

Grace Church
Roanoke, Virginia
Dr. Jack L. Arnold
Elementary Apologetics
Lesson #15

WHY I BELIEVE

The Resurrection of Christ

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The word “resurrection” means a rising from the dead or a return from the dead and always in the Bible refers to the resurrection of the body. There can be no resurrection of the soul or spirit for these cannot die.
- B. In a world of atheistic science, philosophical confusion and religious superstition, does the Christian have any objective basis to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Is it intellectually sensible to believe in resurrection or it is just an emotional binge? Every Christian must face this honestly in his heart!
- C. The Bible teaches that the whole Christian faith rests upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If it is true that the Christian faith rests on Christ’s resurrection, are there any objective facts that would help us prove this. Truth is based on facts, not feelings.
- D. It may be confidentially asserted that as an event the resurrection will stand up to the most rigorous and exacting examination, and remain unshaken. In fact, Matthew Arnold called the resurrection, “The best attested fact in history.”
- E. Of course anyone who wished to throw doubt upon the fact of resurrection may do so. But in so doing he will reject all acknowledged standards of historical proof, and doubt the trustworthiness of all historical records. In all history a certain amount has to be taken upon trust. Some sources have to be accepted, otherwise there can be no history. As historical sources, the New Testament records may qualify without prejudice. Even if a person does not acknowledge the inspiration of scripture, he must, if he is to be intellectually honest, recognize the New Testament as reliable history.
- F. Sir Edward Clarke, K.C., wrote to the Rev. E.L. Macassey, D.D., the following:

As a lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter Day. To me the evidence is conclusive. And over and over again in the high court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on evidence, and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect. The Gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class, and as a lawyer I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate. (J. R. Stott, Basic Christianity)

II. EVIDENCES FOR CHRIST'S BODILY RESURRECTION

- A. The Old Testament Scriptures: For hundreds of years before Christ ever came into this earth it was prophesied that He would be raised from the dead (Jonah 1:17; Isa. 53:10-12; Psa. 16:20 cf. Matt. 12:39-40).
- B. Christ's Own Words: Christ Himself many times told His disciples that He would be raised from the dead (Matt. 12:40; 16:21; 17:9, 22-23; 20:18-19; 26:32; Mark 8:31; 10:34; John 2:19-22). As the God-Man, Christ had to keep His word concerning His resurrection. If He deceived His disciples, He could not be trusted, thus disqualifying Him to be Lord and Savior. If we cannot accept His words concerning His resurrection, then we cannot accept anything else Christ taught.
- C. The Empty Tomb: The body of Jesus on Easter morning was not in the grave. Some explanation must be given to this fact. The one piece of evidence which would have squelched the faith of the early Christians could not be produced – the dead body of Jesus Christ. The Bible states that Jesus Christ supernaturally rose bodily from the grave after lying there for three days as a dead corpse (Luke 24:38-43).
- D. Grave Clothes Untouched: According to John 19:38-42, Christ's body was wrapped with linen and expensive spices, weighing about 200 pounds. The body was wrapped from the feet to the shoulders and a napkin was placed around the chin and head, and would harden the wrappings when they dried. According to John 20:5-7, the grave clothes were lying completely intact. They may have been collapsed because of the heavy spices but they had not been unwrapped; the spices would have made the linen clothes impossible to unwrap. The napkin around the head was wrapped up and the original Greek could be translated twisted up. It may well be that the napkin was in its original convolutions, standing up with a rounded shape which was left from the shape of the head as the body moved physically through the grave clothes. The stone slab, the collapsed grave clothes, the shell of the head cloth and the gap between the head cloth and body showed that Christ's body has moved through the clothes in a resurrected body.

E. The Appearance of the Lord After the Resurrection to the Disciples: Luke, an accurate historian, indicates that Jesus Christ proved His resurrection by many infallible proofs (Acts 1:3). Our Lord appeared at least 15 times to various ones after His resurrection. He revealed Himself to men and women, individuals, small groups and large groups, in different geographical locations and under various circumstances. Our Lord's appearances are as follows:

1. Mary Magdalene (John 20:14-18).
2. Group of women (Matt. 28:9-10).
3. Peter (Luke 24:34; I Cor. 15:5).
4. Two Emmaeus Disciples (Luke 24:13-31).
5. Ten Disciples, minus Thomas (John 20:24-29).
6. Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John and two other disciples at the sea of Tiberias (John 21:1-23).
7. Eleven Disciples (John 20:24-29).
8. Five hundred brethren at one time (I Cor. 15:6).
9. James (I Cor. 15:7).
10. Eleven Disciples at a mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16-20).
11. Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6).
12. Paul in the temple at Jerusalem (Acts 22:17-21).
13. Paul at Jerusalem (Acts 23:11).
14. Stephen at His Martyrdom (Acts 7:55).
15. John on the Isle of Patmos Rev. 1:10-19).

Jesus Christ talked with the disciples. They ate with Him. They saw His physical form. They saw His hands and feet and side where the nails and spear had pierced. They touched the wounds. Our Lord did not just appear to a few but to hundreds and the testimony of these all agreed and harmonized.

- F. The Changed Life of the Disciples After the Resurrection: The Gospels present the disciples as despondent, disillusioned and at the point of despair because of Christ's death. But in the book of Acts they emerge as men who endanger their lives for the person of Christ and they go everywhere teaching the death and resurrection. Fearful and denying Peter became a believing rock. Doubtful James became a leader of the church at Jerusalem. Pragmatic Thomas became a missionary to India. Why? Because of the resurrection. They were convinced. The resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost made them literally new men. It was the resurrection which gave the disciples power, and the resurrection which was the content of their message.
- G. The History of the Christian Church: The resurrection of Jesus Christ has been a pillar in the church since its very inception. Wilbur Smith says,
- The resurrection entered intimately into the life of the earliest Christians; the fact of it appears on their tombs, and in the drawings found on the walls of the catacombs; it entered deeply into Christian hymnology; it became one of the most vital themes of the great apologetic writings of the first four centuries; it was the theme constantly dwelt upon in the preaching of the antenicene and the post-nicene period. It is in the creedal formulae of the church. (Smith, Therefore Stand).
- H. The Fact of the Christian Church Today: The fact that there are believers today shows that these people have experienced the resurrection power of the living Christ. After 2,000 years men are still experiencing the resurrected Christ in their lives. If any business was operated in the manner which the church of Jesus Christ has been operated down through the years, it would have long since lost its existence. The fact of its presence today shows that someone is in this group, alive and eternal.
- I. Day of Pentecost: Three thousand souls were saved on the day of Pentecost. Had they doubted the resurrection they could have walked a few blocks and examined the tomb or talked to the Jewish leaders or the disciples. But none doubted.
- J. Changing of the Day of Worship from Saturday to Sunday: (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2). The day of worship would have reverted back to Saturday if the resurrection had been just a hoax. All the early Christians were converted Jews who before conversion held tenaciously to the Sabbath (Saturday). Only the resurrection can account for this change of the day of worship.

III. HARMONIZATION OF THE RESURRECTION IN THE GOSPELS

A. Rejectors of the resurrection often point to the fact that the scriptural account of the resurrection in the Gospels do not completely harmonize. They claim that because there are some discrepancies in the scriptural record that the whole foundation for the historical fact of the resurrection is insecure.

B. OBJECTIONS

1. The records agree as to the main facts of Christ's resurrection; the discrepancies are only to minor details.
2. The apparent discrepancies are historically a guarantee of authenticity. It shows that these four gospel writers were eyewitnesses of the resurrection event and the broad features are broadly stated.
3. All apparent discrepancies may not be contradictions but lack of knowledge on our part because we do not have all the historical facts to fill in the gaps of the resurrection account as seen in scripture.

IV. CONCLUSION

- A. To believe in Christ's resurrection is intellectually acceptable and is based on the accurate facts of scripture which is reliable history. If the resurrection could be disproved, then and only then would the church go out of existence. The resurrection has not been disproved in 2,000 years, and it will never be disproved.
- B. Christian rejoice! Your Lord is risen! As Christians, we worship, are united to, and serve the resurrected and living Christ who is the Head of the Church, His Body (Col. 1:18).