

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 3/29/2024

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

How can we know that the resurrection really happened? Is there enough evidence to encourage someone to contemplate that the resurrection be taken seriously? Here are several points that might help skeptics to give the resurrection some consideration.

1. JESUS' DEATH AND BURIAL. Most historians agree that the crucifixion of JESUS indeed took place. The description of the crucifixion in the gospels fits quite accurately the historical evidence we have of how crucifixions were performed. Beyond the Bible, there are several extrabiblical records of the execution of JESUS of Nazareth including "The Antiquities of the Jews" by Roman historian Flavius Josephus. Further, it seems highly unlikely that early Christians would have created this narrative that their leader had been put to death like a common criminal. The idea of a crucified MESSIAH would have been tremendously offensive to first-century Jews, making it far more difficult to spread the story of JESUS to the primary audience of the early Christians. Instead, we can accept this event as fact.

2. THE EMPTY TOMB. Some promoted the idea that the Romans took JESUS' body and hid it so that HIS followers would not take it and claim HE had risen as HE said HE would. Why didn't the Romans produce the body then to refute the announcement of the resurrection? Others said it was the Jewish leaders who took and hid the body, but again, why didn't they show the body to disprove the claim? And if the Christians had stolen HIS body and hidden it, why were they willing to die for something they knew to be a lie?

After Roman Emperor Constantine became a Christian in 312AD, he sent his mother, Helena, to the Holy Land to research the stories about JESUS. Her investigation led to her instructing that churches be built at the places where early Christians recalled events from JESUS' life. In many cases, the exact sites were known by those who had been there with HIM. The first church she built was the Church of the Nativity where JESUS was born. It seems unlikely that this location could be known for certain as the birth was insignificant until after the resurrection 33 years later. But the second church, built in 326, is the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, over the tomb of JESUS. Certainly, those first followers of JESUS would have known this location and continued to revere it and share its location with others. Word would have been passed down so that Helena was shown the exact location when she came to Jerusalem.

3. THE TESTIMONY OF WITNESSES. The gospels say that it was the women who first announced that the tomb was empty and that JESUS had risen. The testimony of women was not accepted at that time because of the lower status given to women. Even Flavius Josephus recorded that Jewish law stated "Let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex." If the early Christians were inventing this story, they would have wanted more credible witnesses to the resurrection than the women.

Scripture tells us that after the resurrection, JESUS appeared to more than five hundred people. Experts recognize that this is far more than could be explained away by "mass hallucination." Additionally, these appearances happened on many different occasions making it doubtful that post-resurrection sightings could have been delusions rather than actual encounters with the risen LORD.

There is good reason to believe that JESUS' return to life did indeed happen. When my friend, Ed, went to the Garden Tomb, one of two other places beside the Holy Sepulcher that advertise themselves as the true tomb of JESUS, he was told that it didn't matter which one you went to. You would find the same thing. They are all empty. There is much to support the idea of the resurrection. It's nice to have these facts to back the story. But when it comes right down to it, we accept this event as true by faith, and that is a gift from the HOLY SPIRIT.

In CHRST's love,
Pastor Jeffrey