

Acts 25:19

About a dead man named Jesus whom Paul claimed was alive

'Twas brillig and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wade;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

If it sounds like nonsense, it is because it is nonsense

- It's from the famous nonsense poem, Jabberwocky by Lewis Carol
- In the book *Through the looking-glass, and what Alice found there*
- Which is the sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*
- Humpty Dumpty explains the difficult words from Jabberwocky to Alice
- And Humpty Dumpty is rather scornful of any debate about what words mean
- When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less
- But what if that word is 'resurrection'?

Festus has arrived in Judea to be the new governor, a welcome successor to Felix

- After just three days in the province he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem
- No doubt to familiarise himself with the religious centre of the province
- When the Chief Priests and Jewish leaders presented charges against Paul
- Who had been imprisoned for two years because of the delaying tactics of Felix
- Festus decides those who are accusing Paul should go to Caesarea where he is held
- And after eight to ten days he went down to Caesarea where he convened the court

Like his predecessors Felix and Pontius Pilate, Festus is a politician

- He does not want any trouble
- And the Jewish leaders know that he might do them what favours he can
- In the hope of gaining their cooperation and avoiding any civil disturbance
- When Paul appeared in the court, the Jews from Jerusalem presented their charges
- But they could not prove their charges and Paul was able to defend himself
- 'I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews ...
- or against the temple or against Caesar.'

Festus decides it might be a good idea for Paul to go on trial in Jerusalem

- But Paul realises that this could be a trap
- Partly because he might be kidnapped and murdered on the way
- Partly because even if he does make it to Jerusalem the Sanhedrin is against him
- If Paul is being tried for crimes against the state
- Paul shrewdly replies that he is standing in Caesar's court where he should be tried
- For he has not done any wrong to the Jews, Festus must be able to see that
- Consequently, Paul decides that if he is to have any chance of fair trial
- He must exercise his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar
- Festus is probably quite relieved about this – for it gets Paul out of his province
- But this left Festus with a considerable problem – he would have to write to Caesar
- And as he admits, 'I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him' (v. 26)

A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea

- To pay their respects to Festus
- King Agrippa here is actually King Agrippa II
- Son of Agrippa I, the King Herod of Acts 12 who had James the Apostle executed
- And was later eaten by worms and died
- Grandson of Aristobulus
- And great-grandson of Herod the Great, who was king when Jesus was born

Herod Agrippa II was ruler of the adjoining kingdom to the north of Judea

- He was curator of the temple and regarded as an authority on the Jewish religion
- He had come to meet the new Roman governor
- Faced with the problems he had with Paul, Festus was pleased to welcome him

During the course of their stay, Festus was able to discuss Paul's case with the king

- Like many situations that are difficult to deal with it was not a situation of his making
- His predecessor, Felix, had left him with this problem
- The chief priests and elders of the Jews brought charges and wanted Paul condemned
- But Festus had enough sense of justice to realise that Paul deserved a proper trial
- When the trial was convened Paul's accusers did not charge him as Festus expected
- Presumably charges of sedition against the Roman Empire
- But instead it turned out to be what Festus considered an internal religious matter

Festus admitted to King Agrippa that he was at a loss to investigate such matters

- If it was a religious matter, then the best place for the case to be heard was Jerusalem
- But Paul was a Roman citizen and had appealed to Caesar
- Putting Festus in the difficult position of not knowing what to write to the Emperor
- When Agrippa said that he would like to hear Paul for himself
- Festus was able to make arrangements for him to hear Paul the next day

Agrippa brought his widowed sister Bernice to Festus' housewarming party

- And together they entered the audience room with great pomp
- Bernice had been married to Agrippa's uncle (Herod of Chalcis) and when he died
- Went to live with her brother Herod Agrippa II, where, as Matthew Henry coyly notes
- It was suspected that he was too familiar with her
- It was before people such as these that Paul, the Lord's Apostle, had to appear

In his presentation of the case to Agrippa, Festus had understood one thing

- The centre of the dispute was some points of their own religion
- And about a dead man named Jesus whom Paul claimed was alive (v. 19)
- Throughout the book of Acts
- We have observed that the resurrection of Jesus is critical to the Christian faith
- There is clearly no controversy about the reality of the death of Jesus
- But controversy as to whether he is alive, that is about the resurrection

The resurrection is critical in establishing the central truths about Jesus:

- I JESUS IS LORD
- II JESUS IS SAVIOUR
- III JESUS IS KING

This means that whether Jesus is dead or alive is not some matter of antiquarian interest

- In 1981, Billy Beeny opened a 1950's style café on Interstate 70 in the USA
- A road that is over 2,000 miles long and passes through the state of Missouri
- Billy Beeny's idea was to use his extensive collection of 50s photos and memorabilia
- But 10 years later his café, at Wright City, Missouri, was 99% Elvis
- And Beeny found himself asking the same question over and over again
- 'Is Elvis alive?' Now he's a believer and has opened the 'Elvis is Alive' museum

Though I have not met Mr Beeny personally, my own conclusion is that he is a little nutty

- I don't for one minute believe that Elvis is alive
- Any more than I believe that the earth is flat or the moon is made of green cheese
- But even if Elvis were to be alive what difference would it make, what would it prove

The resurrection of Jesus is the pivotal point of Christian theology

- The claim that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead is the central claim of Christianity
- We don't have direct knowledge of all that Paul said to bring Festus to his conclusion
- But we have letters that Paul wrote within a few years of his trial before Festus
- That give a lot more detail of his belief and hope in the resurrection

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.

(1 Cor. 15:3-8)

This is an early statement of the Christian creed

- As far as Paul is concerned, if Jesus did not literally rise again from the dead
- The entire Christian faith is fallacious (v. 14)
- And ineffective (v. 17)
- Preaching is valueless (v. 14)
- No sins have been forgiven (v. 17)
- Believers have perished without any Christian hope (v. 18)
- Christians are the most miserable of all people (v. 19)

Without the resurrection of Jesus

- the Christian message is reduced to that of one of man's philosophies
- the whole of the New Testament rests on the resurrection as a historical fact
- in his own teaching Jesus intimates his resurrection (Matt. 20:19; John 2:19-22)
- it was the very basis of the preaching of the apostles after Pentecost
- who saw in the scriptures the prediction that the Christ would rise from the dead
- the great controversy was whether Jesus was truthful in his claims as Messiah
- the great proof that Jesus was the Messiah is his resurrection from the dead

I JESUS IS LORD

The simple claim, 'Jesus is Lord' is effectively acknowledging he is the Messiah

- resurrection is not resuscitation (a return to this world's existence)
- Paul indicates that the resurrection body is of a new 'spiritual' order (1 Cor. 15:35ff)
- Jesus was raised in a real body, though it had new and spiritual qualities

Now some people might maintain that Christian doctrine is an arid subject

- But such a contention is far from the truth
- For without Christian doctrine the focal point of faith becomes experience
- And experience varies from day to day
- Sometimes we feel bright and cheery, other days less so
- But Christian doctrine focuses on the work of God in Jesus

Again, some, who should know better, claim that it does not matter what you believe

- Whereas in scripture, what you believe is shown to be of paramount importance
- Who we believe that Jesus is, what we believe he did and what there is for the future
- These can hardly be thought of as matters of little or no importance
- 'You are the Christ the Son of the living God' said Peter to Jesus
- it was an affirmation of belief, after which things were never the same again

From time to time I have the opportunity to go to a service of the Church of England

- in a Methodist Church I would pass the time before the service reading hymns
- but in the Church of England I normally turn to the Prayer Book
- and normally end up reading the Thirty-nine Articles
- which are the basic statements of faith and belief of the Church of England

Now Methodists tend to be a bit vague about what Methodists believe

- The English Methodists were firmly rooted in the Church of England
- And had the Book of Common Prayer and the two Books of Homilies (Sermons)
- In order to give the American Methodists the basic tools for the emerging church
- John Wesley gave them a collection of his sermons, and a revision of the Prayer Book
- This gave him opportunity to edit the Prayer Book and the Thirty-nine Articles
- But Article 3, 'of the Resurrection of Christ' he did not change at all

Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body,
with all things appertaining to the Perfection of Man's Nature,
wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he
return to judge all men at the last day.

There are 10 different resurrection appearances in the New Testament

- Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden (John 20:11-18)
- To certain women, the other Mary, Salome, Joanna and others (Matthew 28:1-10)
- To Simon Peter, alone on the day of resurrection (Luke 24:34, 1 Cor, 15:5)
- To the two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)
- To ten disciples (Thomas being absent) and others with them (John 20:19-24)
- To disciples fishing at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-23)
- To the eleven, to above 500 at once in Galilee (1 Cor, 15:6)
- To James, to the Apostles before the ascension and last of all to Paul

Many convincing proofs were given that he was alive

- To James, to the Apostles before the ascension and last of all to Paul
- He conversed with them face to face
- They touched him (Matt. 28:9; Luke 24:39; John 20:27)
- He ate bread with them (Luke 24:42, 43; John 21:12, 13)

His resurrection was evidence of his Father's acceptance of his work of salvation

- For through his resurrection, Jesus is alive and has entered into heaven
- Bearing the sacrificial offering of his own blood to secure forgiveness for his people
- His death on the cross has made full atonement for all our sins
- His resurrection from the dead makes it clear that his sacrifice was accepted
- Divine justice is satisfied by the death of Jesus on the cross
- Jesus has given his blood as a ransom (compensation) for sinners
- We can be made right with God because of his obedience to death
- It is because of this that believer has the new birth into a living hope
- Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3)

II JESUS IS SAVIOUR

Belief that Jesus is alive is not just a matter of theoretical speculation

- It is a matter of such vast importance that if it is not true we are all undone
- It shows that Jesus is Lord, that Jesus is Saviour it also shows that:

III JESUS IS KING

Of course in the simplest terms owning Jesus as King means accepting his kingship

- Applying his kingly rule in our hearts and lives
- In one sense the resurrection gives us a living Lord, a powerful Saviour
- But that is not the end of the story
- The resurrection of Jesus is also the guarantee of resurrection to believers

How do we know that there is any life after death?

- When Jesus wanted to speak about resurrection life he spoke of the seed in the ground
- The Apostle Paul used the same picture in his great discourse in 1 Corinthians 15
- It is a question like how do we know that spring follows winter
- I guess the only answer we can give to that is we have seen it happen before
- We know that as the days lengthen first will come snowdrops
- Then crocuses, daffodils and all the flowers of spring and summer
- We know because we have seen it happen before

Similarly, the resurrection of Jesus is a pledge, a guarantee, a promise of resurrection life

- 'Christ, the first fruits' as Paul puts it (1 Corinthians 15: 20, 23)

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.

(Romans 8:11)

It is by his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also (1 Cor 6:14)

- this is part of our expectation of sharing in the eternal kingdom
- because of the resurrection of Jesus
- believers may hope for a resurrection at the Lord's future coming in glory
- when the kingly rule of Jesus is ushered in

Paul was on trial not because of sedition or his desecration of the temple

- but because of his faith in Jesus and his resurrection
- Festus understood that the dispute between Paul, the chief priests and Jews
- Was about a person whom he dismissed as 'a dead man named Jesus ...
- Whom Paul claimed was alive
- The resurrection of Jesus
- Whether Jesus is a risen is not a matter of little or no importance
- It is not a matter of theoretical speculation – but at the very heart of our faith

The resurrection is critical in establishing the central truths about Jesus:

- I JESUS IS LORD
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And it is because of these that Paul is on his way to Rome