

**Putting First Things First (Building our Faith)**  
**The sign of the resurrection**  
**The Resuscitation Theory**

**Intro: In our building faith series last year, we not only responded to some of the arguments that have been made by unbelievers against faith and against Christianity in particular; we have also taken an in-depth look at the positive proofs that support our faith in Jesus Christ. And there is no greater proof than the sign of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.**

**Over the past few months we have methodically investigated the evidence the NT gives us for the resurrection by asking three essential questions:**

Did Jesus really die?

How and where was He buried?

Is there adequate testimony from proper sources to confirm His resurrection from the dead?

***The result of this investigation is a series of hard facts that the skeptic or unbeliever must confront.***

***Here is what we have learned about Jesus' death.***

The last day of Jesus life was a day of physical fatigue, intense mental anguish, and life-threatening abuse.

In keeping with Roman custom Jesus was scourged before the crucifixion. The scourging itself was life-threatening due to shock, severe blood loss, and possibility of infection..

Jesus' weakened condition seems to be implied by the fact that Simon of Cyrene is compelled to carry the crossbeam of Jesus' cross.

The crucifixion involved nailing the Lord to the cross through both the hands and feet. This would have resulted in additional significant blood loss.

In Jesus' case, the Roman soldiers who would have been quite skilled in determining death from their experiences on the battlefield, upon examining him, determined that he was dead and consequently did not break His legs.

But as an additional precaution, they thrust a spear into Jesus' side to confirm his death.

Jesus' death was confirmed by the Roman centurion who supervised the crucifixion.

Jesus' death was confirmed by Joseph and Nicodemus who tended to his burial.

***Here is what we have learned about Jesus' burial.***

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus buried Jesus according to Jewish custom by wrapping him in cloths with spices interspersed resulting in an encasement that bound the subject..

Jesus' body was laid in a new tomb near the place of his death that would have been easily identifiable.

The tomb was closed with a large stone, probably circular, like a millstone with a trench prepared for it. It could have weighed as much as 1 1/2 to 2 tons.

Jesus' burial location was witnessed not only by Joseph and Nicodemus, but also by at least two other disciples.

A contingent of Roman soldiers was granted by Pilate to protect the tomb from any attempt by anyone to steal the body of Jesus and advocate his resurrection. Failure at their task would

An official seal prohibiting unauthorized access to the tomb was placed on the tomb to discourage any disturbance of the tomb under the penalty of punishment by the Roman government.

***Here is what we learned about the circumstances of the tomb on the first day of the week.***

The Roman seal on the tomb of Jesus was broken.

The Roman soldiers had abandoned their post.

The stone that had covered the opening of the tomb was rolled from the tomb.

Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb.

The grave clothes of Jesus remained in the place where he had been laid.

Visitors to the tomb report testimony by angels that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

***Here is what we learned about the witnesses.***

Those who knew Jesus testify that they saw him alive not only on the first day but at other times over a period of 40 days.

There were 13 distinct post-resurrection appearances of Jesus each of which adds its own unique evidential value.

***To Christians these facts as presented in the gospels lead us to the inescapable conclusion that Jesus arose from the dead.***

**However, all through the centuries unbelievers have denied the resurrection and offered various explanations in order to explain by natural means why the disciples came to believe that Jesus was alive after his death and who spent their lives proclaiming it.**

**So it seems only fair to add one more question in our study:**

Is there a reasonable naturalistic explanation that adequately explains how the apostle's believed and proclaimed that Jesus was raised from the dead?

**The swoon or resuscitation theory**

***This was the most popular explanation of the resurrection in the late 19th century. This theory affirms that Jesus never really died on the cross, but only appeared to be dead and that in the coolness of the tomb he revived and forced his way out of the tomb declaring himself to be Lord over death.***

Those who have offered this theory have given little proof; but only their interpretation of what little evidence they are willing to accept from the gospel accounts.

They affirm that medical knowledge in the first century was not very great and that people were wrong about Jesus having died on the cross. They point to the fact that Pilate himself seemed surprised that Jesus had already died. (The only piece of Biblical evidence accepted as true.)

Hence, Jesus had not really died, but only swooned and in the intervening hours between his burial on Friday afternoon and early Sunday he revived, appearing to the disciples and leading them to believe that he was alive.

### ***"The Passover Plot"***

Hugh Schoenburg in 1965 authored a book called the "Passover Plot" in which he affirmed that Jesus really thought he was the Messiah and intentionally sought to fulfill all the prophecies of OT including arranging for His own death and supposed "resurrection."

He manipulated events to get himself crucified late on Friday and had planned to fake his death by arranging for a young man to give him water laced with a drug that would make him appear to be dead. He then had arranged with Joseph of Arimathea to collect his body from the cross and resuscitate him, making it look like he had been raised from the dead. The young man came to the cross and offered Jesus the drug when the sour wine was given to him; and Jesus appeared to have died when the drug took effect.

All was proceeding as planned until the Roman soldiers pierced Jesus' side, a thing he had not anticipated. As a result, Jesus died and his body was disposed of by his secret disciples. Those who came to the tomb saw the young man who had been one of those secret disciples and mistook him for the resurrected Jesus.

And so this position which seems almost laughable, is often mentioned by "intellectuals" as a possible explanation. It says that Jesus had planned to "swoon," and be revived. And so ultimately it acknowledges that Jesus did indeed die. But what about the "swoon hypothesis?"

### **The swoon theory simply is not credible.**

#### ***Two observations about how skeptics deal with evidence.***

Obviously there are many intellectuals so-called who think that the resurrection didn't happen. And it should be pointed out that they are primarily motivated by a philosophical position that everything must be explained only in terms of natural processes rather than supernatural ones. On the possibility of supernatural events they are either agnostic or strongly atheistic.

Skeptics often reserve the right to choose which facts they will accept and which they will reject simply because they are incompatible with their theory. No critical or objective thinker has the luxury of simply dismissing any established fact that gets in the way of his theory..

***But think about what this position requires that we believe based on all the facts given in the gospels.***

We are being asked to believe that in spite of all that Jesus endured before crucifixion and the blood loss of the crucifixion that he survived what was itself an instrument of death.

We are being asked to believe that the soldiers misdiagnosed his situation, even though he was inspected by several of them and in spite of the fact that they as soldiers were quite capable of determining when someone was dead. Their lives depended upon that knowledge on the battlefield.

We are being asked to believe that the spear that pierced his side and from which flowed blood and water did not confirm his death; and that somehow one could recover from such a wound in a matter of hours without medical treatment.

We are being asked to believe that those who would have wanted more than anything in the world for Jesus to be alive, his faithful followers and friends, did not bother to check for signs of life when he was removed from the cross.

We are asked to believe that Jesus was able to revive in a cold damp tomb without any medical care or attention.

We are asked to believe that Jesus somehow wiggled his way out of the seventyfive-pound burial carcass that wrapped his body, leaving it behind, though in the case of Lazarus who was buried similarly, it was necessary for him be unbound by others from his wrappings.

We are asked to believe Jesus would have, in less than 36 hours, regained enough strength to push away from the tomb a 1 1/2-ton stone that ordinarily would take several men to move up and away from the tomb.

We are asked to believe that he could have exited the tomb without disturbing the Roman guards. Or that he would have had the capacity to overpower a whole contingency of professional soldiers without a single weapon.

We are asked to believe that less than 48 hours after having been taken for dead that he could appear to have been unaffected by the rigors of crucifixion so as to convince the apostles on the evening of the first day that he had conquered death.

We would have to believe that a day and half after spikes had been driven through his feet, he could possess the mobility to move about the city of Jerusalem and even walk to Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem.

We would have to believe that he could have hidden from all others who might see him over the next 40 days except for the few

appearances to the apostles, convince the apostles that they should go forth teaching that he had in fact been raised from death and ascended into heaven (how he pulled that off we are not told) and then die a natural death without anyone knowing.

But then think of what this position avers about the character of Jesus. Although he had spent his entire ministry teaching others to always be honest, we would have to believe that he deliberately deceived the apostles and never corrected their belief that he had been raised from the dead. Is it conceivable that the one who had never been charged with a single provable sin should end his life on earth harboring the greatest deception of the ages?

*The swoon theory would require greater faith than the miracle of the resurrection itself! Which makes more sense? Which fits all the fact?*

**Conclusion: Indeed, every attempt to explain the resurrection by natural means ends up doing one of two things. First it dismisses without reason some or all of the Biblical evidence without giving an sufficient reason to do so. Second, it asks us to believe what is more incredulous than the Bible record itself.**

**As Hanson has said, “The difficulties of belief may be great; but the absurdities of unbelief are even greater.”**

**The gospel of the resurrection stands against its most arduous critics.**