

DEFENDABLE FAITH - ANSWERING TOUGH QUESTIONS ABOUT CHRISTIANITY

Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? – Part 2

DID JESUS REALLY DIE?

See last week's lesson: 21-05-12

IF JESUS DID NOT RISE FROM THE DEAD, WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BODY?

- **We know from reliable sources that Jesus' body was put in a tomb.**
 - All four gospels agree that Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus' body and placed it in a tomb.
 - A very early creed of the Christian church, perhaps the earliest of all creeds, is quoted by Paul in **1 Corinthians 15:3-6** **3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.**
- **The specificity of this account invited contradiction if it were not true.**
 - If Joseph of Arimathea were not a member of the Sanhedrin who gave Jesus' body an honorable burial, this claim would have been _____ by Joseph himself, members of the Sanhedrin, his family, or his friends.
 - Although the claim to Jesus' resurrection was the supreme argument for Jesus being the Messiah, no counter claims concerning Joseph or the burial were forthcoming. There is no evidence for a single one!
 - In the years immediately following Jesus' death and resurrection, literally no one claimed that Jesus did not really die or that His dead body was not put in a tomb as the gospels describe.
- **The tomb with the body was guarded by Roman soldiers.**
 - The soldiers were assigned by Pilate but instructed to report to the chief priest. The presence of the guard removed any opportunity for someone to steal the body.
 - The guards were rendered unconscious by the presence of the angel who rolled away the stone, revealing an empty tomb.

- When the guards reported what happened to the priests, the priests bribed them to say they were asleep and the disciples stole the body. The priests promised to fix things with Pilate since soldiers could be executed for falling asleep on duty.
- Matthew reports that this transaction between the priests and the guards was _____ knowledge among the Jews (Mt. 28:15).
- Again, the absence of contradiction by unbelievers of what Matthew says “everybody knew” is strong evidence for the validity of the account.
- **A group of women who followed Jesus discovered the empty tomb around dawn on the first day of the week (Sunday morning).**
 - Critics have often cited the _____ in the gospel accounts of the discovery of the empty tomb as evidence against the veracity of the story. These differences include the time of the discovery (dark, dawn, or early morning), who and how many women visited the tomb, how many angels were there, did Jesus appear to one or more of them, and did they tell anyone their discovery.
 - To be honest, there are differences in the details of the accounts. However, none of the accounts presents itself as giving the “complete, unabridged history of the resurrection.” Each one tells the truth, but limited to that which was seen by the individuals in each story. Most of these supposed discrepancies can be harmonized with a reasonable synthesis to the four accounts. A few others are more difficult to explain, but that does not mean the account, even with its mysterious details, is untrue.
 - In fact, the presence of unharmonized details is actually a strong argument for the _____ of each of the accounts. If the gospels were reporting a legend, or even worse, perpetrating a hoax, each of the writers would have been careful to have avoided apparent contradiction. None of the gospel writers demonstrate any concern about this at all. They all report in very straight forward fashion the events as they had learned them to be.
 - While some may desire to quibble over some of the details mentioned above, the remarkable thing is that all four accounts are clear in their testimony: on Sunday morning, the tomb was empty!
 - The fact that it was a group of _____ who are reported to have discovered the empty tomb also argues for the validity of the gospel accounts. At this time in history in Judea and the surrounding area, women were not highly regarded. A woman could not even testify in a court of law. If Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were making up this account, they certainly would have had men make the discovery, because Jews in general would have found the testimony of men to be more reliable. But the gospel writers just told it like it was. The women discovered the empty tomb as they left their homes in the pre-dawn hours to go and anoint the dead body of the

Savior who had loved them more than any other and whom they so sincerely loved.

- **No one had the _____ to steal the body of Jesus.**
 - Certainly the Jewish leaders did not want the body stolen; that is why they asked for a guard.
 - The Romans did not want the body to be stolen; that is why Pilate agreed to securing the tomb.
 - The disciples obviously did not really expect a bodily resurrection even though they had been told it would happen by Jesus. They were in despair and disarray at the death of their master. They themselves had to be convinced that Jesus arose. But when they saw that it was true, their lives were changed. Each of them, save Judas of course, gave the rest of his life proclaiming the gospel, suffering hardship and eventually death, for the sake of this truth they proclaimed: Jesus rose from the dead. They would not have so given themselves for a lie or a hoax which they themselves had devised.
- **The empty tomb was available for everyone's _____.**
 - The site of the tomb was known to all, Romans, Jews, and Christians. Everyone knew it was empty.
 - That is why the Jews bribed the guard to say the disciples had stolen the body. They knew the tomb was empty. That fact could not be disputed.
- **The sum of the testimony is this: On Friday, the body of a very dead Jesus was put in a tomb. The body was there when a Roman guard closed it and sealed it prior to establishing a watch to be sure the grave was not robbed. No one had either opportunity or motive to steal the body. On Sunday morning, when the tomb was opened, the body of Jesus was not there!**

WAS JESUS SEEN ALIVE AFTER THE RESURRECTION?

- **The earliest testimony: the preaching of the apostles.**
 - Peter
 - Preaching in Jerusalem, Peter said in **Acts 2:32** “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.”
 - Later, again in Jerusalem, Peter declares in **Acts 3:14-15** “But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.”
 - Both of these sermons are delivered in Jerusalem, where Jesus was crucified and buried. He is preaching this message less than two months after the crucifixion. They know about the events surrounding Jesus’

death and reported resurrection. Those claiming to be eyewitnesses were in their very midst to be questioned or examined.

- Paul

- Years later Paul preached in Antioch of Pisidia, recorded in **Acts 13:29-33**
29 Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took *Him* down from the tree and laid *Him* in a tomb. 30 But God raised Him from the dead. 31 He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. 32 And we declare to you glad tidings— that promise which was made to the fathers. 33 God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm:

*'You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.*

- Others - The resurrection immediately became the central proclamation of the church by the apostles, each of whom had seen the risen Christ.

- **The early creeds**

- As mentioned earlier, the evidence is that Paul is reciting a creed of the early church when he writes to the Corinthians. Paul has previously shared this creed with them in his first visit to them.

1 Corinthians 15:3-7 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.

- How old is this creed?

- Paul gave it to the Corinthians in his first visit around 51 A.D.
- But when did Paul receive it? Probably in his trip to Jerusalem to talk with Peter and James after Paul's conversion. Paul describes this event in **Galatians 1:18-19** 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. 19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.
- The word "see" in verse 18 means to examine. It is the word from which we get the word history.
- Paul did not just drop in for coffee. He came to talk to other eyewitnesses and examine them concerning their account. This is likely the place that Paul received the creed, less than _____ years after the resurrection!

- This early testimony gives us an extensive list of people who saw Jesus after He arose:
 - Cephas (Peter)
 - The Twelve (Apostles)
 - Five hundred others
 - James, the Lord's half-brother
- From the time the church began reciting this creed through the time Paul declares it to the Corinthians, most of these people were still alive. People could ask them if they had really seen the risen Christ.
- **The Gospels**
 - The gospels are listed third not because they are third in importance but because we are looking at the written testimony referring to eyewitnesses in the time _____ in which it was produced.
 - The gospels also give an extensive list of people who saw Jesus after He had risen from the dead.
 - Mary Magdalene (Jn. 20:10-18)
 - other women (Mt. 28:8-10)
 - Cleopas and another disciple on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-32)
 - eleven disciples and others (Lk. 24:33-49)
 - ten apostles and others (Thomas absent) (Jn. 20:19-23)
 - Thomas with the other apostles (Jn. 20:26-30)
 - seven apostles (Jn. 21:1-14)
 - disciples (Mt. 28:16-20)
 - apostles and many others (Lk. 24:50-52, Acts 1:4-9)
- **Paul's letters**
 - Paul adds his own testimony of seeing the risen Christ to the end of the creed quoted in **1 Corinthians 15:1-7 with verse 8** "Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time."
 - In verse 11 Paul goes on to say explicitly that all the apostles preach this same gospel which includes the bodily resurrection of Jesus.
- **Other theories**
 - Could the resurrection of Jesus just be a legend that grew over time?
 - The oral and written eyewitness reports are too _____ to the event to be considered legendary.
 - These reports were given while the eyewitnesses testimony could be examined and either verified or denied. Legends arise much later, after the actual history has long faded from people's minds.

- A resurrection story arising as a legend also does not explain the empty tomb.
- Could the appearances have been hallucinations?
 - A hallucination is something one person has, not _____ of people, especially at separate times.
 - Even if multiple people in a group have a hallucination, they will not have the same hallucination.
- **The sum total of the evidence**
 - All of the eyewitness accounts of the resurrection do not prove the resurrection of Jesus in a scientific or strict deductive sense.
 - This kind of evidence is the evidence such as is used in a court of law where one is trying to reach a conclusion beyond reasonable doubt.
 - If you took all the witnesses who saw Jesus alive after He was buried and gave each one 15 minutes to tell their story and be cross examined, you would still need over _____ hours for all the testimony. If you took testimony for eight hours a day, five days a week, it would still take more than three weeks to hear all the people say, “He died on that cross. They put His body in the tomb. But I saw Jesus alive after the third day. He is risen indeed!”
 - Most juries would decide this case easily, having no reasonable doubt.
 - Some time ago, Anthony Flew, a leading philosophical atheist, debated Gary Habermas, Chairman of the Department of Theology at Liberty University, on the subject “Did Jesus Rise From the Dead?” Each did his best, but the results were one-sided. Of the five independent philosophers from various colleges and universities, four declared Habermas the unequivocal winner. The fifth said the debate was a draw. None voted for Flew. One of the judges said this, “I was surprised (shocked might be a better word) to see how weak Flew’s own approach was. ... I was left with this conclusion: Since the case against the resurrection was no stronger than that presented by Antony Flew, I would think it was time I began to take the resurrection seriously.”

IS THE RESURRECTION SUPPORTED BY ANY OTHER INFORMATION?

- **The _____ lives of the apostles**
 - When Jesus was crucified, the apostles scattered like sheep without a shepherd. Although Jesus had told them of His impending death and resurrection, they either did not understand or they did not believe.
 - Every indication that we have is that if Jesus’ body had remained in the grave, the apostles would have gone back to what they did before Jesus called them: fishing, collecting taxes, whatever.

- But when they discovered that Jesus had risen, they believed; and with faith came a new level of understanding and remembrance. Then came the indwelling and filling of the Holy Spirit.
- The apostles we see and hear at Pentecost are very different from the fearful men we saw after Jesus' betrayal and arrest. Fifty days after the resurrection, the apostles are bold men of God, preaching Jesus as the crucified and resurrected Messiah of God who would give forgiveness and eternal life to all who would trust in Him.
- And this transformation in their lives lasted their entire lifetime. Each of them suffered greatly because of their faith. Each of them gave the rest of their life to the propagation of the gospel and the service of Christ.
- What made the difference? For forty days, Jesus appeared alive to men and women all over Judea and Galilee. The apostles saw Him, talked with Him, touched Him, and ate with Him. They knew Jesus had risen from the dead, and it changed everything!
- **The conversion of unbelievers**
 - James, the _____ of Jesus
 - The Bible tells us concerning Jesus in John 7:5, "For even His brothers did not believe in Him."
 - 1 Cor. 15 tells us that the Lord appeared to James along with the apostles.
 - Josephus, the Jewish historian, reports that James became the leader of the church at Jerusalem and was later stoned to death because of his faith in Christ.
 - The only thing we know that could account for James' dramatic conversion was the resurrection.
 - Saul of Tarsus
 - Saul is an even more dramatic case example.
 - Saul was ardent in his belief and practice of Judaism.
 - He was so opposed to Jesus and to Christianity that he took the lead in persecuting Christians.
 - Suddenly Saul becomes a believer and accepts a name change - Paul. He starts preaching the gospel he formerly despised and becomes aligned with the very people he hated.
 - What can account for this drastic transformation? Paul's letter to the Galatians begins with the explanation that this change in life came because of an encounter with the risen Christ.
- **Drastic changes for thousands of Jews who became believers.**
 - In the early days of Christianity, over _____ Jews became Christians in Jerusalem.

- When a person raised in a Christian culture is saved, many things change in their life. But the changes that take place in a person's life who is immersed in a non-Christian culture are far more traumatic.
- Jews were known as defenders of their culture. They maintained their traditions and ancient practices far more faithfully than other people groups across the years. One of the reasons for that is that they believe that those traditions were given to them by God Himself.
- Therefore, for these Jews to be converted and instantaneously accept major changes to their tradition and culture provides major evidence that something of huge importance happened to cause them to do so.
- What changed for these Jews?
 - They put their trust in the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross for their forgiveness rather than the animal sacrifices in the temple.
 - They surrendered the idea that one had to keep the law to be in a right relationship with God to the idea that a right relationship was established through faith in Jesus.
 - They surrendered their practice of worship on the Sabbath to worship on Sunday, the day Jesus arose from the dead.
 - They accepted the doctrine of the Trinity: that God is one God, but exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - They exchanged their concept of Messiah as a political/military victor to Messiah also being the suffering servant who died for sin.
- Again we ask, what could cause so many to make such a major change in their lives? There is no suggestion that is rational apart from the resurrection. Some of these people saw the risen Christ. Others of them had a family member or dear friend who saw Him. They were confident that Jesus lived again!
- **The two ordinances: Baptism and the Lord's Supper**
 - The New Testament only authorizes the practice of two ordinances by the church: Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
 - Both ordinances began to be practiced immediately on the formation of the church, not developed centuries later. What is the central truth being remembered or celebrated in each of the ordinances?
 - Baptism - Believer's baptism by immersion, the practice of the early church, is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.
 - Lord's Supper - In the Lord's Supper, we are told to remember the broken body of Jesus and His blood shed to forgive our sins.
- **The growth of the church and the spread of Christianity**
 - New religions begin all the time, but not with the force and dynamic which was present in the early spread of Christianity.

- The first time the gospel was preached, 3,000 people were saved. The church at Jerusalem quickly grew to over 10,000.
- People saved at Pentecost went back to their homes and began to share the gospel. People were saved; churches began. Within twenty years, the gospel had begun to have an impact even at Rome.
- What is the difference between this faith and other religions? It is the power of a risen Christ!
- **The continuing testimony of lives changed by the risen Christ**
 - The power that caused Christianity to spread in its early days is still at work today.
 - Daily, all over the world, amidst all races and cultures, people abandon the traditions of their forefathers in favor of faith in Christ. After they do so, they give testimony of finding forgiveness, peace, security, purpose, and lasting change in their lives. These things they cherish above all else, even if it means giving up the former pleasures of their world and ending up being persecuted or even sacrificing their lives.
 - They do this, not because they just like a new set of doctrines, practices, or rules. They do it because they have found a relationship with a person, a living person, the risen Savior, Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION: The evidence for the resurrection is so extensive and pervasive that we have had to divide it into four questions to keep from getting lost in the vast quantity of information. Yet in our study, we still have not looked at all the evidence that could be brought to bear on this matter, and we have not considered any of the evidence as completely as one could. Volumes have been written on the subject. In fact, I recommend one that I have used extensively in the preparation of these notes: The Case for Christ by Lee Strobel. At the end of the book, Lee gives his own testimony of how as a skeptic, he himself was overwhelmed by the evidence of the resurrection and came to personal faith in Jesus as his Lord and Savior. Anyone who considers the evidence with an open mind and heart will easily be convinced of its validity, but everyone still must make a choice about whether he or she will put their faith, their trust in Jesus Christ as their own Savior and Lord.