

Intro: Many people try to paint Jesus as just another teacher, prophet, or sage, or system among others equally believable systems; one in which they can relegate him to “spiritual leader” but not absolute and exclusive authority with total right over every area of existence, particularly every area of my life. So, they have written off His claim to absolute authority as shown largely by His greatest victory: His atoning death and His subsequent power over death itself. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the keystone upon which our faith stands. If the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is not true, then the entire thing comes tumbling down, for He would be just another powerless martyr fell doomed to the greater power of death after having made some audacious claims about himself.

But we want a Jesus that we can control and categorize in an attempt to throw off His rule and His “constraints” (Ps 2) and reject the reality of our absolute *need*. We value personal autonomy, having fallen for the original lie that we can be as wise as God. We say that we are free, yet Eden’s fruit is still in our death grip, only to be bitten again and again. History shows us that Jesus is completely unique in His person and authority and He can be neither controlled nor categorized...and also that I am desperately inadequate and greatly in need of the rule of the One who has defeated Death itself.

The belief that Jesus physically rose again from the dead is not merely a myth made up by a deceptive group of His followers in order to gain power and prestige. Although deceptive authors and pundits try to make the apostles look like naive dupes who were swayed into believing superstitious foolery like resurrection from the dead, this simply is not plausible given the culture in which the early church was formed. You see, in the days of Jesus the resurrection of an individual in the middle of history and history to keep going on was considered just as implausible, rather *impossible*, much like His resurrection is viewed today. For the followers of Jesus this story, with a resurrected and living leader, made them look like fools and crazy idiots to those of their age, too (Acts 26:24).

Jesus knew that they would not believe it unless he met them in their unbelief and proved to them that He was truly alive. So, this is what He did. Today is the day to begin to doubt your doubts, and to place your confidence in the risen Jesus Christ, who has proven to be powerful enough to set us free from physical death itself, and thus the slavery of sin and the death of the spirit as well. His resurrected life means that His words are trustworthy and that our joy is found in His loving authority over us. Let’s look today to see how he argued with His disciples about their uncertainty (chiding them for not believing His words, v44), gave them joy in His presence, and sent them out powerfully to testify of His resurrection, hoping in this interaction that He will contend with our doubts, give us the joy of His presence, and send us out with His power to be witnesses of His glorious authority and beautiful holiness.

1. Jesus is Opposed to Doubt

- a. First, though Jesus is patient with our doubts, he never *values* doubt, rather He chides His followers for not believing His Words
 - i. v44 – These are my words that I spoke to you...
 - ii. Matt 8:26 – “Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?”
 - iii. Matt 14:24-33, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Peter sinking in the sea)
 - iv. Mark 12:10, “Have you not read this Scripture...” (Chief Priests and Elders asked, “By what authority do you do these things?”)
- b. They had “good reason” to doubt
 - i. In the ancient Jewish world individual resurrection was unheard of

“It cannot be stressed too strongly that 1st century Jews were not expecting people to rise from the dead as isolated individuals. Resurrection for them was something that might happen to all on that great future occasion when God brought history to an end and a whole

new world was renewed. It will not do, therefore, to say that Jesus's disciples were so stunned and shocked by His death, so unable to come to terms with it that they projected their shattered hopes onto the screen of fantasy and invented the idea of Jesus' resurrection as a way of coping with their cruelly broken dream. That has an initial psychological plausibility to 20th century people, but it will not work as serious 1st century history. There were lots of other messianic and similar movements in the Jewish world roughly contemporary with Jesus. There were many situations in which a messianic leader died a violent death at the hands of authorities. In not one single case do we hear the slightest mention of the disappointed followers claiming that their hero had been raised from the dead. They knew better. In the Jewish world-view an individual could not be resurrected in the middle of history and history just continue going. It was not possible in their worldview. So, Jewish revolutionaries whose leader had been executed by the authorities had only two options: give up the revolution or find another leader. Claiming that your original leader had been resurrected was not an option...unless, of course, he was." (N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*)

- ii. Modern people don't believe that Jesus is whom the apostles said that He is, either
 - 1. "The resurrection is a myth written many years later by Christians who wanted to deceive people to gain power and influence"

- a. The only OT reference to resurrection is Daniel 12:2-3, where people are raised from the dead shining.

- i. If you were going to make up a story to try and fool people, Jesus never would have entered the room quietly and with a simple greeting

- 1. Maybe some luminescent Jesus bursting through the doors (think Matrix Neo)

- ii. Not fantastic narrative. If you were making up a story, you don't say mundane and uninspiring things like this.

- iii. Legends and mythical narratives of the time are not like this

"Thus did he stand and ponder, but Achilles came up to him as it were Mars himself, plumed lord of battle. From his right shoulder he brandished his terrible spear of Pelian ash, and the bronze gleamed around him like flashing fire or the rays of the rising sun. Fear fell upon Hector as he beheld him, and he dared not stay longer where he was but fled in dismay from before the gates, while Achilles darted after him at his utmost speed. As a mountain falcon, swiftest of all birds, swoops down upon some cowering dove- the dove flies before him but the falcon with a shrill scream follows close after, resolved to have her- even so did Achilles make straight for Hector with all his might, while Hector fled under the Trojan wall as fast as his limbs could take him."

(Homer's *Iliad*, Book XXII)

- iv. It doesn't make sense to see the disciples using this particular narrative to try and gain power, prestige, or a following.

- 1. It would only lead to ridicule, disdain, and death.

- 2. "Resurrection just doesn't happen, and intelligent people know this"

- a. Primitive peoples believed in miracles; Modern people know *better*

- b. The disciples were completely unable to fit the concept of resurrection into their worldview

- i. They were "exceedingly grieved" when Jesus told them that he was to be delivered over, killed, and raised on 3rd day (Matt 17:22-23)

- ii. They didn't know what 'raised' even meant (Mark 9:9-10; 31-32)

- c. When Jesus appeared, did the disciples accept it?
 - i. Did they assume he had been resurrected?
 - 1. They thought he was a ghost, not a resurrected person
 - ii. They were startled and frightened
 - 1. Even though he had foretold of this, it was so preposterous to them that they still didn't comprehend it!
 - 2. Even after his first argument, they still don't believe (v41)
 - iii. You may have a world-view that says physical resurrection is impossible, but 1st century Jews also believed that an individual resurrection in the middle of history was unthinkable. The Greco-Roman world said that resurrection of the body was utterly impossible, unnecessary, and foolish (Acts 17:32)
 - 1. Our society is now telling us that the disciples made up this part of the story in order to gain followers and power, but the resurrection of Jesus would have been a hindrance to gaining followers and power in the ancient near east.
- c. The only reason it would have been written down was because it actually happened.
 - i. 2 Tim 2:8 – “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead...” an integral part of the Gospel
 - ii. If the resurrection of Jesus Christ is true, it is of the greatest importance; If it is not true, then Christianity is utterly unimportant; The only thing it cannot be is somewhat important.

2. Jesus Brings Them Joy With His Presence

- a. They “still” disbelieved in their joy and wonder
 - i. They were “shocked” in “terror” and “terrified” at His presence
 - 1. “startled” is better translated “terrified”
 - a. cf. Luke 21:9, “when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be *terrified*...”
 - 2. “frightened” is the word used of powerful and imminent danger
 - a. cf. Rev 11:13 of great earthquakes and death;
 - b. Luke 24:5 of the faithful women who fell to the ground when the angels appeared at the tomb
 - ii. It was COMPLETELY unexpected, even though He had told them such in advance
- b. Bodily raised, not merely spiritual
 - i. “Look at me!” Not a ghost – ate food (spirits don't do this)
 - ii. Historically True Resurrection
 - 1. Not merely a spiritual resurrection, but a bodily one
 - 2. It is the complete reversal of Eden's curse, “from dust you came and to dust you shall return.” (Gen 3:19)
 - iii. His eating proved that He was truly alive and not merely a spirit
 - 1. When people die you hear a lot “I can still feel him with me”
 - 2. Jesus made his presence very real, not vague, to them
- c. Jesus communed with them by eating
 - i. He eats *their* meal
 - 1. It was not intended for him, they *share* it
 - 2. This is friendship stuff, i.e. “give me a bit of your sandwich”
 - ii. Completes their joy with the intimacy of a meal
 - 1. Eating together was an intimate expression of friendship together
 - a. Not merely “Chicken soup of the soul” kind of intimacy
 - b. Not merely “Jesus' words inspire me”

2. They had HIM and we will, too!
 - a. His Holy Spirit has been given as the spiritual presence of Jesus (“another paraclete” John 14:26)
 - b. Yet, this is just a “down payment” of the physical presence of Jesus that we will have with Him when he returns (Eph 1:13-14; Rev 22:4)

3. Jesus Sends Them Out in Power to Testify of His Saving Kingship

- a. You will be My witnesses of these things
 - i. They were, and we are, to be completely shaped by the fact that Jesus suffered, died, and has risen from the dead
 - ii. “repentance and forgiveness of sins in my name”
 1. The good news that God’s wrath is satisfied by the death of Jesus Christ and by repentantly trusting in Him (in His name) we are forgiven
 2. It is the living Jesus that holds us secure forever and forgives our sins completely, not us. Now THAT is good news!! We have a living Savior!
 - iii. “preached to all the peoples”
 1. Proclaim the answers, not the doubts! You have seen Me, now go tell others about my saving blood and powerful life...and I’m sending my Spirit to empower and transform you.
 - iv. Live in the world being completely shaped by the fact that Jesus has been raised from the dead and is ALIVE and POWERFULLY WORKING HIS GLORIOUS WILL
- b. He shows them His hands and His feet
 - i. His resurrection does not bring joy *in spite of* His suffering, it brings joy *through* His suffering
 - ii. All the bad things that tore their lives apart now become the greatness of joy when He reveals God’s master plan of redemption and beauty and restoration and hope.
 - iii. The joy and hope of the resurrection will not make you forget all the tragedies and struggles in your life, but *it will include them*, it will explain them, it will redeem them as sources of joy because we now know they are *producing* an eternal weight of glory beyond all compare, consistent with the resurrected Jesus. (2 Cor 4:17-18)
- c. It was His presence with them that overwhelmed them with joy and encouraged them to witness boldly
 - i. They would later receive His Spirit within them, which emboldened and empowered them
 - ii. But it was being in His presence, knowing that He is alive and His promises are completely trustworthy, that their love, respect, and worship blossomed into the life-changing attitude of being witnesses for Him
 1. It wasn’t a procedure, or a learning of method, or a specific style that made them bold witnesses, it was being with Him, overjoyed in His presence, seeing Him, loving Him, worshipping Him as the risen and living Savior of their souls
 2. When we aren’t intent on gaining power over the world, but rather on being with Jesus, we can work for the benefit of the world in all things, primarily in proclaiming, witnessing to, the person of Jesus Christ: He died for our sins, He was raised again according to the Scriptures, He rules over all things right now as our King, He is coming again to complete His redemption.
 3. Preach these truths to your soul every day until they make your heart sing! Then the circumstances of the world, the dangers that you face, the loss of all things becomes a pittance compared to the eternal weight of glory in Christ Jesus.

4. What We *Functionally* Believe is Revealed by Our Moods
- a. Cleopas and friend were just sad *because they believed Jesus was dead and they were still oppressed*
 - b. Having seen Jesus, however, and having believed His Word and seen God's plan from the beginning (as shown through the OT interpretations Jesus gave to them), *they rejoiced!*
 - c. What we are functionally believing to be true determines our moods
 - i. Thus, when we are sad, we must ask ourselves "What am I believing to be ultimately true? What does the resurrection mean for this moment?"
 - ii. When we are angry, we must ask ourselves "What am I believing that I *must have* that somebody is keeping me from? What does His presence and intimacy mean for this moment?"
 - iii. Then, just like Jesus did for Cleopas and friend, we apply the Scriptures, God's revelation of truth, to our heart and mind – preach the truths of God to ourselves
 1. Every day, get with the Lord and His Word and preach His truths to your heart and mind until your heart sings because the gospel reveals that you are new and deeply loved and there is hope in the reigning Jesus
 2. Get your eyes off of your circumstances and on the One who rules your circumstances by His living triumphant life.

Conclusion:

The truth is that our selfish and unchanged hearts have defied the rule and authority of God. Our ruined and stained attempts to dethrone God have come in order to appease our consciences, so that we can make the rules and not submit to anyone, having tried to "throw off the chains" of the only God who gave His Son for sinners (Ps 2). This rebellion, however, has not produced freedom, but slavery of the soul which we feel in our brokenness now and for which God's wrath is reserved in the last day.

The answer for this mess that we've made is not to work harder, but to come undone of the illusion of our own power; to submit to the point of absolute neediness before Him. We must become failures to succeed in salvation, become helpless to obtain hope, to die to our self-esteem in order to come alive with the fresh cool breeze of redemption by the great Savior-King. For, we need a Rescuer to save us, for we are simply not strong enough. But Jesus is. He sits with His Father in heaven, insuring our new life, our innocence before Him, and giving us hope of both present grace and the future day of restoration.

For, His bodily resurrection is the promise of renewal and restoration, it is the promise of glory being produced *through* the bad things, and it is the promise of His presence in our lives today with an intimacy and a beauty that diminishes all else in comparison. He is the only one who can fill you with joy in making much of Him, fill your emptiness with the joyful exuberance of His divine Spirit, the only one who can heal your wounds with the gentle loving hands of the self-sacrificial God, the only one who can redeem your life and fill you with fire to serve Him completely...and He lives to do it powerfully today!

Ask Him to oppose your doubts, honestly and truthfully. He is alive to contend. Ask His Holy Spirit to overwhelm you with joy as He draws near to you in His power. His presence is the promise for those who trust in Him.