

Title: THE RESURRECTION

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THE RESURRECTION

I lost my faith, in college. I lost it because of a subtle psychological pressure. It was all right to believe in Jesus as a “good and wise” teacher, and elevate Him on an equal plain with Mohammed, who founded the Islamic faith, with Gautama Buddha, who was a prince of India and founded Buddhism, with Confucius of China (more of a political philosopher, really) whose sayings affect so much of that portion of the world – in short, with any respectable founder of a religion.

I could put Jesus in that category, dispense with Him as a “good and wise teacher,” be accepted and get my intellectual wings. But to hold to the belief that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and thus supernatural was simply not acceptable. Parenthetically, I might comment that there is a current hour-long advertisement on television for tape sales, telling you the origin of all religions.

It starts in Egypt, but they never go to Sumer where the religions started that flowed to Egypt (and they never got to Babylon). Still, there is no one with any sense that denies the influence of Egypt on both the Hebrews and the Greeks. Cyrus Gordon settled that.

But in this ad some portly little guy sits there, and some suave, slick-coifed tamed TV evangelist-looking guy sits there, and they tell you how all religions started, and then they make an oblique reference to the 16 crucified saviors – which can’t be found in the implication of the analogy drawn.

It’s just another example of the current “ecumenical approach to religion” – the religion of no religion (as it was called by one of my professors in Comparative Religion at Stanford) because all religions (they say) have “the same root.” That approach came at me, persuasively suggesting that I was not intelligent until I graduate from this “primitive” attitude toward Christ as the super-natural, divine Son of God and instead accept Him as but another expression, another founder, in the stream of common religious-ness; thus reduced to simply a “good and wise teacher.”

The only problem with the intellectual substitute for a faith in a supernatural Christ, namely just a “good and wise teacher,” is that **He can’t be either one unless He is both**.

To be good, you have to tell what’s true. You can be insane, you can be a nut, and honestly believe something that’s dead wrong, and be good – but not wise. To be wise, you’ve got to be right; to be good, you’ve got to be honest, and “their” Jesus could be good but not wise, wise but not good, but definitely not both. Why?

In any source that you have for Jesus in history, if you are going to call him good and wise, you are going to go to his sayings and you are going to go to his actions. I don’t restrict the source to the Gospels, even though that is where most of the opponents of a supernatural Christ go as they hunt and peck and pull certain verses out to illustrate his life and sayings, even highlighting them in red on television.

You can go behind the Gospels. There is a hypothetical “Q” document. One of the early church fathers said that Matthew wrote down the sayings of Christ as he traveled with Him, not in Greek but in his native

language, Aramaic. We know his Gospel was written most likely at Antioch and written in Greek. This “Sayings of Jesus,” written in Aramaic, may have been a common source for the Gospels. Those who can read Greek see changes in style in sections of the Gospels, and can reconstruct these sections to propose a source used by all three of the Synoptic Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke (particularly Matthew and Luke).

Most modern scholars regard Mark as written first, because we can see again in the change of style when Matthew and Luke copy Mark. The most persuasive “common source” behind the Synoptic Gospels is called the hypothetical “Q” Document (from the German word for “source”). You can even go to the ancient songs, the earliest fragments. Still, wherever you encounter Jesus doing something or saying something, attached to every one of those records will be a saying by Christ or a projection of a self-image that He has of Himself that precludes calling Him “good and wise” because you will find one or more of the following in every source:

1. He thought he was perfect.

It doesn’t matter whether he was, he **thought** he was. Carlyle says the greatest of all sins is to be conscious of none. There’s nothing as despicable as a person who thinks he’s never made a mistake. That conscious, self-righteous, perfectionist image is not something we respond to, because the wisdom of mankind combines in the knowledge that nobody’s perfect.

Now the issue is not whether Jesus was perfect; we just don’t make saints of people who **think** they’re perfect. The record of people used by God seeing themselves as not perfect goes throughout the whole Old Testament – “I am not worthy of the least of Thy mercies – Who am I that I should lead forth the children of Israel? – I am but a child. I cannot speak.”

Always the criterion of acceptance by God and acceptance by man is that conscious attitude of imperfection. Holy men are aware of the distance they are from God. There was only one man in the whole kingdom who saw God; in the year King Uzziah died, Isaiah was the only man who saw God sitting on a throne high and lifted up – that means he was above everybody. His first words were: “Woe is me; I am undone.”

We just don’t make saints of people who think they’re perfect – but Jesus thought he was. Everywhere you meet him, he projects that. He judges other people: “whitened sepulchers;” “strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.” He looks at the most righteous people of the day and puts them down. The reason that no man ought to judge, and anyone who is a judge should have this sensitive conscience, is that it’s hard to judge your fellow man because we know way down deep we have the same kinds of faults.

But Jesus never had any sense of imperfection. He changed the Law, saying, “You have heard it said unto you, but behold I say,” and then, self-righteously with a consciousness of moral perfection, says, “Think not that I have come to destroy the Law. I am come to fulfill it.”

There is one possible exception to that, when the rich young ruler came to him and said, “Good Master.” He stopped him and said, “Why callest thou me good?” Those that want to talk about Jesus not thinking he was perfect point to that verse; they miss the rest of it, because Jesus said to him, “Wait a minute. Don’t come and call me good rabbi, good teacher. If you are going to call me good, also recognize that only God can be good, so don’t tap the appellation on to me without recognizing that I am also God.”

He had that sense of moral perfection; no sense of a moral inadequacy is ever exhibited anywhere in his behavior.

2. He seated all authority in himself.

He even **said** he had all authority: “You build on what I say, you build on a rock. You build on anything else, you build on sand. All authority in heaven and earth is given to me.”

Again to point to the other illustration used, He said concerning the law (generations of approval had been placed on it): “You have heard it said unto you, but behold I say...” He pronounced judgment without a flicker.

Now, we don’t make saints of people like that. We ask the criteria, “On what do you base this authority?” He based it on himself: “Behold, **I say** unto you...”

3. He put himself at the center of the Religious Universe.

He went further and put himself at the center of the religious universe. Jesus didn’t come preaching a doctrine or a truth apart from himself. He said, “I’m the way. I’m the truth. I’m the life. By me if any man enter in... I am the door of the sheepfold. He that hateth not father, mother, wife, children, brother, sister, yea, and his own life also, taketh up his cross and come **after me**, cannot be **My disciple**.” He made your relationship with him, putting him the center of the religious universe, the determinative of all religious benefits.

4. He talked of the Eternal from the inside.

There is a certain frame-of-reference of familiarity with your home. For example, I may matter-of-factly say, “The couch in my office at home is brown. You don’t ask, “How do you know?” We speak of home with “inside knowledge” and it comes across that way. We don’t argue; we expect to be believed. That’s the frame-of-reference Jesus projects when he talks about eternity. Matter-of-factly, he says, “I’m going back. I’m going to prepare a mansion for you. And after a while, I’ll come back and get you and take you there.”

He says again, matter-of-factly: “Before Abraham, I was.” Or, again, “I saw Satan cast down.” Or, again, “There is joy in heaven by the angels when a sinner repents.” He projected and would have us believe he had “inside knowledge” of eternity and pre-earthly existence before and after “inside” the heavens with God.

5. He would die, a ransom.

He said something’s wrong with the whole world that could only be set right by him dying, a “ransom” in the context where his hearers knew exactly what a ransom was. The ransom was what you paid to restore a lost inheritance, to deliver someone destined to death because of their error. It was the price paid to redeem from the consequences of falling short, doing something wrong, losing an inheritance – and the ransom restored you to that which had been lost. He said the whole world was lost, and he came to die and pay the price of ransom, to redeem them.

6. He would raise again.

He said he would raise again (there was more than that, but I’m choosing very selectively just a few), that when he died, he would raise from the dead.

Now, if I, the Pastor, walked up to the podium at the Cathedral and picked up the microphone and said “All authority in heaven and earth is given unto me,” you would think, maybe Pastor means he’s going to quote, “that into my hands has been delivered this word of God to preach with authority.” So you might check that one off, that maybe this is the Pastor emphasizing the authority of the Word that he is reading from.

But if then I went on and said, as though talking to God: “Here I am, Father. I have done all you sent me to do. There are no flaws in me, no imperfections. The law doesn’t bother me, I have fulfilled it,” and started claiming a perfection like Jesus did, you would start backing up and start looking with sympathy toward Mrs. Scott. And if I further went on to say, “Your eternal destiny is dependent upon putting me in the center of your life and making me your master,” by then I would have been interrupted or viewed as “off my rocker.” I don’t think I would have even gotten to what I didn’t include here, that I would have you think that I was a denizen of eternity.

And what if I were to stand up here and say, not in spiritual terms but expecting to be believed? – “Before Abraham was I was. You know, that guy that came out of Ur; I was there. I saw Satan when he was cast out before Adam was ever born.”

And then I would talk about heaven with a familiarity with which we talk about our homes. If I tell you the couch in my home is beige, and you say, “How do you know?” I’m going to reply, “Because I live there!” But I’m claiming that kind of familiarity with heaven! You put people in a nut house that talk like that! And then if I would say that I was somehow a ransom for the world, then, someone help my wife lay hands on me before I’m a “goner.”

Will you please stop to realize that this proclaimer of impossible things about himself is the **only kind of Christ** who walked around on the stage of history and is the only one you can find in the sources. You don’t find other religious founders doing or saying these things that Jesus said! Buddha never thought he was perfect; he struggled with the essence of *tanya*, which was their meaning for that corrupt desire that produces sin. He sought the way of the sensual release; he sought the way of the aesthetic yogi, and neither one worked. He came to the eight-fold path that brought him into a trance-like state where he lost conscious identity with this life, called *nirvana*. And when he came out of that state, he offered those who followed him the eight-fold path, and all he would say is, “It worked for me. Try it; it will work for you.”

He never thought all authority was seated in him. Instead, he told his disciples (and it’s part of their tripart basket of scriptures) that he wasn’t worthy to lead them. All he left them was the way that worked for him. No assumption of authority seated in him. He never thought he was the center of the religious universe. “The Way” worked, his eight-fold path. Same with all the others.

Mohammed never thought he was perfect. He was God’s – Allah’s – prophet. He had **visions of eternity** that impressed the desert man, but he never claimed to have been there. He never died a ransom for anybody. He had a criteria for authority: God revealed it to him in a vision. Jesus never pointed to a vision like the prophet who would say, “The Lord said...” Jesus said, “I say...” Confucius did a logical analysis of society, and he pointed to that **external analysis** as his authority.

None of the other leaders made themselves the center of the religious universe, seated authority in themselves, had a consciousness of perfection about themselves, claimed an identity with eternity before and after their temporary stay here on earth. **None** of these traits attached to or are claimed by the other respected founders of a religion. That’s why you **can respect them** as “founders.”

With Jesus, you’ve got what C. S. Lewis called the “startling alternate”. **Either** He thought these things were true, but was too stupid to know it’s impossible for a man to make these claims, and thus he could not be wise, **or** he was wise in knowing these things weren’t true, but was capable of duping his followers because of self-serving motives into believing that about him, and that makes him not good. The conclusion is, that those who say he was a “good **and** wise teacher” reveal they have never really taken the time to en-counter the only Christ that ever walked the stage of history.

You must either view Christ as one who considered himself of the order of a poached egg, or you take him for what he says he is, and if He is God, then He **is** perfect, and authority **does** rest in Him, and He is the center of the religious universe, and He **did** have the qualities necessary to die as a ransom for the whole world. He **did** have a knowledge of eternity, and He **will** (and did) rise again.

You can't put Jesus in the "good and wise" bland teacher package and forget about Him. He is either a nut or a fake, or **He is what He claimed to be.**

Well, when I came to that crossroad, I decided I would settle it for myself. The issue revolves around this fact of history. Jesus said, to some who wanted a sign, "I'll give you one." There's only one guaranteed sign on which faith can be built. God has at times gone beyond this guarantee, but the **only sign that God guaranteed** to vindicate His truth was the sign of Jonah, interpreted by Jesus to be the death and the **resurrection** of Christ.

At one point in the vast flow of history, a FACT emerges. God deigned to move into this tent of human flesh, fulfill the law that it might become incarnate, chose then to die in our place as the price of redemption, namely the fulfilled law that He might raise again and adopt us into a family with His new life without the burden of the law, that was but a school teacher to teach us our need of God's delivering power.

That He moved onto the stage of history is the claim of Christianity, and He vindicated Himself with a FACT that can be analyzed.

Now it is a FACT there is no such thing as historic certainty. I learned that while doing my undergraduate major in history. "Historic Certainty" means every **conceivable** piece of evidence is there. That which you can **conceive** as possible evidence must be there to have historic certainty. The moment an event is past, and no more, you have lost the eyewitness ability to see it. Cameras help, but there is an element gone, so all historic certainty by definition is relative. All you can hope for is psychological certainty, where exposure to the relevant facts of history that are available produces a reaction psychologically, and that reaction is impossible not to have.

Any smart attorney knows that in a court-room, there isn't an attorney that says some thing and the judge rebukes him, that the attorney knows before he said it that he shouldn't have said it; he wants the jury to hear it. And the judge bawls out the attorney, and he says, "Yes, your honor," and plays his little meek role. He knows exactly what he is doing. And then the judge pontifically looks over at the jury and says, "Discard that from your consideration." Okay, BANG! That's about the only way you can discard it; it's in there. And you see and hear and feel, and whatever else the evidence, you still have a reaction.

God vindicated His Son by the Resurrection.

Paul comes to Mars Hill; the philosophers are gathered there trying to consider all the gods, so worried they will miss one that they have a monument to the Unknown God. He seizes on that as a lever to talk about Christ. He says, "I'll tell you who the Unknown God is," and preaches Christ, whom he said **God ordained by the resurrection.** Paul said if there is no resurrection, our faith is vain, and we are found false witnesses of God, as we have testified of Him that He raised up the Christ.

The first message of the church was the one Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, "This Jesus whom ye know..." And he named the fact that they knew Him crucified; that they also knew. Then he testified of that which they didn't know, "**This Jesus hath God raised up** of whom we all are witnesses," and he introduced that vindicating fact. Paul says in one of his speeches, "He was seen and He was seen," and he catalogues the witnesses and comes to the cluster he says, "...to above five hundred brethren at once."

In those days, you could assemble eyewitnesses; not today. But like any other historic fact, from who wrote Shakespeare to Julius Caesar's existence, you can look for the FACT of history on which Christianity is based, namely:

Jesus came out of the tomb.

And I will say, to set the frame, that if any person listening came in to the Cathedral making the claims Jesus made about them-selves, I would offer the suggestion that they should submit to psychoanalysis and go to a hospital – unless I could see a twinkle in their eyes, that they were putting me on – because no mortal man can make these claims. But if with the claims that person said, “Slay me and in three days I’ll come out of the tomb and sail off into the blue,” and three days later that same person came out of the tomb and sailed off into the blue, I’d take another look at the one making the claims. I don’t need anything else as a basis for my faith; I don’t need all the fancy philosophic trinitarian doctrines. **This resurrected one, if it happened, is my starting point for a personal and real God.**

If I can find on the stage of history the One whose words I can spend my life researching, who was perfect, the center of all authority, the center of the religious universe, and all of these things, including having redeemed me, raised and prepared mansions in eternity, that’s all the God I need. I start right there.

THE ISSUE IS: DID HE COME OUT OF THE TOMB?

You won’t settle that by thinking about it; you research it. Now, to research anything you have to get a **foundation in facts**. Most people are fuzzy-minded; they argue a resurrection didn’t occur because it can’t occur, and anybody who says it did must be lying. Any other fact, you research it.

If you’re going to ask, “Did Scott preach this message within an hour on this specific Sunday?” you’ve got to assume that I was here and that I preached at all. You’ve got to assume that the Cathedral exists. You’ve got to assume that that Sunday came and went. We don’t have to discuss that; we take those facts for granted when determining if the message was less than an hour. Before we argue whether I preached an hour (or more), let’s at least agree that I preached. You don’t have to agree whether it was good or bad, but that I was here and my mouth moved and said things. That’s known as the frame-of-reference – what’s taken for granted.

And if someone says, “Wow, I don’t believe you were there!”, then stop with debating clocks. It’s much easier to prove I was here than to prove how long I preached, because you don’t yet know when I started. Was it the preliminary remarks? Was it the first mark on the board? That’s more debatable, but to prove whether I was here at all or not, that’s a little easier.

You need to approach the Resurrection the same way. There are certain facts that have to be assumed before you discuss the Resurrection. One is, did Jesus live at all? Why are we talking about whether He raised if we don’t believe He lived? There was a time that was debated; not much anymore. For purposes of today and any meaningful discussion of the Resurrection, you’ve got to at least assume:

Fact 1. That Jesus lived.

If you don’t believe that... Do you agree that it’s probably easier to prove that He lived somewhere sometime than that He died and rose again? Do you agree with that? So give me the easier task. “Well, I’m not sure He lived, so don’t give me that Resurrection bit.” I have more time to do other things than that. Don’t get into any argument about the Resurrection with somebody who doesn’t believe Jesus lived. That’s easy to prove; until that’s crossed, don’t get to the next one:

Fact 2. That He was crucified at the instigation of certain Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem. Roman authorities ordered and carried out the execution.

At the instigation of certain Jewish leaders (not all the Jews, they weren't to blame for that, His Disciples were Jews, just certain Jewish leaders), the Romans carried out the execution. Unless you believe that, there's no sense going to the Resurrection. The crucifixion's much easier to prove than the Resurrection.

Fact 3. That He was considered dead.

Notice I say *considered* dead, because a few people believe He recovered from the grave – resuscitated. He was considered dead: pierced with a sword, taken down from the cross, taken to a grave. Of course, one theorist has come up with a concoction that Jesus practiced this, and had people take Him to the grave knowing He was going to come out. He practiced on Lazarus first (so goes the theory) but of course Lazarus was stinking before He started practicing. Some of the theories stretch the brain more than just accepting the Resurrection, but at least He was considered dead. If you don't believe that, discussing the Resurrection is premature.

Fact 4. He was buried in a known, accessible tomb.

People of that day, and particularly the Jewish and Roman leaders who participated in the crucifixion events, knew where the tomb was and could get to it. You couldn't get into it because of the rock and guards, but the tomb's location was known and accessible.

Fact 5. He was then preached raised.

I'm at this point not saying He raised, but He was **preached** raised, that the tomb was empty, and that Jesus ascended. It's important to remember that the whole preachment included: empty tomb; raised from the dead; and ascending into heaven. All three of those claims were preached.

Now, if you don't believe He was preached with all those claims, I'm doing it today: But He was preached **early on and in the same city** where He was killed! If you don't believe that (that this series of claims were preached), that's easier to prove than the Resurrection.

Fact 6. The Jewish leaders who instigated the crucifixion were more interested in disproving His Resurrection than we would be today.

Common sense will tell you the Jewish leaders who instigated the crucifixion had more interest in disproving the Resurrection than someone 2,000 years removed, considering it intellectually with a lot of skepticism mixed in, because the Jewish leaders' reputations and bread and butter and lives were at stake. If they instigated His crucifixion, accusing Him of trying to set up a kingdom and accusing Him of blasphemy, and then all of a sudden it's true that He raised from the dead, they are going to be looking for new jobs. So common sense says they had more psychological interest in disproving the theory, and would put themselves out a little more than most people on an Easter Sunday would.

Fact 7. The Disciples were persecuted be-cause of preaching the claims of His Resurrection.

They were horribly persecuted because of this preaching, starting with those Jewish leaders who first persecuted them – first they called them liars, then said they stole the body away. The whole Book of Acts tells of the Disciples' persecution for preaching the Resurrection.

Later, centuries later, Christians in general became a target for the evils in the Roman Empire and became scapegoats, and were punished for other reasons, but every record agrees that the **earliest persecutions** would have stopped immediately if the Disciples had quit preaching this Resurrection message, and the Ascension of Jesus. That's why they were persecuted, because the Jewish leaders had their reputations at stake. Thus,

Fact 8. The tomb was empty.

All this leads to the fact, common sense says, if the Jewish leaders who instigated the crucifixion (Fact 2), having the extra interest because their livelihood was at stake (Fact 6); and if He was buried in a known, accessible tomb (Fact 4), they would have gone immediately to that tomb and discovered the body. Therefore, it is axiomatic that the tomb was empty.

The tomb became meaningless because it was empty! Centuries went by and the tomb was lost to history, because **there was no body in it!** Then, when the “relic period” began to grow, people got interested in his tomb, in which there had been no interest because there was no body in it, and tried to find it.

And the whole church world still fights today over the classical site of the ancient historic churches, and Gordon’s tomb that most of the Protestants identify with, just off from the bus station below the escarpment of a rock called “Golgotha” that has an Arab cemetery on top. The fight occurred because the tomb was lost to history; there was no body in it.

Now, these facts are easier to demonstrate than the Resurrection, but unless these facts are accepted, you can’t deal with all the theories about the Resurrection. For example, the preaching has been so effective that all through the centuries people have come up with theories to explain it. Now, the reason that I do this every Easter is that I try to demonstrate that you don’t have to park your brains at the door of the church when you come in, intelligent analysis is in order.

You don’t just **make** people believe, but if you expose yourself to evidence, something happens inside and there will be a psychological reaction. My quarrel with people who deny the Resurrection and live a life style that pays no attention to it, is that I can ask them 15 questions and find they haven’t spent 15 hours of their life looking at evidence for it.

If the Resurrection is true, this is the center of the universe. If the Resurrection is true, this is the **central fact of history**. You have to be a fool among all fools of mankind to think it’s not worth at least 30 hours of study in your whole life. Furthermore, there are many intelligent people in the world who **have** looked and come away convinced. That’s why I am doing this. Because the Disciples’ preachments are so sincere in their nature, all kinds of theories have been broached to explain their belief, but the theories won’t fly if you assume the eight facts previously stated.

Theory 1. The Disciples stole the body.

Theory 2. The Jewish leaders stole it.

Theory 3. The Roman leaders stole it.

Theory 4. The women went to the wrong tomb.

You know, it was dark and they got lost like “women-walkers” – they didn’t have women drivers, but women walkers. They went to the wrong tomb, and they believed He rose, and I mean, they ran screaming and crying out of the garden, “We went and He wasn’t there!” They went to the wrong tomb; they went to an empty one waiting for some-body else.

Theory 5. It was all hallucinations.

Glorified day dreams. They were sincere; they believed that this happened because they had all these hallucinations.

Theory 6. Resuscitation theory.

He was crucified and He was considered dead, and He was buried in a known tomb, but He wasn’t dead, and in the coolness of the tomb He revived and came out wrapped in the grave clothes and, thank God, the guards were asleep, and He pushed that rock out of the way – and here comes Frankenstein!

Theory 7. The Disciples lied.

They made the whole thing up. They'd bet on the wrong horse and they just couldn't live with it so they made up this whole story and it took them seven weeks to figure it out, and then they told it.

Theory 8. IT'S ALL TRUE.

They are telling exactly what they experienced and what they saw. Now, just as you got the "startling alternate" when you consider the only Jesus in history, that He's either a madman, a nut, a faker, or He's what He said He was, and that requires a definition of divinity, you have a "startling alternate" here.

All these theories sound good in isolation. Even the first theory (the Disciples stole the body), which the Jewish leaders themselves concocted. But this theory on its face forces you to indict the Disciples as liars. You are thus again forced to a "startling alternate".

I hate – I've always hated it when I was doing my degree in history – I hate a self-righteous objective historian: "I'm objective; I take no opinion." There's no such thing as a knowledgeable person that doesn't have an opinion. Knowledge forces an opinion; no exposure to facts keeps you neutral. Knowledge forces an opinion, and when you study the facts about Jesus listed above, there are only two options allowed. **Either** the Disciples lied **or** they honestly reported the truth. Let's examine each Theory and deduce the option:

#1 They stole the body (Theory 1), then they obviously lied (Theory 7).

#2. The Jewish leaders stole the body (Theory 2)? These facts preclude that: they were more concerned than anyone to disprove the preaching (Fact 6), so why would they make the tomb empty? And if they had, they would have said, "Wait a minute; we took His body from the tomb." They couldn't even think of that story; they told the one about the Disciples (Theory 1), but even if that were tenable, the Disciples didn't preach just an empty tomb and simply the Resurrection. They preached a seen and living Jesus with whom they partook food; they preached the Ascension with equal vigor. So even if the Jewish leaders' taking the body would explain the empty tomb, the Disciples are still telling the add-ons of the encounters with the Resurrected body and the Ascension, so they have expanded and "made up" a lot of the story – in other words, **they still lied**.

#3. Roman leaders took the body (Theory 3)? With the controversies in Jerusalem, with the contacts the Jewish leaders had with the Romans, enabling them to get the crucifixion done, don't you think they would have exposed that fact, that officials of the Roman government took the body? But even if that explains the empty tomb, it does not alleviate the Disciples' responsibility for preaching a Resurrected body that they had encounters with, and the Ascension, so they're still lying.

#4. The women went to the wrong tomb (Theory 4)? It was a known accessible tomb (Fact 4). The Jewish leaders' interest (Fact 6) would have taken them to the known tomb, and all they had to do to explain the wrong tomb theory was go to the tomb where the body is – and they would have done it.

#5. Hallucinations (Theory 5)? Well, the empty tomb (Fact 8) blasts that. If it had been just hallucinations, there would have been a body in the tomb. You have to couple it with spiring the body away. So, they're still lying.

#6. Resuscitation (Theory 6)? Well, that Frankenstein coming out of the tomb doesn't quite measure up to the good Jesus that was preached. It might explain the empty tomb, but it doesn't explain the kind of Jesus that they had preached, doesn't explain the Ascension – they still made the rest of it up.

So no matter how you look at it, if you assume the eight facts which are much easier to demonstrate than the Resurrection, there are only two options, two conclusions, because it boils down to the veracity of the witnesses. That's why I have no respect for those who deny the Resurrection and have not read the classic, Sherlock's Trial of the Witnesses. He postulated a courtroom scene where all the witnesses were gathered and subjected to the kind of evidence of an English court. Or they haven't read Who Moved the Stone? by an attorney who set out to disprove the Resurrection and ended up writing one of the most convincing proof arguments.

You are faced with a "startling alternate": **either OPTION 1** (which is Theory 7): these Disciples made the story up to save face and the whole thing is a lie, **or OPTION 2** (which is Theory 8): **They're telling what they truly experienced as honest men.**

Now, if you are having trouble distinguishing between "Facts," "Options" and "Theories," let me make it clear: There are eight facts which reduce eight theories to only the startling alternate theories 7 and 8, which become the only two credible theories, thus the only two remaining options, "Theories" 7, they lied, or 8, they told the truth!

And when we come to that point, the entire Christian faith revolves around this question: were these Disciples who were the witnesses honest men telling what they saw, or conspirators who concocted a lie to save face? There are four reasons why I cannot believe they were lying:

Reason 1. Cataclysmic change for the better on the part of the witnesses.

Everybody agrees Peter was unstable, and even when with a group he could not be counted on to stand. He fled in fear and he denied his Lord, he was always in trouble because of his extremes and his instability. After the Resurrection, he is the man that preaches to a mocking mob, he fulfills his destiny to become the Rock, he dies with courage requesting that he be turned upside down because he is not worthy to die in the position of his Master – a cataclysmic change that can be identified to a point in history, and that point in history is where they began to tell this story of the Resurrection.

John? He was self-centered to the extreme. He was one of the brothers called "Sons of Thunder." He wanted to call fire down from heaven on everyone that opposed him. He and his brother used their mother to seek the best seat in the kingdom. After they began to tell this Resurrection story, every scholar agrees John was a changed man. Instead of a "Son of Thunder," he's almost wimpish in his never-failing expression of love. He is known as the "Apostle of Love" – a total cataclysmic change.

Thomas is consistently a doubter: from start to finish, he's a doubter. He's a realist; he questions everything. When Jesus is going to go through Samaria and faces death, and tells His Disciples about it, Thomas then says, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." That's courage, but he thought Jesus would actually die; that's a humanistic view.

When Jesus is discussing going away, building mansions in heaven, says, "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know," all the rest of them are surely shouting about the mansions. Thomas is listening to every word. He says "We don't know where you are going; how can we know the way" Now that's a consistent thumbnail sketch of a personality trait.

Who is it that's doubting when the Resurrection comes? Same guy. "I won't believe 'til I touch Him, put my hands in the marks of death." The moment arrives. Jesus is there and says to Thomas, "Behold my hands and my side." He says, "It is more blessed to believe without seeing." That is an axiomatic truth, but He did not condemn Thomas. He just stated that fact, and then He offered to submit to the test, which is

what we are doing today. He said, “Behold my hands and my side.” And Thomas cried, “My Lord and my God.”

It is significant that in the most philosophic area of the world, where the Vedanta philosophies have produced Buddhism and the Eastern religions that flow out of it, it is Thomas that pierces the Himalayas to die a martyr near Madras, India, to be the herald of faith in the most challenging philosophic area of the world at that time, and never again does he waver an instant in faith – a total change from a consistent doubter to an unwavering “faither.”

Now, you can say, a crisis will change people, but a lie will seldom change people for the better; they’ll get worse. These men are cataclysmically changed for the better; I don’t think that telling a lie would do that.

Reason 2. Indirect evidences and internal consistencies.

There are indirect evidences of truth. Mark wrote to Gentiles; you can count it in Mark’s Gospel, he has Christ referring to Himself as “Son of Man” more often than any other Gospel. Count it yourself.

Now if he was a liar, knew he was lying, trying to perpetrate a fraud, why would he have Jesus refer to Himself with a phrase that suggests humanity when his purpose is to try to represent Jesus as the Son of God? If he’s a liar, he’d just have Jesus refer to Him-self as the Son of God. But ironically, as God’s little hidden evidences of honesty, in Mark’s Gospel, written to Gentiles, designed to prove that Jesus was the Son of God, he had Jesus refer to Himself as the Son of Man more than any other Gospel.

Now, Jesus **did** refer to Himself as the “Son of Man” because Jesus was preaching to a Hebrew audience that read the Book of Enoch and read the Book of Daniel where the Son of Man was viewed as Messiah coming in clouds of glory to set up His kingdom. So it’s quite proper for Jesus to refer to Himself as the Son of Man in a messiah mentality, but if you are writing to Gentiles who don’t know anything about the Old Testament, and trying to perpetrate a lie that Jesus is the Son of God, unless you’re just basically honest and telling the truth, you wouldn’t have Jesus say “Son of Man” as often. Why not change what He said to serve your purpose? Inherent honesty. I could give you a dozen of those, but that is what historians call indirect evidence of honesty.

Let me give one more. In the New Testament world, women were thought incapable of being a credible witness. The Disciples knew that, so why would they present women as the first witnesses of the Resurrection? If they were telling a lie, they would know that their world would discount women witnesses. Liars would have avoided recording women witnesses. More intrinsic evidence they were simply reporting what actually occurred.

The fact that the Disciples waited seven weeks is used by those who say they were lying as the time needed for them to cook up the lie. If they are smart enough to tell a lie of this nature, my judgment is, they would have figured that out. They waited seven weeks because Jesus told them to wait. That’s the action of honest men, even though waiting that long hurts their story – if they were going to make up a lie.

Reason 3. Price paid.

You don’t pay the price these men paid to tell a lie. All of them, save John, died a martyr’s death: Bartholomew flayed to death with a whip in Armenia; Thomas pierced with a Brahmin sword; Peter crucified upside down, St. Andrew crucified on St. Andrew’s cross (from which it gets its name); Luke hanged by idolatrous priests, Mark dragged to death in the streets of Alexandria. These men paid beyond human belief for their “lie”.

Reason 4. They died alone.

St. Thomas Aquinas' great – greatest, I think – proof of the veracity of the Disciples and the Resurrection is that they died alone. Now, as I do every year when I finish this message, I can conceive of a group of men trying to save face, telling a story, having bet on the wrong man, crushed by His failure (as they would view it), trying to resurrect Him with a lie.

I can conceive of them staying together and group pressure holding together the consistencies of their lie, because they don't want to be the first one to break faith and rat on the others and collapse the whole thing.

Let's assume that Bobby Boyle and Jerry McIntyre and Richard Williams concocted this story. You don't have television, you don't have satellite, you don't have FAX, you don't have telephone, and as long as you stay together under great pressure, you don't want to be the one, Jerry, to let Richard and Bobby down.

But now separate you. You, Jerry, be Bartholomew in Armenia; and you, Bobby, be Thomas over in India. And Richard, you be Peter in Rome. You have lost contact with each other. You can't pick up a phone and call anybody; nobody knows where you are, and since you know you are telling a lie and you know you don't really expect the generations forever to believe it, and you, Jerry, in Armenia, are being flayed to death, literally – that is, skinned with a whip, your skin peeled off of you – all you've got to do to get out is say, "It's all a lie," and "Forgive me; I'm leaving town."

Bobby wouldn't know it; Richard wouldn't know it. You could see them next time, exchanging stories together and saying, "Boy, I really tore them up there in Armenia. I told the story, and nobody could forget it the way I told it." Bobby and Richard wouldn't know you lied.

You, Bobby, you're going to be pierced with a sword in India; you are never going to see Jerry or Richard again. All you have to do to get out of the pressure is say, "It's a lie."

You, Richard, you're off in Rome; you're a little more exposed, but with your life at stake, all you have to say is, "Sorry. Maybe I dreamed it", and wiggle out and head to France.

As Thomas Aquinas said, it is psychologically inconceivable that these men, separated, each one paying the supreme price for their story and each one dying alone, that some one of the group wouldn't break away from his fellows and say, "Hey, it wasn't true!"

To die alone. And not one shred of evidence surviving 2,000 years of hard-looking critics, you will never find one record any where on the face of this earth where any one of these men ever wavered unto their terrible death in telling this story. Therefore, I came to the conclusion there's no way these men were lying. They were telling what they thought and experienced and saw as true.

I remember doing this with my professor Larry Thomas at Stanford, and he said to me, "Gene, I am convinced. These men believed what they were telling. Therefore, some one of these other eight facts must be wrong." Well, if you're honest and you say that, I've got you, because those other eight are a lot easier to demonstrate. What is the alternative?

IT'S TRUE, AND HE CAME OUT OF THAT GRAVE.

Well, if that is true, then what? All the rest of this is true, and I have a starting point for a faith in a God eternal. And I then have crossed over that threshold where I can now comprehend what Christianity is, for

if I can believe that Jesus Christ came through those grave clothes, through that rock, through that door, and sailed off in the blue, then molecular displacement is nothing to Him – He can do it without creating an explosion. It is true that all things consist in Him, and He can control them.

Therefore, it's not difficult at all to believe that that same substance of God, placed in Mary, came forth as Jesus of Nazareth through the Holy Spirit. God says He places that same God-substance in us when we trust Him. **That** is the true born-again experience – a generator of life, a regeneration, a new creation that penetrates my cell structure and is placed in me as a gift from God when I connect by trusting His word.

That's the genesis of all Christianity, properly seen, that Christ is in us the hope of glory. I don't have to become some mystic or far-out freak to understand what Christianity is. I can now spend my life pursuing His words, including the authority He attaches to the Old Testament, and the promises that are written therein. And each time I grab hold of those and act on my belief, and sustain the action in confidence, that faith connection keeps in me a life substance **the same as that which raised up Christ from the dead.** That new life substance is as capable of changing my nature as radioactive material, invisible though it may be, can change your cell structure as you hold it.

God puts a life in us capable of regenerating, and that's why spirituality is the expressions of the spirit, and why righteousness is called the fruit of the spirit. It is that new life growing out through us which can only be maintained by faith in His word, but it was founded and based upon the solid rock of the provable quality of "He raised from the dead," and it gives me faith to believe that He will do the other thing He said, which is come again.