

Show Me The Body-1Corinthians 15:12-26

- One thousand nine hundred and eighty years ago,
- Outside the walls of the capital city of an insignificant outpost of the Roman Empire,
- A man was pushed down on a wooden cross and his feet and wrists nailed to it.
- He was hoisted naked before a crowd who looked and jeered.
- For six hours he hung there suffering from the physical torment of alternating asphyxia and excruciating pain.
- Because it was the day before a major Jewish festival,
- And the religious leaders didn't want dead bodies desecrating the celebrations,
- They requested that the punishment be speeded up.
- The Roman executioners complied.
- Taking large wooden mallets they smashed his shins.
- With no support from his broken legs,
- The unrelieved stress on his chest suffocated the life from his body and he died.
- To this day no-one knows who he was,
- And probably no-one really cares.

- And yet not more than 5 metres away another man hung dying.
- The only reason we know anything about that first man,
- Was because of this second man.
- The only reason we're gathered here today hearing about that first man,
- Was because of the second.
- In fact all around the world billions of people know the name of that second man.
- Nearly two thousand years later,
- Of two men who died on the same day in the same way,
- One man is unknown,
- Yet the other changed the course of human history.
- Two men suffer the exact same death,
- One dies in obscurity,
- The other has history marked from his birth date.

-How could one man's death so profoundly impact the world?

-The answer is,

-It didn't.

-It wasn't his death that changed the course of human history,

-But the fact that he didn't stay dead.

-It wasn't the death of Jesus but his resurrection,

-That distinguished Jesus from that other man,

-And all other people that have ever lived and died in this world.

-I'm sure we're all aware of the New Atheists,

-Although they're hardly 'New' anymore.

-The New Atheists argue that any belief in God is superstition.

-They propound a view that all religion is irrational.

-They confidently argue that science disproves the existence of a divine being,

-And only the naïve and gullible leap blindly into faith in an unbelievable deity.

-Furthermore they call us all to use our intelligence,

-To examine the world rationally,

-And don't just accept faith propositions uncritically.

-They call on the religious to prove God's existence.

-So I'm going to take up that challenge this morning,

-And propose that the resurrection of Jesus substantiates a belief in the existence of God.

-Less than 15 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus,

-The apostle Paul was highlighting the fact that the resurrection of Jesus,

-Is the glass jaw of Christian belief.

-In a public letter he holds out a challenge to anyone to step up and debunk this most foundational of Christian beliefs.

-Just listen to the string of propositions that blow Christianity out of the water,

-If the bones of Jesus still lie somewhere under the sands of Palestine;

“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 to be pitied more than all men.” 1Corinthians 15:13-19

-The apostles' preaching is useless,

-Your faith is futile,

-They've lied about the power and possibly even the existence of God,

-We're still in our sins,

-There's no life after death,

-And there's no point in living a righteous and godly life.

-That's what Paul says is at stake if Jesus was not raised from the dead.

-And all an unbeliever has to do is show us the body!

-There's a great little story in Mark ch2 where four friends bring their crippled mate to be healed by Jesus.

-The crowd is so big that they can't get in,

-So they scoot round the back,

-Climb up on the roof,

-And smash a hole through the ceiling of Peter's mother-in-law's house.

-They lower their paralysed friend down in front of Jesus.

-Now here's the interesting bit.

-Rather than healing the man,

-Jesus says,

-‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’

-That sends some of the religious leaders ballistic and they start thinking to themselves,

-‘Who does this bloke think he is?’

-‘This is blasphemy.

-‘Who can forgive sins but God alone?’

-But Jesus confronts them asking;

"Why are you thinking these things?" Mark 2:8

-Isn't that spooky that Jesus knows what they're thinking?

-But he goes on;

"Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? ¹⁰But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" He said to the paralytic, ¹¹"I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Mark 2:9-11

-They've asked,

-‘Who can forgive sins but God alone?’

-For the Jews the answer to that question was no-one.

-Yet Jesus tosses out a challenge;

"But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . . He said to the paralytic, ¹¹"I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

-‘Son of Man’ is just Jesus’ way of referring to himself,

-But when he tells that paralytic to get up and go home,

-And he does,

-Jesus is basically saying ‘I am God’,

-‘You heard me say your ‘sins are forgiven’,

-‘Anyone can say that,

-‘But can anyone make a cripple walk again?’

-‘Draw your own conclusion.’

-How do we prove the existence of God?

- We point people to Jesus,
- Who can forgive sins and heal the crippled.

- Now the atheists could come back and say,
- ‘Well anyone can say your sins are forgiven,
- ‘And there’s lots of people who claim to have done miracles.’
- But how many of those same miracle workers have said;

"We are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, ³⁴who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise." Mark 10:33-34

- This is the knockout punch for the atheist’s claim that there is no God.
- This is proof positive that there is a God,
- And that Jesus is God.

- Right up to the moment of his arrest Jesus was saying he would be put to death.
- Again, anyone could have guessed that,
- Given how much Jesus had antagonised the religious hierarchy.
- But who could say with any confidence that they’d rise back to life three days later?
- It’s easy to say ‘Your sins are forgiven’,
- Easy to say ‘I’ll be put to death.’
- A bit harder to say to a cripple,
- ‘Get up and walk.’
- But it’s impossible to say with certainty,
- ‘I’ll be back in three days!’
- And yet on that first Easter morning,
- A couple of women discover an empty tomb,
- Two other disciples even enter in to it,
- And there’s no body.
- Three days after a centurion pushed a spear into his side and declared him dead,

-Jesus' body is gone.

-Here's my gripe with the atheists,

-They say there's no proof for the existence of God,

-Science and reason does away with God,

-Yet the empty tomb of a man who made the astronomical claim that he was God,

-That he had the authority to forgive human sin,

-That he would be put to death and then rise to life again,

-Stands testimony to the fact he is who he said he said he was.

-If he isn't God,

-Then show me the body!

-But an empty tomb alone doesn't prove that Jesus came back to life.

-Even the Jewish hierarchy were smart enough to realise that.

-They said to the Roman governor;

“Sir, we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’⁶⁴ So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.” Matthew 27: 63-64

-It's not the empty tomb,

-But the appearances of Jesus alive that proves the existence of God.

-Writing no more than 15 years after Jesus crucifixion in a public letter,

-To a body of Gentile believers,

-In a city thousands of miles from the Jewish capital of Jerusalem from which the belief spread,

-The apostle Paul says;

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,⁴ that he was buried, that he was

raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.”

1Corinthians 15: 3-8

- Dozens of appearances on several occasions to individuals and groups,
- One appearance to more than 500 at the same time.
- Mass hallucination?
- Sociologists doubt that.
- Wish fulfillment?
- Psychologists doubt that.
- Mythology?
- Historians doubt that.
- Every rationalistic argument that has been raised by skeptics,
- To try and explain away the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus alive,
- Have been rationally answered.
- Yet so many of the New Atheists who demand ‘reason’ of Christians,
- Will not apply that same reason to accept the conclusion that screams from the empty tomb,
- That Jesus was dead but came back to life.

- For you see the acceptance of God has nothing to do with the intellect.
- The New Atheist may feel intellectually superior to believers in God,
- But for every atheistic professor of evolutionary biology,
- There is a theistic professor of mathematical cosmology.
- The issue is not of the head but the heart.
- The Jewish hierarchy of Jesus’ day believed in God,
- But they still nailed his Son to a cross.
- The Roman governor believed in creative gods,

- But he sent the Creator Lord to be crucified.
 - Jesus himself said he'd be put to death then rise to life on the third day.
 - Either Jesus did that,
 - Or he's an unmitigated liar not worthy of attention.
 - If he did rise to life however,
 - We cannot treat him as just another good teacher or wise philosopher.
 - He is the Son of God,
 - The Lord of all creation,
 - Who died for our sins and rose to return one day as Judge of the world.
 - Jesus is not asking us for intellectual assent,
 - But volitional commitment.
 - Jesus wants us to follow him,
 - To live for him,
 - To have our life governed and oriented toward him.
 - Jesus' death and resurrection is not a challenge to our minds,
 - But our will.
-
- You don't have to be a confessing atheist to reject God.
 - You can be a nice, upright, ethically living theist,
 - And yet every moment of your life be essentially saying to God,
 - 'I know you're there but I really don't care,
 - 'I want to live my life my own way.'
 - Ultimately, atheism is just another line in a list of excuses for dodging Jesus' command to follow him.
-
- The final proof of the existence of God comes from the lips of a sceptic called Thomas,
 - Who when he saw Jesus standing, living and breathing in front of him exclaimed;
'My Lord and my God.' John 20:28
 - The risen Jesus was proof enough of the existence of God,

- It was enough for Thomas' head to see Jesus alive.
- But calling Jesus Lord was proof of his heart,
- For a Lord needs to be followed,
- And Thomas was willing to make that commitment.
- What's stopping you this Easter from whole heartedly committing your life to Jesus?
- Is it really your head?
- Or your heart?

- There was a third man on that hill one thousand nine hundred and eighty years ago.
- Another unknown criminal who died an excruciating death,
- But before he breathed his last,
- He asked of the Son of God;
"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Luke 23: 42
- With the love, grace and mercy of the God who created us,
- Jesus promised,
"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." Luke 23: 43
- That same promise of life is held out to all who humble their hearts,
- And choose to follow Jesus.