

## The Death of Doubt

Any History buffs here today? Do you believe these historical events took place: The Battle of the Alamo? Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered to Gen. Ulysses S. Grant @ Appomattox Court House, VA? Allied Invasion of Normandy? The Holocaust and genocide of 6 million Jews? The Spaceflight of Apollo 11?

How many of you were at any of those events I just mentioned and that you just raised your hand stating you believe, did historically & factually happen?

Why do we believe all those events in history factually happened if we weren't there as eyewitnesses to see it ourselves? Taught in school or at home. Read about it. Viewed it on T.V. News, documentary or movie.

Today we are going to examine together the greatest, boldest claim that scripture makes, and that history makes: That Jesus Christ, God's Son, died on the cross, was placed in a tomb and then three days later came back to life!

Luke 24: 1- 12 But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. <sup>2</sup> They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. <sup>3</sup> So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes.

<sup>5</sup> The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? <sup>6</sup> He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day."

<sup>8</sup> Then they remembered that he had said this. <sup>9</sup> So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened. <sup>10</sup> It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. <sup>11</sup> But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn't believe it. <sup>12</sup> However, Peter jumped up and ran to the tomb to look. Stooping, he peered in and saw the empty linen wrappings; then he went home again, wondering what had happened.

*Is it possible that Jesus really did die and then came back from the dead? None of us were there, just like known of us were at:*

The Alamo, Surrender of Robert E. Lee & the Confederate Army, the Invasion of Normandy Beach, The Holocaust, or on the moon w/Apollo 11.

Many people here today have no doubt, that it did in fact happen. Others believe it is a fairy tale, much like a Disney Story and doubt its validity. Still others don't know whether to believe it or doubt it. Here's good news for us all:

**Doubts are Not the Death of Faith. Doubts *can* Drive the Discovery of Faith.**

*A Life of faith is littered with doubts.* I'm an example of that. Life happens. Our circumstances often cause us to question what we believe creating doubts in our minds about everything we thought was true. *It happens to all of us.*

Is God real? Does God love me? Can God be trusted? Is there life after this one?

Doubts are Not the Death of Faith. Doubts *can* Drive the Discovery of Faith but only if we have an open mind to follow what the evidence establishes. I hope if you are having doubts that are you open to follow where the evidence takes you.

BIG QUESTION: *what if it is true?* What does the words "He is risen", spoken by the angel to the ladies at the empty tomb, mean to us?" I mean, really. Here we are a couple of thousand years after the claim that the tomb is empty. If it's true, what does this mean for me, for you?

The three English words that are translated "He is risen" come from one Greek word. It is the word *egeiro* (eg-i'-ro);. *egeiro* is the greek word that literally means to waken, to rouse from the dead. Egeiro, he is risen.

**The Resurrection of Jesus is Evidence of God Engaging in History.**

Why does this matter? If this is true, it answers the questions: is God Real? Does God love me? Can he be trusted? Is there life after this one?

It's never happened since so I can't believe it. Is that reason to dismiss that it never happened? That logic would mean you don't believe 9/11 happened.

Scripture claims that God so loved the world that He became one of us, sent His only Son, Jesus, born of the virgin Mary, lived the only perfect and sinless life, shed innocent blood upon a cruel cross, was buried, three days later, there was the claim that He is risen. *What if it's true?*

I really love God's Word: It doesn't shy away from digging for the real answers. Scripture clearly answers this question and shows us what it means if Jesus is not risen, and it shows us what it means if He is risen, if he is alive.

If it's not true, what we are doing right now is really a joke. May make us feel good to go but we are simply playing church.

On the flip side, the Bible and history tells us that if it is true, we have new birth. Not only born physically, but we also can be re - born spiritually. All sins can be forgiven. We have a spiritual do-over. We are forgiven, and the scripture says we become new creations. We become new in Christ.

Secondly, we have a hope in God, who rules and reigns. We have a living hope named Jesus in this world, who walks with us through the good, the bad and the ugly circumstances of our lives.

In what circumstance do you need hope to invade your life today? Marriage? Family relationship? Financially? Health issue? Loneliness? And then he ushers us into eternity where we can live forever in the presence of God.

If Jesus has been raised from the dead, we have the promise of new birth and of living hope.

BIG question: *Is it true? Is He risen?* Or, is He not? Because scripture (God's Word) clearly teaches that our life trajectory hinges on how we answer that question.

Many have heard that faith and reason are incompatible. Don't think, just believe. Faith and reason are compatible, and I want you to reason & think. Chew on it. Dissect it. Follow where the evidence leads.

If He has is not risen, this is all just a big joke. But IF Jesus Christ has risen and he is alive then His truth, life, death, and resurrection deserves at the very least our attention to follow the evidence, doesn't it?

It's the third day since Jesus died on the cross. These ladies go to the tomb. They look in and the body of Jesus is gone.

They don't know what happened to his body, but it was clear it is gone. All the records agree that this is a main truth. *This doesn't prove that Jesus was alive*, just that the tomb was empty.

The women go back to the disciples and they don't believe it. Peter goes, looks in the tomb, then goes home wondering what happened. Doubt. Doubts are Not the Death of Faith. Doubts *can* Drive the Discovery of Faith.

Understandably they are depressed. Demoralized. Down in the dumps. Jesus is dead. The one they had left everything behind to follow is dead. The Gospel of John (20:19) tells us "That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors b/c they were afraid of the Jewish leaders".

Jesus's disciples no longer had confidence that Jesus had been sent by God. They believed anyone crucified was cursed by God. They had been taught that God would not let his Messiah suffer death. The Jesus movement was done.

Three pieces of evidence to consider when asking is the Resurrection of Jesus true and what does it mean for me? **The empty tomb. The transformation in Jesus' disciples. The Conversion of skeptics.**

**The Empty Tomb** No one denies this. Even the Jewish leaders agree on this one. Jesus' body is no longer there. The Jews proposed the crazy story that the guards fell asleep. They were grasping at straws, but they started with the assumption that the tomb was empty. Why? Because it was! So, what happened to it?

*The Disciples came and took his body.* What motivation? They took his body and then they kept up the hoax to die for him? Martyr's die every day for a cause they believe to be true. Look at 9/11. Great point. They died thinking 100 virgins would be waiting for them in heaven. They may sincerely think it's true but that can't know for a fact b/c they didn't witness it themselves. If the disciples took Jesus' body, they knew the truth. He was dead. Would you knowingly die for a lie if you had the choice not to?

*His body was stolen by the Jewish Leaders.* Why didn't they produce the body? Christians: "He rose again after three days." Jews: "It's Day 4. Here's the body of Jesus". That would create a shut – down on the whole Resurrection deal. Didn't happen.

*Jesus was never really dead.* He was resuscitated in the tomb. This idea is found in the Koran, which was written in the seventh century. Jesus was flogged which consisted of 39 lashings (sometimes more) w/a whip of braided leather that had bit of rock, bone & glass in it. Crown of thorns. His body lost so much blood this would be impossible.

### **The Transformation in Jesus' Disciples**

Shortly after the resurrection of Jesus they are energized, encouraged and out in the public sharing about Jesus Christ being the Messiah of God who died on a cross, returned to life, and was seen alive by them. They were thrown into jail for talking about Jesus. They talked even louder and more openly. What changed?

Acts 4:8 – 10 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of our people, <sup>9</sup> are we being questioned today because we've done a good deed for a crippled man? Do you want to know how he was healed? <sup>10</sup> Let me clearly state to all of you and to all the people of Israel that he was healed by the powerful name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the man you crucified but whom God raised from the dead.

*Jesus appeared to them in person after he came back to life!* The disciples of Jesus were willing to die for something they had seen w/their own eyes and touched w/their own hands. The Resurrected Jesus. <sup>11</sup> credible people with no ulterior motives. Nothing to gain and everything to lose. All agree they saw Jesus with their own eyes after he left the tomb. Heard it said this way: "People will die for religious beliefs if they sincerely believe they're true, but people won't die for their religious beliefs if they know their beliefs are false."

**The Conversion of Skeptics** These were people who didn't believe in Jesus before his crucifixion but who turned around and adopted the Christian faith after Jesus' death. Some of them were dead – set against Christianity like Saul of Tarsus who became the apostle Paul and wrote 2/3 of the N.T.

Pharisee who hated anything that went against the traditions of Judaism. Studied under Rabbi Gamaliel. He considered Christianity the height of Jewish disloyalty.

He executed Christians when he had the chance and broke up families. He had power, prestige, fame, fortune & notoriety. Everything our world says is important.

Then he up & switches teams? He leaves ALL that behind? He joins their movement: from Jewish Pharisee to Christ – follower. How does that happen?

**1 Cor. 15:3 – 9 (NLT)** I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. <sup>4</sup> He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. <sup>5</sup> He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. <sup>6</sup> After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. <sup>7</sup> Then he was seen by *James* and later by all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, **I also saw him**. <sup>9</sup> For I am the least of all the apostles. In fact, I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted God's church.

Only Explanation: *Saul met the Resurrected Jesus, and his life changed*. He became Paul the Christian missionary. He performed miracles & lived a life of hardship. Often went w/o: food, a bed to sleep in, exposed to the elements, he was beaten, imprisoned and eventually beheaded.

James (Jacob). Jesus kid brother. Same mom, different dad. Can you imagine growing up with Jesus as your older brother? Why can't you be more like Jesus? Listen? Clean your room? Get better grades? Obey?

James, the brother of Jesus was a skeptic. One time, Jesus entered a house, and the crowds began to gather again. Soon he and his disciples couldn't even find time to eat. <sup>21</sup> When his family heard what was happening, they tried to take him away. "He's out of his mind," they said. In John 7:5 it said, "*even his own brothers did not believe in him*".

What would it take for your brother to convince you he is Jesus, the Messiah? His death and resurrection. Became a leader in the church & stoned to death for his faith in Jesus. *Nobody knowingly & willingly dies for a lie*.

Jacob's story. Holocaust Studies class. Eyewitness to the brutality and death in the Nazi Concentration Camp at Dachau. This man experienced it, lived through it & shared his eyewitness story. Jacob not only believed it, *he accepted it* and it *changed him*.

Belief alone won't change you. Many believe but are unchanged. There's more to it.

John 1:12 (NLT) But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. Believe + Accept = Become.

Do you believe in God? Have you accepted the gift of the forgiveness of sin he offers you? Have you become a believer that the Resurrection of Jesus is evidence of God engaging in history? Have you had an encounter w/the risen Christ?

An encounter with Jesus will put to death, once and for all, the doubt of: Is God real? Does God love me? Can God be trusted? Is there life after this one?

### Small Group Questions

1. What stood out to you in this week's message?
2. What does Easter personally mean to you? Do you have any Easter traditions? Share about them.
3. What do you think are some doubts our culture has about Easter and the resurrection of Jesus? What doubts have you personally wrestled with or through? How has wrestling with your doubts helped you grow in your faith?
4. How would you answer the following questions: Is God real? Does God love me? Can God be trusted? Is there life after this one?

Three pieces of evidence to consider as we answer the question: What if the Resurrection of Jesus is true? The empty tomb. The transformation in Jesus' disciples. The conversion of skeptics.

5. Why is the empty tomb relevant for Christianity? What were some of the empty tomb theories? (The Disciples took the body; the Jewish leaders took the body or Jesus was never dead) How would you refute them?
6. How does the transformation of Jesus' disciples add credibility to the death and resurrection of Jesus? What did the disciples have to gain or lose? Since the disciples knew the truth (Jesus was resurrected), is it logical that they would die for a lie? Why or why not?
7. Read 1 Corinthians 15:3 – 9 (this is generally accepted by scholars to have been written 2 – 8 years after the resurrection of Jesus, between 32 AD – 38 AD). What assurances does Paul give in this passage? What was the key to the conversion of skeptics like Saul of Tarsus (who became Paul the apostle) or James, the brother of Jesus? Paul includes the phrase "he (Jesus) was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some of died". What is the importance of that statement? Why do you think Paul included it?
8. None of us were there to witness the life, death and resurrection of Jesus but we do have documented historical evidence and the life transformation of eyewitnesses who were there. How has the power of the resurrection transformed your life?
9. Is it enough to believe in God? Why or why not? What Biblical evidence would you use to build your case?

10. Who is your circle of influence? Are you consistently praying for them and asking God for opportunities to share your story with them? Are you recognizing opportunities when God presents them and stepping into them in faith?