

Just As He Said

Last Sunday I shared with you why Christ's resurrection is of such importance to all of us. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is not just incidental to our faith. Paul said if Christ is not risen our faith is futile and we are still dead in our sin. If Christ is not risen, then he wasn't who he said he was. If Christ is not risen then death still reigns and we have no hope. It is central to our faith. Examine just about any sermon preached in Acts and you will find the doctrine of the resurrection proclaimed by the early church. But is there evidence to substantiate the resurrection?

In a few weeks many of our students will be graduating from high school and headed off to college. Many will find themselves in a classroom where their faith will be challenged. Students need to know what they believe and why. Don't let your faith be shaken because a professor questions your beliefs. Some of the most brilliant minds and intellects in history have been and are people of faith. Examine the evidence and then consider the agenda, the character behind the argument against our Christian faith.

With that said, let me tell you, I believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The angel said to the women who had come to the tomb on Easter morning, "**Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.**" **Matthew 28:6.** I called this message "Just as He said" because the simple fact is, Jesus never spoke of his death without adding that he would rise again. Jesus said it and I believe it happened, "just as he said." But what evidence do I have? I realize we are talking about matters of faith, but let me share some reasons I believe in Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

The first evidence is: **The body is gone.** Even the skeptics have to agree that there is no body. The gospel accounts of the resurrection all begin with the visit of the women to the tomb on Easter Sunday morning. They arrive and discover the stone rolled away, the tomb empty, the body gone. (Matthew 27:50-28:15.)

Within a few weeks, the apostles publicly preach that Jesus had risen from the dead. It was the central theme of their message. We know for sure the tomb was empty and the body was gone. All anyone needed to do to prove them wrong would be go to the tomb, move the stone and expose the body. It would have silenced the apostles in a hurry. There is no doubt the tomb was empty and the body was gone. The question then is: How do we explain the body being

gone? Here are a few theories skeptics have proposed:

The women went to the wrong tomb. Someone argued they simply went to the wrong tomb. It was dark, they were crazy with grief and they made a mistake. Obviously this makes no sense and to disprove the resurrection, you just go to the correct tomb the next day, produce the body and that's the end of Christianity before it gets started.

The swoon theory. Those who maintain this theory believe Jesus didn't die on the cross, he only fainted and then revived in the cool damp tomb, managed somehow to roll the stone away, snuck out and then revealed himself to his disciples. What's wrong with this picture?

First of all, there was a crowd of people watching his crucifixion. Someone would have noticed if he was still breathing. Mark 15:44 tells us when Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate to release the body, Pilate was surprised Jesus was already dead and verified his death with the Roman centurion in charge of the crucifixion. The soldier wouldn't have missed it. To make a mistake like that would have cost him his life.

Joseph and Nicodemus took the body of Jesus to the tomb and according to John 19:40 they wrapped it with about 75-100 pounds of spices in linen cloth in accordance with Jewish burial customs. If Jesus had been alive, wouldn't they have noticed?

Jesus was beaten, flogged, and then crucified. A soldier pierced his side with a spear to make sure he was dead. Are we to believe that Jesus wasn't really dead, he was only unconscious? After all of this he survived 36 hours in a stone tomb without food or water or medical care, rallied enough to unwrap himself from 75 lbs. of linen and spices, move a stone boulder that had been placed over the entrance to the tomb, then escape without being noticed by the Roman guards. Then, he walked all the way to the upper room and showed himself to the disciples in such a way he convinced them he had defeated death and risen from the grave. He slipped away from them and hid somewhere, occasionally showing up at odd times to further convince them he had miraculously risen from the dead. Then, after forty days, he simply disappeared. That is a little hard to believe isn't it? It's easier to believe he truly was the Son of God and God raised him from the dead.

A couple of other points about this. Matthew's account tells us that Joseph of Arimathea rolled a stone in front of the entrance. The next day, Saturday, the guards were sent by Pilate to make sure the tomb was secure. Don't you imagine they would have checked to make sure the

body was there? Matthew says they put a seal on the stone and posted the guard. A stone is rolled down into a grooved out place to cover the entrance to the tomb, but a seal is another stone that slides out over the top of the stone to secure it. There would be no way for someone from inside to move the top stone that sealed the tomb. And the women wouldn't have been strong enough to move it. Besides, the guards were there. The point is, if Jesus fainted and revived in the tomb, he still couldn't have escaped the tomb.

Thieves stole the body. The question is what thieves and why? Why would thieves want to steal the body? It makes no sense. There is no motive for this nor can it be explained how the thieves got the body past the Roman guard or why they took the time to unwrap the body and leave the graveclothes. "Maybe thieves stole the body and fooled the disciples into believing that Jesus rose from the grave." Understand, the disciples didn't believe in the resurrection because the body was gone, they believed in the resurrection because they spent time with the resurrected Christ!

The disciples removed the body. This theory was proposed from the beginning. It was to keep the disciples from stealing the body that guards were posted at the tomb to begin with. After the resurrection, the chief priests paid the guards to lie and say they all fell asleep and while they were asleep the disciples stole his body. (Mt. 27:62-28:15). How likely is it that an entire guard would all fall asleep? And even if they did, why didn't the noise of the stone being rolled away wake them up? And if they were asleep, how did they know it was the disciples that stole the body?

Supposing the disciples did steal the body, it means they conspired together to fool the people of Jerusalem - but for what reason? What did they have to gain? Peter was ready to go back to fishing until the resurrected Christ appeared. They weren't trying to create a religion. If Jesus was dead he was dead and he wasn't the Messiah they thought he was - end of story. There was absolutely nothing to be gained from such a deception. Yet they not only preached the resurrection of Jesus, they suffered for it. All but John died for preaching Jesus crucified and risen from the dead. It means they based everything they said and did from the moment they stole his body upon a lie that offered them nothing but pain, persecution and death.

It would also have to be argued that all of the disciples including hundreds of eyewitnesses decided to be in on this deception and not one of them ever recanted or decided to

come forward and tell the truth, even though this lie cost them the loss of everything, including their lives.

Roman or Jewish authorities took the body. The authorities had heard that Jesus had talked about resurrection and so to pre-empt any deception by the disciples, they took the body. Of course, within weeks the disciples are preaching the resurrection. All the Jewish leaders had to do to stop the conversion of thousands to this new religion was produce the body. All the Romans had to do to calm down the people was produce the body. Disprove the resurrection and the church would collapse. They couldn't disprove it because they didn't have the body of Jesus. No one could find the body of Jesus because he rose from the grave and ascended into heaven, just as the Bible says. I believe in the resurrection because there is no body in that tomb.

The Graveclothes. Then there is the evidence of the graveclothes. It is interesting that the Scriptures tell us the body of Jesus is gone, but the graveclothes are still there. **“Simon Peter...arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.” John 20:6-8** He, John, saw and believed. What did he see?

John 19:38-42 tells us Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea took the body of Jesus and in the burial custom of the Jews, wrapped his body with strips of linen cloth, sprinkling spices as they wrapped his body. It was approximately 75 pounds of spices. They wrapped his entire body and then a separate cloth was used to wrap around his head. Apparently, according to custom, his face and neck were left bare. They then placed Jesus on the stone slab inside the tomb.

Now suppose we were in the tomb when the resurrection took place. What do you think we would see? Would Jesus begin to move, and then somehow unwrap himself from the graveclothes, and then get up? No. He did not regain consciousness. He was dead and he rose again. This was a resurrection, not a resuscitation. John Stott says, “We believe that he passed miraculously from death into an altogether new sphere of existence. What then should we have seen, had we been there? We should suddenly have noticed that the body had disappeared.... It would have passed through the graveclothes, as it was later to pass through closed doors, leaving them untouched and almost undisturbed. Almost, but not quite.” Stott suggests that because of the weight of the spices and linen cloth, once Jesus body was gone, the linen wrappings simply

collapsed down, flattening out in place. There would have been a space between the linen that had been around the body and the cloth that had been around Jesus' head.

In John's account, this is basically what we see. The cloths' lying there. The linen that had been around his head was separated from the other body cloths by a noticeable space.

Imagine seeing the graveclothes, lying exactly where the body should be, undisturbed, but flat now, with a gap between them and the part that was around his head. He hadn't come to and unwrapped himself. In fact, remember in John 11:44-45 when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead? Lazarus hands and feet were wrapped with strips of linen and he could not free himself. Jesus told those standing nearby to take the grave clothes off of him and let him go. No one unwrapped Jesus from those graveclothes. They weren't unwrapped and discarded. He passed through them, like he passed through the locked doors to speak to his disciples. The graveclothes lying in the tomb testify to his resurrection.

The eye witness accounts. We are told of ten separate appearances of the risen Lord to different people. He appeared to Mary Magdalene, to the women returning from the sepulcher, to Peter, to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, to the ten gathered in the upper room (without Thomas), to the eleven including Thomas a week later, to more than five hundred believers at one time, to James, to some disciples including Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James and John by the sea of Galilee where Jesus fixed breakfast for them and to many on the Mount of Olives near Bethany at the time of the ascension. Remember Paul mentions that many of those 500 eyewitnesses were still alive at the time he wrote 1 and 2 Corinthians.

Consider what Luke says, **“After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God..” Acts 1:3** He was risen! He wasn't a ghost. He ate with them, talked with them, and convinced them he was alive. This wasn't a vision or a dream. He was alive.

Still, some doubt the eye witnesses. They argue the disciples made it all up. If they were going to make up a story about the resurrection, wouldn't they have gotten together and made sure their stories were exact? Each account has little details, subtle differences that make it obvious these are the words of eye witnesses. If they had made it up, they probably would have invented some details about the resurrection itself. The gospels don't. We don't know exactly

what happened or how it happened. We just know for sure it happened.

If they were going to make the story up, they wouldn't have chosen Mary Magdalene and the other women as the first witnesses because women didn't have legal standing. Their testimony wasn't accepted in a court of law. They would have chosen one of the male disciples as the first witness if they were concocting a story.

Perhaps it was all an hallucination. I've heard that theory before. Due to the stress of losing the one they loved and thought was the Messiah, it was a mass hallucination. Perhaps they wanted to believe it so much they created the appearance. But not various times, to various people, over a forty day period. Not to doubters like Thomas and James the brother of Jesus. This was having their doubts and questions removed by seeing and believing.

Finally, **The greatest evidence for the resurrection is the changed lives of the disciples...and all of us!** These men who had fled in fear are, in just a few weeks time, boldly standing up to the Sanhedrin that had condemned Jesus to death. Look at Peter. Or look at James, who became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. James is one of the half brothers or step-brothers of the Lord. The gospels tell us his brothers did not believe in him, but in the first chapter of Acts the names of the disciples who gathered in the upper room are mentioned and the list includes, "Mary, the mother of Jesus and his brothers." What made the difference? What convinced James? I think the answer is found in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul declares that Jesus was raised to life on the third day and then he lists some of those who saw the risen Lord. He mentions the 500 that saw Jesus at once and that many of them are still alive, and Paul writes, **"then he appeared to James..." 1 Corinthians 15:7**

Jesus appeared specifically, personally to James. It was the resurrection that changed him, that made a believer out of him. It was the resurrection that changed these men and women, that made them willing to die for their faith. There was no fraud or scam being played. Jesus rose from the grave, just as he said. There is no body in that tomb. The grave clothes were undisturbed. The Lord was seen by eyewitnesses who told the story. The disciples, including the Lord's own brothers, were so convinced, so persuaded by the resurrection, they sacrificed their very lives to proclaim that message of Jesus, crucified and risen from the dead.

If you need more proof that Jesus is risen and alive, look around today. Most of the people in this room have had a life changing encounter with a risen Savior. This is a room full of

ex - you name it. What changed them? What produced such dramatic change? The saving power of a risen Savior, that's what. Don't believe the evidence I've mentioned this morning? Then believe it upon the basis of the changed lives of the past 2,000 years. Believe on the basis of hopeless lives that found hope. Believe on the basis of addicts delivered, murderers and offenders forgiven by victims and their families, marriages restored, sinners saved. Believe on the evidence of changed lives!

Jesus is risen and we have hope. Jesus is risen and what he said he will do, he will do. Jesus is risen and all things are possible. Jesus is risen and he is preparing a place for us where sin and sickness and death can never touch us. Jesus is risen and we should be eager to serve the risen Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength.

He is risen! He is risen indeed! The old song we used to sing says, "You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart!" Does he live within your heart today?