

Jesus "No Other King" – The Conquering King

April 16, 2017- Pastor Randy

Everyone here can be divided into one of three categories. Those who do not believe that Jesus rose from the dead; those who believe in the resurrection of Jesus, but don't really understand the meaning of Jesus resurrection for them personally; and those who do believe and do have a good understanding of the personal implications of the resurrection. My prayer is that in the brief time I have this morning, God will use my words to help each one no matter which category you fall into.

John 20:24-29

One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. They told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side." Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you," he said. Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!"

"My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed. Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."

I. Those of you who don't believe or have strong doubts about the veracity of the resurrection, I have good news – God does not condemn you for expressing your doubts, just like he didn't condemn Thomas. Jesus did tell Thomas that he shouldn't have been so skeptical of the testimony of the other disciples, especially since he had already heard Jesus predict that He would suffer, die, but be raised on the third day. However, what is important to notice is that Jesus helped Thomas to believe. He offered Thomas the evidence that Thomas desired. Should Thomas have been satisfied with seeing him? Of course! Could Jesus have refused to let Thomas set the conditions under which he would believe? Shouldn't Jesus have been put off by Thomas' whiny demands: "*I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side.*" I won't...unless I see...unless I put...unless...I place." Sounds like a little brat, doesn't he?

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But maybe Thomas wasn't a brat. Maybe he was a lot like you and me. If your friends came to your house and told you that a mutual friend who died three days earlier was alive, would you just take their word for it?! I don't think so! Thomas should have believed based on the testimony of Jesus and men he knew were trustworthy, but when we are talking about a miracle like the resurrection, I can appreciate his desire for more evidence.

The resurrection of Jesus is the central claim upon which Christianity stands or falls as a religion to be believed and followed. Paul confronted the issue head-on. He didn't dance around it. He admitted clearly that whether or not the good news which Jesus preached is real news - not fake news - depends on the question of the historical validity of the resurrection. Here is how Paul expressed it in 2 Corinthians 15: IF... Christ has not been raised, THEN...our sins have not been forgiven, our faith is a sham, and our preaching is a lie. Followers of Jesus ought to be pitied because they are wasting their lives.

Since belief in the resurrection is so central to the Christian faith, that the validity of Christianity hinges on the historicity of the resurrection, and while at the same time a resurrection of a dead man is a bona-fide miracle, we should be willing to take the time to offer evidence to those who genuinely seek it.

Pastor Tim Keller offers the following commentary on the description in John's gospel of how Peter and an unnamed disciple came to believe in Jesus' resurrection: *"...it took a great deal of evidence, a whole lot of reasoning for the disciples to believe. If your Christian faith is not shot-through with all sorts of reasoning and thinking, it will never last through all the ups and downs of life in this world."*

Dr. Gary Habermas has been writing, lecturing, and debating in defense of the veracity of the resurrection for years. He wrote the following:

"These are a minimum number of facts agreed upon by almost all critical scholars who study this topic, whatever their school of thought. From this summary, at least eleven separate facts can be considered to be knowable history (while another is additionally recognized by many): (1) Jesus died due to crucifixion and (2) was buried

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afterwards. (3) Jesus' death caused the disciples to experience despair and lose hope, believing that their master was dead. (4) Although not as widely accepted, many scholars acknowledge several weighty arguments which indicate that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was discovered to be empty just a few days later. Almost all critical scholars further agree that (5) the disciples had real experiences which they thought were literal appearances of the risen Jesus. Due to these experiences, (6) the disciples were transformed from timid and troubled doubters afraid to identify themselves with Jesus to bold preachers of his death and resurrection who were more than willing to die for their faith in him. (7) This message was the center of preaching in the earliest church and (8) was especially proclaimed in Jerusalem, the same city where Jesus had recently died and had been buried."

by Gary R. Habermas

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The fact that we have solid historical eyewitness accounts of the resurrection does not prove that it took place, but these key pieces of historical evidence require an explanation if the resurrection did not occur:

1. The Empty Tomb & Missing Body

There are two possible explanations: a) The record of the empty tomb cited by the gospels and NT authors is historically inaccurate. They made it up.

The gospels would not be written as they were if they were an attempt to fabricate a myth. All four gospel writers record that women were the first to testify to the resurrection. The testimony of women was not respected and considered valid in that culture. If the gospels were written in an attempt to fabricate a story they knew wasn't true it would they would never have been written the way they were. The record of the female witnesses is powerful testimony to the fact that the gospels writers' intent was to tell it like it happened. Second, the disciples were proclaiming the resurrection in and around Jerusalem in a span of weeks after the resurrection, causing a stir and angering the Jewish leaders. They could have easily shut the disciples up by producing the body or pointing to the tomb that was still sealed. Matt Perman, in an article at desiringgod.com points out that early Jewish arguments against the resurrection admit the tomb was empty. He wrote: "*The Toledoth Jesu, a compilation of early Jewish writings... acknowledges that the tomb was empty, and attempts to explain it away.*" (The Historical Evidence for the

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Resurrection @ desiringgod.com Sept. 12, 2007) Josephus, the most famous Jewish historian of the first century, wrote that Jesus was condemned and crucified, that his disciples reported that he rose again, without offering any argument to the contrary. Josephus acknowledged the report without citing any attempts to refute it.

b) The second attempt at a plausible explanation is that the body was stolen. The problem with this is that neither the Jews or Romans would never have stolen the body. They had nothing to gain from an empty tomb. A dead Jesus was the only kind of Jesus that would serve their interests. The notion that the disciples would have or could have stolen the body is incredible. Are we really to believe that the same men who were hiding out, scared for their lives, worried that they would be put to death as Jesus was, would all of a sudden get the courage to risk their lives and try to steal Jesus body from a heavily guarded tomb?

2. The Eyewitness Testimonies

I quoted Gary Habermas earlier stating that even most scholars critical of belief in the resurrection acknowledge that there is solid historical evidence that there were many people who believed they had encountered the resurrected Jesus. In Paul's first letter to the Christians in Corinth was written about 20 years after Jesus death. In chapter 15 he wrote about Jesus resurrection as if it was an unquestioned, undeniable, and irrefutable fact. He related how Jesus had been with 500 of his followers at one time and most of them were still alive to testify about their encounter.

Some people have tried to draw an analogy between the witnesses to Jesus' resurrection and Elvis sightings. That analogy just simply doesn't work. First of all, Elvis sightings are just that – sightings. People claim to have seen Elvis. In Jesus case we don't have sightings of Jesus, we have witnesses who spent 40 days with Jesus; touching Jesus, being taught by Jesus, eating with Jesus. The idea that they thought they saw Jesus, but were mistaken defies logic.

One of the most popular explanations given by critics of the resurrection theory is that the eyewitnesses were hallucinating due to the extreme emotion and stress. But this argument has lost much of its appeal because of the overwhelming evidence against it. There are a host of facts about

hallucinations that don't fit with the testimony we have from the witnesses, but the greatest weakness is the simple fact that people don't hallucinate in groups. Hallucinations are personal experiences.

The only other explanation is that these witnesses conspired together to lie and create a myth about Jesus resurrection. As I already mentioned, are we really to believe that the same men who were hiding out, scared for their lives that they would be put to death as Jesus was would all of a sudden get the courage to create a conspiracy that would place their lives in even greater jeopardy?

3. The Birth and Growth of the Church

Facts number 7 & 8 in Habermas' list point to the historical fact of the growth of the early church which was centered on the belief that Jesus resurrection was true. Within the first 40 days of Jesus resurrection we have the record of 500 people encountering Jesus. Within a couple of weeks of Jesus' ascension the disciples were boldly proclaiming that Jesus had risen from the dead persuading at least 5,000, but probably closer to 10,000 people. And the approx. 10,000 people were persuaded to the point of being willing to abandon their deeply cherished customs and traditions. It is a certainty that many more knew the message was true but simply weren't willing to embrace a whole new way of life.

We must also take into consideration that the church grew as a persecuted minority. It had no political or cultural force driving it. It grew in spite of the fact that the political and cultural power structures of the day were opposed to it. It was driven by people who were passionately persuaded that the resurrection was true. They were so persuaded that they were even willing to die for that belief.

Probably the one compelling factor in all of the above evidence is the lack of any attempt by the Romans or the Jews to disprove the resurrection, despite the fact that Christianity posed a threat to each of those groups. Their means of addressing the threat was not through a reasoned refutation of the facts concerning the body of Christ but through attempts to silence the message via persecution.

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My prayer is that God will use what I have just shared to either stimulate faith in the resurrection among those who did not possess it or strengthen it among those who did. Please understand this: Faith in the resurrection does not just involve the mind, or intellect, but it also involves the will. Those who do not want to believe will always find reasons not to believe. Thomas wanted to believe, but he needed help. Jesus met Thomas where he was at.

Why Does the Resurrection Matter to Us?

Now it is not enough to believe in the resurrection. It is equally important to understand the practical significance of the resurrection.

Ephesians 1:19-22

“I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms. Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church.”

Last week we looked at the claims of Jesus and I mentioned the reasons why we should believe that Jesus is worthy of our worship, as He claimed. The resurrection is the final and ultimate reason. We can have all of Jesus’ miracles, all of His wonderful teaching, all of his promises, but if he only died – if he is still in the grave – then all he claimed to be for us and to do for us is meaningless. There would be no experience of forgiveness for our sins or freedom from our sins. There would be no experience of reconciliation with God and therefore no experience of His Holy Spirit’s presence in our life. Finally, there would be no hope eternal life. No hope of future glory in the new creation that has been redeemed from the curse of sin and death.

But because of the resurrection, Jesus claims are vindicated. Because of Jesus resurrection He has proven that he has conquered sin. Therefore, He has the authority to forgive our sin and to free us from it. He has proven that He has conquered death. Therefore, He has the authority to grant us eternal life.

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Jesus is in fact who John declared Him to be in Revelation 19:16, "King of Kings, and Lord of Lords."

By His crucifixion Jesus demonstrated that He is love; by His resurrection he demonstrated that He is Lord. The crucifixion demands a response of what Ravi Zacharias calls appreciation-love. We love Him because he first loved us. We love him out of gratitude for what he has done for us. This love is exemplified by the expression, "After what He has done for me, there isn't anything that I wouldn't do for Him." The love expressed through the cross motivates us to give our lives in service to Him out of gratitude.

The resurrection demands a response of honor-love. Honor-love motivates us to submit to His will because we esteem' Jesus power and authority. He is not a King who scares us into submission. We are motivated to surrender our wills to His will out of respect and honor for the one who is greater than all.

When you understand the cross and the resurrection, your mind and heart will be captivated by both the love and Lordship of Christ. You will understand what it means for him to be the lion and the lamb; humble, yet powerful; One who conquers and reigns through His self-giving love.

