

Billy Graham once said: *If I were an enemy of Christianity, I would aim right at the Resurrection because that is the heart of Christianity.* To say that Jesus Christ died on a cross for the world's sin is not a big deal, because anyone can do that. Anybody could get themselves crucified and claim to die for the sins of the world. But to say that three days later that person rose from the dead, is another thing altogether. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the one element that makes Christianity superior and different from other religions. Christianity begins where other religions end, with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Every other religion of the world can point to a founding father and they can even point to his grave. But only Christianity points to an empty tomb and says *Our God lives!*

The Apostle Paul preached boldly in the synagogue in Antioch about the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and he preached three vital truths about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1. The Physical Nature of His Resurrection. When I was at college one of my professors said: *If they found the body of Jesus Christ in an Israeli tomb today, it would make absolutely no difference to my Christian faith.* For this professor that the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ was unimportant. Another liberal teacher said: *His body lies in a nameless Syrian tomb, but his deathly spirit goes marching on.* These liberal teachers are saying what all the pagan religions believed thousands of years ago. Even Plato believed in the immortality of the soul. But what makes Christianity different is that it teaches the resurrection of the body.

The historical bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is unique among all the religions of the world. Confucius died and was buried. Lao-tzu who was the diety of Taoism wondered off and died with his water buffalo. Buddha rotted with food poisoning. Muhammad died in 632 and his body was divided and spread over the middle east. Only Jesus Christ rose from the dead and is alive.

Every other religion speaks of a leader who was alive and is now dead, but the Bible preaches Christ who was dead and is now alive! Jesus' resurrection is unique. Lazarus was raised from the dead by Jesus but he still grew old and died. When Jesus rose from the dead He had a perfect body that was no longer subject to decay, disease, and death. But understand it was a physical resurrection and we know this because *Jesus took bread and broke it before the disciples*, (Luke 24:30). *He ate broiled fish*, (John 20:15). *He showed Thomas His side and His wounded hands*, (John 20:20). And Jesus said *Behold My hands and My feet and see that it is me. Touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as I have*. (Luke 24:39). Jesus had literal physical resurrection.

2. The Personal Knowledge of His Resurrection. Many people saw Jesus after His resurrection. No one disputes that on that Sunday morning the body was gone, and at least five people who went to the tomb that day confirmed that the body was gone. Even more remarkable is the fact that within just seven weeks, Peter who had deserted and denied Jesus in a cowardly way, was now boldly declaring on the streets of Jerusalem, in front of the Pharisees that Jesus was alive. Now if that tomb had not been empty all the Pharisees had to do to prove Peter wrong, was to invite the listeners to visit the tomb.

Of course, the empty tomb isn't conclusive proof that Jesus rose from the dead. But to preach that Jesus was alive if the body was still in the tomb would be stupid. The presence of the body would say the resurrection was preposterous, but the absence of the body says the resurrection is both possible and plausible.

Now there are two things that no one ever disputed. First, no one has ever disputed that Jesus Christ died for the Bible says in John 19, that when they thrust the spear into his side blood and water came out. When a person dies and the heart stops beating, the blood inside the heart chambers clots quickly and then it separates into two parts: plasma and red blood cells. When the roman soldier stabbed Jesus, the spear wound would produce something a layman might well describe as a flow of blood and water. The spear wound didn't cause Jesus' death, it confirmed it. Then He was buried.

There's no dispute over Jesus' death and burial, so the empty tomb raises only two possibilities: Either He rose from the dead or somebody took the body. And there are two possibilities for who took the body; either his enemies or his friends. In order to commit a crime there must be motive and opportunity. The Pharisees could have taken the body because they had both motive and opportunity. Their motive would have been to prove that Jesus was dead once and for all. They had the opportunity because they were in cahoots with the Roman authorities who feared an uprising. The Romans would want to make sure the body was protected to discourage Jesus' followers.

The problem with these theories is that there's no evidence to support this, and if the Jews took the body wouldn't they would have produced it? All the Pharisees and the Romans had to do to end Christianity was produce Jesus' body. There can only be one reason why they didn't do this; they didn't have His body! What about Jesus' disciples? Their motive for stealing Christ's body was to ensure that His reputation would be preserved. They loved him and this was their motive. But the tomb was guarded so they had no opportunity. All we have is the lie invented by the Roman authorities to cover up the empty tomb. *When they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, 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.* (Matt. 28)

The Chief Priests acknowledged empty tomb, so they concocted this lie that the disciples stole the body when the soldiers had fallen asleep, which is impossible. Roman military records show that a Roman guard had up to sixty men, so all of them would had to have fallen asleep at the same time. And even if they did fall asleep, how would the disciples manage to get past the soldiers and roll away the huge stone, and make off with the body without disturbing even one of them.

Finally, if the guards were sleeping, how did they know who stole the body? This theory is not remotely plausible.

But there's another problem in this theory. Jesus had taught the disciples to live holy and godly lives and stealing the body was to perpetrate a lie. These men were willing to die for their belief in their risen Lord. Men may die for convictions but they won't die for concoctions. They may die for the truth, they will not die for what they know is a lie. The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ has *never* broken down yet, and we do indeed have a personal knowledge of his resurrection.

And finally: **3. *The Practical Necessity of His Resurrection.*** Paul asserts that Jesus had to come back from the dead. He had to be physically raised for three reasons: **a. *The resurrection affirms the reliability of the Saviour.*** Both the testimony and the truth of all that Jesus said was verified and authenticated by His resurrection. In the time that Jesus spent with His disciples, He taught them over and over that He would rise from the dead. *Jesus told them that the Son of Man must suffer and be killed, then after three days rise again.* (Mark 8:31). Again, Jesus told the disciples: *The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him and the third day He will be raised up.* (Matt 17:22). Not only did Jesus tell the disciples of His resurrection, he also told the Pharisees: *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.* (John 2:19). If Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead, He not only is not Lord, He is nothing but a common liar. (John 2:19)

b. *The resurrection assures the resurrection of the faithful.* Jesus said in John 14:19, *Because I live, you shall live also.* 1st Corinthians 15:20 calls the resurrection of Jesus Christ; *the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.* The first-fruits is an assurance of a harvest that will follow later on and Revelation promises us that those who believe in Christ will follow in His resurrection and have a place in the Kingdom of God.

3. The resurrection assures us of the redemption of sin. Peter said: *Let it be known that through Jesus, is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things which could not be justified by the law of Moses.*

It's important that we see how all that we've said about Jesus comes together. Being born of a virgin, He lived a sinless life. Living a sinless life, He could die an atoning death. But having died an atoning death, the proof that that death was accepted as payment for our sins was the resurrection. Jesus died on the cross as payment for our sins. The empty tomb is proof that God accepted that payment and cancelled our sin, and justified Christians forever. And the angel rolled away the stone not to let the Living Lord out, but to let unbelievers in that they might be see and be saved. That's why I give the same invitation the angels gave 2,000 years ago: ***Come and see for yourself. He's not here, He is risen!***

A Buddhist in Africa who was converted to Christianity was asked why he changed religions. He said *if you were walking along and came to a fork in the road, and two men were there and one was dead and the other was alive, which man's directions would you follow?* We have a choice, we can follow the dead, or we can follow One who lives now and forevermore, the risen Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

(1815 words)