**Abundant Life Church**

**Sunday, August 23rd, 2020**

**Title: The Fact of the Resurrection**

**Text:**

Note: This sermon is not original with me. I have borrowed heavily from Matt Perman at Desiring God. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/historical-evidence-for-the-resurrection>

The historical evidence for the resurrection of Christ is very good. When we look at the evidence, the truth of the resurrection emerges very clearly as the best explanation. There is no other theory that even come close to accounting for the evidence. Therefore, there is solid historical grounds for the truth that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

It is worth pointing out that in establishing the historicity of the resurrection, we do not need to assume that the New Testament is inspired by God or even trustworthy. While I do believe these things, we are going to focus here on three truths that even critical scholars admit. In other words, these three truths are so strong that they are accepted by serious historians of all stripes. Therefore, any theory must be able to adequately account for these data.

The three truths are:

1. The tomb in which Jesus was buried was discovered empty by a group of women on the Sunday following the crucifixion.
2. Jesus' disciples had real experiences with one whom they believed was the risen Christ.
3. As a result of the preaching of these disciples, which had the resurrection at its center, the Christian church was established and grew.

These three truths create a strongly woven, three chord rope that cannot be broken.

**Jesus was verified dead.**

43  Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus.
44  Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead.
45  And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.
46  Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.
47  Mary Magdalene and Mary the *mother* of Joses were looking on *to see* where He was laid.
**Mark 15:43-47 (NASB)**

**The Empty Tomb**

1  When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the *mother* of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him.
2  Very early on the first day of the week, they \*came to the tomb when the sun had risen.
3  They were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?"
4  Looking up, they \*saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large.
5  Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed.
6  And he \*said to them, "Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, *here is* the place where they laid Him.
7  "But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.'"
8  They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.
**Mark 16:1-8 (NASB)**

What we know from this text is that the women, who probably at about 5:30 AM, were on their way to anoint in honor the dead body of the one they loved. Their discussion was how they were going to get the stone out of the way. They were in no way expecting that Jesus would be alive. They encounter what is described as a young man, but we know to be an angel, telling them to not be amazed but that Jesus is not in the tomb but that in fact, He had risen and was going to meet them very soon. They left the tomb trembling, astonished and fearful. When they returned to the other disciples and reported that Jesus was alive, the disciples did not believe them (Vs. 11). ‘…they refused to believe it…’

From these passages we learn that Jesus was verified dead and His body laid in a tomb, sealed with a rock. Then very early on Sunday morning these women find the tomb empty and the body of Christ no longer there.

Within 20 years of the death and resurrection of Jesus we have numbers of people forsaking the gods of their culture and political systems, confessing Jesus as Lord above the pantheon of gods and the Caesar’s.

**The significance of the Empty Tomb**

To begin, what is the evidence that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was discovered empty by a group of women on the Sunday following the crucifixion?

**First**, the resurrection was preached in the same city where Jesus had been buried shortly before. Jesus' disciples did not go to some obscure place where no one had heard of Jesus to begin preaching about the resurrection, but instead began preaching in Jerusalem, the very city where Jesus had died and been buried.

Our news is full of stories because, it is believed that possibly, the body of Crystal Rogers has finally been found. Finding the body destroys the lie that she was kidnapped or just walked away. Now there is hope that the FBI will be able to find the evidence to find and prosecute her murderers.

The same would have been true 2,000 years ago. The critics, of which there were a lot, would have simply been able to point to the grave and would have proven the claims of the resurrection as false.

**Second,** the earliest Jewish arguments against Christianity admit the empty tomb. In [**Matthew 28:11-15**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2028.11-15), there is a reference made to the Jew's attempt to refute Christianity be saying that the disciples stole the body. This is significant because it shows that the Jews did not deny the empty tomb. Instead, their "stolen body" theory admitted the significant truth that the tomb was in fact empty

Why is this important? Remember that the Jewish leaders were opposed to Christianity. They were hostile witnesses. In acknowledging the empty tomb, they were admitting the reality of a fact that was certainly not in their favor. So why would they admit that the tomb was empty unless the evidence was too strong to be denied? Dr. Paul Maier calls this "positive evidence from a hostile source. In essence, if a source admits a fact that is decidedly not in its favor, the fact is genuine."

**Third**, the empty tomb is supported by the historical reliability of the burial story. NT scholars agree that the burial story is one of the best established facts about Jesus. One reason for this is because of the inclusion of Joseph of Arimethea as the one who buried Christ. Joseph was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrein, a sort of Jewish supreme court. People on this ruling class were simply too well known for fictitious stories about them to be pulled off in this way. This would have exposed the Christians as frauds. So they couldn't have circulated a story about him burying Jesus *unless it was true*. Also, if the burial account was legendary, one would expect to find conflicting traditions--which we don't have.

**Fourth,** the tomb was discovered empty by women. Why is this important? Because the testimony of women in 1st century Jewish culture was considered worthless. As Craig says, "if the empty tomb story were a legend, then it is most likely that the male disciples would have been made the first to discover the empty tomb. The fact that despised women, whose testimony was deemed worthless, were the chief witnesses to the fact of the empty tomb can only be plausibly explained if, like it or not, they actually were the discoverers of the empty tomb."

**False Theory:**

 The Jews or the Romans stole the body. Silly ideas as both the Jews and the Romans were opposed to Christianity. Stealing the body would have been against their own interests.

 If the disciples stole the body you would have to believe that all 11 apostles were willing to die for a lie.

**The Resurrection Appearances**

Next, there is the evidence that Jesus' disciples had real experiences with one whom they believed was the risen Christ. This is not commonly disputed today because we have the testimony of the original disciples themselves that they saw Jesus alive again. And you don't need to believe in the reliability of the gospels to believe this. In [1 Corinthians 15:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor%2015.3-8), Paul records an ancient creed concerning Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection appearances that is much earlier than the letter in which Paul is recording it:

3  For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
4  and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,
5  and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.
6  After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;
7  then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles;
8  and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.
**1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (NASB)**

It is generally agreed by critical scholars that Paul receive this creed from Peter and James between 3-5 years after the crucifixion. Now, Peter and James are listed in this creed as having seen the risen Christ. Since they are the ones who gave this creed to Paul, this is therefore a statement of their own testimony. As the Jewish Scholar Pinchahs Lapide has said, this creed "may be considered the statement of eyewitnesses."

Now, I recognize that just because the disciples think they saw Jesus doesn't automatically mean that they really did. There are three possible alternatives:

1. They were lying
2. They hallucinated
3. They really saw the risen Christ

**The hallucination theory is untenable because it cannot explain the physical nature of the appearances.** An hallucination would have been brilliant light or clouds or something like that.

39  "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."
40  And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet.
41  While they still could not believe *it* because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"
42  They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish;
43  and He took it and ate *it* before them.
**Luke 24:39-43 (NASB)**

Since the disciples could not have been lying or hallucinating, we have only one possible explanation left: the disciples *believed* that they had seen the risen Jesus because they *really had* seen the risen Jesus. So, the resurrection appearances alone demonstrate the resurrection. Thus, if we reject the resurrection, we are left with a second inexplicable mystery--first the empty tomb and now the appearances.

**The Importance of the Resurrection**

But, in conclusion, don't we have to ask ourselves what implications this has? Why does it matter? Or is this some dry, dusty old piece of history that has no relevance to our lives? I believe that the resurrection is the most important truth in the world. It has far reaching implications on our lives.

First, the resurrection proves that the claims Jesus made about himself are true. What did Jesus claim? He claimed to be God. The resurrection proves that what Jesus said about Himself is true--He is fully God and fully man.

Second, have you ever wondered what reasons there are to believe in the Bible? Is there good reason to believe that it was inspired by God, or is it simply a bunch of interesting myths and legends? The resurrection of Jesus answers the question. If Jesus rose from the dead, then we have seen this validates His claim to be God. If He is God, He speaks with absolute certainty and final authority. Therefore, what Jesus said about the Bible must be true. Surely you are going to accept the testimony of one who rose from the dead over the testimony of a skeptical scholar who will one day die himself--without being able to raise himself on the third day. What did Jesus say about the Bible? He said that it was inspired by God and that it cannot error. I will accept the testimony of Jesus over what I would like to be true and over the opinions of other men and women. Therefore I believe that the Bible is inspired by God, without error. Don't get misled by the numerous skeptical and unbelieving theories about the Bible. Trust Jesus--He rose from the dead.

**Third**, many people are confused by the many different religions in the world. There are all kinds of philosophies which one may advocate, but the resurrection is not a philosophy rather a fact to deal with. This fact gives power to the teachings of Jesus, but I don’t begin with the teachings of Jesus but the person at the resurrection.

**Fourth**, the resurrection of Christ proves that God will judge the world one day.

30  "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent,
31  because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."
**Acts 17:30-31 (NASB)**

**Fifth,** the Bible says that Christ's resurrection is the pattern that those who believe in Him will follow. In other words, those who believe in Christ will one day be resurrected by God just as He was. The resurrection proves that those who trust in Christ will not be subject in eternity to a half-human existence in just their souls. It proves that our bodies will be resurrected one day. Because of the resurrection of Christ, believers will one day experience, forever, the freedom of having a glorified soul and body.

You can believe everything I have said and that is not the same as having faith in Christ.

In the United States Evangelicalism we have reduced Jesus to our ticket to heaven. We simply say a little prayer and poof we go to heaven. Faith in Jesus is not simply saying you believe enough to slide into heaven but to follow Him as the Lord of your life, RIGHT NOW.

Not in the future.

Not as if your life has categories. My Sunday religious life, then my work life, my sex life, my home life, my career life, my hobby life, my family life, etc….

Upon the fact of the resurrection, I surrender my whole self to Jesus and the Kingdom of God right now. I am now, not just going to heaven, but to live in the life in power of the Kingdom here. My whole self, my whole life, my whole intellect, my whole person now devoted to Him.