

Exalting Jesus Christ

"The Resurrection – Part 4"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. This morning we're going to continue our series "Exalting Jesus Christ" – a journey through the gospel of John – by taking a look at the resurrection of Jesus Christ from another perspective in "The Resurrection Part 4".
 - A. The reason we're taking time to understand as much as we can about the resurrection of Jesus Christ is because it is the very foundation of our faith as Christians.
 1. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, we have no reason for believing He is the Son of God and the Savior of our souls.
 2. But if the resurrection of Christ did happen, then we do have a reason for believing He is the Son of God, and that He died to set us free from our sins.
 3. Plus, His resurrection gives us the assurance that He will someday return and also raise us from the dead.
 - B. However, I believe there is another critically important reason for examining the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 1. Sooner or later, we will have to defend our belief.

2. Sooner or later, either you or someone close to you – a close family member or friend – will be confronted by someone who will deny the Biblical account of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.
3. When that happens we cannot simply ignore that threat, we must be willing and able to meet it head on!
 - a. The eternal destiny of someone we love and care about may depend on us being able to meet this challenge.

BODY:

- I. For decades, skeptics have claimed there is no *proof* or *evidence* for the resurrection of Jesus.
 - A. They are wrong!
 1. There is an overwhelming amount of credible "historical evidence" for believing in the Biblical account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 2. Think about it this way. How would you prove to someone that the American Revolution actually occurred? There are at least three ways you could do this.
 - a. First, you could produce the eyewitness records of those who lived during that time, and who actually fought in the American Revolution.

- b. Second, you could produce the historical records of those who may not have seen the American Revolution, but who lived close to that time, and who personally knew some who fought in the Revolution.
 - c. And third, you could simply point to the result of the American Revolution – the existence of the United States of America.
 - 3. How can we prove the resurrection of Jesus Christ? The same way!
 - a. We have the records of eyewitnesses – people who actually lived during that time, and who saw Jesus after He had been resurrected from the dead.
 - b. We also have the records of those who lived close to the time of Jesus, and even though they had not seen Jesus, they personally knew some of those who were eyewitnesses.
 - c. And last of all, we can point to the result of the resurrection – the existence of the Lord's church, and all those who believe in Jesus Christ based on the historical evidence of the resurrection.
- B. So, it's never been a question of whether there is historical evidence to support the Biblical record of the resurrection.

1. The issue has always been a refusal on the part of the atheist and skeptic to even honestly and objectively *consider* the historical evidence supporting the Biblical account.
 2. So, rather than honestly investigate the historical evidence, skeptics have come up with a whole litany of theories they believe prove the Biblical record is not only unreasonable, but blatantly false.
- II. So, let's take some time this morning to examine the most popular theories, and then answer them all one by one.
- A. The first theory is often called the "Unknown Tomb Theory."
1. This theory says, in all probability, the disciples of Jesus never really knew what happened to His body.
 - a. They say Roman executioners generally buried the bodies of those they crucified in common, unmarked graves.
 - b. In fact, there are some fanatical fringe groups, like *The Jesus Seminar*, that still hold to this theory.
 2. But a discovery in 1968 dealt a serious blow to this theory.
 - a. In June of that year the bones of a man by the name of Yohanan Ben Ha'galgal were found in a family tomb outside of Jerusalem.

- b. Forensic evidence proved beyond any doubt that Ha'galgal had not only lived during the first century, but that he had also been crucified.
 - c. And yet, he was buried in his own family tomb, and not simply dumped in a common, unmarked grave along with other crucified victims.
3. The problem with the "Unknown Tomb Theory," like the other theories we'll be looking at, is that it completely ignores the historical record.
- a. First, the Bible tells us Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Sanhedrin and secret disciple of Jesus, went to Pilate to personally request the body of Jesus be given to him. **(Matthew 27:57-58; Mark 15:42-45; Luke 23:50-52; John 19:38)**
 - b. Second, the Scriptures say Joseph of Arimathea (with the help of Nicodemus, another prominent member of the Sanhedrin) placed the body of Jesus in Joseph's new tomb and prepared the body for burial. **(Matthew 27:59-60; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53; John 19:40-42)**
 - c. Plus, the Bible says a group of women, which included Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses and perhaps other

unidentified women, were sitting across from the tomb, watching, and taking special notice of the location of the tomb.

(1). The Scriptures tell us they took notice of the tombs location because they planned to return to the tomb after the Sabbath to anoint the body. **(Matthew 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55-56)**

4. What makes this theory so ridiculous is that it assumes no one knew where Jesus was buried.
 - a. If, for some unthinkable reason, the disciples and the women couldn't remember the location of the tomb, certainly Joseph of Arimathea knew – it was his own tomb.
 5. This theory also assumes that the Jewish religious leaders and Pilate didn't know where Jesus was buried – and yet, Pilate had a detachment of up to 16 Roman soldiers go to seal and guard somebody's tomb.
 - a. If it wasn't the tomb of Jesus, whose tomb was it, and what happened to *that* body?
- B. Another theory that is remarkably close to the "Unknown Tomb Theory" is the "Wrong Tomb Theory."
1. This theory says, the disciples of Jesus didn't remember where Jesus had been buried.

- a. So, on the first day of the week following the crucifixion, they all went to the wrong tomb.
 - b. When they found the tomb empty, they just assumed Jesus had been resurrected.
2. However, this theory also ignores all the historical evidence.
- a. When the women returned to the tomb three days after Jesus had been crucified and buried, they not only found the tomb empty, but there was "a young man" (other accounts say "angels") who told the women, *"He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay..."*
(Matthew 28:5-7; Mark 16:5-7; Luke 24:3-6)
 - b. Remember, it had been less than 72 hours since two of these women had sat across from the tomb, taking special notice of the tomb's location.
 - c. Do you really think they would have so quickly forgotten where Jesus had been buried?
 - d. And once again, if the women and the other disciples went to the wrong tomb and assumed Jesus had been resurrected, then everyone went to the wrong tomb – including the Roman guard, and even the angels of the Lord.
 - e. Do you really believe all that could have happen?

- C. Another theory that has gained popularity over the years is known as the "Legend Theory" or the "Myth Theory."
1. This theory says the Biblical account of the resurrection is nothing more than a legend or a myth that became popular years after the time of Christ.
 2. But this theory falls apart completely when you consider the following.
 - a. First, the women were told by the angel that Jesus had been resurrected, and then just moments later these same women actually saw and talked with the resurrected Jesus. **(Matthew 28:9-10; Mark 16:9-11; John 20:11-18)**
 - b. But second, and perhaps the most important, all the accounts of the resurrection of Jesus were written down and circulated by the apostles – the original eyewitnesses – all of whom wrote before 96-98 AD. This list includes:
 - (1). Peter and all the apostles **(Acts 2:32; 2 Peter 1:16)**
 - (2). John **(1 John 1:1-3)**
 - (3). Paul **(Acts 9:1-9; 22:6-16; 26:12-18; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8)**
 - (4). In fact, in 1st Corinthians chapter 15, Paul gives a whole list of those to whom the Lord personally appeared –

including 500 people at once, many of whom were still living when Paul wrote that letter in about 56 AD. **(1**

Corinthians 15:1-8)

- c. So, there is simply no reason to believe the story of the resurrection was some legend or myth developed over the centuries following the days of Jesus.
 - d. The resurrection of Jesus Christ became a historical fact just three days after His crucifixion – everyone in Jerusalem was talking about it.
- D. Another theory that is equally baseless is what is commonly called the "Spiritual Resurrection Theory."
- 1. This theory actually goes all the way back to the Gnostics of the first and second centuries.
 - a. Gnostics denied the bodily resurrection of Jesus, claiming that the true resurrection was a "spiritual" resurrection that occurred at the moment of death when His spirit was freed from His flesh.
 - (1). Jehovah's Witnesses, who also deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus, have views quite similar to those of the Gnostics.

2. However, the problem with this theory is that it completely disregards a number of Biblical facts. For example:
 - a. When Jesus first appeared to His disciples, they were terrified, thinking they were seeing a spirit. But Jesus reassured them by saying, *"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)**
 - b. And even after touching the Lord, and still thinking He might be a spirit, Jesus asked for food and ate a piece of broiled fish and some honeycomb. **(Luke 24:40-43)**
 - c. Matthew's account says the women to whom Jesus appeared, *"held Him by the feet and worshiped Him."* **(Matthew 28:9)**
 - d. And do you remember the opening words of John in: **1 John 1:1-3** – *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life — 2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us — 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you. . .*

3. And so, we can reject the "Spiritual Resurrection Theory" because the disciples of the Lord not only saw Him and heard Him, they also touched Him and ate with Him.
- E. Another popular theory is known as the "Hallucination Theory."
1. This theory claims the disciples were merely hallucinating – they only thought they had seen the resurrected Jesus.
 - a. A hallucination, as defined by the American Psychiatric Association, is "a false sensory perception in the absence of an actual external stimulus" – which is another way of saying "seeing something that isn't actually there."
 2. From a purely medical point of view, there are some real problems with the "Hallucination Theory."
 - a. First, only certain kinds of people have hallucinations – usually those who are paranoid (who have an irrational fear or dread), or those who suffer from schizophrenia.
 - b. Second, no two people have identical hallucination – the details of what they claim to have seen, vary significantly.
 - c. Third, hallucinations usually occur at specific times or places – usually at the same time of day or night, and generally in the same place or vicinity of where previous hallucinations were seen.

3. Like all the previous theories, there are several reasons why this one also fails.
 - a. There is absolutely no evidence that any of those who saw Jesus resurrected were paranoid schizophrenics.
 - b. Keep in mind, Jesus was not only seen by His closest disciples, He was also seen by those who didn't originally believe He was the Christ – namely, the Lord's own brothers, and then later by Saul of Tarsus who was an enemy of Christians.
 - c. And then remember, Jesus was eventually seen by over 500 people at once. Were they all paranoid schizophrenics – all 500? **(1 Corinthians 15:1-8)**
 4. There is absolutely no evidence that would even remotely suggest that all those who saw Jesus after His resurrection were hallucinating.
- F. All the theories we've discussed so far this morning claim the tomb of Jesus was never empty.
1. They claim people either didn't know or couldn't remember where Jesus had been buried, or that He experienced a "spiritual" resurrection or that His disciples only imagined they had seen Jesus raised from the dead.

- III. Now let's turn our attention to theories that admit the tomb of Jesus was empty on the third day, but try to offer some "natural" way to explain the missing body.
- A. Last week we talked very briefly about one of those theories – the "Disciples Stole the Body Theory".
1. But when we examined the Biblical historical record, we found that the Lord's disciples did not have the motive, the opportunity nor the ability to steal the body of Jesus.
 - a. The tomb was guarded by what could have been as many as 16, highly-trained, fully-armed, combat-ready Roman soldiers who would protect the tomb and its contents with their very lives. **(Matthew 27:62-66)**
 - b. We also saw that the disciples acted cowardly when Jesus was arrested in the garden – they all forsook Him and fled for their own lives. **(Matthew 26:56; Mark 14:50-52)**
 - c. We also mentioned the disciples apparently weren't expecting the resurrection, because they didn't believe the report of the women who said they had seen the resurrected Christ. **(Mark 16:1-12; Luke 24:8-12)**
 - d. And, finally, we mentioned they had locked themselves behind closed doors because they were terrified after hearing about

the resurrection – perhaps because they were being accused of stealing the body. **(John 20:19-20)**

2. Therefore, there is no reason to believe the disciples of the Lord had the motive, the opportunity, or the courage to steal the body of Jesus.
- B. We also briefly mentioned the "Authorities Stole the Body Theory."
1. This theory claims that the body of Jesus was removed from the tomb by Jewish or Roman authorities and placed elsewhere to keep it from being stolen by the Lord's disciples.
 2. But this theory also falls apart when you remember, the Jewish and Roman authorities wanted the body of Jesus to stay right where it was, so that in three days they could open the tomb, produce the body, and prove Jesus had not been resurrected. **(Matthew 27:62-66)**
 3. But what really destroys this theory is that neither the Jewish nor Roman authorities could produce the body of Jesus to prove He had not been resurrected. They simply didn't have the body!
- C. Now let me give you perhaps one of the most ridiculous theories on record – the "Resuscitation Theory" or "Swoon Theory."
1. This theory claims Jesus did not actually die on the cross, but merely fainted – merely lost consciousness.

- a. And since medical knowledge was not all that great in those days, everyone just assumed Jesus was dead.
 - b. Then after they placed Jesus in a cool, dark tomb, He was revitalized, got up and walked out.
 - c. And, when the guards saw Him they fainted.
 - d. And later when His disciples saw Him, they assumed He had actually been resurrected.
2. As I said, this is without doubt the most ridiculous of all the theories, because those who advocate this theory have to explain how Jesus could have survived everything leading up to the crucifixion. **(Matthew 27:32-55; Mark 15:21-41; Luke 23:26-49; John 19:17-30)**
- a. Explain how being scourged and suffering tremendous blood loss had little effect on Jesus – many men died under Roman scourging.
 - b. Also explain how being nailed to the cross and hanging there for six hours didn't seem to affect Him all that much either.
3. If that's not enough, explain how Jesus survived having a Roman spear thrust into His side – a spear that not only punctured His lung but also pierced His heart. **(John 19:31-37)**

4. Explain how He survived being wrapped mummy style with grave cloths saturated with a hundred pounds of wet, sticky, gooey spices (through which it would have been impossible to breathe).
(Matthew 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42)
5. Explain how Jesus managed to get Himself out of that cocoon-like wrapping of grave cloths without unwrapping or cutting them.
(John 20:5-8)
6. Explain how Jesus moved a 1½ to 2 ton stone door away from the tomb – not just away from the entrance of the tomb, but some distance away from the tomb itself – as if He had actually lifted it up and carried it. **(Mark 16:4; Luke 24:2; John 20:1)**
7. Then explain how He managed to fight off a contingent of up to 16 highly-trained, fully-armed, combat-ready Roman soldiers.
(Matthew 27:62-66)
8. And finally, explain how Jesus managed to walk the length of Palestine and appear hearty and healthy to His disciples in Galilee after having been crucified. **(Matthew 28:16-20; John 21:1-25)**
9. Do we need to say any more about this theory?

- D. Last of all is the "Passion Plot Theory."
1. This theory was first introduced by Hugh Schoenfield in his work, *The Passion Plot*. It's not only absurd; it's perhaps the most blasphemous of all – making Jesus out to be nothing more than a lying fraud.
 2. This theory claims Jesus believed He was destined to be the Messiah.
 - a. It claims Jesus knew all Messianic prophecies and somehow arranged His life to conform to those prophecies, making it appear He had actually fulfilled them.
 3. But as opposition rose, and it was apparent He would be crucified, Jesus plotted with Joseph of Arimathea to fake His death on the cross and fake a resurrection.
 4. The plan was for Jesus to secretly be given a drug while on the cross that would mimic death, making the Roman soldiers think He died.
 - a. The drug was covertly added to the wine vinegar Jesus was offered on the cross.
 5. The plan also called for Joseph to then take the body of Jesus to the tomb, and after the drug wore off, Jesus would regain

consciousness, and finally reveal Himself to His disciples as the resurrected Messiah.

6. However, the whole plan went terribly wrong when a Roman soldier unexpectedly thrust a spear into Jesus' side, and He died.
7. So, before dawn on the third day, the body of Jesus was removed from the tomb, and was secretly buried elsewhere.
 - a. Everyone seeing the empty tomb would just assume Jesus had been resurrected from the dead.
8. When Mary and the other women arrived at the tomb, they saw a young man (who was actually part of the conspiracy), and became convinced he was the resurrected Jesus.
 - a. Then, on four other occasions, this same young man also appeared to the disciples of Jesus who were likewise convinced he was the risen Christ.
9. Let me answer the "Passion Plot Theory" by simply saying Schoenfield's work is not only pure fiction, it's really bad fiction.
 - a. It's true that Jesus did, in fact, die on the cross.
 - b. It's also true that Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

- c. However, that tomb was guarded by a contingent of Roman soldiers who were there to make absolutely certain no one disturbed the tomb until after the third day.
 - d. We also know Jesus was not only bodily resurrected from the dead, He also appeared to His disciples – all of whom recognized Him immediately despite the fact that they thought He was a spirit.
 - e. Furthermore, they all saw the evidence of the crucifixion – Jesus showed them the nail prints in His hands and feet, and the wound in His side.
 - f. He was then seen by over 500 people at once.
 - g. And then, some forty days later, Jesus ascended into heaven while His disciples watched.
 - h. And finally, Jesus appeared to one of His biggest enemies on the road to Damascus – Saul of Tarsus, who became the apostle Paul.
10. No matter how desperate Shoenfield and others like him try to disprove the resurrection of Jesus, they simply cannot get past all the historical evidence that leads to only one conclusion.

CONCLUSION:

- I. And so, after examining all these theories, what is the only conclusion we can reach based on the historical Biblical evidence?
 - A. The only conclusion is: *He Is Risen!*
 1. This is why the apostle Paul boldly proclaimed that Jesus was, "*declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*" **(Romans 1:4)**
 - B. Perhaps now you understand why Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost had such a dramatic impact that some 3,000 devout Jews were baptized into Christ that same day.
 1. There was simply no way anyone could deny the testimony of the apostles who gave irrefutable proof of the resurrection from the prophets, and from their own Spirit-inspired testimony.
 - a. They were able to bold proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead, and had ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God – making Him both Lord and Christ.
 - C. If you're not a Christian, or if you're a child of God who has wandered from your faith, I have only one question – Why?
 1. To those of you who are not Christians, why are you waiting to give your life to Christ?

- a. The evidence is clear. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.
 - b. Why aren't you willing to come to Christ in complete obedience, and be baptized for the remission of your sins?
2. And for those of you who are Christians, but whose faith has lost ground over time, what are you doing to regain that faith?
- a. And, perhaps even more important, why are you risking another day – another moment – drifting further and further away from Jesus Christ who died for you so that you could be redeemed from your sins by His blood?
 - b. Heaven is too precious and too wonderful to miss, and life is too fragile and too short to risk another moment.