

Christ in Prophecy
Easter 1: “The Validity of the Resurrection”

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: There is simply no way to overemphasize the importance of the resurrection to the Christian faith, for the resurrection of Jesus is the Christian faith. Christianity stands or falls on the validity, the historical reality of the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is either the greatest event in the history of mankind, or it is the cruelest hoax that has ever been perpetrated. Which is it, truth or fantasy? Stay tuned.

Part 1

Dr. Reagan: I have a friend in Lexington Kentucky who refers to cemeteries as resurrection ground. I like that terminology because the Bible teaches that a day is coming when these graves will open and those who have died with their faith placed in Jesus as Lord and Savior will come back to life and receive glorified, immortal bodies. What a glorious day that will be.

The Bible also says that the Christian hope of resurrection is based upon the resurrection of Jesus. The apostle Paul put it this way in I Corinthians 15, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless.” Peter makes a similar statement in I Peter chapter one where he states that the Christian hope is based upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Based on these statements from Scripture, I don’t think it is any exaggeration to say that the resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Christianity stands or it falls on the assertion that Jesus rose from the dead. So, I think it’s only proper to ask, “Is there any evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, or must it be accepted by blind faith? And if there is evidence, what is it?” For a discussion of those issues, let’s return to our studio where my colleague Dennis Pollock is waiting.

Well here we are back at our studio, and I am delighted to have my colleague Dennis Pollock with me. Dennis, say hello to our viewers.

Dennis Pollock: Well, I'll be happy to do that Dave, but I'd like to say more than just hello. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for the support that you have been giving our program. We have so greatly appreciated your many letters, telephone calls and email messages, and your generous donations. We also appreciate those of you who have informed us that you are praying for us. Keep those prayers going, we need them.

Dr. Reagan: Yes folks, we really covet your prayers. And now, let's turn our attention to the resurrection of Jesus. I'd like to begin our consideration of this epic event by taking a look at the preaching of the apostles. Because the resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith, it was the central theme of the apostle's preaching. We are told for example in Acts chapter 4 that with great power the Apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Dennis Pollock: That's right Dave, and on the day of Pentecost, when the Apostle Peter preached the first Gospel sermon, the focal point of the message was the resurrection. He boldly proclaimed, "This man Jesus of Nazareth, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death, and God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power."

Dr. Reagan: And likewise, the Apostle Paul made it crystal clear that the heart of his Gospel message was the resurrection. He defined the Gospel in I Corinthians 15 in the following terms, and I quote, "That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

Dennis Pollock: Folks, if you will turn to the book of Acts and read the sermons recorded there, you will find that the climax of each one is the assertion that Jesus has risen from the dead. It was this breathtaking, miraculous fact that energized and motivated the Apostles to preach the Gospel fearlessly.

Dr. Reagan: There was no doubt about that Dennis, no doubt whatsoever. Again, the Apostles focused on this event because they present the fact of the resurrection as the event that sets Christianity apart from all other world religions.

Dennis Pollock: Yes Dave, the resurrection is the unique stamp of Christianity, for only Christianity claims an empty tomb for its founder. No resurrection has ever been claimed for Abraham, Buddha, Confucius, or Mohammed.

Dr. Reagan: Again, as Paul puts it in Romans chapter 1, “Jesus was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.” In other words, it is the resurrection that validates Jesus as God in the flesh.

Dennis Pollock: Folks, there’s just no way to get around the fact that the resurrection of Jesus is either one of the most wicked, vicious, heartless, hoaxes ever foisted on the minds of men, or it is the most fantastic truth of history.

Dr. Reagan: Amen Dennis, amen. It has to be one or the other, truth or fantasy. And I believe it is truth. And you know what? I would like for us to take a look at the overwhelming proof that Jesus really did rise from the dead. But before we do so, let’s go to Jerusalem and take a look at the site that many believe may well have been the tomb of Jesus.

Narrator, Don Gordon: Ancient history’s greatest fact, the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The Bible says that, “In the place where Christ was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, where no one was ever laid before.” Here in this lovely garden outside Jerusalem’s City walls, the very heart of the Christian message is proclaimed. Jerusalem, home to the three great Monotheistic faiths. The City where the Creator of the Universe executed His plan to redeem fallen man.

The Holy Sepulcher is traditionally the chief site of Christian pilgrimage, but many, after visiting, wander away without being made aware that Christ came into the World to save sinners. Scripture says Christ suffered outside the gate and that history’s greatest sacrificial death took place at Golgotha, the place of the skull. There, as the people passed by, Jesus bore the wrath of God to take away the punishment that must be paid for our sin. The Gospels record that a rich religious leader, Joseph of Arimathea, took

the Lord's body down from the cross, laying it in his own tomb, and that this tomb was in a garden nearby. In this acre of land, we find two pre-Christian artifacts that attest to a working garden from the first Century. Jerusalem's third largest water system cut out of solid rock, and a very large winepress, evidence of wealth. And just yards away, a tomb that matches the Bible's description in every way, hewn from the rock with a great stone to seal the doorway. Inside is a large weeping chamber, and the place where a body was laid is visible from outside, just as the Bible describes.

We cannot be absolute and say that this is the tomb where Jesus was laid. Joseph never left his mark on it, but others did. Christians have been present here perhaps from the very dawn of the faith. But it's more about who is not here. The raising of Jesus from the dead is the greatest miracle in all history, for it is His resurrection from the dead, as Romans 1:4 declares, that is the proof that Jesus was who He said He was, the Son of God. That's the core of our proclamation. Jesus is alive, after all, no resurrection; no Christianity.

Dr. Reagan: Folks, I love the Garden Tomb. I love to go there and just meditate on the Lord. It is a place of serenity that is enriching to the soul. OK. Let's consider now the evidence of the resurrection, and in doing so, we must start with the fact of the empty tomb.

Dennis Pollock: The Gospels tell us that Jesus was buried in the tomb of a wealthy man, Joseph of Arimathea. Three days later that tomb was empty. It was empty despite the fact that it had been sealed by a huge stone weighing close to two tons, and despite the fact that it had been guarded continuously by a special contingent of Roman soldiers.

Dr. Reagan: And you know, when the soldiers reported their startling discovery of an empty tomb to the Chief Priest of the Jews, they were given a bribe to tell the people that quote, "His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep."

Dennis Pollock: Now I want you to note something very important about the response of the Jewish leaders. The significant thing about their reaction is that they did not challenge the fact that the tomb was empty. That's because the tomb was empty. They

simply couldn't argue with that reality, and so they made up a story to explain why the tomb was empty.

Dr. Reagan: And men have been concocting stories ever since that time. Let's consider some of those explanations, and as we do so, you know, I think you will begin to sense that the shallowness of their arguments speaks louder in many respects than the counter arguments of Christians.

Dennis Pollock: Silliness might be a better term than shallowness. For example one of the arguments against the resurrection is based on the idea that everybody got confused, and in the midst of all this confusion, the Disciples simply went to the wrong tomb. Yeah, some supposedly learned men have proposed this theory over the years. Yet the Gospel accounts tell us that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus both accompanied Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus to the tomb and watched them prepare the body for burial. Are we to suppose that when the women returned they couldn't find their way?

Dr. Reagan: And folks, even if they did get lost and looked in the wrong tomb, did Peter and John do the same thing? Did the Roman soldiers forget which tomb they were guarding? Did Joseph of Arimathea suddenly have a memory lapse as to where his tomb was located? And why didn't the Jewish leaders simply go to the right tomb and produce the body? The answer is simple folks, the tomb was empty.

Dennis Pollock: The oldest explanation of the empty tomb is one that the Jews made up and bribed the soldiers to tell. Namely, that the body of Jesus was stolen by His disciples. Yes this explanation would have us to believe that Peter, Andrew, James and John were body snatchers.

Dr. Reagan: Now folks, I want you to stop and think about this argument for a moment. To believe this theory of body snatching, we would have to believe that a small ragtag band of followers who were scared witless at the arrest of Jesus, and who fled into the night to save their own skins, suddenly found the courage three days later to take on a guard of Roman soldiers.

Dennis Pollock: And even more significant, what would have been the motivation of the disciples to steal the body? We are told over and over again in the Scriptures that they did not understand that Jesus was to be resurrected. Their behavior after the crucifixion testified to this as they sat around in despair mourning the loss of their leader.

Dr. Reagan: And yet, this very group suddenly came alive with hope and went forth boldly, proclaiming the resurrection at the risk of their lives. Now are we really to believe that a group of frightened disciples could be transformed into a courageous band of fearless proclaimers by snatching the body, hiding it, and then committing their lives to a lie? Folks, that's more difficult to believe than the resurrection itself.

Dennis Pollock: Well, that brings us to a third theory, one that has become very popular in recent times, and that's the theory that the disciples experienced a series of hallucinations.

Dr. Reagan: I tell you what Dennis, before we consider that particular theory, let's pause for a moment folks for a great song about the resurrection entitled, "Jesus is Alive." The singer is Ron Kenoly.

Part 2

Dr. Reagan: What a powerful song, praise the Lord.

Dennis Pollock: Amen.

Dr. Reagan: Now Dennis, let's get back for a moment to the survey of the theories that men have concocted over the years to try to explain away the fact of the resurrection of Jesus. The first was that they went to the wrong tomb. And you showed us how ridiculous that concept is. Now the second was that the Jewish leaders made up really a lie that the disciples had stolen the body, and you also showed us that that was equally ridiculous. Now let's go to the third theory.

Dennis Pollock: OK, Dave, well the third theory is that the disciples experienced a series of hallucinations. As one advocate of this novel concept has put it, "they

experienced a disruption of the physiochemical structures of the brain in such a way as to be able to see what they desperately wanted to see.”

Dr. Reagan: Now folks, I will grant that Mary Magdalene might have had a hallucination. After all, she was a frightened and frustrated young woman wandering around in a cemetery at daybreak. And as a matter of fact, the reaction of the disciples to the news of the empty tomb and her encounter with angels who had informed her of the resurrection indicates that they thought she might have been, you know, seeing things.

Dennis Pollock: But what about the appearance of Jesus to all the apostles on three different occasions? Or His appearance to five hundred believers on a Galilean mountain? Or His ascension into Heaven before a host of disciples?

Dr. Reagan: Folks, hallucination is a highly subjective experience and a very personal one. Like beauty, it's in the eye of the beholder. To believe that five hundred people could have the same hallucination simultaneously takes more faith than a belief in the resurrection. And furthermore, the hallucination theory does not explain the empty tomb.

Dennis Pollock: You know another modern theory is that the disciples experienced mass hypnosis. The advocates of this idea argue that the disciples so desperately wanted Jesus to rise from the dead that they created an aura of auto suggestion, or mental hypnosis, and thus whenever the name of Jesus was mentioned His disciples believed that they could see Him.

Dr. Reagan: Now folks mass hypnosis is a probability with even as many as five hundred people, given precisely the right type of controlled environment and the proper mass medium like radio or television or film. But mass hypnosis without some form of mass media, and without a professional hypnotist, and without ideal conditions is utterly outside the realm of sound reasoning. And so I ask you, how could five hundred people in the open air of a country side, before the invention of mass media, and before the discovery of hypnosis, be subject to mass hypnosis? And how does this explain the fact of the empty tomb? I think it's obvious that the skeptics are grasping for straws.

Dennis Pollock: Well, this leaves us with centuries old theory that has been recently popularized by an apostate Christian named Hugh Schonfield, it's called the "Swoon Theory." This is the idea that Jesus really didn't die on the Cross. Instead, He just passed out, and then woke up three days later. Schonfield has revived this idea in his book called, *The Passover Plot*.

Dr. Reagan: Now think about that for a moment folks. Mister Schonfield would ask us to believe that after Jesus was scourged, and crucified, and after He had laid in a cold, damp tomb for three days without food or water. He suddenly revived, removed His burial wrapping, rolled back the stone and ran around the countryside for forty days without the benefit of even a dose of penicillin or a tetanus shot. Only a fool could believe such utter nonsense.

Dennis Pollock: There is one other theory that's become very popular among modern day liberal theologians. It's what I call the "Nostalgia Theory." It's the idea that the resurrection occurred only in the hearts of the disciples.

Dr. Reagan: I am so glad you mentioned that Dennis, because folks, several years ago I ran across a startling example of this concept in the *Dallas Morning News*. The newspaper reported that this crazy idea had been proposed to the students of a local Dallas University by a person bearing the title of Professor of New Testament Theology. He stated in his incredible Easter sermon to the students that Jesus had not really risen from the dead in any literal way. What happened instead, he explained, is that Jesus simply came alive in the hearts of His disciples as they sat around and discussed His life and teachings. Just as had been the case with the followers of Martin Luther King after his assassination.

Dennis Pollock: Dave, such a ridiculous concept is a natural outgrowth of liberal apostasy because it leaves them with the kind of Jesus that they really want, one who is only human. Their messiah turns out to be a man who meant well, but who in reality was a deluded fool who thought He was God in the flesh.

Dr. Reagan: That's well put Dennis. And this nostalgia theory, like all the other theories, fails to explain the well documented post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, and it fails completely to explain the fact of the empty tomb.

Dennis Pollock: Folks, the tomb of Jesus was empty. It was empty, not because it was the wrong tomb, nor was it empty because the body had been stolen. The fact of the empty tomb was not based on hallucinations or hypnosis. It certainly was not based on daydreaming or wishful thinking. The tomb was empty. That is a historical fact.

Dr. Reagan: But let me hasten to say that the greatest evidence of the resurrection of Jesus is not the empty tomb. It's something else that we have not yet mentioned. And we will tell you what it is after we pause for another song. Here is the Cathedral Quartet singing "Because He Lives."

Part 3

Dr. Reagan: What a beautiful song. And now folks, let's consider the greatest evidence of the resurrection of Jesus. As we pointed out earlier, the empty tomb and the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus are powerful evidence of the truth of the resurrection. But you know the greatest evidence of the resurrection in Scripture is to be seen in the transformed lives of Jesus' disciples. For within 50 days of His crucifixion, His disciples had been miraculously transformed from a defeated, frustrated, hopeless group of individuals into a confident band of Christian soldiers determined to win the world for their Lord.

Dennis Pollock: Jesus' own brother James is a good example of what Dave is talking about. James did not believe in Jesus while He was alive. Yet after the resurrection, James became the leader of the Church in Jerusalem. Or consider Peter, who denied Jesus three times in a fit of cowardice. He began to proclaim boldly, Jesus Christ the Lord, even before the very Sanhedrin council that had condemned Jesus to death. And then there was a young Christian by the name of Stephen who was stoned to death because of his witness of Jesus.

Dr. Reagan: And let's not forget the most ruthless persecutor of the church, Saul of Tarsus. He became the greatest missionary in the history of the Church, all because he encountered the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. I ask you, what more evidence could one demand?

Dennis Pollock: Well folks, there is more evidence, and I consider it to be the most convincing evidence of all. I have in mind the way in which peoples lives continue to be transformed today through their encounter with the living Jesus.

Dr. Reagan: What about you? Have you met Jesus? Have you been born again by placing your faith in Him? Are you ready to face death without fear because you know you will spend eternity with God? Salvation is to be found in a personal relationship with a living Savior. Jesus said that eternal life is knowing Him. You know, when one of Jesus' disciples named Thomas finally encountered Him after the resurrection, he cried out, "My Lord and my God." Jesus replied, "Because you have seen me you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." I challenge you to believe in the risen Jesus. John 20:31 says that through belief in Jesus, you may have life in His name.

Well, that's our program for this week. We pray it's been a blessing to you. Until next week this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb and Lion Ministries, saying, "Look up, be ready, for your redemption is drawing near!"

End of Program