

“Why I Believe in the Resurrection”

Date: April 21, 2019

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Luke 24:1-12

Occasion: Easter Sunday

Theme: Easter, resurrection, hope, new life

Whatever one believes about Jesus and his resurrection, everyone has to admit that “something” significant happened on that morning, significant enough to alter the course of history. That “something” was so dramatic that it completely changed 11 men’s lives, enabling them from that time on to endure abuse, suffering and even death. That something was an empty tomb!

If you wish to rationalize the events surrounding Christ and his resurrection, you must deal with certain facts. Let’s consider these historical facts for a moment:

Fact #1: The Roman seal was broken. On Easter morning the seal that stood for the power and authority of the Roman Empire was broken. No one denies this fact. The stone in front of the tomb could be sealed only in the presence of the Roman guards who were left in charge. The purpose of this procedure was to prevent anyone from tampering with the grave’s contents.

After the guard inspected the tomb and rolled the stone in place, a cord was stretched across the rock and fastened at either end with sealing clay. Finally, the clay packs were stamped with the official signet of the Roman governor.

Because the seal was Roman, it verified the fact that Christ’s body was protected from vandals by nothing less than the power and authority of the Roman Empire. Anyone trying to move the stone would have broken the seal and thus incurred the wrath of Roman law and power. The

consequences for breaking that seal were severe, even resulting in death. Would Jesus' disciples have broken the seal? Hardly! After his arrest, they showed signs of extreme cowardice and hid themselves. Peter even denied that he knew Jesus. And yet, the seal was broken.

Fact # 2: The tomb was empty. Another obvious fact that Sunday morning was the empty tomb. No one ever denied that the tomb was empty. It is significant that after the resurrection, the suddenly emboldened disciples of Christ did not go off to Athens or Rome to preach; they went right back into the city of Jerusalem.

Now, if what they were claiming was false, their message would have easily been disproved. The resurrection claim could not have been maintained for a moment in Jerusalem if the tomb had not been empty.

One of the most compelling pieces of evidence showing that the tomb was empty is the fact that it was first discovered by women. Why is that significant? Because in first-century Palestine, women had a low status as citizens or legal witnesses. Except in rare circumstances, Jewish law precluded women from giving testimony in a court of law.

Why would those who wanted to advance Christianity have contrived a legend that embarrassed the disciples, by having *them* flee during the crucifixion and hide afterwards, and yet have *women* discover the empty tomb? Common sense tells us that the only reason women were reported as the first witnesses, is because it was the truth.

Fact # 3: The large stone was moved. The first thing that impressed the people who approached the tomb was the unusual position of the two-ton stone that had previously been lodged in front of the doorway. All of the gospel writers mention the removal of this enormous stone.

In fact, the stone was in such a position – up a slope away from the

entire massive sepulcher – that John had to use a different Greek verb, *airo*, which means “to pick something up and carry it away.” The stone had not merely been rolled away; it had been lifted up and moved.

If the disciples had come and tiptoed around the sleeping guards, why would they have moved the two-ton stone away from the grave, to a position that looked like someone had picked it up and carried it away? The needless effort would have been noisy and taken valuable time and energy. The soldiers would have been deaf not to have heard the commotion.

Those who challenge Christianity often overlook another significant piece of evidence, **Fact # 4: The disciples were eyewitnesses.** The radically changed lives of these men give us solid testimony for the validity of the resurrection.

I can trust the apostles’ testimonies because these men all died martyred deaths. These men were tortured and flogged and put to death by some of the cruelest methods known. Some people might say, “Well, those men died for a lie. Many people have done that. What does that prove?”

Yes, many people have died for a lie, but they did so believing it was the truth. If the resurrection had not happened, obviously the disciples would have known it. Therefore they would not only have died for a lie – here’s the catch – but they would have known it was a lie. It would be hard to find a group of men anywhere in history who would die for a lie, if they knew it was a lie.

Fact # 5: They had to be convinced. Originally, when Jesus died the disciples thought it was all over. Only after ample and convincing evidences did they believe. When the women first told them about the empty grave, they didn’t believe. They had to see for themselves. Jesus had to appear to them and show himself to them.

A classic example of a man who was convinced against his will was James, the brother of Jesus. Although James was not one of the original 12, he was later recognized as an apostle. While Jesus was growing up, James didn't believe that his brother was the Son of God.

No doubt James participated with his brothers in mocking Jesus, possibly saying things such as, "You want people to believe in you? Why don't you go up to Jerusalem and put on a big show with all your miracles and healing?"

James must have felt humiliated that his brother was going around bringing shame and ridicule on the family name with all his wild claims, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

But something happened to James. After Jesus was crucified and buried, James was preaching in Jerusalem. His message was that Jesus died for our sins and was resurrected and is alive. Later, James became a leading figure in the Jerusalem church and wrote a book, "the Epistle of James."

Eventually James was stoned to death on orders from Ananias the high priest. What could have changed James from an embarrassed scoffer to a man willing to die for the belief that his brother was resurrected? Was James deceived? The only plausible explanation is found in 1 Corinthians 15:7, which tells us that after Christ's resurrection, he was seen by James.

Why do I believe in the resurrection? I believe the facts I have just presented are convincing. But I believe in the resurrection for two more reasons: First, the resurrection has stood the test of time. If you know anything about conspiracies, I find it hard to believe that if Jesus' disciples stole the body and hid it, that someone wouldn't have cracked and told the

truth. But no one ever came forward to dispute the disciples' claim that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. And for two millennium we have continued to proclaim this truth.

Finally, I believe in the resurrection because I have experienced it myself. I have known the joy of my sins forgiven. There are parts of my life that I am not proud of, and I am so glad that Jesus has forgiven me – his death and his resurrection God's vindication that Jesus has the power to forgive sins.

And not only me – but I have seen how Jesus Christ can change the hearts and lives of men and women today. For me, the most powerful proof of the resurrection are the changed lives of those who put their faith in him.

At funerals I see the hope of believers, who lay their loved ones to rest, knowing that they will see them again in Heaven. In counseling sessions, I have seen the look of hope in sinners' eyes, when told that God loves them and is willing to give them another chance at life.

“He lives; He lives; Christ Jesus lives today! He walks with me and talks with me, along life's narrow way. He lives; He lives; salvation to impart. You ask me how I know he lives; He lives within my heart!”

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen!