

Five Reasons To Believe in the Resurrection *Easter Sunday – March 31, 2013*

Someone once said, “Christianity begins where religion ends – with the Resurrection.” It is the paramount difference between Christianity and all other religions. All the great founders of the living religions are in their graves, all except one. The distinguishing mark of Christianity is the empty tomb.

Wilbur Smith, in his book *Therefore Stand*, writes: “The original accounts of Buddha never ascribe to him any such thing as a resurrection. In fact, in the earliest accounts of his death, we read that when Buddha died, it was ‘with that utter passing away in which nothing whatever remains behind.’”

Mohammed died June 8, 632 A.D. at the age of 61 in the city of Medina. Thousands each year pilgrimage to visit his occupied tomb. Christians have no place to go. We have an empty tomb.

Disprove the resurrection of Jesus Christ, you destroy Christianity. It’s that simple. Michael Green makes the point well:

Christianity does not hold the resurrection to be one among many tenets of belief. Without faith in the resurrection *there would be no Christianity at all*. The Christian church would never have begun.... Christianity stands or falls with the truth of the resurrection. Once disprove it, and you have disposed of Christianity.

This morning I want us to consider *Five Reasons To Believe in the Resurrection*. The first is:

1) A Dead Jesus

Chris Ledford is a medical doctor. He and his family are involved here at Knollwood. Here is his perspective as a physician about the reality of a dead Jesus.

Video Clip

Based upon the accounts of Jesus’ sufferings, eyewitness accounts and the opinions of those in the medical community, I must conclude that Jesus was really dead. The Roman soldiers, experts in putting people to death, were sure he was dead. They didn’t even need to do with Jesus what was customarily done, that is, break the legs of crucifixion victims to hasten death through asphyxiation.

Jesus was dead. His body was taken down from the cross and swiftly moved to burial because of the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath. Turn in your Bible to John's Gospel, chapter 19. Or grab a Bible in front of you and turn to page 1153.

John 19:38-42

Now, let's finish out the scenario by turning to the first book of the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 27. **Matthew 27:62-66**

So, let's get a good picture of these events. Jesus' body is taken off the cross and carried to a nearby tomb. Here is a picture of a first-century tomb, probably not unlike the tomb where Jesus' body was taken.

Pictures of Tomb

This tomb has an entry area and then the actual burial chamber. There were often niches or ledges within the burial vault upon which the body was placed.

Jesus' body would have been wrapped with linen cloths from the neck to the feet. Between layers of the cloth, spices were added which hardened around the body. The weight was between 75-100 pounds.

Then a large stone was rolled in front of the tomb to keep away robbers or scavengers. There was a Roman seal placed upon the stone. Anyone breaking the seal without formal approval would incur the wrath of Roman law. And then we note that a Roman guard is put into place to watch over the tomb to allay the fears of the Jewish authorities that the disciples of Jesus might attempt to steal the body. This guard may well have consisted of 10-30 soldiers under the command of a centurion. These well-trained soldiers knew that any dereliction of duty would result in death.

Jesus is dead; his body prepared for burial, and placed into a tomb. But then, and here is the second reason to believe in the resurrection: we have an empty tomb.

2) An Empty Tomb

Lee Stobel was an award-winning legal editor of the *Chicago Tribune* and a self-described atheist until he investigated the claims of Christ, including the resurrection. Listen to his perspective on the empty tomb.

Video – Lee Strobel

One of the prominent theories that has been offered to explain the empty tomb is called *The Swoon Theory*. Jesus didn't really die on the cross, but just swooned or fainted. Then when placed in the cool tomb, Jesus was revived, arose and left, appearing to his disciples pretending to be resurrected.

So, think about this. Notwithstanding the medical absurdity of the scenario, Jesus was beaten and scourged with a whip, losing blood copiously, nailed to a cross upon which he hung for six hours. No food or drink throughout the evening before or the day of or the time on the cross. Then a spear was jammed into his side.

But, let's suppose that could happen. He passes a night and two days in the tomb. Then he breaks out of the grave clothes, rolls the stone away from the inside, fights off the Roman guard, and then appears to his disciples claiming he has risen from the dead. Over forty days, with no medical attention, he appears to his followers and then disappears.

David Friedrich Strauss, a 19th century German theologian who was no believer in the resurrection, said this about the *Swoon Theory*:

It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulcher, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to his sufferings, could have given to the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry.

Other theories such as: the disciples stole the body, the women went to the wrong tomb, the Jewish authorities stole the body – they all fall apart upon examination.

The tomb was empty; the only reasonable conclusion I can draw is this: God raised Jesus from the dead, just as Jesus himself had told his disciples would happen.

Now, reason three to believe in the resurrection:

3) Eyewitness Accounts

Over a period of forty days, Jesus appeared to at least 515 people – all eyewitnesses that the One crucified and buried was alive.

The Apostle Paul, writing less than twenty-five years following the events of Good Friday and Easter, talks about these eyewitness appearances with two very important implications.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred people at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. – *I Corinthians 15:3-7*

Two implications:

- These eyewitnesses could have been called into a court of law to give firsthand testimony to what they had seen. The resurrection is attested to by real people, living at a real time, dealing with real events – all available for cross examination.
- The second implication is that with 500 people at one time, it defies an explanation of appearances as hallucinations. Five hundred people don't see the same hallucination at the same time; that's inconsistent with what we know psychologically about hallucinations. Those who were eyewitnesses weren't looking for a resurrected Jesus. In fact, they had to be convinced against their wills to believe.

The fourth reason to believe in the resurrection is:

4) Changed Disciples

The disciples of Jesus were never the same following the appearances of the risen Christ. Think about this: they had followed Jesus for over three years. When their Master was betrayed, they all ran away. Only John, the youngest disciple, was present at the crucifixion. They were in shock and in despair over the events of the previous days.

And then, the resurrection and everything changed. John Stott says, "Perhaps the transformation of the disciples of Jesus is the greatest evidence of all for the resurrection."

They went from being hopeless to being filled with certainty and hope. Once convinced of the fact of the resurrection, they never doubted again. We have to ask what it was that made for such a difference. Someone has written: "Think of the psychological absurdity of picturing a little band of defeated cowards cowering in an upper room one day and a few days later transformed into a company that no persecution could silence – and then attempting to attribute this dramatic change to

nothing more convincing than a miserable fabrication they were trying to foist upon the world. That simply wouldn't make sense."

Only a risen Christ could have so transformed these men that through their lives and witness, they would have a profound impact on their world. Even their enemies remarked: "These men have turned the world upside down."

The cascading effects of the transformed lives of those first believers in the resurrection swept the world. Justin Martyr, about the middle of the second century, wrote:

There is no people, Greek or barbarian, or of any other race, by whatever appellation or manner they may be distinguished, however ignorant of arts or agriculture, whether they dwell in tents or wander about in covered wagons, among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered in the name of the crucified Jesus to God the Father and Creator of all things.

Half a century later, Tertullian adds: "We are but of yesterday, and yet we already fill your cities, islands, camps, your palace, senate and forum. We have left you only your temples."

R.H. Glover states, "On the basis of all the data available, it has been estimated that by the close of the Apostolic Period (that is, the end of the first century), the total number of Christian disciples had reached half a million."

The disciples' lives were forever changed by their experience with the resurrected Jesus. There is no other reasonable explanation for what followed.

A dead Jesus, an empty tomb, eyewitness accounts, changed disciples – all reasons to believe in the resurrection. Finally this morning, a fifth reason:

5) Personal Experience with Christ

Listen to one person's story: Geoff Martineau is a Foreign Service Officer currently working in the Bureau of Consular Affairs. He has had previous postings in Guatemala, Tel Aviv, Abuja and New Delhi. Geoff is married to Susie and they have three children: Molly, Annie and Jack.

Testimony: Geoff Martineau

Just one example of a life changed by the resurrected Christ.

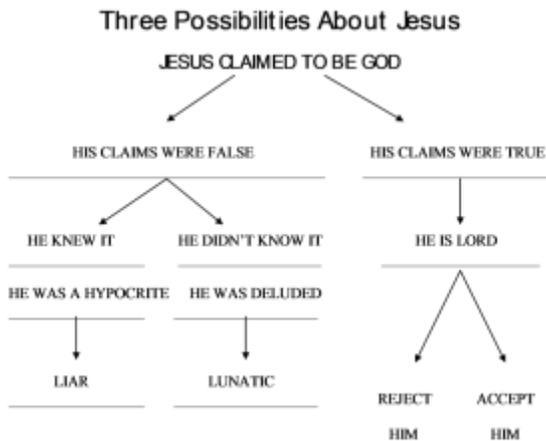
A dead Jesus, an empty tomb, eyewitness accounts, changed lives, and personal encounters with Jesus. All of these drive us to a conclusion and a choice.

If Jesus truly was raised from the dead, and I personally believe the evidence supports that fact, then I have to consider the conclusion that the claims he made about himself are also true.

He claimed to be God – God in the flesh. Fully God and fully man, he came to earth to become the sin bearer for the world. The Bible teaches that when he was on the cross our sins were put on him and God the Father poured out his holy wrath against sin. Jesus literally took your punishment and mine for sin.

The fact that God raised him from the dead certified that Jesus' sacrifice was sufficient to satisfy the justice of God. So that when we believe the message of good news that Jesus died for us, in our place, God is able to forgive us, to restore us to a right relationship with him, and to give us eternal life.

The resurrection validates Jesus' claims to be God. This, then, forces each of us to a choice. Look at it this way:



C.S. Lewis, the English literary scholar and author, put it this way in his book *Mere Christianity*:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

He would either be a lunatic--on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg--or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.

You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

So, here is the choice before each of us: reject what Jesus did for you on the cross or accept the free gift of God's forgiveness. John, one of Jesus' disciples, wrote later: "To all who receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gives the right to become children of God."