

April 8, 2007 by Steve Brandon



Why is it considered incredible if God does raise the dead?

Acts 26:8

1. Many Don't Believe the Prophets.
2. Many Don't Believe Jesus.
3. Many Don't Understand the Power of God.
4. Many Want More Proof.

This Easter morning, it is only appropriate for us to spend a few moments thinking about the resurrection of Christ from the dead. We have sung about it. We have read about it. We have prayed about it. And now, I'm going to preach about it. For my message this morning, I want to take you deep into a speech that the apostle Paul gave in his own defense of his actions. I want to lift one question out of that speech as we reflect upon the resurrection this morning.

In Acts 26, we find Paul standing before King Agrippa to defend himself concerning the charges that were brought against him by the Jews. For two years, he had been held in custody in Caesarea, until an opportune time came for his trial. And now was the time. Acts 26, verse 1, "Agrippa said to Paul, 'You are permitted to speak for yourself.' At those words, 'Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense.'" He said, ...

Acts 26:2-3

In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

Certainly, Paul was grateful to present his case before an objective audience who had some intimate knowledge of the Jewish ways and customs. He had been accused by a hostile, Jewish mob, whose clear motive was to kill him (Acts 21:30). While being held as a prisoner in Jerusalem, some Jews "bound themselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until [they had] killed Paul" (Acts 23:23). And the bias didn't stop there with the Jews. It also extended to the Roman officials who were to try Paul. Paul had given a defense against Felix, who knew about Christianity, but kept Paul in custody because he was "wishing to do the Jews a favor" (Acts 24:27). Finally, he stands before Agrippa, who knew a thing or two about the Jewish customs. He was hoping for a fair hearing. Paul begins his defense by giving a bit of the background to his life.

Acts 26:4-7

So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem; since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion. And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews.

And then, he gets to the crux of the issue of why he stands as a prisoner before Agrippa.

Acts 26:8

Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?

Our English word, "incredible" comes from two words. The first word is "in." The second word is "credible." "Credible" means believable, you can trust it. Preceded with the prefix, "in" the word obtains the opposite meaning. It is not credible. It is not believable. That's the idea behind the Greek word that Paul uses in this place. Paul used the word, *apistoV* (*apistos*), which comes from the root word, *pistoV* (*pistos*), which means something trustworthy or believable. With the alpha-privative, "a" before the word, it negates the word. It is "untrustworthy." It is "not believable." It is "incredible." In other words, "it is not to be believed." There are those who don't believe in the resurrection. They don't find such a believe to be "credible." They don't think that it is reasonable to believe such a thing. So, Paul was asking Agrippa, "Why is it considered to be unbelievable among you if God does raise the dead?"

This Easter morning, the resurrection is the issue before us. Why is it considered incredible if God does raise the dead? Indeed, this is the title of my message this morning.

As Paul continued in his defense before Agrippa, Paul continued on by describing his encounter with the risen Christ. In verse 12, he told of

his journey to Damascus with “the authority and commission of the chief priests” to arrest any Christians that he found and bring them back to Jerusalem (cf. Acts 9:2). But, a light from heaven stopped him in His tracks (verse 13). Then, he heard a voice from heaven saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” It was the risen Christ, who spoke with him. Jesus sent him to preach to the Gentiles the message of Christ (verse 17). With these words, Paul made the resurrection clear to Agrippa. Paul had seen the risen Jesus. He had spoken with the risen Jesus. He was instructed to go and preach of the risen Jesus.

As verse 19 says, Paul told Agrippa, “I did not prove disobedience to the heavenly vision.” He went and preached that people “should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance” (Acts 26:20). It is for this cause that Paul was imprisoned. Look down at verse 22, “So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; “that the Christ was to suffer and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”

As it turned out, Paul’s defense before Agrippa was more like a witnessing opportunity than it was a defense. When Paul was finishing, he said (in verse 27), “King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.” Agrippa’s response (in verse 28) can be read in a few different ways. It can be read as a question, or it can be read as a statement. I believe that it is best to read it as a question, Agrippa replied, “In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian?” (verse 28). Paul said, “I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains” (verse 29).

Paul was wishing that Agrippa would believe in the resurrection. The resurrection was core and central to his beliefs. It was core and central to his preaching. He called on others to believe it. It’s what he called Agrippa to believe. Based upon his actions, we can only assume that he failed to believe. And so, this morning, I want to ask and answer this question, Why is it considered incredible if God does raise the dead? There are many answers that could be given. I’m certainly not going to be exhaustive in my message. But, I’ll give you a few reasons why.

First of all, ...

1. Many Don’t Believe the Prophets.

When Paul was pleading with Agrippa, he brought the discussion back to the Scriptures. Look again in verse 27. Again, verse 27, “King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know you do.” Paul’s question revolves around the person and work of Christ. The prophets predicted that He would suffer. And, the prophets predicted that He would rise from the dead. (This was the point of verses 22-23, “I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; that the Christ was to suffer, and by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”)

The Scriptures had foretold of the day when the Messiah would suffer and rise again. The obvious question that comes to mind is, “Where?” “Where do they prophecy of the suffering of the Messiah and His raising from the dead?” The clearest place where this is taught is Isaiah 53. Many of us are familiar with these words. They clearly predict the suffering of the Messiah, God’s Servant. Verse 3 says that “He was despised and forsaken of men.” Verse 4 says that He was “smitten of God and afflicted.” Verse 5 says that He was “pierced through for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.” Verse 7 says that He was “like a lamb that is led to slaughter.” Verse 8 says that “He was cut off out of the land of the living.” Verse 9 speaks about His grave. And then, in the last three verses (verses 10-12), we see some things written that give us a hint that the suffering servant must be alive. The clear implication is that He must raise from the dead.

Isaiah 53:10-12

But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

In verse 10, we see that the Suffering Servant would “see His offspring. We see that He will “prolong His days.” In verse 11 we see the Suffering servant seeing the result of His anguish, and be satisfied with it. In verse 12, we see that the Messiah would have “a portion with the great.” He is alive to share in His inheritance. These things speak about His resurrection.

And yet, from everything that we can determine, Agrippa didn’t believe. Paul sought to affirm Agrippa’s faith in the prophets, “King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know you do” (Acts 26:27). But, Agrippa’s failure to believe in the resurrection demonstrates that he didn’t really believe in the prophets. This is typical of many. It was typical of many in the days of Paul. It was typical of many in the days of Jesus. It is typical of many today. There are many who simply don’t believe what the prophets speak concerning the resurrection of Christ.

This was the problem with the disciples of Jesus as well. They didn’t believe the prophets. Let’s first see this in Luke 24. This is one of my favorite stories in all of the Scriptures. It tells us of what took place in the life of two of the disciples of Jesus, shortly after the death of Christ. They were walking on the road to Emmaus and talking of what had recently taken place in the city of Jerusalem. Their leader was crucified. But now, His tomb was empty. They couldn’t quite figure it out. Let’s pick it up in verse 13, ...

Luke 24:13-27

And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. And He said to them, “What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?” And they stood still, looking sad. One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, “Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem

and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see. And He said to them, "O foolish men and **slow of heart to believe** in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

What was the problem with these disciples? They didn't "believe in all that the prophets have spoken!" (verse 25). The disciples had the same problem that Agrippa had experienced. They didn't believe in the prophets. For, if they had, they would have believed in the resurrection.

Let's turn now to my second answer to the question: Why is it considered incredible if God does raise the dead?

2. Many Don't Believe Jesus.

This was especially the case of the disciples. They were told often by Jesus, Himself, that He would rise from the dead. The gospel of Mark demonstrates this to be true as well as any of the gospel accounts.

We will begin by considering Mark's gospel. Immediately after it was revealed to Peter that Jesus was the Christ, Mark 8:31 tells us what Jesus did. "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." These words were about as clear as it could be.

- (1) "The Son of Man must suffer many things."
- (2) The Son of Man would "be rejected" by the religious leaders.
- (3) The Son of Man would "be killed."
- (4) After three days, the Son of Man would "rise again."

In verse 32, Mark says, "He was stating the matter plainly." It was clear to the disciples what Jesus was saying. They understood. Later in verse 32, Peter demonstrates how well he understood. "And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke Him." Peter took Jesus aside and told Jesus, "Jesus, I hear your plan. I understand your plan. It's a bad plan. Let's change your plan. There is no way that you should suffer and be rejected by these religious leaders. Why should You die? This is a terrible plan. Let's call time-out and come up with something else." In verse 33, Jesus is all about keeping with the game plan: "This is the plan. I'm going to suffer. I'm going to be killed. I'm going to rise from the dead." So, it was clear to the disciples. They knew what Jesus was teaching them. The simple fact was that they refused to believe the things that Jesus told them.

Let us consider next what took place a chapter later. Again, we find Jesus "teaching His disciples and telling them, 'The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later'" (Mark 9:31). The communication is clear. Unfortunately, the disciples didn't understand (which is what verse 32 says). But, you need to know that their ignorance didn't come from a lack of clarity on the part of Jesus. Rather, it came from a lack of belief on the part of the disciples. They didn't believe the words of Jesus.

In the next chapter, we see Jesus communicating the same thing to the disciples again. This time, we encounter Jesus and the disciples, "on the road going up to Jerusalem" (Mark 10:32). At one point, Jesus stopped, "took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to Him" (Mark 10:32). Jesus said, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again" (Mark 10:33-34). We can't help but to think of how clear Jesus was in saying these things. This is the third time that He said these things to His disciples. Each time, He basically said the same things. We are going to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be delivered to the religious leaders. He will be killed. He will rise again.

And yet, despite the clear predictions, once Jesus was crucified, the disciples were nowhere to be seen. They thought that it was over. They didn't believe in the words of Jesus. They didn't believe that He would be raised from the dead. They didn't believe in the resurrection.

This is even more surprising when we find that Jesus told His disciples of the resurrection on two other occasions (at least). As Jesus and His disciples were coming down from the mount of transfiguration, Jesus "gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead" (Mark 9:9). Furthermore, after celebrating the last Passover, Jesus and His disciples went out to the Mount of Olives. He said to them, "You will all fall away, because it is written, 'I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.' But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." It may well be the case that there were other occasions when Jesus told them of the resurrection as well. But, we have considered at least five. And yet, sadly, the disciples didn't believe Jesus.

We see further evidences of unbelief among those close to Jesus when we consider the actions of the women who came to the tomb of Jesus to anoint His body. We read, "When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. They were saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?'" (Mark 16:1-3). Surely they knew about Jesus' prediction that He would rise from the dead (Luke 24:8). And yet, they weren't looking for Him alive. Rather, they came to the place of

His burial with spices, expecting to anoint His body. At this moment, they weren't believing the words of Jesus. They weren't believing in the resurrection!

The story continues to unfold itself in Luke 24. Shortly after these women had seen the angels and remembered the words of Jesus that He would rise again, they "returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened" (Luke 24:9-12). Notice here that the words of these women "appeared to them as nonsense." It simply didn't compute for them. It didn't make sense. Why? Because they didn't believe the words of Jesus. So, they didn't believe the women, who said that the tomb was empty. Even when they went to the tomb to see for themselves that it was empty, they still didn't believe. Rather, verse 12 says, they were "marveling at what had happened." We can still detect some doubt in their minds.

Why is it considered incredible if God does raise the dead? Many don't believe Jesus.

3. Many Don't Understand the Power of God.

This point here is a Scriptural point as well as a logical point. First, let's deal with the Scripture.

In Matthew 22, we find Jesus defending His belief in the resurrection against those who don't believe that the resurrection takes place. The Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus with a question intended to "trap Him in what he said" (Matt. 22:23, 15). Here is their question.

Matthew 22:24-28

Teacher, Moses said, "If a man dies having no children, his brother as next of kin shall marry his wife, and raise up children for his brother." Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother; so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. Last of all, the woman died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had married her."

"Surely," they thought to themselves, "Jesus cannot answer this question." "It demonstrates perfectly how absurd it is to believe in the resurrection. He cannot answer the question." But the response of Jesus was masterful. Jesus responded by saying, ...

Matthew 22:29-32

You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.

Regarding the Scriptures, Jesus quoted from the Exodus 3:6 and proved that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still alive during the days of Moses, some 400 years after they had died. The Scripture says that God **is** the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It doesn't say that God **was** the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Since God is still their God, it must mean that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive and well. Thus, Jesus proved that the resurrection was real.

But, the issue on the table here in my point is that people fail to believe in the resurrection when they fail to understand the "power of God." Jesus mentions this in verse 29, "You are mistaken, not understanding ... the power of God." I find it interesting here that Jesus didn't say to these Sadducees, "You don't **believe** the power of God." Rather, Jesus chose to focus on their lack of "**knowing**" the power of God, "You don't know the power of God." I think that it is a slap in the face to scientists of our day, who would pride themselves on ability to be sophisticated in all that they know. But, Jesus here says that they "don't understand the power of God." They hadn't yet figured out all the facts.

These Sadducees should have understood the power of God! They were six-day creationists! They knew that the heavens were made "by the word of the LORD" (Psalm 33:6). They knew that "He spoke, and it was done" (Ps. 33:9). They knew that "He commanded and they were created" (Psalm 148:5).

These Sadducees thoroughly believed the creation account. They knew that "the LORD God formed man of the dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Genesis 2:5). They knew that the LORD God was the One who sustains the universe. They knew that "If He should gather to Himself His spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust" (Job. 34:14-15).

These Sadducees weren't ignorant of the ways of God. They knew that "The heavens [were] telling of the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1). They knew that it was God "who sits above the circles of the earth, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in" (Is. 40:22). They knew that it was God who created all of the stars, and "calls them all by name" (Is. 40:26).

They thought long and hard upon the great signs that God performed for Israel in bringing them out of slavery in Egypt (Ex. 10:2). They knew that God turned the water in the Nile into blood (Ex. 7). They knew that God summoned the frogs, the gnats and the swarms of insects upon the land of Egypt, and banished them with His word (Ex. 8). They knew that God struck the Egyptian cattle, while leaving the Hebrew cattle alone (Ex. 9). They knew that God brought the boils upon the Egyptians, the hail upon all the land of Egypt, except for the land of Goshen, where there was no hail (Ex. 9). They knew that God brought the locusts and the darkness (Ex. 10). They knew that God had the power to kill the firstborn of every family and animal in Egypt (Ex. 11-12). They knew that God split the waters of the Red Sea when Pharaoh's army was in hot pursuit (Ex. 14). They knew how the LORD sweetened the water at Marah (Ex. 15). They knew how the LORD provided water at

Massah and Meribah out of the rock (Ex. 17). They knew how the LORD fed the millions of wandering Hebrews for forty years in the wilderness with Manna, the bread that came down from heaven (Ex. 16). They knew how God sustained them for forty years of difficult living in the wilderness without their clothes or sandals wearing out (Deut. 29:5). They knew how the LORD had given them victory over Sihon, king of Heshbon and Og, king of Bahan (Ex. 29:7). These Sadducees knew that all of these things are but “the fringes of His ways” (Job. 26:14).

And yet, for some reason, they didn’t understand the power of God. They didn’t understand the logic. If God can create this universe in which we live, If God can create this planet upon which we live, If God can create life, If God can sustain life, If God can perform miracles beyond comprehension, then, certainly, God can raise the dead. If God can create life from the dust of the ground, then certainly, God can resurrect life from a corpse. Failure to believe in the resurrection is failure to understand the power of God.

4. Many Want More Proof.

For this point, I want to take you back a few chapters in Matthew to Matthew 12. Beginning in verse 38, we find the scribes and Pharisees coming to Jesus and asking Him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” This is really an amazing thing that they ask. In the context of Matthew 12, Jesus had performed two undeniable miracles before the eyes of the scribes and Pharisees.

One Sabbath day, there were some Pharisees who happened to be in a synagogue. It just so happened that two other men were in the synagogue as well. One was Jesus. The other was a man with a withered hand. So these Pharisees came up to Jesus and asked him a question. They said, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” (Matthew 12:10). They knew in their hearts that Jesus could heal this man. They knew that it was the Sabbath. If Jesus healed this man, they could accuse Him of violating the Sabbath (verse 10), and ultimately destroy Him (verse 14). Before healing the man, Jesus gives this talk about having a sheep that falls into a pit on the Sabbath! Everyone would “take hold of it and lift it out” of the pit (verse 11). As human beings are worth far more than sheep, we can “do good on the Sabbath” (verse 12). And so, Jesus said to this man, “Stretch out your hand” (Verse 13). “He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other” (verse 13). An undeniable miracle took place. And verse 14 demonstrates the true motive of these Pharisees. “The Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.” They saw a sign, but it didn’t make any difference.

A few verses later (beginning in Matthew 12:22), Jesus healed a demon-possessed man that was “blind and mute” before he met Jesus. Jesus healed this man so that he “spoke and saw.” The Pharisees were unable to deny the miracle. Rather, they sought to say that the miracle happened because Jesus is in with “Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons” (verse 24). They have a hard heart, that wouldn’t believe in Christ. They will do all that they can do to trap Jesus, so that they might accuse Him and destroy Him.

And then (as Matthew 12:38 indicates), “some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’” He had just given them two signs that they couldn’t deny. And what do they want? They want more. Two undeniable miracles are not enough. They want more. But, in wanting more, in actuality, they are demonstrating that it will never be enough. They want more proof.

Look at how Jesus responds (in Matthew 12:39), “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Jesus told the Pharisees beforehand that He would be in the ground, dead and buried. And yet, his entombment wouldn’t last long, only a few days. And the implication is that He would rise after these three days. But, it wasn’t enough for these people. Because they always wanted more.

Jesus gave a great illustration of the hardness of some hearts to believe when he told the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Lazarus was a poor man, who sat outside the gate of this rich man, “longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man’s table” (Luke 16:21). When they both died, Lazarus found Himself in Abraham’s bosom (verse 22), while the rich man was in torment in Hades (verse 23). The torment was so bad that he was looking for any sort of comfort at all, even a finger of water dropped on his tongue (verse 24). But, Abraham told him that it wasn’t possible. In life, this man had enjoyed the pleasures of this world, while Lazarus suffered greatly. Now, in eternity, the roles were reversed. The rich man then has this conversation with Abraham concerning these things. Let’s pick up the dialogue in verse 27, “And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment. But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’” But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Many people will seek for all the proof that they can get. But, in the vast majority of these cases, the proof never satisfies. Even if one is raised from the dead, they won’t be satisfied. They always want more and more and more.

Why is it considered incredible if God does raise the dead? (1) Many Don’t Believe the Prophets; (2) Many Don’t Believe Jesus; (3) Many Don’t Understand the Power of God; and (4) Many Want More Proof.

(1) The good news today is that this isn’t always the case. There are those who don’t believe the Prophets, but later come to embrace their teachings of the resurrection. My mind immediately thinks of the apostle **Paul**. When standing before King Agrippa (as recorded in Acts 26), Paul told of his intents “to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9). We see him denying the prophets and standing in “hearty agreement” as others stoned Stephen to death (Acts 8:1). But later, Paul came to believe the prophets. He came to see how they spoke of Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:23). He came to see how they spoke of Christ resurrected (1 Tim. 2:8).

(2) There are those who don’t believe the words of Jesus, but later become convinced of the resurrection. At this point, my mind immediately turns to the **disciples**. Initially, they hadn’t believed in the words of Jesus. He told them that He was going to rise from the dead, but they didn’t believe. And yet, seeing the risen Christ and speaking with Him, they became believers. And their boldness to witness to others of what they had seen and heard turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). The world has never been the same. It was their faith in the risen Jesus

that compelled them to preach as they did.

(3) There are those who don't understand the power of God, but later believe fully of His resurrection. My mind immediately thinks of **the Thessalonians**. They were a group of idolatrous people, who thought that the gods were made of wood and stone and precious metals, denying their sovereign creator who had given them many reasons to believe. Listen to their testimony: they "turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

There are those who want more proof, who ultimately believe in the resurrection. My mind thinks of **Thomas**. He was a man who wanted proof of the resurrection, obtained proof of the resurrection, and believed in the resurrection.

In John 20:24, we discover that Jesus had visited with the disciples. But, Thomas, "was not with them when Jesus came" (verse 24). The other disciples were thrilled that they had seen Jesus. They were saying to Thomas, "We have seen the Lord!" (John 20:25). But, Thomas doubted their words. He didn't believe them. Rather, he said, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). Well, eight days later, Jesus appeared to Thomas. He said to Him (in verse 27), "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing" (verse 27). When Thomas saw the proof, he immediately believed. He said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" (verse 28).

Immediately after this account comes a verse that is written for us. Jesus said to Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 20:29). Jesus pronounces a blessing upon those who haven't seen Him, and yet have believed. He's talking about us! None of us have seen the resurrected Christ. But, many of us have believed that He rose from the dead, demonstrating that He has conquered over sin. We no longer walk as condemned creatures. Rather, we walk as those who have been forgiven by His grace.

And here's the question for you this morning. Do you consider it incredible that God does raise the dead? Do you consider it to be a credible thing that Jesus Christ raised from the dead?

This isn't a matter of little importance. It's of great importance. Paul considered it as "first importance." He told those in Corinth, "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Apart from Jesus Christ raising from the dead and conquering sin, we have no hope! "If Christ has not been raised, [our] faith is worthless; [we] are still dead in our sins" (1 Cor. 15:17). But, I'm here today to affirm to your hearts that Christ has been raised from the dead! (1 Cor. 15:20). ... And that changes everything.

When you believe that Christ died for your sins, no longer do you live in the fear of death. No longer do you have the weight of condemnation upon your shoulders. Rather, you are free. You are happy. You are blessed! (John 20:29). You will have eternal life! (John 3:16).

If you don't believe in the resurrection, I would encourage you to go home today and see whether or not any of these reasons is your stumbling block. Perhaps you don't believe the Prophets. Perhaps you don't believe Jesus. Perhaps you don't understand the power of God. Perhaps you are seeking more proof. And know that there are others who have walked in your shoes before. There are others who haven't believed these things, but have later come to see the light. It's my earnest desire for you this morning to be believing, and not unbelieving.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 8, 2007 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.
