

Basic Christianity

Part 13 – The Resurrection of Christ

The central issue of Christianity is the resurrection.

The Christian message hinges on Christ's resurrection from the dead.

Without the resurrection we have no Christianity.

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, how can we believe in someone who no longer exists?

..... how can we ask Him to take control of our lives?

..... how can we claim that He lives in our hearts?

Without the resurrection, Christianity is just another system of ethics.

But if, through His own power, He did rise from the dead, He's the only one who has – and therefore He must be who He claimed to be – God's Son.

The resurrection is the final indisputable proof.

But did He? Is there proof? Are there other valid explanations of the events described in the Bible?

1 Pet 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

You don't need to remove your brain when you come to Christ.

Our relationship with God is based on faith, but it's not unreasonable.

So we're going to look at some alternative theories and see if they can stand the test of pure reasoning.

There are three main alternative theories to the resurrection.

1. The Swoon Theory.

This theory claims that Jesus didn't actually die, but fainted on the cross and later revived and lived to be an old man.

Here are the facts:

1. Jesus was awake for at least 24 hours before crucified (9am).
2. He'd had no food since the previous night.
3. He was slapped and beaten by the Jews – Roman soldiers beat Him with a rod and their hands.
4. He was savagely whipped 39 times – people commonly died from this.
5. He was nailed to the cross and was there six hours before He supposedly fainted.
6. A spear thrust into His side – they decided He was dead so didn't break His legs.
7. He was taken off cross – apparently nobody noticed He was still breathing.
8. His body was bound tightly in strips of linen – 45 kgs of ointment.
9. He was placed in tomb with a huge gravestone rolled across the opening.
10. Roman soldiers stood guard to make sure there was no funny business.

So according to this theory, this is what happened.

Jesus was placed in tomb after having gone through all this – three days later, the cool of the tomb not only brings Him round, but invigorates Him to the point where, forgetting His loss of blood and the sickening wounds, He bursts out of His grave clothes, finds His way in the darkness to the cave opening, kicks out the boulder, punches out the guards and twaddles off down the road as if nothing happened.

Wouldn't someone have noticed as He walked down the street?

We know Jesus was dead because Pilate sent a centurion to confirm it before he'd allow the body to be removed from the cross.

In fact, when the spear was thrust into Jesus' side it tells us that blood and water came out.

That fact is worth more than a thousand eye witnesses.

Because it meant nothing to them, but today through modern medical science, we know that this means the sac surrounding His heart was pierced.

Jesus was dead.

The resurrection is much easier to believe than this theory.

2. The disciples moved the body and made up the resurrection story.

This sounds possible.

The disciples thought Jesus was the Messiah, the conquering King, and yet He was captured so easily and crucified.

They must have been very disappointed.

Even worse, they were embarrassed – sucked in by someone who claimed to be the God's Son and was then killed by ordinary mortals.

So to save face they secretly removed the body and made up the story of the resurrection.

Can't you imagine the disciples sitting around saying, "We're gonna look pretty stupid after all this. Let's tell everyone He rose from the dead." "But people are going to ask, 'If He rose from the dead, where is He?'" "Hmm, that's a toughie. I know, let's just say that He went back to heaven."

This may seem like a reasonable theory, but let's examine it logically.

1. How did this frightened little band of men overcome the guards? Especially if it was a trained Roman guard as is commonly believed.

a) Did they fight them, bribe them, or were the guards just asleep when they got there?

b) In fact, their being asleep is precisely what the Jewish authorities tried to say had happened. Matt 28:13

The guards came to the priests, scared out of their wits, and said an angel had appeared and Jesus was gone. The priests: "Okay guys, how much is it going to cost? Ten denarii, twenty, thirty?" "Well, it's tempting. But we won't ever get to spend it, because the penalty for falling asleep on guard duty is death"

So the priests said that if Pilate heard about it, they'd fix it up with him.

c) But if the guards were asleep, why didn't the priests find the disciples immediately, torture them till they fessed up where the body was?

It would have been indisputable proof that the resurrection wasn't true.

Answer – there was no body to produce and they knew it.

2. The second problem with this theory is that if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, and the disciples knew it, how is it that less than two months later these men who had fled for their lives and gone into hiding, fearlessly defied the authorities, risking their lives to preach that Jesus had risen?

Right in the middle of Jerusalem – in front of thousands of people.

What a transformation – obviously something dramatic happened to change these chicken-hearts into dynamic, courageous men willing to risk their lives.

Would you risk your life for something you knew was untrue, something you knew was a load of rubbish?

All the disciples except one (John) eventually gave their lives for Jesus.

Ask any salesman: you have to believe in a product if you're going to sell it – especially if you're going to give your life for it.

They could never have been that bold if they weren't utterly convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead.

3. The third problem with this theory is that four of the disciples were responsible for writing a large proportion of the NT.

That may not seem very important, but right throughout its pages the quality of truth is emphasised.

They strove to be models of honesty, encouraging others to do the same.

Yet we are asked to believe that the greatest moral code the world has ever seen is based on the greatest hoax ever perpetrated, based on a lie.

That's just not consistent with human nature – they couldn't have kept up the charade for the rest of their lives.

3. The Jewish or Roman authorities moved the body.

The authorities remembered Jesus said He would rise again.

So to prevent the disciples stealing the body and saying he'd risen, they hid it.

Or perhaps they did this to prevent the body becoming an object of worship.

Whatever the reasons, this theory states that the authorities moved the body to a secret location, the women found the empty tomb, and the dopey disciples assumed that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Here are some problems with this theory:

1. Pilate would not have wanted anything to do with the body of Jesus.

a) He washed his hands of whole affair and was reluctant to get involved in first place (having previously sent Jesus to Herod).

He was most likely glad the whole thing was over.

b) The only times Pilate was involved again was when a priest named Joseph requested Jesus' body (he allowed it only after a Centurion confirmed Jesus' death), and he also gave permission for the guard to be placed at the tomb.

c) Pilate didn't initiate any of this – he was busy enough without worrying about Jewish religious arguments.

2. Why would the Jews move the body? It was in their best interests to just put a guard at the tomb to ensure no-one could steal the body and claim He had risen.

But if they had decided to move the body to a secret place and put the guard at the empty tomb, they could easily have disproved any claims of a resurrection.

The disciples say, "He's risen". The priests produce the body and say, "Well, what's this Gonzo? Duh!" That would be the end of any resurrection rumours.

Why didn't they do that? Again, there was no body to produce.

Instead they bribed the guards to say they'd slept while the disciples stole the body.

3. If the disciples assumed Jesus had risen, they got a lot of mileage from a very shaky theory.

They even claimed to have seen, spoken, touched, and eaten with Him.

All on the basis of a mistake.

There's no way they would have given their lives for such a vague belief.

Conclusion

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the cornerstone of the Christian faith.

If Jesus didn't rise, then Christianity is the greatest hoax ever.

All these opposing theories fall down because they contradict themselves – they don't make any sense – they're impossible.

Sherlock Holmes is quoted as saying: "When you have eliminated everything that is impossible, then what remains, no matter how improbable, is the truth."

Based on the facts that are known to us, the only possible option is that Jesus actually rose from the dead.

And yet sometimes people just don't want to believe in the resurrection – not because it's silly or doesn't make sense.

But because if Jesus really did rise from the dead, then He was more than a good man, more than a prophet or a great teacher.

He was who He claimed to be – the actual Son of God.

And if He was the Son of God, His claim of authority extends to all of creation and the only reasonable response is to submit our lives to Him.

Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." (John 11:25)

It was an invitation to trust Him.

How do we know that Jesus rose from the dead? The evidence tells us He did.

Knowing Christ is the best life anyone could ever have.

And it's a gift – Jesus bought it with His death and resurrection.

The resurrection isn't just a cute little story – it's the reason for our faith.

Jesus died on the Cross to pay the penalty of our wrongdoings – to demonstrate how much He loves you and me.

And the resurrection was the proof of the reality and power and love of God, our Creator.

If you don't know the Lord, what will be your response to Christ's claims on your life?