



THE STRANGE DISCOVERY OF THESE « HALF FRANTIC » WOMEN – Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

– Part 1

Why was Jesus of Nazareth crucified? Because He made outrageous claims about Himself. He claimed to be the one and only Son of God. Why would anyone take His claim seriously? Well, if Jesus actually rose from the dead, then His claim to be God's unique Son carries considerable weight. On the other hand, if the Resurrection never actually happened, then Jesus maybe safely dismissed as just another interesting but tragic historical figure.

As we explore this question, there are 3 main facts that need to be explained:

FACT 1: THE DISCOVERY OF JESUS' EMPTY TOMB. This discovery is reported in no less than 6 sources and some of these are amongst the earliest material to be found in the New Testament. This is important because when an event is recorded by two or more unconnected sources, historians' confidence that

the event actually happened increases, and the earlier the sources are dated, the higher their confidence.

After Jesus' arrest, Peter — one of His closest disciples — denied association with Jesus three times and the rest of the remaining “inner circle” disciples ran off, abandoning Jesus. Even if we were to take a sceptical stance when reading the Gospels, this doesn't seem like an invented detail by the Early Church since it certainly doesn't make the disciples look good. It was the women who stayed by Jesus to watch Him die on the cross (along with the apostle John), and it was the women who first saw Him alive afterwards.

The New Testament Gospels report that at least five women, several who are named, including Mary Magdalene, were the first to find Jesus' tomb empty; and Jesus' first post-crucifixion appearances were to Mary Magdalene and (at least some of) these other women. Considering that in first-century Israel women's testimony wasn't taken seriously, even in a court of law, this is an interesting detail.

The Talmud, a written commentary on the Jewish oral law, gives us insight into attitudes towards women in first-century Israel when it puts the testimony of women as witnesses on the same level as gamblers (dice-players and pigeon-racers, to be exact) and slaves. A well-known morning prayer for Jewish men was to thank God that “You have not made me a Gentile, a slave, or a woman.”

In fact, when the women shared that they witnessed Jesus alive, the disciples didn't take them seriously. So, the big question is: Why would all four Gospel writers claim that women were the first witnesses to the resurrection when no one in their culture would take the testimony of women seriously? Even in the second-century, Roman philosopher Celsus mocked Christianity as a religion based on the testimony of Mary Magdalene, a “half-frantic woman.”

Therefore, the fact that women were the first witnesses to the resurrection is undoubtedly historical and it seems unlikely that the Gospel writers would invent this detail if they were only looking to convince people of Jesus' resurrection. A little legend or fabrication would have had men make this discovery. But this detail points towards the opposite: the Gospel writers were more concerned with reporting what they believed to be true than creating a story to make it sound more credible.

The combination of the embarrassing details of Peter's denial, with the abandonment of Jesus by His male disciples, and the fact that the first witnesses of the resurrection were women are all details very unlikely to be invented if the Gospels were mere fictions, and even more if they were designed to win converts to a new religion.

Our confidence in the empty tomb is further increased by the response of the Jewish authorities. When they heard the report that the tomb was found empty, they said that Jesus's followers had stolen His body, thereby admitting that Jesus's tomb was in fact empty.

Most scholars by far hold firmly to the reliability of the biblical statements about the empty tomb. –
And you, what do you think about it?

(To be followed)