

Foundations Lesson #14

The Resurrection of the Dead, Part 1

As Paul was making his defense before King Agrippa, he challenged his hearers by saying, "Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?" (Acts 26:8). Although some people mistakenly fail to believe in God's power to raise the dead, the resurrection of the dead is a vitally important truth which is clearly declared in Scripture.

The entire basis of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead rests upon the reality that God is **life**, and that he loves to impart his **life** to those who truly want it and therefore qualify themselves for it. We're so accustomed to thinking of being alive as the opposite of being dead that we miss the power of this truth. Toward the end of John's gospel, he tells us that he wrote his book so that his readers might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing they may have **life** in his name (John 20:31). He wasn't saying that they were physically dead, because dead people can't read. He was contrasting the life they were living then with the **life** that God was offering, and he felt the gap between the two was so large that those who had never received God's **life** had never really begun to live. Again, when Jesus was talking to religious leaders in his day, telling them they were refusing to come to him to have **life** (John 5:39-40), he wasn't claiming that they were actually corpses. He was saying that they were missing out on a quality and power of **life** that can only be received from the Lord.

God is **life**.

Jn. 5:26 [Jesus speaking] For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself.

Jn. 14:6a Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life.

Again, God is **life**. This **life** of God is far more powerful than most of us realize. When God speaks, even his words are living. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that. I'm not sure that I understand that, but it's true, because the Scripture tells us so. When God creates, even his creation somehow has a measure of his **life** in it. Psalm 98 talks about mountains singing together for joy, the sea resounding, and rivers clapping their hands. Jesus himself on one occasion said that if his followers kept quiet, the stones would cry out. He wouldn't have said that if they didn't somehow have the ability to do so. Apparently, inanimate objects have more **life** in them than what we give them credit for. After all, they've come into existence by the will and the design of the One who is **life**. And we need to remember that his **life** is indestructible; it can't be extinguished. You can read that in Hebrews 7:16. So it shouldn't surprise us that when God imparts his **life** to humans, that it's called **eternal** life. If it's indestructible, it certainly has to last forever. So living in the **life** of God is an existence so vibrant, so beautiful, so powerful, so satisfying, so holy, so healthy, so compelling that until someone's partaken of it, they haven't yet begun to live. Jesus even said that he had come that his sheep might have **life**, and have it **to the full**, or, as some translations put it, more abundantly. There's an incredible richness, a deep abundance to God's **life**. With that in mind, the resurrection of the dead supplies us with a wonderful example of God being the author of **life** and of his loving to impart a measure of that **life** to humans.

On our outline, Roman Numeral number one tells us that the central truth of Christianity is that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. Jesus died by crucifixion at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders who accused him, and at the hands of the Romans who executed him. He was placed inside the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, but on the third day he rose from the dead, revealing his unlimited power even over death itself. His resurrection represented God the Father's seal of approval upon his life and ministry. Each of the gospel writers attach great significance to the story of Jesus' resurrection, and they each give unique details. I encourage you to read all four accounts some time

soon. The references are given on the outline for your convenience. In the best interests of time, I'll only read Matthew's account.

Mt. 28:1-10 ¹After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

²There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

⁸So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

In these ten verses, Matthew records that the two women met Jesus after he had risen from the dead, and they even clasped his feet and worshiped him. Jesus then instructed them to tell the other disciples that they'd meet him in Galilee. Scripture records many who personally met, talked to, and even ate with Jesus after he rose from the dead and before he ascended into heaven. Besides the accounts given by the gospel writers, we have other passages letting us know that Jesus spent time with, on at least one occasion, over 500 people simultaneously after his resurrection and before his ascension.

Ac. 1:21-22 [Peter speaking] Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."

Ac. 2:32 [Peter preaching] God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

Ac. 3:15 [Peter preaching] You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.

Ac. 10:40-41 [Peter preaching] but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

1Co. 15:3-8 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. After 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. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Since Jesus' early followers had had all these experiences with him after he had risen from the dead, they also boldly proclaimed the resurrection in their preaching, even in the face of great opposition. Let me give you some examples:

Ac. 4:2 They [priests, Sadducees, and others] were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

Ac. 4:10 [Peter speaking] then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

Ac. 4:33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.

Ac. 5:30 [Peter speaking] The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.

Also, the early church was thoroughly convinced that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was central to their faith and their message. In the most comprehensive chapter on the resurrection, First Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul writes:

1Co. 15:12-23 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 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. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you can be comforted in knowing that your faith rests on an event that has physically taken place and been historically verified. Granted, some people, regardless of the evidence, choose not to believe in the resurrection, but they choose not to believe **despite** the evidence, not **because of** it.

I'd like to be very clear that two factors separate Biblical Christianity from all the man-made religions of the world. The first is that no religious leader except Jesus Christ ever claimed to be God. Neither Buddha, Confucius, Muhammad, or Zoroaster, nor the founders of Mormonism, the Jehovah's Witnesses, or Christian Scientism ever claimed to be God. But Jesus did. He claimed to be God by receiving worship, by forgiving people their sins, and by how he answered the high priest at his trial, just to name a few. The second factor that separates Biblical Christianity from all humanly contrived religions is that none of their founders ever rose from the dead, but Jesus did. Unfortunately, many people believe that there are many roads leading to God. Jesus was crystal clear that God had only made one road when he said, "I am **the** way and **the** truth and **the** life. **No one** comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Understandably, opponents of Christianity have come up with "explanations" or "theories" to try to refute Jesus' resurrection. In the **Additional Resources** section of this web page, you'll find a document that gives some of their theories as well as an explanation for why each theory lacks reasonable basis.

Roman Numeral number two on our outline gives the seven occasions recorded in Scripture where Jesus told people in advance that he would rise from the dead. These instances give us an example of Jesus' ministry as a prophet. Like many other words of prophecy, they were not always

well understood. In John's gospel, chapter two and starting in verse 19, it says,

Jn. 2:19-22 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

John's wording here would indicate that when Jesus had spoken the words about his raising the temple – meaning his body – in three days that even his disciples didn't believe him. Mark 9:9 gives us another example of Jesus' followers being befuddled by his prophesying about his resurrection. It says,

Mk. 9:9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.

If you've ever wondered about what God meant by saying something, you're not alone. The good news is that, if we continue to seek him for understanding, he'll provide more of it as time goes on. Revelation from God comes to the hungry.

As you can see on the outline, there are many more passages of Scripture that give accounts of Jesus prophesying his resurrection. If you like, you can look them up at your convenience. Or, in the ***Additional Resources*** section of this web page, the document entitled "Scriptures & Quotes" has all those passages printed out for you in the order they appear on the outline. For now, I just want to read Matthew's account of the last time Jesus foretold his resurrection. It says,

Mt. 26:31-32 Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: " 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

I very much appreciate that Jesus, even on the night he was betrayed, still had great concern for his followers, wanting them to be re-assured that he would indeed rise from the dead and that they would see him again after his crucifixion.

So even though Jesus' disciples had some difficulty grasping the truth that he would rise from the dead, some of his enemies knew about it and even tried to make the tomb secure until the third day because of his words.

Mt. 27:62-64 The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' 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."

So even though the chief priests and the Pharisees didn't believe Jesus' words, at least they provided, in their antagonism, wonderful evidence of his actually having risen from the dead. No mere human could have gotten out of that tomb or even moved the stone that sealed off the entrance. Angels also acknowledged that Jesus had prophesied his resurrection.

Mt. 28:5-6 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.

Lk. 24:4-8 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” Then they remembered his words.

So we see in these Scripture passages that Jesus' prophetic ministry wasn't always understood by his followers, that it was acknowledged by his enemies, and that it was confirmed by angels.

Foundations Lesson #14

The Resurrection of the Dead, Part 2

Starting with Roman Numeral number three on our outline, I want us to examine what was accomplished by Jesus' resurrection from the dead. I, for one, am very glad that Jesus' resurrection was not just a powerful historic event that provides a strong foundation for our faith. It is that, but it's also much more than that. No one has the power over death except the One who created life. As was mentioned earlier, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead provides us with a great demonstration of the fact that God is *life*, that he is the author of *life*, and that he loves to impart that *life* to others.

Ac. 3:15 [Peter preaching] You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.

Ac. 2:24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Ro. 4:17 As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He [Abraham] is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed – the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

I love that. It's a great name for **The Almighty** – the One who gives life to the dead.

Jn. 5:21 [Jesus speaking] For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

Jn. 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

The Scripture passages we've just read should give us a glimpse into the heart of God. Not only is he the all-powerful creator of all things seen and unseen, he also loves to use that power to heal, to help, to train, and to transform those who love him. He doesn't give his *life* away indiscriminately, but when a situation warrants his doing so, he really does enjoy giving people of his *life*. He's wonderfully generous, and he loves to bless.

Scripture also informs us that both our justification and our salvation have been secured by

Jesus' resurrection.

Ro. 4:25 He [Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Ro. 10:9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

In addition to the wonderful provisions already mentioned, Jesus' resurrection guarantees that his followers will also rise from the dead. As Paul was making his defense before King Agrippa, he proclaimed this truth, saying,

Ac. 26:22b-23 I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen – that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles."

In being the **first** to rise from the dead, Jesus was a great trailblazer. In the 1800s as the people of America were expanding westward, some pioneers would go ahead of the groups that ventured into the uncharted territory. The purpose of these trailblazers was to explore the land and to determine the best route for the others to take so that all could arrive at their destination safely. In rising from the dead, Jesus blazed the trail that you and I who believe in him will also get to take. After all, he's deeply concerned that we arrive at our destination in the presence of God safely. Fortunately, Scripture tells us that these two events are inseparably bonded together. Jesus' rising from the dead and his followers rising from the dead cannot be separated from each other. As my friend Doug would say, they are fused, riveted, bolted, welded and epoxied to each other. Scripture explains it this way:

1Co. 15:12-20 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 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. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Ro. 8:11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

1Co. 6:14 By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.

2Co. 4:14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.

Jesus' resurrection also had an impact on his disciples that was nothing short of life-transforming. Before the resurrection, they were a discouraged and fearful lot who were hiding behind locked doors from the Romans. After the resurrection, they emerged as confident and bold preachers who performed "many wonders and miraculous signs," and who, after they'd been flogged, rejoiced

because they'd been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name of Jesus Christ. That's quite a turnaround.

For us to appreciate this huge change in their lives, we need to remember that the Jews of Jesus' day were passionately and desperately longing for their Messiah to come. They believed that this Messiah would be a great military and governmental leader who would come to rescue them from the oppression of the Romans and enable them to worship and serve the Lord without fear in holiness and righteousness, somewhat like Moses or David had done in the pages of the Scripture they loved and believed.

When Jesus arrived, he selected a group of followers, also called disciples. Many of them left everything to follow him. The hope of these disciples must have soared to an all-time high, especially when they watched him do what no one else could do – perform miracles, signs, and wonders – and then ultimately when he let them know that he was, indeed, the promised Messiah. But all those great hopes came to an ugly crash when their beloved Master was crucified. They fled from him when he was arrested, and after his death they didn't dare show themselves lest they suffer the same fate he'd suffered. Even though Jesus had prophesied of his death to them, the idea of a crucified Messiah was so strange, so foreign to them that when it took place, it left them completely disillusioned.

Yet just a little while later, these sorrowing followers with shattered hopes and defeated hearts were publicly proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah, that his death had been planned by God as a sacrifice for sins even though humanly speaking it was murder, that he was the author of life, and that God was offering their hearers repentance and forgiveness of sins because salvation was found in no one else, for there was no name under heaven given to men by which they could be saved other than the name of Jesus Christ, the Messiah (Acts 4:12).

What was the cause of this radical transformation? The empty tomb alone didn't have such an impact. Mary, when she was at the empty tomb, thought they had taken the body of Jesus away and she didn't know where they'd put him. Cleopas and his friend acknowledged that the tomb was empty but their faces were still downcast, and Jesus himself had to tell them they were foolish and slow of heart to believe. Mark records that the women who saw the empty tomb were trembling and bewildered. No, the empty tomb wasn't the factor that caused Jesus' followers to have an unwavering faith that their Master was victorious over death and the grave. Then what was it? What gave them the unshakable conviction that Jesus had conquered death and was alive forevermore? Acts 1:3 says it best that Jesus, after his suffering, showed himself to these men and gave **many convincing proofs** that he was alive, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking to them about the Kingdom of God. That's what convinced them. He showed them his hands, his feet, and his side. He taught them. He ate fish with them. He told them to stop doubting and believe. He commanded them to make disciples of all nations. He all of a sudden showed up in their midst when the doors were locked. He told them to stay in the city until they'd been clothed with power from on high. And, finally, he ascended into heaven before their very eyes. For anyone to have tried to convince those men that Jesus was still dead would have been an exercise in futility. They knew better. They'd seen him; they'd touched him; they'd eaten with him; they'd listened to his parting words; and then they watched him rise higher and higher into the sky as he ascended back to the Father.

We also need to realize that the deep conviction of these first followers that Jesus had risen and was alive was so strong that they died for it. Of the original twelve apostles, at least eleven died a martyr's death. When they were commanded to recant of their beliefs, they flatly refused. They would rather have been shot with arrows, boiled in oil, thrust through with a spear, or be burned to ashes than to renounce their faith or their preaching. According to tradition, Peter, when the death sentence was passed upon him, even asked to be crucified upside down, because he felt unworthy to die the same way that his Lord and Master had died.

What many of the early Christians modeled by dying rather than giving up their faith, the Bible also teaches. Followers of Christ need not fear death. We can have confidence in God.

Ro. 6:5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

Heb. 2:14-15 Since the children have flesh and blood, he [Jesus] too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

Jesus has set us free from the fear of death! He even holds the keys of death and Hades!

Rev. 1:17b-18 [Jesus speaking] “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Pp. 1:21-24 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

So we should be comforted in knowing that to die is **gain**, and that it is **better by far** than remaining in the body. Of course, we are not to take our own lives, because, as I Corinthians 3:16-17 says,

1Co. 3:16-17 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

However, we can and need to have great confidence in the Lord to take care of us now as well as then – and our arriving at our eternal destination has been secured for us by Christ's resurrection.

Something else that was accomplished by Jesus' resurrection is the validation of his life and ministry by God the Father. A lot of people got quite upset at some of the things Jesus said when he walked this earth. When he said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30), they picked up stones to stone him. When he challenged them to prove him guilty of sin (John 10:46), they said he was a Samaritan and demon-possessed. On one occasion, Jesus said, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of **me**. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:11-12). Now if the speaker of those words had been just a human being, that would have been the most audacious and conceited thing that could be said, yet Jesus was gentle and humble in heart (Matthew 11:29). We could make a long list of things Jesus said and did that, directly or indirectly, were claims to be God, which left people murderously angry, or upset, or at the very least scratching their heads. But with his resurrection from the dead, they had to realize that God's seal of approval was resting upon the life of this carpenter from Nazareth. It's as if the Father were saying, “I realize my Son said things that were hard for you to understand. But I want you to know that I sent him, that I told him what to say and do, and that he was faithful to reveal me to all of you. I endorse everything he said and did. He is my beloved Son. Listen to him!”

Scripture puts it this way...

Ac. 17:31 For he [God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”

Ro. 1:4 and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

Going on to Roman Numeral number four on our outline, we have two varieties of the resurrection of the dead, both of which are recorded for us in Scripture. The first of these two varieties has to do with being resurrected from physical death back to physical life. Several people from Scripture are listed here who experienced this kind of resurrection. I'm sure all of them eventually died a second time, but their life was temporarily prolonged because God worked a great miracle on their behalf shortly after the first time they died. This is also the kind of resurrection the disciples who were sent out to minister by Jesus were commanded to perform. In Matthew's gospel, chapter 10, Jesus sends out the twelve. Verse 8 relates some of the instructions he gave them before they went on their mission. Jesus says,

Mt. 10:8 [Jesus speaking] Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

Even in the time of the Old Testament, some people were miraculously raised from the dead. Perhaps the most strange and unusual of these instances is recorded in II Kings chapter 13. It says,

2Ki. 13:21 Once while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet.

I wonder who was more shocked: the guy who wasn't dead any more, or the men who watched a dead man stand up. I'm sure none of them had expected to experience a resurrection when they got out of bed that morning. This story also presents some interesting questions regarding the relationship between the unseen realm and the physical realm. For example, how does spiritual gifting, like the power to raise the dead, reside in someone's bones? Or: Why was it unnecessary for Elisha to be alive in order for the gift to operate? Or: Since Scripture shows a definite connection between faith and miracles, why did this miracle take place without anyone apparently having any faith? The passage simply doesn't answer those questions.

Then in the gospels, there are three recorded instances where Jesus brought a dead person back to life again. The widow's son at Nain, Jairus' daughter, and Lazarus were all raised from the dead by our Lord Jesus Christ. Again, the Bible references for each incident are given on our outline, but I'd like to read a portion of John 11 which gives the account of Lazarus' resurrection. Starting in verse 41, it says,

Jn. 11:41-44 ⁴¹So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

⁴³When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

The miracle of Lazarus rising from the dead was particularly astonishing to the religious leaders of the day because Lazarus had been dead and buried in a tomb for four days. Some rabbis of Jesus' day taught that it was impossible for anyone to be brought back to life if they had been dead for more than three days. Perhaps Jesus was pointing out to them by what he did that nothing is impossible with God. Yet I also find it wonderfully refreshing to read of Jesus' complete trust in the Father. In his prayer before calling for Lazarus to come out of the tomb, Jesus never even asked the Father for anything; so strong was his confidence in God.

Of the remaining incidents on our outline where people were resurrected from physical death back to physical life, I'd like to point out just one more. Something very unusual happened just after Jesus died on the cross. Matthew records it this way:

Mt. 27:50-53

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

Jesus' death and the shedding of his blood made it possible for sins to be forgiven, since their price had now been completely paid, satisfying the justice of God. God further bore witness to this supremely important event by performing three additional signs. Besides the violent earthquake, the curtain in the temple, presumably the one separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, was torn in two. I love the detail given that it was torn from top to bottom. If man had tried to do that, it would have been torn from bottom to top. I believe the message here was to announce, pictorially, that access into the very presence of **The Almighty** was now open to all. In addition to these two signs, God bore witness to the **spiritual** life that had just been released when Jesus died by releasing **physical** life – the resurrecting of many holy people who had been in their graves. We don't know where they lived, where they were buried, how long they had been in the tombs, or how many of them there were. If it had been important for us to know those things, God would have included that information in the Scripture for us. What **is** important is that we appreciate that God is **life**, that he is the author of **life**, and that he loves imparting of his great **life** to human beings.

Foundations Lesson #14

The Resurrection of the Dead, Part 3

On the second page of our outline, letter B deals with the second variety of the resurrection of the dead, namely that of being resurrected from physical death to everlasting spiritual existence. We tend to think of death as final; that's when life is over, done, kaput. But God doesn't view it that way at all. He uses several terms to describe death, so that we might understand, metaphorically, that physical death isn't final at all. Let's examine what God writes in his word.

Jn. 11:11-13

After he [Jesus] had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

Ac. 7:59 - 8:1

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.

In both of these passages, the word "sleep" is used to mean death. Personally, I can say that I've fallen asleep over 24,000 times, but each time I woke up again. Falling asleep for me has never been a permanent condition, thankfully. I trust that's true for you, too! Another word God uses to describe death is the word "departure".

2Pt. 1:15

And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

2Tim. 4:6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.

Again, many times in our lives we've departed from one location, only to arrive at the next one. Sure, when we departed we left some things behind, but we were still intact and moving forward. In these verses the word for departure from the original Greek means to cut loose, free from chains, break camp, or raise anchor. Again, that's not anything we need to be afraid of as being permanent. The next phrase God uses in his word to describe death is "putting aside the body."

2Pt. 1:13-14 I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.

Probably, all of us at one time or another have changed our clothes and put aside the ones we were wearing. We certainly kept on existing after we did that. Then, a phrase that's used thirteen times in the Old Testament to describe death is a person being "gathered to his people" or "gathered to his fathers."

Gen. 25:8 Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people.

Jdg. 2:10 After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel.

This particular word-picture describing death might even be considered the most encouraging of them all. I don't picture God describing a convocation of cadavers here. The indication seems to be that not only the one being gathered but also the group he is being gathered to are all able to relate to one another. So in a variety of ways, God lets us know in his word that physical death is not the end of the line; it's not the final act of the play. There will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

Ac. 24:15 [Paul making his defense before Felix] and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

Jn. 5:28-29 [Jesus speaking] "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

Jesus has also spoken of this taking place "at the last day."

Jn. 6:39-40 [Jesus speaking] And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

At this point, the question that many people have has to do with what life apart from the physical body will be like. They want to know if they'll be able to recognize their friends, and if their friends will be able to recognize them; if they'll be able to remember what happened on earth, and so on. Although these concerns are reasonable, Scripture does say that "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). In other words, it'll be more glorious than we can imagine – literally. With that in mind, it's not good to be overly concerned about all the details surrounding such an event. God's got this – and what he has

in store for his followers will be incomprehensibly wonderful. That's the main confidence we should have.

Having said that, Scripture tells us that we'll be like the angels in heaven, in that we won't get married or be given in marriage (Matthew. 22:30). Apparently, we'll be able to recognize one another and have the capacity to remember things that transpired while we were on the earth (Luke. 16:19-31). We should be able to eat, because there will be a celebration called the "wedding supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9), but spiritual bodies don't need physical food in order to survive. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will have passed away (Revelation 21:4). Regarding our bodies...

1Co. 15:35-57

But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Moving on in our outline to Roman Numeral number five, for thousands of years there have been errors, speculations, and false understandings about the resurrection of the dead. Herod claimed that Jesus Christ was actually John the Baptist who had been raised from the dead. The Sadducees were a religious sect in Judaism who didn't even believe in the resurrection of the dead. Matthew's gospel tells us that the Roman soldiers who were guarding the tomb where Jesus was buried reported to the chief priests what had happened when Jesus was resurrected. The chief priests in turn bribed the guards into lying. The fabricated story was that the disciples had come during the night and had stolen the body, a story that ended up with a wide circulation. Some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in Athens sneered when Paul proclaimed that Jesus had risen from the dead. Even some of the believers in Corinth believed that there was no resurrection of the dead. Paul wrote to Timothy about Hymenaeus and Philetus who had wandered away from the truth and were claiming that the resurrection had already taken place.

As long as we're still living on this earth, such errant views will exist, but the best way of combating error is **not** by studying the errors. The best way to combat error is to know the truth so

well that anything which doesn't line up to the truth is quickly discerned as falsehood. Experienced bank tellers can spot counterfeit currency quickly, not because they've studied all the various kinds of counterfeit bills, but because they know the genuine bills so well that fakes are easily recognized. Fortunately, Jesus mentioned two important factors in staying on target when it comes to the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead.

Mt. 22:29 Jesus replied [to those who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead], “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.

We need to know, believe, obey, and love the Scriptures. They've been written by God so that we might know him and walk in his ways. They are words of truth and it's the truth that will set us free. Secondly, we need to know the power of God. Nothing is impossible with God. Nothing. It's easier for him to raise the dead than it is for you to lift your pinky finger. We have to appreciate that he is ***all-powerful***. If we press in to know the Scriptures better and better, and if we believe in God's power, we'll be well equipped to embrace God's truth and stay clear of error. Amen. God bless you all.