

Is there more to life than this?

It is probably true to say that the pace of life, certainly in cities, has increased compared with our grandparents' time.

There are all sorts of pressures to buy the latest gadget or try the latest fad or take up the latest fashion. There appears to be an increase in stress – for instance, if we have a job we may not be sure we can hold onto it. There is certainly an increase in debt, and much stress is caused by debt and the difficulties paying it off. There is also an increase in the break-up of marriages and an increase in the divorce rate. With the credit crunch there has been even more uncertainty, and the threat of job losses and unemployment looms large.



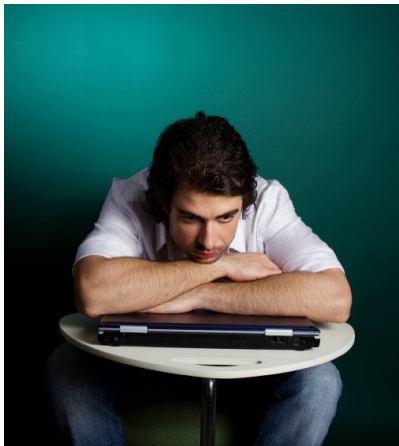
It has been suggested that the credit crunch of 2008 was caused by greed. Bankers took unnecessary risks. They were driven by the lure of big profits and bonuses. They were gambling that house prices would continue to increase, and were prepared to give people mortgages who could not afford to pay them back. Now it seems we may all have had some part to play. We may not all be fat cats with big bonuses, but the level of personal borrowing in the UK reached an unprecedented high before the big crunch hit. It seems that our 21st century lifestyle is pretty much fuelled by greed. Greed of big corporations is driven by the greed of the shareholders and the greed of the consumers.



However, there are several benefits to living in the 21st century. We have better health than our grandparents, and our life expectancy has certainly increased compared with our grandparents' time. This is down to a combination of better medicines and modern treatments, as well as a somewhat better diet.

We need only to nip down to the supermarket and we can buy all sorts of different fruits and food, and in many countries there is no lack of the amount of food that people can buy. On top of that, by and large we do have more leisure time compared with our grandparents' day, and we certainly have more opportunity to do different things in our leisure time. So it might be a good thing to take time and appreciate the good things which you have in your life.

On the downside, we lead stressful lives in the 21st century. There are unprecedented levels of personal debt, and this is one of the largest contributing factors that put pressure on relationships. There has certainly been an increase in divorce rates in the Western world. If you are working you may find stress at work. People may be working all hours for several reasons. For instance, they might be trying to gain promotion or status, or they may work all hours to get more pay. Nowadays it is possible to find people working all hours simply to keep their job.



So perhaps it is time for us to take stock of our lives and consider the question,

Is there more to life than:

- buying the “latest”?
- socialising?
- holding down a stressful job?

Even if life is good for some of us, and we do appreciate the good things in life and don't take them for granted, we all have problems from time to time. One problem is that none of us is getting any younger, and we all face an uncertain future.



Here are just a few quotes from some famous men about the future:

I never think of the future. It comes soon enough.

Albert Einstein

The future is something which everyone reaches at the rate of sixty minutes an hour, whatever he does, whoever he is.

C.S. Lewis

The future has a way of arriving unannounced.

George Will

Prediction is very difficult, especially of the future.

Niels Bohr

The bottom line is that we don't know what is round the corner. We don't know what tomorrow will bring.

Lives in danger

Most of us don't take too many unnecessary risks, and we will try to avoid danger. But there are times when our short-term future is threatened because of illness or accident. In those circumstances few of us would refuse help. If the threat to life is serious enough we will call for an ambulance to get help as soon as possible. So we act when our lives are in danger.



What we don't do when we call an ambulance is to check with the paramedics and the doctors that they are qualified to help us. We assume that they have been sufficiently trained and have had sufficient experience to help us – and save our lives. And by and large they are sufficiently qualified and they do save countless numbers of lives.

We have been talking about threats to our short-term future – but the long-term future of all of us is threatened, and we all need help. We hope you agree by now that a trustworthy source of help for our long-term future is found in the Bible. We are not asking you simply to trust the Bible as you would trust a paramedic or a doctor to save your life. What we are saying is that each one of us has the opportunity to test the qualifications of the Bible to see if it is trustworthy or not. We have tried to show you in the last few weeks that there is evidence which shows that the Bible's message can be trusted.



So let's assume for now that that Bible's message is trustworthy. What does it say about our lives?

Planning for the future



We can make all sorts of preparations for the future to try and guard against disaster, and we can take out insurance policies in case things go wrong. We are legally obliged to have car insurance. Many people pay extra for medical insurance and home insurance and take out life insurance policies.

However, taking out insurance doesn't stop the bad things from happening; it may just cushion us financially when disaster strikes. It can't stop disaster occurring.

Indeed, life insurance policies which pay up on the death of the insured are often called life assurance policies – probably insurance companies are saying you can be assured that those left behind are taken care of. Equally we can be assured that we will all die!

This is what the Bible says about planning for the future:

*Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money". Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? **You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.***

James 4 v 13 and 14

We don't know what is going to happen tomorrow. We understand what it means when it says you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Steam coming out of a kettle only lasts for a short time and then disappears. If you switch the kettle off the steam rapidly disappears. Our lives, James says, are like that.



As we have already seen from some human perspectives, and as the Bible says, human beings cannot accurately predict the future. Our lives are fleeting and soon vanish away.

Bible advice on living



What else does the Bible teach about the way people live in the 21st century?

Jesus had warnings about greed. This is what he had to say:

*Watch out! **Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.***

*And he told them this parable: The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. **I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry . . .***

*But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' **This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God.***

Luke 12 v 15 to 21

Jesus' conclusion is, Don't be greedy. Get right with God, because we could die at any time, and what good would our possessions be then? This teaching is matched elsewhere in the New Testament; the Bible tells us to be content. It gives stern warnings about greed:

*But **godliness with contentment is great gain.** For we brought nothing into the world, and **we can take nothing out of it.** . . People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. **For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.***

1 Timothy 6 v 6 to 10

The Bible teaching and advice for living now is to be content with what we have – we can't take anything away with us when we die. Seeking to be rich can be harmful, and the love of money causes all kinds of evil things. Instead Jesus says we must be "rich towards God". We can do this by finding out what God says about our long-term future and how we can be part of His plan.

Is there more to life than this?



The Bible has advice for our lives now, but what does it say about the long term?

The Bible tells us that our creator is concerned about people. We have seen in the second part of “What is the meaning of life?” that we can have a long-term future in God’s rescue plan (pages 141 to 146).



As we saw in that session, God’s rescue plan as written in the Bible is that God will send Jesus back to the earth. Jesus will then tackle all the world’s problems of injustice, poverty, illness, ageing and death, war and famine, and natural disasters.

The apostle Paul told the people of Athens that the God of the Bible has proved He has the power to put the world to right, by raising Jesus Christ from the dead:

“For he [God] 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 all men by raising him from the dead.”

Acts 17 v 31

If we are to be sure that God will carry out His plan for our Earth, we must be sure that Jesus Christ really did rise from the dead.

In the last part of this section we will look at why we can be confident in the Bible message that Jesus rose from the dead. We can then put trust in the Bible message that we can be raised as well, to be part of God’s rescue plan for our Earth.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ

Non-Biblical evidence

The late first-century Jewish historian Josephus mentions Jesus and his resurrection in his writings.

Here is what he wrote:

*...there arose about this time Jesus, a wise man, **if indeed we should call him a man**; for he was a doer of marvellous deeds, a teacher of men who receive the truth with pleasure. **He was the Christ**. And when Pilate had condemned him to the cross... those who had loved him at the first did not cease...*

...for he appeared to them on the third day alive again, the divine prophets having spoken these and thousands of other wonderful things about him; and even now the tribe of Christians, so named after him, has not yet died out.

Josephus, "Antiquities of the Jews", III.1

Biblical evidence

It has been said that the resurrection of Jesus is the best documented event in history. There is more historical evidence for the life of Jesus than for Julius Caesar!

There are more than 24,000 partial and complete manuscript copies of the New Testament.

There are also some 86,000 quotations from the New Testament by the early church fathers, who lived only a few generations from the events.

Scholars tell us that there are enough quotations of the New Testament in other material written within 150 to 200 years of the time of Christ, to reconstruct all but 11 verses of the entire New Testament.

No other book is even a close second to the Bible in either the number or the early dating of the copies. The average secular work from antiquity survives in only a handful of manuscripts; the New Testament boasts thousands. The New Testament has an overwhelming amount of evidence supporting its reliability.

The Bible records tell us that after Jesus was crucified . . .

- His body was placed in a rock-cut tomb
- The tomb entrance was covered by a large stone
- The stone was sealed
- Guards were posted by the authorities
 - to prevent removal of Jesus' body by his disciples
 - to ensure that Jesus' predictions of his resurrection would not be fulfilled



Is there more to life than this?



- On the third day the tomb was empty. The body could not be produced
 - If it had been, Christianity would never have started
 - The fact was that the body was missing!

Either Jesus was raised from the dead or there is some other explanation.

Alternative explanations for the resurrection

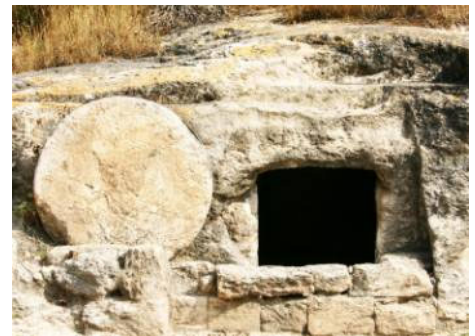
Several explanations for the missing body have been proposed:

- The disciples stole the body
- Jesus did not really die
- The disciples went to the wrong tomb

The oldest theory that was put forward is that the disciples stole Jesus' body while guards were asleep.

The problems with this theory are

- In AD 30 Judea was occupied by Romans
 - This was no place for soldiers to sleep in the open, they would be killed by Jewish freedom fighters
- The tomb was sealed as well as guarded
 - Surely the guards would be woken by the sound of the stone being moved
- Why would disciples perpetrate such a deception
 - And then be prepared to suffer persecution for something they knew was a lie?



Another theory is that Jesus did not really die; he swooned and later revived in the cool of the tomb.

The problems with this theory are:

- The Romans were expert in crucifixion
 - Jesus was given a spear thrust to his side. If he were not already dead, that would have killed him
 - If he had survived the spear thrust, he would have died in the tomb without medical attention
- Remember that Jesus had damaged hands and feet, and a pierced lung, yet he would need to:
 - Release himself from his grave clothes
 - Roll aside the stone from the wrong side
 - Fight his way past the guards
 - Walk seven miles to Emmaus for a resurrection appearance
 - Fool his disciples into believing that his new condition was eternal life

Does this sound believable?

Another theory is that the disciples went to the wrong tomb. Not finding the body, they assumed that he was raised from the dead.

The problems with this theory are:

- The tomb was in a private garden known to the disciples
- The authorities would have pointed to the correct tomb with the body in it. They didn't; instead they invented the story of the stolen body

It was in the interests of the Jewish authorities to discredit the story of the resurrection of Jesus. They were unable to do so.

The rise of Christianity

The rise of the first-century church is indirect evidence of the resurrection of Jesus:

- The church grew rapidly in spite of
 - Persecution
 - Ostracism
 - Social deprivation
- The gospel message spread rapidly despite extremely difficult circumstances
- The evidence of the resurrection was very compelling
 - Early church members were prepared to die rather than deny their faith
- Christians were persecuted in Rome
 - Many died in the Coliseum
- They remained steadfast because of their faith in the afterlife
 - which the resurrection of Jesus guaranteed
- As the apostle Paul wrote:

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.
1 Corinthians 15 v 19 (NIV)

All the evidence we have supports the fact that Jesus Christ really did rise from the dead.

Summary

So, to summarise, the answer to the question “Is there more to life than this?” is “Yes there is!”

We have seen that:

- we can’t predict the future apart from the fact that eventually we are all going to die.
- the Bible has a message for how to live our lives now and long-term:
 - we can be raised from the dead if we die
 - we have an opportunity to be a part of God’s rescue plan for our world.

The resurrection of Jesus is the best-documented event in history.

All the evidence we have supports the fact that Jesus Christ really did rise from the dead.

We can be confident that Jesus rose from the dead. So we can be sure that we can be raised from the dead if we die, and have a part in God’s rescue plan. We can also be sure that there is more to life than this!