



The Resurrection of Christ

“He was dead ... He was buried ...
He was raised”



1. The Empty Tomb

- a. The wide majority of New Testament critics affirm the Gospels' assertion that Jesus' body was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea (*Mark 15:42-47*). The proposal of John Dominic Crossan (of the Jesus Seminar) that Jesus' body was laid in a shallow grave, and later eaten by wild dogs, is not based on the evidence, and is contrary to the consensus of New Testament critical scholarship concerning development of the Gospels.
- b. The tomb was secure. The stone covering the entrance to the tomb was “very large” (*Mark 16:4, cf. Mt 27:60*). A disk-shaped stone was probably rolled down an inclined groove and lodged into place. The Roman government took precautions to make sure that the tomb was secure (*Matthew 27:62-66*). In response to the Jewish leaders' concerns that Jesus' disciples might steal the body, Pilate said to them, “*Take a guard...Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.*’ So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting a guard” (*Matthew 27:65-66*).
- c. On Sunday morning, the tomb was found empty. William Lane Craig offers the following arguments for the historical credibility of the empty tomb story.
 - The empty tomb is implicit in the creed passed along by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. It is generally agreed that this creed (set of fundamental beliefs) was a very early statement of beliefs common to the entire church, and not the product of later legend.
 - The site of the tomb was known. If it were not empty, it would be impossible for a movement founded on belief in the resurrection to have come into existence in the same city where Jesus was publicly executed and buried.
 - The source material for Mark's gospel is obviously early (perhaps no later than A.D. 37) and is much too early for legend to have seriously corrupted it.
 - Mark's narrative is written in a simple, non-apologetic style. It does not exhibit the characteristics of legend.
 - The unanimous testimony that the empty tomb was discovered by women argues for the authenticity of the story, because the testimony of women was regarded as worthless (women did not qualify as legal witnesses). If the story were invented, the first people to discover the empty tomb would certainly not be women.
 - The earliest Jewish polemic (refutation) presupposes the empty tomb (*Matthew 28:13-15*). The empty tomb was not denied. Instead, they claimed that the disciples stole the body.



2. The Post-Resurrection Appearances of Jesus Christ

- a. The testimony of Paul shows that the disciples saw appearances of Christ. At the end of the creed stated in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, Paul writes, “[Christ] appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep (died). Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born” (*1 Co 15:5-8*). As noted above (1.c), this creed is a very early statement of beliefs, supporting the historic credibility of the reported appearances.
- b. The Gospel accounts of the resurrection appearances are historically reliable. They are early, and the presence of living eyewitnesses would hinder significant accrual of legend.

- c. The resurrection appearances are historically credible. They involve a significant variety of people, locations, and reactions (*Mt 28:9-10; 16-20; Mk 16:9-18; Luke 24:13-49; John 20:11-31; 21:1-23; Acts 1:3-8; 9:1-19; 1 Co 9:1, 15:5-7*). The following are a sample:
- Appearance to the women. The fact that women were the first to see the risen Jesus lends credibility to the story (see 1.c above).
 - Appearance to the five-hundred (500). Paul wrote that most of these eyewitnesses are “still living.” Thus there were many people who could verify or refute Paul’s claims.
 - Appearance to James. Earlier skeptical and embarrassed concerning his half-brother Jesus (*Mark 3:21; John 7:1-5*), James became a leader of the church in Jerusalem (*Acts 15:13ff; Galatians 1:19; 2:9*) and was eventually martyred for his faith.
 - Appearance to Paul. Earlier very aggressive in his opposition to Christianity (*Acts 7:59-8:1; Galatians 1:13*), Paul became a fearless proponent of the Christian faith after his encounter with the risen Christ (*Acts 9:1-19*). He was eventually martyred.
- d. The resurrection appearances were physical, bodily appearances. Some critics contend that Jesus’ resurrection body was “spiritual” involving no physical reality. However, this is contrary to Paul and the Gospels, as well as the Jewish conceptions of resurrection.
- Paul teaches that our future resurrection bodies (modeled after Jesus’ resurrection body) will be “spiritual” (*1 Corinthians 15:42-49*). However, πνευματικός means “spiritual” in the sense of orientation, not substance (*cf. 1 Co 2:15*). It is a body fitted for the new age (that is, imperishable, incorruptible, immortal), as opposed to a “natural” body (which is perishable, corruptible, mortal).
 - The Gospels confirm that the appearances were physical and bodily. Every resurrection appearance in the Gospels is a physical, bodily appearance. As Jesus said to his startled and frightened disciples, “Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have” (*Luke 24:39*).



3. The Results of the Resurrection

- a. When Jesus was arrested, “all the disciples deserted him and fled” (*Mt 26:56, Mk 14:50*). During Jesus’ trial, Peter denied him three times (*Mt 26:69-74, Mk 14:66-71*). After Jesus’ crucifixion, his fearful disciples hid in a room and locked the doors (*John 20:19*). After seeing the risen Jesus, the disciples became fearless witnesses of the risen Christ (*Acts 3:14-15; 10:39-41*). They were willing to suffer and die for their beliefs (and most of them did). In general, people do not suffer and die for something they know is not true.
- b. Hardened skeptics, like Paul and James, were radically transformed as noted above (2.c).
- c. The Christian church was born as a result of the death and resurrection of Christ. The earliest Christians were Jews who abandoned cherished religious and social traditions to follow Christ. The early Christians were beaten, stoned to death, tortured, and crucified. Yet they remained peaceful, and the church rapidly expanded across cultures. Without the resurrection of Christ, the birth and growth of the Christian church is inconceivable.

Bibliography

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