

The Final Four---Objections to the Resurrection

As much as I like basketball, this final four has nothing to do with sports. This final four comes from the historical critics of the resurrection. In studying the most popular explanations that critics have come up with to explain the empty tomb of Jesus, something important jumped out at me—none of these supposed experts doubted the historical existence of Jesus. They also willingly admit that all of Jesus' followers believed and taught the resurrection as an historical fact. It struck me that credible and reliable historians were willing to admit that Jesus was a real person who lived in the first part of the first century and He had a large following of believers that testified that they witnessed His bodily resurrection.

What the Bible Says About the Resurrection

The Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would die and be resurrected. Peter said in Acts 2:25-31 that David was writing of the resurrection of Jesus in Psalm 16:8-11. Paul used Old Testament passages to prove the resurrection in Acts 17: 2-3. There are clear teachings that the Messiah was to die in Ps.22 and Isaiah 53 and that subsequent to that, He would reign forever (Isa.9:6, Daniel 2:44).

Jesus predicted His own resurrection in the New Testament. When His opponents asked for signs, Jesus said the only sign He'd give them was the sign of Jonah—as Jonah was 3 days in the whale so Jesus would be buried and raised on the third day (Matt.12:39-40). After driving out the moneychangers in Jn. 2:19, Jesus said the sign He would give them was that when they destroyed “this temple” meaning his body, He would raise it up on the third day. On the way to His last Passover in Jerusalem Jesus repeatedly told His disciples that He must suffer, be rejected, and be killed, and then on the third day rise again (Mark 8:31; 9:31).

The Bible clearly spells out for us why the tomb was empty in many passages like Matt. 28:6 “He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead...and behold, Jesus met them and greeted them”; then we are given at least 12 different appearances of Jesus. He appeared in bodily form to many people, in many places, many times over a 40 day period. He had long conversations, He ate with them, and they touched Him. It could not have been an apparition or an imposter. After all, He had the marks of the crucifixion to prove it. **DO YOU KNOW ANYONE ELSE ALIVE WHO HAS BEEN CRUCIFIED?**

The Final Four Explanations—the Concocted Theories

1. The Swoon Theory—this theory came from the 18th century rationalists, but it is not too rational. They said Christ never died, He just swooned or passed out so they thought

He was dead, but later He revived and His disciples mistook it for the resurrection. This is similar to the Muslims explanation in the Koran as well.

Problems of this explanation include: In the judgment of professional soldiers, Pilate, Joseph, and Nicodemus; Jesus was stone cold dead. He was embalmed in 100 lbs. of spices and bandages and laid in a tomb guarded by soldiers. He had undergone a tremendous loss of blood, major wounds to his hands and feet, and a spear was thrust in his side which pierced his lung and his heart releasing major blood and bodily fluids. Are we to believe that he revived, unwrapped himself, rolled back the large stone, broke the seal on the tomb, overcame the guards, and escaped? He then walked 7 miles to Emmaus, casually had a long conversation and a meal and walked back to Jerusalem. More than anything, this would mean Jesus was a liar and perpetrated a fraud. That's not too rational.

2. Theft Theory—this theory originally came from the chief priests and was fraudulently made up by them and recorded in Matt. 28:11-15. This theory was that Jesus' disciples came in the night while the guards were asleep and took the body.

Problems: The disciples had no power to do this and no intentions. Precaution had been made to prevent this—between 60-120 soldiers had been stationed at the tomb specifically so his disciples could not get the body (Matt 27:64). The penalty for falling asleep was death. This would also mean the apostles were perpetrators of theft, a deliberate hoax, and the misleading of thousands. Would they have all died martyrs' deaths for this lie?

3. The Hallucination Theory—this theory said the appearances were not real. The witnesses were hallucinating, or (my favorite) they were victims of mass hypnosis.

Problems: In Luke 24:39, they touched and felt Him, He had flesh and bones, He ate with them many times and had conversations and long teaching sessions. Some people saw Him on more than one occasion. Once He appeared to more than 500 people at the same time. He walked and talked and ate with them. A large group of them even saw His ascension to heaven, and angels confirmed it (Acts 1:9-11). Don't forget the disciples were doubters, cautious, slow to believe, and skeptical; yet they unanimously came to believe in Jesus' resurrection.

4. The Wrong Tomb Theory—this theory was popularized by a liberal theologian named Kirsopp Lake, and I think it every bit as strange as his name. He theorized that when the women came to the tomb, the gardener responded, "He is not here" so the women rushed off, then the slow witted gardener continued, "He is over there", but alas they had already gone. This is good old Kirsopp's version of Matthew's account in 28:1-10, but if you read it you will be at a loss for how Kirsopp came up with this. Are we to believe Peter and John made the exact same mistake? Mark 15:47 says the two Marys were watching closely at the burial and knew exactly where He was laid. Why were the soldiers there at that tomb as well as the angels? The fact that so many people embraced a goofy theory by a guy named Kirsopp tells you how desperate people are to find an alternative explanation for the empty tomb.

Conclusion—Why Jump Through Hoops?

No other religion claims its leader rose from the dead—it is unique to Christianity. If you can disprove the resurrection, then Christianity is just another religion, one of many and you can pick and choose because they are all the same. If Jesus is alive and sits at the right hand of God, then all His claims are vindicated. Jesus is the Son of God, the one and only provision for the sin of man, and all will be held responsible for accepting Him or rejecting Him. Therefore, people who have already rejected Him must explain away the empty tomb and the many appearances of Christ, and the multitude of witnesses. The pride of man is so great, that rather than admit their sin, humble themselves before the Lord, and receive their Savior---they would rather believe a guy named Kirsapp.

Christmas vs. Easter

Why is Christmas more popular than Easter? Why do even non-Christians celebrate Christmas? It is the difference between a birthday party and a funeral. Almost everyone gets sentimental at Christmas because it is a birthday celebration of a great man. They like the nativity scene, the cute baby in the manger, and the lambs and donkeys. Any fool can feel like a Christian on Christmas, but Easter is different. Easter is threatening, even though it is the main event of Christianity. The authors of the Bible made no effort to preserve the date of Jesus' birth, but we know the resurrection was the Sunday after Passover. We don't even know what month or part of the year Jesus was born in, but we know exactly when He was resurrected. Easter is threatening because it celebrates the resurrection of Jesus, and if you don't believe in it you are not a Christian, and you are not saved. For Christianity to be true there must be a risen Savior, and if Christ is risen, then everyone who is not in Christ stands condemned. This is the sobering reality, yes even the threat of Easter. This is why people have gone to such great lengths to try to explain away the resurrection.

Hope

The world's hope involves dreams of vain glory, riches, power, fame, etc. These are all fading illusions, but biblical hope may be defined as desired expectancy in the promises of God. As Paul said, "in this body we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from Heaven" (the resurrection body). We greatly desire it, and we expect it because God who accomplished it and guarantees it for us is able and willing and unchanging in His purpose. The authors of the New Testament repeatedly tell us God has raised Jesus from the dead, and He will also raise us who are in Christ from the dead to live with Him in eternity. This is where our greatest hope lies.

Death has always been the great enemy feared by all. Christ has defeated it on the cross, and His resurrection proves that death is no longer master over those who believe. As Isaiah predicted, "God will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord will wipe away tears from all faces" (Isa.25:8).

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