

Thursday Together

BEGIN: Read Luke 24:1-24

Open Discussion: How do you explain the rise of Christianity?

Two-pronged hypothesis:

- The tomb of Jesus *really* was empty
- The disciples *really did* encounter Jesus (in ways that convinced them that he was not simply a ghost or hallucination)

By themselves, these points are not sufficient. But put them together and we may see enough evidence of why Christian belief and the Christian movement continued

A quick nugget about burial:

Jesus was buried according to a particular Jewish tradition

- First, you carefully wrap the body with spices and linen, and place it on a shelf in a cave (tomb).
- Then, when the flesh decomposes (hence the spices, because of the smell and since a cave would be used for more than one body) you would collect the bones, fold them up reverently, and store them in a stone box (ossuary).
- If Jesus had not been raised, someone would have to go collect the bones at some point.

Q: What if Jesus didn't really die, but rather, someone gave him a drug and made him *look like* he was dead. And then, later, he was revived in the tomb?

Answer: Roman soldiers know how to kill people.

Q: When the women went to the tomb, what if they met someone else...maybe they were confused and saw someone who looked like Jesus? (Maybe it was Jesus' half-brother James, who perhaps looked like him? In the early morning light, they thought it was Jesus?)

Answer: They would have noticed soon enough.

Q: Isn't it a bit convenient that Jesus only appeared to people who believed in him?

Answer: Thomas didn't believe; he was skeptical. Later on, Paul also didn't believe, and Jesus appeared to him. But if you think deeper about it: none of the disciples *fully* believed in the fully God-fully human Messiah after he died...it technically took them a little bit to get dialed in.

Q: Aren't the Gospel Accounts we have are biased?

Answer: So is all of history and journalism. Every photo is taken by someone from some angle.

Q: Lots of people have visions/dreams of someone they love who has just died... is this what happened to the disciples?

Answer: History is full of stories of strange experiences (like involving the dead; thinking they saw ghost; having dreams or visions in their state of grief and bereavement...). There is language for this. *Strange experiences are not the same as resurrection.* However strange the experience was, they wouldn't have called it resurrection. They knew perfectly well about things like that. They would have said, 'his angel, spirit, ghost.' They wouldn't have said "he's raised from the dead."

Q: What if they all had a spiritual experience...that Jesus was alive "spiritually?"

Answer: Resurrection was and is the defeat of death, not simply a nicer description of it. If Jesus died and came back as a spirit-being, that's not the same as bodily resurrection.

Q: Weren't Jewish tombs, especially those of martyrs, venerated (a burial site regarded with profound respect) and often became shrine (a dedicated sacred space in honor of the one who died)?

Answer: Correct. This did not happen with Jesus' grave.

(Technically: There is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem which claims to be built over top where Jesus was buried. However, the church building and its shrine was built ~300 years after Jesus.)

Q: Why did the early church meet on Sunday?

Answer: A high majority of the first Jesus followers were Jewish. They didn't think they were starting a "new religion." There's not really a good explanation as to why the early church made a big change in their rhythm to meet on the first day of the week *unless* something remarkable really did happen.

Q: The disciples must have been so prideful, so committed to playing make-believe that they were willing to die for their cult leader Jesus?

Answer: The disciples were hardly likely to go out and suffer and die for a belief that wasn't firmly anchored in fact. They believed the resurrection to be a fact, and they acted on their belief.

If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. If our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. (1 Corinthians 15:17,19)