

Resurrection Proof

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Do you remember "doubting Thomas"? The other disciples told him the Lord had risen and that they had seen Jesus. Thomas said,

"Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." (John 20:25 NKJV)

Eight days later (poof!), Jesus appeared in their midst and granted Thomas' request saying,

"Reach your finger here and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." (John 20:27)

This just shows that we should be careful what we ask for! Then in verse 29 Jesus said something very important,

"Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed."

Our Lord Jesus foresaw the time when such tangible evidence as Thomas received would not be available. After Jesus ascended permanently to God, all those who believe in his resurrection would do so without the benefit of seeing the resurrected Lord. It is clear in many places in the New Testament that God in His wisdom selected our believing in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus as a requirement for salvation. For example in his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote,

that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

While God places the greatest importance on our believing in the resurrection of Christ, we aren't asked to accept it by blind faith. The Scriptures give us solid proof that the

resurrection of Jesus Christ is irrefutable. In the beginning of the book of Acts Luke writes,

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom he presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them for forty day and speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:1-3)

In order to give his apostles confidence to present his message, our Lord gave his people many infallible proofs that he was indeed raised from the dead. These proofs included his entering a locked room (John 20:19), showing his wounds (Luke 24:39), and eating and drinking with the disciples (Luke 24:41-43). The apostle Paul also attests to the historical validity of Christ's resurrection saying that,

...He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that he was seen by over 500 brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all he was seen by me also...(1 Corinthians 15:5-8)

Today, the average person we meet may have doubts about the historical reliability of the Bible's historical accuracy. But what is history? Where do historians start to piece together the past? They look for source documents around the time of the person or event they are studying. They look for writings that contain eyewitness accounts of events. If there are eyewitness accounts of several people and those sources can be considered reliable the historical evidence grows stronger. Then they look for facts or accounts that might disprove the earlier evidence and if there is nothing to disprove it, then the information is considered quite reliable.

It is by these standards that we believe what we have about historical figures from Alexander the Great to Marie Antoinette. Noted historians have concluded that for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the evidence is overwhelming. Professor Arnold Thomas, author of the famous book, History of Rome, and appointed to the chair of modern history at Oxford, said, "I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign that God has given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead."

Here are some points to consider concerning the evidence that Scripture gives us:

1. Christ was confirmed dead.

After Jesus died the soldiers stabbed him with a sword or spear in the chest to make sure he was dead (John 19:34). Mark 15:42-45 reports that when Joseph of Arimathea begged Pilate for the body of Jesus, Pilate sent for the centurion to be completely sure that Jesus was dead.

2. The burial

John 19:39-41 says that Nicodemus carried out the proper burial custom of having Christ's body wrapped in linen strips prepared with about 100 pounds of perfume and spices in a sort of mummification process. We know that the tomb was hewn out of Rock and was big enough for at least two people to go in, so the size of the stone that covered the opening was large and extremely heavy.

3. The tomb was sealed and guarded

It is ironic that while the disciples were thinking about properly embalming the body assuming Jesus was dead to stay, the chief priests were paying more heed to what Jesus had said about his resurrection. They had remembered that he had said that he would rise from the dead after

three days. And so they requested of Pilate that the tomb be officially sealed and guarded.

The consequence for the unauthorized breaking of a Roman seal was death. And a Roman soldier who fell asleep at his post was put to death, often by setting his clothes on fire and burning him alive as an example to the others. So the performance of guards on duty was usually flawless! Matthew 28 records that when the mighty angel appeared and rolled back the stone, these guards shook and became as dead men. The guards reported all of this to the chief priests who decided to pay the guards a very large sum of money to say that while they slept, the disciples stole Jesus' body.

Again, it seems that the enemies of Jesus were quicker to understand the implications of the empty tomb than his followers were. Notice that the chief priests and elders made no attempt to deny the empty tomb at this time or later in the book of Acts when the apostles were preaching the resurrection. So, logically, all Jerusalem knew of this empty tomb and no one denied it. This makes Christ's resurrection an historical fact to which the behavior of an entire city attests.

Other Jewish and Roman historical documents mention the empty tomb as well. Therefore to argue against the resurrection on historical ground, you have to come up with another plausible explanation for the empty tomb. You have to believe that trained Roman guards were asleep so soundly that the disciples could come and roll away a huge stone and then steal the body of Jesus.

4. The lives of the witnesses were changed

There were hundreds of eyewitnesses who saw the resurrected Christ. Indeed, a historian must view these witnesses as exceptionally credible. They lived the rest of their lives in witness to the resurrection enduring persecution and often martyrdom for their testimony. In the record with Thomas mentioned earlier, the apostles were behind closed doors for fear of the Jews.

Fifty days later they are boldly preaching Christ's resurrection to thousands of people. By the way, how do you think the crowd would have reacted to Peter's sermon on Pentecost if there were any doubts about the empty tomb?

Brooke Foss Wescott, an English scholar said,

"Ranking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no historic event better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Nothing but the antecedent assumption that it must be false could have suggested the idea of deficiency in the proof of it."

That is precisely correct! Some have their mind made up ahead of time that it is false. The chief priests and elders wanted to guard the tomb against Jesus' claim that he would rise from the dead. They were told by the guards that an angel rolled back the stone. In front of them was the evidence that would shatter their religious order and power, so they used bribery and intimidation in an attempt to suppress the truth. Some hearts are so hard that they will refuse to

accept the truth no matter what the proof. I have witnessed to people who could see the truth and seemed about to accept it and then ran the other way. They too could see that the truth would shatter their comfortable order and take them into an entirely new direction. Even as believers we sometimes run the other way when we are confronted with truth that will change previously untouched parts of our lives. We pay a high price when we are blind to the truth of God's Word (John 9:39-41).

God knows that proof for the resurrection was and is important and He has amply provided it. Even more important is whether one reacts to that proof with blindness of believing. "Blind faith" is a term that the world uses, but to God, it is those who refuse to have faith in the gospel who are blind. God does not want anyone to perish and His gentle love calls us to go beyond proof to faith in Him who so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son to die and rise again that we might live forever.