

Miracles of Calvary: Jesus' Resurrection

Luke 24:1-12

ABC 3/27/16

7 weeks ago, we started this series of the Miracles of Calvary. I started with this sentence: *The highpoint of redemptive history is the atoning death of our Lord Jesus upon the cross of Calvary & His resurrection 3 days later.* Today we come to the greatest miracle, not just of Calvary, but of all time: The resurrection of Jesus. If the resurrection happened, everything else is true in this Book. If it didn't happen, then never mind any of it. If this Book is wrong about the resurrection, the most important thing, then it's not right about anything. The story of the Bible is the story of Jesus, man's Redeemer, the promised Messiah. If He's still dead, then He's not the promised Christ & the rest of it doesn't matter. Christianity rises or falls on the question of whether Jesus physically & historically was resurrected from the dead. The biblical writers say He was. They weren't deluded, trying to pull off a hoax, or writing a legend. They were telling it like they saw it, heard it, touched it, & experienced it. Beyond that, they wanted you & I to believe it too. So, were they right? Yes, they were. I pray that you believe it too. Lk 24:1-12 PRAY

1. Background According to their written accounts, what made the disciples believe Jesus had been resurrected? According to their testimony, it came from 2 things: 1) Their discovery on Sunday morning that His tomb was empty. & 2) Jesus appearing to them many times after His death. It's important to know that the authors deny that what they saw was something spiritual, without a physical body, like a ghost or something. Luke is careful to point out that the disciples 1st thought He was a ghost until Jesus invited them to touch Him. Lk 24:39, 42-43

Ever wonder why were told the fish was broiled? It wasn't baked, grilled, or sautéed. What does this have to do with anything? Nothing. It's just a detail that a legend probably wouldn't include & suggests this is eyewitness testimony from someone who was there. Not only that, but the disciples are also at pains to make the point that this Person who appeared to them was the same Jesus who died on the cross, not someone else. Jn 20:27

He wasn't a ghost. They insisted the Jesus they saw was the same Jesus who'd been crucified. It's also important to understand that neither the empty tomb nor the appearances of Jesus alone would've created the kind of certainty about & confidence in the resurrection the disciples had. If all they had was the empty tomb, they'd have gone away scratching their heads, but it's doubtful they would've

concluded that Jesus had come back to life. Too many alternatives could've explained it: grave robbers, some further humiliation by the Romans, a mistake in locating the tomb, something! At the same time, simply seeing Jesus wouldn't have done it either. Again, there were just too many other explanations: a ghost, a phantom, an impostor, anything! So long as a decomposing corpse could be produced from the tomb, no one could call this a resurrection. But put the 2 together, an empty tomb & the appearances of Jesus, & it was enough to convince the disciples & change history. The tomb was empty because Jesus was alive. **He is not here**, the angel said, **for He has risen** (Mt 28:6). That's their testimony. That's the reason they believed, & that's the reason they ultimately died for the belief that Jesus rose from the dead. You can say you don't believe them. You can say that whatever happened on that Sunday morning, it wasn't that. But if you're going to do that, you have to offer some alternative. If not the resurrection, then what did happen? The one thing you cannot do is pretend nothing happened. Clearly something did because it's created shock-waves throughout history. In the lives of the disciples, whatever it was that happened caused them to change how they saw everything else. They began to believe that this crucified Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, the Son of God, the sin-bearing Lamb of God, the King of kings, the Alpha & Omega, & that He was, & is, alive! Because they believed this, they rearranged their lives so they could proclaim this truth. They abandoned careers, left homes, & refused to deny this belief even as they were beheaded, crucified, impaled, flogged, & stoned. Something happened to cause this. Either Jesus really was resurrected from the dead or something just as powerful happened which caused the disciples to rearrange their lives to proclaim the gospel, even in the face of gruesome martyrdoms. Has anyone ever suggested any alternative that has the power to explain this? Many have tried. **A. Wrong Tomb** Maybe the women went to the wrong tomb & just got everyone excited over a mistake. But then, when a belief that this Jesus had been resurrected was spreading through the city like wildfire, why didn't the authorities just produce the corpse from the correct tomb? They knew where it was because Roman soldiers sealed & guarded it. Besides that, the mere report the tomb was empty wouldn't have created a belief that Jesus had been resurrected. Jesus also appeared to the disciples, alive! That's what they tell us. **B. He Didn't Die** Maybe Jesus didn't really die but only almost died, eventually escaped from the tomb, & made His way back to where His disciples were hiding. Really? That's absurd! The soldiers who reported back to Pilate (Mk 15:44) confirmed that Jesus was really dead. Roman soldiers were pretty

good at making sure they killed the people they were supposed to kill. The disciples understood that Jesus was dead. The women who stood at the foot of the cross went back home to get ready to prepare the corpse. Joseph went to get a tomb ready. Everyone who was there agreed He was dead. This is indisputable. Are we to think Jesus somehow managed to survive the crucifixion & then staggered wounded & spear-stabbed into the presence of His disciples & convinced them, frightened & skeptical though they were, that He was the Lord of life & the Conqueror of death? I don't think so. They wouldn't have gone out to preach, they would've gotten Him a doctor! **C. Body Stolen** Maybe the disciples stole the body & claimed Jesus rose from the dead. Maybe it was the most successful hoax in history. But nothing about this has the character of a hoax. & nobody dies for a hoax. Would you be willing to spend your entire life in danger & poverty to spread a story that you knew wasn't true, being laughed at, rejected, arrested & even killed? If this theory is correct, that's exactly what the disciples did. What would be their motivation if they knew they had stolen the body? If you're just trying to pull the wool over the eyes of the world, when the jig is up & the axe is about to fall, you don't keep on saying, *Jesus is alive!* The only way you stick by the story under those circumstances is if you really believe it's true. **D. Mass Hallucination** Maybe the disciples were the victims of mass hallucination. No, given how many different groups of people reported seeing Jesus, how many different times, & over how many weeks, the notion of a sustained, contagious mass hallucination is impossible. As Lee Strobel writes:

I went to a psychologist friend & said if 500 people claimed to see Jesus after He died, it was just a hallucination. He said hallucinations are an individual event. If 500 people have the same hallucination, that's a bigger miracle than the resurrection.¹

E. Vision Perhaps, then, they were overwhelmed by a dream, a vision, a mystical experience, or even a feeling of forgiveness & spiritual life. Maybe that's what they meant by using the term *resurrection* & not the literal idea that Jesus actually got up from the grave. In other words, maybe all the stories in the NT are just one big metaphor for spiritual truths, not meant to be taken literally. No, the accounts of the resurrection don't have the character of metaphors. They have the quality of eyewitness testimony to events that happened. The Jewish world wasn't unfamiliar with dreams or visions or ecstatic religious experiences, nor was it unfamiliar with want-to-be messiahs whom the authorities

¹ *Case For Christ*

killed off. Given that background, it's unthinkable that a mere dream, vision, or mystical experience, much less a feeling could have brought about the kind of enduring, worldview-altering belief in Jesus' resurrection that marked the 1st Christians. Most of all, no 1st-century Jew would ever have used the word *resurrection* to describe a dream, vision, or mystical experience, much less a feeling. That's because *resurrection* had a very specific meaning. It meant the literal, physical coming-back-to-life of the body, & it wouldn't be used to refer to anything but that. Yet that's the word the writers used to describe what happened to Jesus. **F. Wishful Thinking** Maybe they were all victims of a severe case of wishful thinking. Maybe they just wanted so badly for Jesus to have not died they fooled themselves into believing He'd been resurrected. Again, no. Even if the disciples were searching for comfort after Jesus' death, they wouldn't have reached for the idea of resurrection. It's far more likely they would've comforted themselves by claiming He was *spiritually* alive or something. But it's implausible to think they'd have come up with the idea that Jesus had been resurrected & glorified. The only way they'd believe that is if the things they saw & experienced left them with no other choice. They didn't claim Jesus had been resurrected because of a wish. They claimed He was alive because there was no other explanation for what they saw. It wasn't wishful thinking that led them to that conclusion, it was their own eyes. Besides that, the accounts they left don't portray the disciples as prepared to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. Just the opposite, long before they believed, they disbelieved in a big way, to the point that the resurrected Jesus had to rebuke them for it (Lk 24:25-26). The disciples weren't in any way prepared for the resurrection of Jesus. That such a thing might actually have happened blew them away & left them struggling to explain what it all meant. **G. Look Alike** Maybe it was Jesus' doppelganger who died, not Jesus. Where did this look-alike come from? Can we really believe Jesus' disciples & His own mom didn't notice it wasn't really Jesus on the cross? Something happened that Sunday morning, there's simply no denying it. Now I ask you, what was it that happened? It wasn't a mistake, not a near death, not a hoax or deception, not a mass hallucination, not a dream or vision or mystical feeling, not wishful thinking, & not a look alike. So what was it? When you come right down to it, there's only one answer: Jesus was really, truly, physically, bodily, & historically resurrected from the dead.

2. The Resurrection Mt 28:1-10

Do you believe it? It's all of enormous & eternal importance. N. T. Wright puts it this way:

Jesus' resurrection *remains ... unprovable in logical or mathematical terms. The historian is never in a position to do what Pythagoras did. . . . With history it is not like that. Almost nothing is ever ruled out absolutely; history, after all, is mostly the study of the unusual & unrepeatable. What we are after is high probability; & this is to be attained by examining all the possibilities, all the suggestions, & asking how well they explain the phenomena. It is always possible that in discussing the resurrection someone will come up with the skeptical critic's dream: an explanation which provides a sufficient condition for the rise of early Christian faith...*

It is worthy to note that, despite the somewhat desperate attempts of many scholars... no such explanation has been found. The early Christians did not invent the empty tomb & the "meetings" or "sightings" of the risen Jesus in order to explain a faith they already had. They developed that faith because of the occurrence, & convergence, of these two phenomena. Nobody was expecting this kind of thing; no kind of conversion-experience would have generated such ideas; nobody would have invented it, no matter how guilty (or how forgiven) they felt, no matter how many hours they pored over the Scriptures. To suggest otherwise is to stop doing history & to enter into a fantasy world of our own.... In terms of the kind of proof which historians normally accept, the case we have presented, that the tomb-plus-appearances combination is what generated early Christian belief, is as watertight as one is likely to find.²

When it comes to the most important miracle of all, the resurrection of Jesus, no explanation makes sense of all the evidence other than that it happened just as is recorded in Scripture. So what does it mean?

3. Significance & Meaning As Christians, we have a huge interest in this account of the resurrection being a historical event. Why? Because we're staking our eternal future on it. Non-Christians have an equally huge interest in it not being historical. Why? Because they're staking their eternal future on it. Every human being rests their eternal destiny on being correct in their understanding of Jesus' resurrection. So people have come up with all kinds of alternative explanations for these events. But none of those theories fit with the testimony of the people who were actually there. 3 days after Jesus died, He wasn't dead anymore. His tomb was unoccupied. The angels at the tomb said He was alive. His disciples claimed they saw Him & even ate breakfast with Him (Jn 21:4-14). & they lived the rest of their lives like men who had seen their Teacher living after He had died. On Friday, Jesus was really dead; on Sunday, He was really alive. Any deviation from these 2 facts gets you into unconvincing fantasy & useless faith. This is why Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: **1 Cor 15:1-4**

If you've ever had your imagination captured by a great book, you know the bittersweet feeling that comes when you come to the end of the story. There's a sense of loss that you'll no longer be able to spend time with the characters you've grown to love. There's a sense in which you long for the world of the book to be real, to be able to actually live your life in the universe created by the story. If you're

² NT Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, pp 706-7

a Christian, Jesus' resurrection fulfills all those desires. Because He is alive, you actually do live in this story! All of the events described really happened & all the characters you love are real. Every part of the Christian life is shaped & empowered by the resurrection of the crucified Christ. Let's look at just 3 ways in which the resurrection changes everything. This is great news that will change not only the way you live tomorrow morning as you go to work but also the way you spend all of eternity.

A. Never-ending Life Because Jesus rose from the dead, those who put their faith in Him are saved from eternal death for eternal life & are being transformed even now to live as a citizen of God's kingdom. Without the resurrection, there's absolutely no salvation. Jesus hung on the cross in agony, shame, & condemnation. If that's the end of the story, then Jesus' death is nothing more than an example of self-sacrificing love. Inspiring, perhaps, but futile & useless.

You do realize that we're in a presidential election year, right? Come this November, if the Lord tarries, we will elect a new president. One of the wonderful choices we have will be elected. But whoever it is, they won't be officially inaugurated until January. There's a difference between accomplishing the victory & officially implementing its outcome. So it is with Jesus' death & resurrection. Through His atoning death, Jesus has accomplished victory over sin, Satan, & death: **It is finished!** (Jn 19:30). But if Jesus remains in the tomb, all is for naught (1 Cor 15:17). He'd be like a politician who is elected president but never assumes office. The resurrection is an act of God the Father vindicating God the Son (Acts 2:22-24), showing that His sacrifice for our sins is acceptable & good. It's Jesus' victory over sin & death, & it secures our forgiveness & right standing with God (Rom 4:25). Having faith in Jesus means staking your entire life & death & eternal destiny on Him. Your life depends on Him having been raised from the dead. But if you don't put your faith in Jesus, you're saying He didn't rise from the dead. If you're wrong about that, the consequences are disastrous. When you die, you'll face God & answer for the way you've lived your life & rejected His Son. If you stand on your own record, you'll face God's wrath against you. But because Jesus defeated death by rising from the grave, our record can be replaced with His record so we can be welcomed into the presence of God. That's what happens when we put our faith in Him. The resurrection is a demonstration of God's delight in His Son. & by faith, since we are **in Christ**, God delights in us too! Jesus' resurrection also means we have the certainty of our bodily resurrection. He wasn't raised as a disembodied spirit, He had a glorified, physical body. He was able to tell His followers to **touch me &**

see, for a spirit does not have flesh & bones as you see that I have (Lk 24:39). He was able to sit & eat with them (43). Once our sin has been dealt with, there's nothing that can keep us in our burial plots forever. Jesus declares: **I am the living One... I was dead, & behold, I am alive forevermore, & I have the keys of death & of Hades** (Rev 1:18). Do you see what He's saying? Because He was dead but is now alive, He has the keys to death. He has the power & authority over death. He calls the shots. Death listens to Him. If you're with Jesus, you're coming out of your grave someday to receive a glorified body, no longer subject to sin, decay, & death. What Jesus has, you will have. You'll be made alive just as He's been. The promise of the resurrection for Christian's is that death will be swallowed up in victory, its sting will be removed, & the grave will not be the end (1 Cor 15). Jesus is the resurrection & the life (Jn 11), & because we are His we will live with Him forever, in a real, physical, perfect existence. Listen to these promises from the NT & know that these things are true:

God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power (1 Cor 6:14).

If we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection (Rom 6:5).

We believe that Jesus died & rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus (1 Thes 4:14).

Because of Jesus' death & resurrection, we have never-ending life with Him.

B. Free to Live Life As Christians, we don't live merely for today. Nor do we merely live for eternity. We don't need to live like we need to get everything we want right now. We don't hedge our bets. We don't diversify our portfolio. All of our eggs are in one basket! As Paul said, it's all or nothing.

If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep (1 Cor 15:19-20).

Do you live as if this life is all that you're going to get? Or do you live in light of the abundant life that you have with Christ now? Here's how Paul described his life in his 2nd letter to the church in Corinth:

Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes*. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night & a day I have spent in the deep. *I have been* on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from *my* countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; *I have been* in labor & hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger & thirst, often without food, in cold & exposure (2 Cor 11:24-27).

Does that sound like the good life to you? Paul says if Jesus wasn't raised, his life has been lived for a lie & he's completely wasted it. He's taken beatings & danger & hunger & cold, all for nothing. He's the most pitiful man ever, a pathetic fool. BUT if Jesus rose from the dead, Paul's spent his life on &

gave his life for the only thing eternally worthwhile. & he's been looking forward to eternity the whole time. Like Paul, we must live our lives as if we really believe what we say we believe. We should be so dependent on the reality of a future resurrection with Jesus, have so much staked on this story, that if it weren't true our lives would have been a total waste. If you don't really think Jesus rose from the dead, then you should eat, drink, & be merry, because this is all you're going to get. & if you do live your life in the present & for the present, then it suggests you don't really believe Jesus rose from the grave to give you life now & forever. But since He did rise from the dead, we're free to live life for His glory & not our own pleasure. We're free to give our lives away as Paul did. We're free to live lives of self-sacrificing joy. We're free to pour out our lives, our time, our talents, our resources, into things that will have eternal value. We're free to meet with suffering or disaster or defeat & look beyond them. We're free to enjoy success & circumstances without wishing for more or worrying we'll lose them. We don't need to come to the end of our lives & say: *This was all a waste!* Jesus & His death & resurrection give us so much more.

C. Jesus: With Us Through Life A 3rd implication for our lives is that because Jesus was raised from the dead, we have an ever-present Savior. That seems obvious, but we so often forget it or live like we don't believe it. Jesus is alive & with us right now. We don't worship a dead man. The power of Jesus isn't merely in His words or ideas. His power is in His presence. Because He is alive, He sends His Spirit to His followers so that we can be **clothed with power from on high** (Lk 24:49). He's actually present in us by His Spirit, which empowers us with resurrection power (Rom 8:11). The very same might that ripped open the tomb & brought Jesus back from death is now at work in us & for us. Nothing could keep Jesus in the grave. Not the stone that was rolled across the entrance. Not the Roman soldiers. Not the weight of our sins. Not even the combined forces of hell. That's the power that enables us to stand up under suffering, persecution, & temptation. That's the power that enables us to live like Him & for Him. Not only is the risen Christ present with us by His Spirit, but He's also ascended into heaven, where He lives to speak to His Father on our behalf (Heb 7:25). We never go through life alone. Our struggles, our weaknesses, our temptations, our fear, loneliness, & anxieties are all seen by our ever-present Savior. We go through life with a Friend who loved us enough to die for us & who is so strong that death couldn't hold Him. We know that whatever happens, Jesus speaks to God about us, saying, *Father, forgive*. That makes all the difference.

If you're a Christian, this is the story you're living in right now. It's a better story than *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, & *Narnia* combined. It's a story whose ending you know & whose climax you'll one day enjoy. You may not know all the plot points from this point on, but you can be certain that it'll have a happy ending because it did for Jesus. His resurrection means that, like the disciples, you can go on your way in life **with great joy** (Lk 24:52). We can say with absolute confidence & great confidence that, **for me, to live is Christ & to die is gain** (Phil 1:21).

For those who are not yet Christians, why don't you put your faith in Jesus & His atoning death & victorious life today? Receive by faith His death & resurrection for you. There's absolutely nothing you can do to pay for your sins. Your good deeds can never compensate for your bad deeds. Only the blood of the Lamb of God can cleanse us, cover us, & rescue us from judgment. Consider what God has done for you. Consider the fact that you were born dead in sin. Jesus comes & offers you life by believing in Him. As you do that you are born again & adopted into God's family (Jn 1:12). You are a co-heir with Christ. & although your physical body will still die, you can rest secure in the certainty of a future resurrection. Those in Christ will be made alive (1 Cor 15:22). Our present body is perishable, but it will be raised imperishable, never to die again. When God raises us, death will be swallowed up in victory. My prayer is that your faith is in the Savior who died in your place for your sins & was raised from the dead never to die again. He now offers you His resurrection life. Will you receive it?

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom & of revelation in the knowledge of Him. *I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, & what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead & seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all rule & authority & power & dominion, & every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come (Eph 1:17-21).