

I DARE YOU TO DISPROVE THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST!

By Gary T. Panell

Did Christ rise from the dead? Both friends and enemies of the Christian faith have recognized the resurrection of Christ to be the foundation stone of the Faith. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: “And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—... And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” (I Corinthians 15:14-17)

Paul rested his whole case on the bodily resurrection of Christ. Either He did or did not come back to life. If he did, then it is the most sensational event in all of history, and we have answers to the profound questions of our existence: Where have we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going? If Christ rose, we know with certainty that God exists, what He is like, and how we may know Him in personal experience, the universe takes on new meaning and purpose, and it is possible to experience the Living God in contemporary life. These and many more other wonderful things are true if Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead.

On the other hand, if Christ did not rise from the dead, Christianity is an interesting museum piece—nothing more! It has no objective validity or reality. Though it is a nice wishful thought, it certainly is not worth getting all steamed up about. The martyrs who went singing to the lions, and contemporary missionaries who have given their lives in many parts of the world while taking this message to others, have been poor deluded fools!

The attack on Christianity by its enemies has most often concentrated on the resurrection because it has been correctly seen that this event is the crux of the matter. I want you to consider the facts objectively, just as a British lawyer did. In the early 1930's a young British lawyer was convinced that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a mere tissue of fable and fantasy. Sensing that it was the foundation stone of the Christian faith, he decided to do the world a favor by once-and-for-all exposing this fraud and superstition. As a lawyer, he felt he had the critical faculties to sift evidence and to admit nothing as evidence which did not meet the stiff criteria for admission into a law court today.

However, while he was doing his research, a remarkable thing happened. The case was not nearly as easy as he had supposed. As a result, the first chapter of his book is entitled, “The Book That Refused to Be Written.” In it he describes how, as he examined the evidence, he became persuaded against his will, of the fact of the bodily resurrection of Christ. The book is called, *Who Moved the Stone?* The author is Frank Morison. (Much of this material is taken from Paul E. Little Page 24ff in the book: *Know Why You Believe*)

Here is a copy of the outline we are covering:

Introduction: Scripture, 1 Corinthians 15:14-17, case for the Resurrection, and the Story of Frank

Morison.

I. Questions we must consider:

- A. What is the origin of the Christian Church?
- B. Why do we worship on Sunday?
- C. Where did the New Testament come from?

II. How can we account for the empty tomb?

- A. Did the disciples steal His body?
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- B. Maybe the authorities, Jewish or Roman, moved the body.
- C. Could the women have gone to the wrong tomb?
- D. Jesus may have been unconscious.

III. What about the alleged appearances of Christ?

- A. Some say they were hallucination—what about it?
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- B. What about changed lives of individuals today?
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I. What are some of the pieces of data to be considered in answering the question, “Did Christ rise from the dead?”

A. What is the origin of the Christian Church? First, there is the fact of the Christian Church. It is worldwide in scope. Its history can be traced back to Palestine, A.D. 30. Did it just happen, or was there a cause for it? These people who were first called Christians at Antioch turned the world of their time upside down (or right side up). They constantly referred to the resurrection as the basis for their teaching, preaching, living, and significantly dying.

B. Why do we worship on Sunday? Then there is the fact of the Christian day. Sunday is the day of worship for most Christians. Its history can be traced back to the year A.D. 30. Something tremendous must have happened to change the day of worship from the Jewish Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, to Sunday, the first day of the week. Early Christians said the shift came because of their desire to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This shift is all the more remarkable when we remember that the first Christians were Jews. If the resurrection does not account for this monumental change, what does?

C. Where did the New Testament come from? Then there is the Christian book, the New Testament. In its pages are contained six independent testimonies to the fact of the resurrection. At least three of them are eyewitnesses: John, Peter, and Matthew. (There was also Luke, Mark and Paul.) Paul, writing to the churches at an early date, refers to the resurrection in such a way that it is obvious to him and his readers that the event was well known, and was accepted without question. Are these men, who helped transform the moral structure of society, liars or deluded madmen?

II. How can we account for the empty tomb?

A. The earliest explanation circulated was that the disciples stole the body. In Matthew 28:11-15, we have the record of the reaction of the chief priests and the elders when the guards gave them the infuriating and mysterious news that the body was gone. They gave the soldiers money and told them to explain that the disciples had come at night and stolen the body while they were asleep.

That story is so obviously false that Matthew does not even bother to refute it! What judge would listen to you if you said that while you were asleep your neighbor came into your house and stole your television set?

1. Who knows what goes on while he is asleep? Testimony like this would be laughed out of any court. Furthermore, we are faced with a psychological and ethical impossibility. Stealing the body of Christ would be something totally foreign to the character of the disciples and all that is known of them.

2. It would mean that the disciples of Christ were perpetrators of a deliberate lie which was responsible for the misleading and ultimate death of thousands including their own. Each of the disciples faced the test of torture and martyrdom for his statements and beliefs. Men will die for what they believe to be true, though it may actually be false. They do not, however, die for what they know is a lie. If ever a man tells the truth it is on his death bed.

3. And if the disciples had taken the body, and Christ was still dead, we would still have the problem of explaining his alleged appearances.

B. Maybe the authorities, Jewish or Roman, moved the body of Jesus. A second hypothesis is that the authorities, Jewish or Roman, moved the body, but why? Having put guards at the tomb, what would be their reason for moving the body? A more convincing answer for this thesis is the silence of the authorities in the face of the apostles bold preaching about the resurrection in Jerusalem. The religious leaders were seething with rage and did everything possible to prevent the spread of this message and tried to suppress it (Acts 4). They arrested Peter and John and beat and threatened them, in an attempt to close their mouths. There was a very simple solution to their problem. If they had Christ's body, they could have paraded it through the streets of Jerusalem. With this one act they would have successfully smothered Christianity in its cradle. That they did not do this bears eloquent testimony to the fact that they did not have the body!

C. Could the women have gone to the wrong tomb? Another popular theory has been that the women, distraught and overcome by grief, missed their way in the dimness of the morning and went to the wrong tomb. In their distress they imagined Christ had risen because the tomb they went to was empty. This theory, however, falls before the same fact that destroys the previous one.

1. If the women went to the wrong tomb, why did the high priests and other enemies of the Faith not go to the right tomb and produce the body?

2. Further, it is inconceivable that Peter and John would succumb to the same mistake, and certainly, Joseph of Arimathea, owner of the tomb, would have solved the problem.

3. In addition, it must be remembered that this was a private burial ground, not a public cemetery. There was no other tomb there that would have allowed them to make the mistake.

D. Jesus may have been unconscious. The swoon (faint) theory has also been advanced to explain the empty tomb. In this view, Christ did not actually die. He was mistakenly reported to be dead, but had swooned from exhaustion, pain, and loss of blood. When He was laid in the coolness of the tomb, He revived. He came out of the tomb and appeared to His disciples, who mistakenly thought He had raised from the dead. This is a theory of modern construction. It first appeared at the end of

the eighteenth century. It is significant that not a suggestion of this kind has come down from antiquity among violent attacks which have been made on Christianity. People during earlier times knew about crucifixions, people did not leave them alive!

All the earliest critical records are emphatic about Jesus' death. But let us assume for a moment that Christ was buried alive and swooned. Is it possible to believe that He would have survived three days in a damp tomb without food or water, or any medical attention of any kind? Would He have survived being wound in spice laden grave clothes? Would He have had the strength to extricate Himself from the grave clothes, push the heavy stone away from the mouth of the tomb, overcome the Roman guards, and walk for miles on feet that had been pierced with spikes? Even the German critic, David Strauss, who by no means believes in the resurrection, rejected this idea as incredible. He says, "Such resuscitation could only have weakened the impression which He had made upon them in life and in death."

The only theory that adequately explains the empty tomb is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!

III. The second piece of data that must be explained is the recorded appearances of Christ.

A. Some say they were hallucination—what about it? The major theory advanced to explain away the accounts of the appearances of Christ is that they were "hallucinations." At first, this sounds like a plausible explanation of an otherwise supernatural event. It is plausible until we begin to realize that modern medicine has observed that certain laws apply to such psychological phenomena. As we relate these principles to the evidence at hand, we see that what at first seemed most plausible is in fact, impossible.

1. Hallucinations occur generally in people who tend to be vividly imaginative and are of a nervous make up. But the appearances of Christ were to all sorts of people. True, some were possibly emotional women, but there were also hard-headed men like the fisherman, Peter, and others of various dispositions. Hallucinations are extremely subjective and individual. For this reason, no two people have the same experience. But in the case of the resurrection, Christ appeared not just to individuals, but to groups, including one of more than 500 people! Paul says (at the time of his writing) that more than half of them were still alive and could tell about these events, 1 Corinthians 15:6.

2. Generally these psychic experiences occur over a long period of time with some regularity. But these experiences happened during a period of forty days, and then stopped abruptly.

3. But perhaps the most conclusive indication of the fallacy of the hallucinations theory is a fact often overlooked. In order to have an experience like this, one most intensely wants to believe that he or she projects something that really is not there and attaches reality to his or her imagination. For instance, a mother who has lost a son or daughter in the war remembers how he or she used to come home from work every evening at 5:30. She sits in her rocking chair every afternoon musing and meditating. Finally, she thinks she sees him or her come through the door, and has a conversation with him or her. At this point she has lost contact with reality.

One might think that this was what happened to the disciples about the resurrection. The fact is that the opposite took place. Yes, Christ had said that He would rise from the dead after three days. He

had said this over and over again. But the record shows they (the disciples) did not remember this (that Jesus said He would rise again) until after the resurrection. Their actions show us that they never remembered, expected or believed that Christ would rise from the dead. They were persuaded against their wills that Jesus had risen from the dead!

Mary Magdalene came to the tomb on the first Easter Sunday morning with spices in her hands. Why? To anoint the dead body of the Lord she loved. She was obviously not expecting to find Him risen from the dead. In fact, when she first saw Him she mistook Him for the gardener. It was only after He spoke to her and identified himself that she realized who He was.

When the other disciples heard, they did not believe. The story seemed to them “as an idle tale.” When the Lord finally appeared to the disciples, they were frightened and thought they were seeing a ghost! They thought they were having a hallucination, and it jolted them. He finally had to tell them, “Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” (Luke 24:39). He asked them if they had any food, and they gave him a piece of broiled fish. Luke does not add the obvious—ghosts do not eat! (Luke 24:36-43)

Finally, there is the classic case of which we still speak—Thomas, the doubter. He was not present when Jesus appeared to the disciples the first time. (That only shows that if you skip a church service, you will miss something every time.) The others told him about it, but he scoffed and would not believe. In effect, he said, “I’m from Missouri, I won’t believe unless I’m shown. “Unless I can put my finger into the nail wounds in His hands and my hand into His side, I will not believe.” He was not about to have a hallucination!

John gives us the graphic story (John 20) of Jesus’ appearance to the disciples eight days later. Jesus graciously invited Thomas to examine the evidence of his hands and his side. Thomas looked at him and fell down in worship and said, “My Lord and my God.” To hold the hallucination theory in explaining the appearances of Christ, one must completely ignore the evidence.

What was it that changed a band of frightened, cowardly disciples into men of courage and conviction? What was it that changed Peter from one who, the night before the crucifixion, was so afraid for his own skin that he three times denied he ever knew Jesus, into a roaring lion of faith? Some fifty days later Peter risked his life by saying he had seen Jesus risen from the dead. He preached it in Jerusalem where the events had taken place, where the facts could be verified, and where his life was in danger. Only the reality of the bodily resurrection of Christ could have produced this change in the disciples.

B. What about changed lives of individuals today? Christ is proving He is alive by still changing lives today.

1. If you are saved, you have your own testimony.
2. Also there is the witness of changed lives of millions throughout the world, and these miracles of changed lives have been taking place since the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

You may have known these facts before, or you may not have. In any case you are not saved by

believing the facts of the resurrection. You are saved by asking Christ to be your personal Savior. There are many people who will tell you, "Oh, I believe all that about Christ." But when you ask them if they will accept Him as their own personal Savior, for one reason or another they will not. It may be pride, fear, want to have fun first; lots of things can keep a person from taking this step of receiving Christ. Let us suppose that a doctor has told you that you have cancer, and that he must operate right away on you, or else you will die. And, if he does operate there is 100 percent assurance that you will live. He says, "Do you understand this, and will you please sign on the dotted line." Now you have a choice, you can believe the doctor and sign your name for the operation, or you can choose to die.

There maybe someone reading or hearing this study and you realize that you have the cancer of sin in your life. You realize that if you do not do anything about it, you will die in your sins and go to hell. However, you now know that, Jesus Christ of the Bible has truly come back to life from the dead and has conquered death. That He is like a doctor that can cut out the cancer of sin in your life, so you can live eternally with Him in heaven. Now, what is you decision? Will you sign on the dotted line? If you will, right now, sign your name in the space after repeating this prayer to God. *God in heaven, I know I am a sinner in need of salvation. I repent of my sin. I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins, and that He came to life again the third day. Right now, I invite Jesus to come into my life and cut out the sin in my life. I receive Jesus Christ as my LORD and Savior, in Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

My name is signed here to show that I received the risen
LORD Jesus Christ as my Savior!

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