

I believe in Jesus Christ. On the third day he rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come again to judge the living and the dead. Risen, ascended, seated, coming again.

Risen

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. (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

Christians believe that Christ died on Good Friday by crucifixion. A competent medical examiner would have declared Him dead. He was buried in a borrowed tomb, and three days later, He came back to life with an indestructible body. He appeared to individuals, small groups, and on one occasion to about 500 people.

So what? Two answers to that question will be enough for today. Number one: He is the first of His kind. The Bible says that **in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits, then, when he comes, those who belong to him.** (1 Corinthians 15:22-23) The secular creed says, "Death is the end of me." The Apostles' Creed says the best is yet to come. That belief infuses an entire culture with hope.

Romans 6:4 expresses a second answer to the question, "So what?" **Just as Christ was raised from the dead . . . we too may live a new life** here and now. Do you aspire to be a more godly person? That's how you demonstrate your belief that on the third day Christ rose again from the dead.

Ascended

Acts 1 reports a conversation between Jesus and His apostles after His resurrection. Acts 1:9 says: **After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.** Christians believe that 40 days after He rose from the dead Jesus left this world and ascended into heaven. An early creed in Paul's letter of 1 Timothy 3:16 says that Jesus **was taken up in glory.**

It's easy to ask, "Where did He go?" I don't know. Maybe there's a parallel universe closer to you than your next breath. I do know this: if that's as far as our curiosity goes, we will miss a much more interesting question, which does have an answer. Why did He go? If Christ rose from the dead with an indestructible body, why didn't He go back to the authorities in Jerusalem, barge in on their committee meeting, and say, "Yes, it's me! You were wrong. I was right. You need to change your mind about me right now or else get out of the way. I'm here to put things right."

He didn't do that. He left 11 guys with an incomprehensible mission: **You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.** (Acts 1:8) Jesus disappeared and left them with to do what they had no idea how to do, and He promised them the power to do it, when the Holy Spirit comes on them, whatever that meant.

I'll tell you in Jesus' own words what's going on here. Jesus, ascending into heaven, **is like a man going away: He leaves his house in charge of his servants, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.** (Mark 13:34) In a nutshell that is

the story of the Church for 2000 years and now on a truly global scale. He likes to empower imperfect people to do His work. He had to ascend into heaven to do that. So, what is your assigned task in building the Church of Christ here at BVBC?

Seated

Ephesians 1:19-22 says: **God's power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.**

Christians believe that Jesus Christ now holds a place of supreme authority from which He is governing the affairs of earth in such a way that they serve His purposes and will some day be subject to His gracious will.

In scripture the right hand of God is a figure of speech that means God's power to act as He chooses in human affairs. To say that Jesus is seated there means that God has entrusted Him to exert that power on behalf of mankind. The book of Revelation makes that truth a central theme.

And we may ask, "If God has such power, why does He let evil happen, especially to people who don't deserve it?" There are two answers. First: Christ in fullness of power honors us as free agents. If you want to be free, you have to accept the possibility of evil on a grand scale. Second: God can turn any human evil into a greater good. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ stand as a permanent guarantee that God will do that. We live between the freedom of Man and the freedom of God.

Therefore, let us pray routinely and with ever deepening understanding: Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Coming Again

The apostle wrote to the young church at Thessalonica: **You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.** (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10) The Bible closes with these words of Jesus: **He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.** (Revelation 22:20)

The Apostle Paul said that **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 17:31)

Christians believe Christ will return to this world at an undisclosed time. We believe that He will set things right by His just judgment and by ushering in an eternal state in which **the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.** (Revelation 21:3)

So what? Here are two answers. First, in the words of the Prophet Amos: **Prepare to meet your God.** (Amos 4:12) **I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.** (2 Corinthians 6:4) Don't push God away. Don't hold Christ at arm's length. **Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and**

walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls here and hereafter. (Jeremiah 6:16)

The second answer in Jesus' words is: **Watch! You do not know when the owner of the house will come back – whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. Watch!** (Mark 13:35-37)

And now, we worship Him who is risen, ascended, seated, and coming again.