

“WHY DIDN'T HE JUST STAY DEAD?”Luke 24:1-49**THEME: Easter: the implications of Christ's resurrection****DATE: 04/08/07**

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In one of the *Peanuts* comic strips Charlie Brown and company are lying on a grassy knoll staring up at a sky full of cloud formations. What happened went something like this, as best I can recall. One of the sky-gazers sees in the clouds a scene from the Battle of Waterloo where Wellington defeated Napoleon. Another points out the great bard of Avon, William Shakespeare, at his desk taking up a quill to write another sonnet. In the last frame it's Charlie Brown's turn, and he's thinking to himself, "I was going to say I see a puppy and a kitty, but I guess that just won't do now."

Charlie and friends had far-fetched and feeble imaginations, but they didn't appreciate the real truth about those great clouds.

When you gaze at great cloud formations, what are you really looking at? One huge puffy cloud may contain trillions of water droplets with a combined weight of a half-million tons. That's the weight of about 200,000 average automobiles. Too bad Charlie didn't know that!

- It's much like that with Easter. People think of Easter and see bunnies or bonnets or brunch. Some see Easter as an annual easing of family tensions and going to church with mom and dad.

Those are all illusions. Easter has much more heft and power than the things we see in the holiday.

It's about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. You knew I'd say that!

- What's wrong with celebrating the fun parts of Easter and just leaving it at that? Do we really need to get into Christ's death and resurrection to do Easter properly?

What difference would it have made if Jesus just stayed dead?

- If Jesus' mission in the world was to establish a religion in his name, he could have remained dead, just because of all the miracles he performed.

The religion of Islam is spreading rapidly and its founder died and remained dead.

Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) was the founder of Buddhism. He claimed to accomplish Enlightenment while seated cross-legged under a banyan tree. He died and stayed buried in the fifth century B.C., but the religious and philosophical system named after him continues to flourish.

If Jesus' purpose was only to be a great teacher of truth, his teachings would continue to inspire people, even if he died and didn't rise again. Jesus was a great teacher and his teachings continue to influence people everywhere, but so have the teachings of mortals like Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Shakespeare, Descartes, Milton, and Pascal.

If Jesus' sole purpose was to show mankind the ultimate example of sacrificial love, his success would not have demanded a resurrection. Mother Theresa of Calcutta will go down in history as a great model of compassion. She's dead and she stayed dead.

- Why should we believe that Jesus had to arise from the dead? Why is it important?

In the account of Christ's resurrection in Luke's Gospel, chapter 24 we see some **reasons** why Jesus had to rise from the dead.

I. HE HAD TO RISE TO REVEAL A SPIRITUAL REALITY (1-12)

In order to accomplish his earthly mission, Jesus had to exercise divine authority in the spiritual realm where Satan controls people's lives.

Shortly before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion he said to a crowd in Jerusalem, '*Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.*' (John 12:31)

Would people actually see with their naked eyes the prince of this world, Satan, stripped of his power over the souls of all mankind?

- Couldn't Jesus have accomplished his mission and gone directly back to heaven afterwards without arising physically?

Jesus had to arise from the dead if for no other reason than to prove that what people could not see with their natural eyes was actually true.

If people saw Jesus physically dead, and then saw him physically alive and touched him, then there was something between his death and his resurrection that people needed to know.

If Jesus had not risen from the dead, nobody would have had any reason to believe that Jesus had won a great victory in the spiritual realm.

George Bernard Shaw said, “Death is the ultimate statistic. One out of one dies.”

That’s where life on earth ends. No one has come back afterwards to live and not die, except Jesus.

- Jesus’ resurrection was proof that something enormous had happened after his death on the cross.

What people could see in the resurrected Jesus was the evidence of what they could not see between Good Friday and Easter morning.

¹ *On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.*

² *They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,*

³ *but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.*

⁴ *While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.*

⁵ *In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?”*

⁶ *He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:*

⁷ *“The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.”*

The women were expecting to find a dead body in the tomb. They planned to add their own spices to the embalming of Jesus’ body.

The angels explained, “You’re looking for Jesus in the wrong place. This is a place for the dead. He’s not here. He’s not dead anymore!”

- The grave was just the beginning of Jesus’ greatest work. Everything he had done led up to this beginning that the women thought was the end.

Our eyes could not see and our minds could not comprehend the immensity of what happened when Jesus engaged the forces of evil that had invaded and corrupted and damned God’s creation.

- The Apostle Peter said the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow were things angels longed to look into. (1 Peter 1:12)

What happened between Jesus Christ’s death and his glorious victory fascinated all the spiritual beings in the heavenly realms.

But fallen human beings were not able to see it or grasp it.

- The women were devastated and inconsolable when Jesus died and was buried. But that was just the end of act one.

On the first day of the week the women saw the stone rolled away and the empty tomb. That was just the beginning of act three.

What happened in act two? They missed it.

- I’m sure that anything I imagine about what happened in act two is nowhere near what actually occurred. It happened in the spiritual dimension.

The only parts we see of it are the parts we can grasp: his death and his resurrection.

Jesus had to rise from the dead to show us that there was something immense between the cross and the resurrection—and that’s what it was all about. That’s what he came for.

[Let’s look at a 2nd reason why Jesus had to rise from the dead]

II. HE HAD TO RISE TO DEFINE A FUNCTIONAL FAITH (13-43)

While Jesus went about preaching the good news of God’s kingdom coming into the world, and as he performed miracles and healings, many people put their faith in him (John 7:31; 8:30; 10:42; 12:42).

When Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was, Peter expressed their faith, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16).

Their faith was real, but it was incomplete.

Jesus had to define the meaning of true faith for them.

They believed, but they didn’t believe sufficiently. Jesus had to arise from the dead for their faith to be as big as it needed to be.

- Other events of that day bear this out. Two of Jesus’ disciples were on their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

¹⁴ *They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.*

¹⁵ *As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them;*

¹⁶ *but they were kept from recognizing him.*

¹⁷ *He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast.*

¹⁸ *One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"*

¹⁹ *"What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.*

²⁰ *The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him;*

²¹ *but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.*

These were Jesus' followers. They had put their trust in him as the Messiah. But now they believed their hoped-for Messiah was dead and buried.

²⁵ *He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!*

²⁶ *Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"*

²⁷ *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*

When they reached the village they invited Jesus to stay with them

³⁰ *When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.*

³¹ *Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.*

Jesus chose the moment of the breaking of bread to make them see that it was he who was with them.

He had been raised from the dead. This completely blind-sided them.

- I'm sure they were still confused. All they knew is that it wasn't over. There was more to come, and they had no idea what that might be.

I'll guess that after Jesus disappeared from their sight their old visions of what Jesus would do were revived. Wow! Jesus was now going to turn Jerusalem upside down. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law, and the priests and the elders—the whole Sanhedrin—would have egg on their faces. If Jesus could rise from the dead, he could do anything. It was just a matter of time now and the Roman forces would be sent packing from Jerusalem and Israel would be free.

- They rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the others.

³⁶ *While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."*

³⁷ *They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.*

⁴¹ *And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?"*

⁴² *They gave him a piece of broiled fish,*

⁴³ *and he took it and ate it in their presence.*

Jesus had to rise from the dead to convince them that they were not dealing with a mere man, they were dealing with God.

If the faith of the disciples was no greater than their ability to believe that Jesus was a man who came from God and could perform miracles, that was not enough.

Their faith had to be in the full-strength Jesus—Jesus as Lord not just over his disciples, but Lord over all powers in heaven and on earth.

Their faith had to be in Jesus who was big enough to win the victory over the greatest evil force in the universe and open the way for people to be set free from the power of sin and evil.

By having this kind of authentic faith they would appropriate God's mercy in the forgiveness of all their sins and be renewed spiritually—or born again with eternal life.

[Let's look at a 3rd reason why Jesus had to rise from the dead]

III. HE HAD TO RISE TO MARSHAL A GLOBAL HOPE (44-49)

When the risen Jesus appeared to the Eleven and the other disciples in Jerusalem they were not ready to go out and tell others about him.

Forty days later, just before Jesus ascended to heaven, his disciples still wanted to know when he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel. (Acts 1:3, 6)

From our perspective they seem pathetically obtuse. But if you were in their sandals, you'd probably be excited about the same thing.

- Jesus had to explain the facts to them.

⁴⁴ *He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."*

⁴⁵ *Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.*

⁴⁶ *He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,*

⁴⁷ *and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

- They were eyewitnesses who were to testify to all nations about this.

⁴⁸ *You are witnesses of these things.*

⁴⁹ *I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*

They had to stay in Jerusalem because they weren't ready yet to go out and spread the message of Christ.

If they rushed out of the room at that moment to tell what they believed I think they might have said. "Hey! Listen up everyone, we have awesome news. Jesus has risen from the dead. He is even greater than we thought. Get ready to reclaim this city and all Israel from the Romans. It won't be long. And by the way, he says that you're supposed to repent so that your sins can be forgiven—or something like that."

- Many Christians think it was risen Christ's command to spread the good news of salvation to the nations that motivated his disciples. (See Matthew 28:18-20)

But they didn't get it straight until the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came. "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" (Acts 1:8)

- To spread this wonderful gift of salvation throughout the world, to all nations, Jesus had to rise visibly from the dead.

There had to be eyewitnesses who saw him dead and had the proof of his physical death, and then saw him alive again and touched him.

The world needed the power and conviction of eyewitness testimony.

- The Apostle Paul explained the urgency of spreading the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ: "*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*" *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*" (Romans 10:13-15)

There is more than enough evidence in the Bible to convince anyone with an open mind that Jesus Christ arose from the dead.

Why would the apostles give their lives to preaching the gospel about Jesus and about hope for mankind, and die as martyrs for the cause unless they were thoroughly convinced that Jesus Christ arose from the dead?

- We celebrate Good Friday and Easter morning because those are events are described in terms that we can picture in our minds. But it's all about what happened between the cross and the empty tomb that makes the difference. That's when Jesus accomplished what he came to do.

It's all about the part of us that is spiritual and invisible and will never be annihilated—the essential "you."

- Jesus had to rise from the dead to give us faith that he had done something that cannot be explained in physical terms. Jesus' resurrection blew the sides out of the box that limited the disciples' understanding.

How big is your Jesus? Can you believe big because he's big enough, or do you believe that Jesus can do only what seems reasonable to you?

- Jesus arose from the dead to emphasize that his work of salvation was for people of all nations. We are all sinners who deserve God's wrath, but by his death Jesus suffered the penalty for our sins. Because Jesus did this, God completely forgives all who repent and put their faith in Jesus as their Savior.

Jesus impressed this on his disciples to make sure they didn't think he arose just to make life nice for them and for Israel. But it took more than a month to disabuse them of that notion.

If you just want Jesus to make life nice for you, you will be confused and disappointed—as the disciples must have been for a while.

Why didn't he just stay dead? His resurrection was visible proof that he completed what he came to do, which was something natural eyes could not see. But if he didn't do it, we would be hopelessly damned.