

The Credibility of the Resurrection

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – the intellectual and spiritual credibility of the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead
2. aim – to cause us to be strengthened in our faith knowing that Jesus rose from the dead
3. passage – 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

b. outline

1. The Reality of the Resurrection
2. The Rejection of the Resurrection
3. The Realness of the Resurrection

c. opening

1. the *shrinking* importance of Easter (e.g. Thom Rainer, President, LifeWay)
 - a. because it's always celebrated on Sunday – just a Sunday like any other
 - b. because it's always a *different* Sunday in the year – not a notable day on the calendar
 1. **note:** the Council of Nicea (325AD) established that Easter be held on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Vernal Equinox (or the first day of Spring, March 20)
 - c. because it's not treated as a *national holiday* – most people's work schedule is not affected by it
 1. unlike Thanksgiving (which also "moves" on the calendar) which is not a *church* holiday
 - d. because it's not associated with an *economic* reality – Good Friday is not another Black Friday
 - e. because it's no longer considered a culturally mandated thing to participate in
 1. the massive *secularization* of W culture has led to a place where the message of Christianity is no longer tolerable or even acceptable (i.e. it flies in the face of a spirit of autonomy) – thus, the church is seeing a mass exodus of those who no longer wish to be *constrained* by a sense of "duty" surrounding church events like Easter
 - a. **note:** IMO this is a *good thing* – the "sifting" off of the goats allows the church to more effectively minister to the sheep and to be focused on its true mission
 - f. because it's not *significant as an event* to the lives of unregenerate people
 1. its historical reality does not have any *impact* upon the lives of those who reject the *implications* of the event – it is *irrelevant* to unbelievers if Jesus actually walked out of his own tomb

I. The Reality of the Resurrection

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a. the reality of the resurrection as an *historical* event (did this actually happen?)

1. the Christian faith is built on *historical* realities, not a series of "theoretical" or "spiritual" events
 - a. the Incarnation is the reality of God *literally* entering into his creation
 - b. the life of Jesus is the reality of someone living *literally* (and perfectly) under the law
 - c. the Crucifixion is the reality of the Christ *literally* suffering in place of others
 - d. the Resurrection is the reality of the Son of God overcoming the *literalness* of death
 - e. the Parousia is the reality that the King will *literally* intervene in time and space again
 - f. **faith is the essence of believing that real things are evidence for even greater promises**
 1. i.e. the early creed of **1 Corinthians 15:3-5 [extended to v. 8]** testifies to this truth
2. **the resurrection of Jesus is the quintessential historical truth (or hinge) upon which the entirety of Christianity is built (read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19)**

II. The Rejection of the Resurrection

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a. various theories put forth to "explain away" the Resurrection

1. the "**wrong tomb**" theory – the women (and the disciples) mistakenly went to the wrong tomb (in the dark), and then believed that Jesus had been raised because they couldn't find his body
 - a. i.e. the disciples cooked up the idea to continue the work of Christ, or to give some meaning to the 3½ years they had spent with their now-dead leader
 1. the *known location* of the tomb by *everyone* (**Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55**)
 2. the *posted guard* before the tomb establishes its location (**Matt. 27:62-66**)

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3. the *lack of rebuttal* by the Jews or Romans (**i.e.** why not show the world the body?)
 - a. **remember:** those who plotted to kill Jesus had a strong incentive for him to *remain* dead – they became concerned about preaching a resurrected Jesus (**e.g. read Acts 4:1-2**)
2. the **“falsehood”** or “stolen body” theory
 - a. **i.e.** the disciples stole the body (or moved it) and made up the resurrection story – by stealing the body, both the missing body and the disciple’s story can be “explained”
 1. the lack of understanding by the disciples of Jesus’ predictions (**Luke 9:45, 24:8**)
 - a. ironically, the Pharisees and chief priests understood Jesus well (**Matt. 27:63**)
 2. the fear in the disciples of the religious and political leaders (**John 20:19**)
 3. the posted guard before the tomb (**Mark 15:47**)
 4. the burial wrapping left behind (**John 20:5**)
 5. the strange excuse and bribing of the guards to make up *this* story (**read Matt. 28:11-15**)
 6. the change in the lives of the disciples
 - a. the change in Peter (**Acts 2 cf. Luke 22:62**), Paul (**Acts 9**)
 - b. the imprisonment and martyrdom of most of the original 13
3. the **“vision”** or “mass hallucination” theory
 - a. **i.e.** the women and disciples, in their excited state of mind, “thought” they saw a vision of a risen Jesus, and went about proclaiming that to be true in reality (a common “explanation” amongst the most fiercely *anti-supernatural*)
 1. too many people were witnesses to it (**more than 500**) – Mary (**John 20:11-17**), to other women (**Matt. 28:9-10**), to Peter (**1 Cor. 15:5**), to the Emmaus disciples (**Luke 24:13-35**), to the ten (**Luke 24:36-43**), to the eleven (**John 20:26-29**), to seven at the sea (**John 21**), to more than 500 (**1 Cor. 15:6**), to those at the ascension (**Matt. 28:16-20**), to Paul (**Acts 9**)
 2. the testimony of the witnesses to a real *living* body (**John 20:21**)
 - a. the sight of his hands and side (**20:20**), his breath (**20:22**), the testimony of Thomas (**20:27-28**), his consumption of food (**21:9-14**), his physical presence
 3. the lack of rebuttal by the Jews or Romans (**i.e.** why not show the world the body?)
4. the **“swoon”** or “resuscitation” theory
 - a. **i.e.** that Jesus didn’t actually die, but swooned into a state of near-death, awakened in the tomb, extricated himself, and then appeared to his friends as though he was “resurrected” (**a hoax**)
 1. the sheer trauma of Jesus’ death on a cross
 - a. the scourging (**Matt. 27:26**)
 - b. the crucifixion – including, the expertise of the Roman soldiers, the volume of blood loss Jesus experienced, the shortness of time that he was on the cross (6 hours is too short), the fact they didn’t break his legs (**John 19:33**)
 - c. the spear wound – both blood and water indicating a punctured heart (**John 19:34**)
 2. the witnesses – John, who was at the cross (**John 19:35 cf. 19:26**), the centurion, when Jesus commends his spirit (**Luke 23:46-47**), those who buried him (**Luke 23:50-55**)
 3. the unbelief of Pilate that Jesus had died in such a short time (**Mark 15:44**)
 4. the sheer difficulty of getting out of the burial wrappings and tomb *undetected* by the guards
 5. the way he faked out his disciples even with such tremendous wounds (**Luke 24:31**)
 6. the way he disappeared from public view for the rest of his natural life
 - a. **note:** a man with an ego so large as to fake his own resurrection to start a cause would *probably* not be able to remain in hiding for the rest of his life, especially as that cause grew
5. the **“mythical”** or “it doesn’t matter” theory
 - a. **i.e.** that the actual resurrection of Jesus is *irrelevant* to the Christian faith – that it may (or may not) be true *physically* and *historically*, but that is not relevant *doctrinally* or *spiritually*
 1. or the “Jesus was never crucified” position of many Muslims (**i.e.** a substitute died for him)
 2. or the “supernatural events” are unnecessary to the Christ faith position
 3. or the Resurrection is a matter of *faith*, not of history, and that Christianity is based on the *subjective ideal* of Jesus rather than on the *objective fact* of his resurrection
 - b. the rebuttal
 1. the factual Resurrection is what gives the gospel its *longevity* – if the event were a myth (or explainable), it would have died out over a few decades or centuries (**e.g.** the Greek pantheon)
 2. the factual Resurrection is what gives the gospel its *value* – there is no *personal and human* connection to Jesus if he is just a figure in history and not *actually alive as a man* today
 3. the factual Resurrection is what gives the gospel its *strength* – if Jesus did not actually return to life *as a man*, then his promise to rise again in conjunction with his work to save is invalid
 - a. if (of course) the gospel is about salvation from sin, and not just doing good (**i.e.** liberalism)

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III. The Realness of the Resurrection

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a. the realness of the resurrection

1. **the Resurrection is the exclamation point on the end of Jesus' statement "it is finished!"**
 - a. all of the work of redemption *culminated* in the death of the Son of God – he *finished* everything that the Father had required of him to save a people *from his own wrath*
 - b. the Resurrection (then) *validates* the death of Christ *for that end* – it shouts throughout Creation that the Father has accepted the sacrifice of the Son
2. **but, our hope also rests in a present reality that flows from that event**
 - a. just as Jesus was raised from the dead, we (too) have been raised from the dead (spiritually)
 - b. those who have trusted in Christ *by faith* have experienced the new birth of regeneration, and are able to live as having been "raised from the dead"
3. **the celebration of Easter is both a celebration of the fact that Christ arose from the dead and a celebration that we (too!) have been raised from the dead by faith (Romans 10:9)**

"if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

 - a. **the reason why Easter is "unimportant" to so many people is because they have never experienced the effect of the gospel in raising them from the dead**