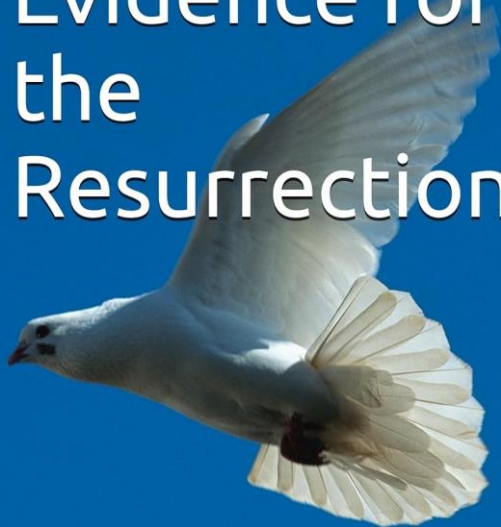


The Evidence for the Resurrection



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By David A. DePra

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Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews. (John 20:19)

Imagine a group of confused, exhausted, and fearful men and women, huddled together in a locked room, afraid for their lives. With each sound they hear, their hearts leap. With each voice they hear outside, they fear it may be the authorities coming for them. Only three days before, Jesus had been arrested, tried, beaten, and crucified. And everyone knew they

had been with Him. Would they be next?

How had things come to this? The disciples had left everything to follow Jesus. For three and one-half years they had seen Jesus do miracles, heal the sick, cast out demons, and raise the dead. They had heard teaching that had never been given before. God had become REAL to them. In fact, they, themselves, had gone out, two by two, and done miracles in Jesus name. Above all else, they had been eye-witnesses to a perfectly sinless man.

As John writes:

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, of the Word of
life; (For the life was
manifested, and we have seen
it, and bear witness, and show
unto you that eternal life,
which was with the Father,
and was manifested unto us"***
(1 John 1:1-2)

But now Jesus had been crucified. The unthinkable, the impossible had happened. How? They had been certain, and had confessed, that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God. The fact that He was now dead cast a doubt on whether anything they believed about Jesus was true. A dead Messiah? No such thing had ever been considered in Israel.

Notice the two-fold problem: Their lives were in danger. But worse, their faith had been shattered. Where were they to go from here?

Well, it was late in the day that first Sunday following the crucifixion. Three days had passed since the disciples' world had come crashing down. They rehearsed the events of the last week, trying to make sense of them. But they could not. All they could do is be afraid.

Earlier that day the confusion of these disciples only seemed to become more compounded. The tomb of Jesus had been found empty. Mary Magdalene had found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. Even Peter and John had seen that Jesus' body was

gone. (see John 20:1-10) Who would steal his body? And why?

Even more amazingly, some of the women had claimed to have seen Jesus alive.

John writes,

It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles." But the disciples did not believe. John continues, "And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. (Luke 24:10-12)

Alive? That was impossible! These disciples had no frame of reference, or expectation, for a

resurrected Messiah – for Jesus being raised. Vaguely they could remember Jesus saying some things about being raised up – but they really didn't understand what He meant by those words. He really didn't mean that He would die and be raised, did He? Indeed, they were so unprepared for the possibility that Jesus might be raised from the dead, that they did not even consider it upon seeing an empty tomb. They did not believe it even when some of the women claimed that they had seen Him alive.

So we find these disciples hiding that Sunday night -- in fear for their lives. Their faith dashed to pieces and wondering if they would ever be able to return to normal lives again? Again – where

were they supposed to go from there?

A Big Change

In just a few moments everything was going to begin to change. Something would change these disciples from being confused, fearful, and in hiding, to those who were clear, bold, and willing to openly proclaim a risen Christ. What changed them?

One thing is for sure: The danger to them had not changed. They were right to be afraid for their lives. Their Master and teacher, Jesus Christ, was executed for what He taught. And the probability existed that they also would be arrested for teaching His message. So what changed these disciples?

There is only one possible answer: They saw the risen Christ. Indeed, John writes:

Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." (John 20:19-22)

This would be the first of many appearances by Jesus after His resurrection. Paul would write:

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. (1 Cor. 15:3-8)

These appearances of Christ changed the disciples. There was yet an even greater change to

come, but at this point, seeing Him alive was enough. Once they saw that Jesus was alive, they were no longer afraid. They were no longer confused. Now things started to make sense.

Peter perhaps stands as the one representing the greatest change. Remember that he had been identified as being a disciple of Jesus the night Jesus was betrayed. He had denied Jesus three times in fear for his life. But in only 50 days from that Sunday night when he was in hiding with the rest of the disciples, the day of Pentecost would, "fully come." (Acts 2:1) It was Peter who boldly preached the very first sermon under the New Covenant; the very first sermon by a born again believer.

On that day, he boldly stood up and proclaimed to the crowds:

You men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as you yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be held by it....Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom you

have crucified, both Lord and Christ. (Acts 2:22-24, 36)

What changed Peter? Again -- only one thing could have changed him. He had seen the resurrected Christ. Nothing else can explain his willingness to risk his life to preach that Jesus had been raised from the dead -- nothing else can explain his boldness before many of the same people who had actually been responsible for crucifying Christ. Nothing else can explain why any of the disciples would take such a risk -- and keep taking it for the rest of their lives.

Fearing For Good Reason

The disciples' fear, of course, that they would suffer death for being followers of Christ, was not

without foundation. Their fears were confirmed right from the start. Every one of the apostles was arrested at some point, either as a group, or separately, within weeks of that day of Pentecost. They suffered persecution, at great personal cost, from that point forward. Every one of them wound up dying for their faith and their message -- except perhaps John. But even John suffered much persecution and even years of imprisonment.

Peter would be crucified at Rome in 67 A.D.. Thomas, who was the last of the apostles to believe Jesus had been raised, was lanced to death in India for his faith and message. Philip was executed in Turkey in about 90 A.D.. Andrew was crucified in

Greece about 69 A.D.. James, the lesser, was stoned to death in Jerusalem. Bartholomew was whipped to death. Simeon was another one of the apostles who was crucified, in N. Africa, about 61 A.D.. Jude was put to death in Persia in 65 A.D.. Matthew was martyred in Egypt. James, the brother of John, was one of the first to be killed, in Jerusalem, about 44 A.D.. Luke, the author of the gospel and Acts, was hanged by priests. Mark, who wrote a gospel, was dragged through the streets of Alexandria. Steven was stoned to death within weeks of Pentecost. And of course, Paul, who was not yet converted to Christ, would be beheaded for his faith.

The disciples were in hiding after the crucifixion. But after they saw

Jesus alive they were out opening proclaiming Him. They had been eyewitnesses to the most important event in the history of the world: The Resurrection of the Son of God. And Jesus was sending them out to tell people about it.

Theories

Most Christian people are probably unaware that there are 39 known references to Jesus Christ by non-Christian writers – outside of the Bible -- contemporary to NT times, or close to it. It is also a fact that in this day and age that even the most agnostic scholar does not deny the existence of Jesus Christ. That was not the case 50 years ago, but it is the case today – not even the biggest critics of

Christianity, who are scholars, deny that Jesus Christ actually lived. Neither does anyone deny the Jesus Christ was crucified. That may surprise some people, but it is a fact – the skeptics and agnostics know that the existence and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ are historical facts. And finally, neither does anyone deny that the disciples of Jesus Christ believed that He was raised from the dead, indeed, no one denies that they claimed to see Him alive. Again – these are recorded and verifiable historical facts. No one with any credibility disputes them.

What is disputed by the skeptics is that Jesus did, in fact, rise from the dead. Therefore, it must be explained as to WHY the disciples believed that He was raised. Did they simply INVENT

the story? In other words, were they, as a group, LYING? Or did they imagine that they saw Him alive – a mass hallucination? Or – did they actually see the Risen Christ? Really, those are the only three options: They were liars, lunatics, or they were telling the TRUTH.

First of all, the suggestion that the disciples were lying – that they had conspired to invent the story of Jesus' resurrection. This does not add up at all. Once the disciples claimed to have seen Jesus alive, they did not stay together – and try to start a movement. They didn't try to start a church. There was no scheme to make money or gain a following. No. They were in just as much in danger after they starting preaching as before – in

fact, in MORE danger. If they had invented this story of a resurrection, once they began to be arrested, beaten, and persecuted, they would have given up the lie.

We have to remember that we are talking about a much different world back then than we have today. Today there are countries where you can be executed for preaching Christ, but in those days, it was pretty much everywhere. This certainly was the case if you preached Jesus Christ Risen in Israel. After all, Jesus Himself had been crucified. The point being that the disciples had absolutely NOTHING to gain and EVERYTHING to lose by preaching that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. It is absurd to imagine that they

fabricated this big lie and then went around preaching it under those circumstances.

In addition, the apostles eventually went in different directions to distant lands to preach Christ. In these distant countries they were separated from each other – and again, they had NOTHING to gain and EVERYTHING to lose in doing so. People who conspire to invent a lie don't do that. They don't conspire to invent a story and then break up and never see each other again. The whole point of a conspiracy is to stay together for GAIN.

These apostles died when separated from the others by many miles. They were not executed as a group. They were

not hiding and then one night hauled off to their death. They died for what they believed – most of them thirty to forty years after the resurrection. No one would invent a resurrection story and stick to it at the cost of thirty or forty years of persecution and then death. If they thought inventing such a story was going to be gain to them, by thirty or forty years later they would have learned otherwise.

Not only that, but why invent a risen Christ? Get that. If you are going to lie about Jesus Christ in order to perhaps start a movement around His name, why not just make a martyr out of Jesus? Why not just say He was a great man and died for the Truth? Adding a resurrection to the story you are fabricating adds

something that is impossible to prove? They could prove He lived and that He died. Why complicate things? Plenty of religions are built on martyrs. Why not this one?

The apostles spent the rest of their lives preaching that Christ was raised from the dead, and almost all of them died for it. Of course, the fact that they were willing to die for what they believed does not prove that **WHAT** they believed was true. Lots of people have died for what they believe throughout history – and in many cases they were deceived. They died for a LIE.

But this was different. Why?

Well, first of all, the preaching of Christ Risen **STARTED** with the

apostles. They were not handed a resurrection story. They did not buy into someone else's account of Jesus rising from the dead, and then die for believing it. No. They said they SAW the risen Christ. In other words:

It is one thing to die for lies you ignorantly believe. But no one WILLINGLY dies for lies they invent.

As noted earlier, lots of people have died for false religion. This proves NOTHING. Lots of people have been deceived by false teaching and been put to death. In fact, there are a few people who have even invented false religion and been executed for it. They have been hauled off and executed for their false teaching. But in the case of the disciples,

we are not talking about one liar who pays the price for his lies. We are talking about upwards of 500 or more who had personally seen the risen Christ, who, to a greater or lesser degree, spent the next 40 years preaching Him at the risk of their lives – mostly separated from each other by distance. Many of them were executed for preaching Christ. None of them ever came out and confessed that the story had been fabricated.

We have to remember the context of what was happening at that time. Today, Jesus is big business. Then, He was big trouble. Today, you can earn lots of money selling religion. Then, you could earn death. Again -- there is not one thing the disciples had to gain by preaching

Jesus as risen from the dead. But they did have everything to lose. There was no money in it. No popularity in it. Nothing but hardship and eventual death. You don't voluntarily take that course – and they did VOLUNTARILY take it -- if you are part of a conspiracy to invent a lie. No. You take that course ONLY if you know what you are preaching is the Truth.

Other Theories

Another theory which attempts to discredit the resurrection is the notion that the disciples were all so disappointed that Jesus had been killed that they sort of all, "imagined," that He appeared. This is the, "mass hallucination," theory. It is utter nonsense. Such self-deception could never be

maintained in the face of possible martyrdom – by a large group of people. Furthermore, Jesus had appeared a number of times, to many different people, and different sized groups of them – and not to all of them just once. Not only that, but He had taught them from the scripture over the course of the forty days after His resurrection. Did they imagine that, too, every day for forty days? He had even eaten with them. Thomas had felt his wounds. And what about the ascension? Was that imagined, too? By all 120 of the disciples who were there?

Actually, if the disciples were having mass hallucinations about a risen Christ, there would be one sure way of proving that it was a hallucination: GO TO THE TOMB.

If the body of Jesus was still in the tomb, well, this would have snapped them out of their delusion.

Of course, the Pharisees claimed that the disciples stole the body of Jesus. Some agnostic scholars today agree with them. But wait. If there is one thing such an accusation by the Pharisees proves, it is that the body was missing! Right? They would not have said the disciples stole the body if the body was still in the tomb. Sure. And it also proves that the tomb where Jesus was buried was a known and accessible tomb – a tomb the Pharisees had inspected, and saw was EMPTY.

The suggestion that the disciples stole the body from a tomb

guarded by Roman soldiers is ridiculous. Rather, the disciples were hiding in fear of their lives. Besides, who steals a body out of a tomb, and then preaches a message about it that they know will get them executed? As mentioned, why invent the resurrection story at all? Just make Jesus a martyr. You can still have your little religious movement. You don't need a risen Christ.

You cannot escape the conclusion: The disciples were NOT lying. They were not part of a mass hallucination. They saw the risen Christ.

The Witness of God

Have you ever noticed how God doesn't seem concerned about

proving historically that Christ rose from the dead? I mean, we do have these historical proofs. But at the end of the day, we weren't there. We are not eyewitnesses to the resurrection. But that does not mean there is no first hand evidence of the resurrection for us today. There is – and according to John the apostle, it is the greatest evidence of all. John writes:

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believes on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believes not God hath made him a liar; because he believes not the witness that God gave of his Son. And this is the

witness, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. (1 John 5:9-11)

The greatest evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is CHRIST IN US – Christ dwelling in believers. Our faith is not based merely on a history lesson. It is not based simply on the eyewitness testimony of the apostles. No. If Jesus Christ is risen then He is alive today – and if we receive Him – He will live IN US.

Now, I realize that unbelievers and skeptics alike will scoff at this. But they contradict themselves. Why? Because they won't believe the historical OUTWARD evidence – and yet God is offering them an INWARD evidence of Christ HIMSELF. Thus,

they won't accept ANY evidence at all.

John clearly states that the witness of man – the eyewitness account of the disciples seeing the Risen Christ – that this is great. But the witness of God is greater. And the witness of God is the living Christ in us.

This was the greater witness of Christ even to the very disciples who had seen Him alive. For you will note that despite the fact that the disciples had seen and talked with the Risen Christ, and seen Him ascend into heaven, that Jesus forbade them to go out into ministry – until when? Until they received the Spirit of God from on high – which happened in Acts 2. Why? Many people have tried to say it was because they needed

power to minister. That CANNOT be the reason because even prior to His death and resurrection Jesus had sent them out to minister, and they even cast out demons in His name. Giving them power would have not required them to receive the Spirit of God in Acts 2. No. They had to tarry in Jerusalem because before they did anything more in the name of Jesus, they needed to receive CHRIST HIMSELF.

Despite all of the experiences these people had undergone with Christ – both before His death and resurrection and after – despite all of that, those experiences were OUTWARD. They had seen the Risen Christ – but this was an outward witness. God wanted to give them something far greater. He wanted

to give an INWARD witness; indeed, He wanted to give them Jesus WITHIN. In that upper room, where the church began – the new birth began in God's people – they received through the Spirit of God Christ WITHIN.

Somewhere along the line, people have gotten the idea that Christianity is a list of teachings to believe in – teachings of Jesus and the apostles. Or perhaps a list of rules to follow. But as important as sound doctrine and Biblical teaching is, Christianity is not faith in doctrines or rules. It is faith in a Person, Jesus Christ. Christianity is **CHRIST IN US, the hope of glory.**