

A common thing that people who don't believe in Jesus's resurrection say, is that those Christians who purport to accept the resurrection are just comforting themselves—and know it. Yet Christians, those who truly follow Jesus Christ as resurrected and living Lord and God, are not simply happy believing a lie. As the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:19, believing in the resurrection as a myth, fantasy, and falsehood, just for comfort or momentary joy, or to have better morals and be a better person, is of no help whatsoever. Others should instead pity Christians more than anyone else, as we should despise ourselves, if Christ did not rise and instead remains dead. Others should also ignore Christian doctrine and morality, rightly regarding Christians as fools, if Jesus didn't walk from the grave. Christians know that we are fools if Jesus did not rise.

That Christians fully accept Paul's admonition as fundamental doctrine, credits rather than challenges the faith. Christians rightly challenge one another and others to test every belief against the evidence, which is why Christianity underpins rather than undermines sound science. Jesus intended it that way. Matthew 12:39 and Luke 11:29 both record Jesus saying that the sign of Jonah will validate everything that he claims. Jesus explained that as Jonah was three days inside a large fish before rising again to warn Nineveh to repent, Jesus would spend three days in the earth's heart before rising, greater than Jonah. The resurrection is central to everything else in Christian faith.

Thus, the question is indeed, what happened to Jesus? Some teach that Jesus did not die, not on a cross, instead dying a later, natural death. Yet the eyewitness gospel record of Jesus's death on the cross is crystal clear. That account includes extraordinary and convincing detail, such as that the guards speared Jesus in his side, letting blood and body fluids pour out to ensure that he was dead, even as they instead broke the other two crucified men's legs. Medical experts have no doubt that the account communicates death rather than something less, and does so in just the manner that a crucified person would die. While the gospels are wholly reliable, the Roman general and historian Josephus also recorded the widespread Roman practice of crucifixion and specifically recorded the governor Pontius Pilate's crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus most surely died a crucifixion death, just as David, Isaiah, and Zechariah had prophesied hundreds of years earlier, in Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, and Zechariah 12, even before the Romans invented crucifixion.

The questioner's bigger question may be whether Jesus lived again. The questioner is right that the natural act is to live and then die, not to die and live, which would be supernatural—God-like. Although Jesus's resurrection stunned those many who witnessed it, before dying Jesus had said that he would live again, to fulfill plan and prophecy. The disciples had heard Jesus predict it and knew that its occurrence would fulfill long-held prophecy. The disciples had even seen Jesus bring others back to life, including a boy, girl, and adult friend Lazarus. Yet by the gospel accounts, the risen Jesus shocked and perplexed those closest to Jesus. That Jesus's rising stunned the disciples showed that they had the same healthy skepticism that anyone would have to such a claim, even though they knew the plan and prophecy.

The risen Jesus also transformed the disciples. Jesus walked into their locked room twice to speak and eat with them, taught them the gospel while walking along the road, and met them again back in their home Galilean region, also appearing to hundreds of others. The disciples touched his pierced hands, side, and feet. Jesus's resurrection was so certain to the disciples, that the same disciples who fled at Jesus's arrest, outside his trial denied even knowing him, and hid behind locked doors after his crucifixion and death, suddenly appeared boldly before the same religious officials who had just condemned Jesus, after they witnessed him resurrected. These same formerly fearful disciples gladly faced whippings, prison, stoning, and even crucifixion, just to tell of the risen Jesus.

The witnesses to Jesus's resurrection were so many and convincing that the new faith spread like wildfire, despite every internal opposition of the Jewish leaders who had condemned Jesus and every external opposition of the Roman occupiers who had executed Jesus. Jesus's resurrection even transformed Jesus's half brothers, who had before his resurrection considered Jesus crazed. The generation of witnesses who saw, spoke with, ate with, and marveled at the risen Jesus soon passed away, leaving their gospel and other New Testament accounts. But their testimony was so weighty, certain, and compelling as to convince well over a billion persons.

You still ask, why should you believe? Accepting the resurrection is still an act of faith, indeed a critical act of faith. The apostle Paul put it most clearly in Romans 10:9 that salvation depends on two things. One must first acknowledge openly that

Jesus is Lord, which is to submit to his will, pursue his desire, obey his commands, follow his teaching. Yet then, one must believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead. Doing as Jesus says, accepting him as a profound teacher and following his model, is not enough for you to join him in eternal life. You must also accept that he rose in resurrection, or you will not rise in resurrection with him.

God could compel every one of us to the point of utter belief, as he did the doubting disciple Thomas, by having him stick his hand in the risen Jesus's wounds. God instead offers a better thing that we would get to choose his love, choose his glory, choose his intimacy. Who is the better lover, the one who demands recognition or the one who invites exquisite intimacy? God desires you as a free being, thinking, examining, and reflecting first, then choosing him on the evidence of his love.

So, indeed, the questioner should choose as a free and rational person. The questioner is right again, though, when asking whether to believe. The one thing that God demands of us, that his claim that Jesus rose again by his supernatural, other-worldly power, demands of every person, is that we decide while we still have the time. Decide wisely. Choose the side of love and eternal life. As Jesus himself said in John 15:13, what greater love can one have than to lay down one's life for another, only to take up life again to forever free the other of death?