

Resurrection Life

A skeptic's response to the resurrection might sound something like this: **“Do you seriously believe that Jesus was crucified in the most brutal and efficient manner devised in history and then rose from the dead, leaving an empty tomb behind?”** Consider this question for a moment and then ponder your answer. Most of us would say, “Of course.” But why have you come to this conclusion? Certainly there is historical evidence and support from historians that validate the life and death of a man named Jesus. As a matter of fact, no true historian worth his salt would deny these facts. However, the bodily resurrection of a man once dead is a bit more difficult to believe, isn't it? Yet, Luke is very clear in stating the purpose for writing his Gospel account: “... to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us ... having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account” (Lk 1:1-4). In other words, Luke documents the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, from His birth through His ascension, using the accounts of those who were participants or first-person spectators in order to authenticate every happening.

As Luke's account of Jesus' life closes with the “unbelievable” events of chapter 24, we find a group of female followers discover an empty tomb and a disciple, by the name of Peter, who investigates their claim. Would that be enough to convince a skeptic that Jesus arose from the dead? How about all of the number of witnesses who claimed to have seen Jesus, beginning on the Sunday following His crucifixion? The list is quite lengthy: Early on Sunday morning Mary Magdalene and other women saw Jesus at the tomb. That same morning, Jesus appeared to Peter (Lk 24:34; Mk 16:7). Later that day, disciples traveling to Emmaus walked, talked, and ate with Jesus (Luke 24:13-35). Finally, still on Sunday, Jesus appeared to ten disciples, without Thomas, for a visit and little snack (Lk 24:36-49; Jn 20:19-23). A week later He appeared to the disciples again, this time with Thomas present (Jn 20:24-31). Jesus visited various disciples, both in Jerusalem and in Galilee (Jn 21:1-14; 1 Cor 15:5, 7). He even appeared to 500 followers at once according to Paul's defense of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:6). Jesus' appearances spanned a 40 day period between the resurrection and ascension with the final one occurring on the Mount of Olives as the disciples watched Him leave their sight and return to His Father (Acts 1:1-11). But, is the large and diverse group of eyewitnesses enough to sway a skeptic toward belief? While it may help, in the mind of a skeptic, their

testimony may only be a collaborative effort to cover up the embarrassment of a wasted three-year devotion to a make-believe king! However, Dr. Peter Kreeft, professor of philosophy at Boston College, points out the obvious conundrum:

“Why would the apostles lie?....Liars always lie for selfish reasons. If they lied, what was their motive, what did they get out of it? What they got out of it was misunderstanding, rejection, persecution, torture, and martyrdom. Hardly a list of perks!”

The fact is that the most powerful evidence for any skeptic on the spectrum of doubt is not usually the “facts” that may be presented in a spiritual conversation or debate. Especially today, in a time where “my truth” carries more weight than “the truth”, facts carry very little impact. While the happenings and circumstances surrounding the resurrection are entirely true, the hardened heart of a skeptic or cynic is often left unmoved by cold historical facts. However, **a changed, compassionate, and devoted life is hard to dismiss.** The resurrection life that the disciples experienced following their encounters with the living Christ and with the indwelling Holy Spirit caused them to embody the Apostle Paul’s words, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). According to tradition - other than John, who died in exile on the island of Patmos - every one of the apostles died as a martyr taking the Good News to the nations.

The standard has not moved. It remains that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). The Good News never changes! Nevertheless, the need for genuine surrender and dynamic life-change has never been more essential in making the living Christ known! Chinese church leader and martyr, Watchman Nee, once wrote, “Christ is the Son of God who died for the redemption of sinners and resurrected after three days. This is the greatest truth in the universe. I die because of my belief in Christ.” Has the Good News of the living Savior so captured you that you live for it fully?

1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (ESV) - *“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.”*