

## The Resurrection of Christ; An Undeniable Fact of History 1 Cor. 15:3-11

**Intro:** It happens every Easter. Someone comes up with a sensationalized denial of the resurrection. Last year it was *The DaVinci Code*. Last month the Discovery Channel aired a documentary by James Cameron (the movie *Titanic*) based on the book, *The Jesus Family Tomb*, by Simcha Jacobovici (an investigative reporter) and Charles Pellegrino (who wrote the book *Titanic*). In both the book and documentary (*The Lost Tomb of Jesus*), the authors claim to have discovered the burial boxes (ossuaries) of Joseph, Mary, Jesus, Mary Magdalene and their alleged son, Judas. The subtitle of the book claims they have "evidence that could change history."

Among their sensation claims, the authors declare to have found the family tomb of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, complete with DNA evidence, overwhelming statistical certainty and archaeological proof that Jesus never physically rose from the dead nor ascended into heaven. "*We are not denying the resurrection,*" they assert, explaining that it must have been "*spiritual,*" not literal.

Any real study of the supposed facts in the book and film along with a little thought, will result in a realization that both are nothing but, as Dr. Gary Habermas, Chairman of the Department of Philosophy and Theology at Liberty University, called them, "*bad history and bad science.*" Reasons for doubting the conclusions of the authors of the book and the maker of the film are substantial and plentiful, and even experts who are not friendly to traditional Christian theology agree. Even the man who first found the tomb 27 years ago, says, "*The claim that the burial site has been found is not based on any proof, and is only an attempt to sell.*"

However, both the book and film coming out just before Easter gives us an opportunity to again look at the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The fact that ***The Resurrection of Christ*** is anything but ***An Undeniable Fact of History*** is something that Christians need to be absolutely convinced of because our very eternity rest upon it.

Paul, in his first letter to the church in Corinth, gives us our best argument for the fact that the ***Resurrection is an Undeniable Fact of History***.

### ***[Read 1 Cor 15:1-11/Pray/Dismiss Jr. Church]***

In his letter to the church in Corinth Paul deals with many problems that young church was dealing with. In chapters 1 thru 4 of the letter he deals with church division, then, in chapters 5 & 6, he deals with the difficult issue of church discipline, then, in chapters 7-14 he deals with other difficulties in the church. Then, in our text for today, chapter 15, he deals with ***Disbelief***.

One might find it hard to believe that disbelief was a problem in a church full of born again believers (he calls them *sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints* in 1:2) but it was. The same it true today, listen to some of these statistics (Barna):

- 46% of born again Christians believe that Satan is "**not a living being but is a symbol of evil.**" (2005)
- 33% of born again Christians believe that if a person is good enough they can earn a place in Heaven. (2005)
- 28% of born again Christians believe that "while he lived on earth, Jesus committed sins, like other people" (2005)
- 12% of born again Christians believe the Bible has errors

If this level of unbelief exist in today's churches then it is important that we truly believe in the resurrection or the very foundation of our faith will begin to crumble. We can almost be grateful to the Corinthians for all their quarrels and questions! At least they gave the great apostle an opportunity to deal with matters which, ever since, have been of great interest and importance to the church. How bankrupt we would be without Paul's discussion on the Resurrection because in it he gives us the **Undeniable Historical Facts** to support it.

At the heart of the Christian gospel is the resurrection of Christ. No other religion is based upon the historical fact of a bodily resurrection. This is unique to Christianity. It sets it apart. It stands of falls with that.

What does Paul tells us are the **Undeniable Fact of History?**

**Paul...****1. First he States the Facts of the Gospel Vv. 3-4. Paul takes us to where all good defense of the gospel should go...****A. He takes us to the Cross V. 3**

- 1) For the resurrection to be real their first has to be a cross
- 2) If Christ did not die then He need not be resurrected
- 3) The fact of his death could not be denied since there hundreds of eyewitnesses to his crucifixion.
- 4) He not only died but His dead body was pierced by a Roman spear to demonstrate once and for all He was dead.
- 5) **One weird theory**, invented to explain away the bodily resurrection, is that Jesus did not die on the cross He only "swooned."
  - (a) He was put in the tomb; in the cool of the tomb He supposedly revived and managed to escape from the tomb and elude guards; found a hiding place and on the third day, showed Himself to be alive – thus giving rise to the story of His resurrection.
  - (b) To believe this: You have to believe that a Roman soldier left before making sure the victim was dead – but we know that he did make sure since his last orders were to expedite the deaths of the three men because of the approaching Jewish Sabbath, by breaking their legs.
  - (c) We have to believe that the Lord's enemies, who had plotted for weeks to bring about his death, would leave Calvary without making sure He was dead
  - (d) We have to believe that the Lord's friends, who took Him from the cross and prepared His body for burial, would have embalmed a body in with life still in it.
  - (e) We would have to believe that Jesus revived in the tomb, that He was able to escape from the grave clothes, carefully fold them and put them back on the stone slab, that He accomplished this feat in total darkness, and that He managed, with every bone in His body out of joint from hanging on the cross, weak, from the loss of blood, in pain from his body being torn to shreds by the scourging, could roll away a massive stone, elude the guard and escape into the night.
  - (f) On top of all that we would have to believe that on the first day of the week, He perpetrated a deliberate fraud by pretending to have been raised from the dead – contrary to everything we know about His character, integrity, and honesty.
- 6) How much simpler to believe the clear statement of gospel truth, "*Christ died*"; and the immediate explanation: "*for our sins according to the Scriptures.*"
- 7) Every sacrifice of the OT pointed forward to the Cross, Psalm 22 & 69 and Isaiah 53 and a host of other Scriptures pointed to the Cross and so did Paul; He took them to the Cross

**B. Then, He takes us to the Cemetery V. 4a.**

- 1) Isaiah had long since foretold that He would have an honorable burial.
  - (a) He was to be "**with the rich in his death**" Isa 53:9 tells us
  - (b) Two of the most influential men in the country, Joseph of Arimathea & Nicodemus, men of wealth and power, members of the Sanhedrin, joined forces to bury Him
  - (c) He was buried
  - (d) But His body was preserved from the corruption and decay which was always a quick result of death in a tropical climate.

**2) Paul takes us to the cross, to the cemetery then...****C. He takes us to the Calendar V. 4b****1) A deed to be remembered – "He Rose Again!"**

- (a) We love to sing the old hymn: *Vainly they seal the dead, Jesus my Savior; Vainly they watch His bed, Jesus my Lord! Up from the grave He arose, with a might triumph o'er His foes; He arose a Victor from the dark domain and He lives forever with His saints to regin; He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!*
- (b) The resurrection of Christ is the best proved fact in history,
- (c) There is more concrete evidence for the resurrection of Christ than there is for the conquest of Britain by Julius Caesar or that Columbus discovered the America's.
- (d) Look at the Cross. The Lord of Glory was nailed to the Cross. He was taken down dead and buried. The rocks broke apart; the sun went out, the graves broke open wide. The message seemed all to clear: Jesus defeated! The tomb was closed; it was sealed and guarded; it was

over. Death had triumphed. Three days later Jesus rose from the dead; the message come through loud and clear: Jesus had defeated death!

- (e) He has done for sure; when John saw Him there on the isle of Patmos He declared to him, ***“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”***

(f) Paul reminds us that there is a ***deed to be remembered and there is...***

2) ***A day to be remembered – “He rose again the Third Day”***

(a) This is what He had repeatedly told His disciples He would do (Matt. 27:63; John 2:19).

(1) The simply didn't believe him

(2) His enemies did

(3) After the crucifixion was complete the Pharisees went to Pilate and asked that he have the tomb made “**sure**” or sealed and guarded until after three days because they remembered that it was the third day He said He would rise and they wanted to prevent that.

(4) When the resurrection was realized they went back and paid the guard large sums of money to lie and say that the body had been stolen in the night while they slept.

(i) This was a silly lie, if it had happened that way the guard would have been the first to deny it because to have lost that which he guarded meant his life

(ii) If he slept while the disciples stole the body then how did he know who or what happened?

(5) What is the truth: ***He arose THE THIRD DAY***

(6) ***Paul reminds us that there is a deed to be remembered, a day to be remembered and...***

3) ***A detail to be remembered – “He rose again the third day According to the Scriptures”***

(a) The Lord Himself pointed to Jonah as a type of Himself: ***“For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”*** (Matt. 12:40).

**Paul First States the Facts...**

2. ***Secondly, He Substantiates the Facts*** Vv. 5-8a Paul lines up a host of eyewitnesses for us; ***He was seen by...***

**A. His Friends V. 5**

1) ***The Man who denied V. 5a***

(a) Peter had a meeting with the risen Lord according to Lk. 24:34

(b) It must have been a memorable meeting between broken Peter; ashamed of himself for denying the Lord after all his boasting.

(c) Yet the Lord told Him that He was praying for Peter that His ***“faith fail not”*** (Lk. 22:32) he would need those prayers.

(d) It was also Peter who a risen Jesus challenged that if he really loved Him to feed his sheep in John 21:1-22.

(e) Something had to have happened to make cowardly Peter brave enough to a few weeks after denying he even know Jesus to stand up and charge the Jewish nation with the guilt of murdering their Messiah.

2) ***The Men He discipled V. 5b***

(a) He appeared to the disciples

(b) Men who would were good and honest men

(1) Men with varied backgrounds:

(2) They were the kind of men you wanted on a jury

(c) They were also men who were not easily convinced of something

(1) Peter and John wouldn't take Mary's word for the empty tomb they had to see for themselves

(2) When the Lord appeared to them in the upper room they thought it was an apparition until the Lord let them touch Him and He had showed them his hands and His side.

(3) The hardest of all was Thomas who wouldn't take the word of the others – He said he would not believe until he could put his hands in the nail holes

**B. His Flock V. 6**

1) Above 500

2) There were more that 500 eyewitnesses

- 3) This likely took place when Jesus appeared to the 11 on a mountain in Matt. 28:16.
- 4) This is why Paul was able to say to King Agrippa that these things were public knowledge in Acts 26:26.
  - (a) Paul had personal knowledge that a large number of witnesses who had seen the risen Lord could corroborate his message.

#### C. His Family V. 7a

- 1) That the Lord had half brothers and half sisters is established fact
  - (a) Matt. 13:55 lists James, Joses, Simon and Judas
  - (b) After this list of brothers Matt 13:56 adds *“<sup>56</sup>And his sisters, are they not all with us?”*
  - (c) If there were only two they would have said both
  - (d) Plus Jesus is called Mary’s *“First-born”* leading to the natural inference that she had others children.

#### D. His Followers V 7b

- 1) This seems to imply a larger company of followers than the 12 of verse 5.

#### E. His Foes V. 8

- 1) Paul was the chief persecutor of the early church until his conversion on the road to Damascus
- 2) He had been a bitter, energetic and determined foe of Christianity until that meeting along that dirty road
- 3) He clearly understood that meeting as an encounter with the risen Lord not an apparition or spirit.

#### **Paul, Having Stated the Facts then Substantiated the Facts...**

3. Then **Stands on Those Facts** Vv. 9-11. He tells of his Faith in the Gospel

##### A. He Give His own Testimony V. 9

- 1) It might be hard to imagine Paul as feeling inferior to anyone; a Jewish rabbi, Greek scholar, Roman citizen, fearless ambassador for Christ and the churches foremost missionary and theologian.
- 2) It is easy for us to believe the disciples were intimidated by him and that the church in Jerusalem was awed and alarmed by the scope and authority of Paul’s gospel.
- 3) Yet Paul felt keenly the advantage the 12 had over him.
- 4) They had known Jesus intimately, lived with Him, seen His miracles, and heard His teachings.
- 5) Peter may have denied Him and Thomas may have doubted, but Paul had persecuted Him; he had the blood of Christian martyrs on his hands.
- 6) The Holy Spirit says of Paul in Acts 9;1, that he was *“breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord”*
- 7) He even said of himself that he had *“persecuted this way unto death...”*
- 8) No wonder Paul spoke of himself as the *“least of the apostles...”*
- 9) ***We all have a testimony and if we, like Paul have meet the risen Lord we have the greatest triumph and Paul tells of...***

##### B. He Tells of His own Triumphs Vv. 10-11. He recalls the...

- 1) **Transforming Grace** V. 10a
  - (a) What was he? He was the great apostle to the Gentiles.
  - (b) He was the man who wrote the better part of the New Testament
  - (c) He was the man who made “full proof” of his ministry, as he urged others to do (2 Tim 4:5)
  - (d) It was grace which found him, a religious bigot, a whirling human tornado of hate and rage.
  - (e) It was grace which caused the scales to fall from his eyes
  - (f) It was grace that saved him
  - (g) Grace! It became one of Paul’s favorite words.

##### **Then He recalls the...**

- 2) **Transcending Grace** Vv. 10b -11
  - (a) This was the man who, traveling at the rate of some 17 to 20 miles a day covered some 5,580 miles on foot and 6,770 miles by sea to take the gospel to the untold millions of the world who were still untold.
  - (b) In the space of some 20 years or less, Paul evangelized along a line of some 1,500 miles all the way from Antioch to Illyricum.
  - (c) While the other apostles were still debating the Great Commission, Paul was evangelizing Tarsus and all the part of his native land.

- (d) While they were still figuring out if they could simply expand the church within an obsolete Judaism, Paul was out conquering Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece
- (e) **"Yet not I,"** he says, it was **"the grace of God"** at work.
- (f) Then he says **"No matter!"** Whoever has done the work, I or they, it makes no difference! Grace (based on Calvary and the resurrection of Christ) has been the very foundation of your faith...**Stand on that Fact.**

**Conclusion:** If it could be proven that the tomb they found was actually the tomb of Jesus' family, it would contradict the literal resurrection of Christ, leaving only a vague possibility of some "spiritual" resurrection which one of the so-called experts on the "team" who wrote the book and produced the documentary suggests would not undermine the Christian faith.

Despite this naiveté, the Apostle Paul says just a few verses after he defends the resurrection as **An Undeniable Fact of History: "For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished"** (Vv. 17-18).

This so-called experts "spiritual" resurrection is nothing more than post-modern neo-Gnosticism and is nothing new to the gospel. From Paul's day down through history men have tried to destroy the **Undeniable Historical Fact of the Resurrection** for to do so will ultimately destroy the Christian Faith. If the Resurrection didn't happen than we have no hope, no future in heaven and nothing to look forward to.