



THE IF

What if
you could
believe
that Jesus
rose from
the dead?

THAT

CHANGES

with contributions by
John C. Lennox & John Dickson

EVERYTHING

MIKE HOOD

“How can one weekend change everything for everyone? Mike Hood doesn’t just show you how; he shows you why—and the profound difference Easter makes. This book will give you solid reasons not only to believe in the resurrection of Jesus but, even more, to love it.”

GLEN SCRIVENER, Author, *The Air We Breathe*

“I highly recommend this helpful and inviting book. Mike Hood covers not only why believing in the resurrection is rational but also why it’s beautiful—why it makes life worth living. His language is accessible, readable and sympathetic, but never simplistic or patronizing. He draws on plenty of real-life examples of people who have wrestled with belief in the resurrection. I would recommend this book both to those who already believe (but need to remember why it matters) and to those seeking answers to the big questions.”

TED TURNAU, Author, *Popologetics*

“This book combines a compelling, concise demonstration of the evidence for the resurrection with a unique emphasis on the relationship Christians have with the living God and with one another. A stunning combination! This book will be my go-to giveaway. It’s short, warm and convincing.”

LINDA ALLCOCK, Author, *Deeper Still*;
Ministry Leader, The Globe Church, Central London

“A great short introduction to the case for the resurrection of Jesus. Without the resurrection, things don’t make sense, but this book shows that when we accept the truth of Jesus’ resurrection, it makes the most sense of the historical evidence and of life itself.”

DR PETER J. WILLIAMS,
Principal, Tyndale House, Cambridge

"In a world of shifting questions and beliefs, Mike Hood offers something solid: a clear, compelling case for why the resurrection of Jesus isn't only credible but life-changing, and even world-changing. Mike doesn't just explain why the resurrection is a believable fact of history; he shows why that fact is so good. To read this book is to hear an invitation to explore how the resurrection of Jesus makes sense of history, shapes our identity and offers genuine hope. Whether you're exploring faith or looking to deepen it, this is a book worth reading."

MATT LILLICRAP, CEO, UCCF

"The question of whether Jesus rose from the dead is, as Mike Hood so clearly shows, the most important question we could ask. This is a brilliant guide for the curious that not only unpacks why we *can* believe it but also why we *should*. The resurrection of Jesus is not just a historical reality—it changes everything!"

MICHAEL OTS, Author and apologist

"Ace communicator Mike Hood distils the case for the resurrection of Jesus in clear, persuasive and readable prose. A great book to share with a friend to start a conversation about—arguably—the central event in human history!"

STEPHEN C. MEYER, Author, *Darwin's Doubt*



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the**goodbook**
COMPANY

The If That Changes Everything

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INTRODUCTION

“**D**id you know that if you eat a whole cabbage, you will die?”

I don't think this question was on the school chemistry syllabus, but Mr Mavrommatis was easily bored. So in a dull moment he had wandered up to one of my classmates and asked her this alarming question.

She was incredulous. “No way! That can't be true, can it?”

Before long the whole class had been drawn into the debate: “Surely not, sir! That can't be right! If cabbages were poisonous, someone would have warned us before now!”

But he insisted: “I promise you it's the truth. If you eat a whole cabbage, you will die.”

Eventually, after he had soaked up an enjoyable amount of teenage scepticism, Mr Mavrommatis paused for a moment and grinned at us through his bushy beard.

“Okay, look. I never said *when* you would die.”

We looked at him, nonplussed.

“If you eat a whole cabbage, you will die. And if you don’t eat a whole cabbage, you will die. Everybody dies, kids.”

Why do I still remember that joke nearly two decades later? I think it stuck with me because it’s so rare for anyone to say it out loud. “Everybody dies.” It’s the most basic fact of human existence, something we all have in common. Yet it’s also something we don’t like to talk about. Mostly we try not to even *think* about it.

We tend to assume that thinking about death would drain all the colour out of life—so we cram it into a dusty cupboard at the back of our minds, shove the door shut, and brace ourselves for the day it comes bursting back out at us. But what if the truth about death could actually fill our lives with meaning and hope?

I’m convinced that it can.

Why? Because I’m convinced that Jesus rose from the dead.

The If That Changes Everything

You probably know the Easter story. Jesus Christ, the central figure in the Christian faith, was put on trial before Roman and Jewish authorities in the 30s AD. On what we now call Good Friday, he was unjustly executed on a cross. But that Sunday, Jesus came back to life. His tomb was found empty, and he appeared bodily to many different people for six weeks—eating with them, embracing them, and explaining to them what it all meant, before finally returning to heaven.

If that’s true, it changes everything.

It revolutionises our perspective on life after death. It means we aren't stuck with vague hopes about "going to a better place"—hopes that start to fall apart if we look at them too closely. Instead, we have a solid reason to believe that death is not the end. Jesus has come out the other side of it into a life that he says will last for ever—a life that is joyful and personal—and he offers us that future too.

But that's not all. If this is true, it would also transform life *before* death. It might not seem obvious yet, but the more you think about Jesus' resurrection, the more you'll realise how huge the implications are. If Jesus rose from the dead, then he really was who he said he was: our Creator, who became a flesh-and-blood human being to introduce himself to us and renew us from the inside out. If Jesus rose from the dead, it means we are not just atoms or accidents; we are known completely and loved immensely, and we are being invited to live a life of deep purpose and meaning that nothing can ever take away.

If Jesus rose from the dead. But that's a huge *if*, isn't it? You might be feeling pretty sceptical. You might think: *maybe* there's a God or life beyond death, but surely there's no way for us to really know!

I can sympathise with that; I'm naturally very sceptical myself. I've been wrestling with questions and doubts around this for years—and I want to show you the things that have convinced me that the resurrection of Jesus really happened. I think we can believe it, not by blind faith or childish optimism but by being rationally convinced. The resurrection of Jesus makes sense of the

facts of history in a way no other explanation can, and it also makes sense of the whole universe.

So in the pages that follow, I'm hoping to do two big things:

- I want to show you that you actually can believe in the resurrection of Jesus and everything it means. It's credible and real.
- And I want to show you that it is spectacularly good news. The implications are profound, beautiful and exciting. If it's true, it's both life-affirming and life-transforming.

I don't know what you believe at the moment about life, death, morality or meaning, and I don't know what doubts and questions you have about those beliefs. But wherever we're coming from, we are all searching for answers that are both good and true. I think we can find them.

CHAPTER 1

HOPE, AND WHY IT MATTERS

“**H**ope is a powerful weapon.”

Nelson Mandela wrote those words to his wife from a hard-labour prison on Robben Island where he had been locked up for seven years.¹ He would be in there for 20 more. Two more decades of back-breaking work in the quarry and lonely hours staring at prison walls. But somehow, Mandela held onto hope. When he was finally released, he hadn't hardened into vengefulness or crumbled into despair. He emerged with the strength of character to lead his country peacefully through the transformation he had longed for; and he was renowned all over the world for his *smile*. Hope turned out to be a very powerful weapon indeed.

If I'm honest, I used to be bored by talk about hope beyond death. It all sounded like “pie in the sky when you die” that made no real difference to me. But I realise now that I was missing something crucial. Genuine hope changes things in the present. A difficult journey

feels totally different if we know where we're going. The same story could be either a heartbreaking tragedy or a beautiful epic, depending on how it ends. What we believe about tomorrow changes how we feel about today; it changes how we make sense of things and how we choose to live. Hope is powerful.

So before we dive into the rational question about whether Jesus really rose, we're going to think about why that question matters right now. This is relevant to all of us—whether we're feeling our frailty or we're young, fit and healthy—because life confronts us with urgent questions that we just can't answer if we have no idea what comes after death.

We're going to consider two of those questions: a personal question we face when we lose someone close to us, and a global question that rears its head whenever we watch the news. One is about love, the other about justice; but they both bring us back to the question of hope.

Love Versus Death

My grandad was the first person I ever sat with on their deathbed. As my brother and I held his hands, I wished that we could somehow hold on tight enough that we wouldn't have to let him go. But at the same time, the question pounding in my head was: let him go *where*? I think most of us who've lost someone will have had moments—maybe as we wait for the end to come, or after the funeral, or at a family wedding that they would have loved to see—where we find ourselves asking these kinds of questions. Have they really gone? Where

are they now? Are “they” anywhere at all, or is there no “them” left?

We might talk about people “watching over us” or being “in a better place”, but we don’t know if we actually mean it, and we’re scared to think about it too hard.

A couple of years ago, I attended the most moving funeral I’ve ever been to. It was for Marcel, a friend of my wife’s. For all the years we’d known him, Marcel was a walking, talking explosion of joy. He had become a Christian when he was 18, and it had totally transformed him: he was one of the warmest people I’d ever met, utterly transparent, with a booming laugh that was wonderfully infectious. He was an actor; at the funeral we heard stories about him drawing an entire cast into animated discussions about God just before curtain-up at the National Theatre. We watched clips of him dancing exuberantly dressed as a caterpillar, for reasons I don’t fully understand! But Marcel had died of an unusual heart condition in his thirties, leaving behind his wife and two young children. They were lost without him. It was unbearably sad.

No one dared offer hollow words of comfort that day. But there was a moment in the service that I will never forget, when they played a video that Marcel had recorded with a Christian theatre company. He was acting as John, one of Jesus’ friends, in a scene retelling how John met Jesus after he’d risen from the dead. As Marcel spoke out John’s description of Jesus—alive and real and right there with him in the room—it was obvious that the tears of joy and love welling up in the

corners of his eyes weren't just a performance. At one point he looked into the camera and repeated the words of Jesus:

I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.²

You could see on Marcel's face that he really believed it. It was like he was preaching at his own funeral.

As I watched, it came home to me that Marcel was not gone for ever. If Jesus really had come back from the dead, then he could keep that promise: he could really give Marcel life beyond death. It came home to me that Marcel still existed, he still loved his wife and his kids, he still loved Jesus, and he was enjoying being alive with him at that very moment. So, in amongst the tears of grief and shock and confusion, there were also tears of poignant, certain joy. Tears of hope.

Some people teach us to be stoical about death. They say it's wise not to let ourselves get too attached to anything or anyone. Love is a strange glitch in the vast, impersonal machine of the universe, and that glitch will vanish in the end; we shouldn't try to fight that or hope for something more.³ We can only find peace by surrendering to the inevitable.

But as I held my grandad's hand, love didn't feel like a glitch, and I didn't want to surrender. And if Jesus did rise from the dead, we don't *need* to surrender. The Easter story says that Jesus sacrificed his life in the ultimate act of love: his death was *for* us. If Jesus defeated death and rose to unstoppable life, then that means love is *stronger* than death, not weaker. Jesus'

love for us is so strong that, if we believe in him, he will take hold of us and never let go. We will enjoy life with him for ever. It is death that will disappear one day, not love.

We might go months or years without considering what we think about this stuff. But my guess is that for all of us moments will come when we find that this matters immensely—that we need to know here and now what's really going to happen next.

But it's not just love that makes us ask that question. It also jumps out at us when we see the injustice in our world.

Will Justice Ever Come?

A friend of mine told me once that a charity he was involved with in Uganda was supporting the education of a ten-year-old girl. A local businessman had wanted to buy the house that this girl lived in, but her mother didn't want to sell. So this businessman raped the little girl. He then bribed the local police chief, so that when the girl's brother went to report the crime, they arrested *him* instead for no reason. My friend's charity worked hard to gather evidence against the businessman, but he was not convicted. He was never even charged with an offence. And he continues to run a successful business to this day.

I don't know how you feel reading something like that; I still feel my stomach churning with anger when I think about it. But the fact is, there's nothing unusual about that story. Whether it's through corruption, intimidation, or sheer force of arms, there are people

all over this planet—in both poorer nations and rich ones—who’ve committed terrible evil without ever being called to account. And even if we manage in our generation to forge a better world, we are already too late for the countless murderers and warmongers who have lived out their days on earth without ever being brought to justice.

The problem is that if death is the end, then that’s it. If death is the ultimate full stop, then that man’s wealth will probably shield him for ever, and that girl will never get to see that what he did to her *matters*. If this world of politics and power is all there is, then as long as someone has enough power, there’s no hope for justice at all.

But if Jesus rose from the dead, that’s not true.

Paul of Tarsus was a man who claimed to have met Jesus soon after he’d been resurrected. He gave a speech about it in Athens a few years later, which ended like this:

Now [God] commands all people everywhere to repent. For he 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 everyone by raising him from the dead.⁴

Jesus said that one day he will be the just judge of everyone who has ever lived.⁵ According to Paul, if Jesus rose from the dead, that’s emphatic proof that his claim was true. Earthly justice, with all its failings, is not the only justice there is; there’s something better on its way.

Imagine the difference this makes for that Ugandan family. Death is not the end. There will be justice. More than that, the ultimate judge isn't some distant, uncaring deity—it's Jesus. This judge is compassionate. In fact, he cares so deeply about victims that he willingly became one. He was humiliated, brutalised and even killed; he plumbed the depths of human suffering and injustice.⁶ So when Jesus judges the world, he will show exactly the right amount of compassion towards that little girl, and exactly the right amount of anger towards that businessman. His justice will show them both how much that little girl is truly worth. Whatever lies the world might have told her, on that day she will know that she matters.⁷

Martin Luther King Jr. once said this:

Evil may so shape events that Caesar will occupy a palace and Christ a cross, but one day that same Christ will rise up and split history into A.D. and B.C., so that even the life of Caesar must be dated by his name.⁸

It may seem as if political power and brute force rule the world, but ultimately Jesus will have the final word. If Jesus rose, then justice will triumph. If Jesus is in charge of the eternal future, no one will be forgotten and nothing will be swept under the carpet: *every* wrong will be put right.

This is a bit of a double-edged sword for people like me and you. We have all been wronged, and we want justice to declare that what was done to us matters. But we have all also wronged other people, and they matter

too. For many of us, if we take an honest look back at our lives, we realise that perfect justice is something we both long for and dread.

Yet Jesus' death and resurrection are not just a promise of judgment but also an offer of forgiveness and redemption—as we'll see later. This means his hope is “a powerful weapon”, but it's not a weapon meant to be brandished against others, to crush people with guilt. Jesus' kind of hope humbles the proud and comforts the conscience-stricken. It gives courage to the weary and strengthens the weak. It's powerful not to harm, but to heal.

But there's one vital qualification to make.

“Hope Is a Dangerous Thing”

It's become quite intellectually fashionable in recent years for people to say, “I live my life *as if* God is real” or “*as if* Jesus rose”. This might mean they have moral values that they can't explain from an atheist perspective. Or they might take the resurrection as a metaphor: there's always light at the end of the tunnel, winter gives way to spring, and “life” can come out of “death” in even the bleakest circumstances. The resurrection as a symbol of hope sounds lovely and inspiring; but the problem is, if it's *only* a symbol, then that hope is false and misleading.

In the 1994 film *The Shawshank Redemption*, prison inmate Andy confidently tells a veteran prisoner, Red, that hope is something the guards can never take away from you. But Red replies, “Hope? Let me tell you something, my friend: hope is a dangerous thing. Hope

can drive a man insane.” He’s got a point. If you’re in prison and there is genuinely no way out, you’re far better off facing the facts and getting used to it than fixating on an inspirational fantasy. Hope that isn’t rooted in something real is ultimately cruel, because it will let us down when we need it most. When we lose someone we love, a vague metaphorical hope will be no comfort at all.

But the first followers of Jesus insisted that they weren’t writing a metaphor or a myth. One of them wrote, “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.”⁹ In other words, this is either real or it’s a pointless and immoral lie. My sceptical brain resonates with this massively. We’re not meant to just ask ourselves, “Do these ideas sound nice to me?” We’re meant to investigate honestly whether they are true.

That’s why the *if* in this book is so important. If Jesus is dead and buried somewhere, Christianity is a dangerous delusion. But if Jesus is actually alive, he’s so much more than a motivational story. If Jesus rose, we know that death is only temporary, love will last for ever, and every wrong will be put right. And that’s just the start! It would mean that there’s a living, loving God, and you and I matter to him. It would mean that he’s inviting us right now to join his family and play a vital part in what he’s doing to redeem this world.

So the question is: is it true? And how could we possibly know?

FOR REFLECTION OR CONVERSATION

- *What do you think about life after death?*
- *What has led you to those ideas?*