

WHY I KNOW JESUS IS ALIVE

1 Corinthians 15:14 And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of Christianity. Without it, our message is not only false, but completely powerless! But the resurrection DID happen, even though skeptics have tried to disprove it for centuries.

Most recently, THE DAVINCI CODE, a blockbuster novel by Dan Brown (and movie by producer Ron Howard) has assaulted the character of Jesus Christ by saying – among many other absurd notions – that the church basically made up His deity, His virgin birth, His sinless life, and His resurrection nearly 300 years after He lived!

“Jesus’ establishment as the Son of God was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicea.’ ‘Hold on. You’re saying Jesus’ divinity was the result of a vote?’ ‘A relatively close vote at that ...’” (TDC, p. 233)

First of all, the vote taken at the Council of Nicea was for the purpose of affirming the deity of Christ, which had been assaulted by false doctrine. How close was this “close vote”? It was 318 to 2 (!) – talk about fiction!

But the bigger issue is this – how soon did Jesus’ followers actually believe He was divine? Was it really 300 years later? NO!

John 6:68-69 ⁶⁸ Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

John 20:27-28 ²⁷ Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust *it* into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. ²⁸ And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

The Bible said that Jesus was the Son of God 700 years before His birth!

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

If Jesus wasn’t divine, if He wasn’t virgin born, if He wasn’t sinless, and if He didn’t rise from the dead ... then every Christian has wasted their life and every church has propagated a lie. But I can stand here confidently today and tell you that I know for sure Jesus is alive!

Today we are celebrating Jesus’ resurrection from the dead – that makes Christianity unique among world religions. Confucius died and was buried; Lao-tzu wandered off and died with his water buffalo. Buddha rotted with food poisoning; Muhammed died in AD 632, his body cut up and spread all over the Near East. **But Jesus rose from the dead!**

- Brooke Foss Wescott, English Scholar and Textual Critic: “It is not too much to say that there is no historic incident better supported than the resurrection of Christ.”
- Paul L. Maier, Professor of Ancient History at Western Michigan University: “No shred of evidence has yet been discovered in literary sources or archaeology that would disprove [the resurrection of Jesus Christ].”
- Harvard law professor Dr. Simon Greenleaf, who lectured for years on how to break down testimony and determine whether or not a witness is lying, said: “There is more evidence for the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ than for just about any other event in history.”

In spite of the overwhelming evidence, skeptics still exist. We shouldn’t be puzzled by that, because the skepticism started at the beginning with the Jewish Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate.

Matthew 27:62-66 ⁶² Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, ⁶³ Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. ⁶⁴ Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: **so the last error shall be worse than the first.** ⁶⁵ Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, **make it as sure as ye can.** ⁶⁶ So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

Here are some of the precautions they took to make sure they would never be troubled by Jesus again:

THEY CRUCIFIED HIM

Alexander the Great introduced crucifixion to Egypt and Carthage, and the Romans subsequently learned and perfected it. Cicero called it “the most cruel and hideous of tortures.” Will Durant wrote that “even the Romans pitied the victims. Josephus the Jewish historian had observed many crucifixions during the siege of Jerusalem that he called them “the most wretched deaths.”

The Romans were grimly efficient about crucifixions. Victims did NOT escape with their lives. Remember how frightened the Philippian jailer was when he thought his prisoners had escaped? He wanted to kill himself rather than be found negligent in his duty and incur the wrath of his superiors! (Acts 16:27). And Jesus was not only crucified! He was scourged, tortured to exhaustion, and his rib cage was pierced with a spear that ruptured His pericardium so that blood and water flowed out. JESUS WAS DEAD!

THEY BURIED HIM

Jesus' body was placed in a tomb hewn out of solid rock and a very large stone (Mark 16:1-4) was rolled against the front of the tomb (Matthew 27:60). In one of the copies of Mark's gospel preserved in the Cambridge library in England, a parenthetical statement is added at this point in the narrative that says, "And when [Jesus] was laid there, [Joseph of Arimathea] put against the tomb a stone which 20 men could not roll away." Engineers have examined the evidence and said that the type of stone in that area would weigh 1½ to 2 tons to be large enough to cover a 4½ to 5 foot door.

THEY GUARDED HIS TOMB

The Roman Guard referred to in the gospels was a 16-man security force. Normally 4 men were placed immediately in front of what they were to protect; the other 12 would sleep in a semi-circle in front of them with their heads pointing in. They rotated in shifts of four around the clock. Historian Paul Maier says "it would have been virtually impossible" for thieves to get to the tomb.

BUT IN SPITE OF ALL THE PRECAUTIONS, THE TOMB OF JESUS CHRIST WAS EMPTY ON EASTER MORNING!

If you wish to rationalize away the resurrection, you must deal with certain insurmountable facts. You might say that the Jews and the Romans actually outwitted themselves when they took so many precautions to make sure Jesus was dead and remained in the grave – because their precautions make it very difficult for Jesus' critics!

- The Roman seal was broken!
- The tomb was empty!
- The large stone was moved!
- The Roman guard fled!
- The graveclothes were empty – and undisturbed!
- There were hundreds of eyewitnesses of Jesus AFTER He rose from the dead! (1 Corinthians 15:6 – over 500 at once!)
- Most of all, the lives of the disciples were changed forever!

THE CITY OF JERUSALEM WAS THE VERY LAST PLACE ON EARTH CHRISTIANITY COULD HAVE STARTED IF JESUS' TOMB REMAINED OCCUPIED!

The crucifixion of Jesus wasn't only a stupid move on the part of the Sanhedrin, but on the part of the devil! He couldn't see what was coming!

1 Corinthians 2:7 Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known [the hidden wisdom of God] they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Philip Yancey: "In many respects I find an unresurrected Jesus easier to accept. Easter makes him dangerous. Because of Easter, I have to listen to his extravagant claims and can no longer pick and choose from his sayings. Moreover, Easter means he must be loose out there somewhere."

Jesus is indeed "loose out there somewhere" – in His church!

John 14:12 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and **greater works than these shall he do**; because I go unto my Father.

Acts 17:6 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, **These that have turned the world upside down** are come hither also;

One hundred years ago today, on Easter Sunday 1906, a young lady named Jennie Evans Moore attended the morning service at First New Testament Church in Los Angeles, California. She had been fasting along with several others in a small prayer group, and had received the Holy Ghost only six days before. They opened the floor for testimonies at the end of the service, and she stood ... then as she ended her testimony, she began to praise God in other tongues. The congregation was electrified. That evening, services began at the Azusa Street Mission ... and the rest is history.

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Just over a week ago, on Friday, April 7, 2006, I stood on the stage in an arena in Lahore, Pakistan along with our crusade team. I preached (through an interpreter) an extremely simple message about calling on the Lord in repentance. Then when Bro. John Arcovio spoke the word of faith, it happened in seconds, not minutes ... out of 17,000 people gathered, over 4,500 received the Holy Ghost. It was like a river pouring down from the sky – everywhere people were speaking in other tongues!

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