

SERMON: 2018/04/01 (Easter Sunday @ 1000, Year B) - Mk. 16:1-8\_BTR

[Erect a cork-board on a tripod with a portrait of Jesus in the middle. Place model of Roman arch on a low table in front.]

Did you know that today is "April Fool's" day?

Yes?

Has anyone played a trick yet on you (this morning)?

[Wait for response.]

Well, there are those (people) today - more and more of them, in fact - who say that Jesus' *seeming* resurrection on the first Easter morning was (merely) a trick, a hoax - that either Jesus didn't really die or that His followers took his body from the (fancy) tomb where Joseph of Arimathea buried it [Mk. 15:43-46], and hid it away from the authorities.

And, personally, I've certainly encountered lots who think this - taxi-cab drivers, friends, even physicians.

But does this matter?

Yes.

Because, says the Bible, 'the truth will set you free' [Jn. 8:32], and '[t]his event, in first-century Palestine, is the cornerstone of *everything*!'<sup>[n.1]</sup>

And, in particular, of Jesus life-changing claims about the existence of God, of the character of that God, of His embodiment in Him, and of their plan 'to create new heavens and a new earth' [Is. 65:17] where I might live, *a second time*, forever, in a place of eternal beauty and tranquility [e.g. Rev. 21:2-4].

These *incredible* claims *all* rest - find proof - through what the Marys and Salome found in that garden when they 'bought spices...[to] anoint [the body of their (young, Galilean) rabbi]' [Mk.16:2] in that garden (of rest) outside of Jerusalem.

And if what they *actually* saw was His body, decayed and broken, and He hadn't return from death, then Christianity is just a (false, feel-good) mythology, and the Church a sham.

[Remove keystone from Roman arch model.]

But what if the sceptics are wrong?

What if there is, *in actual fact*, tonnes of evidence for *orthodox* Christian belief?

Let's - *briefly* - unpack some of that:

Firstly, we can be certain that Jesus really was dead when they took Him (down) from the cross and carried Him away: [place dead emoji on Jesus' photo].

I say we can be confident about this because the men who killed Him - Roman legionaries - were experts at doing exactly this:

We know, from extra-Biblical literature, that they regularly performed crucifixions and to thousands of victims; so their method - *their technique* - was *finely* honed and *well* practiced. [Photo: crucifix]

Not only that, He had already been whipped before being stuck up there [Photo: cat-of-nine-tails], so had already suffered massive bodily trauma *even* before undergoing the agonising asphyxia of that particular style of (brutal) execution.

Finally, to ensure He was dead, don't forget that they impaled a spear in His side too: [Photo: spear].

It is also worth mentioning that the Romans themselves didn't doubt that they had done the job properly: their own historians like Tacitus [photo] mention Jesus' execution.

Secondly, the tomb was empty.

Now, there's at least two possibilities for where Jesus' *deceased* body was laid [photos] and both lack a corpse.

(I know: I've checked myself!)

[Stick empty fuel tank symbol over photos]

And if Jesus body *had* remained *in situ*, the tomb would have become a place of *intense* veneration - *but it didn't*.

Unlike *all* other major world religions whose founders have *occupied* graves [photos], Christians don't have a shrine to visit.

Had the body of our Saviour been removed?

Not likely:

*One*, the tomb was guarded by a platoon of soldiers: [picture] who never left their post and made no report of an ambush or the such like.

*Two*, Jesus' critics [photo] - who were *desperate* to discredit the new religion - never found any remains *nor* could they prove that His followers were liars:

And, believe me, they tried - using torture: *ten* of the remaining eleven disciples were intimidated, violently interrogated and murdered in the most barbaric ways: flayed or boiled alive [picture], fed to lions, disembowelled, mutilated.

And none of them - *none of them* - confessed to anything except that they had

seen Jesus *in the flesh* and risen: breathing, laughing, teaching, eating breakfast and then, finally, ascending to Heaven.

But what about those *few* ancient (textual) sources that claim otherwise?

The Qur'an, for example.

Or the so-called "Gospel of Peter" and so on?

Well, to be clear, they were all written much, much, *much* later than the *canonical* gospels, that is, the four we actually find in the Bible - *Matthew, Mark, Luke* and *John*; and later than Paul's epistles, which were written almost immediately after the events that they describe and theologize about.

And even reputable *atheist* scholars of religion admit that the 'wealth of material' available to us about the main episodes of Jesus' life and ministry is "embarrassingly" vast [n.2], and confirmed by non-Christian sources from that period - by men - historians - like Josephus: [picture], who admits, despite having no self-serving reason to do so, that our Lord was seen alive *after* His execution.

I could go on.

But I encourage you, if you're curious - *or doubtful(!)* - to do your own investigating.

For as a young(-er) man (of no real faith), I was *overwhelmed* by the *robustness* of the Biblical claims.

Have faith that this is true for you (too), and there is every reason to celebrate today!

Let's pray: ..

Footnotes:

1. Swamidass, S. Joshua (15th of April 2017), 'Is There Evidence for Easter? A Scientist's List', *The Veritas Forum*, available at [http://www.veritas.org/evidence-easter-scientists-list/#\\_ftn5](http://www.veritas.org/evidence-easter-scientists-list/#_ftn5) (accessed March 31, 2018). (My emphasis.)
2. McDowell, Josh D. and Jones, Clay (13th of August 2014), 'The Bibliographical Test', available at <https://www.josh.org/wp-content/uploads/Bibliographical-Test-Update-08.13.14.pdf> (accessed March 31, 2018).

Further Reading:

Craig, William Lane (2000), *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*, Eugene, O. R.: Wipf & Stock Publishers.