

EASTER EXPOSITION (2013)

We are here today on a day known as Easter to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The actual reason why we do this is because we have read about this event in the Bible. The men who actually wrote or taught us about this were apostles. They are the ones who actually said this is what happened, that Jesus arose from the dead.

That point becomes apparent right from the infant days of the Church. In fact, the Apostle Peter addressed the nation Israel in Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem and he said this: "You disowned the Holy and Righteous One...and put to death the Prince of Life, **whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses**" (Acts 3:15).

Later, when Peter went to Caesarea and spoke to a Gentile named Cornelius, he told him that the apostles were witnesses of the fact that the Jews put Jesus to death on the cross and witnesses of the fact that God raised Christ from the dead on the third day (Acts 10:39-40). He then went on to tell him that there were chosen apostles who were ordered by Him to preach this (Acts 10:40-42).

So the apostles become critical to what we believe. There are three key undeniable facts that the apostles dogmatically proclaim:

(Apostolic Dogmatic Fact #1) - Jesus Christ was a real person, the real Savior and Messiah, who was really killed. They specifically point out how He was killed; He was crucified and buried;

(Apostolic Dogmatic Fact #2) - God raised Jesus Christ from the dead;

(Apostolic Dogmatic Fact #3) - We are witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now the first part of the first claim "Jesus was a real person who was killed" has rarely, if ever, been doubted. I do not know of a single denial that Jesus Christ really did live and really did die. In fact, I don't know as if I have ever heard anyone question whether or not Jesus Christ actually lived.

That point is well substantiated by both biblical and secular history and by the science of archeology. Flavius Josephus, Cornelius Tacitus, Lucian of Samosata and the Jewish Sanhedrin all give non-biblical written evidence concerning the existence of Jesus Christ.

In fact, Seutonius, a historian who lived and wrote around the year A.D. 100, in his work *The Lives of the Caesars* refers to Jesus Christ in his discussion of Claudius when he says the Jews were making constant disturbances because of "Chrestus" or "Christus" who was a Jew (p. 171).

Even all false religions of the world acknowledge the existence of a person named Jesus Christ. Hare Krishna says Jesus was Krishna's son. Jehovah's Witness say Jesus was "a god." The Mormons say Jesus was a preexistent spirit-being. Christian Science says Jesus is the name of a man who is the ideal truth. The Muslims say Jesus was a sinless prophet, not as great as Muhammad. There can't be much doubt that Jesus Christ was a fact of history. He really did live and He really did die.

Now there have been some questions concerning the value of Christ's death; some say He died as a martyr, some say He died as some insurrectionist criminal, which, incidentally, are all proved false by the resurrection, but that is for a different Christological study. **But even the faulty views concerning the death of Jesus Christ do assume that He actually and really did live and He actually and really did die.**

There really has never been much doubt that Jesus Christ was a real person who did live and did die. If Jesus Christ had not actually died, there would be no basis for the resurrection and if there is no resurrection, there is no point to His death. If Jesus Christ just dies and is not raised from the dead, He is just like any other individual who dies. The thing that makes the death of Christ so valuable is the resurrection of Christ.

It is the resurrection claim that is questioned. **The second assertion that Jesus was raised from the dead is the one that has come under attack and the validity of the resurrection hinges on the third and final point; the apostles are witnesses of that resurrection.**

All apostles claim they were witnesses of Christ's resurrection. Even the final apostle to be added to the apostolic list, Paul, said "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (I Cor. 9:1) **There cannot be much doubt that the apostles claim they are witnesses of the resurrected person of Jesus Christ.** Now there are only three possible options to this claim:

Option #1 - The apostles are telling and testifying of the truth—Christ arose and they are real, true witnesses.

Option #2 - The apostles were deceived and fooled into thinking Jesus had risen from the dead when in fact He had not.

Option #3 - The apostles were not deceived or fooled in their thinking and are out to deceive others by their testimony and writings.

To deny and reject the resurrection of Jesus Christ, you have to deny the fact that the apostles were really eyewitnesses of it. **And if you deny that the apostles are eye witnesses of it, you must assume that the apostles are not telling the truth because they all claim they were.**

So either their story is accurate, or they were fooled, or they are out to fool the world. If the apostles actually know there was no real resurrection of Jesus Christ, then their motive for writing all of the things they wrote about the resurrection of Jesus Christ is very deceptive.

Since the whole case hinges upon whether or not we may logically believe that the apostles were not deceived and were not out to deceive but are telling the truth, we would like to examine this on this Easter Sunday. My conclusion after examining all the evidence is:

THE APOSTLES ARE TELLING THE ABSOLUTE TRUTH WHEN THEY TESTIFY THAT THEY WERE EYEWITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST.

However, to get to this conclusion, we want to ask and answer two simple questions:

QUESTION #1 – Is it possible the apostles were deceived into thinking that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead when in fact He really hadn't?

We start out by saying it is absolutely impossible that they were deceived in regard to this fact. They could not possibly have been deceived for **four main reasons**:

Reason #1 - The apostles were actually there.

The first reason why it would be impossible for them to have been deceived is because they were actually there to live it and see it. Now we will admit that humans are fallible and they can make mental miscalculation. However, if you have two or three eyewitnesses, then fact may be established (Matt. 18:16).

Now this is one of the arguments that skeptics use against the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The argument basically says since none of us were actually there 2000 years ago, we cannot say what happened. Now of course this is true, none of us were there.

Of course none of us were around when George Washington was President either. None of us were around when Lewis and Clark opened up the west from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean. We know this is true because there were eyewitnesses there and they wrote it down. In fact, we have the journals of Lewis and Clark, which Meriwether Lewis and William Clark documented in the early 1800's so we can read and study their journals. In fact, one of my favorite historians, Stephen Ambrose, who died in 2002, a man I personally spoke to on the phone, literally retraced the route of Lewis and Clark based on their journals. The bottom line is we take the word of historical eyewitnesses on various historical points because they were there. Lewis and Clark were there.

Well these apostles were historical eyewitnesses. They were actually there. When you read the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, there is little doubt that those apostles are real men who are really there in person. Furthermore, when we begin the book of Acts, the men are specifically named as having just seen Jesus, who was alive, ascend into heaven—Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James, Simon and Judas (Acts 1:13).

In the first message preached by Peter, he specifically pointed out that God raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:24). Shortly after this, Peter and John said we are witnesses to His resurrection (Acts 3:11-15).

So if you base what you believe on eyewitness accounts, we must conclude that these apostles were not deceived or duped into thinking Christ arose from the dead; they were there and actually saw Him alive.

Reason #2 - The apostles were mentally competent humans capable of making logical observations and coming to logical conclusions.

When we track all the information that we have about the apostles, there is no hint from any of the apostles that they do not think rationally.

For example, toward the end of a day they realized that people needed to find a place to sleep and needed to get some food to eat (Lk. 9:12). We would probably say that the most unstable of the apostles was Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Christ. However, even when we examine information about Judas, he certainly was a competent person able to think rationally, handle money and even negotiate a money deal to betray Christ (Matt. 26:14-16). It is true that Judas commits suicide before Christ was raised from the dead (Matt. 27:3-6), but it is obvious even from this action that Judas could think through things as a normal human and make normal, rational decisions. **There is no evidence that any apostle was some mystical weirdo who experienced delusional hallucinations.** Peter, James and John knew how to run a very successful fishing business at the north end of the Sea of Galilee (Luke 5:10; Matt. 4:21-22; Mk. 1:19-20). John was a property owner, who actually owned his own home in Jerusalem (Jn. 19:27). These were good solid-thinking businessmen.

So we may conclude that every apostle had a rational mind and was able to observe whether or not Jesus Christ lived, died and was resurrected. They are certainly in a position to tell if someone actually lived or actually died, just as we are able to today. By virtue of the fact they have these kinds of minds, they would be in a position to tell whether one had actually come back to life after having been dead.

Now we can testify of the first two things as competent rational human beings. We are able to tell whether or not a person was really alive and whether or not a person really died. Last year when we were on vacation at my sisters in Tybee, a detective from Portage wrote me an email asking if a specific person they were trying to track down had been in our church. He wanted to know if I knew this person and could verify the location. I am in a position to testify of that and look how mentally deficient I am.

We are in the same condition and position of the apostles in that regard. So if these competent apostles, who are like us, said—Jesus was alive and He was dead and then He was alive again, we have no evidence to suggest that their mental faculties have changed from being a competent normal human into being a delusional mystic.

Reason #3 - The apostles were unprejudiced and unbiased judges who demanded proof.

There is no hint in any of the writings of the apostles that what they believe is imaginary. In fact, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that they want facts and proof. They were very skeptical of who Jesus was and they were very slow to believe in Him. In fact, it was that point that often got them into trouble with Jesus when He was here with them.

We may remember that they were very slow to believe that Jesus was God; they were slow to believe that Jesus was Israel's Messiah. In fact, they were so slow to believe this that Jesus said "How long shall I put up with you?" (Matt. 17:17). He made this statement after spending many months with them because of their little faith in Him (Matt. 17:20). These apostles were not gullible simpletons who just believed something because someone said it.

Furthermore, they were slow to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. In fact, when Mary Magdalene actually went and told the apostles that Jesus was risen from the dead, “they refused to believe it” (Mark 16:10-11).

When the women were telling the apostles that Jesus had risen from the dead, their words “appeared to them as nonsense” (Luke 24:11). In fact, Thomas so refused to believe Jesus was actually risen that he said, “Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails and put my hand into His side, I will not believe” (John 20:24-25).

Now everything they were being asked to believe about Jesus Christ was actually contrary to their biased prejudices. They initially did not believe that He was the Messiah and the Son of God; in fact they demanded proof.

This point proves these men were not duped into believing some fictitious lie.

Reason #4 - The apostles had ample opportunity to determine whether Jesus had really risen from the dead from His post-resurrection appearances .

According to the Scriptures, Jesus appeared at least eleven times. Two noted psychiatrists said Christ’s appearance this many times to this many people make “erroneous perceptions” impossible (Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, p. 275).

- 1) First, he appears to Mary Magdalene—Mark 16:9.
- 2) Second, He appears to other women on the way to His tomb—Mark 16:11.
- 3) Third, He appears to Peter—Lk. 24:22, 34; I Cor. 15:5.
- 4) Fourth, He appears to two men on the road to Emmaus—Mark 16:12-13.
- 5) Fifth, Jesus appears to ten apostles minus Thomas—Lk. 24:36-43; Jn. 20:19-25.
- 6) Sixth, Jesus appears to 11 apostles including Thomas—Jn. 20:26-28.
- 7) Seventh, Jesus appears to seven apostles by the Sea of Galilee—Jn. 21:1-14.
- 8) Eighth, Jesus appears to 500 brethren—I Cor. 15:6.
- 9) Ninth, Jesus appears to the eleven apostles again at a mountain in Galilee—Mt. 28:16-20.
- 10) Tenth, Jesus appears to James, the half-brother of Jesus—I Cor. 15:7.
- 11) Eleventh, Jesus appears again to the twelve apostles in Jerusalem and leads them out of the city and ascends into heaven—Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:4, 9.

Now the apostles were there at most of these appearances and they certainly do have ample opportunity to discern whether or not it was really Jesus, who had been raised from the dead.

Furthermore, Luke says that the apostles actually spent 40 specific days with the Lord, proving that He was alive and teaching them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

So based on these reasons, our conclusion is the apostles were not deceived into believing something that wasn’t true. These are thinking men, not gullible simpletons. So we conclude that they were not deceived into believing a fairytale.

QUESTION #2 – Were the apostles out to deceive people into believing Jesus had risen from the dead when he actually hadn't?

If the apostles are not telling the truth about Christ's resurrection and if they have not been duped or deceived, then the only other possibility would be they know the truth and are out to deceive other people by making up a story. This is not even logically possible because there is no possible way that twelve guys could pull off a hoax that would fool thousands of people living in Jerusalem at the same time. Let me illustrate; Joseph Smith tried to pull off a religious con on people in the Midwest, by claiming some angel Moroni appeared to him and gave him tablets and the people of the Midwest ran him out and he took his group and moved west.

Many apostles did not leave Jerusalem, but stayed there and they had tremendous support from others who also said we saw the resurrected Christ. But back to our argument, would it be possible for the apostles to deceive people? It is not possible because of several reasons:

Reason #1 - They were men of integrity who literally left their careers to follow Jesus Christ.

Peter, James and John left a lucrative fishing business and Matthew left a lucrative tax collecting business. They did not end up better off financially for following the Lord, so what would be their motive for trying to deceive others? They certainly did not end up better off physically for following the Lord, so what is the motive?

We know that these are men of integrity because when they write things about themselves, they don't try to make themselves look good, but they always tell the truth.

For example, when Peter and John were confronted by the Sanhedrin and told that they were to stop preaching that by believing in the name of the resurrected Christ people may be saved, they could have said, "Okay, just let us go and we will stop preaching." Instead, they looked them in the eyes and said we are not going to stop preaching and teaching because we are going to obey God and not you (Acts 4:16-20). Now that is integrity. They could have lied and walked away unscathed, but they didn't.

When Matthew writes about his calling, he includes himself in a classification of terrible sinners. Then later when he talks about what happened to Jesus when He was arrested he said, "all the disciples left him and fled" (Matt. 26:56). He includes himself as being a fleeing apostle. The Apostle Paul, who also saw the resurrected Christ, called himself "the chief of sinners."

These are men who tell the truth. They are men of integrity so they are not the kind of men who will make up a bunch of lies about something that is not true and then try to get others to believe the lie they invented.

Reason #2 - Their testimony that Christ was raised from the dead got them killed.

Life for the apostles was not better off because they proclaimed Christ's resurrection. Preaching that Christ was raised from the dead did not bring them wealth, fame or popularity.

It brought them hate, mockery, persecution, imprisonment, torture and death. All the apostles, except John, died a martyr's death.

Now it is true that many people die for some false religious cause. People die for their false beliefs all of the time. **However, when people die for false religious causes they die because they think they are dying for the truth. No one will die for what they know is a lie.**

Also, torture tactics are used to try to get the truth out of people and if the apostles knew that Christ really hadn't risen from the dead, you may be certain they would have said, "Okay, enough is enough; we made the whole thing up."

If the apostles are lying about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, then they know they are being tortured and dying for a lie. Why would you do that if you knew you are the one who made the whole thing up?

What is the motive? The only reasonable conclusion that we may come to is the apostles are telling the truth. They were eyewitnesses to the resurrected Savior.

Now what exactly did these apostles say was the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Peter said this: "through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43).

Paul said, "through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things" (Acts 13:38-39).