***The Resurrection - CA-013***

We are continuing our study of Christian apologetics.

**False Messiahs**

Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that there was a man who claimed to be the messiah in about 40 A.D. He announced that he would part the waters of the Jordan River, and about 30,000 Jews showed up to watch this. Of course, nothing happened. I don't know what became of him. There is also an unnamed Egyptian who claimed to be the messiah, and he claimed that he was going to cause the walls of Jerusalem to fall. And of course, nothing happened.

Sometime later in Eastern Europe, there appeared a man named Sabbatai Zevi who was an Orthodox Jew. He claimed to be the messiah. In several places in Eastern Europe (especially in Poland), Jewish people did not plant their crops, but they followed Sabbatai Zevi to Israel, which was then under the dominion of the Muslims. He announced that he was the messiah, and he and his followers had come to take their rightful place as owners of the land of Israel. The Sultan said, "OK, you have a choice. You can either become a Muslim, or we will execute you. And Sabbatai Zevi decided all of a sudden that he was not the Jewish messiah. He had been wrong about it all the time. So he gave up his claims to be the Messiah.

So throughout history, there have been many men who have appeared and have claimed to be the Jewish messiah. Almost nothing is known about these people. It's really hard, if you want to do research, it's hard to find anything out about them. But there is one who claimed to be the Messiah, and he backed it up. He's the one that we have been looking at recently.

**God**

In our study of Christian apologetics, we saw, first of all, that it is very reasonable to believe that the Christian God exists. In fact, it's unreasonable to disbelieve. We've looked at the Bible as the Word of God. God not only exists, but God is a communicator. He has communicated with man through the Bible.

**Miracles**

We've looked at miracles, and we've seen that that even the claims for miracles are almost nonexistent except in Christianity. In the life of Christ, miracles fantastically characterized the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. So we've made the case for Christian miracles.

**Jesus Christ**

Then we've looked at the person of the Lord Jesus Christ in prophecy. We've seen that the Old Testament Scriptures very explicitly predict so many things about the Messiah that were true in the life of Jesus, that there is no way it could have been coincidental. We've looked at the character of the Lord Jesus Christ, and last time, we looked at the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**The Resurrection**

Now we come to the very critical part of the evidence for Christianity, the very cornerstone, the bedrock of Christianity, and that is the resurrection. In Acts 1:3, in his forward to the Acts of the apostles, the human author Luke says, "To these (to the apostles), He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of 40 days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God." So Luke was a medical doctor, a scientist, and a historian. He was very objective. He says, "Yes, Jesus presented many convincing proofs that He not only was the Messiah, but that He had risen from the dead." Luke says that He appeared to them (the disciples – the apostles) over a period of 40 days.

**The Post-Resurrection Appearances of Jesus Christ**

So let's look at the appearances of Jesus after the resurrection.

The first one is in Luke 24. You can also find it in John and in Matthew, but we're not going to read all of the references. In fact, we find several appearances in Luke 24. This first one was with women. In verse 10, it tells us that it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary, the mother of James. Now, this is very interesting because women held a very inferior position in Jewish society at that time. A woman could not even legally appear as a witness in court because the men thought, "You know how those girls are. They're emotional, and they think things that are really not true, and they're easily influenced." This was the type of thinking. So if you were going to invent a story, you would not have women to be the first witnesses.

This would be like if you were kicking up a tale in the Deep South years ago, you wouldn't get a bunch of black slaves to be witnesses to it. You would try to find people that you would think would have more credibility. So that's interesting. The first appearance was with women. And then Peter saw the wraps (the linen wrappings), and he went to his home, in verse 12, marveling at what had happened.

Apparently, later the same day, Jesus appeared to Peter. 1 Corinthians 15: says that, "He appeared to Cephas," which was another name for Peter. "And then to the 12." We're going to be going back and forth to this passage several times.

Back to Luke 24:34: "The Lord has really risen, and has appeared to Simon." So he appeared to Peter that same day. Then He appeared, that same day, in Luke 24, to two believers, one whose name was Cleopas. We can find that in Luke 24:13. We don't know who the other one was on the road to Emmaus. I suspect it was Cleopas' wife. It just says, "Two of them we're going to a village named Emmaus." And they were about 7 miles from Jerusalem. You know the story about how they were walking along, and this Man comes and walks along with them and starts explaining prophecy to them about the Messiah, and how prophecies were fulfilled in Christ. In verse 30, they stopped to eat: "When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. Then their eyes were opened." I suspect when He broke the bread, they saw the nails scars in His hands, and then the Holy Spirit opened their eyes, and they knew exactly who he was. "And they recognized Him, and he vanished from their sight."

Then in verse 36, apparently the very same day: "While they were telling these things, He stood up in their midst (the apostles were together), and said to them, 'Peace be to you.' But as they were startled and frightened, and thought they were seeing a spirit, He said to them, 'Why are you troubled and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Touch Me and see Me, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' When he had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet."

Now, notice that at these appearances, He goes out of his way to have them to touch Him; to look at Him; and, to see that His body is a physical body. It would be one thing if you thought you saw a dead man. You knew that He had died. You had seen Him die, He appeared to you, and you reached out to touch Him, and your hand went right through Him. That would be one thing. That's what you may expect would happen. But Jesus, at these appearances, would say, "Now, look at me. Look real closely here. Touch me." Then He showed them His hands and feet. "While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' So they gave him a piece of boiled fish, and He took it and ate it before them." So He went out of His way to show them that He was not a spirit and not a ghost. It was His actual physical body that had risen from the dead.

Then we find again in John 20:19, this was probably the same appearance that He appeared to the disciples. It was on a Sunday, the first day of the week, but Thomas was not there. So in John 20:24, we find that Thomas had missed it. So in verse 26, one week later, the next Sunday evening, His disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them: "Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their mist and said, 'Peace be unto you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Reach here with your finger and see My hands, and reach here your hand, and put it into My side, and do not be unbelieving, but believing.' Thomas answered and said to him, 'My Lord, and my God.'"

Then in verse 30, John says, "There were many other signs (probably many more appearances) that Jesus also performed in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book."

So then Jesus appeared to some of the disciples, we see, in John 21 on the seashore of Galilee. He prepared a meal for them.

Then Luke tells us in Luke 24 that Jesus spent time with the disciples after He had appeared to them.

In Acts 1:3-8, He had been with the disciples, and He appeared to them again before He left them.

Back to 1 Corinthians 15, Paul outlines the post-resurrection appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 5: "After He was raised on the third day, he appeared to Cephas, and then to the 12. After that, He appeared to more than 500 brethren, most of whom remain until now. But some have fallen asleep."

Then he appeared to James, his blood brother (his half-brother), and then to all of the apostles again: "Last of all, as to one untimely born," Paul says, "He appeared to me also." You can read all about this in Acts 9, how Paul was going to Damascus. He was taking Christians to have them executed, and Jesus appeared to him, and Paul became a believer.

So Paul just keeps bringing this up. Everywhere that we read that Paul was giving his testimony, he always brought that up.

In 1 Corinthians 9:1, Paul says, "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?" So Paul could never forget, and he could never let anyone else forget that he had seen the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

**The Resurrection**

I want to go over some vital facts about the resurrection. First of all, the Lord Jesus Christ predicted that He was going to die, and that He was going to be raised from the dead. We read about this in Matthew 16:21, Mark 9:1-10, John 12:32-34, and Luke 9:22. The resurrection was prophesied. It was predicted. And, as we have seen, it was witnessed. It was well-witnessed. In fact, it was so well-witnessed, this is one of these things that Paul could say, "He appeared to 500 people at one time. If you don't believe me, go talk to them – 500 hundred of them, a few are dead, but most of them are still living."

It was so well-witnessed that in Acts 1:21-22, when the apostle found out that Judas had committed suicide, and they needed 12 apostles, and they were looking for someone to take his place, they said, "Therefore it is necessary that of the man who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." So that was the primary requirement for an apostle – that he had been with them right from the first, through the three years of ministry, and that he had seen the Lord Jesus Christ in a post-resurrection appearance, and that he was a witness of the resurrection.

Now, liberals will tell you that Jesus was really a good man, and really a good teacher, but all this stuff about His being God, and that He rose from the dead, this was cooked up later, probably by a second- or third-generation of Christians.

1 Thessalonians 4 was probably written, as far as we can tell, about 20 years after Jesus had left the earth. And Paul says, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again." So within 20 years, this was a firmly established belief of the Christian church. Back then, without TV; without computers; and, without radios or newspapers, things happened very slowly. 20 years was a long, long time. This belief was still around. It had not gone away. In fact, it had entrenched itself, and Christians everywhere believed in the resurrection. So it was not only predicted, witnessed, and accepted, but it was made even more obvious by Jewish silence.

Now, the Jews didn't have anything to say about it, except they said that somebody had come and stolen the body. But it looks like, if that had happened, they would have located the body, and paraded it through the streets of Jerusalem. They didn't say anything about it except that somebody stole it. This is one of those instances where the argument from silence speaks very loudly.

There is also the argument of the empty tomb. You can visit the graves of most of the leaders of world religions. They make shrines of their graves. That's probably why God didn't allow anyone to know where the body of Moses was buried. But there is a tendency to make a holy place out of the shrine where founders of religions are buried. We don't even know for sure where the empty tomb was located. There are at least two places in Jerusalem that some people believe was the burying place of Jesus. There was one that was widely accepted. In fact, they even built a little church there until the 1800s. General Chinese Gordon was looking out his hotel window, I understand, in Jerusalem, and he saw a hill that looked just like a skull. So investigation found that there were some caves there. One of the caves, it is believed now, that this was the burial place of Jesus. But isn't it interesting that nobody really knows for sure where the greatest leader in the world was buried, because the tomb was so insignificant. It was empty. Nothing was there in the tomb. So why make a big deal out of it? So the empty tomb really speaks volumes about the resurrection.

**The Nazareth Inscription**

There's an archaeological discovery called the Nazareth Inscription. Again, this doesn't say anything absolutely for sure, but it certainly looks suspicious. In 1878, this inscription was discovered, and it is a decree from Caesar which makes it against the law, punishable by death, to remove a body from a tomb. Now, they had found things before that said that it was against the law to desecrate a burying place, and it carried a fine or prison sentence. But this is a decree from Caesar, probably around 40 A.D. And it says that it's a crime punishable by death to remove a body from a tomb. It was found in Nazareth. So this looks very suspiciously like something had happened in Israel that caused a lot of controversy, because it was believed that someone removed a body from a tomb. It was so controversial that Caesar wrote this (they're not sure whether it was Tiberius or Claudius), but Caesar felt like he needed to step in and say, "You can't do that anymore. It causes too much confusion. This is a capital offense."

Now, in closing, there are three principles that, again, point to the resurrection that I want to give you.

First of all, all throughout history, from the time of Moses, the Jewish people have worshiped on the Sabbath. And then all of a sudden, this sect of Messianic Jews, who believed that they had found the Messiah, changed that. They started worshiping on Sunday, the first day of the week. They called it the Lord's Day, which is the day that Jesus rose from the dead.

Another principle is that all of these believers, again, were Orthodox Jews. Orthodox Jews were very mono-theistic. That means that they believed in one God. Then, within just a few years of the death of Jesus, they were believing in the Trinity – in one God, but three persons. Now, they didn't understand that, and we really don't understand it either, but they were believing it. Their Orthodox Jewish heritage had been modified, not only from the Sabbath, but to a belief in the three persons of the Godhead.

Another is baptism. The Berean congregation is sharp enough to know that when you say baptism, you're not always talking about water. We have the Christian ritual of water baptism. The apostle Paul says in Romans 6:1, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be? How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know then all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death (spiritual baptism here – the baptism of the Holy Spirit)? Therefore (water baptism), we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too, might walk in newness of life."

What water baptism represents is being placed into Christ – number one. And number two is that it represents death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and our death to sin, and our resurrection to walk in newness of life.

Again, to reiterate this, Colossians 2:12: "Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God who raised Him from the dead." So the church ritual of water baptism speaks of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was really early on.

Also the other church ordinance is the Lord's Supper. Another name for the Lord's Supper is the Eucharist. That means a thanksgiving festival, or a ceremony of giving of thanks – a time to rejoice thankfully. Now, is there any religion in the world that has a thanksgiving memorial that their leader has died – that the founder of their religion has died? No, Christianity is the only one. We rejoice, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, because He died; He rose again; and, He is coming again. No other religion in the world believes that their leader was physically raised from the dead; is alive today; and, is coming again to this earth.

So no founder of any religion, sect, or cult has ever said, "OK, I'll tell you what. You kill me, and in three days, I'll rise again." If any did say it, they were not able to come across with it. Jesus did. And to this day, we celebrate, at the Lord's Supper, the one who died; who rose again; and, He's coming again now.

There is one final principle that I'm going to leave you with about the Lord's Supper. 1 Corinthians 15:19: "If we have hope in Christ in this life only, we are of all men, most to be pitied." If the resurrection were not true, and if Jesus had not risen from the dead, then we would be the biggest fools in the world. Christianity rises or falls on the resurrection. It is the bedrock and the cornerstone of Christianity. It's not like it's kind of an optional matter, and if you're a Christian, well, do you believe in the resurrection or not? You can't say, "Ah, I don't know. I haven't decided yet." It's the very foundational truth of Christianity. If the resurrection were not true, then nothing else would matter. You might as well be a Buddhist, a Muslim, or a nothing. Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and because He rose, so will we also.

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