

The Resurrection of Christ Awesome Fact or Absurd Fantasy

Introduction

There have been many controversial events in human history that have left us with unanswered questions but none with the significance and potential impact as the question of "Did Jesus Christ really rise from the dead?" To the skeptic and unbeliever it is a ridiculous idea and one that has brought delusion to countless millions through the centuries. But to the one who believes, Jesus Christ's resurrection offers boundless hope and secures the other promises He made during His short life on earth.

The apostle Peter says: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (I Pet. 1:3)-" Peter's life - was anchored in what he called a "living hope" because of Christ's resurrection. "Hope" is a desire that you think might be fulfilled. "Living hope" is a desire that you are convinced is based upon a certainty, in this case the resurrection of Christ from the grave. But is it true? Did He really resurrect? We will explore the case for His resurrection and allow you to be the judge yourself.

The Significance, if True!

If Christ did resurrect from the grave, the implications are enormous! First of all, He did not claim that He would resuscitate or recover from a short bout with death. He claimed He would conquer death by resurrecting after three days and return to His disciples in a glorified body.

No other spiritual leader whether it be Buddha, Mohammed, leaders of Hinduism, or any other leader has made such a claim. These religions are all based upon men's ideas of what is true in the spiritual realm. They all died with nothing to validate their authority other than the appeal of their own spiritual philosophy. Christ, on the other hand based the validity of His claims of who He was and what He taught upon His ability to conquer death. The resurrection has always been the very foundation of Christianity. If it did not really happen, we could still honor Jesus as a wonderful man with obvious spiritual powers, but we could not receive Him as the Son of God. However, if He did resurrect, it validates everything He claimed about Himself and His mission and demands a decision from each of us.

The Claims of Christ

1. Jesus Claimed that He was the Son of God.

Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven (Mk. 14:61,62)."

This and many other scriptures record the claim of Jesus that He was in fact the only Son of God, the very nature and essence of deity, incarnate in a human body to fulfill the purposes of God for our salvation. It was this very claim that ultimately gave the Jewish leaders their justification to kill Him, since this claim was considered blasphemy in Israel and punishable by death.

In the above scripture, Jesus knew He was about to die and declared to the high priest what would happen afterward. Because He was the Son of God, He would be seated at the right hand of the throne of God and later, in the Second Coming, come with the clouds of heaven to execute God's final judgement (Acts 1:11; Rev. 19:11).

2. His Death Would Atone for the Sins of the World

"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him and by His stripes we are healed (Isa. 53:5)."

When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to be baptized he declared, "Behold! The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29)." John knew by revelation that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, the One sent by God in the fulness of time, who came to fulfill the prophets and make a way for us to be restored to our Creator. Sin had brought mankind under the curse and alienated us from God. Sin had to be atoned for, divine justice had to be satisfied, in this case by a sinless sacrifice. Only the sinless Son of God could accomplish this atonement by offering Himself.

Once sin was atoned for, mankind would have access to God through faith. "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) (Eph.2:5)."

3. He Would Rise from the Grave

Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up (Mt. 17:22,23)."

Of all the claims of Christ, this is the one that really put His reputation and following on the line. People have been resuscitated and brought back from short episodes with death but no one has ever resurrected from the grave after a three day period of time. Such an occurrence is medically and physically impossible. Impossible for man, yes, but not impossible for God! At one point when being confronted by the Pharisees, Jesus declared, "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself, I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again (Jn.10:17,18)." Shortly after this occasion Jesus would demonstrate the scope of His power by raising Lazarus from the dead (Jn.11:43). During that incident He would proclaim to those present, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me shall never die, he shall live (Jn. 11:26)."

Major Obstacles to the Resurrection

There were obviously some overwhelming obstacles facing Christ in His claim that He would be resurrected. The following is a list of these:

- 1. He was crucified.** This is a verifiable historical fact recorded by historians such as Josephus. All of the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, record the details of His betrayal, interrogation, the shuffle between the Jewish and Roman authorities, the beatings and mocking, how He was marched through the streets of Jerusalem carrying His cross, the arrival at Golgotha, and Him being nailed to the cross and lifted up as a spectacle for the crowds to see. "And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him (Lk. 23:33)."

- 2. He died before being removed from the cross.** "Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out (Jn.19:32-34)." Some have tried to claim that Christ was not really dead but only appeared to be when He was taken down. The apostle John was an eyewitness that when the sword pierced Christ's side blood and water came out. The combination of the watery serum with the clots of blood would be proof to a pathologist that Jesus was dead. If not, when the side was pierced, strong spouts of blood would have emerged with every heartbeat. Even if Christ was not dead before being pierced, He would soon have bled to death because of the untreated wound. In addition, it was the responsibility of the Roman soldiers to make sure that each who was crucified had in fact died.
- 3. He was buried.** The Bible records that Jesus' body was taken from the cross, prepared for burial and placed in a new tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea. "And Nicodemus....also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury (Jn. 19:39,20)."
- 4. The tomb was sealed and a guard was stationed.** "So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard (Mt. 27:66)." The stone was likely sealed by stretching a cord across it and placing a wax seal on each end with the impression of the signet ring of the king. A Roman guard was placed at the tomb, consisting of probably ten or more soldiers who were commissioned to protect the body within upon penalty of death. At this point the Jewish leaders were reveling in their success. This man, who had caused such a stir and created such problems for them, had now been eliminated, seemingly forever. His claims would be buried with Him. He had been confronted, tried, found guilty of blasphemy, humiliated, crucified, died and been buried. The religious leaders were well aware of Christ's claim that He would arise from the grave so they made sure that the tomb was secured by an armed guard of Roman soldiers, just in case this man's followers tried anything. Everything appeared to be under control until Sunday morning when their worst fear materialized. The body of Jesus was missing and no one knew where it was! We can imagine that a full scale frantic search immediately began in and around Jerusalem in a desperate attempt to find the missing body. It was all in vain and no body was ever found.

Two Different Reports

Two different versions of what happened to the body immediately surfaced. The soldiers claimed that the disciples had stolen the body (Mt. 23:13). The disciples had a completely different version which we find in Matthew 28:1-6: "Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you." So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word.