



HOW COULD DISTRESSED AND FEARFUL MEN, HIDING IN FEAR FOR THEIR LIVES, TURN THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN?

-- Did Jesus really rise from the dead, *part 2*

In a previous article we saw that the fact that the tomb was empty on the day of the Resurrection was a well-established historical fact, proving the veracity of the Gospel story of the resurrection of Jesus. Two more facts

can be examined to add even more validity to the resurrection story as it has been reported by the authors of the gospels.

Fact 2: The appearances of Jesus alive after His death. In one of the earliest letters in the New Testament, the apostle Paul provides a list of eyewitnesses of Jesus's resurrection appearances. He appeared to Peter then to the 11 disciples, then to more than 500 believers at one time. Afterward He appeared to James then to all the apostles. Finally, He appeared also to Paul, who was at that time the main persecutor of the early Church.

On the basis of Paul's testimony alone, virtually all historical scholars agree that various individuals and groups truly experienced appearances of Jesus alive after His death.

"It may be taken absolutely certain that Paul and the disciples had experiences after Jesus' death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ." Gerd Lüdemann, New Testament scholar, University of Göttingen

Fact 3: The disciples' belief that Jesus rose from the dead. After Jesus' crucifixion, His followers were devastated, demoralized and hiding in fear for their lives. As Jews, they had no concept of a Messiah who would be executed by His enemies, much less come back to life! The only resurrection Jews believed in was the universal event on Judgment Day, after the end of the world. Not an individual event within history.

Moreover in Jewish law, Jesus's crucifixion as a criminal meant that He was literally under God's curse. Yet somehow, despite all of this, the disciples suddenly and sincerely came to believe that God had raised Jesus from the dead. They were so completely convinced that, when threatened with death, not one of them recanted. They were literally transformed! Even the Pharisee Paul who persecuted Christians, suddenly became a Christian himself. He later went through imprisonment and torture, ultimately facing beheading, but always faithful to his faith.

"Some sort of powerful transforming experience is required to generate the sort of movement earliest Christianity was. That is why, as an historian, I cannot explain the rise of early Christianity unless Jesus rose again, leaving an empty tomb behind Him." N.T. Wright, New Testament scholar, University of St Andrews.

How do you make sense of these facts? Down through history, various naturalistic explanations have been offered to explain them away: the conspiracy hypothesis, the apparent death hypothesis, the hallucination hypothesis, the displaced body hypothesis, the legend hypothesis, and so on. All of

these have been nearly universally rejected by scholars. The simple fact is that there is just no plausible naturalistic explanation of these three facts.

The original explanation given by the early eyewitnesses is that God raised Jesus from the dead. If it is even possible that God exists, that explanation cannot be ruled out. For a God who can create the entire universe, the Resurrection would be child's play, as extraordinary as it might seem.

"This Jesus, God raised up, and we are all witnesses", declared the apostle Peter, martyred by crucifixion, and willingly dying for what he knew was true.

The Bible says that every one of us has sinned and is separated from God. We owe God a debt that we could never pay in ten thousand lifetimes because of our sin. Jesus paid the debt for our sin, He suffered the consequences of our sin. You can choose to suffer the consequences of your own sins or you can say to God: "I choose to allow Jesus to pay that debt for me. I believe that when Jesus died on the cross, He died for me. He died to pay my sin debt, and I am trusting in what Jesus did for me to save me from my sins."

The choice is yours. What will you do with the resurrection of Jesus Christ?