

Light Brings Salt

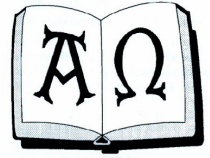
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Iron Range Bible Church

Dedicated to the Systematic Exposition of the Word of God



Did Christ Rise from the Dead?

Pastor John Griffith Sr.

Both friends and enemies of the Christian faith have recognized the resurrection of Christ to be the foundation stone of the faith. Paul, the great Apostle, wrote to the Corinthians, many of whom had questioned and even denied the resurrection of the dead: "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain and your faith also is vain" (1 Cor. 16:14). Paul rested his whole case on the bodily resurrection of Christ. Either He did or He didn't rise from the dead. If He did, it was the most sensational event in all of history, and we have conclusive answers to the profound questions of our existence: Where have we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going? Christ rose, we know with certainty that God exists and that we may know him personally. The universe takes on meaning and purpose, and it is possible to experience the living God in contemporary life. These and many other wonderful things are true if Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead.

Not Wishful Thinking

On the other hand, if Christ did not rise from the dead, Christianity is an interesting museum piece, nothing more. It has no objective validity or reality. Though it is a nice wishful thought, it certainly isn't worth getting steamed up about. The martyrs who went singing to the lions, and the contemporary missionaries who have given their lives in Ecuador like Jim Elliot and his 4 companions and others around the world while taking this

message to others, have been poor deluded fools.

The attack on Christianity by its enemies has most often concentrated on the resurrection because it has been correctly seen that this event is the crux of the matter. A remarkable attack was once contemplated by a young British lawyer in the early 1930's. He was convinced that the resurrection was a mere tissue of fable and fantasy. Sensing that it was the foundation stone of the Christian faith, he decided to do the world a favor by once and for all exposing this fraud and superstition. As a lawyer, he felt he had the critical faculties to rigidly sift evidence and to admit nothing as evidence which did not meet the stiff criteria for admission into a court of law of the day.

However, while Frank Morison was doing his research, a remarkable thing happened. The case was not nearly as easy as he had supposed. As a result the first chapter in his book *'Who Moved the Stone?'* is entitled, 'The book That Refused to Be Written.' In it he described how, as he examined the evidence, he became persuaded by the evidence of the reality of the bodily resurrection of Christ.

Data To Be Considered

What are some of the pieces of data to be considered in answering the question, "Did Christ rise from the dead?"

1. The fact of the Christian church's existence. It is worldwide in scope. Its history can be traced back to Palestine around 33 AD. Are we to assume that it just happened or was there a cause for it? The people first called Christians at Antioch turned the world of their time upside down. They constantly

referred to the resurrection as the basis for their teaching, preaching, living and significantly, their dying.

2. Then there is the fact of the Christian day of worship. Sunday is the day of worship for Christians. This history also can be traced back to 33 AD. Such a shift was monumental, and something cataclysmic must have happened to change the day of worship from the Jewish sabbath, the seventh day, to Sunday, the first day. Early Christians said that the shift came because of their desire to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This shift is all the more remarkable when we remember that the first Christians were Jews. If the resurrection does not account for this change, what does?

3. Then there is the evidence of the New Testament. In its pages are 6 independent accounts of the fact of the resurrection. Three of them by eyewitnesses: John, Peter and Matthew. Paul in his epistles referred to the resurrection in such a way that it is obvious that to him it was well known and accepted without question. This in a time when many would still have been alive who could have refuted him, if what he said was not true. Are we to assume that these men are all consummate liars or deluded madmen? This would be harder to believe than the reality of the resurrection.

Two facts must be explained by the believer and the unbeliever alike. They are the empty tomb and the appearances of Christ.

The Empty Tomb

The earliest explanation given was that Christ's followers stole the body! In Matthew 28:11-15, we have the record of the reaction of the chief priests and the elders when the guards gave them the infuriating and mysterious news that the body was gone. These soldiers were paid to spread the story that the disciples had come at night and had stolen the body while they were asleep. So blatantly false was this story that Matthew didn't even bother to refute it! Each of the disciples faced the test of torture and martyrdom for his statements and beliefs.

People will die for what they believe to be true, though it may actually be false. They do not, however, die for what they know is a lie! If the disciples had taken the body, and Christ was still dead, we would still have the problem of explaining his appearances.

One popular theory that has been advanced is that the women, distraught and overcome with grief, missed their way in the dimness of the morning and went to the wrong tomb. In their grief then they are to have imagined that Christ was risen because the tomb was empty. Are we to believe that all of the followers of Christ then also went to the wrong tomb? This was not a public burial ground with many tombs but a private one owned by Joseph of Arimathea, who, being a believer himself would have pointed them in the right direction very quickly.

Then there is the swoon theory which has been advanced to explain the empty tomb. In this view, Christ did not actually die. He was mistakenly reported to be dead but had swooned, or passed out, from the exhaustion, pain and loss of blood. When he was laid in the cool tomb, he revived. He then came out of the tomb and appeared to his disciples, who then mistakenly thought he had risen from the dead.

This is a fairly modern theory which first appeared in the 18th century. If we assume for a moment that Christ was buried alive and had only passed out, is it possible to believe that he would have survived three days in a damp tomb without food or water? Would he have survived being wound in spice-laden grave cloths? Would he have had the strength to extricate himself from the tightly wound grave cloths, push the heavy stone weighing several tons away from the mouth of the grave, overcome the Roman guards and walk miles on feet that had been pierced with spikes? Such a belief is more fantastic than the simple fact of the resurrection itself. Actually, if this were fact then Christ is himself involved with flagrant lies. He did nothing to dispel the belief among his disciples that He had died and was buried and came alive again. In fact He encouraged them in this

belief! The only account that adequately explains the reality of the empty tomb is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Appearances of Christ

There are many recorded appearances of Christ. These occurred from the morning of His resurrection to His ascension forty days later. Ten distinct and separate appearances are recorded with great variety as to time, place and people involved. For the same reason that the empty tomb cannot be explained away on the basis of lies or legends, neither can we dismiss the statements of His appearances on this basis. This testimony is given by eyewitnesses fully and profoundly convinced of the truth of their statements. The major theory advanced to refute the appearances is that those who claimed to see Him were hallucinating. All of the various people at different times and places were supposed to have seen Christ as a hallucination. If you hold to that, you have to completely ignore the evidence.

What was it that completely changed a band of frightened, cowardly disciples into men of courage and conviction? What was it that changed Peter from one who, the night before the crucifixion, was so afraid that he denied knowing Christ three times into a roaring lion of the faith? Some fifty days later Peter risked his life by saying he had seen Jesus risen from the dead. It must be remembered that Peter preached his electric Pentecost sermon in Jerusalem, where the events took place and his life was in danger. He was not in Galilee, miles away where no one could verify the facts and where his ringing statements might go unchallenged.

Only the bodily resurrection of Christ could have produced this change. Many years ago a brilliant scholar at Cambridge, Canon B.F. Westcott said, "Indeed, taking 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. Nothing but the antecedent assumption that it must be false could have suggested the idea of deficiency in the proof of it."

Why are the Evolutionists so Defensive?

The question arises then, if evolution is so solidly proven, what are evolutionists afraid of? Why must evolution be protected from scrutiny? Why must students be shielded from other views? Why not present all the pertinent facts and encourage the students to think critically, as a good scientist should? Would this not be a good educational technique? Would this not produce better citizens and scientists?

Evolutionists purport that there is no real science supporting intelligent design, that ID is just religion, or at least a "backdoor" to religion. But the facts are that many secular scientists, through observation and experimentation and based on the scientific evidence and data they've obtained, have come to the conclusion that life has been designed, not created by mere chance from nothing.

Science involves conducting research, using the scientific method in various disciplines, and reporting on the data and results. There's no religion in the facts [such as] recently discovered groundbreaking evidence about rock dating, carbon-14 in diamonds, excess helium within zircons, and other geologic data supporting a young earth . . . this science [should] be available for scrutiny by critical thinkers -- that students, specifically, are able to evaluate the evidence and formulate their own beliefs. If the science points to a designer, so be it. But if the evidence suggests otherwise, which we're sure it does not, then so be it. Let the chips fall where they may.

Perhaps evolutionists' avoidance of these kinds of data exposes a basic insecurity in their position . . . evolution cannot stand the test of science -- it must avoid the light of open inquiry. Only by limiting the debate can evolutionists hope to maintain their monopoly on education. Yet, it serves us well to recognize that the debate involves a deeper issue than just control of academic content. If evolutionists admit that science does indeed support intelligent design, then they are admitting that there is a possibility of a Creator. Perhaps what evolutionists are truly afraid of are the implications of the presence of a higher power. Higher power means higher authority and, ultimately, higher accountability.

[Excerpt from the ICR newsletter]