

March 30th 2008: 1 Corinthians 15:1-20: The Reality of the Resurrection.

(Can't take that chance)

Today we strongly declare that the One buried in Jerusalem over 2,000 years ago did indeed rise from the dead three days later
Yet we only have to look back at Easter Sat newspaper to recognize that not everyone shares such a view point.

Perth Anglican Dean, Dr John Shepherd, rejected the notion of a physical resurrection of Jesus' body. In so doing he showed himself as a shepherd who can offer very little to his flock.

He was quoted in the West as saying:

..it would be wrong to demand a specific interpretation of the resurrection, such as the physical reanimation of Jesus' corpse, because the Gospel referred to a resurrection of a body transformed by the spirit of God.

He said Jesus' followers felt his presence after his death as strongly as if it were a physical presence and claimed it as a resurrection experience. "Their concern was not so much to provide an exact historical account of the life of Jesus, but to communicate the reality of their experience to the new life which he embodied," Dr Shepherd said.

Such Teaching is not new. It has been around for centuries. Paul faced it with the church at Corinth and that's why he wrote the chapter we read today.

Basically it states that Jesus' spirit or soul was resurrected after His death. That the disciples somehow got rid of His body so that the focus would be on His spirit living on in God's presence, and then sensing that Spirit with them as they lived day by day.

It does not deny life after death. Most everyone in the world at Paul's time believed in the immortality of the soul. That after death the soul lives on, and whether its existence is pleasant or otherwise depends upon what a person has done in this life.

And things haven't really changed much. If you were to ask around you would know that most of your non-church friends still believed in some existence after death.

But what was not believed in was a bodily resurrection, But that is exactly what the physical resurrection of Christ predicts.

That one day all will stand in the presence of God and for all in Christ, our earthly bodies will be transformed into a new glorious heavenly body.

- **Paul saw no place whatsoever for any view** that downgraded the resurrection of Jesus.

Look with me at 1 Corinthians 15:3-5

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve.

Look first how Paul mentions four things that are of prime importance

- Christ died
- Christ was buried
- Christ was resurrected
- Christ appeared

Christ did not just die spiritually. He wasn't buried just in a spiritual sense. Neither was He resurrected in just a spiritual sense.

They are all listed together because they all physically took place.

SECOND in every case there were ancient and historic documents --the preserved and sacred scriptures of the Jews—that foretold the death—burial---and resurrection

Third there were a host of eyewitnesses that saw Jesus.

Not just one at a time, but in one case over 500 at once. And they were not all friendly to the idea of a resurrection either.

Paul mentions James, half brother of Jesus. He did not believe in Jesus before the resurrection, but the appearance of Jesus to him changed that completely.

And of course Paul himself was the most anti-person you could ever have met, yet something powerful changed him. It was the appearance of the risen Lord

Fourth: Paul's Challenge.

The majority of those eyewitnesses were still alive at the time Paul wrote this. Consequently Paul can say, "most of whom are still living". In other words: If you don't believe me, go see them and check it out.

Now it may well be, that some will read Dr Shepherd's comments, and look at what Paul has to say,

And deep down they may wonder what all the fuss is about.

Why is it so important that Jesus came alive physically?

The answer is obvious to every believer

As Archbishop Barry Hickey said:

"It is absolutely essential to our belief that Jesus rose from death, otherwise he would not be our saviour he would just be an inspirational figure."

"The essence of the whole story is whether Jesus suffered, whether he died and whether he rose. The resurrection was a triumph over the power of death."

And he is absolutely right. Especially with that reference to Jesus as Saviour.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:17

"And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."

That majority of people in Paul's day, who believed that the soul existed after death, did not believe that they had anything to worry about as far as sin and judgment was concerned.

Like many today, they felt that if there was a judgment, they had lived a good life, and had no sin bad enough to stop them enjoying the afterlife.

The message of the cross is that such belief is wrong.

Indeed, every person has fallen short of God's perfect standard, and will face Him one day with a sin stained life that will be judged unsuitable for God's presence

That beautiful and wonderful life that God has prepared would be declared out of their reach.

Could God in His love for us, allow that to happen?

No

Instead God the Son came and lived a perfect human life, and then bore on the cross the punishment for every human heart----for all have sinned.

- **But for us to know that His sacrifice had done the job**
- **For us to know that we could turn to Him and receive forgiveness for our sin**
- **For us to know that Faith in Him would enable us to overcome death**

God had to show us that Jesus had overcome death by raising Him from the death in His physical body.

**He beat death and sin on our behalf
His resurrection proves it.**

**And death is no longer a door to judgment, but a gateway to a life
beyond our greatest imaginings.**

**Christ's resurrection is an historical fact. It happened on the
first day of the week following Passover in the city of
Jerusalem. Our faith is grounded in history, not a philosophy.
Today in prayer we thank Christ, that He not only predicted
His resurrection, but also fulfilled it.
So that we might have hope in Him.**