

Resurrection? I'll Believe That When Caterpillars Fly. Luke 23:1-12

Disclaimer: Material from this message was adapted in part from messages found on the Sermon Central website.

Christ has Risen!

He has risen indeed!

Did you hear that? Today around the world Christians are rejoicing as they repeat this phrase to one another; they have been well trained, well rehearsed, just as you said it right now. Christ has Risen! **(He has risen indeed!)**

But do you really believe that? Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus? That anybody could come back to life after death?

"But, that's just impossible! It flies in the face of everything we know, you would have to be an idiot to believe in the resurrection." I hear this sort of thing all the time, and it's often spoken as though it is the very essence of bear-trap logic.

The only sensible response I can think of is: *"You're right, you'd have to be an idiot to believe in the resurrection or any of the miracles recorded in the Bible, but only if the God of the Bible doesn't exist. However, if He does exist, then you'd have to be an idiot to think that this God couldn't do what the Bible says He did."*

So the real problem for the skeptic is not so much the idea of resurrection – of a person coming back to life after death - but basically of God's existence. Once that's settled, the rest is pretty easy.

Now if this were a discussion between you and me about God's existence, I would just point out that the universe is impossible to account for without a Creator. **Without a clockmaker, how did the clock get here?**

The proposed alternatives to a creating intelligence behind the existence of our universe really do not have much to commend them:

- Either the universe never had a beginning; it has always been here (the Second Law of Thermodynamics negates that idea) .
- Or that the universe just somehow popped into existence all by itself with the big bang

Frankly, it takes a whole lot more suspension of rationality to believe in a godless eternally existing or self-created universe than it does to conclude that there must be a guiding intelligence behind all this. But that's a discussion for another day.

Today's question isn't about God existence , it's about the likelihood that **resurrection -- being restored back to life -- is the natural outcome of His plan not only for Jesus of Nazareth but for each one of us as well.**

So, assuming there is a God who can bring a universe into existence anytime He wants, here are seven perfect reasons why believing in Jesus' historic and our eventual resurrection from the dead is the most rational way to live.

1) Because Of New Testament Claims That Christ Actually Rose Again.

The New Testament declares that Jesus rose from the dead and that one day his followers will too. Unless you have personally looked into these claims, this might strike you as a fairly lightweight argument for the resurrection. Just claiming something doesn't make it true, and holy books make all kinds of claims that are hard if not impossible to believe.

The critically thinking person (as we all should be) has every right to suspect any such claim, religious or not. But if you take the time to examine all the evidence, the fact emerges that the reliability of the New Testament's claims have already been tested and proved by some of the most critical minds in history.

I can refer you to the mountains of information already compiled in this area, not simply by believers, but by world-class historians, archeologists, paleontologists, and text critics, some who began their investigations with the intent of debunking the entire foundation of the Christian faith, but as a result were driven to accept it.

As author Charlie Campbell wrote, *many of those who scoff at the trustworthiness of the Bible do so completely overlooking the fact that thousands of archaeological discoveries have affirmed the historical reliability of the Bible.*

So if the New Testament claims that Jesus returned to life after His death, it has sufficient proven credentials to be given the benefit of the doubt.

2) The Early Church Never Debated The Resurrection Of Christ.

Strangely, even though every other aspect of the Christian faith was debated and squabbled over within the first century Christian community, the resurrection of Jesus was not. If a topic under debate had any connection with the resurrection, the writers simply resolved the issue by reminding all contenders that **Jesus rose from the dead**. That ended the debate simply because this event was the one established, irrefutable fact the church didn't doubt.

3) Alternative Stories Of Jesus Disappearance From The Tomb Have All Been Discredited.

Immediately after the resurrection of Jesus, alternative stories for the empty tomb began to appear among those who hated Jesus and were horrified by the news that He had risen from the dead. His physical—not spiritual—reappearance was the last thing they wanted to hear. Jewish authorities actually instructed the frightened guards -- who had seen the event -- to spread a rumor saying "*his disciples came by night and*

stole the body while we slept" (MT 28:13), (that is if you believe any Roman soldier would confess to having slept on their watch).

Modern historians then have suggested other explanations for why those early Christians might have mistakenly thought they saw Jesus was again alive.

- **The first theory is that He actually never died**, but after the trauma of scourging and crucifixion, Jesus merely passed out and was presumed dead. Then three days later in the cold dark tomb, He woke back up and with wounded hands and feet pushed the stone away, then overpowered the armed guards to run away into the night (yeah sure). You should ask the guard who purposely ran a spear up into Jesus' heart about the possibility of Jesus not being dead.
- Another theory is that **what His disciples saw was only His spirit or possibly a mass self-hallucination**. Well the Bible lists over 500 witnesses who would attest to seeing not a ghost but a very much alive Jesus for over a seven week period following His death, many of whom even sat down and ate meals with him. I never heard of a ghost who could eat food.
- And a third theory proposes that His **disciples just made up the story** to keep their struggling faith alive. Well, one person might choose to die to protect a lie, but that dozens, even hundreds, choosing to die rather than admitting they had made up a lie? I don't think so.

Once again, each one of those theories is harder to believe than the straightforward claim that Jesus was raised from death by God's infinite power, as testified to by hundreds of eye witnesses.

4) All Creation Hints At Resurrection

Most of the world believes that the universe is a product of a creator, that an all powerful intelligence brought it into existence. Very few think that all this came into being by itself, and for good reason; there isn't the slightest rational basis for such a view. Even cosmologists have to acknowledge that behind their "big bang" theory there has to be something/someone who caused it. The "uncaused cause," is a strange name for God, but it's the best they can come up with.

The Bible affirms that God—the infinite, personal, intelligent God—designed and made all that is, that everything is heavily laden with evidences of design, and that there is nothing we see around us that isn't designed.

Everything that God made is very valuable to Him and He regards His creation with such great love that He takes a very dim view of anyone who tries to destroy it (Rev. 11:18). What God created He very much likes and intends to keep — forever.

And of all that Gode made, human beings are His highest and greatest work (Psalm 8), His earthly royalty. So the resurrection is not just about Jesus, but also for every human being who wants to be part of God's eternal program; and it's not merely about human bodies, but about everything God ever made (Rom. 8:18-25).

From a careful Biblical reading on matters of creation and resurrection you will discover that God is interested not in immortal souls, but in **immortal, physical bodies** dwelling forever on an **immortal, physical earth**.

Let everyone count themselves immortal.
Let them catch the revelation of Jesus in
His resurrection. Let them say not merely,
'Christ is risen,' but 'I shall rise.'
Phillips Brooks

5) Nature Illustrates The Resurrection.

The seasons of the year illustrate for us the cycle that God intends for everything He made. Things die in the fall and winter, but come back to life in the spring. Dead things come back to life every day.

There is nothing so dead as a seed that has been lying in a jar for thousands of years. Have you ever wondered what would happen if a seed were put in a jar and kept for the next two thousand years, then planted by someone who discovered it in, say, 4022? Happily, we already know the answer.

In 1963 archeologists working around Herod's Temple in Masada came across an ancient jar containing the seeds of the Judean palm tree which had since gone extinct. Out of curiosity, in 2005 they planted one of the seeds. To their astonishment it grew! Dubbed the Methuselah Palm, it now stands over 10 feet tall and has been used to fertilize other palms from which scientists hope to now plant an entire palm orchard in order to better understand this food from Jesus' day

<https://lukechandler.wordpress.com/2016/05/03/methuselah-date-palm-fertilizes-other-tree-bears-fruit/>

6) There Is Also A Universal Conviction That Death Isn't The End

Modern archeologists often reflexively discount human intuition or traditions as keys to some historic fact. But many are now being forced to change their thinking by Anthropologists who have established that collective human memories are most likely based on some profound historic event.

Since many different cultures around the world tell flood myths which are eerily consistent with each other, this is rather solid evidence that somewhere in prehistory a dramatic flood wiped out the majority of both humans and animals.

In a similar way, the vast majority of the human race is also convinced that death is not the end of everything. Take a look at every belief system you can find in the ancient or modern world, East or West, small village or great city, and you'll find that people just seem to have an inborn sense that this world and this life are not all there is.

This doesn't validate any or all beliefs about it, but it does suggest that we seem to have built into us knowledge of the eternal. We're hard wired to expect something more.

7) Finally, Jesus' Resurrection Was The Opposite Of What Everyone – Even His Disciples - Expected.

When Jesus arose from the tomb, the morning of the first day of the week, and appeared to His disciples -- as well as to His skeptics – in a physical body, He did something that no one was prepared for.

Women were the first witnesses and the last to be regarded in their culture as a reliable testimony. Peter and John certainly didn't believe them. So the two disciples ran to the tomb and finding it empty they went back home both confused and concerned but not believing until later that evening when Jesus personally appeared to all of them as they fearfully hid in some undisclosed location.

Even though He had often talked about His return to life after death, it took Jesus another six weeks after His resurrection to demonstrate and explain this resurrection concept, not only to His disciples, but to over 500 others who would later gladly bear witness to what they saw.

As Andy Stanley once remarked

*If a man can predict his own death and resurrection,
and pull it off, I just go with whatever that man says*
Andy Stanley

As for our own resurrection yet to be, the best way the Apostle Paul could describe it was the process of leaving our dead body behind, like climbing out of an old tent, only to find ourselves now living in a new eternal body built by God (2 Cor. 5:1-4).

Why then should belief in Christ's resurrection and our own eventual rising to a new life be so hard when, in addition to all this evidence, we can see the actuality of resurrection happening every day?

Watching crawly caterpillars morph into things of flying beauty doesn't impress us much because it happens all the time; it's just too common to get our attention. But what if it never happened before, and you were hearing the story of butterfly metamorphosis for the first time? Imagine someone explaining to you how this slow moving, fuzzy bug climbed into a little sleeping bag looking something like a burial shroud, and several days later emerged as an exotically painted flying flower!

"Oh, Don't give me that!" might be your first reaction. And it should be. **Just think of the massive reorganization of molecules required to transform from a fat worm into a graceful butterfly.** It might be compared to driving an RV into a large garage, wrapping it up in a white tarp and leaving it untouched for several days. Then, when the tarp is removed, you see that the RV has mysteriously been transformed into a sleek Lear jet.

Personally, I think that God gave us this wonderful example of His handiwork just to get our minds thinking in the right direction. Even if you don't accept the Bible's explanation of things (which you should), you can still read the book of nature and come up with some pretty good clues.

So do we really have to be idiots to believe in the great events of the Bible and the astonishing claim of resurrection?

Do we have to check our brains at the door before entering the church?

I think God has given quite enough evidence to satisfy every honest inquirer (even the honest doubter), but there's never enough evidence to convince the one who simply doesn't want to believe no matter what.

And if we honestly desire more confirmation because we love what we've already found, then Christian history assures us that God will give us as much as we need to have confidence that we're on the right path. This is definitely not the God who tells us to stop asking questions and just take a blind leap of faith, but who invites us to come and spend time reasoning in His presence (Is. 1:18).

Christ has risen. (**He has risen indeed**).
That's the truth! But is it a truth you have accepted for yourself.

The Bible assures us

Those who believe in him
are not condemned;
but those who do not believe
are condemned already

John 3:17

'That God so loved the world that He gave us His only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

'Indeed, God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (John 3:16-18)

No matter how true you now believe it to be, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead will do you no good, unless you accept it for yourself. Christ said that His return to life would be proof that He has the power forgive your sins, and to save you along with all others who put their faith in Him.

This Sunday morning, if you have not done so, please put your faith in the one who both promises and proved that you can also rise again to a new and eternal life.