

FaithPrayers

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JESUS' RESURRECTION: A REAL EVENT IN HUMAN HISTORY?

By Ron Simkins

Most of us who believe that Jesus is alive today are especially convinced by our experience of his presence in our personal life and in the life of our community of Jesus followers. However, our personal experiences are often discounted or reinterpreted by those who have not yet had these experiences. That is certainly understandable. So are there other reasons to at least consider that God may really have raised Jesus from the dead? Drawing on many authors, but with special attention to N. T. Wright and Frank Morrison, I would like to suggest a few:

1. If God did not raise Jesus from the dead, someone needs to offer a coherent and consistent explanation of where the power originated that allowed a group of relatively small and socially disempowered Jewish believers to cross every imaginable boundary in creating new communities. Most of the alternative explanations I have seen have been pretty lame

and inconsistent with reality. If the energy generated in the lives of the first believers did not come from an experience of meeting the risen Jesus of Nazareth, where did it come from?

2. The claim that the early inner circle of Jesus' followers faked a resurrection is actually on very weak grounds. Remember, these early believers were not the CIA or the KGB wielding powers of disinformation and police control. Neither did they wield the power of Rome nor of the High Priestly clan in Jerusalem. It would have

been very difficult for a socially disempowered group to pull off such a hoax when that hoax also embarrassed and shamed those who did wield the power to shut it all down.

3. Conceding that people risk their lives for all kinds of things, it is still difficult to imagine a reason why the early leaders of the Jesus Movement would have consistently been willing to risk their lives for their claim that God had raised Jesus from the dead if they knew they had made it all up. Where did the power come from that pretty



“My House will be called a House of Prayer for all nations...”

Isaiah 56:7

Matthew 21:13

JESUS' RESURRECTION: A REAL EVENT IN HUMAN HISTORY? (cont.)

consistently led to a refusal to recant even in the face of torture and brutal executions?

4. Contrary to popular opinion, the fact that the writings we have originated some 30 to 50 years after the claimed historical event – that God raised Jesus from the dead – is not a serious weakness in the claim. This would coincide with the point at which the original generation of eyewitnesses began to die off – only now does it need to be written in order to preserve it. In our own time, we have seen this same sudden need to interview “eyewitnesses” and write their memories as the last of the generation of slaves and children of slaves, civil rights workers, WWI and WWII veterans, and Native American culture bearers have begun to die.

5. The event of Jesus being raised from the dead is better attested than any of the ancient claims that we pretty much take for granted as valid events in world history. Many writers have explored this so I will not elaborate. I still find *Who Moved the Stone* by Morrison to be one of the most intriguing explorations of this reality, though not as scholarly

as Wright and others. And, Morrison pointed out that the inconsistencies in the eyewitness accounts point to their validity rather than fabrication. He noted that when “eyewitnesses” in a courtroom give testimonies that are too consistent, we know they are probably fabricated and rehearsed rather than genuinely eyewitness reports.

6. It is not true that it would have been easy to convince 1st century people that God had raised Jesus from the dead because they were expecting something like this to occur. We have no record that any Jewish group expected an “end of the ages” type resurrection to occur “right in the middle” of history. Like Martha in John 11, those who believed in a resurrection at all, believed it would be at the end of this age of history. No one expected the “last days” to begin “in the middle.” Every record we have indicates that even Jesus’ disciples could not get their mind around it until after it happened. It was precisely what they did not expect.

7. The New Testament writers had language for “spiritual experiences” and for “contacts by the spirits of the deceased,” and for “immortal souls,” but they explicitly chose bodily resurrection language for their claims about Jesus’ ongoing life. They knew that they were making a claim that was by definition something that occurred in space and time outside their personal experiences as well as within their experiences.

Do these arguments mean an honest person can have no doubts? Of course not! On the other hand, if one has not already made up his/her mind that this “could not happen” or “did not happen,” the resurrection of Jesus and its effects in human history are pretty dug in.

An honest inquirer might find that the claims are harder to reasonably get rid of than we might have thought.

FaithPrayers thanks Ron Simkins, Pastor of New Covenant Fellowship, Champaign, Illinois, for this month's article.

SCRIPTURE OF THE MONTH



**“It’s true!
The Lord has
risen...”
~Luke 24:34**

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