

Reconsidering the Resurrection

Introduction:

1. All three news magazines this past week had Jesus on the front cover. [April 8, 1996]
 - a. *Time, Newsweek, U.S. News & World Report*
2. It was the type of story they have re-hashed now for the last several years.
 - a. An attack on the credibility of the Bible, and especially the resurrection.
 - b. A group of 75 skeptics formed a self-appointed committee called the “Jesus Seminar” to release their pronouncements to eager media.
 - 1) They have voted rejecting the virgin birth, the miracles of Jesus, and most of the sermon on the mount.
 - 2) They were divided but recently voted that Judas didn’t really betray Jesus; and of course they reject the resurrection of Jesus.
 - 3) They say the “myth” that Jesus was divine, performed miracles, and was raised from the dead, came three or four century after he lived, as his followers embellished stories about their great hero.
 - 4) They affirm that the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are all forgeries, and that none of the books of the New Testament were written until the 2nd or 3rd centuries.
 - c. Opponents have pointed out that this self-appointed “Jesus Seminar” was not formed on the basis of scholarship but on the fact they had a common goal to eradicate the idea that Jesus is divine.
 - 1) For example, the latest credits of “Seminar” member Paul Verhoeven was his role as director of the movie *Showgirls*.
3. Attacks on the resurrection are not new, but have been on-going for centuries. This central doctrine of the Christian faith has been attacked many times.
 - a. Those who secured the soldiers to guard the tomb --Matthew 27:62 - 28:4, 11-15; (Acts 12:19).
 - b. Others of the first century denied any resurrection and therefore the resurrection of Jesus. (Acts 23:8) 1 Cor. 15:12.
 - d. Some disciples erred, saying the resurrection was already past. 2 Tim. 2:17,18.
 - e. Some false teachers denied the very Lord who bought them. Jude 1:4; 2 Peter 2:1.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE RESURRECTION

Analysis by J.W. McGarvey, *Evidences of Christianity*, Part III, p. 117, 118.

“By the leading skeptics it is now admitted, first, that Jesus actually died and was buried; second, it is admitted that on or before the third morning

His body disappeared from the tomb; third, that the disciples came to believe firmly that He arose from the dead. The exact issue has reference to the last two facts, and may be stated by the two questions: Did the body disappear by a resurrection, or in some other way? and Did the belief of the disciples originate from the fact of the resurrection, or from some other cause?”

1. The Empty Tomb --

- a. The open and empty tomb--
 - i. Who opened and emptied the tomb?
 - (1) Disciples -- the guard was posted to prevent this. The stone was exceedingly great (Mk. 16:4) - folded the grave clothes back up?
 - (2) Jews -- to discredit the apostles they would have only needed to produce the body, or explain what they did with it.
- b. The activity of the soldiers -- stood guard. (Matt 28:4, 11-15)
 - i. Posted on Saturday -- at request of Jews -- Matt 27:62-66.
 - ii. Terrified during the resurrection --
 - iii. Reported to the Jews who had commission the guard -- Matt. 28: 4ff
- c. The grave clothes v -- Jesus was “bound” according to Jewish custom, John 10:40.
 - i. Christ’s burial garments left behind in the tomb form one of the most interesting aspect of the evidence for the resurrection. Two areas to consider:
 - (1) Their position --
 - (a) John tells us that the grave cloths were left “lying” indicting that Jesus had passed through them without disturbing their position.
 - (b) They apparently were lying in the same folded position which formed the outline of the body of Christ when he was “wound” in them for burial (Mk. 15:46).
 - (c) The grave cloths were not disheveled but were found lying as they had been folded originally.
 - (d) Whether they were rather flat in position or whether the sticky spices, which would certainly have acted as a glue, would have held the cloths in a slightly collapsed cocoon shape they were nevertheless still there in their folds and pressing the mind for answer.
 - (2) Burial Custom of the Jews --
 - (a) John 19:40 -- “they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to

bury”.

- (b) Buried in the manner of the Jews -- cf the burial of Lazarus, John 11:44.
- (c) When Jesus was placed in the tomb he had been bound hand and foot with grave wrappings.
- (3) If Jesus was not raised -- who moved the stone so quietly-- who unwrapped the body of Jesus and rewrapped the grave clothes with such skill that eye-witnesses could not detect the deception, and then carry away the body totally without detection?

2. The Significance of the Third Day

- a. This refers to the third day after Christ’s crucifixion. It was on this day, the “first day of the week” that Jesus’ tomb was found empty (Matt. 28:1-7; Mark 16:1-7; Luke 24:1-7; John 20:1-7)
- b. This historical fact on this particular day offers to us at least five points of consideration as contributing evidence to the resurrection claim.
 - i. It was the day on which Jesus prophesied he would be raised.
 - (1) Matt. 20:19; John 2:19; 8:28; 12:32-33; Luke 13:32; 18:33, etc)
 - (2) Other details of prophecy of our Lord’s death were fulfilled accurately.
 - ii. The prophecy was foretold early in his ministry.
 - (1) It was not merely a “human” insight as to what was to happen.
 - (2) The first cleaning of the temple (John 2:13-22).
 - iii. The prophecy of his death and resurrection became common knowledge --
 - (1) The Jewish leaders understood his meaning though they deliberately misapplied it to the temple of Herod. Matt. 27:62-66 (Matt. 26:, 60, 61, John 2:19, 20)
 - iv. There was the empty tomb on the third day.
 - v. Christianity and the first day of the week
 - (1) From Pentecost following the crucifixion the first day of the week became special to Christians. The church was established on this day-- it was the day of Christians gathering to worship (1 Cor. 16:1-2). The day the Church came together to observe the Lord’s supper (Acts 20:7).
 - (2) The question-- what great event happened to produce such an emphasis being put on this day if not the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the early disciples believed?

3. The Appearances of Jesus -- The Witnesses

- a. J.W. McGarvey, **Evidences of Christianity**, p. 118. “To us the witnesses are a group of women, not less than five in number; the twelve older apostles; and the apostle Paul. The testimony of the women and the twelve is recorded in the four Gospels, in Acts, and in the Epistles of Peter and John, and in Revelation. That of Paul is found in Acts and his epistles.”
- b. Jesus appeared to individual disciples, in small groups and in large groups.
 - i. Their testimony could be appealed to as well. 1 Cor. 15:6.

4. The Changes in the Apostles on Pentecost

- a. Luke records the drastic change in the apostles in Acts ch. 2. With the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them in keeping with Jesus’ promise they are changed from mere disciples of a Jewish teacher to dynamic gospel preachers endeavoring to save men from sin.
- b. They now understand the meaning and significance of Calvary.
- c. They are no longer ignorant of the spiritual nature of the kingdom.
- d. They are united in doctrine.
- e. They are no longer fearful, but are bold even unto death.
- f. Here was a change of such proportion that the mind is staggered to think of it happening, and the question is, what could have accounted for such a drastic change apart from the truth of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead?

5. The Witnesses of the Apostles

- a. Jesus said the apostles were to bear witness of him (John 15:27). The apostles’ witness, then was to confirm the deity of Christ to the world.
- b. The apostles’ witness carried confirmation. Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:3-4
- c. The belief and conviction of early disciples -- even on Pentecost-- was based on the apostles’ testimony and preaching. (John 17:20)
- d. Believing without seeing is not blind faith.
 - i. After Thomas had seen the resurrection evidence in Jesus’ hands and wounded side, he confessed his belief in him as “My Lord and my God.” (John 20:27-28).
 - ii. Jesus’ reply in vs. 29, “Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”
- e. The question -- Why should we believe in Jesus whom we have not seen? -- the answer is **testimony!**
 - i. Everything we accept as true which we have not seen is done so on the basis of reliable testimony.

- ii. We can believe in Jesus' resurrection because of the reliable testimony!
- f. **Their number** -- twelve, Acts 1:22.
 - i. Twelve -- more than adequate in any court.
- g. **Their Unity**
 - i. Their unanimity of agreement.
 - ii. Not a testimony they formulated years later-- but immediately!
 - iii. Not hazy, ambiguous, nor contradictory!
 - iv. It was corroborated by many others.
- h. **Their Lives**
 - i. Without a doubt their faithful lives were the crucible of Christianity.
 - ii. From Pentecost the grand evidence for the resurrection was the unswerving testimony of a unified band of apostles who, however imprisoned (Acts 4:1-3, 5:17, 25), and in the face of threats upon their lives (Acts 4:17, 21; 5:17-33; 8:1-4) and the early martyrdom of the apostle James (Acts 12:1-3), nevertheless maintained that they had seen him alive!
 - iii. The apostles persisted with their testimony in face of all manner of threats, and gave their lives to this great truth.

6. The Conversion of the Saul of Tarsus --

- a. His manner of life in time past was well known among the Jewish leaders -- Gal. 1:13-14.
 - i. He persecuted the church beyond measure --
 - ii. He advanced in the Jewish religion
 - iii. He was exceedingly zealous for the traditions of his fathers
- b. Was there an ulterior motive behinds Saul's Conversion
 - i. Wealth? -- He had this with the Jews and gave it up for the poverty of Christianity (cf. Acts 20:33-34; 1 Cor. 4:11-12).
 - ii. Reputation? -- He had a reputation which was heard among kings (Acts 26:24) and renounced it to become "a fool for Christ" (1 Cor. 4:10, 13).
 - iii. Passion? -- Was there some immoral reason? His moral integrity was above reproach among Jews and Christians as well.
 - iv. Power? -- He had this with the Jews and left it for Christ (see Acts 26:1-12).
- c. Was Saul deceived?
 - i. Not influenced by any man or any group of men (Gal. 1:1).
 - ii. His conviction was based on the personal appearance of Jesus Christ to him. (Jesus appeared not only on the Damascus road, but several times to him during his ministry.)
- d. Was he mad?
 - i. Festus thought so (Acts 26:24) when Paul expressed his belief in Jesus' resurrection.

- ii. Paul's reply "I am not mad most excellent Festus; but speak forth words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).
- iii. He expressed that "this hath not been done in a corner" -- Acts 26:26.
- iv. His life was an open book to both Christians and enemies.
- v. He attested, "Now touching the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not." (Gal. 1:20).

7. The Epistles of the Apostles

- a. 1 Cor. 15:12-19 Paul "*If Christ Hath Not Been Raised*"
 - i. "*Then is our preaching vain*"
 - (1) From the first sermon the Apostles had testified to the great fact of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Acts 2:24, 32; 3:13-15; 4:33; 17:30,31.
 - ii. "*We are found false witnesses of God.*"
 - (1) This was their mission - John 15:27
 - (2) The selection of one to take Judas' place was based on this qualification -- Acts 1:21-22.
 - iii. "*Your Faith is vain*"
 - (1) FAITH relies upon TESTIMONY, and testimony to FACTS. The fundamental fact of Christian faith is the resurrection of Christ.
 - iv. "*Ye are yet in your sins*"
 - (1) If Jesus was not raised, he is not our high priest, and he has not made atonement and intercession for us in the presence of God (Heb. 7:16; 7:25, 28).

8. The Testimony of the Monuments

- i. As in nature where "God has not left Himself without witness" to His creative acts and providence (Acts 14:17), so in the spiritual realm He has not left Himself without monuments to the Divine origin of Christianity.
- ii. Since the resurrection of Jesus is the fundamental fact and foundation of the whole system, God has provided ample evidence in proof of this fact. The institutions of Christianity bear witness as monuments to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.
- iii. [See Joshua 4:1-8.]

b. The Church

- i. The church has been here for over 19 centuries.
- ii. It rests on one great faith-- the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- c. **The Bible**
 - i. The great book here admits this great truth.
 - ii. If false-- then its great character and teachings are based on a lie.
 - iii. It's strength is truth-- based on true history--
- d. **The Lord's Day**
 - i. It has been a special day of worship since Pentecost, about fifty days after the resurrection of Christ.
 - ii. It has stood from the beginning as a monument to the resurrection (Acts 20:7; Rev. 1:10).
- e. **The Lord's Supper**
 - i. This is an institution observed by Christians from the beginning -- Acts 2:42.
 - ii. Though commemorative of His death, it is also commemorative of the resurrection, for it is to be observed "till He come" I Cor. 11:26. This affirms the resurrection; He cannot come back, if he has not been raised and ascended.
- f. **The Significance of Baptism**
 - i. Baptism is for the remission of sins (Mark 1:1-4; Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38).
 - ii. But from Pentecost the significance of the resurrection was attached to baptism; it was into the death of Christ and a resurrection with Him, (Rom. 6:3-5; col. 2:12).
 - iii. It was the evidence of the resurrection that moved three thousand to be baptized on Pentecost, Acts 2:32, 41.

- b. It is not ours to offers any "experiences" of our own as proof of Christianity. Ours is to "preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

A Short Bibliography

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Windell Gann -- <http://home.hiwaay.net/~wgann>

Conclusion:

1. The only conclusion in the light of the evidence as it comes to us in the historic documents of the New Testament is that the apostles testified to what actually happened.
 - a. Jesus was raised from the dead and they actually saw him.
 - b. What other possible alternatives can be offered in keeping with the facts for such testimony from such men?
 - c. Herein lies the real force of Luke's statement that "**with great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.**" (Acts 4:33).
2. Today we have no testimony of our own experience which can convince anyone of Jesus' resurrection. Our testimony must be that of the apostles.
 - a. This apostolic testimony was the testimony accepted by the early Christians who had not seen the Lord yet were ready to lay down their live for the faith (John 17:20; Rev. 12:11).