

“True and Rational Words” (Part 2)

Introduction

The Text

- A. This is now Part 2 of what we began last week. It was then that I read to you [Acts 26](#) in full.
1. For the sake of time, I’m not going to read all 32 of those verses.
 2. Instead, I’d like to simply dip back in to those sections that are particularly pertinent to what we shall be focusing in on this morning.
- B. So first I’d draw your attention to how the chapter begins—with Paul standing there on trial, as it were, before the Roman governor Festus and the Jewish king Herod Agrippa II—with many others in attendance, looking on from their place in the governor’s chamber as well. We read this in [vv. 1-8](#): “¹ So Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You have permission to speak for yourself.’ Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense:
² ‘I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews,³ especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.
⁴ ‘My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews.⁵ They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee.⁶ And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers,⁷ to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king!⁸ Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?’” . . .
- C. He goes on from there to tell his own story: how Jesus had confronted and converted him there on that Damascus Road—taking one of the church’s greatest opponents and turning him into one of its greatest proponents.
- D. And then we come to [vv. 24ff.](#) and read this: “²⁴ And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.’²⁵ But Paul said, ‘I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words.²⁶ For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.’²⁸ And Agrippa said to Paul, ‘In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?’²⁹ And Paul said, ‘Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains’” ([vv. 24-29](#)). We’ll stop there. Let me pray . . .

Part 2

- A. Paul is in the middle of sharing the gospel with these guys when Festus interrupts him there to say what? Well, in essence: “Paul, you’re crazy.” “[Y]ou are out of your mind . . .” [v. 24](#). “You’re talking about a man who was dead and is now alive? Come on. You’ve lost it.”

1. It's the sort of response that would perhaps throw you and I off the track, shake us up a bit.
 2. But not Paul. He responds calmly and confidently and, even, respectfully: "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words" (v. 25).
- B. I saw that in him and I thought: that's what I want for us.
1. I want us to have that kind of confidence when we're sharing the gospel.
 2. Whatever the response, we know this is "true and rational"—not just some pie-in-the-sky fairytale.
 3. We have good reasons for our faith.
- C. So that's why we're giving ourselves to a more careful analysis of Paul's presentation here.
1. I said last time that I see four layers to it that together, I think, help him make a very "true and rational" argument for the validity of Jesus and the gospel.
 - a. In Part 1 we looked at the first two layers: The case he makes is (1) Personal; and (2) Biblical.
 - b. Now in Part 2 we're going to look at the last two layers: The case he makes is also (3) Logical; and (4) Historical.

Layer #3: Logical

- A. I'm thinking in particular here of what Paul says in v. 8.
1. After referring to the resurrection of Jesus as the realization of Israel's "hope" (cf. vv. 6-7),
 2. he makes this seemingly side remark: "Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?"
 - a. It's phrased as a question, but, no doubt, he's making a statement.
 - b. And it's here, I say, that Paul is really starting to push his listeners towards the logical dimension of the Christian faith.
- B. And so that's what I want to consider more fully with you in a moment . . .

Everything Hinges on the Resurrection of Jesus

- A. However, before we go any further with that, I do think it is important to first draw your attention to the emphasis Paul places on the resurrection of Jesus in particular when he's attempting to reach people with the gospel. This seems to be the focal point for him . . .
1. V. 6: "I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers . . ."
 2. V. 7: "And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king!"
 3. And what is this "hope"? Well, that's what he's referring to in v. 8: "Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?"

- a. In other words: it's the resurrection of Jesus.
 - b. That is the central issue for him in all of this.
- B. And this is not an anomaly. It seems to me, as you go back through the book of Acts and look at the various times these early Christians are attempting to share the gospel, this is always what you see. For them everything hinges on the resurrection of Jesus.
 - 1. So in [Acts 2:32](#), on the day of Pentecost, Peter stands up and declares to the crowds around: ["This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses."](#) "That's why we're here. That's what we're trying to get across to you. Jesus is alive!"
 - 2. Or in [Acts 3:15](#), Peter says again, this time to the Jews there in Solomon's Portico: ["\[Y\]ou killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses."](#)
 - 3. And then in [Acts 4:33](#) we get this summary statement from Luke about all the apostles: ["And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus . . ."](#) (cf. [Act 10:39-41](#); [13:30-33](#); [17:30-31](#)).
- C. Again, this is the central issue for the apostles and these early evangelists.
 - 1. For if, on the one hand, Jesus is not raised from the dead, then he's certainly not the Christ, and we need not give much if any of our attention to him at all. He's just another dead man in a tomb.
 - 2. But if, on the other hand, God did raise him up from the dead—as a vindication of his message and ministry; as a display of his triumph over Satan, sin, and death—well, then it changes everything . . . and we ignore him to our own peril.
- D. I guess I bring this up because, when we're attempting to share the gospel with folks, sometimes we get all mixed up on what we should focusing on, and we start going down all these different rabbit holes, and we lose the central issue.
 - 1. Often non-Christians come into those conversations with their own hot-button issues. They want to know:
 - a. "What does Christianity say about LGBTQ stuff?"
 - b. If I become a Christian does that mean I can't sleep around?
 - c. Does that mean my politics are going to change?
 - d. Does that mean I have to believe that those who haven't placed their faith in Jesus are going to hell?
 - e. I don't want to change or accept some of these things. I don't like it. It offends me. So if that's what it means, I don't want to believe in Jesus."
 - 2. And I get it. Those are hard questions, real issues.
 - a. But, with all due respect, they are all secondary things.
 - b. Or if I could put it more bluntly: Who cares about all that? Who cares how Jesus might impact your sex life, or your politics, or your worldview, or your friend group.

3. That's all secondary to the central issue in the matter. Is he raised from the dead or not? Is he the Messiah? Is he the Christ? Is he alive?
 - a. Because if he isn't, well then you shouldn't believe in him anyway and you can go on living however you want.
 - b. But if he is, who cares what you feel about some of the things he's taught, you better go with him and trust him because he's God—and he knows more than you about life, and love, and truth, and what will actually satisfy the human heart.
 - i. He'll help you deal with that other stuff later.
4. That was Paul's story, right?
 - a. He was so offended by Christianity. He wanted to kill the Christians.
 - b. But then he ran into the brick wall that is the risen Jesus. And he said: "Okay, I guess now I am a Christian." Not because he loved it at first. But because it's true.
- E. So these early disciples, in their outreach and evangelism, they're always focused on the resurrection of Jesus . . . because everything hinges on that.

Evaluating for Logical Consistency

- A. But, now, with this in the background, let's return to Paul's words there in v. 8: "Why is it thought incredible [or 'unbelievable'] by any of you that God raises the dead?"
- B. Do you hear what he's doing? He's inviting his listeners to evaluate their own line of reasoning and set of personal beliefs for logical consistency.
 1. This would be especially relevant for Herod and any of the Jews in audience there who already claim to believe in the God of the Bible in particular.
 - a. If you believe God has the power to create all things from nothing, as the book of Genesis teaches—it's terribly inconsistent for you to then turn around and say that he can't raise someone up from the dead. Of course he can!
 2. This is what in Latin they would refer to as an *a fortiori* line of reasoning—"from the stronger."
- C. Paul is here attempting to expose the inconsistency between their presuppositions or premises, on the one hand, and their conclusions, on the other.
 1. If you believe this, as you say you do, why don't you believe that?

2. If you believe in God, why not the resurrection?

- a. You would have to at least grant that it's logically possible.
- b. You'd at least have to be open to the idea and willing to look at the facts with me.

But What about the Skeptic?

A. You say: "Okay, all this is interesting. But I'm not usually talking to orthodox Jews who already believe in the God of the OT. Around the Bay Area, it's a lot of skeptics. A lot of them don't even believe in God. They think it's a joke.

- a. So how does this logical layer of Paul's discussion here relate to me and the people I hope to reach for Jesus?"

B. Well, interestingly enough, this same approach Paul takes here can be easily applied to the skeptic or atheist you and I come across in our culture.

- 1. So for the person who believes in God, Paul could say: "If you believe in God why don't you believe in the possibility of the resurrection?"
- 2. But then for the person who doesn't believe in God, Paul could likewise say: "If you don't believe in God, why don't you believe in the possibility of the resurrection?"

- a. You say, I don't get it. Well, let me show you what I mean . . .

C. What would the skeptic say in response to that question there? Why doesn't he believe in the possibility of the resurrection?

- 1. Inevitably he'd point to something like science and natural law.
- 2. He'd say: "Listen, we all know that resurrections don't happen. Miracles like that don't happen."
 - a. People back in the day used to believe in magic and myth and gods around every corner—and, hence, they had no problem using this supernatural language to try to make sense of natural things.
 - b. But now we know better. Jesus didn't rise from the dead because it violates the very laws of nature, the inherent properties of matter, etc. Whatever may have happened with Jesus, I'm sure there's a natural, scientific explanation for it.

D. This may feel intimidating to hear, but our response to it isn't really all that complicated. You don't have to be a scientist to get it. You might say something like this:

- 1. "If you are appealing to the laws of nature as the basis for why there could be no resurrection from the dead, would you mind telling me where the laws of nature came from?"
- 2. I agree with you that there is clear order and regularity in the universe. I just wonder how you claim such things came to be?

- a. The way I see it, and what we get from everyday experience, is: The existence of a law presupposes the existence of a law-giver. The existence of order and regularity presupposes the existence of an orderer and regulator.”
- E. This is why, as many of you likely know, the scientific revolution didn’t develop from outside the Christian worldview but, rather, from within it.
 - 1. It was only later with the Enlightenment that men began to enshrine their own reason and distance themselves from God.
 - a. And, in so doing, they effectively sawed off the branch upon which they’d been sitting, they severed themselves from the root that had so long been nourishing their scientific endeavors.
 - i. “Claiming to be wise, they became fools . . .” (Rom. 1:22).
- F. The Christian worldview can account for the laws of nature and regularity in the universe that scientists rely on to do their work. The atheistic worldview cannot.
 - 1. Why is there law and order in the universe? How do we know it will be the same tomorrow?
 - a. The Christian can say it is so because God created and sustains it.
 - b. The atheist has no rational answer.
- G. So Tim Keller writes: “All scientific, inductive reasoning is based on the assumption of the regularity (the ‘laws’) of nature, that water will boil tomorrow under the identical conditions of today. The method of induction requires generalizing from observed cases to all cases of the same kind. Without inductive reasoning we couldn’t learn from experience, we couldn’t use language, we couldn’t rely on our memories.

Most people find that normal and untroubling. But not philosophers! David Hume and Bertrand Russell, as good secular men, were troubled by the fact that we haven’t got the slightest idea of why nature-regularity is happening now, and moreover we haven’t the slightest rational justification for assuming it will continue tomorrow. If someone would say, ‘Well the future has always been like the past in the past,’ Hume and Russell reply that you are assuming the very thing you are trying to establish. To put it another way, science cannot prove the continued regularity of nature, it can only take it on faith.

There have been many scholars in the last decades who have argued that modern science arose in its most sustained form out of Christian civilization because of its belief in an all-powerful, personal God who created and sustains an orderly universe” (The Reason for God, 136-37).
- H. Similarly, physicist Paul Davies puts it this way: “Even the most atheistic scientist accepts as an act of faith that the universe is not absurd, that there is a rational basis to physical existence manifested as a lawlike order in nature that is at least in part comprehensible to us. So science can proceed only if the scientist adopts an essentially theological worldview” (<https://firstthings.com/physics-and-the-mind-of-god-the-templeton-prize-address/>).
 - 1. Therefore, as the phrase goes, “you can’t have your cake and eat it too.”

- a. You can't simultaneously accept the laws and reject the law-giver.
 - b. They come together or they don't come at all.
- I. I suppose what I'm trying to get at here with all this is:
 - 1. If, on the one hand, you believe there is a God, then you have to say it's possible for a man to be raised from the dead.
 - a. Why? Because clearly God would be capable of it.
 - i. Yes, he is the giver and sustainer of natural law,
 - ii. but he also transcends natural law and can work, in that sense, outside of it.
 - 2. But if, on the other hand, you don't believe there is a God, then you too have to say it's possible for a man to be raised from the dead.
 - a. Why? Because you have no logical basis for denying it.
 - i. You can't dispose of God without also disposing of natural law and the clear rationality of the universe.
 - ii. And if you dispose of natural law then the universe is open, random, ungoverned, absurd . . . and anything can happen—even a resurrection.
 - 3. So either way you slice it, you can't close yourself off to the possibility of it.
- J. But now, just because something is possible doesn't mean it's probable or actual.
 - 1. To get there, we'd have to then give ourselves to an investigation of the facts themselves.
 - a. And that leads to the next layer in Paul's discussion here . . .

Layer #4: Historical

"This Has Not Been Done in a Corner"

- A. Back in our text, when, as I mentioned, Festus is essentially laughing in Paul's face because, to him, he sounds crazy talking about such things.
 - 1. We already saw the first bit of how Paul responds in v. 25: "I'm not crazy, this is true and rational."
 - 2. But then look at how he goes on to make his case for that. Turning to Herod, he says: "[T]he king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner" (v. 26).
- B. Remember, Festus was new to the position of governor there in Judea. He'd only recently replaced Felix. And he clearly wasn't all that familiar with the Jewish religion and all that had been going on in the region.

1. But Herod, he was a different story.
 - a. The Herodian dynasty had always had much to do with Judea and Jerusalem and the Jews there. And so Herod Agrippa II here had a particular interest in all this.
 - b. Beyond that, he would have been a young boy when Jesus was ministering in and around Jerusalem and ultimately crucified there on the hill of Golgotha.
- C. So, yes, “the king knows about these things . . . for this has not been done in a corner.”
1. In other words: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were public historical events—events that can be verified in many ways, because you can go and talk to the people who were there, even to the people who saw him raised and all this.
 2. Remember, Paul is speaking to Herod and Festus here sometime around 60 AD.
 - a. If Festus was truly interested in testing the claims made by Paul here, there were plenty still living right there in Jerusalem who could still testify to such historical facts.
 - b. Most scholars date the crucifixion to around 33 AD. In other words, less than thirty years had passed.
 - i. Our nation just remembered the 25th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. If you were there, you don’t forget what happened.
 - ii. Likewise, if you were in Jerusalem, if you saw Christ killed and then raised, you don’t forget that in a few decades. That’s burned in your memory.
 3. So Paul is saying: “Festus, go talk to some of these folks if you’re truly interested. You can reject these claims all you want, but don’t you dare laugh them off as madness.
 - a. I’m speaking ‘true and rational words’ because I’m not just talking about something logically possible, I’m talking about something that’s historically verifiable.”

But What about Today?

- A. Now, just as we did for the logical piece, so we must also ask here: “Okay, so this maybe could work for Paul with Festus and Agrippa and these guys, because they were just 25 or so years removed from the events themselves; but how might this work for us in our evangelistic conversations when we’re now a couple millennia removed?
 1. How do we make a case that the resurrection of Jesus isn’t just logically possible but historically true . . . today?”
- B. Well, I’ll give you the clearest way I know to make a case for this in the few minutes we have left. (It may prove helpful that I don’t have much time for this since often the people you’re sharing with won’t give you much time either.)

1. But here's what I've got: 1 → 2 → 3

a. 1 Historical Fact → 2 Pieces of Evidence → 3 Common Pushbacks . . .

b. . . all leading us to the final verdict that Jesus really does seem to have risen and, therefore, he really is the Christ, the Savior just as the Scriptures claim.

1 Historical Fact

A. With this, you might be thinking I'm referring to the historical fact of the resurrection.

1. But that's not it. Because now, 2000 years removed, we don't have a way of objectively verifying that.

2. Any case we make for the truth of the resurrection has to get at it another way. The best way I know how is to start with the historical fact of the church and work back from there.

B. What I mean is this: We know that the church is here. We're it. We know that the Christian movement has somehow taken off and become a global phenomenon. All around the world, people are gathering, even as we are gathering here this morning, to worship Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Christianity is the largest religion in the world. That's the fact. The church is here.

1. But the question we must then ask is: Where did it come from? How did it get here? What was the initial spark that set this engine roaring back in the first century AD?

C. Well, according to the Bible, as I already mentioned, it was the resurrection of Jesus.

1. That's what gets Peter standing up on the day of Pentecost ([Acts 2:32](#)).

2. And that's what gets the church going.

a. We're here today because that happened back then.

b. So the eminent NT scholar and ancient historian, N.T. Wright writes: "Christianity is inexplicable apart from the assumption that virtually all early Christians . . . did indeed believe that Jesus of Nazareth had been raised bodily from the dead" (*The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 587).

D. That's what got this started. But what was it that convinced them?

2 Pieces of Evidence

A. The first is the empty tomb (cf. [Luke 24:5-6](#)). The second is the many appearances.

1. They saw that he wasn't in the grave.

2. And they saw him alive. Paul says in [1 Cor. 15](#) that there were hundreds of people that saw him ([v. 6](#)).

B. Those two proofs combined to convince these early Christians of Jesus' resurrection.

1. And “the rest is,” as they say, “history.”
2. Or is it?

3 Common Pushbacks

- A. People have been trying to find alternate explanations for the origin and ongoing existence of the church from the very beginning on down to the present day.
 1. And they all know they have to deal with the early Christian’s claims about the resurrection in one way or another. So that’s what they target.
- B. I can only summarize for you the three most common pushbacks and offer a quick word of rebuttal.

PUSHBACK #1: MISCHIEF

- A. Some claim that the first disciples were up to no good. They were trying to start some new movement, get power over folks for themselves or something . . . so they knowingly deceived people.
 1. They must have hid the body and the lied about seeing him risen (cf. [Matt. 28:11-15](#)).
- B. But there’s one massive problem with this pushback:
 1. If it was all about lying to get something for themselves, why would they hold to it even unto death? We know from history that the majority of these guys were hated on and even killed. It doesn’t make sense.
 2. If the lie wasn’t paying off, why hold to it . . . unless you really believed it?
- C. That leads people to consider pushback #2 . . .

PUSHBACK #2: MISTAKE

- A. People don’t die for what they know is a lie. But they do sometimes die for things they truly believe but just got wrong.
 1. You might think again of the Al Qaeda extremists who were responsible for 9/11. They really did believe that they were pleasing Allah and set to receive paradise and a harem of virgins from him for killing themselves and others. They’re genuine, but mistaken.
 2. Maybe the disciples are like that.
 - a. They thought the tomb was empty, but they just went to the wrong one.
 - b. They thought they saw Jesus alive but they were just hallucinating in their sadness or something.
- B. It sounds plausible. But, again, there’s one massive problem with this:

1. If they just simply made a mistake, why in the world would the Jews or the Romans not have simply presented the dead body of Jesus? Both of these groups we know clearly from history desperately wanted to stop this growing Christian movement. If all they had to do was present the body because they went to the wrong tomb or whatever, why would they not do it?

- a. The most likely conclusion is: they didn't because they couldn't. There was no dead body to be presented.

C. There is a third pushback that we get today that must also quickly be addressed . . .

PUSHBACK #3: MYTH

A. Some people claim Christians came years later and added in all this embellishment, all this supernatural stuff long after the time it could have ever been verified.

1. That's what we have in other religions. You look at some of the miracle stories that came to be told of Muhammed and the Buddha, for example, and you realize the earliest written records we have of such things started circling hundreds of years later they actually lived—long after anyone could ever actually go back and verify such things and speak to the eyewitness and all this.
2. So people say that must be what we have with Jesus and the miracles and especially the resurrection as well.

B. It sounds plausible . . . until you really look into the scholarly consensus on the dates for a lot of these NT documents.

1. Take what I referenced earlier for example with [1 Cor. 15](#).
 - a. Most scholars (conservative and liberal) agree that the letter was written sometime around the mid 50s AD—just a couple decades after the death of Jesus.
 - b. And, it's here that Paul writes about the fact that Jesus is risen and hundreds have seen him.
 - c. And then, for extra credit, he just throws in this little detail: "[most of \[these eyewitnesses\] are still alive \(v. 6\)](#). What's he doing?
 - i. He's saying I know it sounds crazy. But you don't have to take just my word for it. You can go talk to all of them as well.
 - ii. "[\[T\]his has not been done in a corner" \(Acts 26:26\)](#).

C. I don't think you don't need me to tell you: This is not how you write myth. It is, however, how you write history.

The Final Verdict

A. So 1 → 2 → 3 . . . final verdict? It's for real. The church is an historical fact because the resurrection of Jesus is an historical fact.

1. As notable historian Philip Schaff writes: “The Christian church rests on the resurrection of its Founder. Without this fact the church could never have been born, or if born, it would soon have died a natural death” (History of the Christian Church, I.2.19). But it didn’t . . . because he’s risen!

Conclusion

- A. So if we want to share the gospel like Paul does here with “true and rational words” our communication needs to be personal, biblical, logical, and historical.
- B. But I just want to close by taking all we’ve seen today and applying it to us.
 1. What’s the point of all this rational argumentation for the resurrection of Jesus?
- C. Well, if you’re a Christian . . .
 1. I want you to see just how stable your faith and, therefore, your peace and your hope and your joy really are. It’s all as stable as Christ is risen.
 - a. Do you remember that time at the end of John’s Gospel when the disciples still think Jesus is dead and so they’re all hiding away behind locked doors, anxious and afraid?
 - i. That’s how a lot of us might feel even now, right? We’re scared. We might not say it, but we feel like God’s dead. If he’s not dead, he’s at least gone.
 - b. But do you know what happens in that story? Jesus shows them: “I’m not dead, I’m alive. And I’m not gone, I’m right here.”
 - i. And what are the first words he says to them: “Peace be with you.” (John 20:19). “If I’m alive, then so is your peace, and your hope, and your joy . . .” and all these things.
 - c. I want you to know that!
- D. And then, if you’re not yet a Christian in this place . . .
 1. I want you to see first just how seriously you have to consider all this.
 - a. You can’t just laugh it off with Festus and chalk it up to “crazy Christians doing crazy things.”
 - b. This isn’t crazy. It’s true and rational. It’s logical and historical. It “has not been done in a corner” (v. 26). You’ve got to really give it a fair hearing.
 2. But then second, I want you to see just how far God was willing to go to bring you home to himself.

- a. The resurrection isn't just a magic trick God does to get our attention.
- b. It's God's vindication of his Son. It's evidence of his acceptance of all that Jesus did on the cross for us.
 - i. Jesus wouldn't have had to rise if he didn't first die.
 - ii. And the reason he died was because he chose to offer himself up freely as a sacrifice for your and my sin—in other words, because he loves you. He really loves you.
- c. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).
 - i. "[W]hoever believes." "[W]hoever believes."
 - ii. Maybe today is the day that "whoever" includes you!