

THE RESURRECTION: FACT OR MYTH?

Matthew 28:1-20

(Not original with me, credits at the end)

Introduction: Easter is celebration of the greatest event in human history, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Someone once said that the resurrection is either the greatest day in the history of mankind, worthy to be celebrated, or the resurrection is the greatest hoax ever to be pulled off. It all comes down to what actually took place that first Easter morning.

Christians are often asked "Why do you believe this or that?" "Why do you believe that a man who died actually came to life again? What evidence/proof is there that such a thing ever took place? Have you personally ever seen someone who was dead come back to life again? Isn't all this resurrection stuff just a story concocted by this man Jesus' followers after their hero was killed and buried?"

It is indeed a very mind boggling claim to make that the very same Jesus who died on a cross rose from the dead. However, Christians stand on very solid ground in the belief that the resurrection actually happened and it is a very real fact, a physical miracle and a historic event.

Hank Hannegraff, in his book "Resurrection," in Part One: "Defense of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ," wrote about the "F.E.A.T" of the resurrection which he used to identify four things that Christians and non Christians can agree upon regarding the death of Jesus Christ. Upon looking at these things describing the resurrection, the question then might better be asked, "What is the best, even the ONLY explanation to account for these facts?"

F. E. A. T.

The letter "F" stands for "Fatal Torment." Jesus literally suffered and died upon the cross. Even the most skeptical critics of Christianity agree upon this point. The Jewish historian Josephus, born about four years after Jesus' death on the cross, referred to Jesus' crucifixion as an established and accepted fact. Although Josephus was not at that time a believer in the resurrection, his writings prove, that **NO ONE, NO ONE**, doubted that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified by the Romans under Pilate. A proven **FACT**.

The letter "E" stands for the "Empty Tomb." After the third day, the tomb was reported empty. The Roman authorities felt the need to circulate an explanation as to why this was so. For thousands of people became believers in the resurrected Jesus Christ not long afterwards. However, to crush this movement, all the Romans had to do was to produce the body of Jesus, but of course this they could not do. Another proven **FACT**.

The letter "A" stands for the "Appearances of Christ." The resurrection story states that Jesus appeared first to women, and then also to His disciples. An important fact is that in the first century, the testimony of women was inadmissible in any court, therefore if someone was trying to make up a story about how Jesus supposedly rose from the dead, using women to spread the story was not how it would have been done. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians about some 500 witnesses who saw Jesus between His resurrection and His ascension. In doing so, he was inviting his readers to investigate and check out their stories while they were still alive. This is another proven **FACT**.

The letter "T" stands for the "Transformation of the Disciples." Think about it - the disciples who walked and talked with Jesus were absolutely convinced that Jesus was dead and anybody who was dead would remain dead. Of course this was an embarrassing fact, given the fact that Jesus had already told them that His resurrection would happen. However, that first Easter morning found the disciples dejected, hopeless and fearful to which they even admitted. They became so convinced, however, that the same Jesus who died literally rose from the dead, that they were willing to go throughout the world preaching the resurrected Christ, even suffering and dying because of that belief. This is an outstanding FACT.

Everyone knows that people will die for something they know to be true. People will also die for something they believe to be true, but it is actually a lie. For instance on 9/11, numerous terrorists died for their belief that they were doing Allah's will by killing almost 3,000 innocent American citizens. These terrorists died for a lie. People will not die, however, for what they know to be a lie.

Christian, imagine that you are one of the disciples. Imagine that you never saw the living Jesus after you heard that He was resurrected and you are about to be stoned to death by an angry mob, however you can escape being stoned to death by just admitting that you never saw a living Jesus. Would you be willing to make your family fatherless, motherless just to keep the lie going? However, you would be willing to die, if you knew the resurrection to be true because YOU WERE AN EYEWITNESS to the risen Lord, would you not? History reveals that ten of the eleven remaining disciples died martyr's deaths. They had rather of died than deny Jesus Christ.

Putting everything together, the evidence proves that Jesus suffered deadly and fatal torment. Afterwards, there was much controversy regarding an empty tomb. Hundreds claimed to be eyewitness of the risen Jesus Christ. The very disciples who doubted His resurrection became convinced and were willing to die for that belief. FACTS!

Some claim that the best explanation is that Jesus didn't really die on the cross, He merely seemed to die. Actually He "swooned" (fainted). This, however is preposterous. If Jesus was somehow mistaken for having died, that means that a severely wounded Jesus was given no medical treatment, was placed in an airtight tomb, received no food or water, was there until the third day, then He woke up, rolled away the heavy stone by Himself and single handedly overcame the very strong, well trained Roman soldiers guarding the tomb. He did all of this only to then appear to His disciples, try to convince them that he died, and rose again, knowing none of this was true, only then to disappear and live out His days in obscurity so that His disciples would flood the earth with a false resurrection story. None of this makes sense and to believe this takes more faith than it does to believe the resurrection account given in the Scriptures.

The ONLY credible explanation for the facts is that Jesus did exactly what He said He would do. Also Christians, consider that the resurrection is the only explanation for the birth of the Church. Think about it. Thousands of Jesus whose total history and identity was wrapped up on the laws, the habits, the life of a Jew and all that was associated with Jewish style of worship at the temple, adopted Sunday as a memorial of Jesus Christ's resurrection day. What a change! The growth of the gospel in the first century is a movement unequalled in all of human history. In just a relatively short amount of time, the gospel took the world by storm. How is such a rapid growth explained? It was the number of EYEWITNESSES.

The resurrection also addresses the greatest problem mankind faces. The problem of sin and death. Without a resurrected Jesus, mankind has no hope after death. A living Savior is needed to give eternal life. A conqueror of death is needed to give hope beyond the grave. It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ that gives mankind the ability to have assurance of eternal life and heaven. Just a little insert here: Muhammad, the founder of Islam, said that he did not know what would become of him. He could not know if he was good enough to make it. Confucius was concerned with secular ethics and offers no words of comfort regarding hope beyond the grave. The Hindu believe that if they live a good life, they might be reincarnated as something or someone else to a different degree and keep repeating that process until one day, hopefully Nirvana would be achieved which is a nothingness,. Thus, their hope lies in the possibility of non-existence. ONLY the Christian faith speaks of a confident expectation of heaven. ONLY the Bible says that one can have assurance that he/she will spend eternity in heaven. It is the resurrection that gives such basis for this LIVING HOPE.

CONCLUSION:

Christians believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and do so not because it is a myth that they (we) desperately want to believe. Christians arrive at the resurrection because anything else is absurd. Christians believe by faith. No Christian of today was there 2,000 years ago and Christians have yet to be able to touch the nail scars in the hands and feet of Jesus, but all Christians can sing at the top of their lungs and with all their heart, **"ON CHRIST, THE SOLID ROCK I STAND, ALL OTHER GROUND IS SINKING SAND..."**

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- Part One: "Defense of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ" (F.E.A.T.)