

Memory or Miracle?

by Warren Wiersbe

The resurrection of the dead is a believable, practical, and essential doctrine that controls our lives today and gives us hope for the future.

Duration: 35:07

Scripture: Acts 24:14

Topics: "Resurrection Faith", "Christian Hope"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He argues that the resurrection is not impractical, but rather the most practical thing one can think of. The resurrection serves as the foundation for our faith, encourages our hope, and stimulates godly living. The speaker uses examples from everyday life to illustrate how people make decisions and plan for the future based on future events, and therefore, the resurrection should also shape our actions and priorities. The sermon references Acts 24:14-21 and Acts 26:1 to support the belief in the resurrection.

Transcript

We're reading from Acts chapter 24, Paul's testimony in verses 14 through 21, and then one verse from Acts chapter 26. You'll recall that Paul is now a prisoner. He's standing now before Felix, and this is his testimony, Acts 24 verse 14.

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets, and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And in this do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men. Now after many years, I came to bring alms to my nation and offerings, whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude nor with tumult, who ought to have been here before thee, and object if they had anything against me.

Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, except it be for this one thing, that I cried standing among them, concerning the resurrection of the dead, I am called in question by you this day. Then in Acts chapter 26, Paul is witnessing to Agrippa, and we read only verse 8. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? And if it is incredible to you, I trust that during this hour of worship it will become credible, and you will believe it and experience it. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

And yet there are many people today who consider the resurrection of the dead incredible.

When something is credible, you believe it. Some months back we went through what the country was calling a credibility gap. When something is incredible, you have a hard time believing it.

And Paul looks at this ruler and he says, why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise up the dead? The resurrection of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the dead, this doctrine is a keystone in our faith. If Christ be not risen, then we are yet in our sins. The gospel of Jesus Christ is wrapped up in the resurrection.

Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures. He was buried. He arose again the third day, according to the scriptures.

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. Now you talk to the average person today about the resurrection of the dead or the resurrection of Jesus Christ and you will get two responses. A mocking smile, oh, or a shrug of the shoulders, so what? Paul faced this back in his day and we face it today.

Therefore, I want to deal this morning with three objections to the resurrection that people are throwing at us. I want to show you that these objections are not valid and that the resurrection of the dead is a believable, practical doctrine. You see, everyone here in sin or alive in Christ, there is no middle ground.

Now, if my friend, you are dead in sin, I trust you will listen closely to the word because we would love to see you today raised from the dead. And if you're alive in Christ, I trust that this word will encourage you. The first objection that is brought to us is that the resurrection is impossible.

Now, back in Paul's day, the Greek philosophers had dealt long and hard with death. They had philosophized on death. They had come to the conclusion that a resurrection was impossible for two reasons.

Number one, man is made up of particles of matter. When man dies, these particles of matter are spread abroad in nature and the root systems reach down and they decayed bodies become food for the soil and the soil becomes food for plant life and animal life. And so when a person dies, his body is just scattered throughout all of nature.

There are those who have been blown to pieces in war. There have been those who have been buried at sea. I have remarked on another occasion, and I bring it before you now, that when they exhumed the body of Roger Williams, the great American patriot, they discovered a nearby apple tree had sent a root right through the coffin, so that everyone who was eating those apples was being given a part of Roger Williams.

Now, say the Greek scientists, now say the philosophers, do you mean to tell me that when the particles of matter are scattered all over, there's going to be a resurrection? The second reason they gave for not believing the resurrection was the fact that they thought the body was sinful. To the Greek, the sooner you got rid of your body, the better off you were. To the Greek, heaven was a place of disembodied spirits.

Don't give us our bodies back. In these bodies, we had pain. In these bodies, we had appetites that were wrong.

In these bodies, we sinned. Therefore, we don't want our bodies back. Well, you say the resurrection is impossible, but the resurrection is not impossible, because resurrection is not reconstruction.

Nowhere in the Bible are we taught that on Resurrection Day, when Jesus Christ shall return and take to Himself His people, and then sometime later when He raises those who are not His people, nowhere are we told that God puts the particles of matter back together again. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 15, this question is raised. 1 Corinthians chapter 15, beginning at verse 35.

But some man will say, how are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come? Here's the mocking, sneering philosopher saying, tell me how God can put the pieces back together again. And Paul answers, thou fool, that which thou sowest is not made alive, except it die. And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but a bare grain.

It may be chance of wheat or some other grain, but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed its own body. The cemetery is a field where seed has been planted. Years ago, they used to call the cemetery God's Acre.

That's a good name, because the resurrection is the harvest. And Paul is saying, you take an ugly bulb, you take an ugly tulip bulb, and you place that ugly tulip bulb in the ground, and it dies. And having died, it brings forth life.

And the life that comes up is far more beautiful than what you put down. There is continuity, but not identity. In the resurrection body, it is a new body, there is continuity, but not identity.

You're the same person, but it's not the same body. You shake your head and say, Pastor, how can that be? Well, I've got news for you. Your body today is not the body it was yesterday.

Your body today is not the body it was five years ago. The doctors tell us that every minute, three million cells in our bodies are being replaced. This body is not the same body it was an hour ago, but I'm the same person.

There is continuity, even though there's not identity of matter. God nowhere says He's going to put the pieces back together again. God says He's going to plant the seed in the ground, and He's going to give to that seed a beautiful, glorious new body.

That's resurrection, not reconstruction. Now, the resurrection is not impossible. The same God who made us and gave us these bodies can give us new bodies.

The same God who every spring fertilizes all of nature, and there comes forth of the ground the beauty and the fullness of the harvest, can certainly take our bodies, though they turn to dust, and He can give to us new bodies for His glory. Nowhere does the Bible teach that the body is evil. Your body is not evil.

Your body is neutral. Your body was made of clay. The nature that controls the body may be evil.

The Bible calls that the flesh, the old nature, the old man. But my body is not sinful. My body is a tool that can be used by God for His glory, or it's a tool that can be used by sin and Satan and self to do damage.

But God nowhere says the body is evil. And God says to me, when I saved you, I saved the whole man. When you trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, I saved your spirit.

Your spirit was dead, and my spirit moved into your spirit and made you alive. And I'm saving your soul. Day by day as you walk with Christ, the inner man is being renewed.

And one day, says God, I will save your body. I have delivered you from the penalty of sin, which is death. And I am delivering you day by day from the power of sin.

And one day, I shall deliver you from the very presence of sin, and you shall have a new body, like to my Son's glorious body. So promises the Lord. Now, some scientist comes along at this point and says, but just a minute, the resurrection is a miracle, and miracles violate natural law.

Who said so? Miracles do not violate natural law. Miracles simply illustrate that the lawmaker knows what he's doing. The same one who laid down natural law is able to suspend and overrule natural law.

And the fact of the matter is, if we knew more about God's creation, we'd understand resurrection more. My God is able to raise the dead. He raised His Son from the dead and gave to Him a glorious body, a body that walked through doors and yet ate honey and fish, a body that appeared one minute and disappeared the next minute, and yet was able to walk with people.

He was able to reach out and say, behold, my hands and my side, feel me. A spirit hath not flesh and bones, as I do. No, the resurrection is not impossible, for with God all things are possible.

The second objection that comes to us is this. People say, well, the resurrection may be possible, certainly God is able to do it, but the resurrection is impractical. What difference does it make if there's going to be a resurrection of the dead? Here I am living in the city of Chicago, I need a job, or I need a place to live, or I've got a problem.

What difference does it make about the resurrection? Why talk to me about some far-off event when today I need some money in my pocket and some food on my table, and I need some help with my problems? The resurrection, they say, is impractical. That's why when Paul was preaching at Mars Hill to those Greek philosophers, some mocked, and some said, well, we'll hear you again about this, and some just shrugged their shoulders and said, so what? I come to you on the street and I say, do you know that George Washington died? And you say, so what? What difference does it make as far as the city government is concerned, or my bank book is concerned? I come to you and say, do you realize that the sun is shining? Well, it's been there all the time. I say to you, do you realize that Jesus Christ arose from the dead, and one day, if you should die, you will be raised from the dead? And you say, so what? The resurrection of Jesus Christ is impractical, they tell us.

Now, an argument like this is foolish. Everybody listening to my voice right now is doing something today because of something in the future, or you are not doing something today because of something in the future. You hop on the bus, you go downtown, you meet a student, he's walking into Roosevelt University.

You say, where are you going? Let's go get a cup of coffee. Oh, I can't, I can't, I've got to study. You mean you'd rather study than have a cup of coffee? Oh, I've got to study.

Exams are coming. Here's a man who is governing his life today by something that's going to happen in the future. Every student knows what it is to discipline his life in getting ready for the future.

The other day, I rode past a bridal shop, and the sign in the front said, Happy Weddings Begin Here. I wish they could guarantee that. But here comes a girl, and she's floating out of the shop.

She's not walking, she's floating. And you say to her, my, you're happy today. What happened? Oh, I'm getting married in two weeks.

Well, isn't that interesting? I've got a lovely fellow you ought to meet. I don't want to meet him. I've already met the boy I'm going to marry.

Oh, but he's got money. I'm not interested in his money. Here's a girl whose life today is being controlled by a future event.

Don't tell me people aren't concerned about the future. People work and earn money and save money because they want to pay the rent or buy the house. Somebody here today can reach into her purse and pull out a little bottle of capsules, and you say, well, why do you carry those capsules around? I want to live.

If I don't take these capsules today, I may be dead next week. Now, you get the point, I'm sure. Our lives today are governed by the future.

The present power of a future hope. Now, the resurrection is the same way. People who do not believe that there will be a resurrection and that men will stand before God live like that.

First Corinthians 15, once again, Paul says, if there is no resurrection, then let us eat and drink and be merry. Tomorrow we die. Now, Paul believed in the resurrection.

Paul believed that one day, should he die, he would stand before God. The Bible teaches there is a resurrection of the just and of the unjust when Jesus Christ returns. And that could be today.

And wouldn't it be a wonderful day if he did when Jesus Christ returns, he raises his own. He brings with him the spirits, the souls of those who have died in Jesus. He raises bodies.

He puts body and soul and spirit together and glorifies it and takes us to heaven. And then when all of time has been wrapped up and God has accomplished all of his purposes, he raises the unjust and judges them. And sad to say the unjust are cast into a lake of fire.

You see, the resurrection in the future has a bearing upon your life today. One day you will stand before God either as a justified one because you've trusted Christ or an unjustified one because you've rejected Christ. Now, the resurrection controlled Paul's life.

I'm looking at Acts chapter 24 and I'm discovering here that the resurrection was very practical in Paul's life. Here's Paul wearing chains, a prisoner of Rome. And you say to him, Paul, what difference does a resurrection make in your life? He said, it makes all the difference in the world.

I used to believe in a resurrection, but I thought Jesus was dead. And then I saw him alive. And then he made me alive.

Look at Acts chapter 24. In verse 14, the resurrection was the foundation for Paul's faith. He says in verse 14, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets.

How do we know the Word of God is true? I go walking through O'Hare Field to catch my plane. I'm going through the terminal and almost at every door someone is standing with a religious book, a religious leaflet, some sort of propaganda. How do we know that the Word of God is true? Because of the

resurrection of the dead.

When Jesus Christ arose from the dead, this was God's seal of approval on the Word. Paul said, you know, I used to read my Old Testament. It didn't make a lot of sense to me.

Then I met the risen Christ and now I know what I believe and I know in whom I believe and I know why I believe. Oh, my friend, you may be going through the valley and you may be having difficulties in your life, but if you know the risen Christ, you have a Bible and you can trust it. The resurrection was the foundation for Paul's faith.

Now, remember, Paul was an ardent Jewish rabbi and overnight he became an ardent, zealous Christian missionary. What made the difference? The resurrection. When he saw the risen Christ, Paul realized what the Old Testament was all about.

And Paul said, I'm basing my life on that resurrection. It is the foundation for my faith. I notice in verse 14 and in verse 15 that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the foundation for his hope, the encouragement for his hope.

He said, I have hope toward God that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust. Hope. They don't find much hope today.

There used to be a sailing vessel, a boat, a missionary boat called Hope. And it was supported by many people and it took medicine from place to place. I noticed recently that boat is no longer in operation.

They've scuttled it. Kind of tragic that a boat named Hope should be scuttled. But many boats named Hope have been scuttled.

People have hoped in this and hoped in that. And along comes Paul who said, you want to know where my hope comes from? What keeps the future bright for me? I believe in the resurrection. If Jesus Christ could conquer death, He can conquer any enemy that I face.

If He can be victor over death, and death is the last enemy, then He can conquer all of the enemies in between. I don't have a thing to be afraid of. Paul was a prisoner.

They could have pulled the strings and pushed the buttons and Paul had been killed. There were a group of men trying to kill Paul. It didn't worry Paul.

Paul said, I know in whom I have believed. I know who is my Savior. I know who has been raised from the dead.

By the way, do you have that kind of hope? When you get up in the morning and raise the shade on a brand new day, do you look out with hope or with despair? Oh, without Jesus Christ, there's despair. It's hopeless. But the resurrection of Christ is the foundation for our faith and the encouragement of our hope.

Look at verse 16. The resurrection of Christ is the stimulus to godly living. Verse 16, and in this do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men.

Paul, why don't you go around hurting people? I believe in a resurrection. Why don't you go around lying? I believe in a resurrection. You say, what's that got to do with it? Well, the resurrection means we stand before God.

Have you read lately 2 Corinthians chapter 5? I read it again yesterday and it's just a little bit convicting. 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 9. Wherefore, we labor, or we make it our aim, that whether present in this life or absent, we may be acceptable to him, God. Look at verse 10.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body. According to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. He's talking here about Christians.

And in this body I have served God. And I'm going to stand before God in a body. And I'm going to give an account of the life that was lived in a body.

And God is going to reward faithfulness. And where there's been unfaithfulness, I'll lose reward and then I'll enter into his glory. Paul said, you want to know what keeps me going? What keeps my conscience clear? You want to know what it is that keeps me from scheming and lying? I'll tell you what it is.

It's the resurrection. One of these days I will stand before God. Now that's an encouragement to godly living.

It ought to be a discouragement to sinful living. Someone says I can do with my body whatever I want to do with my body. That's right, you can.

But you can't escape the consequences. There are consequences here and now. And there are consequences at the resurrection.

And when the unsaved stand before God and they have rejected Christ bodily, they will be judged. They sinned in the body, they shall suffer in the body. If we serve God in the body, we shall glorify God in the body.

Now the resurrection is not impractical. It's the most practical thing you can think of. It is the foundation for our faith, verse 14.

It is the encouragement for our hope, verse 15. It is a stimulus to godly living, verse 16. Look at verse 17.

Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation and offerings. It's an incentive for serving others. Now if there is no resurrection, live for yourself.

Be like that godless farmer whose ground brought forth plentifully. He said, what am I going to do? Ah, this will I do. I'll build bigger barns.

And I'll say to my soul, soul, take thine ease, eat, drink. You have much goods laid up for many years. And that night God says to him, thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.

You see, if there is no resurrection, if there is no future life, live for yourself. Enjoy all of life you can. This is heaven.

Ah, but there is a resurrection and this is not heaven. If there is a resurrection, it means we should be serving others and living for others. It's a great incentive to Christian service.

No, the resurrection is not impossible and the resurrection is not impractical. If you do not believe in a resurrection, you will live like that. You'll live selfishly and sinfully.

But if you believe in a resurrection, you'll realize that one day you shall stand before God. Believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to be judged for rewards. Unbelievers will stand before the great white throne judgment to be judged on the basis of their lives to see how much punishment they'll receive forever.

There's a third objection that people bring when we talk about the resurrection. I've heard this from college students. They say the resurrection is not only something that is impossible and something that is impractical, but they say the resurrection is something that is impersonal.

I've never seen a resurrection. I've never experienced a resurrection. When someone says that to me, I say, I feel sorry for you.

I have seen resurrections and I have experienced a resurrection. You say, now, wait just a minute. Resurrection of dead bodies? No, no, something far greater than that.

You can raise a dead body, as Jesus did with a little girl and a young man and Lazarus, and they'll die again. I'm talking about the greatest resurrection of all, the resurrection out of sin into salvation, out of the death of the Spirit into the life in the Holy Spirit. You see, Paul was standing there as exhibit A, that the resurrection is true.

He says, how can you think of a thing incredible that there is no resurrection of it? Take a look at me. I was once dead in trespasses and sins. I was once so wrapped up in my religion, I persecuted anybody who did not believe the way I believed.

But I want you to know, I experienced a resurrection. Saul of Tarsus was lying in the grave, dead in trespasses and sins. Someone says, just a minute, weren't you a religious man? I certainly was.

Weren't you a righteous man? I obeyed the law. Weren't you a zealous man? No one was more zealous. And yet you were dead? I was dead because I'd never experienced faith in Jesus Christ.

And then I saw him on that Damascus road. I discovered he was alive and I was dead. All these years I'd thought that I was alive and he was dead.

And I trusted him. That's what Paul means in Philippians 3.10 when he says that I may know Him, Christ, and the power of His resurrection. And Paul is saying, I have experienced this resurrection.

It is not something impersonal. It's not something 50 years down the road. I have experienced this resurrection in my own life.

Jesus said that. Let me quote to you the words of Jesus. Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me hath everlasting life and shall not come into judgment, but is passed from death unto life.

That's resurrection. Have you experienced that? Oh, you say, Pastor, nobody can experience that. Oh, yes, you can.

In fact, I rejoice that day after day here in the city of Chicago, people are experiencing resurrection. And you hath he made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins. And he can do that for you today.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not a piece of apologetics for a theologian. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not just a fact of history for the historian. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an experience in your heart when you trust Him.

Like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. And that's resurrection. Oh, you say, I wish I had newness of life.

I wish I could start life all over again. You can. You can.

The Lord Jesus Christ can move into your life today and give you eternal life. He can raise you from the dead. And then He strips off those grave clothes and gives you life and liberty.

And you begin to walk in newness of life. If any man be in Christ, there's a new creation. Old things are passed away.

Behold, all things are become new. One of the saddest men who ever lived, I think, was Dr. Freud, founder of modern psychiatry. He wrote in one of his lectures, quote, and finally, there is the painful riddle of death for which no remedy at all has yet been found, nor probably ever will be.

Oh, how wrong he was. We Christians don't look upon death as a painful riddle. We say with Paul, oh, death, where is thy staying? Oh, grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The resurrection is impossible. Of course not. With God, all things are possible.

The resurrection is impractical. Of course not. It's the motivating force of our lives.

The resurrection is impersonal. Of course not. We've experienced it.

We sing about it. You ask me how I know he lives. He lives within my heart.

That's what Paul meant when he said Christ liveth in me. Now my friend, are you dead in sin or alive in Christ? Have you been raised out of the graveyard of sin and death? Are you walking in newness of life? This is what it's all about. A thing incredible? No.

A thing very wonderful. A thing very practical. A thing very personal.

An experience that you can have today when you trust the living, loving Savior. Would you hear his word once again? That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. And my friend, when you are saved, you don't have to worry about sin or death or hell because you have a living Savior and you live in him.

Gracious Father, we ask that many today will put faith in Jesus Christ and begin to live. We're thankful, O God, that not only is the resurrection of the human body possible, but the resurrection of the human spirit is possible. We can be raised from the dead.

We can receive newness of life through Christ. Lord, this excites us, makes us realize how wonderful life is because Jesus is living. I pray that many here today will trust the Savior and experience this life, for we pray it in his name and for his sake.

Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/17/SID17612.mp3>
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/warren-wiersbe/memory-or-miracle/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net