

What if They Found the Bones of Jesus?

By Marco Scouvert



Are Jesus' bones buried somewhere in Israel? Does it really matter? If archeologists definitely demonstrated that they had found the bodily remains of Jesus, what difference would that make?

In 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul was responding to some people who were denying that there will be a bodily resurrection of the dead in the future and, by logical extension, denying that Christ had been raised

from the dead (vv. 12-13). Therefore, Paul informed them of six devastating consequences that result if Jesus is still dead. Seriously consider them.

1. The gospel is powerless: “Our preaching is in vain” (v. 14a). The word translated “preaching” is not the activity of preaching but the content that was proclaimed. The apostles were declaring that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, able to save those who submit to and follow him. But if Jesus is not raised from the dead, then the gospel is emptied of its power, and Jesus is merely a corpse who is unable to help us in this life or the next!

2. Our faith is meaningless: “Your faith is in vain” (v. 14b). Pretend a man tells me that I can fly, and I believe him. I get up on the roof of my house, confidently asserting my aerial ability. But the problem is that my friend told me something that wasn't true. My confidence is useless, because gravity is real and I am not a bird. When I leap, I will fall straight down to the ground. If Jesus is a dead man rotting away in some Jewish tomb, a response of faith in the gospel becomes absolutely meaningless, no matter how confident in Jesus a person is.

3. Christians are liars: “We are found to be misrepresenting God” (vv. 15-16). The apostles publicly testified that God raised Jesus from the dead, and even claimed that they had seen him. So if Jesus is not raised from the dead, then they told false reports about God's activities. They were not, as some nominal Christians say, “Nice religious men doing their best to explain their perspective on their experience of God in their time.” They were flat-out liars, and so are we. Regardless of our motives and intentions, we have been deceiving people, convincing them to believe in and follow a lie.

4. Our faith is useless: “Your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins” (v. 17). The entire purpose of faith is to unite us to Christ and his saving work on the cross where he bore our sins and experienced the judgment from God that we deserved — death. But if Jesus is not raised from the dead, we are still condemned to die without any hope of rising and living in God's kingdom because our sins are unforgiven. The resurrection of Christ, and not just his death, is essential to redeem us from our sins and give us eternal life. As Paul said elsewhere, “[Jesus] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25).

5. Dead believers have perished forever: “Those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (v. 18). If Jesus is not raised, then believers who have died are hopelessly lost forever. They have died unforgiven and unreconciled to God. Those who thought they would immediately go into the presence of Jesus when they died instead opened their eyes in the agonies of hell where they will be *forever*.

6. Christians are tragically pathetic: “We are of all people most to be pitied” (v. 19). If Christ is still dead, then we have been following an empty tale. Our prayers have been meaningless. We have needlessly denied ourselves the pleasures of sin, certain enjoyments of this world, and comforts of this life. We have been pointlessly spending our time and money to help others. And we have senselessly experienced sorrow, pain, and difficulty in the path of sacrificial loyalty and obedience to Jesus. In the end, we will have nothing to show for it. It has been one big waste of the only life we have. Yes, we have lived the most lamentable lives and are the most pitiful people the world has ever known!

If Jesus' body is still in a grave, then the foundation of Christianity is removed, the heart of the gospel is ripped out, and our hope is entirely lost. Thankfully, Paul does not leave us in this hypothetical pit of despair and discouragement. He suddenly brings us out in verse 20, ringing a victorious and triumphant note: “But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead.”

Jesus is alive from the dead, and that changes everything! It completely reverses the previous consequences if he were not raised. Christians are telling the truth when we say that God physically raised Jesus from the dead. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to those who believe it. Our faith has joined us to a living Savior whose death has covered our sins before God. Believers who have died are now in the presence of Jesus, enjoying his rest and glory. We have lived the most desirable lives and are the most enviable of all people who have ever existed, because when Jesus returns we will be richly rewarded for every sacrifice we have made and labor we have done for the sake of Christ and the gospel.