

The Resurrection – Fact or Fiction

Luke 24:1-12

Among the various pieces of literature comes the tall tale of Pecos Bill, folklore that rose during the expansion of the West and immortalized among cowboys. As the story goes he was born in Texas around 1830. His family lived in a small town, but his father thought the town was getting too crowded so they moved away. One day as they were traveling little Pecos fell out of the wagon unbeknown to the family. He was found and raised by a pack of coyotes. Years later his brother found him and convinced him that he was not a coyote, after which he became a cowboy. He had two snakes that he used for a lasso and a whip. Legend says he lassoed a twister and rode it for miles and miles digging out what became the Pecos River. His horse was named Widow-Maker or Lightning but sometimes he rode a mountain lion.

Pecos Bill met the love of his life, Slue-foot Sue, while she was riding a catfish down the Rio Grande. Widow-maker was so jealous of her that after the wedding He bucked her off and she bounced and bounced until she landed on the moon. Pecos tried to lasso her with Shake the snake but failed. He was so heartbroken that he left civilization and rejoined the coyotes. It's said that coyotes now howl at the moon in honor of Bill's sorrow at the loss of Sue.

Now right away we know this tall tale is as far-fetched as they come. We know it's fiction and that there is no credible evidence to support that any of the story is true. Now when we read the account of the passage that is before us this morning some have considered it just as preposterous as the story of Pecos Bill. They conclude that there is no credible evidence to support that a resurrection took place or for that matter could ever take place. Let's face it, that kind of news is not something you hear or read about. Are you convinced the resurrection happened?

As we approach Easter let's turn to Luke 24:1-12 and examine the evidence that is before us and come to some conclusions about the resurrection. Is it fact or fiction. As we examine the passage let's consider three key points.

The perplexity around the resurrection

The proof of the resurrection

The purpose for the resurrection

I. THE PERPLEXITY AROUND THE RESURRECTION

Let's first of all come to the understanding and agreement that for there to be a resurrection there must be a death. There must be a body, a dead body. Otherwise it's just a resuscitation.

If you are of a mind to read the classics of literature you may have read one of the great pieces by Charles Dickens. He wrote a number of novels, short stories and plays but is perhaps best known for *A Christmas Carol*.

Here is the opening to this classic: "Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it: and Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change, for anything he chose to put his hand to.' Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail...Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise?"

We could rewrite that to say that Jesus was dead.

There was no doubt whatever about that. The evidence of His death was substantiated by the guard at the scene of the crucifixion.

There was the astonished observation of the guard when he witnessed Jesus take His last breath.

There was the evidence from the guard who took his spear and drove it into the side of Jesus from which a mixture of blood and water poured out the opening left by the spear.

There was the evidence of the guard summoned by

Pilate to substantiate that Jesus was in fact dead before the body could be released to Joseph for burial. Roman soldiers may not have been medical experts, but one thing is certain, they were experts at killing and they knew when someone was dead. The guard had to be certain the victim was dead or else he would be executed for not carrying out his duty.

Jesus was dead to begin with. His body was removed from the cross and prepared for burial by wrapping it from head to toe and then covering it with about 100 lbs. of spices. Finally it was placed in a tomb and a large stone was placed in front of the opening. Mark indicates that it was a very large stone.

Concocting a conspiracy theory, the religious leaders requested that Pilate post guards outside the tomb because, while the disciples didn't remember what Jesus said about His resurrection on the third day, they did and they wanted to ensure that the disciples didn't pull a stunt by stealing the body and claim He had risen.

In addition, Pilate had the tomb sealed with his signet ring and could only be broken at his request.

According to our text it is now very early on the first day of the week, Sunday. Some of the women returned to the tomb in order to put more spices on the body. Along the way they realized that there was a barrier to their plans. There was a large stone standing between them and the body of Jesus. How would they roll it away?

When they arrived at the location of the tomb their dilemma was answered, the stone had been moved away from the entrance, the guards were not there, and the seal had been broken. Their gloom at the dilemma of the stone for a moment turned to gladness. They would be able to complete the intended preparation. But their gladness instantly evaporated when they realized another puzzling dilemma when they entered the tomb. The body

was missing.

I can well imagine the confusion and distress that must have flooded their heart. I don't misplace things very often but when I do and depending on the item, a little frantic.

It was enough that their Master and teacher had died, now His body was missing. Mary Magdalene did the only thing she knew to do in her distress, confusion and uncertainty. She ran back to find the disciples to tell them the horrific news. To make matters worse, they thought she was crazy. After some convincing, Peter and John raced to the tomb and found that she had been telling the truth. Some sceptics want to suggest that obviously the women and Peter and John had gone to the wrong tomb.

I'm convinced it was the right tomb. All anyone would have had to do was look for the broken seal. That would have provided conclusive evidence that it was the right tomb. But the broken seal isn't proof of the resurrection, only that the body was missing.

Critics of the resurrection want to suggest that Jesus wasn't actually dead, but had only fainted from all the trauma to the body during the crucifixion and then the coolness of the tomb revived Him. How could someone in a weakened state from the ordeal of the trial, the beatings and scourging, and the crucifixion tear through all the grave cloths and spices that bound Him? How could someone in that weakened condition move a large stone?

Matthew records that some of the guards reported to the chief priests the events that took place at the tomb. With the earthquake that shook the place and the crashing of the stone away from the opening of the tomb I believe those guards must have also entered the tomb and saw that the body was missing. Why else would the chief priests fabricate a story that the soldiers were overpowered in their sleep by the disciples who then stole the body? They were paid to spread that story, a story that

Jews continued to believe. That story would be a problem for the soldiers. To fall asleep or to leave one's post meant the death penalty.

All they knew for sure was that the stone had been moved and the body was missing. One historian calls the stone "the one silent infallible witness in the whole episode" of the resurrection. Understand that the stone was not moved to let Jesus out, but to let the others in, so they could see He was gone.

So where was the body? Think about how perplexing it was to the women, the disciples, the guards, the religious leaders. They witnessed His death and preparation and burial. They saw the large stone rolled in front of the entrance. But it was gone and the body was missing. Even more perplexing was the grave clothes still there in the tomb. So what evidence is there for the resurrection? What proof can we find?

II. THE PROOF OF THE RESURRECTION

Nothing at the scene is conclusive evidence of the resurrection. People of interest would be the disciples as the chief priests wanted to suggest. Others would conclude that it was grave robbers. So where's the proof?

Before I lay out some evidence let me say that Christianity rises or falls on the resurrection.

Let me ask you a question. If you really wanted to get to the bottom of something, how much time are you willing to spend investigating it so that you could conclude that all your research resulted in the truth?

Josh McDowell spent 700 hours researching the resurrection. From his research he determined that the evidence for the resurrection was not only credible, but that it was fool proof. Now don't panic, I won't take that long to explain the proof of the resurrection. Here's what he wrote in his book

More Than A Carpenter and then repeated in his book *The New Evidence Than Demands A Verdict*: "I came to the conclusion (after 700 hours of investigation) that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is either one of the most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever foisted upon people, or it is the most important fact of history. The resurrection issue takes the question 'Is Christianity valid?' out of the realm of philosophy and makes it a question of history. Does Christianity have a historically acceptable basis?"

Luke 1:1-4

Acts 1:1-3

As a doctor, Luke was thorough in his investigation. Setting the importance of the accuracy, infallibility, and inerrancy aside for a moment that this book, the Bible is the authoritative Word of God, we must also consider the credible testimony of Luke who was a doctor and given to careful and deliberate investigation before making a diagnostic claim. We know he was inspired by the Holy Spirit, but we must also consider his reputation as a doctor in what he wrote.

I want you to carefully note what he wrote to Theophilus about the resurrection: "After His suffering, He (Jesus) showed Himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive."

He ate, He showed the scars, we can perhaps infer that convincing proofs included miracles.

I want to read from McDowell's book *More Than A Carpenter* that includes testimony from brilliant legal minds about the validity of the evidence for the resurrection.

(*More Than A Carpenter* - pages 96-99)

We could read the conclusive evidence of many other notable scholars who attest to the proof of the resurrection based on their careful research, but they weren't there. Let's for a moment put aside all the

academic evidence and consider one very important factor in the truth of the resurrection. Eye witnesses. I Corinthians 15:1-8
Acts 3:15

You cannot refute the evidence of over 500 people who all saw Jesus alive after the crucifixion. As a matter of fact there are 11 different appearances of Jesus to individuals or groups recorded in the New Testament. The evidence of eye witnesses is key.

Last fall I told you I attended a Pastor's conference in Kentucky. There might be some who think I sat by the pool at some resort. But the irrefutable evidence that I actually was in attendance comes from the eye witnesses who saw me there.

I ran into an old friend I knew from Barakel. I have known Duane Cross since I was teen at camp. I didn't know he was going to be there but we ran into each other at the conference.

Richard Haines is someone I met two years ago at the conference and this year met up again. We sat together second row center throughout the conference.

Then there's the picture taken with me and Bodie Hodge who was the moderator of the conference.

Eye witnesses are an essential factor in validating the evidence. Over 500 eye witnesses saw Jesus alive at the same time. They were not in some psychotic trance hallucinating His appearance. They weren't seeing a ghost or imaging Jesus.

The proof of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is irrefutable. So why didn't the disciples or the women believe Him when He said before the crucifixion happened that He would die and then rise again three days later?

Luke 9:18-22

Luke 18:31-33

To the woman at the well Jesus said He was the resurrection and the life (John 11:25).

To John on the Island of Patmos Jesus said "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!" (Revelation 1:18)

So why didn't they believe what He said?

Verse 34 gives a clue.

"The disciples did not understand any of this. It's meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what He was talking about."

They had Jesus with them and had difficulty accepting it, how important it is for us to walk by faith believing the infallible Word of God that it happened just as it says – that Jesus lives.

I serve a risen Savior...

It was a head scratcher for them. It didn't make any sense. Let's go back to Luke 24 and notice a very important question asked by the angel. "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

Warren Wiersbe makes a very astute observation, one that should give us pause to think about. "How sad it is when God's people forget His Word and live defeated lives."

II Peter 1:3-4 "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who call us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

If we believe the Word of God is true, we must believe in the power of the resurrection, not just for Jesus on that day, but for us in a day yet to come. If we believe the Word of God is true, believe His promises. Trust that He will be faithful to do what He says.

If He said He would rise three days after His death, believe that He did.

If He said He will return someday, believe that He will.

If He said He is the only way to the Father, then believe what He said.

If He said He will give eternal life to those who believe on His name, believe Him.

Are you convinced that there is enough evidence to prove the reality of the resurrection, that it wasn't just a hoax fabricated by a group of delirious men? So convinced were they that Jesus had died they returned to fishing, but then they saw Him alive.

Perhaps an even greater evidence of the resurrection isn't in their testimony as eye witnesses, but in the dramatic transformation that occurred once they did see the living Christ. They went from fearful to faithful witnesses.

They went from cowards hiding from the authorities to committed ambassadors willing to die for what they believed and openly proclaimed about the resurrection.

The proof of the resurrection is overwhelming. There is no evidence in history, archeology, or literature that has ever disproved it. Denying it rejects the historical facts and refuses the testimony of the New Testament. If we reject the credibility of the resurrection, we must also reject the credibility of the rest of the Bible. So why the resurrection? Why not just be satisfied with the cross and leave it at that?

III. THE PURPOSE FOR THE RESURRECTION

This will be answered in more detail on Easter when we consider I Corinthians 15. But let me in part answer it by reading from a book by J. Oswald Sanders – *The Incomparable Christ*. (page 223)

John R. W. Stott said that “the resurrection lies at the heart of Christianity. Without it Christianity is destroyed.” There is no greater event in history than the resurrection – period. Not the landing on the moon or even the cure for cancer if that should ever occur. Without the resurrection we are still

dead in our sins. Without the resurrection we are hopelessly lost. Without His resurrection we have no hope of a resurrection. The death of Christ was important to pay the debt for sin, but the resurrection is essential because it is the assurance that the sacrifice Christ paid on the cross was accepted. His victory over death and the grave through His resurrection assures our victory over death and the grave as well.

That we gather together every Sunday is a testimony that we believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

The bodily resurrection of Jesus affirms to us that He is who He claims to be.

Romans 1:1-4

The bodily resurrection of Jesus proves His sacrifice for sin was accepted.

Romans 4:22-25

The bodily resurrection of Jesus helps us walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:4 (I Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20)

The bodily resurrection of Jesus points to His coming again as Judge

Acts 17:30-31

The bodily resurrection of Jesus is our hope and longing.

I John 3:2

I Thessalonians 4:16-17

So, where does the resurrection leave you?

If you are convinced that the resurrection really took place, what evidence is there in your life that you believe it?

Others should see a difference. Do they?