

His Resurrection Series

April 12, 2023

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-6

1. In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

2. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

3. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

4. And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead *men*.

5. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

6. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

Summary: A unique characteristic of Jesus.

“His Resurrection”

Today I would like to address one question...

Why should anyone believe in Jesus?

1 Peter 3:15 says we should “always be ready to give ...a reason for the hope that is in [us]...” If you have:

• Listened to the radio
• Watched TV • Read the newspapers ANY TIME IN THE LAST 25 - 30 YEARS

You might have noticed that the world does NOT hold Christianity in the highest regard. In fact, Christians are commonly the object of ridicule by skeptics in politics, TV and legal circles. These powerful circles of influence give the appearance that there is no reason to believe in Jesus.

The question is: ARE THEY RIGHT???

For our own faith, and the faith of others, it is critical for us to be able to give a reason why we believe in Jesus.

My goal with tonight's lesson is to give you good sound reasons to believe in Jesus and to show you why the resurrection of Christ was so unique.

Let's look at verse 6 and I want us to see seven very important words from the bible, words that capture the central reason why anyone should believe in Jesus.

They were spoken by an angel...to a small group of broken-hearted women. These women had just returned from a tomb where a few days earlier, their master, their cherished friend – Jesus – had been buried. But now his body was missing. And these women didn't know where it was or who had taken it. And in the midst of their grief and confusion, an angel appeared. And in the heart of his message were seven of the most powerful words that the world has ever heard.

Those words are found in Matthew 28:6 – "He is not here; he has risen."

Words, with profound implications, telling of the first and only person in all of history who had conquered death.

These words conveyed an idea totally contrary to mankind's belief in the absolute permanence and finality of death. Yet the angel proclaimed that what was impossible for man had been accomplished by God:

"He (Jesus) is not here; he has risen!"

So, for 20 centuries, the world has wrestled over the truth of these seven powerful words:

Think about it, the greatest attacks on Christianity have been against the resurrection and for good reason. Believers and Non-believers alike understand that the resurrection is the cornerstone of Christianity.

If Jesus rose from the dead, then Christianity is true.

If he did not, then it is false. It is that simple.

So, the question of whether we can or should believe in Jesus is dependent upon whether the resurrection happened.

Are the seven words of the angel true? Did Jesus really die and come back to life? Is there evidence to support our belief?

Let's briefly consider what is at stake.

The implications are huge!

If the resurrection did happen... then it proves:

- 1. Jesus has power over death.**
- 2. You can personally trust him with your eternal destiny. Because he predicted and fulfilled his own resurrection, which means you can trust the promise he made to you about his intention to raise you from the dead.**

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

- 3. All other religions are false. We've all heard someone say, "It doesn't matter what you believe so long as you are sincere". But that's not true.**

Romans 10:8-17

I can be sincere and still be absolutely wrong. I can sincerely believe that the airplane I am flying in will land just fine. But if the wheel falls off during landing, no amount of sincerity will prevent the plane from crashing. It's the same thing with our belief in Jesus. Either he rose from the dead... or he did not. Sincerity is irrelevant.

If Jesus claimed to be the ONLY way to God (which he did in John 14:6), then his rising from the dead is the stamp of approval from a completely truthful God saying that Jesus is in fact the only way to Heaven.

EVERY OTHER RELIGION IS FALSE. I find it amazing that every religion claims to know how to conquer death, but none except Christianity claims a leader who actually did conquer death.

If, however, the resurrection did NOT happen...

Then the implications are summed up by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:14... “if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”

What Paul is saying is that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then:

1. Jesus is a liar or at a minimum a lunatic.
2. Christianity is false.
3. You have, and I wasted our life believing in Jesus’ supposed ability to save us from death.

There is a lot at stake here! So, did he rise from the dead?

To answer our question, we need to examine 2 things:

1. EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION
2. BEST of the FALSE THEORIES AGAINST the resurrection.

I. Evidence for the Resurrection

We do not have a “blind faith”. God does NOT ask us to believe things for which there is no evidence. But instead, He has graciously given us an abundance of evidence.

Let’s begin by reading an account from Luke...

Luke 24:1-12 “On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” Then they remembered his words. When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not

believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.” John 20:14-18 adds to this saying that after meeting the angels, Jesus revealed himself to the women, they were eyewitness.

Let’s examine the evidence.

1. Empty Tomb - You would expect that if a resurrection occurred, then the tomb would be empty, right? Of course. But is the “empty tomb” enough evidence – by itself -- to convince us that Jesus rose from the dead? The answer is **NO**. Neither the empty tomb nor the testimony of the women – by themselves – convinced the apostles. (Today the eyewitness testimony of the women is good evidence, but in ancient Israel, unfortunately a woman’s testimony was unacceptable in court). The women were convinced, but the disciples needed more proof. And they – like we – will get it.

2. The change in the Disciples’ attitudes after the resurrection. –

Before the resurrection, they were cowards. Hiding in shadows...afraid of being discovered as followers of Jesus. **AFRAID OF BEING KILLED**. After the resurrection, they were fully committed. Boldly claiming Jesus’ resurrection in the presence of enemies. (Acts 2:25-36)

QUESTION: What caused such a radical change in their attitudes? Was it the empty tomb? The testimony of people who talked to angels.

The bible tells us in John 20:19-20 “On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.” **THEY SAW HIM WITH THEIR OWN EYES!!!!** No other explanation can account for such a complete turnaround in their behavior.

QUESTION: Is their change in attitude good evidence that they in fact saw him alive? **ABSOLUTELY... BUT WE HAVE EVEN MORE.**

Let’s look at the next piece of evidence...

3. Disciple's willingness to suffer. - At one point in the Old Testament Book of Job 1:6-12, 20-22, God tells Satan to look at Job. God is pleased with Job because he seeks to do what is right in God's eyes. So, Satan asks the question of God. "Does Job fear God for nothing?" "You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." In essence... You've given him all good things. THAT's why he follows you. NOT because he loves you. As we know, Job passed the test.

Nothing shows others the sincerity of your beliefs more than your willingness to suffer and sacrifice for it. And the disciples suffered for their testimony that Jesus had risen from the dead.

They endured whippings, stoning, hunger, shipwreck, beatings, poverty and imprisonment. They could have easily avoided all of this BUT they REFUSED to stop telling people that Jesus rose from the dead AND that they personally saw Him. Not that they HEARD Jesus was alive, but that they SAW him themselves.

4. Willingness to die. - As if a willingness to suffer years of persecution were not enough evidence of the apostle's conviction to the risen Christ, the Bible and church history give us the confirmation of their willingness to gladly die rather than deny the resurrection. Some people might suffer and die for what they believe to be true, but no one in religious history was ever willing to gladly suffer and die for what they knew to be a lie. If anyone ever recants a false story, it is when they are faced with certain death. The apostles could have denied the resurrection and saved themselves. But they knew it was true and therefore considered this life of little value compared to their commitment to Jesus.

If the disciples knew the resurrection was a lie, would they have died for it? Of course not. They saw him with their own eyes. Touched him with their own hands. They knew he was alive and had conquered death. And THAT accounted for their change in attitude, their willingness to suffer and their willingness to die as martyrs to prove to the world that the resurrection actually happened.

5. Apostles Miracles after the resurrection. - Mark 16:20 “Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.”

Jesus performed miracles and so did the apostles. Thousands of people joined the church because of the testimony and the miracles performed by the disciples in Jesus’ name. Could a dead Jesus perform miracles? Of course not.

6. Conversion of Paul. - I love this piece of evidence primarily because of its irony. The greatest hater of Christianity turns into its greatest friend and defender. Suffering for many years and giving his life for his testimony that he too saw the risen Jesus.

7. The existence of the Church. -There must be a reason it exists today, for it to have existed this long. We’ve just seen the evidence supporting the resurrection; now let’s see what arguments the skeptics can throw up against it.

II. The Best of the False Arguments Against the resurrection.

1. The “JESUS FAINTED” Theory/Argument - Now the “Fainting” theory suggests that: Jesus did not actually die on the cross. He simply fainted while on the cross. The soldiers thought he was dead and took him down. Put him in a tomb. Revived by the cool air. Got out of the tomb. Went to his disciples. Who then believed he had conquered death. Thus the Christian church was born. Sounds possible right? Wrong!

There are huge problems the theory that Jesus fainted on the cross. Notwithstanding the fact that it’s pure speculation without a shred of historical evidence to back it up. It is not believable because of three reasons:

1. Jesus’ physical condition - Before the crucifixion, Jesus is whipped to the point that he needs someone else to carry the cross to the area of execution. During crucifixion, Jesus’ hands and feet are pierced with heavy nails about the width of my finger. A Roman soldier stabs Jesus in the side with a spear to make sure he is dead. And we are supposed to believe that someone in this condition – in desperate need of medical attention – convinced his followers that he had conquered death? It doesn’t make sense.

2. The next problem with this theory is “The Roman soldiers” themselves. These men were killing machines, skilled at inflicting death. I mentioned that

one of them put a spear into Jesus' side to make sure he was dead. There's a reason for that. In ancient Rome: if a roman soldier took a criminal off the cross before he was dead, the Roman soldier had to take his place on the cross. Therefore, is it likely or in any way believable that the Roman guards would have taken Jesus off the cross before he was REALLY dead, knowing that they would have to take his place? No.

3. The final problem with this argument is the Tomb itself. This argument would have us believe that while this "fainted Jesus" was in the tomb, the cool air revived him. He then was able: to take off his grave clothes. Find the tombs opening -- in the dark. Then roll a 2,000-pound stone away from the opening. Fight off a group of highly-trained Roman guards – by himself. Walk on spike-pierced feet – to find the apostles. And then in his tortured, horribly disfigured condition, prove to them that he had conquered death.

Who would have believed a Jesus who came to them in this condition? Would you? I certainly would not have. Yet somehow Jesus came to them in such a way that the apostles did believe and gladly laid down their lives for him after years of hard service spreading the word of his resurrection. Does it sound at all possible that Jesus fainted on the cross and that's how the disciples mistakenly thought he had risen from the dead? No, of course not.

2. "PEOPLE LOOKED FOR JESUS IN THE WRONG TOMB" THEORY.

This theory can be dismissed very quickly because of what would be necessary for it to be true: Let me explain: Jesus is laid in the tomb. The Gospels tell us at various places that everyone knew which tomb it was. The women knew, the apostles knew, the Jews knew, and the Roman guards guarding the tomb knew. But this theory would have us believe that the women went to the wrong tomb. Then the disciples went to the wrong tomb? Then the Jewish leaders? Then the roman soldiers? Did no one remember where they buried Jesus?!! Then to top it off...no one looked in any other tomb?

Certainly, if there was any question about which tomb it was, the Jews and the Romans would have opened up every other tomb in the area. But they didn't, because they knew which tomb, he had been buried in. The fact that no one searched the other tombs is all the evidence we need to dismiss this false theory.

3. "THE DISCIPLES STOLE THE BODY" theory.

This theory can also be dismissed quickly. If they had stolen the body, would they have suffered and died to try to convince people to believe in a dead man who had lied to them. No one in all of religious history has willingly suffered for years and then died as a martyr while knowing all along that what they believed in was a total lie. This theory is nonsense.

4. "UNKNOWN PERSON(S) STOLE THE BODY OF JESUS" theory.

If this happened, the disciples would still know that their testimony was a lie. They died for their testimony, which was that THEY saw Jesus after the resurrection. Not that they heard about it from someone else. We can trust their testimony. This theory as we see doesn't hold up to even a bit of scrutiny.

5. "WILD DOGS ATE JESUS' BODY theory. ... (Under the general heading of "Nobody Knows where the body is".) The skeptics are grasping at straws now. They just don't want to believe. Instead of admitting that the evidence for the resurrection is insurmountable, this argument says simply "We don't know what happened to Jesus' body, but He couldn't possibly have risen from the dead because we just don't believe in miracles". It is interesting to note that often this last argument is what is at the heart of atheism and skepticism – a refusal to believe in God or anything miraculous.

So, because they refuse to believe in Jesus, they look elsewhere. Man searches the stars with powerful telescopes, looking for the starting point of the universe, but refusing to come to Jesus – the one who set the universe in place. Man uses powerful microscopes to probe the depths of the atom trying to find order in life but refusing to come to Jesus – the one who brings order to life. Archeologists probe the earth digging through layers of dirt searching for the origin of man, but refusing to come to Jesus, the Author of Life. As we have seen, the atheist is willing to believe, without firm evidence, in any attempt to deny the overwhelming evidence of the truth of Jesus' resurrection.

Why don't skeptics want to believe in the resurrection?

(1) A total refusal to believe in miracles – REGARDLESS of the evidence. (And the resurrection certainly qualifies as a miracle).

(2) Because they love sin. Think about it Christianity mandates repentance from sin. They choose sin over submission to Christ.

Summary: I believe in Jesus because the evidence shows that he rose from the dead. And because he conquered death, I can trust that his claims about the way to eternal life are true. If a lack of evidence has stopped you from trusting Jesus with your soul and your future, I hope these words today have helped you see that there is overwhelming evidence proving that Jesus rose from the dead. If a desire to hold on to your sin is what is stopping you from giving your life to Christ, then no amount of evidence will change your heart.