



In this session we will examine Jesus' power and authority over life and death. Since we all will die, determining the validity of Jesus' claims concerning death could have great significance for each of us.

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DISCOVERY • 2

Jesus Claimed Power Over Death

"It's not that I'm afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens!"
— Woody Allen

DISCUSS

What do you think happens to people when they die?
What do you think determines where they go?

Jesus' extraordinary statements about His identity set Him apart from other religious leaders. No other religious figure including Moses, Buddha, Mohammed or Confucius made such amazing statements. In this session we will examine Jesus' power and authority over life and death. Since we will all die, determining the validity of Jesus' claims concerning death could have great significance for each of us.

● NAP TIME?

"...Jairus, a leader of a Jewish synagogue, came and fell down at Jesus' feet and begged Him to come home with him, for his only child was dying, a little girl twelve years old. As Jesus went with him...a messenger arrived from Jairus' home with the news that the little girl was dead. Jesus told the father, 'Don't be afraid! Just trust Me, and she'll be all right.' When they arrived at the house...the home was filled with mourning people, but He said, 'Stop the weeping! She isn't dead; she is only asleep!' This brought scoffing and laughter, for they all knew she was dead. Then He took her by the hand and called, 'Get up, little girl!' And at that moment her life returned and she jumped up!" — Luke 8:41-55

DISCUSS

What might have convinced the crowd she was dead?
 Could she have been in a coma?
 Why did the onlookers scoff when Jesus said, “She is only asleep”?

● DEAD MAN WALKING

After hearing that his friend Lazarus had died four days earlier, Jesus went to console Lazarus’ sister Martha. *“Jesus told her, ‘I am the one who raises the dead and gives them life again. Anyone who believes in Me, even though he dies like anyone else, shall live again...’*

“Tears came to Jesus’ eyes. Then they came to the tomb. It was a cave with a heavy stone rolled across its door. ‘Roll the stone aside,’ Jesus told them. But Martha, the dead man’s sister said, ‘By now the smell will be terrible, for he has been dead four days.’

“But didn’t I tell you that you will see a wonderful miracle from God if you believe?” Jesus asked her. So they rolled the stone aside. Then He shouted, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ And Lazarus came out—bound up in the grave cloth. Jesus told them, ‘Unwrap him and let him go!’ And so at last many...who...saw it happen, finally believed on Him.” — John 11:25-45

DISCUSS

What makes this incident harder to believe than the previous one?
 People often say, “Show me a miracle and I will believe.” If they were to see an actual miracle, would everyone believe? Why or why not?

● BACK TO THE FUTURE

Several times Jesus predicted His impending death to His disciples. However, they could not or would not accept the implications of His predictions.

“From then on Jesus began to speak plainly to His disciples about going to Jerusalem, and what would happen to Him there—that He would suffer at the hands of the Jewish leaders, that He would be killed, and that three days

later He would be raised to life again.”
 — Matthew 16:21

DISCUSS

What were the details Jesus predicted about His own future?
 If one of your friends today made this kind of statement, what would you think?

● POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

The Jewish Encyclopedia explains why the disciples found Jesus’ predictions so hard to understand and accept: *“...the Jews yearned for the promised deliverer of the house of David, who would free them from the yoke of the hated foreign usurper, would put an end to the impious Roman rule, and would establish His own reign of peace and justice in its place.”*
 — The Jewish Encyclopedia

A. B. Bruce further comments: *“There seems to have been the hope that He had taken too gloomy a view of the situation, and that His apprehensions would turn out groundless...a crucified Messiah was a scandal and a contradiction to the disciples; quite as much as it continued to be to the majority of the Jewish people...”*
 — A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*

● THE EXECUTION

“Two others, criminals, were led out to be executed with Him at a place called ‘The Skull.’ There all three were crucified—Jesus on the center cross, and the two criminals on either side. ...Then Jesus shouted, ‘Father, I commit My spirit to You.’ And with these words He died.”
 — Luke 23:32-46

“When evening came...Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new rock-hewn tomb, and rolled a great stone across the entrance. ...The next day—at the close of the first day of the Passover ceremonies—the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate, and told him, ‘Sir, that liar once said, “After three days I will come back to life again.” So we request an order from you sealing the tomb until the third day, to prevent His

disciples from coming and stealing His body and then telling everyone He came.’ So they sealed the stone and posted guards to protect it from intrusion.” — Matthew 27:57-66

DISCUSS

What precautions were taken to ensure that the body would not be stolen?
What is the weakness of the argument that either the disciples or Jesus’ enemies stole His body?

● GHOST BUSTERS!

“Very early on Sunday morning they...found that the huge stone covering the entrance had been rolled aside. So they went in—but the Lord Jesus’ body was gone. ...Suddenly two men appeared before them, clothed in shining robes so bright their eyes were dazzled. ...Then the men asked, ‘Why are you looking in a tomb for someone who is alive? He isn’t here! He has come back to life again!’

“Within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem, where the eleven disciples and the other followers of Jesus greeted them with these words, ‘The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter!’ ...Jesus Himself was suddenly standing there among them, and greeted them. But the whole group was terribly frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost! ‘Why are you frightened?’ He asked. ‘Why do you doubt that it is really I? Look at My hands! Look at My feet! Touch Me and make sure that I am not a ghost! For ghosts don’t have bodies, as you see that I do!’

“As He spoke, He held out His hands for them to see the marks of the nails and showed them the wounds in His feet. Still they stood there undecided, filled with joy and doubt. Then He asked them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’ They gave Him a piece of broiled fish, and He ate it as they watched!” — Luke 24:6-43

DISCUSS

How did Jesus seek to prove that He had returned from the dead?
Why did the disciples react as they did?
How would you react if you encountered a friend who had come back from the dead?

● EVERYONE’S SEEN HIM!

“I passed on to you right from the first what had been told to me, that Christ died for our sins just as the Scriptures said He would, and that He was buried, and that three days afterwards He arose from the grave just as the prophets foretold. He was seen by Peter and later by the rest of ‘the Twelve.’ After that He was seen by more than five hundred...Then James saw Him, and later all the apostles. Last of all I saw Him too...”

— Paul the Apostle, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

DISCUSS

What is the significance of so many people seeing Jesus after His resurrection? Could such numerous and varied appearances be attributed to mistakes or hallucinations? Why or why not?

● POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS FOR THE EMPTY TOMB

1. Jesus rose from the dead.
2. Someone stole the body.
3. Jesus did not die.

DISCUSS

Which one of the above do you think most likely happened?

If Jesus had not been killed, but only weakened and wounded by crucifixion, the stone and soldiers would have prevented His escape from the tomb. If Jesus’ friends had tried to steal the body, the stone and the soldiers likewise would have prevented them. Psychologists say that people will not die for something they know to be a lie, yet 11 of the 12 disciples died martyrs’ deaths. Jesus’ enemies would never have taken the body since absence of His body from the tomb would serve to encourage belief in His resurrection.

Thousands of people in Jerusalem came to believe in Jesus as the Son of God within a few months after the crucifixion—and they were the ones best able to examine the tomb and question the alleged eyewitnesses. The resurrection of Jesus appears to be the only

reasonable explanation for the empty tomb and His appearances to His disciples.

● BEYOND A REASONABLE DOUBT

Professor Thomas Arnold, author of the famous three-volume *History of Rome* and chair of modern history at Oxford, says: *“I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God has given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead.”*

● THE KEYS TO HEAVEN

“...I am the One who raises the dead and gives them life again. Anyone who believes in Me, even though he dies like anyone else, shall live again.” — John 11:25

DISCUSS

What did Jesus say is the source of eternal life?

What do you think He meant when He said: “He who believes in Me shall live even if he dies”?

● WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

“The New Testament writers speak as if Christ’s achievement in rising from the dead was the first event of its kind in the whole history of the universe. ...He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought and beaten the King of Death. Everything is different because He has done so.”
— C.S. Lewis

“We seem to think as though other people are always the ones who will die. ...This type of person is fleeing what most horrifies him: the certainty of his own death...” — Viktor Frankl, survivor of Auschwitz

“These events have reminded me of what my faith means to me, how it addresses things like fear...when you’re stripped of everything and brought face-to-face with eternity.” — General Robert VanAntwerp, commenting on American Airlines flight 77 crashing into his office in the Pentagon on September 11, 2001

“We never know when we, too, will be called into eternity. I doubt if even one of those people who got on those planes, or walked into the World Trade Center or the Pentagon that morning thought it would be the last day of their lives. And that’s why each of us needs to face our own spiritual need and commit ourselves to God and His will now.” — Rev. Billy Graham at Washington National Cathedral on September 14, 2001

Is it important whether or not Jesus rose from the dead? Why or why not?

What do you think will happen to you when you die?

What do you think is the significance of Jesus’ resurrection for your eternal destiny?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- *The Case for Faith* by Lee Strobel
- *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell



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