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SKEPTICS OF THE RESURRECTION, PART TWO

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David Hume remains one of the most famous English philosophers of all time. He was a scathing skeptic of religion, particularly of Christianity. Modern skeptics love to quote from him. Listen as I read one of his most popular quotes:

If we take in our hand any volume: of divinity or school of metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames; For it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.¹

In other words, if it isn't verifiable by mathematics or science, then it's worthless. Therefore, all religion fails the test and must be discarded. However, as Ravi Zacharias points out, the test itself is neither mathematical nor scientific: "*The test itself does not pass the test.*"²

My point is that we can believe both those things that can be verified by science and those things that are informed by faith. In fact, we *must* do so—even the skeptics must appeal to a basis outside of science when they insist that we can only believe that which can be scientifically tested and verified; for how can *that test* be tested scientifically?

Nevertheless, we have a God-given sense of reason which we must not violate. Is it reasonable to believe in the miracle of the Resurrection and the greater truth behind it, that Jesus is God? What evidence do we have? Last week we discussed three proofs of the deity and resurrection of Christ.

FIRST, HIS VIRGIN BIRTH

In spite of their searching for evidence to contradict this claim, they could not find any evidence to show that Jesus did not fulfill the prophecies surrounding the birth and life of the Messiah. *The skeptics give us strong evidence because they examined His claims and could not refute them.*

1 David Hume, *On Human Nature and the Understanding*, Anthony Flew, ed. (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 163. Quoted in Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), p. 63.

2 Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), p. 63.

SECOND, HIS PRISTINE LIFE

Jesus challenged them to find fault in Him throughout His lifetime; and though they tried their utmost, they could find no fault in Him. No one else in history can make this claim with any sort of credibility. *The skeptics give us strong evidence because they examined His life and could not find fault.*

THIRD, HIS RESURRECTION

They knew what He had said, knew what He had meant, and wanted to prevent anyone from allegedly bringing it to pass. They set a contingent of guards; they rolled a huge boulder in front of the opening to the tomb; and they sealed the boulder in place. *The skeptics give us strong evidence because they knew of His promise to leave the tomb and they could not prevent it.*

Today, I want to offer as proof three direct evidences of the Resurrection and one powerful but indirect evidence.

THE FIRST EVIDENCE: CHRIST ACTUALLY DIED

Christ had to physically die in order to rise again from the dead. There is a theory that Christ, under the terrible stresses placed upon His body, fainted upon the cross, was mistaken for dead, and was therefore actually buried alive. The coolness of the tomb revived Him. He was able to move Himself out of the tomb after He had rested and been refreshed.

The Scriptural record is very clear: Christ died on that cross. First, He had been subject to a severe beating and loss of blood before He even was placed upon the cross. That beating alone was enough to put a person into a state of shock because the lashes of the whip cut right to the bone.

Second, the Roman soldiers concluded that He was dead and did not break His legs to hasten His death. You see, the legs are needed to push the body up in order to breath. The body's unnatural position on the cross causes one to suffocate if one cannot push up to breath. That is also why Christ's seven statements from the cross are so short: He had to push up for air, say quickly what must be said, and then relax and hold His breath again. Breaking the legs made it nearly impossible to pull up to breath; but He was already dead. The soldiers were professionals, and a botched execution was a death sentence for them. (How would you like to have *their* job?) Just to make sure, a soldier pierced His side, upon which blood and water came out. The fact that blood and water came out indicates that the area around Jesus' heart had filled with fluid, and His heart had burst. Think about that: of all the injuries pushing Christ toward death, the one that claimed His life was a broken heart. *Jesus died of a broken heart!*

The third evidence that Jesus actually died is that He could not have recovered from those injuries in such a short amount of time, if He could have recovered at all. His body was broken—completely, utterly broken.

THE SECOND EVIDENCE: THE EMPTY TOMB

In fact, we find that even His closest friends and followers fully expected Him to stay dead. The first of His followers to find Him actually alive were the women who had come to prepare His body according to their customs. They expected to find Him dead.

The tomb—guarded, blocked, and sealed—was unguarded, unblocked and unsealed.

“He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay” (Matthew 28:6).

- 1) He spoke of His Absence—He is not here—the tomb is empty.
- 2) He spoke of His Presence—He is risen—He is alive. Men do not live in tombs.
- 3) He spoke of His Evidence—vs. 6—“As He said.”

Seven times in the gospels it is recorded that Jesus said He would rise from the dead.³

THE THIRD EVIDENCE: HIS POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCES

The disciples expected Him to stay dead. When the women reported that He was, in fact, alive, Peter and John had to go to the tomb to see for themselves! They did not expect Him to be alive, because they had witnessed the brutality and finality of His death.

And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not (Luke 24:11).

Even after He had appeared to the women and to most of the disciples, one who had not yet seen Him still did not believe, even after the testimony of so many other people. Matthew records this in the passage we read at first—“But some doubted.” John gives a fuller account in John 20:

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

³ “Evidence for the Resurrection.” Sermon presented at Thomas Road Baptist Church, March 27, 2005. Available at <http://trbc.org/new/sermons.php?url=20050327.html>.

The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the LORD. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

And Thomas answered and said unto him, My LORD and my God.

Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

Even though Thomas had walked with the Lord, had heard Him promise to rise again, and had heard the first-hand testimony of the witnesses of the Resurrection, he still refused to believe. He was a skeptic! That is, he was a skeptic until Jesus stood right in front of him and challenged him to do the very things that Thomas thought he had spoken out of Jesus' hearing. Thomas did not expect Jesus to hear his challenge to the other disciples; but *Jesus did hear it and challenged Thomas right back!*

Jesus appeared to others as well; in fact, on one occasion He appeared to over five hundred at once! The authors of the New Testament wrote these facts down while the witnesses were still alive and could be cross-examined. *There is no parallel in all of recorded history.*

INDIRECT EVIDENCE: THE MARTYRDOM OF THE WITNESSES

Many men will live to propagate a lie, but how many would suffer in order to continue that lie? The Bible tells us of the deaths of a number of those who witnessed the Resurrection—men who died because they boldly proclaimed the Resurrection. Can you imagine—*just imagine!*—the glee with which any one of these men would have been received if he had but changed his report. What if any one of them had said, “Well, now, come to think of it, I really don’t want to die; you know, me and my friends made this all up”? You can believe me when I say that the men who condemned Jesus to death would have strongly desired to find even *one* witness who would renounce the Resurrection. Yet historically we find that none of them did.

- Peter, crucified upside-down in Rome circa AD 64.
- James, son of Zebedee was beheaded in AD 44, first of the twelve to die (since the addition of Matthias)
- John, son of Zebedee, natural causes due to old age, last of the twelve to die, only one of the twelve (or 13 counting both Judas Isacariot and

Matthias) to die naturally (as mentioned by Christ at the end of the Gospel of John).

- Andrew, Peter's brother, was crucified upon a diagonal or X-shaped cross.
- Philip was crucified in AD 54.
- Bartholomew (also known as Nathaniel) was flayed alive (skinned) and then beheaded; some sources locate his death at Derbend on the Caspian Sea.
- Matthew killed by a halberd in AD 60.
- Thomas was killed by a spear in Mylapore, Madras, India in AD 72.
- James, son of Alphaeus, beaten to death with a club after being crucified and stoned.
- Jude was crucified.
- Simon the Zealot was crucified in AD 74.
- ...
- Matthias, Judas' replacement, was stoned and beheaded.⁴

Stephen, the first martyr, was not one of the twelve apostles; his martyrdom is recorded in the Book of Acts, chapter 7. If you read that account, you'll find that Stephen had made an outstanding case for the working of God throughout history to bring about the work of the Messiah. Because they could not refute Stephen's words, they reacted to the message he gave in the only other way they could:

Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: (Acts 7:57-58b).

This same reaction is recorded for us elsewhere in Scripture. You see, the Resurrection forces us to make a choice: either we continue going our own way, or we accept the consequences of the Resurrection and the message of the Gospel. We will "stop our ears," or we will open our hearts. The cross of Christ and the empty tomb stare right through all of the other things we prefer to believe about ourselves and our world.

The Resurrection of Christ is therefore the best-attested historical account in the world. It has withstood the scrutiny of skeptics among whom it occurred, and it remains credible in our time to those who will examine the matter with an open heart and an open mind.

No, the real problem is not whether or not the Resurrection is a credible, historical fact, but whether or not *we will be honest enough to apply what it means*. In the death of Jesus Christ, we see the suffering of the One who should never have suffered. In the death of Jesus Christ we see the sinfulness of mankind placed on the One who was pure. If, then, the Resurrection be true, we can see through the suffering and impurity of the cross to the complete goodness of a holy God who is worthy of our love and devotion.

⁴ Wikipedia.com, "Deaths of the Twelve Apostles." Available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deaths_of_the_Twelve_Apostles

And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;

Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing (Rev. 5:11-12).