

SERMON NOTES
John 20:1-9; I Corinthians 15:1-8
“Resurrection Investigation”

Intro:

- Ellen Yinger: When my daughter lost her last baby tooth, I was weary of the Tooth Fairy and decided it was time to dispel this childhood myth.
- *"Kelli," I said, "You know how the Easter Bunny is really Mommy, and Santa Claus is, too?"*
- *"Yes," she replied, a bit warily.*
- *"Well, there's one more person who is really me. Can you guess who that is?"* Slowly, Kelli's eyes grew big as saucers and her mouth dropped open. In a small, awe-filled voice, she said, *"Do you mean God?"*
- *What is Easter to you? A childhood myth? Or the most important event in all of human history?*
- Many Americans have what could be called an *Easter faith* – meaning Faith in Easter, not in the Christ of Easter // something like this: *just as tulips rise from the ground in the Spring – so also our souls will live forever after we die*
- *It is faith in the idea of hope – and new life – and immortality and life after death - without actually being grounded in Christ's resurrection from the dead*
- Just as people celebrate the spirit of Christmas without believing in the actual Incarnation and Virgin Birth of Jesus – many people celebrate the spirit of Easter without believing that Jesus of Nazareth actually rose from the dead
- *Maybe his spirit lives on in his followers and in his example and teachings and influence – but an actual bodily resurrection?*
- *If the bones of the dead Jesus were discovered tomorrow in a Palestinian tomb – such as the preposterous claim of the documentary “The Jesus Tomb” -- what would change?*
- For many people – nothing
- *They would still think that Jesus was a great moral teacher // their daily lives and basic values and beliefs and priorities would remain unchanged*
- **But in reality, if the bones of the dead Jesus were discovered tomorrow in a Palestinian tomb – everything would change**
- *The fact is – without a resurrected Christ – there would be no Christian religion or any Christian churches of any kind – Christianity never would have become a movement or a religion without Christ's resurrection*
- You see – Christianity is not a philosophy or metaphysical theory or moral code or religious system
- **In essence, Christianity is the Good News of what God has done in human history through Jesus' death and resurrection to save us from the dominion of sin, death and Satan**

- **The death of Jesus Christ is the means of Christ's victory over sin, death and Satan**
- *The resurrection is the proof of Christ's victory over sin, death and Satan*
- *Sin, death and Satan are not defeated by philosophical arguments or metaphysical theories or religious dogma or personal spirituality*
- Sin and death entered the world through an event in human history – the sin of a real man
- *Therefore, sin and death can be defeated only by an event in human history – the death and resurrection of a Real Man, Jesus of Nazareth*
- **The resurrection completes our salvation – without the resurrection, Jesus' death is just another tragedy**
- *Only a death that makes full atonement for our sins could break the power of death as sin's penalty – and only an actual resurrection can give evidence that the power of death has been broken*
- **The resurrection sets Jesus apart from all other religious founders**
- *The bones of Abraham and Mohammed and Buddha and Confucius are all still here on earth*
- **Only Jesus' tomb is empty**
- What is the most important question to ask when investigating any religion?
- *Is it good for me? Will it enhance my life? Do its teachings agree with my ideas? Do I like its view of God and of life after death? What do my friends think of it?*
- The most important question to ask of any religion is this: ***Is it true? Does it reveal God as He really is?***
- Perhaps the most important step in anyone's spiritual journey is to exchange their idea of God – or the kind of God they want to believe in – *for the God who is – the God who said to Moses: I AM WHO I AM*
- *How can you know whether a religion is true or not?*
- How would you evaluate whether Hinduism or Islam or Buddhism is true or not?
- *Christianity makes it easy for you*
- **The truth of Christianity rises or falls with the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ**
- *If the resurrection did not happen, then Christianity is based on a lie or deception or fraud – so forget about it*
- *If Jesus' bones have been rotting in a Palestinian tomb for 2000 years, then Christianity is false at its core – so walk away from it*
- ***But if Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, then Christianity is true***
- *If Jesus rose from the dead, then that validates his claim to be God in human flesh – and if He is God in human flesh – then everything else he said is true*
- ***If Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, then the only rational response is to worship Him and follow Him as Lord***

- Last Sunday evening our HUGS puppet team performed a wonderful show entitled: *Creation Investigation*
- This morning we're going to do our own *Resurrection Investigation*
- Many skeptics and believers alike have never really investigated the evidence for or against the Christian claim that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead
- *Let me assure you – if you are here this morning as a doubter or unbeliever or skeptic – first of all, you are welcome here – and secondly, we have no intention of trying to persuade you to become a Christian in a way that violates your intellectual honesty*
- **We don't expect you to believe something in your heart that makes no sense to your mind**
- Before asking you to commit your life to Christ – we're going to present you with some solid reasons to believe that Jesus is the Son of God as proved by his resurrection from the dead

I. JUST THE FACTS, PLEASE

- What is the difference between a fact and a belief?
 - *That Jesus of Nazareth was crucified on a Roman Cross is a historical fact*
 - *That Jesus of Nazareth was crucified on a Roman Cross to take away the sins of the world is a religious belief*
 - Now if the facts and the historical evidence all point to the conclusion that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead on the third day – as he predicted – then that would support the logical deduction that Jesus is indeed the Son of God whose death did indeed provide atonement for our sins
 - *But we're going to begin our Resurrection Investigation with the facts of the case before we look at various theories that attempt to explain those facts*
 - In your sermon notes in your bulletin, you will see a list of pertinent facts related to the claim that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead
 - *Again, these are facts – not beliefs*
 - Skeptics and believers alike must account for these facts of history
- 1) *Jesus' death was certified by the Romans*
 - 2) *Several people knew and saw where Jesus was buried*
 - 3) *The tomb was guarded by Roman soldiers and a large stone*
 - 4) *The stone was rolled away from the tomb entrance and the tomb was empty on the third day – Jesus' body was gone and only his graveclothes remained*
 - 5) *The dead body of Jesus was never found – and the enemies of Christianity were never able to produce Jesus' corpse*
 - 6) *The disciples, the women and 500 other eyewitnesses claimed to see Jesus alive – and some touched his physical body that still bore the wounds of his crucifixion*

- 7) *These appearances ceased after 40 days*
- 8) *The disciples were transformed from fearful cowards to bold and courageous witnesses of Jesus and the resurrection*
- 9) *The Christian movement / religion / church was founded in the city of Jesus' crucifixion based on the central claim that Jesus was risen from the dead – still the central claim today*
- 10) *Devout Jewish believers changed their day of worship from Saturday to Sunday*
- 11) *Those claiming to have seen Jesus alive were willing to suffer and die for their testimony – and many did*
- 12) *The New Testament writings are permeated with references to Christ's resurrection – much of it written by eyewitnesses, and all of it written within the lifetimes of people who witnessed Jesus' crucifixion*

- These are the basic facts of the case
- The Christian explanation of these facts is that God raised Jesus from the dead
- *That explanation fits all the facts – but creates other problems*
- For example, none of us today has ever witnessed a resurrection
- *So the Christian explanation is contrary to our normal experience today – namely, we observe that dead people stay dead and dead bodies stay put*
- It is always difficult to believe someone else's testimony to a supernatural event that you yourself have never witnessed
- *Even many Bible-believing Christians are often skeptical when they hear reports of people sharing stories of healings and miracles and supernatural events today*
- Most people today have a natural bias against belief in supernatural events
- *We are basically naturalistic in our worldview – assuming that even events that seem to be extraordinary most likely have a natural explanation and a natural cause that will eventually be discovered*
- So it is not surprising that many people respond to the claims that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead with skepticism – and look for other – non-miraculous – explanations for the facts of the case

II. ALTERNATIVE THEORIES

- As Peter Kreeft points out in his excellent book on Christian apologetics, there are five logical possibilities:
- *(1) The resurrection really happened, (2) the apostles were deceived by a hallucination or apparition, (3) the apostles created a myth, not meaning it to be taken literally, (4) the apostles were deceivers who conspired to foist on the world the most famous and successful hoax in history, or (5) Jesus only swooned and did not die and was only resuscitated, not resurrected*

1) *The Swoon Theory*

- This theory was popularized by the book *The Passover Plot* when I was in college
- *The theory claims that Jesus never died on the Cross – he only swooned – and then was revived in the tomb – and when he appeared alive people mistakenly believed that he had been raised from the dead – and he let them think so*
- The death of Jesus is so well-attested that even most skeptics do not take this theory seriously

A woman wrote J. Vernon McGee: "*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 for thirty-nine heavy strokes. 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 fact is: Jesus really did die on that Roman cross – any explanation for why his tomb was empty 3 days later must begin with the fact that he was dead when he was buried

2) *The Conspiracy Theory*

- This theory postulates that the disciples stole the body and made up the whole story of the resurrection
- *This theory goes all the way back to NT times:*

Matthew 28:11 - 15 (NIV) ¹¹While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.

¹²When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' ¹⁴If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." ¹⁵So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

- First of all, Roman guards would never fall asleep on duty – upon threat of death
- *And secondly, how would the disciples ever have been able to overpower professional Roman soldiers to steal the body?*
- *There are psychological contradictions as well*

- Whatever people may think of the theological and supernatural elements of the NT, most people agree that the ethical teachings found in the NT are of the highest caliber
- *Are we really to believe that these ethical teachings were written down by the most cunning, conniving deceivers in the world who were all the while perpetrating a giant hoax on the rest of humanity?*
- Even more incredibly, that would mean that these men died for what they knew to be a lie
- *It is true that people throughout history have died for causes that turned out to be false – but they believed in the justice and truthfulness of those causes at the time*
- All of the apostles were persecuted for their belief in Jesus and his resurrection – with all but one of them being martyred
- *Many other Christians who were either eyewitnesses of the risen Christ – or close friends of such eyewitnesses – also were persecuted for their belief in Jesus and his resurrection*
- Most of them remained true to Christ even to the point of death
- *But there are records of some early Christians breaking under persecution and denying Christ as their Lord*
- **But no one ever confessed that the resurrection itself was a lie**
- *Are we really to believe that hundreds of Christians would die for a lie – without a single one of them cracking under pressure and admitting that the whole story of the resurrection was made up?*
- *History knows of no similar example of a hoax of such magnitude or import*
- This theory is as unique as the resurrection itself—but much less plausible and far less able to explain all the facts of the case

3) *The Hallucination / Apparition Theory*

- *This theory tries to explain the resurrection appearances of Jesus*
- According to this theory, the disciples sincerely believed they saw Jesus alive again – walking and talking and looking very much alive from the dead – *but in reality they were only seeing an apparition or hallucination*
- It is not impossible that one or two of the disciples could have seen an apparition or hallucination
- *But there were too many different appearances to too many different people in too many different locations*
- That 10 or 11 apostles would have seen the same hallucination at the same time is nearly impossible psychologically – *to think that 500 would have had the same hallucination is insane*

- Explaining the appearances by means of an apparition is nearly as problematic – *though that theory at least has in its favor that when Jesus was walking on the water toward the disciples in the boat – they thought at first they were seeing a ghost – and when the 10 apostles first saw Jesus alive on Easter evening – their first response was that they thought they were seeing a ghost*
- *Jesus had to dispel that notion by eating some fish so that they could see that he was a real man with a real body who was really alive from the dead*
- And again, there were just too many appearances to too many people on too many occasions to explain them all by apparitions
- It is also curious that the hallucinations or apparitions stopped suddenly after 40 days
- *Why 40 days? Why not a week – or a year?*
- The Gospels do record that there was some initial confusion as to what the disciples were seeing and experiencing
- *After all – no one was expecting a resurrection*
- And Jesus' body – though real and bearing the wounds of his crucifixion – was also transformed and not exactly the same as his mortal body
- *So Jesus had to prove to his disciples that his body was real – and truly his – and not an apparition or ghost or spirit*
- Though there may have been some initial confusion as to what they were seeing – there was absolutely no confusion by the time of Pentecost 50 days later
- *From the day of Pentecost forward, the heart of the Christian message was Jesus and his death and bodily resurrection*
- The early Christians had their disagreements about other issues – but never about the resurrection
- *And there is not even any record among the enemies of Christianity claiming that the Christians had seen just an apparition*
- **Both the hallucination and apparition theories fail to explain the empty tomb**
- *Even if the disciples couldn't tell the difference between a ghost and a living person – and were either deceived or mistaken in concluding an apparition or hallucination was actually a living Person – the enemies of Christianity would have had every reason to refute such claims*
- **The refutation of the resurrection claims would have been quite simple: go the tomb and produce the dead body**
- *End of story – all talk of Jesus and his resurrection silenced forever*
- But even the enemies of Christianity had to admit that the body of Jesus was gone
- **No one has ever found the dead body of Jesus of Nazareth – a fact of history that is very hard to explain by any theory other than the actual resurrection**

4) *The Myth Theory*

- Given the difficulties and weaknesses and flaws in these alternative theories, one of the most popular theories today is the myth theory
- *This theory states that the Gospels were never intended to be taken literally – rather they are mythical stories – neither literally true nor false – but rather made-up stories conveying non-historical spiritual truths*
- The death and burial // the empty tomb // the resurrection appearances – none of it historical fact – all of it myth – *none of it to be taken literally – all of it to be taken spiritually or symbolically*
- There are several problems with this theory
- *For one, anyone who is familiar with the literature of myths knows that the Gospels do not read like Alice in Wonderland*
- The Gospels include such details as are telltale marks of eyewitness descriptions
- *For example, in the story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery who was about to be stoned, John records Jesus writing in the sand before he speaks*
- We are not told what he wrote or why he wrote – and it has no bearing on the outcome or meaning of the story
- *So why did John include that detail?*
- Simply because he was there and he wrote what he observed
- *There are mythical elements in some of the non-biblical writings of later centuries such as the so-called Gospel of Peter (which was written decades after Peter's death and has nothing to do with Peter being the author)*
- But again, these later so-called Gospels include imaginary and exaggerated and fantasy elements that are missing in the NT Gospels
- Another major problem is that the NT was written far too close to the actual events to allow myth or legends to develop
- *Several generations need to pass before myth or legend can be accepted as fact*
- All of the eyewitnesses need to be long dead before unhistorical embellishments can be accepted as fact
- *This sort of thing did happen with Krishna and Buddha and Mohammed – but only after many generations and even centuries had passed*
- But the NT Gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection were written within 30-60 years of the events themselves
- *Think of someone trying to add mythical embellishments to a biography of John F Kennedy or Martin Luther King Jr. – such embellishments would never be accepted as fact because only 40 or so years have passed and there are still too many people alive who remember the actual people and events*
- **All scholars admit that Paul wrote I Corinthians about 55 AD – just over 20 years after the actual events**

- *When he lists the resurrection appearances in chapter 15, he specifically mentions that most of the eyewitnesses were still alive and could validate the truth of what he wrote*
 - **The life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth are far too well documented to try to dismiss as myth or legend**
 - *Those who doubt the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth must also doubt the historicity of Socrates or the Roman Emperors – for the life of Jesus is better documented than that of the Caesars or Greek philosophers*
- 5) ***Miracles are impossible***

- When all else fails – and there is no theory that adequately accounts for all the evidence associated with the facts surrounding the accounts of Christ's resurrection – *some skeptics fall back on this philosophical presupposition: Miracles are impossible and therefore the resurrection could not have happened*
- Whatever the facts may indicate – there must be some other explanation – because miracles are impossible and therefore the resurrection could not have happened
- *Don't confuse me with the facts – my mind is already made up*
- Talk about a blind leap of faith

III. THE RESURRECTION THEORY

- There is one more logical possibility:
- *If Jesus did in fact die on the Cross // and if the apostles were neither deceived nor deceivers nor myth-makers – **then the only possible adequate explanation of the historical data is the Christian explanation – namely, that Jesus rose from the dead***
- *Why was the tomb empty on the third day? Why was the dead body of Jesus never found? Why were the enemies of Christianity never able to silence the talk of resurrection by producing the corpse of Jesus?*
- **Because there was no dead body to be found – the tomb was empty because the body of Jesus was resurrected**
- *Why did the women, the disciples and 500 others claim to see Jesus alive – seeing him with their own eyes // hearing him with their own ears // touching his crucifixion scars with their own hands – watching him eat fish before their very eyes – **because they were experiencing the reality of a personal encounter with the risen Lord***
- *Why did the resurrection appearances cease suddenly after 40 days?*
- **Because that's when Jesus ascended into heaven and he was no longer on earth to be seen**

- *Why did the disciples experience such a radical transformation from fearful cowards to bold and courageous witnesses who were persecuted and eventually martyred for their proclamation of Jesus and the resurrection?*
- **Because they saw Jesus alive again and were empowered by His Spirit to bear eyewitness testimony to the truth of his resurrection**
- *Why did devout Jewish believers change their day of worship from Saturday to Sunday?*
- **Because Sunday is the day of the Lord's resurrection**
- *Why are the NT writings permeated with references to Christ's resurrection?*
- **Because Christ's resurrection actually happened – and the NT writers were writing what they had seen and heard and experienced – within the lifetimes of people who were still alive to say otherwise if they were lying or embellishing the facts**
- *Which theory best accounts for all of the data: the empty tomb // the empty graveclothes // the missing body // the number and variety of eyewitnesses // the definite period of time of resurrection appearances // the transformation of the disciples // the centrality of the resurrection in the earliest preaching and worship of the early church – as well as throughout the world today // the failure of anyone to produce a corpse to refute the claims of resurrection // devout Jewish believers changing their day of worship to Sunday // the spread of the Christian Gospel and Church among peoples of all nations and cultures in the face of persecution and martyrdom*
- Each of you must decide which theory best explains the data
- *Swoon theory? Conspiracy theory? Hallucination or Apparition theory? Myth theory?*
- **Or the Resurrection theory – that Jesus Christ actually rose from the dead on the third day and was seen alive by eyewitnesses for 40 days?**

IV. SO WHAT?

- *If Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, then Jesus is more than a man – he is the divine Son of God and He lives today and forever as Lord of all*
- *If Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, then there is life after death*
- *If Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, then salvation is through Jesus Christ alone – Jesus is indeed the Resurrection and the Life and the only way to God and heaven*
- *If Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, then not all our dreams need to be fulfilled on earth before we die – there is reasonable hope for our best and highest and most noble dreams to be fulfilled in eternity in heaven*
- When my niece, Cassie Green, was 15, she wrote this poem entitled “Dreams”:
- *Dreams are goals and ideas we hope for,*

Wishes we hope will come true.

Dreams are hopes we think about every single day.

Dreams can make you float on air and feel like you could fly.

Dreams are wishes we hope will never, ever die.

Dreams allow us to look forward to every waking day.

They let the real you come out and play.

Dreams are accomplishments we wish for deep within our hearts.

Dreams hold our goals for the future, a future where our dreams come true.

But in order to be happy we must believe in our dreams, work for our dreams,

Then enjoy them in our lives.

- Cassie never got to enjoy her dreams or see them come true
- *Her dreams were crushed by alcoholism and an eating disorder that cut short her life at age 26.*
- **If Jesus Christ is not risen from the dead, then all of Cassie's dreams died with her**
- *If Jesus Christ is not risen from the dead – then there is no certain hope of a future after death where our unfulfilled dreams can come true*
- **Life after death is nothing more than philosophical speculation and wishful thinking if the bones of Jesus Christ are buried in the same cemetery where the bones of Buddha and Socrates and Mohammed and Confucius are buried**
- *No one can see or observe or prove the immortality of the soul*
- All we can observe is that dead people stay dead and dead bodies stay put wherever they are buried
- **It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ that has brought life and immortality to light**
- *The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the only rational basis for a certain hope that we will live forever after we die – that we will see our deceased loved ones again – that dreams unfulfilled on earth can still come true in heaven*
- *How can you be sure that you will live forever in heaven?*

1 John 5:11 - 13 (NIV) ¹¹And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

- *How about you? Do you know that you have eternal life?*
- **He who has the Son has life**
- *Do you have the risen Son of God living within you – giving you spiritual life now that will survive death and enable you to live forever in heaven?*

Prayer to Receive Christ:

Worship Team – *All the Earth Will Sing Your Praises*