

Objections To Christ's Resurrection Answered

Matthew 28:1-8

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That which anchors our faith in Christ and in the truth of God's revelation in Scripture is the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead on the third day. Without the bodily resurrection of Christ, the Apostle Paul declares that the preaching about Christ and our faith in Christ is vain and useless (1 Corinthians 15:14). After Jesus was crucified, the Disciples ran and hid in fear from the Jewish religious leaders. But when they saw the risen Lord, they became bold witnesses who were willing to lay down their lives for Jesus Christ. No other religious leader has been slain in full view of trained executioners, has had a tomb guarded by trained soldiers with a huge rock blocking the entrance, and then rose from the dead three days later to appear to hundreds of witnesses. Buddha did not bodily rise from the dead. Muhammad did not bodily rise from the dead. Confucius did not bodily rise from the dead. Krishna did not bodily rise from the dead. Only Jesus has bodily risen from the dead. He alone has conquered death. That is why Jesus Christ is the only way to have forgiveness, righteousness, and everlasting life. You can be absolutely sure that when you come to Christ in faith, you are not coming to a fraud, a fake, a myth, or a liar. For Jesus Christ, who was gloriously raised from the dead proclaimed: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

The bodily resurrection of Christ makes all who trust alone in Christ alone shout for joy. However, the bodily resurrection of Christ makes all of His enemies quake in fear, for it seals their doom and destruction. This Lord's Day let us turn our attention to those who first saw, heard, and announced the victorious news of the empty tomb. The main points from

our text are these: (1) The First Witnesses To See The Empty Tomb (Matthew 28:1-8); (2) The Objections Of Skeptics Answered.

I. The First Witnesses To See The Empty Tomb (Matthew 28:1-8).

A. Let us consider the context leading up to Christ's bodily resurrection on the first day of the week.

1. The Lord Jesus celebrated the Lord's Supper with His disciples on Thursday evening. He was betrayed by Judas and apprehended by a multitude of soldiers and Jewish leaders in the Garden of Gethsemane early Friday morning after midnight.

2. He was unjustly tried and condemned by the Jewish Sanhedrin, and then brought before Pilate for sentencing over a span of several hours Friday morning from before the dawning of the sun to after the dawning of the sun.

3. He was beaten, spat upon, made to wear a crown of thorns, and crucified by 9 a.m. on Friday morning. For the next 6 hours, the Lord hung upon the cross suffering as no man has ever suffered in body and soul for undeserving sinners like you and me. He breathed His last breath shortly after 3 p.m. on Friday (the Jewish Day of Preparation for the Sabbath).

4. The body of Christ was removed from the cross and buried with great love and care by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus Friday evening. A very large stone was rolled into place at the mouth of the tomb before Joseph and Nicodemus left. Certain women watched from a distance where Christ was buried.

5. On the following day (which was the Sabbath or Saturday), the Jewish Sanhedrin obtained Pilate's consent to have Roman soldiers placed as guards around the tomb in order to prevent the Disciples of Christ from stealing His body and claiming He was raised from the dead.

6. We now come to the first day of the week (early Sunday morning), which from that point on becomes the Christian Sabbath or the Lord's Day in perpetual honor of Christ's resurrection.

B. Early in the morning on the first day of the week, several of the women who had faithfully supported and followed the Lord Jesus in His ministry, had stood with Him at the cross as He was crucified, and had watched at the tomb as He was buried Friday evening, have now come together to honor the Lord and to anoint His body with sweet-smelling spices (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1). Our text states that they arrived on the first day of the week as the sun was just dawning and rising above the horizon (Matthew 28:1).

C. Matthew mentions two of the women who came to the tomb, even though there were other women who accompanied them (according to Luke 24:10). On their way to the tomb and before they arrived at the tomb, the huge stone that was rolled in front of the tomb became an issue. How would they be able to get to the body of Christ in order to anoint it with that enormous stone in the way (according to Mark 16:3)? These women are not thinking, "How will we get by the soldiers who are guarding the tomb?" Why? Because when the women who watched the body of Jesus being carefully and lovingly wrapped in linen cloth with the spices brought by Nicodemus on Friday evening and saw the stone rolled into place, there were no Roman soldiers guarding the tomb and no Roman seal upon the tomb. There was only that huge stone in front of the tomb that presented an obstacle in their own minds. These women were not aware that the day after they were last at the tomb of Christ (on the Jewish Sabbath or Saturday), the chief priests and Pharisees had secured Roman soldiers to guard the tomb and make it as secure as possible from all intruders, especially from the disciples of Christ

(according to Matthew 27:62-66).

D. As they arrived at the tomb, their concern about moving the stone quickly melted away, for the stone which all of the women together did not think they could move with their combined strength had already been moved out of its place in front of the tomb. Of course, the Roman soldiers who had been guarding the tomb the night before (of whom they were not aware) were also gone and nowhere to be seen. These women entered the tomb (according to Mark 16:5) and found it empty (according to Luke 24:3). And within the tomb was an angel who gave to these women the glorious announcement of Christ's resurrection.

E. I would have you note, dear ones, that it was women who were appointed by God to be the first witnesses to the empty tomb—not the Apostles of Jesus Christ. The women who had been faithful in standing with the Lord Jesus while He was crucified and while He was buried, despite the possible danger from the Jewish Sanhedrin (who wanted to destroy Christ and all that He taught) were made the first witnesses to the empty tomb. This is not an insignificant fact.

1. In Roman law, women could not function as witnesses. They were incapable of being a witness in any form of jurisprudence where witnesses were required. In fact, women were reckoned with minors, slaves, the mute, and criminals to be incapable of being witnesses. And yet, here in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, women are ordained of the Lord to be the first witnesses to the empty tomb. These women were also the first witnesses to the angelic announcement that Christ was bodily raised from the dead (Matthew 28:5-6). These women were also the first witnesses sent to bear testimony to the Apostles (who were still in hiding) that Christ was gloriously raised from the dead (Matthew 28:7). This is an amazing honor bestowed upon these

courageous women. God uses courageous women to build His kingdom, and He honors them for it.

2. Dear women of God, you have an important role in extending the kingdom of Christ. Do not hide your gifts and abilities, rather employ them in ministering to those in need. This Church needs your faith, your prayers, your testimony, your love, your service, and your courage if it is to grow. It was women who served Christ in His earthly ministry, who accompanied Him to the cross, who saw where he was buried, who came to anoint His body, and became the first witnesses to the empty tomb (Matthew 27:55). In the greetings that the Apostle Paul gives at the end of his letter to the Romans (Romans 16), he mentions the service of particular women by name (Phebe in vs. 1), Priscilla in vs. 3, Mary in vs. 6). What a blessed and most honored place the Lord gives to women in building Christ's kingdom within the family (1 Timothy 5:14; Titus 2:3-5). What a glorious honor is yours, dear women, to devote yourselves to the training and homeschooling of the children God has given to you. Let me say it clearly, the kingdom of Christ and His covenanted reformation will not go forward without your tireless service of love. And dear men, our unceasing love, encouragement, thankfulness, and prayers must be extended to them. If a worker is worthy of his wages, then surely the sacrificial work of a wife and mother within the home is worthy of our abundant praise.

F. Carefully note why the Roman soldiers were no longer guarding the tomb of Christ when the women arrived at the tomb (Matthew 28:2-4). For clearly, the Roman soldiers were there the night before. The Roman Governor, Pilate, sent them with the Jewish leaders to the tomb of Christ in order to guard it with their lives. An intruder would not be read his rights and given a quarter to make a phone call. They would be swiftly put to death by the sword of the Roman soldiers.

1. However, early on Sunday morning while it was yet dark, God sent a great earthquake and a mighty angel descended from heaven in the presence of these soldiers of war and easily rolled the enormous rock away from the entrance to the tomb. At the sight of these events, the mighty Roman soldiers shook like leaves and then became paralyzed with fear, unable to move as if they were dead. Once these Roman soldiers came to their senses, they fled into Jerusalem to tell the chief priests what had happened (according to Matthew 28:11-15). The chief priests then bribe the soldiers to keep their mouths shut about what they actually saw and rather say that while they slept the Disciples of Christ stole the body of Christ from the tomb. The Roman soldiers are promised by the Chief Priests that if their alleged sleeping on the job should come to the attention of Pilate, they would smooth things over for them (for sleeping on the job or deserting one's post was a crime worthy of death among the Roman Legions). This explains why there were no Roman soldiers at the tomb when the women arrived there, as well as how the extremely large stone came to be rolled away from the entrance to the tomb.

2. Dear ones, the enemies of Christ shake in fear at a resurrected Christ for a resurrected Christ will destroy all who will not have Him to rule over them. A resurrected Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man, condemns all other religions as false and contrary to the one true religion: Biblical Christianity. What a picture we have here of how the Lord can and will make all of His enemies like dead men—helpless and unable to move a finger against our Savior. Dear ones, has the constant attack of the enemies within you in the form of fears, worries, idols of the heart, unbelief, and lusts of the flesh weakened your resolve to withstand them? Or has the constant attack of the enemies outside in the form of those who hate the truth, those who despise you for being a Christian, those in places of authority who make

decisions concerning your safety, you job, your welfare, or has even the enemy of death itself led you to tremble in fear. Here is a picture to carry around with you in your mind just as you would carry a photo in your wallet. All of the enemies of Christ that attack us (whether within or without) are like those Roman soldiers. They appear to be armed to the teeth. They appear to be those who would destroy us. But look and consider the terror and fear of those enemies as they lay helplessly upon the ground unable to move like dead men. It is the latter image of their utter defeat in the face of a resurrected Christ that our faith should embrace, rather than the former image of their guarding the tomb with their swords and spears. Beloved, our faith will not grow to withstand the attacks of our enemies who would destroy us, if our faith is not firmly fixed upon the resurrected and victorious Christ.

II. The Objections Of Skeptics Answered

A. I submit to you that the skeptics' objections to a resurrected Christ are also beginning to shake in fear and act like dead men. For already in the account of Christ's crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, at least three of the skeptics' objections are shown to be entirely false.

1. The objection that states that Christ never really died, therefore, He could not really rise from the dead is shown to be absolutely false from the historical records of the Gospels. For on several occasions the death of Christ is either explicitly or implicitly cited. Mark 15:37 says, "And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost" (or breathed His last breath). The following facts confirm that Christ was actually dead and that He did not simply look dead and then regain consciousness within the tomb.

a. The Roman soldiers did not break the legs of Christ as they did the thieves on either side of Him because He was already dead

(John 19:32-33).

b. When Joseph of Arimathaea sought the body of the Lord from Pilate that he might honorably bury Christ, Pilate sent to the Roman centurion in charge of Christ's crucifixion to gain confirmation from him that Christ was indeed dead before delivering the body to Joseph—which confirmation Pilate received (Mark 15:44-45).

c. The followers of Christ would not have entwined and buried Him if there were the slightest signs of life.

d. Furthermore, assuming for the sake of argument that Christ did not die, how could He have removed the stone by Himself in such an emaciated and weakened state, and how could He have escaped without the Roman soldiers hearing Him? Moreover, how could such a weak and frail man having suffered what He had suffered (with the extensive loss of blood), how could He have frightened the Roman soldiers to such a degree that they fled for their lives? The historical account found in the Gospels shows how absurd is the unbelief of such skeptics that Christ was not actually dead.

2. A second objection of the unbelieving skeptics is refuted by the historical accounts found in the Gospels. This objection is that which was manufactured by the Jewish leaders at that time: namely, the Disciples of Christ stole the body by night.

a. However, the Gospel accounts make it clear that the Apostles of Christ had fled from Christ the night He was betrayed (Matthew 26:56). The only Apostle of Christ mentioned at the crucifixion of Christ was John. Only women are mentioned as having the courage to come to the burial of Christ (besides of course Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus who were not Apostles). And only women are mentioned as having the courage to come to the tomb of Christ to anoint the body on the first day of the week. The cowardly Disciples of Christ would hardly be candidates to risk their lives by taking on the Roman soldiers that were

guarding the tomb. Furthermore, the Disciples of Christ were not trained in warfare (most of them were fishermen), and would have been no match at all for the Roman guard.

b. Let's for a moment suppose (for the sake of argument) that the Disciples did steal the body of Christ as alleged. If the Disciples of Christ did steal the body of Christ while the soldiers slept, how did they move the enormous stone from the entrance to the tomb without waking the Roman soldiers? It is unbelievable that such a story could be circulated and believed.

c. Does it make any sense at all that these cowardly Disciples would have subsequently had the boldness to proclaim to all of their enemies a lie (namely, that Christ was risen from the dead) and to willingly lay down their lives as martyrs for that which they knew to be a lie? People vainly die for that which is not true all of the time. But people do not routinely suffer and die for that which they know to be a lie, which they themselves have fabricated.

3. Finally, some skeptics have foolishly stated that there was no resurrection at all because the women who went to the tomb in the first place went mistakenly to the wrong tomb (that is, a tomb that never had a body in it and therefore was empty). This is patently false from a couple facts.

a. The women had been at the tomb of Christ just on Friday evening and knew exactly where the tomb was (Matthew 27:61).

b. And if the women went to the wrong tomb (for the sake of argument), why didn't the Jewish leaders go to the right tomb and produce the body of Christ and put an early end to Christianity? They certainly were able to find the right tomb in as much as they had placed Roman guards around the tomb in order to secure it just the day before.

c. Certainly Joseph of Arimathaea would have been able to find the right tomb (since it was his tomb) and to produce the body of

Christ, if the women had gone to the wrong tomb.

Dear ones, what is the common thread with all skeptics? They do not want to see in the Gospels the miraculous resurrection of Jesus Christ. They have ruled out (in their own minds) the possibility of Christ's resurrection from the outset. For they realize the consequences of a resurrected Christ to their own autonomy and independence. If Christ is raised from the dead, all of their mere human wisdom and supposed sovereignty over their own lives must quake in fear and act like dead men (just as did the Roman soldiers).

It is not we who have embraced the resurrected Christ alone for our eternal salvation that need quake in fear before the skeptics of this age. It is the skeptics and unbelievers that need to quake in fear before a resurrected Christ. For a resurrected Christ is their worst nightmare. Whereas a resurrected Christ is the Christian's greatest joy.

Do Christians presently suffer? Yes. Do Christians presently sorrow and grieve over the sins they continue to commit against God and their fellow man? Yes. Do Christians presently die? Yes. Then how is the lot of the Christian different from that of the non-Christian? We have a certain, confident hope that our resurrected Savior and Lord is in loving and sovereign control of our lives (regardless of what happens). Because Christ is raised from the dead, there is meaning and purpose to life. There is forgiveness of all our sins, and the imputation of Christ's glorious righteousness (instead of our unrighteousness) to all those who trust alone in Christ alone. And though we die, the sting of death has been removed, for Christ has conquered death and we have a certain hope that we will be ushered into the immediate presence of Christ and all of His glory awaiting the final day of resurrection when our mortal, corruptible

bodies will be raised from the dead and made immortal and incorruptible. At that time, there will be no more enemies of Christ. They will all be like shaking in fear, as we (who trust alone in Christ alone) enjoy a blessedness that cannot be imagined in the presence of Christ.

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