

Christ in Prophecy

Easter 4: “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 in Cemetery

Dr. Reagan: Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Blessed Hope, and welcome to Christ in Prophecy. I have a friend in Lexington, Kentucky who calls cemeteries “Resurrection Ground.” I like that terminology, because the Bible teaches that a day is coming when these graves will be 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 1 Corinthians 15: “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless.” Peter makes a similar statement in 1 Peter chapter 1 where he states that the Christian hope is based on “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 is 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 any evidence, what is it? For a discussion of these issues, let’s return to our studio where my colleague, Nathan Jones is waiting.

Part 2

Dr. Reagan: Well, here we are back at our studio, and I am delighted to have my colleague, Nathan Jones, with me. Nathan, tell the viewers hello.

Nathan Jones: I'd love to do that Dave. But I would like to say a little more than Hello if that's alright.

Dr. Reagan: Okay.

Nathan Jones: I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the support you've been given our program. We have greatly appreciated your many letters, and 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 apostles' preaching. We are told, for example, in Acts chapter 4 "with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."

Nathan Jones: That's right, Dave, and on that day of Pentecost, when the apostle Peter preached the first gospel sermon, the focal point of his message was the Resurrection. He boldly proclaimed: "The Man Jesus of Nazareth, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to the cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. And God raised Him up again, and put an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power"

Dr. Reagan: Likewise, the apostle Paul made it crystal clear that the heart of the gospel message was the Resurrection. He defined the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15 in the following terms he wrote: "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

Nathan Jones: Now folks, if you'll 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 had risen from the dead. It was this breathtaking, miraculous fact that energized and motivated the apostles to preach the Gospel fearlessly.

Dr. Reagan: There's no doubt about that, Nathan. And 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.

Nathan Jones: 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 even 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.

Nathan Jones: And folks, there's just no way to get around the fact that the Resurrection of Jesus is either one of the most wicked, and vicious, and heartless hoaxes ever foisted upon the minds of men, or it is the most fantastic truth of history!

Dr. Reagan: Amen, Amen! Nathan. It has to be one or the other; truth or fantasy. And I believe its truth, and 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.

[Music]

Narrator Don Gordon: Ancient history's greatest fact, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

[Music]

Narrator Don Gordoni: 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.

[Music]

Narrator Don Gordoni: Here in this lovely garden outside Jerusalem city walls the very heart of the Christian message is proclaimed.

[Music]

Narrator Don Gordoni: Jerusalem home to the three great monotheistic faiths; the city where the Creator of the universe executed His plan to redeem fallen man.

[Music]

Narrator Don Gordoni: 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.

[Music]

Narrator Don Gordoni: 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 the 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 cistern 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 the 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 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.

Part 3

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. Okay, let's consider the evidence of the Resurrection. And in doing so, we must start with the fact of the empty tomb.

Nathan Jones: The Gospels tell us that Jesus was buried in the tomb of a wealthy man, Joseph of Arimathea. And 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 when the soldiers reported their startling discovery of an empty tomb to the chief priests of the Jews, they were given a bribe to tell the people that "His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep."

Nathan Jones: 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 could not 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, I think you'll begin to sense that the shallowness of their arguments speaks louder in many respects than the counter arguments of Christians.

Nathan Jones: Silliness might be a better term than shallowness! For example, one of the arguments against the Resurrection is based on the idea that everyone got confused, and in the midst of all this confusion, the disciples simply went to the wrong tomb! Yes, some supposedly learned men have proposed this theory over the years. And 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 then supposed to assume that when the women returned they could not find their way?

Dr. Reagan: And 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? Well folks the answer is simple: the tomb was empty!

Nathan Jones: Well the oldest explanation of the empty tomb is the one 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 believe that Peter, and Andrew, James and John were body snatchers!

Dr. Reagan: Now, folks, stop and think about this argument for a moment. To believe this theory of body snatching, we would have to believe that a small rag-tag 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!

Nathan Jones: And even more significant, what would have been the motivation of the disciples to steal the body? I mean we're told over and over again in the Scriptures that they did not understand that Jesus was to be resurrected. Their behavior after the crucifixion testifies to this, and 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. Are we really to believe that a group of frightened disciples could be transformed into a courageous band of fearless proclaimers by snatching a body, hiding it, and then committing their lives to a lie? That's more difficult to believe than the Resurrection!

Nathan Jones: And that brings us to a third theory, one that has become very popular in recent times. It is the theory that the disciples experienced a series of hallucinations.

Dr. Reagan: Well I'll tell you what, Nathan before we get into that particular theory, let's pause for a moment for a great song about the Resurrection this song is called "Jesus is Alive." The singer is Ron Kenoly.

Part 4

Dr. Reagan: What a powerful song! And now, Nathan, let's get back to the theories that men have concocted to try to explain away the reality of the Resurrection. The first one that you mentioned was the fact that they went to the wrong tomb, and you showed how ridiculous that was. The second was the story that was dreamed up by the Jewish priests and that was that the disciples stole the body! And again, you showed us equally how ridiculous that was. Let's go to the third theory.

Nathan Jones: Okay, Dave, the third theory is that the disciples experienced a series of hallucinations. And as one advocate of this novel concept has put it, "They experienced a disruption of the physio-chemical 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 about in a cemetery at day break. As a matter of fact, the reaction of the disciples to her news of the empty tomb and her encounter with angels who informed her of the Resurrection indicates that they thought she had been seeing things.

Nathan Jones: But what about the appearance of Jesus to all the apostles on three different occasions? Or His appearance to 500 believers on a Galilean mountain? Or His ascension into Heaven before a host of disciples?

Dr. Reagan: A hallucination is a highly subjective experience and a very personal one. Like beauty, it is in the eye of the beholder. To believe that 500 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.

Nathan Jones: Well another modern day theory is that the disciples experienced mass hypnosis. The advocates of these ideas argue that the disciples so desperately wanted Jesus to rise from the dead that they created an aura of auto-suggestion which is mental hypnosis and thus, whenever the name of Jesus was mentioned, His disciples believed they could see Him.

Dr. Reagan: Now, folks, mass hypnosis is a probability, with even as many as 500 people, given precisely the right type of controlled environment and the proper mass medium like radio, 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. So, I ask you, how could 500 people in the open air of a country side, before the invention of mass media, and before the discovery of hypnosis, be subjected to mass hypnosis? And how does this explain the fact of the empty tomb? I think it's obvious that the skeptics are simply grasping at straws.

Nathan Jones: Yes, well this leaves us with a centuries old theory that has recently been popularized by an apostate Christian named Hugh Schonfield. It's called the "swoon theory." And 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 this for a moment, folks. Mr. 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 wrappings, rolled back the stone, ran around the country side for 40 days without even the benefit of even a dose of penicillin or a tetanus shot. Only a fool could believe such utter nonsense!

Nathan Jones: Well there is one other theory that has become very popular among modern day liberal theologians. And it is what I call the "nostalgia theory." It's the idea that the Resurrection occurred only in the hearts of the disciples.

Dr. Reagan: I'm very glad you mentioned that, Nathan, because several years ago I saw a startling example of that in *The Dallas Morning News*. Folks it's hard to believe but the newspaper reported that this crazy idea had been proposed to the students of a local Dallas university, a Christian 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 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!

Nathan Jones: Well, Dave, such a ridiculous concept is a natural outgrowth of liberal apostasy because it leaves them with the kind of Jesus they like - one who was 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: Well put, Nathan. You know folks 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.

Nathan Jones: Folks, the tomb of Jesus was empty. And 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! And that is an 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 a song. Here now is the Cathedral Quartet singing “Because He Lives.”

Part 5

Dr. Reagan: What a beautiful song! And now, 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 folks 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 whole world for their Lord.

Nathan Jones: 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, three times in a fit of cowardice he denied Jesus. But then He began to proclaim Jesus boldly, 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?

Nathan Jones: Well, folks, there is one more evidence, and I consider it to be the most convincing evidence of all. I have in mind the way in which people's lives continue to be transformed today through their encounter with the living Jesus.

Part 6 Cemetery

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. When one of Jesus' disciples named Thomas finally encountered Him after His 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. I hope it's been a blessing to you. Until next week, this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb & Lion Ministries, saying "Look up, be watchful, for our Redemption is drawing near."

End of Program