

The empty tomb and the bodily resurrection of Jesus

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Frank Morrison, a.k.a. Albert Henry Ross and Lee Strobel had one thing in common though they were separated by two continents – England and America and the period of 70 years. They both wanted to prove that Christianity was a hoax and nothing more than a fairy tale. To disprove Christianity, these very intelligent atheists went for the jugular of Christianity – the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They knew that the whole theology of Christianity is hinged on this. Morrison and Strobel thought that if they could prove that Jesus didn't resurrect from His tomb, everything would fall apart. Much to their dismay, after thorough researches and analyses, they both came to the same conclusion – Jesus has indeed risen from the dead. And they both became dedicated Christians and wrote their books. "Who moved the stone?" by Morrison and "The Case for Christ" by Strobel.

Do you know this vain quest of attempts to disprove the resurrection of Christ continues in the 21st Century? So-called progressive theologians often teach that Jesus' resurrection was "spiritual" or "metaphorical." It might sound like a deep concept, but a metaphorical resurrection is no resurrection at all.

When the disciples of Jesus saw the tomb in which they had previously buried the body of Jesus, it was empty. The burial garments were in such shape and place to indicate their abandonment by the orderly departure of the body of Jesus unlike someone getting out of bed. When Jesus later appeared to His disciples, He was in a body:

Luke 24:39 Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."

His resurrection body performed the functions of movement, appearance, and the eating of food. He talked and heard. He occupied a room but did not need a door for access. It was the same body in its glorified form that Jesus took from the tomb, leaving it empty and without an occupant.

A. THE BODILY RESURRECTION

Any notion that seeks to disprove the bodily resurrection of Jesus is confronted with the appearances of Jesus in His own body.

With amazing frequency, the Bible affirms the fact of the bodily resurrection of Christ. Perhaps the most direct of all its statements is Luke's account in the Book of Acts, where he reports:

Acts 1:3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

The resurrection of Christ was not simply an addition to the earthly life of Jesus, but it is one of a series of redemptive events that are linked in a chain from eternity to eternity. These include the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension, the rapture, and the Second Coming. Any missing link would destroy the chain and thus make redemption impossible.

B. THE RESURRECTION IS ESSENTIAL

Romans 6:8-9 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is among the most important of all biblical truths. It is foundational and bedrock. Many other aspects of the Christian faith depend and rest on the fact of the Resurrection. Let me share with you just three essential Christian truths that depend on the resurrection.

1) Life beyond death depends on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:21-22 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

Jesus' victory over death promises us that we, too, will overcome death. When we overcome death, we get to have eternal life in heaven instead of eternal death in hell.

2) God's future judgment of the world rests upon the resurrection.

Acts 17:31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.

This promise reminds us that God will judge all the unbelievers one day. To those who are born-again will receive the rewards according to what they have done.

3) The resurrection of Christ gives us the power to live the Christian life.

Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

The Resurrection, therefore, promises us that God will not only give us life beyond the grave, but He will give us the power to live the Christian life on earth.

C. THE RESURRECTION IS KEY TO UNDERSTANDING ALL THE SCRIPTURES

If there was someone who understood the Old Testament, it would have been Saul of Tarsus. As a Pharisee, he thought that Jesus of Nazareth, the one who was crucified by the Romans could not be the Messiah. His reasoning seemed to be a logical one in the mind of an unbeliever: The Messiah by definition is "Anointed." It means "the chosen one, beloved one." A Messiah would be blessed by God and the favored One. He would please God. But here is this Jesus Christ, supposed to be the Messiah, but he was dead on a cross.

The Romans and the Jews knew to die on the cross, that's the bad end of people who are the lowest of the low. And doesn't Deuteronomy itself say, "*Cursed is he who is hung on a tree*"? And maybe Paul didn't know about this comment by Jesus' own mouth, but if he did it certainly would have gone along with his thinking. Didn't Jesus actually cry out, "*My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?*"

But after his dramatic conversion to Christianity on the road to Damascus, the apostle Paul understood the Resurrection, he understood the cross, paired together. And once he paired the Resurrection and the Cross together, he looked back and the whole Bible opened up to him.

Paul had been expecting a mighty Messiah to come to save the Jews. But instead, he suddenly realized, "Wait a minute, it's a Messiah coming in weakness to save those who admit their weakness and their need for a Savior." Once the people saw that, it opened everything up. Jesus explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself. And at the very end, He does the very same thing: "*These are*

the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.” according to Luke 24:44.

Allow me to recap the Old Testament in a couple of minutes

He, Christ is the Creator of the universe; He was prophesied by His Father when the first two humans sinned. The Lord pronounced the judgment and the prophecy of the salvation of mankind by saying, *“He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”*

He, Christ was a typology of Isaac, the beloved Son of the Father who was offered as a sacrifice but did not succumb to the power of death. He, Christ was a typology of the good and compassionate brother Joseph who in his glory was not ashamed to acknowledge his brothers however lowly and abject their condition. He, Christ was the great sacrifice and priest of the Most High God Melchizedek who was offered an eternal sacrifice once for all.

Jesus is the sovereign law-Giver Moses writing his law on the tablets of our hearts by His Spirit. He, Christ is the faithful captain and guide Joshua to lead us to our promised land. He, Christ is the victorious and noble king David bringing by his hand all rebellious power to subjection. He, Christ is the magnificent and triumphant king Solomon governing his kingdom in peace and prosperity.

This is what we should, in short, seek in the whole of Scripture: Truly to know Jesus Christ and the infinite riches that are comprised in Him and are offered to us by Him from God the Father. If one were to sift thoroughly the law and the prophets, he would not find a single word that would not draw and bring us to Christ. Therefore rightly does the apostle Paul say in another passage that he would know nothing except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

D. THE RESURRECTION GIVES HOPE TO THE BELIEVERS

The vast majority of people are fearful of death, whether they are believers or not. Because it is unknown. Oh, yes, we heard those who experienced their death and came back to life and write books about it. But can we trust them? The psychic industry makes good money by supposedly connecting the living with their dead loved ones. Inquiring minds that are also spiritually ignorant want to know. There is a great Spanish phrase for that: *“¿Eres estúpido?”*

The Lord Jesus doesn't give us any philosophical argument or psychic mumbo jumbo about life after death. He simply declares it! He speaks of what the truth is, and tells us with the authority of heaven: *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live”* in John 11:25.

1 Corinthians 15:51-57 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed- 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” 55 “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” 56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you have confidence in God that you will be in heaven after you die? If you do, why? Because you are a good person? Because you were born in America? If you don't have that confidence? Why not?

From what we just have read, Christ has replaced the dark door of death with the shining gate of life for all of us. Any of us can have that confidence if we put our trust in Christ, not in ourselves.

The apostle Paul, too, had that confidence. He said, "*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain,*" in Philippians 1:21. Paul's true hope was rooted in Christ, who died on the cross for sinners, who rose from the grave that first Resurrection morning, who is alive in heaven, and who would one day take believers into His presence. Those who are prepared to die are most prepared to live.

E. JESUS' RESURRECTION AND UNBELIEVERS

Of course, not everyone believes Jesus rose from the dead, and I think there are reasons for that. I don't think people reject His resurrection because they have necessarily carefully researched it and have concluded that the evidence for its historical facts and reality came up lacking.

I think they reject it for the same reason they reject the biblical account of the creation: If God did indeed create the world, then we're not just highly evolved animals. It means we are responsible to our Creator and will have to answer for our sinful actions. And if the resurrection of Jesus is true, then there is life after death, and there is a future judgment against those who reject becoming born-again Christians.

The real reason a person doesn't believe isn't intellectual or rational, but moral and spiritual:

Psalm 14:1 The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good.

If you don't have God at the beginning, then you don't have Him at the end. And you don't have God in the middle, either. If you believe you evolved, then you say your life is an accident, maybe even a mistake. You have come from nowhere, you are going nowhere, and your life has no eternal purpose. You don't belong to anyone, and you have no accounting to give to anyone. You might like to keep it that way. But the truth is the opposite.

God created us, and we will be judged by Him. This reminds us, among other things, that God's justice ultimately will prevail. We have all witnessed wrongs committed against others – and ourselves, but it's all going to be settled at the judgment seat of Christ, who rose from the dead and conquered sin, forever.

Some of you might say, "How can you believe Jesus' resurrection from the dead?" It's very easy if you can believe the first verse of the Book of Genesis: "*In the beginning, God created heaven and earth.*" To God, resurrecting a dead body was a cakewalk.