Is death THE END?
A friend of mine was a paratrooper and faced live action in many different areas of conflict. Whenever we talked about his experiences, even though he’s not a Christian, he would say, “There are no atheists on the battlefield.” When he first said this, I thought he was joking, but there was no smile on his face.

When the bullets were ripping past his head, and death could have come for him at any moment, he really cried out to God in fear. It was when he thought he was going to die that he asked God to help him. Most of us can probably
understand this fear of death, even if we’ve never been on a battlefield.

Yet, as soon as the battle was over and the enemy fire had stopped, my friend forgot about God . . . at least until the next time he was in a war zone.

—Russell Fralick

Most of us, of course, are not in the armed forces, and so the imminent threat of death is not necessarily a part of our daily lives. However, we all have to face death at some point; it is the only absolute certainty in life. But after we die, what happens next? And are we ready? We need to take death seriously and make sure we are prepared for what comes after.
What Christians believe

Christians say that Jesus Christ came back to life over 2,000 years ago. For them, the empty tomb of Jesus is key to their belief that they too will be given a new unending life with Him after they die. It is the evidence that death is not ‘the end’.

Many people don’t know what to think about life after death. And outside of Christianity, barely anyone thinks Jesus’ resurrection is a historical fact. To many, it is simply a fairy-tale. To believe that a person came back from the dead—after having been buried for days—seems stupid.

Yet almost 2,000 years ago, Jesus died on a cross. Before the sun set that day, His friends buried Him. His enemies even sealed the tomb. But the Bible tells us that He left the grave a few days later. When Jesus walked out of His own grave, He showed death was beaten; it is the moment that changed everything. It certainly changed the lives of His followers.

When Jesus was arrested and sentenced to be executed, His friends and followers ran away in fear. But when Jesus walked out of His tomb, His scared
followers became bold. Jesus’ followers were so convinced by the ‘fairy-tale’ of Him coming back to life, that they were willing to die for their belief.

The point is this: if the key story of Jesus dying on the cross and then coming back to life three days later is a myth, then why were his followers so certain it was true? And willing to die defending it? Many of them were murdered in brutal ways. Yet many others believed them and also signed up to suffer for the message of Jesus’ new life.

If God has raised Jesus back to life, then we need to pay attention to the message that goes with it.

When Jesus walked out of His own grave, He showed death was beaten.
A certain event

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

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 Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have [died]. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also. —1 Corinthians 15:1–8

Paul clearly explained, in his letter to the church in Corinth, that Jesus came back from death in a resurrected body. This doesn’t make it true, but he quickly builds his argument by reminding his readers of the message they heard when they first believed in Christ: Jesus Christ died to pay the price for how we reject and ignore God. He was buried but then came back to life again just as God had promised in the Old Testament.
However, this church did not necessarily believe what was written without proof. Quoting the Bible was not enough for them. So Paul went on to remind them of how Jesus had made many appearances after His resurrection. Several specific meetings took centre stage: Jesus met with Peter, James and Paul himself after His resurrection. Jesus met with all His followers too and even to a group of more than 500 people. That is quite a list of witnesses. Imagine a trial where over 500 people could confirm that they saw Jesus alive! The evidence would be overwhelming.

But we are almost 2,000 years away from the resurrection. We can’t talk to the eyewitnesses. How can we be assured that it really happened?

There aren’t many options. The writers of the accounts of Christ’s resurrection were alive when it happened. We can either believe that what they wrote actually happened or think of them as idiots or liars.

Why not ask someone in your church to help you read John’s gospel in the Bible, and then decide for yourself? John was a friend of Jesus, and was there when He died. But remember, the possibility of John being a liar is unlikely. Liars break down when they start suffering for their lies.

He was buried but then came back to life again just as God had promised in the Old Testament.
Yet with John and the other followers it was different. Most of them were executed, not because they were criminals, but because of the message they were spreading: “Jesus has risen from the dead and believing in Him is the only way to be saved”. They had nothing to gain by selling a lie. In fact they had everything to lose; yet they continued. But not one of them ever said, “We have been lying. We made the whole thing up; it was all fake!” That leaves only one possibility that really makes sense: they believed deeply enough to die for those beliefs, without a hint of doubt that what they were saying was true.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an historical event for which eyewitnesses were willing to die.
An important belief

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 [liars] about God, for we have [claimed] 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 [useless]; you are still in your sins. —1 Corinthians 15:12–17

Some say that the idea of life after death is old fashioned. But Paul doesn’t leave room for that possibility. Paul tackles the issue head on and declares in no uncertain terms that to deny a future resurrection is to reject God’s salvation. And if we have no salvation from God, we have no real basis for hope; we may as well live by the philosophy: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (1 Cor. 15:32).

The point is that belief in the resurrection of Jesus is the core of Christianity. Paul said that Christ Jesus died for our rejection of God; so, we should trust Him
and come back to God. He rose again and appeared to many people. If we deny that Jesus died to pay the price for how we have treated God, we have no forgiveness. If we deny that He rose from the grave, we have no hope for the future.

If Christ’s resurrection was real, ours will be too. If we trust Christ with our lives, we will be raised from the dead, just as He was. And we will be made perfect before God. But more than that, once we belong to Him we are never separated from Him. Once we trust Christ, it’s like our new future life has already started—we belong to God again straightaway. And our life in heaven is safe and secure; nothing can separate us from God’s love!

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\text{If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.}
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1 Corinthians 15:13
Paul’s discussion of the resurrection reaches its peak:

*I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the [earthly] inherit the [heavenly]. . . . For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised [in perfect new life], and we will be changed. For the [earthly] must clothe itself with the [heavenly], and the mortal with immortality.* —1 Corinthians 15:50-53

We can’t enter heaven in our present earthly bodies. We must each be given a new body. God revealed to Paul the wonderful truth that a day is coming when Christ will return for those who trust Him. Christians, when they die, will be transformed from their “earthly” bodies to receive new, perfect “heavenly” bodies.

All those who believe in Christ will receive unending life and new bodies! This thought made Paul burst out in joy and praise: “When the
[earthly] has been clothed with the [heavenly], 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” (1 Cor. 15:54–57). Our enemies—sin and death—will be defeated. Jesus Christ, through His death and resurrection, has so completely defeated death that it will be “swallowed up”.

Paul goes so far as to taunt death: “‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’” The sting of death is sin because death is the punishment for how we act towards God. But Jesus Christ lived a perfect life in our place, and through His death He paid the price for our sins, breaking death’s power over us. He won the victory over sin and death. We don’t need to be afraid!

From praise, Paul turns to a challenge: “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain” (v. 58).

We await the reward of heaven because of the work of Christ. In light of this great promise, we can live for
God, no matter what comes our way. And the reward will be so much better than any troubles or pain we have to go through in this life.

The choice we make now regarding Jesus decides where death’s door leads. We can either reject Jesus, staying separate from God and living in fear of our final breath. Or we can trust Christ to die our death for us, knowing with certainty that He has brought us back to God to live with Him forever. It’s never too late for anyone to come to Jesus. Knowing the risen Lord gives us the confident hope of our own future resurrection. We can know that new life waits beyond death’s door.

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