypothesis that Jesus actually rose bodily from the dead as the New Testament claims is the best hypothesis to account for the reported facts. (The word proof cannot be used.) I believe that the 'bodily' (actual/an objective public event) resurrection of Jesus is the only adequate explanation to account for the resurrection faith of the apostles and the recorded historical facts. According to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul here they are:

<b>Matthew 28:1-10</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Mary and the other Mary went to the tomb.</li><li>2. They met an angel of the Lord and he told them that Jesus had risen.</li><li>3. After that Jesus appeared to women who "took hold of his feet and worshipped him".</li><li>4. The risen Jesus repeated the instructions of the angel.</li><li>5. Later, he appears to all the apostles and commissions them to make new disciples.</li></ol>
<b>Mark 16:1-8</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went to the tomb and found it empty.</li><li>2. They met a mysterious person who told them that Jesus was raised.</li><li>3. They reported this information to Peter.</li></ol>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Luke 24:1-11</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and other women visited the tomb and found it empty.</li> <li>2. They met two men dressed in dazzling apparel.</li> <li>3. They told them to report the resurrection to the disciples.</li> <li>4. They did not find the report credible.</li> <li>5. Luke adds the report of the appearance of Jesus to the two men on the road to Emmaus.</li> <li>6. They found the eleven remaining apostles and the apostles told the two men that the Lord had risen and appeared to Peter.</li> <li>7. Luke also describes Jesus' farewell to his disciples.</li> </ol>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>John 20:1-18</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Only Mary Magdalene went to the tomb.</li> <li>2. She found the stone rolled back and the tomb empty.</li> <li>3. This she reported to Peter and John.</li> <li>4. They ran to the tomb and found what Mary had described.</li> <li>5. Later, Mary returned to the tomb thinking the body missing and she met the risen Jesus.</li> <li>6. He said not to hold him.</li> <li>7. Mary returned to the disciples and told them that Jesus had risen.</li> </ol>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>I Corinthians 15:3-8</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Christ was buried and was raised on the third day.</li> <li>2. He appeared to Peter and then to the other apostles.</li> <li>3. Later, he also appeared to five hundred people and these people were still alive as Paul wrote.</li> <li>4. Then Jesus appeared to James and all the other apostles and lastly to Paul himself.</li> </ol>

Clearly, there are some differences but these make the similarities all the more powerful. All five writers agree that:

1. Women, especially Mary, were the first to observe the empty tomb.
2. Mary Magdalene was the first to see the empty tomb.
3. Peter was the first apostle to see the risen Jesus.
4. All the disciples saw the risen Jesus and some other people as well.

Your outline lists the five questions I want to try to answer. (See lecture outline)

### **What are we to make of the differences in the resurrection reports?**

We must admit that the Gospel reports are not completely harmonious so the first thing we must come to grips with is the nature of the Gospels themselves. They are not pure objective history written by detached authors taking care to put aside their preconceived notions. The Gospels were written by men with an a priori theological story to tell impressed upon them as a result of their Pentecost experience which gave them understanding of what they had seen and heard; for this reason, they selected the material from an oral tradition and shaped it in order to accomplish a predetermined theological purpose. This does not mean that they made the facts up but it does mean that they used the oral tradition that came to them as a vehicle for reporting their confident belief that the Jesus who was crucified did not remain in the tomb and that he arose and later appeared to them as he himself predicted. (Even though the disciples did not realize what Jesus was talking about at the time.) How the Gospels came to be written accounts for the differences but these differences do not disprove the appearances of Jesus as an actual event rather than a fabrication of the early church, an apparition or an experience of wish fulfillment.

Had the early church hired a public relations company to improve the marketability of their written documents, adjustments would have been made to 'smooth over' the variations in the resurrection reports. These differences may have been eliminated all together in an effort to gain public support for the church's message. However, the Gospel writers and the early church were far too honest to accept such a practice because they preferred to report the resurrection event as it was came to them because of their confidence in its veracity. The fact that these differences exist enhances the credibility of the reports because it eliminates the possibility of conspiracy through collaboration to hide the inevitable discrepancies that occur when any event is reported by more than one observer. Just as differences in the report of a car accident by several witnesses does not mean that an accident never occurred, so it is with the Gospel accounts; they do not cast doubt on Jesus' resurrection as an observed fact. On the contrary, the differences serve to highlight the points of agreement and thus the actuality of the event is all the more credible. The following story serves to illustrate this point.

Recently, my two grandsons and I were driving home and as we turned into the street where I lived we noticed flashing lights, ambulances, tow trucks, police cars, and three (or was it two) mangled vehicles. We all easily reached the same conclusion at the same time; a car accident had taken place and we were quite sure that it had happened sometime during the last hour or so. The glass had already been cleaned off the street and the officers were measuring, interviewing, and taking notes.

The next day we told grandma about the accident. Daniel said that three cars had been involved but I saw only two. Calvin, who is five years old, didn't even mention the cars; he was more interested in describing the tow trucks because of their flashing lights and bright colours. Daniel included in his recount that the other cars were sub compact and they were less damaged than the large car which was a Mercedes. He said the Mercedes was brand new. I corrected him by pointing out that the Mercedes was at least five years old but I couldn't remember very much about the other cars at all because I was driving and therefore unable to observe everything. Clearly, there were some differences in our recollection that drew us into a vigorous conversation which caused us to relive our common experience. We were unable to completely harmonize our recollection but at no time did any one of us doubt that an accident had taken place. We knew it did occur. Years from now we may have a different recollection of where we were coming from, how many tow trucks there were and whether or not grandma was in the car; but we will all know for sure that the accident was an actual event; it happened; it was not a figment of our collective imaginations.

I will deal with the next four questions as a unit before moving to the last one.

**2. What are the theories that explain the resurrection?**

**3. To what extent do they account for the facts reported by the New Testament writers?**

**4. What are the compelling reasons to believe that on the third day the grave was empty and that the risen Christ appeared to several people?**

**5. Why does the message of the New Testament require us to take the Gospel accounts at face value?**

The five theories that I will briefly discuss are proposed by those who begin with the assumption that the resurrection is impossible on rational grounds; this assumption eliminates the possibility that God raised Jesus from the tomb because God, even if he exists, does not intervene in this way. However, the proponents of these views admit that some explanation has to be found for the resurrection faith of the early church. One question they are compelled to answer. What changed the disciples from disappointed, discouraged, and doubt filled former followers to courageous, confident, and faithful announcers of the Gospel and the resurrection? Why were they willing to accept the dire consequences of preaching the story of the risen Christ? What happened to imbue them with the unshakable confidence that the one who had died was now risen and that his death provided atonement for them and all mankind – both Jew and Gentile without exception? (The radical nature of the universal significance of Jesus' death and resurrection escapes modernity. This theme runs through out the Gospels and the epistles.)

## **A. The Disciples stole the body**

The first theory is that the disciples stole the body in order to perpetrate the enormous fraud that Jesus had actually been raised bodily from the grave. This notion is not new since it was suggested from the very beginning. Matthew reported the actions of the soldiers as they tried to save their proverbial skins. They were supposed to guard the tomb but had failed in as much as the body was missing. They went to the chief priest to tell him what had happened and together they devised a plan to cover up their apparent failure. The soldiers were given a large sum of money to keep their mouths shut and they were told what to say which was:

His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep. If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.  
(Matthew 28:13-14)

The soldiers, according to Mathew, did as they were told and the story circulated widely as planned.

This theory raises a serious difficulty because it presents the disciples as courageous enough to do such a dangerous thing even though they lacked the courage to identify themselves with Jesus only a few hours earlier. Secondly, we are asked to believe that Jesus' body was hidden and its location kept secret. Thirdly, it asks us to believe that they went on to preach the fact of the resurrection in the face of tremendous persecution and eventual martyrdom knowing all the while that it was a bold faced lie. Men and women do not sacrifice themselves for what they know to be a lie. Just think how quickly Richard Nixon's supporters abandoned him when they found out the real truth. This theory runs counter to what we know of human nature. Men and women are capable of tremendous courage for a truthful cause but not for a lie. The theory strains logic and common sense.

## **B. The Swoon Theory**

The swoon theory was proposed by the German scholar Paulus in 1828. He rightly pointed out that a person took a long time to die when they were crucified- as long as one week. He reported that people were often taken down while they were still alive and so it is entirely possible that some victims survived their crucifixion. He argued that Jesus was removed from the cross in a very short time meaning that he had considerable energy left as shown by his loud cry. In other words, he was still alive when removed from the cross and the spear thrust into his side was merely a surface wound made by a soldier with a bad aim or a dull blade. This would mean that the still alive Jesus would have had to hide out the rest of his life in order to sustain the myth of his resurrection. Some have even suggested that he married Mary, had several kids with her, and moved to Spain.

This theory was taken up and developed further by Hugh Schonfield in his popular book called “The Passover Plot”. You may remember him as he was a popular guest on several talk shows because of the controversial nature of his hypothesis. Here the plot thickens greatly and it goes like this:

1. Jesus felt a call to preach repentance to Israel but failed miserably in his task.
2. Influenced by such texts as Isaiah 53, he decided that he must suffer an atoning death for his people so he devised a plot to be crucified without actually dying.
3. Deliberately, he goaded Judas into betraying him and turning him over to the council and then to Pilate to be found guilty of sedition. (political treason)
4. He cleverly arranged for these events to coincide with Passover so his apparent death could be associated with the Passover lamb.
5. He further plotted with Joseph of Arimathea to make plans for his ‘death’ and ‘resurrection’.
6. He also arranged for a drink to be given to him at a prearranged time that would send him into a trance and create the illusion that he had died.
7. This was the signal for Joseph to request Jesus’ removal from the cross so he could put Jesus in a tomb. Jesus’ plan was to get up later and rejoin his disciples.
8. However, the soldier’s sword weakened him and he soon died from the wound. This meant that the ‘fake resurrection’ plan was ‘kaput’.
9. His clothing was neatly placed in the tomb and his body removed by Joseph.
10. When several different people came to the tomb, they found it empty and concluded that, indeed, Jesus had risen.

Sadly, but not unexpectedly, this book captured the imagination of the public and the author sold lots of books. If his theory is correct then someone knew where the body of Jesus was and they were willing to keep it a secret as the disciples went about boldly proclaiming the resurrection. That a lie of such enormity could be kept a secret in perpetuity strains common sense because the presentation of the body would mean that “the game was over’ and the fraud revealed; the disciples would have gone back to their fishing and you and I would not be sitting here now and certainly we would not sing once a year “Up from the grave he arose”.

### **C. The Wrong Tomb Theory**

Kirsopp Lake, a scholar at Harvard, proposed another theory in which he tried to account for the rock firm belief of the disciples in the resurrection. He argued that there were several tombs in the area where Jesus’ body was placed. The women who went to the tomb were unsure of which one had been used in which to place the body of Jesus; mistakenly, they mistook an empty tomb for the actual one and assumed that Jesus had been raised from the dead. According to Lake,

the young man tried to point them in the right direction by saying, “He is not here, see the place where they laid him.” The women, having been discovered where they should not have been fled not understanding what had been said to them. As time passed, they came to the naïve conclusion that the man was an angel announcing Jesus’ resurrection. This theory makes the assumption that there were many tombs in the area and it implies that they drew a conclusion that nothing in their background prepared them to make. Lake’s proposal simply does not correspond to the given facts especially since the empty tomb, by itself, did not give rise to the church’s resurrection faith. However, his subsequent appearances did and Lake’s theory provides no explanation of these.

#### **D. The Vision Theory**

Many scholars, like the Catholic scholar James Crossan, have argued that the disciples saw something after the discovery of the empty tomb but they say that their experience was purely subjective. In other words, they experienced something real (to the extent that a dream or vision is real to the person experiencing it) but with no correspondence to object reality except for the person experiencing the vision. The subjective vision theory has been defended by Johannes Weiss. He believed that it was the faith of the disciples that produced the visions. They were so empowered by the memory of Jesus that this sense of power expressed itself in their belief in Jesus’ bodily resurrection. He wrote:

“... the appearances were not external phenomenon but were merely the goals of an inner struggle in which faith won the victory over doubt. The appearances were not the basis of faith, though so it seemed to them, so much as its product and result.”

His thesis, and Crossan’s, is that their profound inner conviction and desire for resurrection faith gave rise to what they experienced subjectively. The important question is to what extent this theory is justified by the facts. This explanation of the disciples’ resurrection faith stands up only if the disciples were full of expectation that Jesus would rise from the dead and it logically follows that he could appear only to those who had a similar faith and expectation. If Jesus appeared to even one unbeliever the entire theory implodes. The overwhelming evidence provided by the text establishes the fact that the disciples were not believers when Jesus appeared to them and furthermore there was nothing in their background as Jews that would compel them to expect a risen Christ or for that matter a dying, suffering Messiah. Craig Evans, in his book “Fabricating Jesus”, points this out convincingly as does N.T. Wright in his momentous work on the Resurrection. Both argue that there was nothing in the thinking of the apostles that would produce an expectation so strong that it caused them to imagine Jesus’ post resurrection appearances. Furthermore, it is especially difficult for Weiss to explain how they all had the same vision at the same time as an experience of what amounts to massed hysteria. In fact, it was his appearance that made them believers, not the other way around.

I mention briefly the writing of N.T. Wright where he presents a powerful argument that the disciples could not have anticipated the events that eventually overtook them and produced their resurrection faith. Wright writes that there was nothing in the early church's Jewish background that could produce the psychological conditions demanded by Weiss' or Crossan's theory. He is convinced that the belief of the disciples after Jesus' resurrection was dramatically dissonant with their messianic understanding and with all Jewish expectations concerning the messiah. He writes:

..... the early Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus could not have been generated from the combination of their previous knowledge of Jesus and their study of particular biblical texts, however much both of these things contributed to their interpretation of the event once it had happened. (The Resurrection of Jesus, Edited by Robert B. Stewart, page 18)

Wright says that the early church's belief in the resurrection runs counter to Jewish understanding in several ways. Each of these he calls a mutation.

1. With the disciples, resurrection moves from the periphery of faith where it stands within Judaism to the very center of their preaching. (Jews expected the messiah to get rid them of their Roman oppressors and get their land back.)
2. Judaism was vague as to the form of the resurrected body but the early church came to believe that the resurrection involved a kind of immortal physicality. Paul argues in 1 Corinthians that the resurrected body, though different from the natural one, is of the same essence; the resurrected body of each individual has continuity with their earthly existence. Secondly, the resurrection became central to their proclamation. Forty percent of Mark's Gospel is devoted to the last week of Jesus' earthly life and the events he describes culminate in Jesus' actual resurrection.
3. The resurrection is seen by the early church as a two step process whereby Christ's resurrection is a first fruit followed by a general resurrection at the second coming. Jews, if they believed in a resurrection at all, saw it as a single event. (This belief is what Paul was responding to in 1 Corinthians 15.)
4. Within Judaism resurrection was primarily understood metaphorically as the return of Israel from exile (Ezekiel 37) whereas the early church thought of it in terms of its literal, bodily meaning. For them, the bodily resurrection confirmed the effectiveness and universality of Jesus' atoning death. This universality is one of the most startling claims of the early church. Jewish members were reluctant to embrace Gentiles as full members. Their gradual acceptance of this fact is described in the Book of Acts.
5. No Jew expected the Messiah to be raised from the dead because no one expected him to die, particularly on a cross that represented a curse. A



dead messiah who died a criminal's death was no messiah at all. This remains the stumbling block for my Jewish friends.

The bottom line is that nothing in the background of the early believers prepared them for what they discovered. What they eventually claimed concerning the empty tomb could not have been driven by any prior belief so their testimony represents a dramatic shift or mutation in their belief system. The best way of accounting for their change of mind is the actual (public) appearance of Jesus in the form of an immortal but real body. Nothing else can account for the shift that occurred in their belief about resurrection. According to N.T. Wright:

.... the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus together constitute a sufficient condition for the rise of early Christian faith as we have studied it – that is to say, if Jesus did rise bodily and was seen not only having left an empty tomb but appearing in the garden and elsewhere, then this would offer a complete explanation of why the early Christians not only believed in his resurrection but told the stories the way they did and modified the basic Jewish resurrection belief. (The Resurrection of Jesus, Edited by Robert B. Stewart, page 21-22)

If the various theories concerning the resurrection of Jesus are found wanting then one is compelled to take the Gospel accounts at face value and accept the only hypothesis that takes the facts into account whereby God actually intervened in human history by entering space and time, lifting a dead Jesus from the grave and enabling him to actually appear to several people in several places.

However, we must not think that faith is merely a rational conclusion based on the recorded facts. On this point I quote the American scholar George Eldon Ladd.

I believe in the living God because I met him through the living witness of the Holy Spirit. In the end, I accept the biblical witness to the resurrection not because of logical reasoning, but because of an inner quality of the gospel, namely its truthfulness. It so overpowers me that I am rendered willing to stake the rest of my life on that message and live in accordance with it. My faith is not a faith in history but faith in God who acts in history. It is faith in God who has revealed himself to me in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, and in his resurrection, who continues to speak to me through the prophetic word of the Bible. (I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus, George Eldon Ladd, page 140)

### **What is the theological meaning of the resurrection?**

Finally, we come to the most important question of all. What is the theological meaning and importance of Jesus' bodily resurrection? Here, I want to use two contemporary theological minds in order to answer this question – the Anglican scholar N.T. Wright and Dr. Victor A. Shepherd professor of systematic theology at Tyndale Seminary and The Toronto School of Theology. Both these superb scholars reject outright the notion that the resurrection occurred as a reward

given to Jesus by God for his obedience although both would agree that the resurrection would have been impossible had Jesus refused the cup of suffering placed before him in the garden of Gethsemane. (Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Matthew 22:40-46) However, it does not follow that he was raised from the dead as the prize for his willingness to suffer an agonizing death on the cross.

Wright in his Book, *Evil and the Justice of God*, discusses the meaning of the cross and resurrection as it relates to God's salvific activity to rid creation of the devastating effects of Adam's fall and the subsequent presence of profound evil within creation and also at the center of every human heart. Dr. Shepherd explains the meaning of the cross and resurrection as it relates to the sovereignty of God which he carefully defines as running counter culture to the normal understanding of this word. I begin first with N.T. Wright.

He says that the theme that runs through the biblical text from Genesis to Revelation concerns how God has acted and does act to encounter evil and ultimately defeat it by means of the cross and the bodily resurrection of our Lord. He points out that the biblical text does not attempt to define evil philosophically nor does it attempt to answer our philosophical questions concerning the reason why evil exists in the first place. (Those of us who studied Job last season know this to be true.) It does not resolve the question of why an all loving, all powerful God allows evil to exist. From the very beginning, evil is just there and it is "supra-natural, supra-personal," and all pervasive. (Evil is not personal the way God is but neither is it an abstraction thus the terms supra-natural and supra personal.) He reasons that evil has to be understood through the lens of the cross and resurrection and by looking at it from this perspective we see that evil's purpose is to bring disharmony, alienation, rebellion, and ultimately death to creation. In short, evil is acting to abscond with the created order in order to destroy it of which death is the ultimate sign. The profound effects of evil, he says, cannot be overturned by forces within human history; evil's defeat requires intervention from outside of human history and culture which really means the only God can rid his creation of evil and its disastrous effects. The bible is a record of his actions to do just this.

The story, he writes, unfolds as follows. God made a promise to Abraham, called Israel into a special relationship with himself in order to carry the promise forward, gave them the law at Sinai, and used the voice of the prophets to call Israel back to obedience from their idolatry as a way of cleaning up the mess caused by Adam's fall. All along the way, he passed judgment on them but he never abandoned his promise. (Covenant) God's purpose is to supplant the reign of Satan in the world and establish his own covenantal reign within creation (beginning with Israel) and this he does finally through the sacrifice of his incarnate son on the cross, confirmed by the resurrection. The cross, therefore, is the focal point of God's encounter with the evil that exists within human nature and outside of it as well. The cross is the occasion where evil is allowed to have its way as it places Jesus on the cross but God uses the death of his son to provide the atonement that overturns evil's design to alienate Man from God. (Wright

insists that atonement should be understood as an event rather than a theory.) Further to this, the resurrection of Jesus from the tomb wrestles evil to the ground by overpowering evil's ultimate goal – death. The resurrection, therefore, is the sign and guarantee that evil is finally defeated and it is the guarantee that the reign of Satan will be supplanted by the reign of God at the second coming of the Son.

Professor Shepherd would agree with Wright that evil is being encountered and defeated by the cross and resurrection but he explains the meaning of these two events in terms of God's sovereignty but he is careful to point out that 'sovereignty' has an entirely different meaning when it is understood biblically. This is important! For the world 'sovereignty' has to do with power and it is a means of accomplishing some purpose by the use of overwhelming force that casts aside all resistance. In other words, sovereignty is an irresistible force that seeks to implement the desired goal of those who are in possession of such power whether it is military or political. Importantly, he makes the point that an understanding of God in terms of might has led to many abuses when the church tried to impose the faith on those unwilling to accept it. (For example, the outrageous anti-Semitism of the church during the Middle Ages.)

Dr. Shepherd explains that God's sovereignty is not a matter of power. He says that the sovereignty of God is that he always accomplishes his purpose and his means is the cross affirmed by the resurrection. A beautiful phrase occurs several places in his writing where he says that "God does his greatest work at the point of his greatest weakness." The cross he sees as the event where God becomes totally vulnerable and mysteriously absorbs unto himself the responsibility for human sin even though he appears to be overpowered by evil. What then is the meaning of the resurrection? The effectiveness of the cross in providing the means by which men and women can be forgiven is demonstrated by the resurrection as death, the supreme consequence for sin, is overturned.

What these men write makes sense only as the resurrection is comprehended as a 'real' or 'actual' event which is, I think, what the Gospels mean when they speak of Christ's resurrection as 'bodily'. In my view, any other reading of the Gospel accounts concerning the resurrection rids the Gospel message of its coherence and causes it to collapse into a heap of rubble that cannot be put back together. On this point I want to again quote N.T. Wright.

If nothing happened to the body of Jesus, I cannot see why any of his explicit or implicit claims should be regarded as true. What is more, I cannot, as a historian, see why anyone would have continued to belong to his movement and to regard him as Messiah. There were several other Messianic or quasi-Messianic movements within a hundred years either side of Jesus. Routinely, they ended with the leader being killed by the authorities, or by a rival group. If your Messiah is killed, you conclude that he was not the Messiah. Some of those movements continued to exist; where they did, they took a new leader from the same family. (But note: Nobody ever said the James, the brother of Jesus, was

the Messiah.) Such groups did not go about saying that their Messiah had been raised from the dead. The early Christians did believe that Jesus had been raised bodily from the dead. What is more, I cannot make sense of the whole picture, historically or theologically, unless they were telling the truth. (N.T.Wright, "How Jesus Saw Himself," Bible Review 12, June 1996: page 29)

Lastly, I must first remind myself and you as well of the invitation that lies at the very heart of Gospel. The empty tomb and the subsequent appearances of Christ provide the guarantee that the sacrifice of the Son of God is **the** effective atonement for your sins and mine. The resurrection, therefore, inescapably brings each of us to a point of personal decision. It must be remembered that the God whose face is disclosed in Jesus does not impose himself or his saving act upon us. Instead, he offers a gift that must be accepted with a repentant and consenting faith. Believing in the bodily resurrection as an historical fact is not enough! The Christ who walked out of the tomb effectively remains there unless he is invited, by means of God's grace, into each human heart personally. His rising is for no effect until we respond with the words recorded in the Gospels. "Lord have mercy on me." Then, our personal acceptance of the unmerited gift that God presses into our hands will move us to say with the apostle Paul:

**But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.**

(1Corinthians 15:20-22)

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