**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

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**Was Jesus Raised from the Dead? (Part 1)**

If Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead then Jesus was not the sinless Son of God and His death on the cross means nothing. The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of the Christian’s faith. If Jesus was not raised then our faith is futile. The apostle Paul makes this point in 1 Corinthians 15. He states in verses 14-19 that if Christ was not raised from the dead, then their preaching is vain, the apostles are found to be false witnesses because they testified that God raised Him from the dead, our faith is vain, we are still in our sins, those who have died have perished, and we are of all men the most pitiable.

But if Jesus was raised from the dead then He is the Son of God and all that the Bible says is true. A friend of mine debated an atheist at Iowa State University back several years ago. Hisproof that there is a God is that Jesus was raised from the dead. His contention was that ifthe resurrection of Christ is proven then the existence of God is proven. And that’s right. Genesis chapters one and two gives us an account of the creation of the world. How do youknow that is true? Because Jesus was raised from the dead, He is Lord, and Jesus spoke of the truthfulness of the creation account (Matt. 19). How do we know the truth ofthe world-wide flood recorded in Genesis 6 & 7? Because of the resurrection of Jesus, and Jesus spoke of the flood having occurred (Matt. 24:37-39).If Jesus was raised from the dead then the Bible is true. If you take the resurrection away,then there is no reason to believe any of it. But if the resurrection of Christ did occur then ALL of it is true. And so you see the importance of the resurrection ofJesus Christ?

What this says is that our faith as Christians hinges, not just upon the life and teachings of a man by the name of Jesus, but upon whether or not this Man was raised from the dead. Our faith then is based on an historical event. Josh McDowel states in his book, Evidence That Demands a Verdict, “All but four of the major world religions are based on mere philosophical propositions. Of the four that are based on personalities rather than a philosophical system, only Christianity claims an empty tomb for its founder.” The Jews do not claim any of their leaders were raised from the dead. Buddha died, and the original accounts of his life never ascribe to him any such thing as a resurrection. Mohammed died June 8, 632 A.D., at the age of sixty-two, at Medina. Thousands visit his tomb every year. Jews, Buddhists, and Muslims agree that their founders were never raised from the dead. But the faith of the Christian hinges upon that having occurred to Jesus Christ.

Was Jesus raised from the dead? Was the resurrection of Christ a true historical event? These are the questions we want to consider on our program today and next week, the Lord willing.

First let us consider what we know historically. Then, we will see what explanation best fits the evidence. What are the historical facts? First, Jesus Christ was a real person of history, not a myth or legend. Jesus died on a Roman cross. He was buried in a new tomb. The tomb was sealed with a Roman seal and guarded. On the third day, the body was missing from the tomb. In subsequent weeks, His disciples claimed they saw Him alive again after He had died. Their belief in His resurrection was so strong that they were willing to die for their testimony. These are facts.

Someone might be saying, “But all of that just comes from the Bible.” No, some of it is found in secular writings, but it is true, the New Testament scriptures provides the primary historical source for information on the life of Christ and His resurrection from the dead. Many people claim these writings are not reliable historical documents about Jesus Christ. Some say they were written by men who lived in the second century A.D., a hundred or more years after the events occurred. But the fact is Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the first four books of the New Testament are accounts of the life of Jesus written by men who lived in the days that Jesus lived. Matthew and John were two of the apostles who live and walked with Jesus. And also the writings of men in the second, third and fourth centuries (such as Cyril, Eusebius, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and others) prove that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were written in the first century and that they were written by the men whose names their books bear. We have here eye witness testimony of Jesus’ life, death, burial and resurrection. The New Testament scriptures are reliable historical documents. Josh McDowell writes, “The historian Luke wrote of ‘authentic evidence’ concerning the resurrection. Sir William Ramsay, who spent 15 years attempting to undermine Luke’s credentials as a historian, and to refute the reliability of the New Testament, finally concluded: ‘Luke is a historian of the first rank . . . This author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians.’”

And also when the New Testament documents were being circulated, many of the men and women who were alive at the time of Jesus death, burial and resurrection were still living. These people could certainly have confirmed or denied the accuracy of their accounts. McDowell also states, “F. F. Bruce, Rylands professor of biblical criticism and exegesis at the University of Manchester, says concerning the value of the New Testament records as primary sources: ‘Had there been any tendency to depart from the facts in any material respect, the possible presence of hostile witnesses in the audience would have served as a further corrective.’”

The point is, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are reliable historical documents.

How do we explain the facts, especially that of the body missing from the tomb? How do we know the tomb was empty? Because the apostles were preaching that Jesus was raised from dead in the very city where He died and was buried. The preaching was done within walking distance of the tomb. Many people were being converted as the result of that preaching. As one writer said, “Is it conceivable, then, that the apostles would have had this success if the body of the one they proclaimed as risen Lord was all the time decomposing in Joseph’s tomb?” No, it is evident the tomb was empty.

How do we explain the empty tomb? What we want to show is that the only reasonable explanation is what the apostles were testifying to, Jesus is risen.

Let us consider some of the possibilities.

Could the disciples have removed the body? This is what the Jewish leaders had concocted. Look with me in Matthew 28:11-15, *“Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, ‘Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure.’ So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.”* Does it really make since that the disciples of Christ would have passed the Roman guard and stolen the body of Jesus? I suggest they were not in a state of mind to steal the body. Remember, they had all forsook Him and fled when Jesus was arrested (Mark 14:50). Peter had denied the Lord. They had acted cowardly and were fearful of the Jews. Remember, the tomb had been sealed with a Roman seal and to break a Roman seal meant automatic execution. People feared the breaking of the seal. The disciples were in no mood to take the body.

And also this theory does not account for the behavior of the disciples after they testified that they had seen Him alive after His death. They now were willing to die for Jesus. What would turn a band of cowardly men into a group of bold preachers willing to die for what they taught? Are they now willing to die for a lie? Someone says, “But there are people who have died for a lie.” This may be true, but did they know it was a lie when they gave their lives? You see, if the disciples had stolen the body, then they would have known they were telling lies about the resurrection. Does it make sense they were willing to die for such a lie? No, the stolen body theory does not properly explain the facts.

Could the body have been removed through another opening in the tomb? Some have suggested that Jesus may have been buried in a cave, and caves sometimes have more entrances than one, so someone might have removed the body through another opening while the soldiers were guarding the main opening. Matthew 27:60 says that Joseph “*laid it* [the body of Jesus] *in his new tomb which he had* *hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and* *departed*.” Jesus’ body was not buried in a cave, but in a tomb “hewn out of the rock” There was no other entrance. This theory does not explain the empty tomb.

Another explanation that some have given is that the women who reported that the body was missing had mistakenly gone to the wrong tomb. If so, then the disciples who went to check up on the women's statement must have also gone to the wrong tomb. However, remember that the women observed where and how the body of Jesus was laid. Luke 23:55 says, *“And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid.”*  And we may be certain that that Jewish authorities, who asked for a Roman guard to be stationed at the tomb to prevent Jesus' body from being stolen, would not have been mistaken about the location. Nor would the Roman guards, for they were there! And if the disciples had gone to the wrong tomb, why didn’t the enemies show the right tomb when the disciples starting preaching? They could have gone to the right tomb, presented the body of Jesus and that would have been the end of it. No, this theory does not explain the empty tomb.

There are other theories, and we want to consider them next week on our program. What we are saying is that all these theories fall short of the evidence. The only explanation for the empty tomb that fits the evidence is that Jesus was raised from dead as the apostles testified. And this means that Jesus is Lord and Savior. Why not give your life to Him. He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

We want to talk more about this next week, so join us next week.