

## Christ's Resurrection – Fake News?

Matthew 28:11-15; 1 Corinthians 15:17-20 (04/16/17)

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We are in the midst of an epidemic of fake news. Fake news includes stories fabricated out of thin air to push an agenda. Fake news has become so common we don't know if we're hearing the truth or not. That's why the fact-checkers are busy scouring records, speeches, and events, trying to determine whether what this public person just said is true. Call it propaganda, false narratives, cover-ups, whoppers, you name it.

Two messages went out about Christ's resurrection. One was true, the other fake news. Did He really rise from the dead three days after he was crucified, or have we bought into a line of fake news? Or did His enemies launch fake news to deny His resurrection? Christianity stands in the balance here. Either Christ did rise from the dead and Christianity is true or Christ didn't rise from the dead and Christianity is one huge hoax. And if He didn't rise from the dead, the implications for all of us are crushing. This is what Paul will talk about in 1 Corinthians 15, the resurrection chapter.

But first, let's lay out the facts of the matter leading up to Christ's death and resurrection, see how a false narrative was launched to deny it, and then list the implications for either the truth or the lie of His resurrection.

**First, the facts.** You are all familiar with the suspense-filled story of the good guy rescuing the hostage damsel but finding himself in an impossible situation. He has no possibility of escape. He's on his knees surrounded by 15 bad guys with deadly weapons laser trained on his head and chest. All his work, all his efforts to save the day have come to this. He lays down his gun. It's over. Evil apparently has won. Your heart sinks. There's no way he can get out of this one. And yet at the last desperate moment he acts and "BOOM!" He completely neutralizes the enemy and saves the frightened lady. This scenario is something like the story of Christ. Seeing Christ hanging on the cross looks like evil won. They murdered Him. He's dead. Dead people don't come back to life. Hope is gone.

What were the facts? God promised in the Old Testament He would send the Messiah who would be born of a virgin, and sure enough, the day came when Mary in Nazareth found herself with child, virgin conceived. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth, and became a popular teacher of the people in Galilee and Samaria for three years. He had His enemies, those religious leaders who hated Him, dogged His steps, and tried to eliminate Him. But He kept preaching the coming kingdom of God, performing miracles of all sorts, healing people, turning water to wine, walking on water, and raising the dead. Toward the end of the three years, He began to tell His followers that He had to go to Jerusalem and be crucified, and he added that in three days He would rise from the dead. He said He came to give His life as a ransom for sinners, to lay down His life for His Sheep.

Sure enough, He was arrested one night while praying in a garden outside Jerusalem. All his followers fled in fear. The soldiers took Him in the middle of the night into the city for a series of fake trials, finally accused Him of blasphemy, and by morning He was sentenced to be crucified. They abused Him, whipped Him, spit on Him, mocked and ridiculed Him. They marched Him carrying His cross, bleeding, and wearing a crown of thorns through the city streets and out to a place called Golgotha, a place prepared for crucifixion. There He hung in agony and suffering between two thieves. People yelled out, "Come down from that cross! If you are who you say you are, the Son of God, come down and save yourself!" His enemies sneered, "He saved others, but look, He can't even save Himself. He said He was the King of Israel. Let Him come down and we'll believe in Him." Suddenly and strangely, darkness fell over the entire area. And in the middle of the agony and darkness He screamed out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" What happened? Did He fail in His mission? Like the explosion of the Challenger, did God's grand plan of redeeming sinners crash and burn? Then a few minutes later, He breathed His last and yielded up His spirit. It was over. He was dead; a lifeless corpse.

Christ's body was taken down by a wealthy gentleman named Joseph. After wrapping 100 pounds of spices into the linens around Christ's body, he laid the body in his own new tomb cut out of rock and rolled a stone in front of the opening. In that cold darkness the body of Jesus of Nazareth lay, lifeless. The next day His haters asked Pilate to assign guards to make it as secure as possible.

*Matthew 27:62-66 Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, 63 and said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.' 64 "Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." 65 Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." 66 And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.*

In the meantime, His disciples went to their homes completely dejected, their hopes crushed. They thought He was indeed the Messiah, but now He's dead. Their hearts were filled with grief.

These are the facts. His enemies laughed, mocked, and sneered. Satan and his demons took a victory lap. "He's dead! We won! We won!" How wrong they were! The impossible happened! Dead people don't rise from the dead, but Jesus did! Matthew 28 records the happening. There was an earthquake. The angel rolled away the stone. The guards shook in fear and they went unconscious. And the great news immediately began to spread, "He's not here, He's risen!" The ladies ran to tell the others and Jesus met them on the way! These are the facts of the case. He is risen indeed!

**The Fake News.** Those guards, probably four guards taking four hour shifts, saw the angel for a moment, shook with fear, and then lights out! The ladies had seen the empty tomb and were on their way to tell the others when these guards knew they had completely failed to do what they were assigned to do, guard the tomb to be sure no one comes and steals the body. Let's read the account of the Fake News:

*Matthew 28:11-15 Now while they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. 12 And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, 13 and said, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' 14 "And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble." 15 And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day.*

The rulers, these haters of Jesus, couldn't believe it. Their worst nightmare has come true. "We knew He said He'd rise in three days, but we also knew that was impossible, and yet He has! He has escaped from our hands. He's on the loose." What do they do? Have you ever heard of cover-ups, corruption, bribes, false narratives, fake news? You're looking at it. Just like they paid off Judas to betray Him, now they are paying off these guards to spread a false narrative. Notice, they gave a large sum of money to these guys.

And here's the Fake News. "When they ask you what happened, when they bring you before the Sunday morning talk shows, when they interview you about what happened at the tomb of that dead and buried Nazarene, say this, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.'"

"Wait a minute," says the fact-checker. "Who came?"

"His disciples."

"When did they come?"

"In the middle of the night, in the darkness."

"What did they do?"

"They stole His body away."

"And what were you doing while they stole the body? You were supposed to be guarding that tomb, weren't you?"

"Yea, well, uh, ahem, we sorta fell asleep."

“Hold it. You knew it was His disciples who came in the darkness, moved that huge stone, went in and drug the corpse out, and yet you were sleeping? Your story sounds like one huge fabrication. In fact, you get four pinnochios.”

This is pure Fake News.

Won't they get in trouble for failing on the job, a crime worthy of their own execution? What do the rulers promise? “Don't worry about it. If this comes to Pilate's ears, we've got you covered.” So what do these soldiers do? Take the money and run. And every time someone asked them about what happened, they spread the same lie, “His disciples stole the body.”

And it continues to this day, meaning all the way down the 2000 years to 2017, because the stolen body theory is still believed, along with the swoon theory, and the hallucination theory, and the wrong tomb theory, the myth theory, or, for many today, who cares theory. I assure you, the day will come when you will care. Christopher Hitchens, one of the new atheists who wrote about how religion poisons everything, died in 2011. He knows the truth now. He cares now, but it's too late. Christ is risen. And that means you are accountable to Him. That's exactly what Paul told the philosophers in Athens. Acts 17:31, “Because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

How do liberals and modern secularists think about the resurrection? “It's all a myth. The Scriptures are not inspired by God, but simply records written by men who evolved the story of Jesus into this tale of a resurrection.” The best they can come up with is that His spirit arose and lives forever. Richard Dawkins, another new atheist of our time, says, “The accounts of Jesus' resurrection are about as believable as Jack and the Beanstalk. No one in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can believe these things without embarrassment!” So really, the fake news continues. Islam rejects the resurrection of Jesus – they don't even believe He was the one who died on the cross. Unitarians reject a literal interpretation of the resurrection, “We do not regard Jesus as a unique revelation of God.” So which is Fake News and which is True News? What do you think?

Let's go over to 1 Corinthians 15 for some **implications of the truth or lie of Christ's resurrection.** Things got into a miserable way in the Corinthian church. They had some in the church teaching that there is no resurrection of dead for anyone. So Paul sets them straight with some really close reasoning. We're jumping into the middle of his discussion.

1 Corinthians 15:16-19 *For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; 17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.*

Here's the thing. The resurrection of Christ is the keystone, the supporting wall of all of Christianity. Take it away and the entire edifice crumbles like the walls of Jericho. Remove the resurrection of Christ and all your systematic theology is worthless. While His work on the cross is what paid for our sins and His perfect life that He lived in our place is the righteousness God imputes to us, the fact is, if Jesus never raised from the dead, it wouldn't matter how many miracles Jesus did, how much He loved us, even what He accomplished on the cross. Without Christ's resurrection we would be completely and totally without hope.

Paul warns us in verses 17-19 of the result if Christ hasn't been raised from the dead. 1) Your faith is worthless – completely empty of reality, just a myth. 2) You are still guilty in your sin because no resurrection proves Jesus didn't actually satisfy the justice and wrath of God against your sins. 3) All people who have died as believers in Jesus have gone straight to hell. This life would be all there is. We would never see our believing loved ones again. 4) Finally, we are most to be pitied if we've endured all the persecution and tribulations in this world for nothing. What a waste. What a pity. Your hopes were a pipe dream. You may as well eat, drink, and be merry, because tomorrow you're going to die and go to hell with no eternal hope!

So there Christ was, a dead human corpse, apparently a colossal failure. Seemingly God's glorious plan came crashing down with a fizzle and pop. He's dead. All hope is gone. And there isn't a human being on earth, not a scientist, philosopher, physicist, medical team anywhere on the planet who can raise the dead. Once you're dead, you're dead. End of story.

Read one verse further. 1 Corinthians 15:20, *But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.*

"Death cannot keep its prey, Jesus, my Savior, He tore the bars away. Jesus, my Lord. Up from the grave He arose, with a mighty triumph o'er His foes. He rose a victor o'er the dark domain, and He lives forever with His saints to reign. He arose! He arose! Hallelujah Christ arose!"

This is not Fake News! This is the True News! The Good News and the Best News for this cursed and dying human race. "But now Christ has been raised!" The resurrection of Christ from the grave proves it's all true, the entire Bible, the reality of God Himself, the fulfillment of prophecy and all Christ's promises. This proves His death on the cross accomplished exactly what God intended – a substitutionary sacrifice. He died in our place. There was no failure when He cried, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" He was suffering the justice and wrath of God that we deserve. Because He arose, we have assurance that we are accepted by God and justified by faith alone! Romans 4:25 says clearly, "He was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification." His resurrection is the guarantee that if you believe in Him your faith is of eternal value. "If you believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." You've been released forever from the guilt and condemnation of your sin. Everyone who died trusting in Christ will be raised again – you'll see your believing loved ones, and you of all people on this planet, are supremely and eternally blessed! Through His death and resurrection sin, Satan, and death have been dealt God's death blow! All your enemies are vanquished.

Now imagine if you had heard this for the first time. God Almighty became a man, died, and rose again on your behalf to save you from every spiritual enemy. If there is anything in our experience that really should send shivers down our backs, that should fill us with amazement and overwhelming hope and joy, that when we walk out of here today we feel like our feet are hardly touching the ground, it is this right-now reality. Right now, today, your Savior is alive and living for you at the right hand of God! He is thinking about you and giving you all His resurrection power needed to live your life right here and now for His glory. Do you know Him? Is He your Savior? Have you confessed Christ as your Lord and believed in your heart that God raised Him from the dead? Then you shall be saved.