

Jesus- Salvation

Today we remember and celebrate the single most significant event in all of human history, the resurrection from the dead of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. In fact, Christians around the world actually celebrate the resurrection of Jesus every Sunday and for that matter every day of the week. It is that significant. All else we believe and are compelled to do centers around and is driven by this single event and those leading up to it. Not much else we believe really matters a whole lot unless the resurrection really happened just as the bible reports that it did.

This morning, I would like to ask three rhetorical questions regarding the particular events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ:

1. Can I believe the resurrection really happened?

No one, not historians, atheists, agnostics, Muslims, or even Satanists, doubts or questions the life and crucifixion of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. There are few people or events in ancient or even recent history that are as thoroughly and explicitly documented as that of the life and crucifixion of Jesus. The only question of some skeptics and unbelievers is Jesus' miraculous resurrection from the dead. Can we be reasonably, intelligently sure that Jesus really did defeat death and the grave and rise from the dead?

FACT #1: BROKEN ROMAN SEAL The Roman seal stood for the power and authority of the Roman Empire. The consequences of breaking the seal (on the tomb) were extremely severe. High level investigators of the Roman Empire were called into action to find the man or men who were responsible. If they were apprehended, it meant automatic execution by crucifixion upside down. People feared the breaking of the seal. Jesus' disciples displayed signs of cowardice when they hid themselves.

FACT #2: EMPTY TOMB The disciples of Christ did not go off to Athens or Rome to preach that Christ was raised from the dead. They went right back to the city of Jerusalem, where, if what they were teaching was false, it would be clearly evident. The empty tomb was "too notorious to be denied." The resurrection "could not have been maintained in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact for all concerned."Both Jewish and Roman sources and traditions admit an empty tomb.Paul Maier observes that " . . . if all the evidence is weighed carefully and fairly, it is indeed justifiable, according to the canons of historical research, to conclude that the sepulcher of Joseph of Arimathea, in which Jesus was buried, was actually empty on the morning of the first Easter. And no shred of evidence has yet been discovered in literary sources, inscriptions, or archaeology that would disprove this statement."

FACT #3: LARGE STONE MOVED On that Sunday morning the first thing that impressed those who approached the tomb was the unusual position of the one and a half to two ton stone that had been lodged in front of the doorway. All the Gospel writers mention it.Those who observed the stone after the resurrection describe its position as having been rolled up a slope away not just from the entrance of the tomb, but from the entire massive sepulcher. It was in such a position that it looked as if it had been picked up and carried away. If the disciples had wanted to come in, tiptoe around the sleeping guards, and then roll the stone over and steal Jesus' body, how could they have done that without the guards' awareness?

FACT #4: ROMAN GUARD GOES AWOL The Roman guards fled. They left their place of responsibility. How can their attrition be explained, when Roman military discipline was so exceptional? Historians agree that this offense would be punishable by death. The fear of their superiors' wrath and the possibility of death meant that they paid close attention to the minutest details of their jobs. Certainly the entire unit would not have fallen asleep with that kind of threat over their heads. Dr. George Currie, a student of Roman military discipline, wrote

that fear of punishment "produced flawless attention to duty, especially in the night watches."

FACT #5: GRAVECLOTHES The tomb was not totally empty--John, the disciple of Jesus, looked over to the place where the body of Jesus had lain, and there were the grave clothes, in the form of the body, slightly caved in and empty--like a caterpillar's empty cocoon. That's enough to make a believer out of anybody.

FACT #6: JESUS' APPEARANCES CONFIRMED Christ appeared alive on several occasions after the cataclysmic events of that first Easter. When studying an event in history, it is important to know whether enough people who were participants or eyewitnesses to the event were alive when the facts about the event were published. To know this is obviously helpful in determining the accuracy of the published report. If the number of eyewitnesses is substantial, the event can be regarded as fairly well established.

***OVER 500 WITNESSES** One of the earliest records of Christ's appearing after the resurrection is by Paul. The apostle appealed to his audience's (Corinth) knowledge of the fact that Christ had been seen by more than 500 people at one time. Paul reminded them that the majority of those people were still alive and could be questioned. What gives a special authority to the list (of witnesses) as historical evidence is the reference to most of the five hundred brethren being still alive. Paul says in effect, 'If you do not believe me, you can ask them.' Such a statement in an admittedly genuine letter written within thirty years of the event is almost as strong evidence as one could hope to get for something that happened nearly two thousand years ago." Add to this the testimony of many other eyewitnesses and you would well have the largest and most lopsided trial in history.

***HOSTILE WITNESSES** Another factor crucial to interpreting Christ's appearances is that He also appeared to those who were hostile or unconvinced. Some people comment that Jesus was seen alive after His death and burial only by His friends and followers. Using that argument, they attempt to water down the overwhelming impact of the multiple eyewitness accounts. But that line of reasoning is so pathetic it hardly deserves comment. No author or informed individual would

regard Saul of Tarsus as being a follower of Christ... Saul despised Christ and persecuted Christ's followers. It was a life-changing experience when Christ appeared to him. Although he was at the time not a disciple, he later became the apostle Paul, one of the greatest witnesses for the truth of the resurrection.

Christians believe that Jesus was bodily resurrected by the supernatural power of God. The difficulties of belief may be great, but the problems inherent in unbelief present even greater difficulties. **The theories advanced to explain the resurrection by "natural causes"** are weak; they actually help to build confidence in the truth of the resurrection.

***THE WRONG TOMB?** Some assume that the women who reported that the body was missing had mistakenly gone to the wrong tomb. If so, then the disciples who went to check up on the women's statement must have also gone to the wrong tomb also. We may be certain, however, that Jewish authorities, who asked for a Roman guard to be stationed at the tomb to prevent Jesus' body from being stolen, would not have been mistaken about the location. Nor would the Roman guards, for they were there! If the resurrection-claim was merely because of a geographical mistake, the Jewish authorities would have lost no time in producing the body from the proper tomb, thus effectively quenching for all time any rumor of resurrection.

***HALLUCINATIONS?** Another attempted explanation claims that the appearances of Jesus after the resurrection were either illusions or hallucinations. Unsupported by the psychological principles governing the appearances of hallucinations, this theory also does not coincide with the historical situation. Again, where was the actual body, and why wasn't it produced?

***DID JESUS SWOON?** Another theory, popularized several centuries ago, is often quoted today. This is the swoon theory, which says that Jesus didn't die; he merely fainted from exhaustion and loss of blood. Everyone thought Him dead, but later He resuscitated and the disciples thought it to be a resurrection. Skeptic David Friedrich Strauss--certainly himself no believer in the resurrection--gave the deathblow to any

thought that Jesus revived from a swoon: "It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulchre, 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. Such a resuscitation could only have weakened the impression which He had made upon them in life and in death.

***THE BODY STOLEN?** Consider the theory that the body was stolen by the disciples while the guards slept. The depression and cowardice of the disciples provide a hard-hitting argument against their suddenly becoming so brave and daring as to face a detachment of soldiers at the tomb and steal the body. The theory that the Jewish or Roman authorities moved Christ's body is no more reasonable an explanation for the empty tomb than theft by the disciples. If the authorities had the body in their possession or knew where it was, why, when the disciples were preaching the resurrection in Jerusalem, didn't they explain: "Wait! We moved the body, see, He didn't rise from the grave"? And if such a rebuttal failed, why didn't they explain exactly where Jesus' body lay? If this failed, why didn't they recover the corpse, put it on a cart, and wheel it through the center of Jerusalem? Such an action would have destroyed Christianity from the very beginning!

THE RESURRECTION IS A FACT The scholar/historian Professor Thomas Arnold, was well acquainted with the value of evidence in determining historical facts. This great scholar said: "I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead."Brooke Foss Westcott, an English scholar, said: "raking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is

no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ."

Greatest PROOF? THE DISCIPLES' LIVES The most convincing testimony of all must be the lives of those early Christians. We must ask: What caused them to go everywhere telling the message of the risen Christ? Had there been any visible benefits gained from their efforts--fame, wealth, increased social status or material benefits--we might logically attempt to account for their actions, for their whole-hearted and total allegiance to this "risen Christ." As a reward for their efforts, however, those early Christians were beaten, stoned to death, thrown to the lions, tortured and crucified. Every conceivable method was used to shut them up. Yet, they laid down their lives as the ultimate proof of their complete confidence in the truth of their message.

2. Why did Jesus have to die?

Since God is God and He makes all the rules, why couldn't He have just set up a guideline that if you don't commit any of the "major" sins and do a certain number of good deeds you could get to heaven?..... The problem with that idea is that heaven would be completely void of any human beings now and for all eternity. Truth: We have all sinned "major" sins-worshipping other gods/idols, not honoring our parents, lying, coveting. Need I go farther? The bible confirms this-

23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. **Romans 3:23 (HCSB)**

This clearly manifests the great heavenly conflict- God's clear, frequently and profoundly stated eternal, unconditional love for His creation (especially and particularly mankind) vs. the universal and completely sinful, rebellious and unrighteous state of all humanity.

Possible conflict solutions:

***Condemn all of mankind** and/or let mankind destroy itself by his own sin.

23 For the wages of sin is death **Romans 6:23a (HCSB)**

***Ignore the sin** and let man into heaven in spite of his sin. Of course this would lead to sin entering heaven and infecting it for all eternity. Heaven would no longer be heaven.

***Provide a way** for sin to be covered and man to become righteous. How could that sin be covered? Every man, woman, boy and girl are guilty. Sin must be dealt with. Was there anyway someone could step up and be the sin bearer for all humanity? There was only one way. Only the eternal Son of God could possibly accomplish such a noble and sacrificial task. He put on flesh and lived among us.... He revealed His purpose in coming to earth many times such as during His visit to the home of Zacchaeus.....

10 **For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.”**
Luke 19:1-10 (HCSB)

And of course the fulfillment of the need for the sin of all mankind to be punished was ultimately carried out on the cross. The sinless Son of God bore the judgment of the Father for all the sins of the world past, present and future so that we could stand before God pure, clean and innocent by repenting of our sin, putting our faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, and receiving His gift of eternal life.

24 He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness; by **His wounding you have been healed.**²⁵ For you **were like sheep going astray**, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.^[62] **1** Peter 2:24-25 (HCSB)

I don't know that we can fully understand the why of the divine plan for man's redemption this side of eternity. But, we

do know that it was created and formed from the infinite, unconditional love of God and His all-knowing, perfect wisdom.

11 For the grace of God has appeared, with salvation for all people, ¹² instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ He gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for Himself a special people, eager to do good works. **Titus** 2:11-14 (HCSB)

What must I do?

Peter, before he saw, heard and was touched by the resurrected Jesus, cursed and denied that he even knew Him. Less than three months later, at Pentecost, the dramatically transformed Peter publicly preached a clear and bold message about the good news of the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ. He was a different Peter transformed by his multiple encounters with the resurrected Christ. His message was powerful and effective.....

37 When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: “Brothers, what must we do?” ³⁸ “Repent,” Peter said to them, “and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” **Acts** 2:37-39 (HCSB)