

Truth **in** Grace

Truth in Grace Ministries

Dan Hayden, Director

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What if?

Dan's Desk



W

hat if Jesus Christ never rose from the dead? Would that make any difference in your faith? Could you still go on being a Christian?

Haddon Robinson tells the story of a book written in the later part of the 19th Century entitled *When It Was Dark* where the author imagined that a group of atheistic archaeologists had found the body of Jesus in a Syrian grave. Then the author imagined what would happen if such a discovery were accepted as true. He suggested that Christians would lose their faith, Christian churches would close their doors, and Christian missionaries would be summoned home from the mission field. He predicted that within half a century, the western world would be plunged into chaos, defeat, and despair.

Dr. Robinson goes on to admit that the book was not necessarily a good novel. He does point out, however, that the author did understand the heartbeat of the Christian faith. For if the body of Christ were found rotted in a Palestinian tomb, Christianity would certainly crumble. All of the blessings and promises and validity of our Christian faith rests on the firm foundation of an empty grave. That fact is well understood by all who study it.

A British agnostic once said "let's not discuss the other miracles; let's discuss the resurrection. Because if the resurrection is true, then the other miracles are easily explained; and if the resurrection is not true, the other miracles do not matter."

Unfortunately, we only discuss the resurrection at Easter—and then we get it all mixed up with rabbits and chickens and colored eggs. Yet the resurrection is the foundation of our faith. Without it we are doomed—Christ's death on the cross was nothing more than an awful tragedy. But with it we are saved—Christ's death was indeed an awesome triumph. Perhaps we ought to discuss it more than once a year.

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The Apostle Paul put the importance of the resurrection into perspective when he said, “*and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins*” (1 Cor. 15:17). That is a stirring statement. When it comes to eternal life and forgiveness of sins, everything is nothing if Christ did not rise from the dead. Conversely, if the resurrection is true, then salvation in Christ is a glorious hope.

Solid Reasons for the Resurrection

When Paul wrote his statement on the importance of the resurrection, he framed it in a conditional sentence. He said “*...if Christ has not been raised...*” Now we first of all need to observe that he was not expressing doubt or uncertainty. In the Greek language there are a variety of ways of expressing conditional thought. Here it is the second class condition which assumes the falsehood of what is being said. In other words, “*if Christ has **not** been raised*” is assumed to be false. The truth is quite the opposite—He **IS** risen. A few verses later (1 Cor. 15:20), he confidently asserts, “*But now Christ **has been raised from the dead.***” So in verse 17, he uses the second class condition to set up a hypothetical circumstance. Paul

is simply pondering the awful alternative, that if Christ is **not** risen (and He is), then everything we believe, and all of our hopes are nothing more than misplaced confidence in a mirage. He wants us to understand how important the resurrection is to our faith.

The proofs of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead are numerous and compelling. Many have written on this subject, and Josh McDowell’s *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* is one of the classics. My purpose here, however, is only to summarize some of the major arguments as a means of appreciating Paul’s confidence in the subject.

The Empty Tomb

One thing upon which all agreed, both friends and foes alike, was that the tomb was empty. The whole Jewish community was upset over the matter and that made the Roman world upset. This was no little private concern. Great care had been taken to keep Jesus in the tomb—there was the Roman seal and a guard of Roman soldiers—but the grave was empty and they could not deny it. The only thing they could hope to do was to explain it away.

Matthew tells us (Matt. 28:11-15) that the Jewish and Roman authorities collaborated on an explanation whereby they would blame it on the disciples of Jesus. So they circulated the story that the disciples stole the body. Yet that was so obviously false that Matthew doesn’t even try to refute it. Men who had run for their lives at the arrest of Jesus were now supposed to have overwhelmed professional soldiers, brazenly broken the seal of Rome, moved the huge stone at the mouth of the tomb, and would later face the test of torture and martyrdom without breaking down and confessing to the lie of a contrived resurrection. That is too much for even the most skeptical mind to believe.

Other explanations are equally as hollow. For instance, some have said that the Jews or Romans took the body. They didn’t face the same obstacles as the disciples. But think about it. They, above all, wanted to keep the body in the grave. Seven weeks later, when Peter caused such a stir at Pentecost by preaching the resurrection of Christ, all the authorities had to do was to produce the body and the Christian movement would have been dead in the water. As others have said, “the silence of the enemies of Christ on that day was as impressive as the preaching of Peter.”

Eyewitnesses

Paul begins his defense of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 by appealing to the fact that there were many eyewitnesses who claimed to have seen Him alive after His death (1 Cor. 15:4-8). In all, the Bible records ten distinct appearances of the resurrected Christ with regard to a variety of times, places, and people. There were appearances in the early morning, during the day, and at night over a period of forty days. They took place in various locations—in the garden



near the tomb, twice in the Upper Room, on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and far away in Galilee. Three appearances were to individuals (Mary Magdalene, Peter, and James), several appearances were to the disciples as a group (John records three), and on one occasion He appeared to over 500 people at once. The variety of circumstances defy the possibility of explaining away the eyewitness accounts as psychological hallucinations. There is every reason to believe these testimonies as real accounts of actual experiences.

Impact of Evidence

I have shared here merely a summary of some compelling arguments surrounding the empty tomb and eyewitness accounts. There are, furthermore, additional evidences related to the formation of the early church and the momentous change from Saturday to Sunday as the Christian day of worship. There is no lack of evidence to substantiate the factuality of Christ's resurrection. These are things we as Christians need to know, for, as Paul indicates, they undergird our faith and validate our hope.

Consider what others have said about all of this:

Sir Edward Clark—*a prominent lawyer in Great Britain*

"As a lawyer, I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. To me, the evidence is conclusive; and over and over again in the high court, I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. The Gospel evidence for the resurrection I accept unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts that they were able to substantiate."

Canon Westcott—*for years a brilliant scholar at Cambridge University*

"Indeed, taking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ. Nothing but the antecedent assumption that it must be false could have suggested the idea of deficiency in the proof of it."

Thomas Arnold—*Professor of History at Oxford University; author of a 3-volume history on ancient Rome*

"I have been used for many years to study the history of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them; and I know of no 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 that Christ died and rose again from the dead."

Serious Ramifications of the Resurrection

The Apostle Paul was totally convinced that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. But he wanted his readers to think about the serious ramifications of that truth with regard to their eternal welfare. Suppose that Christ had not risen from the dead. What then? Well, he says that the consequences of that would be "*your faith is worthless*" and "*you are still in your sins*" (1 Cor. 15:17). That would pretty much cancel out any

hope we might have for eternal life. However, since Christ did rise from the dead, let's consider these two things from the positive point of view. Here, according to Paul, are the benefits that come to us through the resurrection:

The Validity of Personal Faith

To express the statement in verse 17 in the converse, Paul is saying that because of the resurrection, "*your faith is NOT worthless.*" Faith in Christ for salvation is a valid thing. Some people think of faith as a blind leap in the dark—simply a wish and a prayer with lots of hope and no substance. But that is not the Biblical concept of faith. Faith is "*the substance of things hoped for*" and "*the evidence of things not seen*" (Heb. 11:1, KJV). Christian faith is built upon the firm evidence of a risen Savior as a proof of the fact that His sacrificial death on the cross was effective as the means of our salvation. There's substance to our faith. It's built upon facts that can be historically verified.

Early in my ministry I went through a time of personal doubts that shook my faith. I was ministering to students on the campus of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and in the context of that radical agnostic environment, I was running headlong into intellectual skepticism and scholarly scoffing at the message of the Gospel. I was not a match for the brilliant minds that tore away at the foundations of my faith—my confidence in the Bible as the inspired Word of God and my commitment to Jesus Christ as the incarnation of deity, the Savior of the world. It was a suffocating environment, and I was struggling for survival.

Consequently, I was forced to go back and examine the evidence for the resurrection of Christ that substantiates the validity of the Christian faith. I had to know—was it true? After hours and hours of study and reading, the sunlight of joy began to rise once again upon my faith in Christ as I discovered that the evidence for His resurrection is exceedingly strong, even compelling, even wonderfully overwhelming! I went back to the campus with a revitalized faith—the Gospel message is true and the resurrection of Christ is the proof. No longer did I seek to argue about religion and philosophical apologetics. In every encounter, I made a beeline for Jesus and the undeniable proof of His deity in the resurrection.

Be encouraged, my friend in Christ. What we have in Jesus is not tradition, but truth; not religion, but reality; not rit-

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ual, but a personal relationship with God. Our faith is not worthless because Jesus **IS** risen from the dead!

The Value of Promised Forgiveness

When you place your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you can be assured of the fact that you are forgiven of your sins. As Paul would confidently say it, again in the converse of verse 17, “*you are **NOT** still in your sins*” because Jesus **IS** risen from the dead. You see, the bottom line issue in Christianity is not a better life, but eternal life—and that is directly related to the forgiveness of your sins.

I was sitting on a bus next to a young man who was on his way to join a commune cult as the follower of a popular guru. As I talked with him about Christ, I sought to build a bridge by equating Christ with the very hopes he was seeking in the cult. I shared how Christ would fulfill his desire to be a better person (a new creation), help him gain insight into the true self, and lead him to an understanding of true spiritual values. But I discovered that

he didn't need my Christianity of a better life, for in his mind he already had a better life. Then I realized my error, and talked with him about his sin before God. I asked him how his sin was going to be cared for in the teachings of the guru. And he was silent. There was no provision in the cultic beliefs for the forgiveness of his sin. There was no Savior, no incarnate God dying for his sin. There was no resurrection as the proof of deity and the consequential effectiveness of salvation.

You need to understand, dear friend, that Christianity is unique. There is no religious leader that can prove his claims of deity by his resurrection from the dead. Only Jesus can do that. All religion either ignores the sin problem or seeks to solve it by self-effort. There is no provision for forgiveness of sin through the substitutionary atonement of a Savior, except in Jesus. Jesus Christ is, indeed, the only hope of the world for forgiveness of sin and eternal life with God—for He is the only One who has risen from the dead!

Again, we are encouraged by the words of Paul as intended in the force of his hypothetical second class conditional sentence, “*you are **NOT** still in your sins*” because Jesus **IS** risen from the dead.

Conclusion

Our faith is not worthless and we are not still in our sins. There is validity in our faith and there is value in the promise of forgiveness. These things are true for those who have placed their faith in Christ for salvation. The Gospel is real and our hope is sure—all because “*Christ has been raised from the dead*” (1 Cor. 15:20).

So this Easter season, let's rejoice with Paul in the confidence of our faith as expressed in his final comments on the importance of Christ's resurrection:

“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Cor. 15:57, 58)

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Who is **News & Reviews** TRUTH in GRACE



“It sounds good!” That can be said about anything that emerges from **Robert Eller's** sound studio. His keen ear and commitment to excellence have set a high standard of audio production for *Truth in Grace* Ministries. Robert grew up in Granger, Indiana, northeast of South Bend before moving with his wife Candy to Holland, Michigan. Audio has always been a hobby with Robert and, as an amateur HAM Radio operator, he serves Ottawa County as a member of their communications team for emergency services. His love for music and his experience as the sound engineer for Grace Church simply added to his interest in sound technology. In February of 1997, he accepted the challenge of going full-time with Sola Scriptura as the director of audio productions for a complex of ministries, including *Truth in Grace*. With his expertise in computers and communications systems, along with recently acquired specialized training in audio technology, Robert has become the consummate audio professional. His tireless commitment to excellence has been greatly appreciated by all of us at *Truth in Grace* Ministries. We love his heart for the Lord, and servant spirit to the cause of Christ. Robert and Candy continue to live in Holland with their two children, Lisa (16) and Alan (13).

A Word from the Word

THOUGHTFULLY OBSERVANT

John 20:8

ὁράω

I have long been a fan of mystery novels. Not the shoot-em-up bloody, gory type, but the simple who-done-it type. Sherlock Holmes was my favorite. But then, I've also read most of the Agatha Christie novels, too. I love a good story, but actually my interest in mystery novels goes beyond that. I am intrigued by the powers of observation—the ability of a Hercule Poirot to see things that everyone else has missed, and thereby to solve a mystery that no one else could solve. I have discovered that good Bible study is like that, which is why I have been so fascinated with the principles of thoughtful observation and good deductive logic.

The resurrection was like that, too, and it was there that the Apostle John distinguished himself as the Sherlock Holmes of the disciples. It's all wrapped up in the words for “to see” or “observe”, and you find it in the 20th chapter of John's Gospel.

When Peter and John learned from Mary Magdalene that the tomb of Jesus was empty, they both took off running as fast as their legs could carry them. John got there first, and stooping down, looked in. It says that “**he saw** (*blépo*) *the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in*” (v. 5). *Blépo* simply means to look at something, to glance around. It is the simple act of seeing something without necessarily thinking about it. Then Peter arrived and, being the impetuous man that he was, went bursting into the tomb. The text says that “**he beheld** (*theoréo*) *the linen wrappings lying there, and the face-cloth, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself*” (v. 6-7). The word *theoréo* is used here indicating that Peter looked at things a little more carefully. He perused the details and saw where every-

thing was. *Theoréo* is a more careful scrutinizing look than *blépo*, which is simply to glance around.

It was then that John also went into the tomb and observed the same scene that Peter was looking at, but it says of John that “**he saw** (*horao*), **and believed**” (v. 8). This time a totally different word is used which means to look at with discernment, to perceive with intelligent comprehension. That's why it also says that he believed. John not only saw the linen wrappings collapsed, he also realized that for a body to leave the mummified wrappings without disturbing them was a miracle. He not only saw the face-cloth, he also comprehended that for it to be folded neatly in a place by itself meant that the act had been done deliberately and leisurely. John deduced that this was no common grave robbery, it was a miracle of resurrection. There was no other explanation for what he was looking at. And his thoughtful observation (*horao*) led him to believe.

Most people observe the resurrection of Christ in a *blépo* fashion—they simply notice it and go on. Others are more careful. They are *theoréo* in their observation—they linger longer and notice many of the details. But the thoughtful observer thinks about the implications of it all in a *horao* manner and realizes that here indeed is an act of God. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. There is no other explanation for what is being observed—and it leads to belief.

This Easter, begin a lifetime of thoughtful observation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. There's no question about it—when you *horao*, you will believe.



As you peruse this edition of our *Truth in Grace* quarterly, you are enjoying a taste of **Scott Holmgren's** work and ministry. His ability to conceptualize ideas and then put them into a pleasing context of visual proportion and design is truly a gift from God. Born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, Scott studied at Columbia College in downtown Chicago, majoring in film and screenwriting with minors in history, fine arts, and design. A class in graphic design was destined to set him on a course of occupational pursuit in that field. David C. Cook, the Christian publishing company in the Chicago area, nabbed Scott for their operations, and for the first time graphic design and publication production became a ministry in his life. It was October of 1993 that Scott began designing the communications aspect of a growing complex of ministries, the most recent of which has been *Truth in Grace*. His deep commitment to Christ as Savior and Lord is reflected in everything he does. Scott enjoys baseball/softball, historical board games, and film. He and his wife Annamarie have three wonderful boys—Jonathan (almost 7), Jared (4), and Jack (1)—with a fourth on the way. For all you Packer fans, no, they are not related to your former coach — but that doesn't keep them from calling him “Uncle Mike”.

Truth in Grace

Bits & Pieces

...You've no doubt heard the expression regarding "the best laid plans of mice and men..." Well, that's the way our plans for a Holy Lands Tour have gone. The response has been meager, so we have postponed "April in Israel" (April 17-30, 1999) indefinitely. Keep saving your money and stay tuned. We will undoubtedly "give it another go," as the English would say.

...*Truth in Grace* is an extension ministry of Grace Church of West Ottawa in western Michigan, and now you can see who we are on the Internet. Grace Church has recently established an Internet site at www.gcwo.org — pull us up and check us out!

...We've talked about a *Truth in Grace* radio ministry in previous issues of this publication, and we want you to know that we are still pursuing this opportunity. We obviously need to be careful about presuming on the future (so this is not an announcement nor a prediction), but we have been diligently working on the production side of things and are now actively pursuing the Lord's provision for future broadcasting opportunities. As you think of us, pray for us in this regard.

...Some have asked about a tape catalog of Dan's Bible teaching — but at this point in time, we do not have one available. Four tape albums have been completed now, and we continue to work on others — so hopefully a catalog may be forthcoming in the near future. Thanks for asking.

...*Truth in Grace Ministries* is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit ministry, and all gifts are receipted for tax purposes. A special thanks to all who have included us in their special giving to the Lord's work. We are deeply appreciative.

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