

THREE CRUCIAL QUESTIONS ABOUT JESUS:

(TEXT: 1TIM 1:12-17; 1 JOHN 1:1-4)

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:1-3 (NASU)

Introduction:

1. The hoax: Two British landscape painters (1978-91) sneaked into fields in Southern England and flattened 25-30 crops each season for a period of 13 years.
2. Made mysterious circles using ball of string, wooden plank, baseball bat.
3. Prompted a rash explanation including suggestions of these being landing spots for UFO's
4. Others talked of atmospheric microwaves flattening the crops.

5. All this prompted a new science called 'cereology' and a new academy called 'the circle effect Research Unit'
6. It was just a hoax - a deception.
7. Could it be possible that Christianity might be a hoax? What if millions of Christians over the centuries simply have been misguided in thinking that Jesus of Nazareth was a historical figure?
8. In different eras we have also had different responses given by the world on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ
 - a. In the late 60's he was a **political Jesus**
Nations were gaining independence and Latin American scholars developed their liberation theology with ideas borrowed from Mzee Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and Kwameh Nkurumah of Ghana. Some went as far as to claim a Black Jesus for Africa.
 - b. In the 70's he was the **revolutionary Jesus**
Ideas about Marxism and communism were sweeping a number of nations especially in the student world - and he was put in the same bag as a revolutionary. He was compared to Che Guevara and Karl Marx.
 - c. In the 80's he was **Jesus Christ Superstar**

Presented as an entertainer with a warped moral character. Even movies with such title were produced

- d. In the 90's he was viewed as the **new age Jesus**

He does not have any specific definition. He fits into mysticism and Eastern ideas, just as he is supposed to fit into Christianity. He is every where and everything

- e. In our day he is a **post - modern Jesus**

He is what you make him to be. God created us in his image we have decided to do him a favour - we are creating him in our image.

- f. Others have said, he is a good man, a prophet, a religious guru.

THREE CRUCIAL QUESTIONS ABOUT JESUS:

- 1) Did Jesus exist?
- 2) Was Jesus God?
- 3) Did Jesus rise from the dead?

DID JESUS CHRIST EXIST?

The Biographical Witness: (Scripture):

1. Paul makes an important statement that "Christ Jesus came into the world..."
2. We are not talking about some pseudo Christ which is the figment of man's imagination. We are talking about the Authentic Jesus - Let the real Jesus stand up. The bible talks about him
3. He came into this world - there was a time he was directly (physically) in this world - a time he existed (Jn.1:1)
4. "The glory that we had with you before the foundation of the world."
5. Jesus was the son of God who became incarnate and was born of flesh.
6. Divinity took upon humanity and walked our streets, food, clothes and death.
7. He came into this world.

The Witness of History:

Even early writers historical attest to his existence.

1. Roman Pliny to Emperor Trajan AD110
"early in the morning Christians gather to sing hymns to Christ as to a god."
2. Historian Tacitus (AD 115)
"Christ who was persecuted in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate.
3. Josephus the Jewish Historian writing in Jewish Antiquities (80 - 90 ADO

"The tribe of Christians named after him are not extinct

4. Suetonius: (60 - 130)

"He (Claudius) expelled the jews from Rome because of the rioting in which they were constantly engaging at the instigation of Chrestus 'Christ'"

5. Thallus referred to the "darkness that took place around the time of his death" confirmed later by Julius Africanus.

6. All these are secular and some hostile writers testifying of Jesus.

7. Malcolm Muggeridge:

"As for the other kingdom - yours which is not of this world - it alone is real. The cross is real wood, the nails are real and real iron, the vinegar thinly tastes bitter and the cry of desolation in life not recorded."

Proclaim the historicity of Jesus and the resurrection: He died, was buried, body missing, empty tomb, post resurrection appearance.

Frank Morrison, a non-Christian lawyer, set out to prove that the resurrection did not take place and that

the evidence could not hold in a court of law. But what he discovered made him change his mind. In his book *Who Moved the Stone?*, he writes:

I wanted to take this last phase of the life of Jesus with all its quick and pulsating drama, its sharp and clear-cut background of antiquity and its tremendous psychological and human interest- to strip it of its overgrowth of primitive beliefs and dogmatic suppositions and to see this supremely great person as he really was

...Fully ten years later the opportunity came to study the life of Christ as I had long wanted to study it, to investigate the origin of its literature, to sift some of the evidence at first hand and to form my own judgement on the problem, which it presents. I will only say that it effected a revolution in my thoughts. Things emerged from that old-world story which previously I would have thought impossible. Slowly but very definitely the conviction grew that the drama of those unforgettable weeks of human history was stranger and deeper than it seemed. It was the strangeness of many notable things in the story which first arrested my and

held my interest. It was only later that the irresistible logic of their meaning came to view.

Morrison thus ended writing a different book from what he had intended. Jesus said: "If any man is willing to his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is God or whether I speak from myself."(John 7:17). Do you want to know the truth? Try it?

The Witness of transformed lives:

Listen to two of them speak for themselves:

2 Peter 1:16-18

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased" -- and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

(NASU)

1 John 1:1-3

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we

have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

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This was personal experience and the list could go on. An Outcast. A detested prostitute. An Ostracised tax-collector. All would tell their versions of how they experienced him.

What we are talking about is not theory. It applies to me because Christianity is true; Jesus Christ is real and God does exist. One can give him a chance and join the ever-growing list of witnesses whom he is transforming today:

- Prostitutes who are morally straight
- Drunkards who are now sober
- Drug-addicts who do not need the needle and the pills any more because they have been healed
- Thieves who are working honestly now

- Liars who can now for ones tell the truth
- And religious bigots and self-righteous people whose pride have been pricked like a balloon

I would invite you to experience him for yourself.

If Christianity is true, then we need to share it with the intellectuals without fear. May we cling to him and deeply experience him.

DID JESUS RISE FROM THE DEAD?

- ◆ John Stott; not as an astronaut immune but died our deaths. But he was divine also
"Christ who is God over all forever praised"
Rom. 9:5
- ◆ "Your throne O God will last forever (Heb 1:8)
- ◆ In the beginning the word was ...God (John 1:2)
- ◆ He said of himself:
 - Bread of life
 - Door of the sheep
 - Good shepherd
 - Resurrection and the life
 - The way, the truth and the life
 - The true vine
 - He is the Lord
- ◆ Does not leave us much alternative except to see him as a lunatic, liar or Lord

DID JESUS CHRIST RISE FROM THE DEAD?

1. The renown Catholic journalist and Philosopher Malcolm Muggeridge has written this concerning the death of Jesus:

"One thing at least can be said with certainty about the crucifixion of Christ; it was manifestly the most famous death in history...practically every European artist, great and small has planned or executed a representation of it. From the Italian primitives to Francis Bacon. Most writers likewise, have made use of the scene and its imagery in their work, if only for the purposes of ridicule and blasphemy. Film makers and Hollywood impressions in search of a sure-fine box-office success equally turn to it for a theme."

2. Isn't it true that the world wide record for best watched movie is likely to be held by Mel Gibson's "passion of the Christ" which emphasizes on the crucifixion of Jesus?
3. The late Sheikh Ahmed Dedat, a renown Muslim scholar in his provocative book *Crucifixion or Crucifixion* wrote;

"In the battle for the hearts and minds of mankind, crucifixion is the only card that the Christian holds. Free him from his infatuation and you will have freed the Muslim world from missionary aggression and harassment."

4. What can be said of the crucifixion can be said of the resurrection, if not even more.
5. 'If you could meet any person of the past and ask just one question, whom would you meet and what question would you ask?' When asked this, Professor Joad, then professor of Philosophy at London University and not a Christian answered, 'I would meet Jesus Christ and ask him the most important question in all the world- "Did you or did you not rise from the dead?"'(Val Grieve: *Your Verdict on the Empty Tomb of Jesus*: 1988 STL/ IVP: p.19)
6. Without the resurrection there is no Gospel. As Paul says, 'If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile' (1 Cor.15:17).
7. Theologian Gerald O'Collins put it this way: "In a profound sense, Christianity without the resurrection is not Christianity without its final chapter. It is not Christianity at all."
8. Dr. Michael Ramsey, a former Archbishop of Canterbury once said "For the first disciples, the Gospel without the resurrection was not

merely a Gospel without its final chapter; it was not a Gospel at all" (Val Grieve: *Your Verdict on the Empty Tomb of Jesus*: 1988 STL/ IVP: p.21)

9. In the global village in which we live people are increasingly asking, 'What is the difference between Christianity and other religions?' The answer is basically very simple. Christianity is the only religion in the world based on the resurrection from the dead of its founder. (Ibid. p.21)
10. Novelist John Updike states the same truth more poetically:

*Make no mistake: If He rose at all
It was as his body;
If the cells dissolution did not reverse,
the molecules reknit,
The amino acids rekindle,
The Church will fall
(Ibid. p.245)*

11. The resurrection is the epicentre of belief. It is, says C.H. Dodd, "not a belief that grew up within the church; it is the belief around which the church itself grew up, and the given upon which its faith is was based." (Ibid. p.245)

Resurrection is NOT:

1. The immortality of the Soul as reflected by the Words of the dying Socrates when he said,

'Catch me if you can'. The body viewed as the prison of the Soul.

2. The reincarnation: Going through a process of birth and rebirth until you finally reach "Nivarna".
3. Resuscitation: Bringing back of a corpse to life.
4. It is a body no longer subject to the laws of nature. Those who were resuscitated later on died but, 'Since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again: death no longer has mastery over him' (Rom.6:9).

The Myth Hypothesis:

1. Compares Jesus to other myths in the pagan Ancient Near Eastern period, thus a creation of the Christians rather an existing figure of history.
2. Not "resurrection of a corpse" Sir James Frazer in his book, the *Golden Bough* tried to show that in the ancient world there was widespread worship of a dying and rising god - Tammuz of Mesopotamia, Adonis of Syria, Attis in Asia Minor, Osiris in Egypt and Jesus in Judea
3. But Jesus did exist and was a historical figure. Even secular historians like Josephus made reference to him as a historical figure. If he did exist how did he die?

4. The resurrection did not come out of the church,
the church came out of the resurrection

The Swoon Hypothesis:

1. The Koran actually says in Surah IV (Al Nisa):
157-158 that :

156. *They rejected Faith
That they uttered against Mary
A grave False Charge*

157. *That they said (in boast)
"We killed Christ Jesus
The son of Mary,
The Messenger of Allah"
But they killed Him not
Nor crucified him,
But so it was made
To appear to them
And those who differ
Therein are full of doubts,
With no (certain) knowledge
But only conjecture to follow,
For of a surety
They killed him not-*

158. *Nay, Allah raised him
Unto Himself; And Allah
Is exalted in Power, Wise-*

2. Ahmadiya Muslim sect maintains that after Jesus escaped from the tomb he met the disciples in Galilee and then walked on to North India; he finally died at the age of 120 and was buried in Srinagar, Kashmir in the tomb of an unknown sheikh. (Ibid. p.50)
3. Some who oppose the resurrection have said that he fainted on the cross and or he had been given a drug that made him appear dead but he was finally revived by the cool damp air of the tomb. (Karl Bahrdt)
4. Holy Blood, Holy Grail, 1982: Pilate was bribed to allow his body to be removed from the cross before he died.
5. Copying these ideas the author John Brown of the Book *The Da Vinci Code* went to great length to prove that Jesus was finally buried somewhere in France. He wrote as a historical fact although it was only a novel. Ben Wetherrington has responded to his claims in the book *the Jesus Code*.

Did Jesus actually die on the cross?

The state of Jesus body before the crucifixion:

1. Suffering from great psychological stress that led to what is called in medical terms hematomidrosis: break down of capillaries in the

sweat glands leading to sweating small amounts of blood.

2. The Roman floggings with metal or bone studded whips that left the shoulders, the back, the buttocks and even the legs shredded, sometimes even exposing the spine.
3. The third-century historian Eusebius described the flogging and said: "The sufferer's veins were laid bare, and the very muscles, sinews and bowels of the victim were open to exposure"
4. This led to what the medics would call hypovolemic shock: the person is suffering the effect of losing large amounts of blood, the person could collapse and faint and also become very thirsty, both of which happened to Jesus as the body would desire more fluid to replace the lost blood.
5. Jesus therefore was already in a critical condition even before the nails were driven through his hands and feet.

The Death on the cross:

1. Spikes (7inches long) driven through the wrist. The pain was excruciating. In 1968 archaeologist found the remains of a victim of crucifixion that took place around 70AD. He has been named Johanan Ben Hagalgal. He was crucified through

the wrists and not through the palm for this would tear the body.

2. Collection of fluid around the heart before death that was later proved when fluid and blood flowed out of his side when he was pierced by a spear. The Romans knew their work well.
3. Death by cardiac arrest. There was no need to break his legs as usually would happen because he was already dead.
4. A man who had gone through such an ordeal could not have had the ability to steal away from the grave and even roll a heavy stone away and overcome soldiers who were guarding the grave. Jesus was very dead.
5. Appealing to history, medicine, archaeology and Roman rules, there is no doubt that Jesus actually died.
6. If he had revived from the grave there is no way he would have walked away with the kind of abuse he had received.
7. And certainly he would not have convinced the disciples that he was Lord so that they would go and preach in his name throughout the whole world. His disciples could not have easily been deceived.
8. Roman historian Tacitus in book 15 of his annals AD115 notes that the Christians "got their name from Christ who had been executed by sentence

of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius."

Was the tomb actually empty?

1. People have objected to the resurrection on the grounds that:
 - He did not die, just swooned and revived in the atmosphere of the sepulchre.
 - The woman returned to the wrong tomb
 - The body of Jesus was stolen from the tomb
 - Empty tomb has a legend created by the church.

2. Three things that Jesus had to escape from, from the tomb:
 - The grave clothes which would have hardened around the body- left in a heap
 - The Stone that was sealing the tomb- rolled away by an angel
 - The soldiers who were guard the tomb- smitten to the ground as dead men

3. "The resurrection actually constituted an act of civil disobedience, since it involved breaking Pilate's seal and striking down the official guards. In this case triumphing over the powers meant active resistance." (Philip Yancey 2004: Evangel Publishing House: The Jesus I Never Knew: p.241)

4. There is too much evidence for the resurrection for one just to dismiss the case that easily:
 - If the body was stolen all they needed to do was to produce the real body
 - The woman could not have visited a wrong tomb because they had seen where the body had been laid.
 - To dismiss this, one has to explain records of all the four gospels
 - The early Christians could not continue talking of an empty tomb in Jerusalem if this did not happen.
 - The Jews themselves assumed an empty tomb.

Eye witnesses account of his appearance

1. The martyrdom of most of the disciples - no one would die for a lie.
2. It was not the disciples who convinced themselves that Jesus was alive, it was Jesus who had to convince them that he was alive.

David Holloway points out that:

"Mary did not see the gardener near the tomb and think it was Jesus. She saw Jesus and thought it was the gardener. The two on the road to Emmaus did not see a stranger and think it was Jesus. They saw Jesus and thought it was a

stranger. The apostles in the upper room did not see a Ghost and think it was Jesus. They saw Jesus and thought they had seen a ghost" (Quoted in Ibid. p.57)

3. The disciples only had visual apparitions.
4. Most people would choose to disbelieve regardless of the evidence.
 - An original death certificate signed by Pilate.
 - An affidavit sworn by the legal consultant of the San Hedrin affirming this.
 - A report from the chief pathologist in Jerusalem
 - These still would not be convincing enough.
 - Our minds are already made up.
5. The discouragement and frustration of the disciples suddenly transformed into confidence and certainty - they were willing to die for the truth.
6. The disciples had what I would call "resurrection faith".
7. The faith that can only be produced by resurrection.
8. It is the faith that created the church. It is not the church that created the faith.
9. The resurrection was the heart of the early Christian message.
 - Not the incomparable life of Jesus.

- Not his excellent teachings.
 - Not his awe inspiring works but rather the resurrection.
10. The resurrection was actually bodily although it possessed higher powers than the previous physical body.
- Could appear and disappear.
 - Could get in through locked doors.
 - Body did not need the stone to be rolled away - the stone rolled away for the disciples not for Jesus. He probably was gone before the stone was rolled away.
11. Mighty works done because of resurrection:
- In the resurrection, events that belong to the age to come have invaded history.
 - It is the embodiment in time and space of eternal life.
 - Jesus is continuing his activity with the power of the age to come because he is alive in person.
 - Many of us who have shed tears - received blows heartaches of lost friends suffering, challenges.
 - Jesus is at work today in and through us/the church - his body with the powers of the age to come.
 - Anything in the Turin shroud?

- Power greater than atomic bomb dropped at Hiroshima.

12. "The resurrection drew forth contrasting responses. Those who believed were transformed; infused with hope and courage, they went out to change the world. Those who did not believe found ways to ignore strong evidence." (Ibid. p.241)

Post-Resurrection appearances:

- Appeared to Cephas- Peter
- The twelve
- More than 500 brethren at one time- most alive at the time of writing/ some have died
- James
- To all the apostles
- To Paul- as if untimely born
(Paul's view of himself- the least of all the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle because he persecuted the church: the grace of God made him who he was, he grace of God enabled his labours)

The Incomparable Christ:

Listen to the words of this unknown writer as he celebrates Jesus:

He came from the bosom of the father to the bosom of a woman. He put on humanity that we might put on divinity. He became man that we might become the sons of God...

In infancy he startled a King; in boyhood he puzzled the doctors. In manhood he ruled the course of nature. He walked upon the billows and hushed the sea to sleep. He healed the multitudes without medicine and made no charges for his services. He never wrote a book, yet not all the libraries of the country, could hold the book that could be written about him.

Great men have come and gone yet he lives on. Herod could not kill him. Satan could not seduce him. Death could not destroy him...He laid aside his purple robes for a peasants gown. He was rich yet for our sake he became poor...He slept in another man's manger. He cruised the lake in another man's boat. He rode another man's donkey. He was buried in another man's tomb. All failed but he, never. The ever-present one- He is the chief among ten thousand. He is altogether lovely.