

Message #1053
Rev. Jack C. Longley

"WHAT DOES THE RESURRECTION MEAN?"
{I Corinthians 15: 1-22}

Trinity Presbyterian Church
April 11, 2004

Several years ago NEWSWEEK magazine carried an article written by Kenneth L. Woodward entitled, "RETHINKING THE RESURRECTION: A NEW DEBATE ABOUT THE RISEN CHRIST." Early in the article Woodward stresses the importance of the resurrection: "By any measure, the resurrection of Jesus is the most radical of Christian doctrines." To strengthen his point, he quotes the late German Marxist philosopher, Ernst Bloch...

"It wasn't the morality of the Sermon on the Mount which enabled Christianity to conquer Roman Paganism, but the belief that Jesus had been raised from the dead. In an age when Roman senators vied to see who could get the most blood of a steer on their togas--thinking that would prevent death--Christianity was in competition for eternal life, not morality."

Most critics of Christianity do not deny the existence of the historical Jesus; but...
...they challenge the claims that Jesus was born of a virgin
...and most especially that He was raised from the dead.
...they begin by questioning whether He was dead when taken from the cross
...they ask: "How can Christians say that He was dead?"
...could He not have swooned and later regained consciousness in the cool tomb?
Let's look at the question...

WAS JESUS REALLY DEAD?

First, let me remind you that crucifixion is not something people walked away from. Death by crucifixion was essentially death by asphyxiation.

...and also we must remember Jesus' treatment even before the cross
...He had been brutally beaten
...guards hit him with their fists
...he was so badly bruised that he was unrecognizable
...He was forced to carry the heavy cross through the streets of Jerusalem.
...and He was so weakened by all the torturous ordeal that preceded that parade that He fell under the weight of the cross.
...another came alongside to help Him climb up Golgotha
Dear ones, Jesus was near death by the time He reached the place of the skull!

Secondly, the Bible tells us that when the soldiers came to break his legs, He was already dead.

"The soldiers therefore came, and broke the legs of the first man, and of the other man who was crucified with Him; but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead they did not break His legs..." {John 19:32-33}

Thirdly, when He was stabbed with a spear, blood and water came gushing out!

...if indeed He was still alive, the spear would've killed Him
...it was typical crucifixion procedure to pierce the victim with a spear to make sure the person was dead.

Fourth, If Jesus was still alive after the experience of crucifixion and revived while in the tomb, there are some extremely extraordinary events that need to be explained. One writer put it this way...

"After the trauma of crucifixion and being in the tomb without food and water for three days, a revived Jesus moved a huge grave stone, fought off and disarmed at least one guard, walked some distance to where the disciples were, evidenced no signs of His ordeal to those He met and walked with them on the road to Emmaus. This would be an extraordinary feat for someone who had undergone the ordeal of flogging, dehydration, and crucifixion. When He made His first appearance to His disciples, He would have had great difficulty making them believe He had been resurrected. What shape would He have been in? He would be bleeding from His wounds, He'd be pale from the loss of blood, swollen from the beatings and very weak."

...I think not!

...and who would've believed Him?

So then...

HOW DO WE KNOW THAT JESUS WAS LITERALLY AND BODILY RAISED FROM THE DEAD?

How do we respond to the scholars who say that Jesus' body "rotted away" in a tomb...or, that it had been devoured by wild dogs {a fate quite common of those who had been crucified actually}?

In their book, "Did Jesus Rise from the Dead: The Resurrection Debate," authors Gary Habermas and Antony Flew deal with objections by giving a number of key evidences for Christ's resurrection.

1. The disciples' eyewitness experiences, which they believe to be literal appearances of the risen Christ {were they all hallucinating?}
2. The early proclamation of the resurrection by these eyewitnesses {were these propagators of a lie?}
3. Their transformation into bold witnesses who were willing to die for their convictions {their total transformation is even more reason to believe}.
4. The empty tomb {and how is this to be explained?}
5. The fact that the resurrection of Jesus was the center of the apostolic message, all of which acquire adequate explanation. It is also found that the disciples proclaimed this message in Jerusalem itself, where it is related that in repeated confrontations with the authorities {wherever they went they preached boldly that Christ was raised from the dead!}
6. The Jewish leaders could not disprove their message even though they had both the power and the motivation to do so.
7. The very existence of the church, founded by monotheistic, law-abiding Jews {how could/would it survive on a myth?}
8. And worship being moved to Sunday as "The Lord's Day". {why if there was no resurrection?}
9. Also the fact that the great persecutor, Saul of Tarsus, met Jesus on the road to Damascus face-to-face and was converted and because the great apostle {of all people, Saul would've been the last to acknowledge the resurrection!}

Let's address some of the objections put forth--

1. The Disciples Stole the Body of Jesus

First, there is not a shred of evidence to support this. History gives reason to believe that they nearly all died martyrs deaths--can you imagine these laying down their lives for a lie?

...that not one would come forth to "set the record straight?"

..the disciples died declaring what they KNEW to be true-- Jesus Christ is alive!
Also, I remind you that the religious leaders went to Pilate, the Roman governor saying, "We remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise!'"

They wanted the tomb secure so Pilate gave them a guard of Roman soldiers and told them to "make it as secure as you know how!" The tomb was secured by the rolling of a huge stone over the entrance and "sealing the stone" and the posting of a guard. {strange scenario}

Biblical scholar Albert Roper writes...

"The Roman seal affixed to the stone before Joseph's tomb was far more sacred to them {the guards} than all the philosophy of Israel or the sanctity of her ancient creed. Soldiers cold-blooded enough to gamble over a dying victim's cloak are not the kind of men to be hoodwinked by timid Galileans or to jeopardize their Roman necks by sleeping on their post."

2. The Roman Authorities Removed the Body

This is easily refutable--where's the body?

...if they removed the body

...where is it?

...produce it and declare the resurrection a hoax

The Jewish leaders devised an elaborate cover-up and gave the guards "a large sum of money" to say the body was stolen and promised to "appease" the governor and "make you secure!"

Why did they have to bribe?

Because the resurrection was reality and they couldn't refute it!

THE MOST POWERFUL EVIDENCE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION--EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNTS

Look at the proof from these post-resurrection appearances--

1. To certain women as they returned from the sepulcher, after having seen the angel who told them Christ had arisen {Matthew 28: 1-20}
2. To Mary Magdalene at the sepulcher, probably upon her second visit to it that morning. {John 20: 11-18; Mark 16: 9-11}
3. To Peter, before the evening of the day of the resurrection, but under circumstances of which we have no details {we read in Luke 24: 34: "The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter!"}
4. To the two disciples on the way to Emmaus on that resurrection afternoon. {Mark 16: 12-13; Luke 24: 13-35}
5. To the ten disciples {Thomas was absent} together with others whose names are not given, assembled together on that evening at their evening meal. {Mark 16: 14-18; Luke 24: 36-40; John 20: 19-23; I Corinthians 15: 5}
6. To Thomas who declared Him as "My Lord and My God" after placing his fingers into the nail prints and Jesus' side!
7. To the disciples while fishing at the Sea of Galilee {John 21: 1-23}
8. To the disciples and over 500 others at one time on a mountainside in Galilee {Matthew 28: 16-20; I Corinthians 15: 6}
9. To James
10. To the disciples at Jerusalem immediately before ascending from the Mount of Olives. {Mark 16: 19; Luke 24: 50-52; Acts 1: 3-8}

In these appearances...

...some came up and touched Him

...He manifest physical abilities

...He ate with them

...He stated that He was not a spirit..."A spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have!"

THE CHURCH

The resurrection is the only reasonable explanation for the beginning of the Christian church.

Historian Philip Schaff writes in "History of the Christian Church"-- "Without this fact the church could never be formed. The Christian church rests on the resurrection of its Founder. Without this fact the church could never have been born, or if born, it would soon have died a natural death. The miracle of the resurrection and the existence of Christianity are so closely connected that they must stand or fall together. If Christ was raised from the dead, then all of His other miracles are sure, and our faith is not in vain. It was only His resurrection that made His death available for our atonement, justification, and salvation; without the resurrection, His death would be the grave of our sins. A gospel of a dead Savior would be a contradiction and a wretched delusion. This was the reasoning argument of the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15."

Our gathering here this morning is an attestation to the resurrection of Jesus Christ...WE WOULD NOT BE HERE IF IT WERE NOT TRUE!

CONCLUSION

The Bible says...

"God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him...whoever believes in Him is not condemned..." {John 3:16-18a}

For "...there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set us free from the law of sin and death..." {Romans 8:1}

Jesus told Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" {John 11:25-26}

Do you believe this today?

The Bible declares..."As Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with Him in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection." {Romans 6:4b-5}

Do you believe this today?

That's the hope of every believer today?

You can walk out of this room this morning with that hope!

Do you know for certain that if you were to die today that you have the gift of eternal life?

...do you fear death?

...do you welcome it knowing it means eternity in His presence?

Have you placed your faith and trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior and declared Him as your Lord?

...if you have--you have received the free gift of eternal life?

...you have HOPE

How do you receive it--ask God--He will give it to you out of His mercy...and His incredible gift of grace because of your faith. I have good news for you today...you can know the resurrection Savior and Lord today--you can take Him home with you today...in your heart!

