

## **Sermon 3: The Resurrection**

### **OUTLINE**

- The resurrection narratives
- The external sources
- The empty tomb
- The grave clothes
- The post-resurrection appearances
- The transformed disciple
- The unique resurrection

### **INTRODUCTION**

The resurrection is the lynch pin of the Christian faith. If Jesus had died and not been raised we would be lost, 1 Cor. 15:17 (ESV) "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." There is much that we need to say about the significance of the resurrection but in this study we will be concerning ourselves with the fact of the resurrection. The resurrection has been denied from many sides. There are those who deny the resurrection on certain scientific assumptions. That because we don't see dead people resurrecting today, therefore it could never happen. There have been other theories such as Jesus only swooned and did not die, and revived in the cold tomb. Or that Mary Magdalene who was love-struck, and a little crazy thought she saw Jesus because she really wanted to, but only saw the gardener. Or that the women approached the tomb in the dark and couldn't see that they went to the wrong tomb. Or that all the disciples were the victims of mass hallucination. Or that the Jews, or Romans, or disciples had stolen the body. Or as Islam believes, it was not Jesus who died on the cross, but Judas, satan, Simon of Cyrene, or another disciple, and therefore Jesus did not resurrect but was raptured and will return again one day. We will see from the evidence that we have that the overwhelming conclusion that is forced upon us is that Jesus truly did resurrect from the grave. More liberal views think that a physical resurrection is not necessary for our faith, and that Jesus rose spiritually and is now the good in every person. All these other theories cannot account for all the data that we have from both biblical and extra-biblical sources, the irrepressible conclusion is that Jesus has indeed resurrected from the dead. Not only because we accept this on the basis of the authority of God's word, but also because the evidence is best accounted for by accepting the Bible's testimony.

### **The resurrection narratives**

My primary sources for the info here is taken from James Montgomery Boice's Foundations of the Christian faith; and Gary R. Habermas, from various writings.

Boice's first point has to do with the narratives found in the 4 Gospels. Have you ever seen a program where there are a group of people who have conspired together to commit a crime and then lie about it? One of the tell tale signs that make it look suspicious is that they all sound the same. It reveals that they are hiding something and that their story is contrived. Well, the Gospel accounts do not have the contrived and conspired harmony to them. They do not contradict each other, yet they appear to be independent accounts. Boice says, "A first important evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is that of the resurrection narratives themselves. There are four of them, one in each Gospel; they are more or less independent. Yet they are also harmonious, and that suggests their reliability as historical documents."

(Boice: Foundations of the Christian faith, ch17).

Boice adds, "If four people had sat down together and said, "Let's invent an account of a resurrection of Jesus Christ" and had then worked out the details of their stories, there would be far more agreement than we find. We would not find the many small apparent contradictions. Yet if the story were not true and they had somehow separately made it up, it is impossible that we should have the essential agreement we find. In other words, the nature of the narratives is what we would expect from four separate accounts prepared by eyewitnesses." (Boice)

Now there are certain details which with a shallow read create problems, just the sort of problems that you would not find in a story that had been ironed out. Just the sorts of problems given if people were giving accounts independently of other accounts, not trying to make theirs fit with another. For example, "First, there is the variety of statements about the moment at which the women first arrived at the tomb. Matthew says that it was "toward the dawn of the first day of the week" (Mt. 28:1). Mark says that it was "very early on the first day of the week ... when the sun had risen" (Mk. 16:2). Luke says that it was "at early dawn" (Lk. 24:1). John says that "it was still dark" (Jn. 20:1). These phrases are the kind of thing the authors would have standardized if they had been working on their accounts together. But they are in no real contradiction. For one thing, although John says that it was "still dark," he obviously does not mean that it was pitch black; the next phrase says that Mary Magdalene "saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb." Presumably, the women started out while it was yet dark but arrived at the garden as day was breaking." (Boice)

Another example is one which has caused some to doubt the resurrection accounts, some think that the Gospel accounts give different accounts in that one emphasizes a group of women, but another just Mary Magdalene. However, if you have 2 independent accounts who are not trying to be exhaustive but are focusing on different aspects of the same event, and are not trying to harmonise their accounts, but give their own eyewitness account, you would expect this sort of variety. We need to test the accounts to see if they contradict, or if they correspond to and build up the other accounts. Boice highlights the following, "A second example of variation in detail in the midst of essential harmony is the listing of the women who made the first visit to the garden. Matthew says there were two Marys, "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary" (Mt. 28:1). Mark writes, "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome" (Mk. 16:1). Luke refers to "Mary Magdalene and Jo-anna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them" (Lk. 24:10). John mentions only "Mary Magdalene" (Jn. 20:1). Actually, one reference throws light on the others. Mark and Luke, for example, explain who Matthew's "other Mary" was. When we put them together we find that on that first Easter morning, when it was still dark, at least five women set out for the tomb: Mary Magdalene (who is mentioned by each of the writers), Mary the mother of James, Salome, Jo-anna, and at least one other unnamed woman (who fits into Luke's reference to "other women," which includes Salome). The purpose of their trip is to anoint Christ's body. They already know of the difficulty they face, for the tomb had been sealed by a large stone and they have no idea how they can move it. It begins to lighten a bit as they travel, so when they finally draw close to the tomb they see that the stone has been moved. That is something they were not expecting; so, although it suits their purpose, they are nevertheless upset and uncertain what to do. Apparently, they send Mary Magdalene back to tell Peter and John about the new development, which John himself records, although he does not mention the presence of the other women (Jn. 20:2). As the women wait for her to return, the morning grows lighter; eventually, emboldened by daybreak, the women go forward. Now they see the angels and are sent back into the city by them to tell the other disciples (Mt. 28:5-7; Mk. 16:5-7; Lk. 24:4-7).

In the meantime, Mary Magdalene has found Peter and John, who immediately leave her behind them and run to the tomb. John records their view of the graveclothes and points out that it was at this moment that he personally believed (Jn. 20:3-9). Finally, Mary Magdalene arrives back at the tomb again and is the first to see Jesus (Jn. 20:11-18; compare Mk. 16:9). On the same day Jesus also appears to the other women as they are returning from the tomb, to Peter, to the Emmaus disciples, and to the others as they are gathered together that evening in Jerusalem." (Boice).

Another factor points towards the reliability of the Gospel accounts, and that they are not contrived accounts written to pull the wool over our eyes. Firstly, many of the disciples are described as not recognizing Jesus, that they doubted reports or were mistaken about His identity, e.g. Mary in the Garden (Jn 20:14), the disciples on the Emmaus road (Luke 24:16), Thomas (Jn 20:25), John 20:12. If you were constructing an argument for a lie you would leave out these detrimental details. However, if you were giving an honest account regarding an indisputable fact, these are just the sorts of reports you would expect. Secondly, if one were contriving an account of a resurrection to be believed you would not make your first witness a woman. In a court of law a woman's testimony would not be counted, this is a weakness if you were wanting to make something believable.

### **The external sources**

Gary Habermas has done some writing on the issue of historical method, and speaks about the different types of historical evidences we find, and their value in establishing the facts of history, Regarding the sources for the resurrection of Christ and His appearance to His disciples after His resurrection he says the following, "Beyond these six writings (The gospels, Acts, and 1 Corinthians), there are almost two dozen others from the ancient world that record well over 100 aspects from the life of Jesus. For those who like non-Christian sources, seventeen fall into that category. Of these, about a halfdozen, most notably ancient historians Josephus and Phlegon, record that Jesus appeared to His followers after His death. Such multiple attestation from about every possible category of data is also without parallel in the ancient world." There are no external sources that speak of Jesus as not having died and resurrected, there are no claims to have His body in a particular tomb. The external sources only confirm what is reflected in the Biblical accounts.

### **The empty tomb**

One of the main pieces of evidence is the empty tomb itself. Jesus died was buried, and His body is no longer there. The empty tomb has been seen as a problem by many people, because if it is true it points to the resurrection. So there have a been a number of theories propounded. Firstly, that the women went to the wrong tomb because they couldn't see in the dark. However, this theory is immensely weak for the disciples Peter and John also went to the tomb, during the day time and found it empty. And if at any point the Jewish authorities wanted to show that Jesus was in fact still dead they could have merely produced the body from the correct tomb. It never happens. Secondly, there is the theory that the Jews or the Romans stole the body and hid it. Various things militate against this theory. Firstly, the Jews and Romans at no point produced the body later when the apostles began preaching that Jesus was resurrected. Secondly, it would be counterproductive to their various causes to provoke the disciples to falsely believe that Jesus was risen. The Jews were trying to keep the Jewish populace in control as were the Romans. Thirdly, you have the difficulty of the grave robbers stealing the body but taking the time to unwrap it and leave the grave clothes behind. All the while Roman guards are outside. Thirdly, there is the view that the disciples stole the body, either the women or the other disciples. This view is given little attention when you realise what would happen to a Roman guard who left

his post, fell asleep, or lost his charge. The death penalty was handed out for neglect in duty, that ensured that the guards were attentive. Their lives depended on it, and we have no account of the guards being strong armed, and no charges brought against the disciples for anything like this. Also if we are going to believe that these disciples deliberately stole the body and lied, we have to go further and postulate that all the apostles were willing to die, and be beaten for that lie; and that all the other 500 witnesses mentioned in 1 Cor 15 were deluded. Fourthly, there is the view that Jesus merely swooned on the cross and revived due to the cool of the tomb, and the smell of the spices when He was buried. That He shook Himself loose from the graveclothes, rolled away the stone, escaped the attention of the guards and was able to make His disciples believe that He had conquered death, being able to suddenly appear in a room, and keep His identity revealed in plain sight. John Stott puts it like this, 'are we to believe that after the rigours and pains of trial, mockery, flogging and crucifixion He could survive thirty-six hours in a stone sepulchre with neither warmth nor food nor medical care? That He could then rally sufficiently to perform the superhuman feat of shifting the boulder which secured the mouth of the tomb, and this without disturbing the Roman guard? That then, weak and sickly and hungry. He could appear to His disciples in such a way as to give the impression that He had died and risen, could send them into all the world and promise to be with them unto the end of time? That He could live somewhere hidden for forty days, making occasional surprise appearances, and then finally disappear without any explanation? Such credulity is more incredible than Thomas' unbelief.'" (The new evidence that demands a verdict, p259). The Romans who were masters and perfectors of crucifixion, experienced army men who had seen death and been trained to kill, these were the ones who had killed Christ and confirmed His death to Pilate. The fact that Christ's legs did not need to be broken to speed death, that He was stabbed with a spear to confirm His death, and that His body was released upon the word of the officer in charge. We should not doubt that He did in fact die and resurrect. The resurrection gives the best accounting for the empty tomb.

### **The grave clothes**

When Peter and John arrived because of Mary's report, the tomb was empty but for the grave clothes. Of special interest to us is John's account because he is said to have believed when he saw the grave clothes. John 20:1-10 (ESV) "Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. [2] So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." [3] So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. [4] Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. [5] And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. [6] Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, [7] and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. [8] Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; [9] for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. [10] Then the disciples went back to their homes." What made John believe when he saw the grave clothes?

John's account indicates to us the way Jesus was buried. He appears to have been buried in the typical style of burial for that day. The body was wrapped in linen clothes from the top of the arms to the soles of the feet. The shoulders, neck and face were exposed, and then a type of turban was placed around the head. You will notice in v6-7 that the two parts of the linen are still lying there, in tact, but there is no body inside them. It appears as if the body has passed through the grave clothes without disturbing them. So there is now a gap

where the neck and face once were. And the turban is still folded as if worn. When John saw this He knew a miracle had happened. We are told He did not know it had to happen, or that it happened in accordance with prophecy, but that the appearance of the grave clothes alone led him to believe a miracle of resurrection. It has been pointed out that John's account gives the impression not just of an eye witness but of a careful observer. He notes that it was dark, that they were running, that John ran faster, that Peter looked first, that the grave clothes were still folded. These details draw our attention to the peculiar detail of the graveclothes. It has been pointed out that they would have been wrapped and stuffed with a sticky substance, and a lot of powdered spices. If someone had tried to steal the body, unwrap it and rewrap it, there would have been a mess. But what John saw did not lead him to think that someone was playing a prank, but rather that God had done a miracle of resurrection.

Some have asked whether the shroud of Turin is legitimate. Based on the evidence that we have from John's Gospel I do not believe that it is. The shroud is no doubt intriguing for it has the wounds as Christ had. There is no evidence of decomposition, the image seemed to be burned onto the clothe in a type of radiation, and there is no evidence of other mediums to make the image. Carbon dating however places it in the late medieval period, but this has been argued and the claims made that the part of the fibres tested were affected by a Church fire. I go with Scripture, not the Shroud as interesting as it is.

### **The post-resurrection appearances**

Josh McDowell gives the following accounts of the post resurrection appearances of Christ found in the Scriptures.

1. To Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9, John 20:14)
2. To the women returning from the tomb (Matt 28:9-10)
3. To Peter later in the day (Luke 24:34, 1 Corinthians 15:5)
4. To the Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:13-33)
5. To the other apostles without Thomas (John 20:26-29)
6. To the apostles with Thomas present (John 20:26-29)
7. To the 7 by the Lake of Tiberias (John 21:1-23)
8. To the 500 plus (1 Corinthians 15:6)
9. To James (1 Corinthians 15:7)
10. To the eleven and gave the great commission (Matt 28:16-20)
11. On the day of the Ascension (Acts 1:3-12)
12. To Paul (Acts 9:3-6)
13. To Stephen (Acts 7:55)
14. To Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:9)
15. To Paul in the temple (Acts 22:17-21, 23:11)
16. To John on Patmos (Revelation 1:10-19) (p250)

There are those who claim that Mary Magdalene had been hallucinating, however as we view this impressive list of post resurrection appearances we can see that the eye witness account does not rest on one person's testimony. Some have tried to say that the sightings can be attributed to mass hallucination, however, the conditions necessary for hallucination are not met. Habermas has these points against the view that this resulted from Hallucination. 1. hallucinations are private experiences but we see 500 experiencing the same 'hallucination'. 2. Jesus appeared to various types of people, and different group sizes making the hallucination theory impossible. 3. hallucinations spring from hopeful expectations. The disciples showed no such high hopes but rather appeared to have their hopes dashed. 4. hallucinations are not sufficient to account for the radical transformations experienced by the disciples that they were willing to lay down their lives, 5. that cynical

James was converted by a resurrection appearance, .6. and Paul, a persecutor of the Church. 7. the hallucination theory also has no accounting of the empty tomb. (Five views on apologetics). We could add as well that hallucinations are not able to eat, be touched, clung to, touched, etc which was the experience of the disciples.

### **The transformed disciples**

Various disciples were dramatically affected by the resurrection giving further support to the resurrection. Firstly, consider Peter who had denied Christ, yet is preaching boldly on Pentecost. A man who had failed, who had entertained the possibility of going back to his old life of fishing, but was then restored by Christ to the ministry. Secondly, consider Thomas. We know of his doubt that he refused to believe unless he saw things with his own eyes. And when he saw he gives us one of the most profound professions of Christ as God in the Scriptures (John 20:28). Think of James, the Lord's half brother, who during Christ's life did not believe (John 7:5). However, after an appearance we see that he becomes one of the leaders in the fledgling church (Acts 15), as well as Jude another brother writing one of the epistles in the NT. Or Paul, a man who was well educated, zealous, and bent on destroying what he was already convinced was a blasphemous and dangerous movement. But when Christ appeared to him on the Damascus road we see that he does a 180 turn and begins preaching the very Christ he was bent on denying.

Add to this the holy lives lived, the selling of property, willingness to end Jewish exclusion and include Gentile as equal covenant members, the commitment to missions, the willingness to be martyred for Christ. All of these truths bear overwhelming testimony to the Bible's claim that Jesus is risen from the dead.

### **The unique resurrection**

Some have suggested that the disciples made up the account of Christ's resurrection, that it is merely a case of wishful thinking giving expression to the religious beliefs of the day. They say that because many wanted to believe that he rose, and because these poor naïve pre-scientific people were prone to believe myths, they spread the myth of Christ's resurrection. There are many problems with this hypothesis.

Firstly, the notion of the first century Jews being pre-scientific and not knowing the difference between a fact and a myth is extremely prejudicial. For example, think of Joseph when he first heard the news of Mary's virgin conception. Joseph thought that she had been unfaithful and sought to put her away, and was not automatically gullible.

Secondly, the resurrection of Christ is unique from the views and expectations of the day. The Jews had come to believe in a universal and bodily resurrection of the dead at the end of time. Daniel 12:2, 'And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.' Bodily resurrection apart from that end times event was not part of the expectation of the Jews. Think of Jesus discussion with Martha at Lazarus' tomb. John 11:23-24, 'Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."' Added to that we can see by the depression of the disciples after Jesus crucifixion and death that they were not waiting in eager anticipation for Christ to rise but thought that all was lost. The idea of one rising from the dead apart from the universal resurrection was not part of the Jewish belief system. Some Jews of the day, namely the Sadducees denied a bodily resurrection at all. The Greeks of the day denied bodily resurrection thinking that a bodily resurrection would be a step backwards and not forwards because they viewed the body as evil. So between the orthodox view of a universal

resurrection at the end of time, no bodily resurrection and no resurrection at all, which religious belief are the disciples borrowing from? None!

Thirdly, the expectation of the coming Messiah was not one of a Messiah who would come and die and rise again, but one who would come in military conquest to subjugate Israel's enemies. If you wanted to fabricate a believable Messiah story this would not be the way to do it. And added to that to claim that this man who was raised is also God as Thomas confesses in John 20:28 was not part of an underlying belief system from which naïve people could predictably draw on to fabricate an identity story for Jesus. Which monotheistic Jew would dream up a story of worshipping a person who had died as God, never mind the Messiah? The facts of the resurrection were too outlandish for any monotheistic Jew who had a certain view of the Messiah and resurrection to dream up.

If we take all that evidence and we put it all together as a cumulative case and we test it by all the other theories, the best explanation of the evidence is that Christ rose from the dead and He was observed by the witnesses. This is the most plausible explanation. I hope you can see the intelligibility of the Christian position, it is not intellectual suicide.

Paul tells the Athenians in Acts 17:30-31, 'The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,<sup>31</sup> because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.'" You cannot hear these facts and say, 'O that is interesting,' and go on as if nothing had happened. If Christ has risen, you will rise from the dead to stand before God to give an account of your life. All sin will be punished. Do you think you will go unpunished before the perfect judge who never reneges on justice? Do you think you will be seen as a good person by the one who can read your mind and has seen all your secret intentions and actions? There is no hope for a sinner like you and I to stand on judgement day and be found innocent. This is why Christ died and resurrected. He died to pay our sins debts, and rose to give us eternal life. He is calling you to stop sinning, and to bow the knee to Him. He is willing to grant an amnesty and forgiveness to all who are willing to receive Him as their God and Saviour. The resurrection proves all this to be true. Do not delay!