“Is The Resurrection of Christ True?”

April 1, 2018

Matthew 28:1-10

Please open your Bible with me to the fifth chapter of the Book of Acts. Happy Resurrection Day to all of you.

There aren’t too many days when we celebrate the impossible. But, today we do. Granted, there have been some (very few) who were raised from the dead. But no one raised ever *Himself* from the dead until Jesus came back to life on the third day after His crucifixion.

The largest religion in the world is Christianity. The most sold book in the world has been and continues to be the Bible. Every year for the past fifty years the Bible outranks every other book sold; with no less than 3.9 billion copies sold. That’s just about 780 million Bibles sold each year for the past fifty years.

So, today I want you to open your Bible with me “Is The Resurrection of Christ True?” Shall we pray?

As usual, when I teach or preach, I want to keep your heart and mind focused, not on what I say, but what does the Bible say. And, since today’s topic is so important, I want you to read the passages with me and let the truth of Scripture settle your heart; even the longer sections.

When we say that the resurrection of Christ is true, what are we saying? We’re saying that Jesus physically and literally died and three days later He rose from the grave. He came back to physical life. In other words, the resurrection is not just a story or a symbol or a lesson to learn. It really happened in history.

Here’s what God says through the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15:1 *“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; (2) By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.*

*(3) For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; (4) And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: …”*

Jesus died. He died for *our* sins because He had none of His own. He died just as predicted in the OT Scriptures. He was buried. And three days later He rose from the dead. And all four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all tell that same story from four different viewpoints.

The Book of Acts. The reason I want you to look with me at the Book of Acts is this. Acts is the history of the Church. What did the Christians in the Early Church believe? What did they tell their friends and neighbors about Jesus? Were there people living at that time that actually saw the LORD alive after His resurrection?

There are sixty-six people mentioned by name in Acts; ordinary people, Apostles, Roman rulers, priests, and teachers. And fifty-two cities mentioned by name in Acts. And there are nine regions mentioned by name in Acts. The Book was written by a medical Doctor. He’s called in Scripture “Luke, the beloved physician.” Colossians 4:14 *“Luke, the beloved physician...”*

So, it’s a fair question to ask; “if the resurrection of Christ is *not* true, why was it so important to the Early Church?” Because if it wasn’t true, you’d have to wonder why so many people came to believe it; and especially why so many people today believe it.

Now let me go to the nineteenth century A.D. There were many quote “Bible scholars” in the nineteenth century who completely rejected the idea that the Bible’s recorded history was accurate. One of those scholars was a Scottish archeologist by the name of Sir William Mitchell Ramsay. Ramsay lived at the end of the nineteenth century and died in 1949. And he was also a geographer; someone who is a master in geography. And Ramsay had been taught, as many were in the nineteenth century seminaries, that the Bible was a religious book; but not scientific and not historically accurate. So, Ramsay personally took on the Book of Acts. He did his own research. His goal: to prove once and for all that the Bible cannot be trusted; especially the writer Luke. So, for fifteen years he traveled to all the cities referred to in the Book of Acts. And he discovered that indeed, every single place referred to in Acts was just exactly where Luke, the writer of Acts said it was.

His book is titled *“The Bearing of Recent Discoveries on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament”.* He writes *“Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect to its trustworthiness" (page 81) and Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements trustworthy . . . this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians.”* *“You may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historian’s, and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment …” (page 89).*

Ramsay came to believe that, not only is the Bible trustworthy on the matters of history and geography, but in everything it said.

Well, in March of 2017, a NT Bible scholar named Jill Marshall decided to look at the Book of Acts using Google Earth. Her resulting picture of Acts is this. She found all 52 cities in existence then and now. Folks, no one today rejects the accuracy or the historicity of the Book of Acts.

So, what is the message of the Christians to their neighbors in the Book of Acts? Look with me at this one story; Acts 5:16 *“There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one. (17) Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation,*

*(18)* *And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. (19) But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, (20) Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. (21)* *And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught.*

*But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. (22) But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned and told, (23) Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety,*

*and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. (24) Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. (25) Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.*

The leaders of the day, the Sadducees, *were “filled with indignation”* not only because everyone was being healed by these men. But, because they were teaching the people that Jesus, Who *they themselves* had crucified and given a proper Jewish burial; they were now saying that He was alive; that He had risen from the dead just like He had promised.

Folks, some of the Jews of that day did *not* believe in the resurrection of the body from the dead. In particular, this group, the Sadducees, they didn’t believe it. They also didn’t believe in angels and they also didn’t believe in miracles. And their own Bible is full of stories of miracles and, of course, angels.

So, when the Apostles of Jesus were teaching the resurrection and then miraculously healing everybody of their diseases, they were upset.

They proceeded to have the Apostles arrested. They had them placed in one of the common jails in Jerusalem, which stopped neither God nor the Apostles. That very night an angel opened the prison doors and told the men to go to the Temple the next morning and to keep on telling everyone that the words of life are found in the Christ Jesus alone.

Now, would you, had you been one of these men who’d been arrested, would you have gone to the Temple the very next morning to teach the people again the message of Christ? Probably not. But folks, when God directs you, you need to obey Him; period.

So, the men are re-arrested and brought before the Council, verse twenty-seven. Acts 5:27 *“And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, (28) Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.*

*(29) Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, we ought to obey God rather than men. (30) The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. (31) Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.*

*(32) And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. (33) When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.”*

It has never ceased to amaze me that even when miracles are occurring in front of them, some people, even and especially religious people, reject the obvious *if* it in any way contradicts their belief system.

Now, folks, if Jesus had not risen from the dead, I don’t believe anybody would have to have an opinion about Him. But, from the time Jesus was here to this very moment, everyone has an opinion of Who Jesus is and what He did.

The Jewish Sadducees had opposed Him while He was here. They along with the Pharisees had Him arrested, tried in six trials, passed sentence, and then executed Him, when He’d never done one thing wrong; never said a wrong word or had done one thing contrary to the Laws of Moses. Yet, they took this Perfect Man and they crucified Him.

Now, He’s risen from the dead and now His followers are filling the city of Jerusalem with the teachings of the Jewish Messiah.

And, folks, if it wasn’t true, and if only a few people were saying that Jesus rose from the dead when He hadn’t; don’t you think that would be the end of the story and that Jesus and His followers would simply fade away into history? I think so.

Well, we have someone who felt exactly the same way. Look with me one more time at the Acts five. This time, it’s verse thirty-four. Acts 5:34 *“Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; (35) And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.*

*(36) For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. (37) After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all,*

*even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. (38) And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: (39) But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. (40) And to him they agreed: and when*

*they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. (41) And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. (42) And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”*

Gamaliel is a well-known name through the history of Judaism. This man’s grandfather, of the same name is referred to as the greatest of the first century Rabbis. We still have some of his writings.

But, here’s why question. Is what Gamaliel said true? Look again at verse thirty-eight. Acts 5:38 *“And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: (39) But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.”*

One, if *what* the followers of Jesus were saying and doing were “of men,” it would come to nothing. Two, if it was “of God,” then no one could overthrow it. And three, if you tried to, you’d find yourself fighting with God. That’s what this Jewish leader said about the message these Christians were teaching.

Folks, lots of generations have come and gone. We’ve had now twenty centuries filled with people who’ve come to believe on Christ, His teachings, His crucifixion, and His resurrection. So, if it wasn’t true, wouldn’t the movement begun by the Apostles have just faded away into history like the efforts of Theudas and Judas of Galilee who were mentioned by Gamaliel?

We celebrate the greatest event in the history of the world day. We celebrate the impossible. The LORD of Heaven Who had become a man and Who had lived an absolutely perfect life, had been rejected by mankind and nailed to a cross. Yet, Jesus rose from the dead and lives today. His message is true and millions believe it to this very moment.

So, why is it that so many people have accepted it after some 2,000 years?” Could it be that the Christian population worldwide is completely deceived? Could it be because Christians have done a great job in promoting it and presenting it to people? Or, could it be because it’s a very popular topic and people are greatly interested in it? Or, could it be because the human race *needs* to believe it? Or, could it be that it’s absolutely true?

This is Dr. Ian Hutchinson. Dr. Hutchinson is Professor of Nuclear Science and Engineering in the Department of Nuclear Science and Engineering at the Plasma Science and Fusion Center Massachusetts Institute of Technology Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Quote. *“I’m a professor of nuclear science and engineering at MIT, and I believe that Jesus was raised from the dead.  So do dozens of my colleagues.”* [Found on <http://www.veritas.org>] “Can a Scientist Believe In The Resurrection?”

And he continues. *“… the first disciples attested to a physical resurrection. How could an untruth logically support high moral character? How could it have sustained the apostles through the extremes of persecution they experienced founding Christianity? … We really believe in the bodily resurrection of the first century Jew known as Jesus of Nazareth.*

*My Christian colleagues at MIT – and millions of other scientists worldwide – somehow think that a literal miracle like the resurrection of Jesus is possible. And we are following a long tradition. The founders of the scientific revolution and many of the greatest scientists of the intervening centuries were serious Christian believers…*

*“… if science is not able to adjudicate whether Jesus’ resurrection happened or not, are we completely unable to assess the plausibility of the claim? No. Contrary to increasingly popular opinion, science is not our only means for accessing truth. In the case of Jesus’ resurrection, we must consider the historical evidence, and the historical evidence for the resurrection is as good as for*

*almost any event of ancient history…I was brainwashed as a child. If you’ve read this far and you are still wondering how an MIT professor could seriously believe in the resurrection, you might guess I was brainwashed to believe it as a child. But no, I did not grow up in a home where I was taught to believe in the resurrection. I came to faith in Jesus when I was an*

*under-graduate at Cambridge University and was baptized in the chapel of Kings College on my 20th birthday. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are as compelling to me now as then.”* *[Found on* [*http://-www.veritas.org*](http://-www.veritas.org)*] “Can a Scientist* Believe In The Resurrection?”

This is Dr. Joshua Swamidass. He’s a physician, a scientist, and Assistant Professor of Laboratory and Genomic Medicine at Washington University in Saint Louis. Here’s what Dr. Swamidass says about the resurrection of Jesus.

*“Science is full of trust-like faith. We believe grand, counterintuitive things because we trust the accounts of trustworthy sources… I am a scientist. Still, on Easter, I celebrate that Jesus rose from the dead about 2,000 years ago. This event, in first-century Palestine, is the cornerstone of everything. In the same way that trust-like faith in science is connected to evidence,*

*so is the faith I have in the Resurrection. The early accounts of the Resurrection and prophecies predicting it were reliably transmitted through history. As of 2014, more than 66,000 early manuscripts are known, orders of magnitude more than other ancient texts. Many are carbon dated to before Jesus’ time on earth and the first few centuries after.*

*We see accounts nearly unaltered in the earliest manuscripts.**A pattern of consistency emerges. There are variations in the manuscripts, but nothing invalidates the reliability of the Resurrection accounts. Accounts of the Resurrection include inconvenient and unflattering details, that make most sense as attempts to reliably record what had happened, free from*

*embellishment. They do not fit expectations of a fabricated account…. If Jesus really rose from the dead, it reorders everything… Without the physical Resurrection, two thousand years of history are left begging for explanation, like a movie missing a key scene. No other event in all recorded history has reached so far across national, ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural, political, and*

*geographic borders. The message spread with unreasonable success across the world. During just the first few centuries, it spread without political or military power, prevailing against the ruthless efforts of dedicated, organized and violent opposition…*

*The final verdict, for me, is that the Resurrection makes sense through the lens of history. I find the Creator of all that science studies comes to us in this way. The evidence is compelling, but not definitive. Faith in Jesus is reasonable and is certainly not without evidence.”* [Dr. Joshua Swamidass – see above].

So, when I found Dr. Swamidass’ information, I sent him an email and asked him why he believed in the resurrection of Jesus. Here’s the email he sent back to me on Friday.

Hello Dan,

Thanks for the note. I wish I had time to write you a longer email. In terms of evidence, I'd point you here, and references there in:

<http://www.veritas.org/evidence-easter-scientists-list/>

But as I explain in this article, it eventually became much more than just evidence for me:

<http://peacefulscience.org/swamidass-confident-fatih.pdf>

So my quick summary is that I trusted the evidence for the Resurrection, but then I really came to see Jesus.

Peace,

S. Joshua Swamidass

http://swami.wustl.edu/

And here is one of the paragraphs in the article he sent me titled “Peaceful Science*.” “Somehow, there is this presence that pervades my life. My awareness of it developed slowly over the decades. It is not unique to me and it is not controlled by me. I cannot scientifically prove it. I do not understand it. Some may write this off as unverifiable and unscientific babble.*

*I understand that this all may seem simple minded, and not nearly sophisticated enough to explain a professor's faith. I do not have an intellectual argument to offer that might compare with Jesus. I agree, this is not science, but it is an invitation to come, taste, and see.*

*I myself do see him. I see his hand, shaping me as a potter shapes clay, in my past, my present, and my future. I follow Jesus because He is alive. He is real. He is good…* *As for scientist me, the reason for my hope is Jesus, the solid Rock. I stand on the Resurrection.*

Folks, Acts five tells us a story; a true story; a story of people who lived in the first century A.D. They believed and taught that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. And they lived fully surrendered to this One they claimed as their Savior and their Messiah, as the Who rose from the dead. It’s also a story of some who, no matter what the evidence presented says, they rejected Him.

So, that brings us to you and me. What is your verdict? Jesus Himself said this. “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father, but through Me.”

The resurrection is true. Jesus Christ is alive. It is the most attested fact in history. And today He’s inviting you to come to Him for His free gift of eternal life. It’s yours for the asking. My question to you is this. “What is holding you back from the LORD Jesus Christ?”

*“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

Will you put your trust in the One Who was crucified on the Cross for your sins and then rose from the dead three days later? If not, why not?

So today, here’s what you can do about your sins. You can say these words to the LORD.

•         “I Repent” = I change my mind about God, Christ, my sin, and God’s free gift of salvation.

•         “I Believe” = I simply trust the Lord Jesus Christ alone as the One Who paid the entire penalty for my sins. And in believing, I make Him Lord over my entire life.

Today, will you receive Him, the Lord Jesus Christ, as your Savior? If not, why not? Please turn with me in your Hymnal to # \_\_\_\_ “\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”

Here’s the Sinner’s Prayer:

*“Father, I realize I am a sinner. I believe that Jesus died in my place on the cross. I repent of my sins. I want to be completely forgiven today. I am trusting you right now to save me.*