

ST Augustines. Easter Sunday. 27.3. 2005

Why was it necessary for God to raise Jesus from the dead?

The other day as I was looking through some literature relating to this sermon, Abby came in to the study. She had been watching her favourite Christmas animation about Mary and Joseph and the birth of baby Jesus at Bethlehem.

Anyway, in she walked, very solemnly carrying a water bottle and a margarine tub and something else.....realizing what she was doing, I quickly switched from reading about empty tombs to playing the role of Mary -

“ I bring you frankincense” she said, and gave me the water bottle.
“Thank you” I replied, and took it.

“ I bring you myrrh ‘, she said, giving me the margarine tub, which I just as solemnly took, saying “ Thank you “.

Then she gave me the third gift – “ I bring you scissors” !!

(It made me laugh too!)

How bizarre, I thought.

Here am I, trying to find stories and illustrations for my Easter Day sermon, and Abby comes in pretending to be a wise man from Christmas!

But then it dawned on me - **Christmas without Easter would be meaningless!**

If there was no Resurrection of Jesus, no-one would have bothered to record the events of his birth – why would they?

Christmas without Easter, or perhaps I should say Christmas without ***‘Resurrection’***, would be meaningless.

And you can't have a Resurrection Sunday without a Good Friday either

that Jesus physically rose from the dead is a truth we state it in our creeds each week.

And those church leaders who deny that it is *necessary* to believe the physical resurrection of Christ; who actually state that they themselves **don't** believe it, are to be pitied more than any others.

As Paul says in 1 Cor 15 v 19

“ If only for **this** life we have hope in Christ,
we are to be pitied more than all men...”

For a Christian church leader to say ‘ *Christ has not been raised*’ means that both their preaching and their faith is useless. **What is the Christian faith, if Jesus is still dead in the ground?** If that were the case, we would not really be forgiven by God and millions of Christians would have been **living under delusion** for almost 2000 years – in which case **all** of us then should be ‘pitied’. **That's around one billion followers worldwide.....**

Far too many people these days have no clue about *why* we celebrate Easter, and what it is really all about. [incidentally, the name Eastre itself does in fact date back to an ancient pagan festival of the dawn goddess whose name was ‘Oestre”]

Perhaps we should get away from the pagan name we have borrowed, and call today **‘Resurrection Sunday’** – there are in fact *some* churches who like to think of *every* Sunday as R. S. like at Taize – a religious community in S. France where **they relive the events of Good Friday, holy Saturday and the resurrection every w/e of the year!**

As far as most schools are concerned – this is now the ‘*spring break*’, yet in my memory at least, it was always called ‘the Easter holidays’ . And Christmas seems to be just **‘the** holidays’ now. It’s no longer ‘happy *Christmas*’ on the TV commercials, but ‘happy holidays’.....It seems to me that everybody is too worried about offending somebody else, so we go over the top about it and try to adopt *politically correct language*....that means there must be no Christian references at all.....

A little story.....

One Palm Sunday, a Sunday school teacher asked her class if they knew what happened that 1st Easter, and why it was so important.

One little girl spoke up saying "Easter is when the whole family gets together, and you eat turkey and sing about the pilgrims and all that"

"No, that's not it" said the teacher

"I know what Easter is" a second child piped up' "Easter is when you get a tree and decorate it and give gifts to everybody and sing lots of songs"

" Er, no not quite" replied the teacher.

Finally a third child spoke up,' Easter is when Jesus was killed, and put in a tomb and left for 3 days"

"Ah thank goodness," thought the teacher "somebody knows something...'

But then the child went on " then everybody gathers at the tomb and waits to see if Jesus comes out, and if he sees his shadow he has to go back inside and we have 6 more weeks of winter".

The joyful Easter greeting

" Christ is risen -
he is risen indeed, Alleluia!

we should shout at the tops of our voices ; for it is the absolute central truth and tenet of the Christian faith.

AS Paul states, if Jesus was **NOT** raised from the dead, the Xian faith is worthless.

ON the other hand, if JC **DID** rise from the dead,

- it substantiated his claims to being God;
- we can be sure that there **is** forgiveness of sins and life after death,
- we can be confident God has visited this planet and proven his love for us
- that JC **is** the Way, the Truth and the Life....

Now of course we have no photographs or film footage that can show a dead man getting up, rolling away a stone, leaving behind his grave-clothes and walking out of his tomb!

(Even if that **had** been possible, plenty of people would say it was a hoax, pulled off by an actor.....)

But clearly *something* happened in first century Palestine that had a *remarkable* effect on a small group of frightened disciples who hid behind locked doors after Jesus' death.....// and has had a remarkable effect upon our world. What is the best explanation for this?

Well, lets take a look at The Empty tomb. (the following few paragraphs are taken from an article by Michael Horner in 'the ezine 'Retirement with a purpose')

What are the historical arguments for the empty tomb?

Here are some-

First, the origin of the Christian movement being geographically in Jerusalem would have been impossible without the empty tomb. If the tomb still contained the body, no one would have believed the disciples' story of the resurrection. But thousands did believe. The founding of Christianity in the *same* city where Jesus was publicly killed and buried demands that the tomb was empty.

Second, the written account describing the burial is widely recognized as being historically credible. The inclusion of Joseph of Arimethea as the one who buried Jesus in his own tomb is one of the many reasons most scholars accept the accuracy of the burial story. It is highly unlikely that fictitious stories about a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling class, could have been pulled off.

Third, the earliest anti-Christian propaganda confirms the tomb was empty.

The Jewish religious leaders *themselves* claimed the disciples stole the body.

The fact that they never denied that Jesus' tomb was empty, but only tried to explain it away is persuasive evidence that the tomb was in fact empty.

Historically, this is evidence of the highest quality because it comes from the opponents of Christianity.

Fourth, the fact that Jesus' tomb was never venerated as a shrine in the first century indicates that it was empty. It was customary to set up a shrine where a holy man's bones lay. There were at least 50 such sites in Palestine at that time. The absence of such a shrine for Jesus suggests the bones weren't there.

Fifth, the testimony of the Apostle Paul implies the tomb was empty. Writing in about AD 55, Paul quotes an old Christian saying that *Jesus died, was buried and rose on the third day*. The idea that a person could be raised from the dead while the body remained in the grave would have been nonsense to Paul's Jewish mind. The Jewish concept of resurrection was extremely physical. Paul is clearly assuming and implying an empty tomb here. As the theologian Dr. W.L.Craig points out, "*Were this not so, then Pauline theology would have taken an entirely different route, trying to explain how resurrection could be possible, though the body remained in the grave.*" (*Assessing the New testament*. The Edwin Press. 1989 p 359)

Moreover, this saying concerning the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus as quoted is too early to be legendary. Paul would have learned it in his first two years as a convert, or at least no later than AD 36 when he visited Peter and James in Jerusalem. Thus, this formula is no later than five or six years after the resurrection, not enough time for legend to dominate.

Then there are the objections that are sometimes brought up about the resurrection: for example -

The Conspiracy Theory

What about the claim that the disciples stole the body? Although this theory may seem plausible at first, biblical scholars have universally rejected it for nearly 200 years. However, since it is often still offered as an explanation for the empty tomb at a popular level, its worth a glance.....

The conspiracy theory is morally, psychologically and physically impossible.

It is hard to deny that the disciples were at least sincerely devout men who tried to pursue the righteousness that Jesus taught them. The conspiracy hypothesis forces us to regard them as cheap frauds and cunning deceivers, quite inconsistent with the ethics of their own writings. And what did they gain from this deception: **power, wealth, prestige**? No. **Rejection, contempt, torture, and ultimately, martyr's deaths!**

Remember that the disciples were defeated, despondent and afraid after Jesus' death, hardly in the frame of mind to plan a daring heist. In addition, it is psychologically impossible that one of the disciples could have convinced all the others to follow such a scheme without someone breaking rank or spilling the beans sometime in the next 50 years. **People don't die for a lie when they know it's a lie!**

Then there is the problem of the guards at the tomb making it physically impossible to steal the body. It cannot be emphasized enough that no modern biblical scholar would for a moment entertain the conspiracy hypothesis.

Not only was the tomb impervious to escape, it was also impervious to a break-in.

The Romans put a seal on the tomb. Matthew 27:65 records,

"Pilate answered, 'Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.' So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone."

A seal is a leather strap, placed around the stone at the mouth of the tomb, for the same purpose that a wax seal is stamped on letter envelopes. Not only does it further immobilize the rock, but it also reveals whether or not the rock has been tampered with from the outside. The disciples would not be able to steal Jesus' body without breaking the seal.

Also, **guards** were posted. Matthew 27:66 records,

"Take a guard,' Pilate answered... So they went... posting the guard..."

Could the disciples have overtaken the guards? No, they were no match for well-trained, armed Roman guards.

Could the disciples have stolen the body while the guards were asleep?

No, it is improbable that the guards would be so foolish as to all sleep at the same time. The fear of punishment by their Roman superiors would drive them to keep at least one soldier awake at any given time. Therefore, it is improbable that the disciples would have any chance of stealing the body unnoticed.

- Furthermore, the disciples were all tortured or killed for propagating the resurrection story. The historian **Eusebius**, around 300 A.D., records that
 - - Matthew was killed with a sword.
 - Mark was dragged through the streets of Alexandria.
 - Luke was hanged on an olive tree.
 - John was banished to prison on the island of Patmos.
 - Peter was crucified upside down at Rome.
 - James was beheaded at Jerusalem.
 - James the Less was beaten with a club.
 - Bartholomew was skinned alive.
 - Andrew was tied to a cross.

Now, if the resurrection story were a hoax, these tortures would have forced at least one of these disciples to admit to stealing the body. But none of them did. Therefore, no one stole the body.

Could one disciple have admitted to stealing the body, while the historians neglected to record it? No. Hoaxes don't last long once the truth is leaked.

For example, the skull of "**Pitldown Man**" was no longer taken seriously once the scientists discovered it contained ape parts.

The "UFO" circles made in the wheat fields of England were dropped from the headlines once the perpetrators admitted to making them.

Now if the resurrection story were a secret conspiracy, all it would take to break it would be for one disciple to admit to stealing the body. But such is not the case. The resurrection story survived, because all the disciples even under torture, held firm to their claim that **Jesus miraculously rose from the dead**. A hoax could never survive under such persecution.

The empty tomb itself did not produce a belief in the resurrected Jesus. For most of the followers it was Jesus physically appearing to them that led them to conclude that Jesus had risen.

So, Were the disciples hallucinating?

No. Too many **eyewitnesses**. The apostle Paul records in 1 Corinthians 15:6, "After that, He appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time..."

Moreover, even if the disciples *were* prone to hallucinations, it is improbable that their written testimonies of their visions would agree as they do. Have you ever experienced a hallucination? Maybe when coming out of an anesthetic or something? What kind of drug would cause the eleven disciples to have **all** seen a risen Jesus, preach the **same** story, and teach the **same** doctrine?

It is very unlikely, therefore, that even two of the disciples would have the same hallucination at the same time.

Well, maybe The disciples were mistaken?

No. There is very little room for mistakes here: Read the gospel accounts for yourself - notice Luke's attention to detail, and John's emphasis on having seen, heard, and touched the risen Jesus, the testimony of the other disciples, and the presence of the 500 other eyewitnesses we've already mentioned.....

Of course, once in a while, mistakes about events do happen, like a sighting of **Elvis**, leading many to the belief that *he* is still alive! Couldn't the disciples have been mistaken in the same way, aided by mass hysteria?

No. Jesus has the testimony of 500+ eyewitnesses. Elvis does not. The truthfulness of Jesus' witnesses were tested by torture. Elvis' witnesses were not! **Jesus' witnesses not only saw Him, but touched and heard Him as well.** Elvis' witnesses did not. Jesus appeared over a period of forty days. Elvis only for a brief moment in Kalamazoo. Jesus' witnesses had to be so sure about what they saw, in order to tell about the impossible. Elvis' witnesses had it too easy; their story is about a hero who simply went into hiding.

Perhaps Jesus never actually died in the first place – so he was able to escape out of the tomb – that's another objection sometimes suggested –

No. Impossible by natural means, because Jesus was dead. John's gospel gives evidence of that – " **when the soldiers came to Jesus, they found he was already dead, and did not break His legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear.....bringing a flow of blood and water.....**" (19.34)

Not only did the soldiers pronounce him dead, but a physician would explain that the flow of blood and water is clear evidence of death: "There remains, therefore, no supposition possible to explain the recorded phenomenon except the combination of the crucifixion and the rupture of the heart." (Samual Houghton MD in McDowell, J., Evidence That Demands A Verdict, 1979, p. 198)

Even if Jesus were to revive Himself, His burial would make it impossible for Him to break out of the tomb by natural means. According to John 19:40, Jesus was wrapped like a mummy, making it impossible for an ordinary man to escape:

Later, when Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. he was allowed to take the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.

As we have seen, Jesus was placed in a rock tomb which was sealed - Archeological excavations today reveal that the typical rock tomb during the Roman era would be impossible to escape from. Such a tomb was a simple cave, with solid rock on all sides. There would be only one entrance, blocked

by a wheel-shaped rock that was about seven feet in diameter. It would take several men to move the rock.

No, escape was impossible. Especially after considering that Jesus also underwent beatings, floggings, whippings, a crown of thorns, and blood loss, it would be impossible for a natural man to revive himself, and still escape from such a secured tomb. Although the greatest magicians have been known to escape from chained trunks, they could not do so after enduring the kind of torture Jesus went through.

So, What do you think?

If the resurrection account is not a hoax, nor an exaggeration, nor a hallucination, nor a mistake, **then what is it?**

This leaves us only two explanations to choose from. Either Jesus and the disciples were madmen, each and every one of them sacrificing their lives to deceive the world for an unknown motive, or that **Jesus really rose from the dead.**

John Singleton Copley, one of the great legal minds in British history and three times High Chancellor of England, wrote, *"I know pretty well what evidence is, and I tell you, such evidence as that for the resurrection has never broken down yet."*

So, what do you think ? Did it happen? Is Jesus alive?

And if he is, what are you going to do about Him?

At the end of his gospel, John wrote these words -

"These miracles are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:31)

Last week. Jonathan's sermon was called 'Why did Jesus die?' and if you were in church at all on Friday, you would have been reminded of that – Jesus died for the sins of the world.....

This week, in response, we could ask: Why did God need to raise Jesus from the dead?

Seems an unnecessary question first off.....doesn't it?

Heb 9.26-27 shows Jesus' work **was** as a sacrifice for sin –

*“ but now Christ has appeared once for all at the end of the ages
to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.
Just as man is destined to die once,
and after that to face judgement,
so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; ”*

Just as in Adam all die, as he brought sin and death to mankind by his disobedience to God's commands, and our human nature tends towards sin.... In contrast, **Jesus kept all God's commandments and lived a perfect life.**

The death of Jesus. However, could have no force at all as an effective sacrifice, if he had **not been raised from the dead**. Jesus, '*born of a woman, born under law*' (Gal 4.4) came under the same condemnation of death that we have inherited from Adam. He personally was free from Sin, therefore death could not hold him 'death has no more dominion over him' (see Rom 6.9)

The righteous principles of God could not allow such a man, who had perfectly kept his laws, to remain subject to the law of sin and death. In Acts ch 2. Peter tells us :

*“ God raised him to life again, setting him
free from the pangs of death, because it
could not be that death should keep him in its grip” (Acts 2.24)*

It was through the absolute justice of God as well as through his love for us that Jesus rose from the dead;

*“For God so loved the world that he sent his only
begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him
should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jn 3.16)*

When all is said and done, I need to answer this question for myself :
How do **I** know that Jesus is risen from the dead and alive for evermore?

And the simple answer is : because I've met Him.

When I was 14 and invited Jesus to be Lord of my life; when I gave my heart and life to him, it wasn't with a dead person that I entered this relationship.....but I encountered the **risen Christ** and became increasingly aware of His presence with me.

The forgiveness of my sins that I experience is very real – he sets me free from the *burden* of them; forgiveness is not only a truth from Scripture but a **living reality today**.... And freedom from the burdens of the past – *do you know what it's like to carry burdens from your past?* Well the good news is that the risen Lord Jesus can set you free from those burdens and hurts too.....

and the Peace!.....the Peace he brings really *does* pass all human understanding.....

I wonder.... if I were to ask you here this morning to raise your hand if you believe that you too have 'met' with the risen Christ, I wonder how many hands would go up/ I won't do that as I don't want to put anybody on the spot,.....but it would be interesting to ask yourself – '*can I say I have met Jesus? Do I know Him as my friend? My brother? Do I have a close relationship with him?*'

Well, it would be great and very convenient if we could hold in our hands some physical 'proof' of Jesus' resurrection wouldn't it?

- For in the end Jesus' victorious resurrection over sin and death is a matter of religious belief – of faith.
- IN the end, you cannot prove or disprove it. And that is why some people *believe* and some people do not believe. // You cannot conclusively **prove** it one way or the other –There just aren't any photos or video footage.
- IN the end we must fall back on the words of Jesus to Thomas:

" Thomas, you have believed because you have seen. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe." (John 20.29)

