

April 12th, 2009
“The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 42”

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Acts 2:22-24:

22 “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—

23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;

24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles. We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

One of the most disturbing trends in our society is the rise of revisionism. We have reached a point in our society in which any truth, historical or moral, can be changed in the minds of people by simply revising the explanation of events to fit a theoretical model of reality that, while plausible, appearing to make sense, is not accurate. We never demand to see the truth of the theoretical model of reality, but it becomes our perception of reality, as the statement of the model is repeated by those who we esteem and become statements of authority in our minds.

Take abortion, for instance. The revised theory of reality is the widely held but inaccurate assertion that a fetus is not a human being until it is born. While this theory may seem plausible to the ignorant or to the people that want to abort a child, the knowledgeable know that it is patently not true. However, it leads to the argument that a woman should be able to kill a “fetus”, although she cannot kill a child.

We justify abortion in our minds and consider abortion as a mother’s right by changing the definition of the word “fetus”, from “unborn child” to “mass of cells”, creating the plausible but inaccurate assertion that an unborn child is not a human being until it is born. We simply revise reality in our minds.

Take the argument for homosexual marriage. The argument is that homosexuals are just normal people that love each other, and that homosexual relationships are just as legitimate and loving as are heterosexual relationships. The revision of reality comes in the widely held but inaccurate assertion that homosexuality is not really a perversion, but an innate, God-given characteristic over which a homosexual has no control. While this may be plausible, it is patently not true. Homosexuality is a sin and, like any other sin, is an act that people desire to do, but

decide to either do or not do by an act of the will. But we call this sin a God-given characteristic, simply revising reality in our minds.

Christianity is not, and has never been immune to the activity of the revisionist thinker.

2Peter 2:1-3 tells us:

1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.

2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

3 By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

2Corinthians 11:13-15 tells us about these false teachers.

13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.

14 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

There are many, especially in academia but some even in the Church, who fit the description given in the aforementioned passages of Scripture. Many of the colleges and theological seminaries in our nation, which were founded for the purpose of equipping men to spread the Gospel, have been seduced by Satan and now equip men to cast doubt on the truth of the Gospel by a simple revision of history. Academic leaders have endeavored to revise history by simply making the plausible but inaccurate assertion that it is scientifically impossible for Jesus Christ's to have risen from the dead.

Why would they do this? To allow the following argument:

Since the Bible that reports the Resurrection is historically inaccurate, we can then deduce that the Bible is also morally inaccurate.

Since our moral norms are based on the authority of the morally inaccurate Bible, it is logical that we revise the norms of morality.

The revision of moral norms is the ultimate agenda of the abortionists, homosexuals and others who wish to revise Biblical morality.

The Apostle Paul foresaw this situation. **1Corinthians 15:12-19** gives us his account of the argument.

12 Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.

14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.

15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise.

16 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.

17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!

18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

The argument for the Resurrection is found in the testimony of the witnesses, the people that saw Jesus Christ alive after His Resurrection. There are those, however, who would dispute the facts of history on a scientific basis. Their idea is that the Resurrection is scientifically impossible, thus the Bible is a collection of myths. Although that is plausible, it is patently not true.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is an historical event, not a scientific one. Scientific proof requires repeated human observation of recurring physical activity in our environment. The assumption of science is that our environment is a self-regulating set of physical processes, and scientific proof is a compilation of the observation of these processes. I can prove to you scientifically that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. All we have to do is observe the sunrise and sunset on a series of days. If the sun rises in the east and sets in the west every day, we say that we have scientific proof that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, because we have observed the same condition repeatedly. The reason that scientists do double-blind studies on drugs is to objectively observe the effects of the drug on a group of people, from which they can make a projection as to how the drug will affect the majority of people. The observation of the effects of the drug in the study is called scientific proof.

Historical events are not like scientific events. Since historical events do not occur naturally, historical events can be unique, meaning that they do not occur over and over again to be studied by science. The signing of Declaration of Independence was an historical event that happened because of a deliberate action of a group of men in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1776. Since it only happened once, we cannot scientifically prove that it happened. To prove the signing of the Declaration of Independence, we have to rely on documentary, or historical proof. We have the document that was signed and we have the testimony of those that were there to give us the legal proof of the historical fact that the Declaration of Independence was signed.

So, whether or not Jesus actually rose from the dead is not a matter of scientific investigation, and the fact that we do not have the ability to duplicate Jesus' resurrection by scientific means is not a relevant fact in an investigation of whether or not the Resurrection occurred. The testimony of history is that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ happened, and since executed dead men, pronounced dead by executioners and buried in sealed tombs do not normally rise from the dead without human assistance after three days in the tomb, we must conclude that a force other than nature caused the Resurrection. The historical record of the Resurrection is first given by Peter, in our text for today, **Acts 2:22-24**:

22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—

23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;

24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.

Peter is the first of a multitude of historical authors that testify to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The testimony of history is that the power of God raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

This is the same power of which the Bible testifies, in **Genesis 1:1-5**:

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

2 The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

4 And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.

5 God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.

The creation of our existence is a unique historical event, as is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Human scientists take the position that our creation, as deliberate as it appears to be, is a matter of chance. The Big Bang theory does not invalidate the Biblical record of creation; it simply postulates that creation was not an intentional work of God, but rather a random occurrence caused by chance, and the precise layout of our environment that allows us to survive and thrive on the earth is a matter of fortunate coincidence, rather than deliberate planning. A roughly analogous situation would be to go into a junkyard with a crane, pick up automobile parts at random, throw them into the air, and, when they descend, they come down in the form of a 2009 Buick Park Avenue Ultra, running, with the key in the ignition.

I submit to you that a scientific evaluation of historical events is not necessarily objective. The reason that science exists is that men want to be able to predict and control nature, and when events outside of the nature occur, scientists have no science with which to explain those events, so they develop theories that may have no scientific basis but fit their belief structure, which may be prejudiced against the existence of God. Since Jesus' resurrection was outside of the natural norm, it was historical, rather than scientific, and we need to go to the testimony of history, rather than to the prejudices of scientists, to decide whether or not the resurrection actually happened. The historical question, rather than the scientific one, is: Is there any reliable testimony that the Resurrection actually happened?

I can say without fear of successful contradiction that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single event in the history of antiquity for which there is the most evidence. We have eyewitness testimony that is without equal and documentary evidence that is without peer. The Resurrection changed the course of Jewish and Roman history, and redefined the most powerful nation in the history of the world at that time. Christianity and paganism went head to head in Rome, starting in 33AD. The pagans held sway for 280 years, until in 310 AD; when the Roman Emperor Constantine capitulated to Christianity and became a Christian.

Understand that for much the first 280 years of Christianity, to become a Christian was to put yourself at great personal risk. There were the great Roman circuses, where Christians were thrown to the lions to be eaten, and where beautiful young Christian maidens were tied to poles on the top of the coliseums, covered with pitch and lit as lanterns to provide illumination for the evening activities. For 280 years, people all over the Roman Empire made the ultimate sacrifice, that is, they gave their lives, in order to spread Christianity, and eventually, their sacrifices proved not to be in vain, as Christianity became the state religion of Rome.

The fact that the Christian Church still exists nearly 2000 years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an important piece of circumstantial evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Men have put their lives on the line throughout history for ideals in which they believe, but men

would not go to prison and to death as did the Christians in the first three centuries of the Christian era for something that they know to be a lie. If there was not an actual person named Jesus Christ that lived the life that the Bible describes, or if Jesus Christ's body was never in the tomb, or if Jesus Christ's disciples stole His body, how can you explain the history of Rome from 33 AD on? Were all of the eyewitnesses deluded?

Understand these eyewitnesses did not testify in comfortable chairs in courtrooms with a jury deciding the case. These eyewitnesses testified while in death chambers facing execution, and said "Jesus is Lord" while staring death in the face for doing so. The testimony of the blood of those individuals cannot be ignored.

Of course, the Bible is our source of information for the events surrounding the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As a source of history, the Bible has excellent attestation. First of all, there has never been an archeological find that contradicted a Biblical reference. As a matter of fact, archeologists are among the most conservative Biblical scholars because they can go to the places that the Bible tells them that artifacts exist and find them there. Secondly, the authors of the Biblical accounts were eyewitnesses or the secretaries of eyewitnesses. These men were serious witnesses, because they all, except the Apostle John, laid down their lives in defense of the testimony that Jesus rose from the dead. They were persecuted, tortured and finally killed because they would not give up the story of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The testimony of the followers of Jesus Christ so affected history that here, from the perspective of 20 centuries, we are still reading their testimony and the Church that God founded through them still exists, and over 80% of the people of our highly scientific and enlightened country believe in Jesus Christ to some degree and have at least some affiliation with the Church.

The library is full of historical books testifying to the facts about the life of Jesus Christ and the historical fallout created by His death, burial and Resurrection.

We have every historical and evidentiary reason to believe in the testimony of the Scriptures and the accuracy of the Bible. However, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ was a unique historical event. Since it was a unique event, rather than a recurring event, scientific observation has no jurisdiction over our thinking on the matter of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As the Apostle Paul says, in **1Corinthians 15:12-19**:

12 Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.

14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.

15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise.

16 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.

17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!

18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

But then Paul puts the matter into factual perspective by saying, in **1Corinthians 15:20-22**:

20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.

22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

As I said before, we have every historical and evidentiary reason to believe in the testimony of the Scriptures and the accuracy of the Bible.

The real problem that many have with the Scripture is not with the history of the nation of Israel and the early Christian church, but with the moral doctrines given in the Bible by God to govern our lives. The testimony of the Scriptures is that Jesus Christ died that sins might be forgiven. In order to have your sins forgiven, however, you must first agree with Jesus Christ as to the definition of sin. People don't necessarily reject Jesus Christ because they disagree with His history.

People generally reject Jesus Christ because they disagree with His teachings on how life should be lived. I attended a school to learn how to evangelize, and in the school, the teacher told us of an encounter that he had.

He boarded a plane in Chicago bound for Houston, Texas, when a fellow sat down next to him. Once the plane was airborne, the fellow, a friendly Texan, looked over at him and introduced himself. They struck up a conversation. "Sir", the fellow said, "What do you do for a living?"

The evangelist replied, "I work for the Kingdom of God."

"Quite a job you have there", said the Texan, "I certainly would not want to get on the wrong side of the boss if I was working in your position."

"Speaking of that", said the evangelist, "Are you a church-going fellow?"

"Not too much", said the Texan, "You know, Easter and Mother's Day. That's about it."

The evangelist, sensing the opening, began to work his way into a gospel presentation. He asked the Texan, "What would you say if you died and God asked you, 'Why should I let you into My Heaven?' "

The Texan had no real answer to the question, so the evangelist began giving the Texan his gospel presentation. He acquainted the Texan with the concept of sin, and informed him about the universal nature of sin and that we have no natural way to escape the power and penalty of sin. He then went on to talk about the loving nature of God, but also the justice of God that could only be satisfied by an accounting for our sin. The evangelist continued, talking about Jesus Christ, the God-Man who came down from heaven to pay the penalty that we owe for our sins, to purchase us a place in heaven which He offers us as a free gift. He talked about the passion and the suffering of Jesus Christ as He hung, bled and died on the Old Rugged Cross to give us a right to everlasting life.

As the evangelist described the torture that Jesus endured, the Texan began to be affected by the story. The Texan hung his head, and tears began to form in his eyes. The Texan found himself reaching for his handkerchief as the evangelist went on with the story of the pain and agony that Jesus suffered, and made it clear that Jesus died that that his, the Texan's, sins might be forgiven. The evangelist went on to describe the various different types of faith to the Texan, and made it plain that the only way that the Texan could successfully make it to heaven when he died was to trust in Jesus Christ alone for his salvation.

At the conclusion of the presentation, the evangelist said, "Now, my friend, that was the greatest story ever told about the greatest man that ever lived and the greatest offer ever given.

The Bible says that wherever two or three are gathered together, Jesus Christ is in the midst. Jesus is here with us right now, and the question that He would have me to ask you is, would you like to receive the free gift of eternal life?"

The Texan looked at the evangelist with tears in his eyes and softly said, "No."

"No?" questioned the evangelist.

The Texan said, "You know, you never asked me what I do for a living, and now that I have heard your story, I am ashamed to tell you. What I do skirts the fringes of being illegal, and is certainly immoral without a doubt. My problem is that I do not want to give up my business because it is making me rich, and I enjoy the, uh, shall we say, associations that I get into. It may be wrong in the sight of God, but I just can't give it up right now. Maybe the day will come when I will change my mind, but right now, my life is tied up in my business."

There was nothing that the evangelist could do, because the man had the facts and made up his own mind to not act on them. **Mark 10:17-23** tells us:

17 Now as [Jesus] was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

18 So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.

19 You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'"

20 And [the man] answered and said to [Jesus], "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth."

21 Then Jesus, looking at [the man], loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."

22 But [the man] was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

23 Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"

You may notice that Jesus let the young man go away sorrowfully, and it is clear that the Lord did not go after him. Of course, I understand the Biblical stories of the lost coin and the lost sheep, where the woman sweeps her house from top to bottom to find the coin and then rejoices because she has found her lost coin, and where the shepherd leaves the 99 sheep to find the one lost sheep. But here is Jesus' principle.

Every man has free will, and you can't convince a man past his own mind. Once a man has the facts of the case, it is just a matter of will on the man's part.

Jesus knew that more arguments would not help the mind of the young man, but only a change of his will. Only the young man himself could make a change of his will a reality.

Revelation 3:19-20 quotes Jesus as saying:

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

Jesus is willing to come in, but you have to open the door. The episode with Jesus and the young man concluded thusly, as recorded in **Mark 10:23-27**:

23 Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!”

24 And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, “Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!

25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

26 And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, “Who then can be saved?”

27 But Jesus looked at them and said, “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.”

Science may tell us that the Resurrection is impossible, but God tells us, through His Word, that with Him, through His power, all things are possible.

God is able to change you, once you surrender your will. He can fix your erroneous thoughts through the power of the Holy Spirit. He can help you to understand His Word, which is the lamp for our feet and the light for our pathway. It is time that we decide, by an act of our will, to read and understand the Word of God, to conform our lives to the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit which is transmitted to us through the objective Word of God. With men, this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible.

Therefore, to be ignorant of God’s WORD is to be as one lost on the sea, clinging only to a capsized boat, awaiting the inevitable death to come...

Therefore, to be without God’s WORD is to be as one stranded in a desert, searching for an oasis, but finding none he becomes parched and dying...

Therefore, to be indifferent to God’s WORD is to be as one begging along the roadside, asking for help but receiving only the crumbs that vain philosophies can provide...

Therefore, to reject God’s WORD is to be as one that is lost, always traveling toward disappointments and despair on dead-end roads...

Therefore, to deny God’s WORD is to be as one who is stumbling in the dark, with no light to guide him as he continues to fall into every dangerous crevice...

Therefore, to disbelieve God’s WORD is to be as one who builds on a sand dune that shifts every time the wind blows...

And therefore, to dispute God’s WORD is to be as one who waits for the golden moment of opportunity that will never come...

But you can believe in God’s WORD and be saved by God’s WORD, and benefit from God’s WORD, by a simple decision of the will. Let us, then, turn away from the invalid theoretical models that incorrectly endeavor to redefine reality and turn once again to the authenticity of the accurate and unadulterated Word of God, which tells us that the reality of the resurrection is that Jesus Christ rose physically from the dead on that first Easter Sunday morning to offer us the free gift of eternal life. **Romans 6:23** says:

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.

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