

The Resurrection Factor Part 1

The background for what we're going to look at in the next few sessions, which will be on the resurrection of Jesus Christ – Fact or Fallacy?

The background for what I am going to share is my own personal testimony where I truly believed that Christianity was a farce. I did not believe it was true. And as a student in the university, I set out to make a joke of Christianity; to explain away the historical reliability of the Bible and to make a joke of the resurrection. Because I concluded that no intelligent person could ever believe that somebody was killed, buried, and literally raised again the third day because it went against what I believed to be true.

But in my investigation, there were several intellectual conclusions I came to first and then after that, placed my trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. One was this, I came to the conclusion that I could hold the Bible, the Old and New Testament, in my hand and say, "It is historically accurate and it is historically reliable." We did four sessions on the scriptures and their historical accuracy, but that was the first conclusion I came to as a non-Christian that this book is accurate and true. The second conclusion I came to was that the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as much as I did not want to believe it, was an historical fact. In other words, it did take place in history. I tried my best to refute that, but I couldn't. The third conclusion I came to is that Jesus Christ truly was God incarnate, God taken on human flesh, that He lived as a man, He was crucified, buried, raised again and ascended to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit. Those were three of many conclusions that I had when I set out to make a joke of Christianity. In these sessions now, we're going to look at just some of the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And I like to call this Fact or Fiction – Farce or Fact.

Now the basis of the resurrection and the importance of it is given by the apostle Paul. In 1 Corinthians 15, verses 13 to 17, Paul wrote, "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised and if Christ has not been raised then our preaching is vain. Your faith also is vain. Moreover, we are even found to be false witnesses of God because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact, the dead are not raised, for if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless." What the apostle Paul does here is base everything that Christ taught, lived and died for upon the resurrection. That's why it is so crucial to study it and come to understand it.

The skeptic, Dr. David Frederick Strauss, made this point about how critical the resurrection is as a skeptic, not a believer. He said, "The resurrection is a touchstone, not of only the life of Jesus, but of Christianity itself." He says, "It touches Christianity to the quick and is decisive for the whole view of Christianity."

Everything that Jesus taught, lived, and died for depended upon one thing: His resurrection, His burial, His ascent – His resurrection and then His ascension. My conclusion was, if I can show that Christ did not rise from the dead then my case was one against Christianity, but I was not able to do it and I'm going to share with you some of the reasons why in these sessions that we will have together.

Now it's important that we understand that Christ did predict His resurrection. Let me read several passages. We will start out with the Book of Matthew, chapter 16, starting in verse 21, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem" Jesus said. "And the Son of Man will be delivered to the death. They will deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to whip and to crucify Him and on the third day, He will be raised up." And then in Mark chapter 9, verses 9 to 10, the word of God says, "He began to teach them, the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed and after three days, rise again." And then in John, the apostle John, in chapter 2, verses 19 to 22 writes, "Jesus answered and said to them, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews, therefore, said, it took forty-six years to build this temple and will you raise it up in three days? But He was speaking about of the temple of His body." Jesus predicted that He would be raised from the dead.

Here is the scene. God sent His Son to be born of a virgin, the Virgin Mary. He was born, He grew to about thirty years of age, He was from Nazareth, He taught in the synagogue and all, He confused many of the scholars. He

gathered twelve men around Him as disciples who became apostles. And then He started to teach them of the Kingdom of God and He started to show through prophecy, miracles, and wonders that He performed that He was the Messiah, the Son of God. And then He told them that He was going to have to go to Jerusalem, He was going to be beaten, flogged after several trials and then they were going to literally crucify Him, bury Him and then on the third day, He would be raised from the dead. That is kind of the long story in a short form.

Now the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not some super historical spiritual event. The resurrection of Christ took place in what I like to refer to as time, space, dimension, and history. You say, "What do you mean by that?" Well it took place two thousand years ago in history as we know it today. There was time and there was space. It was the third day. It was the sixth hour. If you had been at the tomb of Christ and had a watch, it would have been ticking off the time. It was time as we know it today and it was space as we know it today in history. There is a literal, physical stone sealed; a tomb; there were people as we know it today. The reason I emphasize that, a lot of people like to say, "Well, Christ's resurrection was not historical. It was something spiritual from another world." No. It happened in history as we know it today. There were guards at the tomb. Five hundred people said they saw Him at one time. Now I was in a history class and the professor said, "Well, you know, back then they would believe anything, they believed myths and tales and legends and fables." But I think we need to understand, they were not dumb back then, they were as smart back then as we are today. And the apostle Paul wrote, in 1 Timothy 1:4, said not to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies. They knew the difference between fact and fiction, between genealogies and myth and reality. And then in 2 Peter 1:16, Peter said, "We did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the coming and the power of the Lord Jesus Christ." Even back then, they discerned the difference between tales and truth; between fiction and fact. And so you are not able to say that this did not happen in history.

Now I was in another literature class and I was speaking and afterwards, the professor made this statement. And he said, "Oh the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the person of Christ and everything attributed to Him is no different than Greek mythology and others" and he started to name off people. Finally, I said, "Just a minute, Sir. Here is a basic difference. When you come to Greek mythology and these other mythologies that you have mentioned, every one knew they were mythological characters and what was ascribed to them." But I said, "Sir, when it comes to Jesus Christ, these were people like you and me. These were His friends, His enemies, and others who ascribed these things about the resurrection; about Him being the Son of God to a real live person they knew." And I said, "Sir that takes it out of myth and puts it into history." It happened in time, space, history. It happened in time, space, history.

Now when I set out to refute Christianity, one of the first things I did was to look at the people who had a lot of expertise in their area of research and how they set out to refute Christianity and ended up becoming a Christian. I wanted to see, as experts in their fields, what caused them to change their thinking and eventually to make a decision about Christ or what caused people to start to consider Christ when they applied their profession.

For example, Thomas Arnold, for fourteen years, was the headmaster of the famous Rugby School in England. He wrote the three great volumes on the history of Rome. And this was his conclusion, as an expert in history, when it came to the resurrection. This great scholar said, "I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them." And then he concluded this, "I know of no one fact in the history of mankind, which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort. To the understanding of a fair inquirer than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead."

And then Brooke Foss Westcott, the English scholar, the literary giant, the Greek aradite, who had studied the scriptures for years in the light of history – Dr. Westcott made this observation, "Taking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no historical incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ. Nothing but the anteceded assumption that it must be false could have suggested the idea of deficiency in the proof of it."

A professor in my country, Dr. Paul Maier, is the professor of ancient history at Western Michigan University in the state of Michigan. He is a man I greatly respect, because he is an intellectual giant, but he can take intricate things and make them simple. He has done a number of historic novels about Pilot, about Jesus, the resurrection, the first Christmas. Dr. Paul Maier, as a professor of ancient history, made this observation, "If all the evidence is weighed carefully and fairly, it is indeed justifiable according to the canons of historical research to conclude that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was actually empty on the third day."

The Englishman, John Singleton Copley, is probably better known historically as Lord Lyndhurst. He was recognized as one of the greatest legal minds in the history of Great Britain. He held almost all the highest offices that a legal expert could hold in England. He was the Attorney General of England; three times he was the High Chancellor and elected the High Steward of the University of Cambridge. This is what Dr. Copley wrote, but it was not revealed until after his death. When John Singleton Copley died, they were removing papers from his office and his desk and they came across a notepad in his own handwriting about why he believed in the resurrection. And this is what he wrote, "No intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in a verdict that the resurrection story is true."

Dr. Frank Morison was a journalist and he was trained in examining the evidence to report the truth about stories. He thought the life of Jesus Christ was the most beautiful lifestyle ever lived. But when he got to the resurrection, he truly thought somebody had come along and tacked a myth on to the beautiful life of Christ and destroyed it or had added tales or a myth to it. This so bothered Dr. Frank Morison, he decided to write a book to refute the myth of the resurrection. He took his own money and went to Palestine to do part of his research. While he was there, he became a believer. And he went on to write a book called *Who Moved the Stone?* And the first chapter is significantly titled, "The Book that Refused to be Written."

Dr. Simon Greenleaf, in my country, is probably one of the greatest legal minds in the history of America. He was the professor, the famous royal professor of law at Harvard University Law School. He wrote the three great volumes on the *Laws of Legal Evidence*, which were used to evaluate evidence in the court of law to see if it is credible. He was a skeptic, not a believer and he used to mock and put down the Christians in his law classes at Harvard. Well one year, some Christians in the law class got tired of it so they challenged Greenleaf to take his three volumes on the *Laws of Legal Evidence* and apply his expertise and these principles to the evidence for the resurrection of Christ. Now that wasn't a bad challenge. After much persuasion, he had to accept it or lose all of his integrity. He started to apply his principles of evaluating evidence to the resurrection. In the process, he became a believer. He went on to write a very large book on testimony – *The Four Evangelists, According to the Laws of Legal Evidence Administered in the Courts of Justice*. And this great legal mind concluded, that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the best established facts of history, now listen – according to the laws of legal evidence administered in the courts of justice.

What did these men find? What caused them to so change their thinking and to eventually become a believer? In these sessions together, I want to look at a number of things that caused them, that caused me, to totally change my way of thinking and in the university, to place my trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Now there were a number of security precautions taken at the tomb of Christ. Dr. Robert Gordis was of the Jewish Theological Seminary, a Jewish scholar, made this observation about, not just so much the security precautions taken, but the significance of the trial of Jesus and why so many precautions were taken. And he makes a comparison to other trials in history. The Jewish scholar, Robert Gordis says, "No trial in the long and tragic annals of mankind has had more momentous consequences than that of an obscure Jewish religious leader who came in to Jerusalem with a small band of followers and was arrested, convicted and executed over nineteen hundred years ago. To be sure, there have been other landmark cases in history, like those of the Hebrew prophet Micah, the Morishite; the Greek philosopher, Socrates; the heresy hearing of the Italian scientist, Galileo; and the ex-communication of the Dutch-Jewish philosopher, Spinoza; as well as more recent trials that are still the subject of controversy. But then this Jewish scholar concludes this about the trial of Jesus, he said, "Yet none has had a greater impact for good or for ill upon the lives of men than the trial and the death of Jesus of Nazareth."

It says, not only in the scriptures, but in history that Pilot oversaw a trial relating to Jesus. Over the years, many scholars have questioned even the existence of Pilot and the reason is there had been no archaeological confirmation that Pilot ever existed, there had only been literary references to Pilot. But then against all odds at that time in 1961, at the time when there was only literary references to Pilot, and so people questioned that Pilot had even been in a relationship with Christ in any way. In Caesarea, in Israel, the Mediterranean port, an archeologist by the name of Antonio Froya, found an inscription in the amphitheatre and it was about two feet by three feet. The inscription read this, "Pontius Pilot prefect of Judea has presented the Tiberian to the Cesareans." And all of a sudden, the skeptics were silenced. Why? Because archaeology, totally apart from the Bible, had not just confirmed the existence of Pilot, but he was the prefect of Judea, where Christ was. Again, archaeology confirmed the scriptures.

And then I see a number of problems, or motives, behind the trial of Christ and what led to it. One is the political motive. You see, Jesus claimed to be the King of the Jews. In the trial, they said, "Are you the Messiah; are you the King of the Jews?" When He said yes, that made it a political issue. In fact, to claim to be a king within Rome was a justifiable death sentence. And then there was the Jewish problem. The Jewish leaders were afraid that if Jesus was not silenced, then the Romans would take reprisals and action against the Jews themselves and so the Jews had a problem with Jesus. They had to silence him. Their fear was that His supporters would cause a revolt and then Rome would move in and crush the Jews. There was not only a political problem and a Jewish problem, there was a Roman problem. If Pilot refused to deal with Jesus and a revolt did break out, then the Roman leaders like Tiberius would be infuriated and Pilot and other Roman leaders would be thrown out of Judea. You had a Roman problem, then you had an economic motive. Jesus was upsetting the economic system of the temple. If you recall, Jesus went in and He threw the money changers out of the temple, He turned over their tables. Well, this was an income for many of the Jewish leaders. They needed to get rid of Jesus for economic reasons. And then there was a religious problem, or a religious motive, for the trial of Christ. The problem here was, so many Jewish people were starting to follow Christ as the Messiah and a result of that, they started to question the teaching of the Jewish leaders in the synagogue. As a result, the Jewish religious leaders had to get rid of Christ.

So you see, there are all kinds of factors that led up to the trial and the crucifixion and burial of Christ. There was a political motive; the Jewish motive; the Roman motive; the economic motive and the religious motive. All of this led to Christ fulfilling prophecy and being tried before Pilot and the other Roman leaders. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the crux of the Christian faith. As Paul said as we read, "If Christ be not raised from the dead then your faith is in vain." I want to state it again, every thing that Jesus Christ taught, lived and died for, depended upon His resurrection. That's why I tried so hard to refute it, but I could not.

In the next number of sessions, I want to share just some of the evidence: the background for the trial and the crucifixion and the burial and the resurrection of Christ. Because I believe in doing it, you will come to the same conviction that I have – that on the third day, Christ was raised from the dead.