

## INTRODUCTION

If Jesus carries every one of us is facing the grave. Some people are so afraid of dying they will go to extraordinary lengths to try to avoid the grave. There is a process called cryonics in which you can have your body submerged in liquid nitrogen and frozen at -120 degrees. The introduction from the cryonics web page promises: The Cryonics Institute offers cryonic suspension services and information. As soon as possible after legal death, a member patient is prepared and cooled to a temperature where physical decay essentially stops, and is then maintained indefinitely in cryostasis. When and if future medical technology allows, our member patients will be healed and revived, and awakened to extended life in youthful good health. What a promise! Of course it doesn't come cheap. The Alcor Life Extension Foundation in Scottsdale, Arizona (where baseball star Ted Williams is cooling right now) will charge you a minimum of \$120,000 to be frozen. If that's too much, for only \$90,000 you can choose neurosuspension in which your head is severed from your body and frozen in hopes that future medical science will connect your head to a newer, younger body. I've got the toll free number if anyone is interested. Actually I have a much better idea: submerge your life in Jesus Christ and you don't have to worry about death—He is the end of your grave problems!

As we've been teaching through the book of Luke over the past three years, we have moved toward the climax of the death of Jesus on the cross. Last week we examined the last words of Jesus before He died. Beginning in Luke 23:50 we will read about what happened after Jesus died:

Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and he was waiting for the kingdom of God. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. [Luke is careful not to say "he asked for Jesus" because Jesus wasn't in that "body"—He was in paradise. When you attend a funeral of a Christian— that's only the body— not the person.] Then he took it [not "him"] down, wrapped it [again, not "him"] in linen cloth [John 19:39: Nicodemus used 75 pounds of burial spices] and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered his words. When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of

James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

As we talk about the resurrection of Jesus, I want us to consider the miracle of the resurrection and the meaning of the resurrection.

## **I. THE MIRACLE OF THE RESURRECTION:**

Perhaps no event in history has been debated more than the resurrection of Jesus. Through the centuries men have tried to explain away the resurrection—to remove the heart of the Christian faith. The two theories most often mentioned to deny the resurrection are the (1) kidnap theory and the (2) swoon theory. The kidnap theory proposes the body of Jesus was stolen and hidden and then the disciples said He was alive. The glaring weakness of that theory is if the followers of Jesus were deceptive enough to steal His body and concoct a resurrection story, then they had to have some selfish motive for doing so. If you embrace that theory it stands to reason they would have gained something from their resurrection preaching. But of the original disciples only John is believed to have died a natural death—the others were tortured and executed. All of the disciples went to their deaths confidently affirming the resurrection.

The swoon theory suggests Jesus never really died—he only swooned on the cross, but when He was placed in the tomb, the coolness revived Him and He escaped—by removing the two ton stone and overpowering a detachment of Roman soldiers. Sadly, even some theologians and pastors who claim to be Christians deny the bodily resurrection of Christ.

One of my favorite radio Bible teachers was J. Vernon McGhee. One reason I like him was because his two passions of life were teaching the Bible and playing golf! He received a letter from a lady who listened to his program. She wrote: “Our preacher said that on Easter Jesus just swooned on the cross and that the disciples nursed him back to health. What do you think?” McGee replied, “Dear Sister, beat your preacher with a leather whip. Nail him to a cross. Hang him in the sun for six hours. Run a spear through his heart. Embalm him. Put him in an airless tomb for three days. Then see what happens.”

The central truth of the Christian faith is that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. Note three indisputable sources of evidence.

### **1. The miracle was communicated by the angels**

Women were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb. Some religions denigrate women to a place of dishonor. A popular daily prayer of Jewish men during the time of Jesus was, “I thank you, God, that I was not born a dog or a woman.” Islam even teaches the absolute subservience of women—equating them with pets. But the Christian faith was launched by men and women together. And in Jesus Christ, there is no male or female, Jew or Greek, slave, or free—we are all one in Jesus Christ. (Galatians 3:28)

In a painting by the great 19<sup>th</sup> century Danish painter, Carl Bloch, Jesus is seen rising victoriously with the two angels in attendance. When the women arrived at the tomb on that first Easter morning, they were met by the angels. These angels were God’s messengers coming to announce to the disciples Jesus was alive. They asked, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here— He is risen!” Just as God sent a band of angels to announce the birth of Jesus to the shepherds in the fields around Bethlehem, He sent angels to announce the resurrection to these faithful women.

## **2. The miracle was confirmed by His absence**

A few weeks ago I showed a photograph of a hillside outside Jerusalem that looks like the face of a skull. Many scholars believe this was the site of Golgotha. Not too far from there, archaeologists have uncovered a tomb—and the tomb is empty. Obviously it was a very expensive tomb, with places for several bodies. When scientists took microscopic samples from the soil and rocks they found there was no trace of any human remains (traces can be found in burial sites thousands of years old). So if this was His tomb, Jesus was the first and last to use it. The Old Testament predicted centuries earlier the Messiah would “make His grave with the rich.” (Isaiah 53:9) As a member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimathea could have afforded such a tomb. In Bible times the tomb was sealed with a large round stone. It could be rolled downhill into a groove to seal the opening.

This planet is littered with the graves and tombs of millions of people—some are famous tombs, but most are obscure. The pyramids in Egypt are really tombs, the Taj Mahal in India is a mausoleum, and the Ming Dynasty Emperors are buried in massive tombs, with each complex covering almost 100 acres. Millions of Muslims visit the tomb of Mohammed in Medina each year. But there is no tomb of Jesus, no burial shrine. We don’t know if the tomb I showed you was really where He was buried or not—because wherever it was, He was only there for three days. Today, we don’t visit some holy site and say, “That’s where the body of Jesus is.” Because no one has ever produced the *corpus delecti*—the body of Jesus. One of the greatest proofs of the resurrection is the fact that nobody has ever produced the corpse of Jesus. The Romans couldn’t be convicted of murder in an American courtroom today because there is no corpse. Even if you’re a skeptic, you’ve got to answer the question: What happened to the body of Jesus?

## **3. The miracle was certified by His appearances**

The absence of a body alone is not a compelling argument—but when you combine it with the fact that a living, breathing Jesus appeared on several occasions to His disciples, you either have to say the account is fictional, or Jesus really came back from the dead.

On the first Sunday evening, Jesus suddenly appeared to His disciples from behind closed doors. He invited the disciples to feel His hands and feet—He even invited Thomas to put his hands in the wound in His side. Can you imagine the wonder and the awe as the same folks who witnessed the savage crucifixion seeing Jesus alive? No wonder Thomas fell to his knees and cried, “My Lord and my God!” But Jesus didn’t just make one or two appearances. The Bible says during the forty days between His resurrection and when He ascended back to heaven He made numerous appearances: “The Messiah died for our sins, exactly as the Scripture tells it; that

he was buried; that he was raised from death on the third day; that he appeared to Peter, then to his closest followers, and later to more than five hundred of his followers all at the same time.” (1 Corinthians 15:3-6 *The Message*) Now, if it was a hoax perpetrated by two or three people who claimed to have seen Jesus alive they might have pulled it off. But it is beyond the realm of logical possibilities that 500 people could have been a part of a hoax. Of those 500, all of them suffered persecution and many of them died horrible deaths.

Chuck Colson was a former advisor of President Richard Nixon during the Watergate scandal. He tells how difficult it is to keep a cover-up going. All of Nixon’s top advisors got together and agreed to the same lie. They concocted a story and agreed on the same dates, the same facts, the same time to protect President Nixon. Yet Colson says, as soon as the media scrutiny began every one of them folded like a cheap suit trying to protect himself. Chuck Colson says, “If six Harvard and Yale educated men could not stand a modicum of media scrutiny to protect the most powerful man on earth, how likely is it that eleven uneducated fishermen could withstand torture, imprisonment and death to cover a hoax concerning an obscure Jewish rabbi. As incredible as the resurrection may seem, a cover-up is even more incredible.”

## II. THE MEANING OF THE RESURRECTION:

Maybe you accept the historical fact of the bodily resurrection of Jesus but you don’t really understand what it really means to us. In other words, there is the fact of the resurrection—but what about the *impact* of the resurrection of Jesus? Here are three things it means to us:

### 1. I know that Jesus is more than just a man!

Some people say if there had been no resurrection Jesus would be remembered today as simply a great teacher. I disagree. Had there been no resurrection, we would never have heard of Jesus. His influence would have been buried with Him in the tomb. History is full of obscure characters that gathered a small group of followers and are forgotten today.

If there is no resurrection, we really are a bunch of fools. Paul contemplated that issue when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:13-18: “If there’s no resurrection, there’s no living Christ. And face it— if there’s no resurrection for Christ, everything we’ve told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you’ve staked your life on is smoke and mirrors. If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we’re a pretty sorry lot. But the truth is Christ *has* been raised up...(*The Message*)

Many of you are familiar with the cartoonist, Johnny Hart. He created the comic strip “B.C.” and corroborates on the “Wizard of Id.” Mr. Hart is 70 years old and a few years ago he was converted to Christ. Since that time he has often used his comic strip to share the truth about Jesus. One of his cartoons shows a couple of ants standing in front of an empty cross. There’s a note nailed to the cross and one of the ants climbs up to read it. When he returns the other ant asks, “What does it say?” In the last panel you see the empty tomb and the ant replies, “To be continued.” Without the empty tomb, the cross loses its meaning.

By the way dozens of newspapers (including *The Los Angeles Times*) have dropped the B.C. cartoon because of its Christian message. Johnny Hart says Jesus is the only way to heaven—and some people have had a "Hart attack" over it! They accuse him of being intolerant in his religious beliefs. As I've warned you before—the only unforgivable sin in America today is intolerance.

Johnny Hart isn't the only who believes it. Thousands of Jewish rebels were crucified and buried—but only One came back from the grave. That's what makes Jesus totally unique.

Years ago, when Nikita Khrushchev died in Russia, they were looking for a place to bury him. By this time he was *persona non grata* in Russia. They even made a request of Golda Meir the first prime minister of Israel. Her reply was priceless. She said, "Yes, you may bury Mr. Khrushchev in Israel, but I must warn you that Israel has the highest resurrection rate of any nation on earth!"

## **2. I know that I can be forgiven!**

The two biggest problems of all people on the earth are sin and death. Regardless of your culture, your nationality, your race, your education or your financial standing these two problems call out for you to address them. Everyone on this planet has done or said the wrong things—that's sin. Nobody is immune to sin. The other problem, death, is related to sin because the Bible says, "The soul that sins—it shall die." So obtaining forgiveness for your sins deals with the death problem as well. The Bible calls that salvation or "being saved." One of the clearest salvation verses in the Bible is found in Romans 10:9: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the death, you will be **SAVED**." Why doesn't the Bible say, "Believe in your heart that Jesus was born of a virgin?" Or "Believe that Jesus walked on water?" Or "Believe that Jesus healed a blind man?" Why? Because it is the resurrection that makes Jesus totally unique among all the people who have ever walked on the earth. The only way you can get into heaven is to have your sins forgiven, and the only way you can have your sins forgiven is to believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

Not long ago, the city of Charlotte, North Carolina honored one of its own: Billy Graham. He commented that he had bought a new suit for the occasion. He surprised the audience by announcing this new suit would be the one he would be buried in.

Then he told a funny story about Albert Einstein traveling from Princeton on a train. The conductor came in to punch the tickets, and the absent-minded Einstein couldn't find his ticket. He felt in his coat pockets, then his vest pockets, and then his pants pockets—no ticket. The conductor said, "Dr. Einstein, we all know who you are, and I'm sure you bought a ticket, so don't worry about it." Einstein nodded and said, "Thank you."

A few minutes later the conductor walked by and saw the great scientist on his hands and knees searching under his seat for his ticket. The conductor said, "Dr. Einstein, I told you not to worry about your ticket. I know who you are, so it's okay." Dr. Einstein said, "Young man, I, too, know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going."

Then Billy Graham said, "When you see me in my casket wearing this suit. Remember that I not only know who I am, but I know where I'm going." Because your sins can be forgiven, you can know where you'll go after you die.

### **3. I know that the grave isn't the end!**

Have you read the latest statistics on death? Get ready to write this down: One out of one people dies. But we don't like to talk about death. Have you noticed we used words like, "Mr. So-and-So has passed on." or "Mr. So-and-So is no longer with us." We have a hard time saying, "He died."

Death is inevitable, but the bigger question is: What happens to a person after they die? Many people insist this life is all there is, and the grave is the end. The resurrection of Jesus lets us know for certain the grave isn't the end.

A few years ago, a letter went out from the Greenville County, South Carolina, Department of Social Services. The letter was addressed to over fifty former residents who had recently died. The letter said: "To whom it may concern: Your food stamps will be stopped effective immediately, because we have received notice that you passed away. You may reapply if there is a change in your circumstances."

Americans don't like to talk about death. We use words like, "he passed on." Obviously, that letter was a mistake, and some irate family members informed the government of their displeasure. But they weren't mistaken in their acknowledgment that death *isn't* the end.

Before He was resurrected, Jesus taught that each of us would also be resurrected. Jesus said, "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned." (John 5:28-29)

Many people don't believe there is life after death. Bertrand Russell was a 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and an atheist. As he approached his death in 1970 he wrote: "The life of Man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, towards a goal that few can hope to reach and where none can tarry long. One by one, as they march, our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent Death."

Compare that to the words of Jesus Christ, God: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." (John 11:26)

## **CONCLUSION**

Just because you may not believe in God or an afterlife will not change the fact there is something beyond the grave. It's interesting that Jesus compared the spiritual life to being re-born. Imagine a conversation between two twins in their mother's womb. The female twin, Sandy, asks her brother, Andy, "I believe in life after birth, do you?" Andy replies, "No, this is

all there is." Sandy sighs, "No, I've got to believe that there is another place—a place of light where we will have the freedom to move."

Later, Sandy says to Andy, "I've got something else to say, and you probably won't believe it either, but I also believe that there's a mother." Her brother says, "What? What are you talking about? We've never seen a mother. I tell you, this place is all there is. Why do you want more? We've got everything we need here."

For a while Sandy doesn't say anything else. But finally she couldn't stay quiet. She blurts out, "But don't you feel those squeezes and can't you hear those muffled sounds? I know the squeezes are sometimes painful, but I think they're just getting us ready for another kind of living that's much more beautiful than this where we will see our mother face-to-face." Finally, Andy is so fed up he doesn't even answer—after all, the womb was all there was, and all there would ever be. Some time later they were born—and boy, was Andy surprised! For Sandy, it was even better than she imagined!

Do you believe in life after birth? Do you believe in life after death? When we die, some people, like Andy, are in for a surprise. But for many of us, like Sandy, it will be better than we could ever imagine.

## OUTLINE

### I. THE MIRACLE OF THE RESURRECTION:

1. Communicated by the angels
2. Confirmed by His absence
3. Certified by His appearances

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#### 1. I know that Jesus is more than just a man!

If there's no resurrection, there's no living Christ. And face it—if there's no resurrection for Christ, everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you've staked your life on is smoke and mirrors. If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot. But the truth is that Christ HAS been raised up... *1 Corinthians 15:13-18 The Message*

#### 2. I know that I can be forgiven!

If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you will be SAVED. *Romans 10:9*

#### 3. I know that the grave isn't the end!

Jesus said, "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned." *John 5:28-29*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes