

Article: DR153

THE RESURRECTION: MIRACLE OR MYTH?

This article first appeared in the From the President column of the *Christian Research Newsletter*, volume 5, number 2 (1992). For further information go to: <http://www.equip.org>

What was the central truth of the early apostles' preaching? What was the stimulus to the miraculous growth of the early church? What was the energizing force which spread the gospel across the face of the earth? These questions, posed by Dr. Walter Martin in his book *Essential Christianity*, all find their answer in the singular event of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. "He is risen!" was the victory cry of the early Christians, as they spread the message of Christ's bodily resurrection to the ends of the earth.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the very capstone in the arch of Christianity. When it is removed all else crumbles. It is, in fact, the singular doctrine that elevated Christianity above all the pagan religions of the Mediterranean world. And it is precisely because of its strategic importance to the Christian faith that each person who takes the sacred name *Christian* upon his lips must be prepared to defend its historicity.

Thus the question must be asked, How can we know beyond any doubt that Jesus really rose from the dead — that this singular event is not some queer predilection on the part of the Christian but is rather *faith* founded on irrefutable *fact*?

As Christians, we must be prepared to demonstrate that Christ's resurrection was an event that occurred in time and space — that it was, in reality, *historical* and not *mythological* (cf. 2 Pet. 1:16). The importance of this event cannot be minimized, for Jesus Himself proclaimed that His resurrection would prove His power over death, and thus His deity (John 2:18–22). Not only that, but Christ's resurrection is the very heart of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1–4).

When I first began examining the evidences for Christianity, I discovered that belief in the Resurrection does not constitute a blind leap into a dark chasm but rather a step into the light. Indeed, the evidence for Christ's resurrection is so overwhelming that no one can examine it with an open mind desiring to *know* the truth without becoming *convinced* of its truth.

Of the many evidences available, none is more compelling than the fact that the resurrected Christ appeared to over five hundred individuals *at a single time* (1 Cor. 15:6). Christ appeared to numerous other individuals as well, providing "many convincing proofs" of His resurrection (Acts 1:3). Christ in His resurrection body was even touched on two occasions (Matt. 28:9; John 20:17), and challenged the disciples (Luke 24:39) and Thomas (John 20:27) to feel His wounds.

For those who continue to harbor doubts about the veracity of the biblical evidence, one need only point to Dr. Simon Greenleaf, the greatest authority on legal evidences in the 19th century. It is noteworthy that after examining the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Greenleaf suggested that any cross-examination of the eyewitness testimonies recorded in Scripture would result in "an undoubting conviction of their integrity, ability, and truth."

Despite the biblical evidence, some have suggested that Jesus' body was stolen from the tomb — by either the Romans, the Jews, or the disciples. However, even as we consider such alternative explanations, reason drives us back to the conclusion that Christ rose from the dead. Consider the following: We know that the *Romans* would have no reason to steal Christ's body. After all, they wanted to keep the peace in Palestine.

The *Jewish religious leaders* would also have no motive in stealing the body since that would only stir up the very movement they had tried to crush. Besides, if the Jewish leaders *had* stolen the body, they could have later *openly displayed* the body to prove to the disciples and indeed the world that Jesus had not really risen from the dead.

And certainly, the *disciples* wouldn't have stolen the body, for why would they choose to suffer and die for a cause they knew to be a lie? While it is conceivable that someone might choose to die for what they know to be the truth, it is inconceivable that hundreds of Jesus' followers would be willing to die for what they knew to be a lie.

Another theory that has been resuscitated (*ad nauseam* and *ad infinitum*) in a desperate attempt to explain away the Resurrection is the so-called "Swoon theory." This theory says that Jesus did not really die on the cross, but merely passed out and was later revived. However, this theory is hopelessly flawed. Think about it for a minute. Can you imagine that Jesus endured six trials, a crown of thorns, a Roman scourge, a crucifixion, a spear thrust into His side, the loss of a great deal of blood, going three days without medical attention or food, pushing a two-ton stone away from His tomb's entrance, and then *physically overcoming an armed Roman guard while walking on pierced feet*? No! The Swoon theory is ridiculous in the extreme. And yet, amazingly, some people continue to hang their hats on it.

After carefully examining all the evidence, one can only come to the singular conclusion that *Jesus did indeed rise from the dead and that He now lives to be our Lord and Savior* (Rev. 1:18). And let me emphasize that the resurrection of Christ is not just an Easter-time phenomenon to be celebrated in song and service. Rather, it is a truth that should daily fill us with eternal hope. Not only did the resurrection of Christ transform the disciples from cowards to lions of the faith, but His resurrection still continues to transform lives today. Because Christ lives, the Scripture says, we will live also. Indeed, in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, we shall be transformed into physical resurrected bodies like unto His resurrected body.

— Hank Hanegraaff