

HE IS RISEN!

Selected Scripture

Introduction:

“Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.”

The most critical issue one can ever face, when it comes to the truth of Christianity, is the question of the resurrection. Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Is there enough evidence to prove that He did come out of the tomb? And if He did what does that mean for you and me?

→ Wilbur Smith makes an interesting observation regarding these questions. He says: “The meaning of the resurrection is a theological matter, but the fact of the resurrection is a historical matter; the nature of the resurrection body of Jesus may be a mystery, but the fact that his body disappeared from the tomb is a matter to be decided upon by historical evidence.”

This Easter Sunday morning I want to briefly look at the resurrection of Jesus Christ from those two perspectives: history and theology.

I. The Resurrection as History

What are some of the proofs, the evidences that Jesus rose from the dead, and how do we answer the objections that are raised? This is nothing new for most of you, but I believe it bears repeating.

A. The Empty Tomb – Mark 16:6 - The empty tomb was seen by many during those first hours on that Sunday morning. Even though the tomb was under secure guard, yet when the women came to the tomb, it was empty. Jesus’ body was not there see Luke 24:2-3,12.

Objection: Stolen body theory – began immediately; see Matt. 28:11-15.

Response: first, neither the Jews, nor the Romans had anything to gain by stealing the body of Jesus. To do so only perpetuated the very ideas that they were trying to suppress. Second, the disciples all went to their death preaching and defending the message of the

resurrection. If they had stolen the body, then they died defending something they knew was not true. Is that even a possibility? (Read account by Charles Colson - RBC Booklet “Did Christ Really Rise from the Dead?” – pp. 27-29)

Also, what about the grave clothes that were left behind?

Objection: The women went to the wrong tomb. In their despair, they made a mistake.

Response: The Gospel accounts all clearly state the fact that the women noted the place where he was laid. Then even if they were mistaken, would the disciples have also made the same mistake? What about the Jewish leaders? Joseph, who owned the tomb? There were many who could have corrected the error.

B. Appearances of Christ – During the hours following the resurrection Jesus appeared to Mary in the garden, to the two disciples on the road, and to the 11 in the upper room. In the following days and weeks, he appeared many times to various individuals and groups of people, some as large as 500 at one time – 1 Cor. 15.

Objection: Hallucination Theory – the disciples were so desperate to see their Lord and Master that they actually believed he appeared to them – they were hallucinating.

Response: The idea that as many as 500 people would all have the same hallucination at the same time is preposterous. Also, hallucinations generally occur because someone wants so badly for something to be true that their mind creates their desire for them. There is no indication that the disciples were expecting to see Jesus. They were in despair. In fact, they were forced almost against their will to believe that he was alive.

C. Transformed lives of the disciples – the most powerful testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the change that came over the disciples. In the days and weeks following the resurrection, the way that disorganized band of men & women changed is unexplainable.

Objection: Critics would suggest that they were believing a legend. As time went by, they developed a whole legendary system of beliefs about this man they had once followed.

Response: Clearly, it takes much longer than days or weeks to develop a legend. Legends are born over a period of generations. They can only truly be believed after there is no longer anyone who can refute them from personal experience.

The following description of the change that occurred in the lives of the apostles after the resurrection is an interesting poetic portrayal: (Evidence That Demands a Verdict – McDowell)

"On the day of the crucifixion they were filled with sadness; on the first day of the week with gladness. At the crucifixion they were hopeless; on the first day of the week their hearts glowed with certainty and hope. When the message of the resurrection first came they were incredulous and hard to be convinced, but once they became assured they never doubted again. What could account for the astonishing change in these men in so short a time? The mere removal of the body from the grave could never have transformed their spirits, and characters. Three days are not enough for a legend to spring up which would so affect them. Time is needed for a process of legendary growth. It is a psychological fact that demands a full explanation.

"Think of the character of the witnesses, men and women who gave the world the highest ethical teaching it has ever known, and who even on the testimony of their enemies lived it out in their lives. 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."

The resurrection is one of the most supported incidents in all of history. The fact that it occurred is really beyond doubt. It is clearly the central event of history. But what about the theological side? What about the meaning of the resurrection? We need to see that it is not only the central event of history, but it is also at the very heart of the Christian life.

II. The Resurrection as Theology

What difference does it make to us that Jesus Christ rose from the dead? I want to briefly mention three things.

- A. It is our assurance that those who believe in Jesus Christ will someday rise to eternal life with God.
It is a sign of God's victory over death. Death is the result of sin. But when Jesus died on the cross, he not only paid for our sin, but in his dying he defeated death. (See Rom. 5:12,17-21.)
No wonder Paul said to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 15:55-57 – *"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*
When Jesus rose from the dead the sting of death was forever removed, and we have the assurance of eternal life.
- B. It is an indication (symbol) of the new life we have in Christ.
Read Romans 6:4; 8:9-11. When we come to Christ in faith, we are, in effect, buried with him into death. We die with him, but then we are raised up with a new life. Just as he came back to life, so do we, only our new life is, in reality, his life.
That is what Paul meant when he said in Gal. 2:20 – *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*
- C. It is a sign of the mighty power of God that is available to us.
We must never underestimate the power of God—the power he has given us to live out that new life. The Apostle Paul expressed the desire to know and experience that power in his own life – Phil. 3:10 – *"...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection."* Is it your desire to experience that power in your life?
Listen to Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers: Eph. 1:18-20 – *"...having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,"*
God is no less powerful today than He was when He raised Christ from the dead, and Paul clearly indicates that we have that same power in our lives today.

Conclusion

Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Yes, historically there is really no question about it.

What difference does it make?

Conclude with the reading from RBC booklet "Did Christ Really Rise from the Dead?" – pp. 30-31.

Invitation to receive Christ.