

How Do We Know That Jesus Christ Rose From the Dead?

It is no secret that the entire Christian faith is built upon the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The claims of Jesus Christ to be the Son of God depend upon his bodily resurrection from the dead. The truthfulness of all that Jesus taught also hinges upon his bodily resurrection from the dead. If he did not rise again as he promised, then he is a fraud. And worse than that, we are still in our sins.

But this question has far reaching ramifications for the rest of the world as well. If Christ did rise again, then the question of world religions is over. After all if Jesus conquered death and as a result validated his unique standing as the God-man, then he is in truth Lord of all! If Christ rose again, then all are accountable to him. If Christ rose again, then all are compelled to worship him and confess him as their own personal Lord and Savior. Failure to do so will result in eternal loss.

We come then for a brief examination of this most important question: *How do we know that Jesus Christ rose from the dead?*

The Testimony of the Empty Tomb

In an attempt to explain away the resurrection some people claim that Jesus never really died. However, the gospels make it very clear that Pilate would not release the body of Jesus for burial until his death was confirmed. In fact, the centurion in charge was called before Pilate to confirm that Jesus was dead. Only then would Pilate grant permission for Joseph of Arimathaea to take the body for burial.

Furthermore, the day following the burial of Jesus Matthew's gospel tells us that *"the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch (guard): go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch."* It is a historic fact that Jesus died at the hands of Pontius Pilate, was taken from the cross with Pilate's permission by those who prepared his body for burial, and that his grave site was secured by Pilate lest anyone tamper with his grave.

Now the Scripture tells us in Matthew's gospel, *"In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week . . . there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it . . . and for fear of him the guards did shake, and became as dead men."*

Those guards wasted no time getting away from the tomb. By the time the women arrived at the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus the guards were gone. And to the surprise of the women who arrived first at the tomb that early morning, the great stone that had covered the entrance to the tomb was rolled away. The Scripture says, *"And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him."* Again in Luke's

gospel it says of those who entered the sepulcher that they “*found not the body of the Lord Jesus*” (Luke 24:3).

Right here is the greatest evidence of the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. His tomb is empty! Later when the apostles gave powerful witness to the resurrection of Jesus all the enemies of Christianity needed to do to silence the apostles was to produce the dead body of Jesus. But they could not! The empty tomb was clearly there for all of Jerusalem to see. So how could they explain the empty tomb? The only explanation for the empty tomb that the enemies of Jesus could come up with was the pathetic idea that the disciples had stolen the body. They actually spread that lie. And believe or not, some still believe the lie that the disciples stole the dead body of Jesus. But my friend, a simple examination of the circumstances should dispel that idea completely.

In order to steal the body of Jesus from the tomb the disciples would have to first over-power a band of rugged Roman soldiers guarding the tomb. Then they would need to move the huge stone from the entrance of the tomb. Then they would take the dead body and carry the corpse to some other location with the full knowledge that as soon as the Roman authorities caught up with them they would be put to death. All of that for a dead man! No, no my friend! The disciples did not steal the body of Jesus.

It is important to point out right here that the disciples were not in any state of mind to even attempt to steal the body of Jesus. Please remember that the death of Christ in public humiliation crushed the spirit of the disciples. They were confused and disillusioned. They thought Jesus to be the promised messiah and now he was dead. All their hopes were dashed to pieces. Afraid and uncertain as

to what the future held for them they were in hiding from the authorities. They had neither the motivation nor the means to steal the body of Jesus. Simply stated the disciples did not steal the dead body of Jesus from that tomb.

Rather, the real explanation for that empty tomb is this: *on the third and appointed morning the Spirit of God visited that tomb and raised Jesus from the dead!* When news of the resurrection came to Peter and John they both ran to the tomb. And when John arrived he looked into the tomb and saw the *empty* grave clothes! But when Peter got there he went all the way into the sepulchre and not only saw the empty grave clothes, but he saw the napkin that had been around the head of Jesus *not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.* Think about the implication of what they saw. The body of Jesus was gone and mysteriously the cloth used to wrap his head was neatly folded and laid aside from the other grave clothes. Can't you see the picture Scripture is painting for us? Here is what happened. The power of God visited that tomb and the dead body of Jesus was quickened and raised from the dead. Then Jesus removed the napkin about his head, folded it and laid it to the side. Then with a mighty earthquake the angel of the Lord rolled away the stone and the glorified Christ walked out of the tomb!

His Enemies Could Not Produce His Dead Body

Next, it should be pointed out that the enemies of Christ actually confirm the resurrection. As mentioned above, to dispel the resurrection all the enemies of Christ needed to do was produce his dead body. If there was no resurrection surely those who painstakingly secured the tomb to prevent such a rumor from ever

occurring in the first place would follow-up on the misguided claims of a resurrection in order to fully embarrass those who claimed Jesus rose from the dead. In so doing the discovery of the dead remains of Jesus would have for ever squelched the preposterous claims of the Nazarene who claimed to be “the resurrection and the life.”

However, those who participated in the crucifixion of Christ and who had the most invested in destroying his memory completely could not disprove the resurrection. They could not produce his dead body. Remember that all of Jerusalem was aware of the death of Jesus and it was common knowledge that Joseph of Arimathaea, a well known prominent Jew, buried him in his own new sepulcher. No doubt many in the city visited the tomb for themselves and discovered that it was empty. They soon heard the false report instigated by the Pharisees that the disciples came and stole the body. But they knew the tomb was guarded by the Roman authorities. How then were the disciples able to steal the body? And if they did steal the body, why is no one tracking them down and recovering the dead remains to disprove the whole idea of a resurrection?

The enemies of Christ could not overcome the reality of the empty tomb. Nothing they put forth could provide a satisfactory explanation. Soon they would be engaged by the bold preaching of eyewitnesses who testified to them and the world that they had seen the resurrected Christ. These passionate men were the same ones who watched him die and who just a few weeks earlier were hiding in fear of their lives at the hands of these same men.

Mark this down: *the enemies of Christ could not produce his dead body and Jerusalem's well informed knew this to be the case. Their inability to produce the dead body of Jesus serves as a confirmation of his resurrection!*

By the Testimony of the Roman Soldiers Guarding the Tomb

Matthew's gospel states that "*there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it . . . And for fear of him the keepers (guards) did shake, and became as dead men . . . behold, some of the watch (guard) came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done*" (Matt. 28:2, 4, 11).

Please note that there was no doubt among the soldiers as to what happened at the grave site. They felt the earthquake. They saw the stone rolled away. They heard the report to the woman, "*Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said*" (Matt. 28:5-6). These seasoned Roman soldiers became as dead men in the face of all they experienced! And at least part of them went immediately to the chief priests and elders to report the empty tomb. In light of this report the only option available to the enemies of Christ was an attempt to hide the truth from the general population. How wicked! How devious! How akin to their father the devil to instigate a lie in an effort to cover the truth! But understand this: *those Roman soldiers actually testified to the empty tomb!*

By the Testimony of the Jewish Rulers Who Sought to Oppress the Truth

As previously noted the Jewish rulers could not produce the dead body of Jesus. In fact, they knew in light of the testimony of the Roman soldiers at the tomb that they could *never* produce the dead body of Jesus. Their actions to facilitate a cover-up actually bear testimony to the reality of the resurrection. Sadly Matthew reports that this fabricated lie was "reported among the Jews until this day." At the time Matthew wrote his gospel this lie was still in circulation. Perhaps this lie remains a stumbling block for some until this very day. But know this: *this lie*

was only needed because they had no other way to deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

By the Eyewitness Accounts of Those Who Saw and Talked with the Risen Christ

How do we know that Jesus Christ rose from the dead? We know because of the overwhelming testimony of eyewitnesses. *Hundreds of people saw Jesus alive from the dead!* (1 Cor. 15:6). The bodily resurrection of Jesus was confirmed by those who saw him and touched him and talked with him after the resurrection. The apostles in particular were called to be witnesses to the world of the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Hear the testimony of these men. The apostle John said, “. . . *we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father . . . that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled . . . for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us; that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you...*”

The apostle Peter said, “*For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty . . .*” As well, the book of Acts declares: “*And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.*”

All these men had the same conviction. The Jesus they walked with for three and one-half years, the Jesus they communed with at the last supper, the Jesus they forsook as he was tried, the Jesus they saw beaten and humiliated, the Jesus they saw die in shame, the Jesus they knew to be buried in a rich man’s tomb WAS NOW ALIVE AND HAD CONQUERED DEATH!

Thomas expressed their conviction best. When he saw the risen Lord he bowed at the feet of Jesus and said, “*My Lord and my God.*” Remember, Thomas is famous for his skepticism. He did not immediately embrace the truth of the resurrection. Even though the others testified to seeing Christ he refused to believe until he could see the Lord for himself. A week later, Thomas was confronted by Christ and invited to touch the scars in his body and not to doubt but to believe. Upon seeing the Lord he bowed at his feet and proclaimed, “*My Lord and my God.*” His doubts were over. He went on to serve as an apostle and an eyewitness to the resurrection.

The eyewitness testimony of hundreds who saw the risen Christ should be enough to convince anyone that he arose from the dead!

Conclusion

It should be briefly noted that the apostles went on to confirm the resurrection with many mighty works in the name of Jesus. Their testimony and those works bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the apostles gave their lives as martyrs in testimony to the overwhelming conviction that Jesus rose from the dead! They would not deny what they knew to be true. They could not deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

It should also be noted that the church founded upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles and Jesus Christ himself the chief cornerstone, cannot be explained apart from the bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead. The existence of the church for the past nineteen centuries bears testimony to the risen Christ who prophesied that he would build his church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it!

And finally, we have the testimony of the written Word of God. The record God gives of His Son in Holy Scripture is emphatic. Jesus arose from the dead!

The resurrection of Christ is central to the whole New Testament and then ends with the message of the future Revelation of the risen Christ at his second coming. The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is beyond doubt. Only those bent upon persisting in willful unbelief deny the resurrection of Christ. However, it is possible for all to come to a place of repentance instead of travelling the road of unbelief. We simply must turn as the Spirit of the Lord convicts our heart with the truth of the gospel. Here is God's promise to all who will believe upon the resurrected Christ:

“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God HATH RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD, THOU SHALT BE SAVED.” Amen!