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PROVING THE RESURRECTION by Juan Baixeras

A lot of people who are not familiar with the facts think that Christianity is simply a blind leap of faith. This is just not the case. God does ask that we have faith in His promises, but He has left us a good amount of hard core evidence to prove that what He has told us is true. God does not want His family to be a bunch of brainless robots who worship Him because that is what they were told to do from childhood. He wants His family to consist of people who voluntarily and intelligently choose to follow Him. People who see the truth in His words and in His deeds, and because of them come to believe in Him and His promises. Mark 12:29 says:

"You shall love the LORD with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."

Use your mind. As the saying goes, "It's a terrible thing to waste."

In the Old Testament God performed many miracles, people could also listen to God's word through the prophets and then watch it come true. Nowadays, people do not see the Red Sea part down the middle, or people being raised from the dead. I do believe God still does miracles, but I think they are more on a personal level and not for the whole world to see. Why is this so? I think it is because in the old days God performed miracles in order for people to believe that He is the ONLY true God, as was the case with the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, or with Daniel and the den of lions, etc. In today's world we do not need miracles in order to believe in God and His promises because He has left us the greatest proof of all, the resurrection of His son, Jesus the Messiah.

Everything hangs on the resurrection. It is the single most important fact in Christianity. If the resurrection of Jesus is true, then we must accept that Jesus is whom he said he was, the Messiah of God, which logically gives validity to the existence of God.

If we accept that Jesus is the Messiah by proof of his resurrection, then this also confirms the validity and accuracy of the Old Testament because Jesus himself states that everything in the Law, in the prophets, and in the Psalms must be

fulfilled (Lk 24: 44).

"These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled."

The New Testament is also validated because it was written primarily by those whom Jesus chose personally.

Without Jesus' resurrection there is no way to know that the Bible is actually the word of God as opposed to stories of a particular people. It all comes down to the resurrection. If it is true, then Christianity as it was taught by Jesus is true. If it is not true, then Christianity is the most successful hoax in the history of mankind. The big question is, can we prove the resurrection of Jesus Christ almost 2000 years after it happened? The answer is, absolutely yes! You just have to use what God gave you in the first place, your mind.

A successful businessman once said,

"Do not accept any deal until you have all the facts, but do not reject any deal until you have all the facts."

Well, here are the facts.

Nobody seriously disputes that a man named Jesus of Nazareth actually existed. The few that do fall into the same category as those that claim that there was no holocaust in WW2. It is really just ridiculous. There is more written about Jesus than any other individual or event in the history of mankind. If Jesus did not exist then how can we say that Julius Caesar, Napoleon, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington or anybody else for that matter ever really existed. He is mentioned by Roman Historians Suetonius in AD 49 in *Claudius*, 25,4, and by Tacitus AD 115-117 in *Annals*, XV,44, and by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus in the first century AD in *Josephus Antiquities*, XX,200. Roman historians had absolutely nothing to gain from mentioning him in their records and neither did Josephus who was a Jew.

The dispute is in whether he actually resurrected, thus proving that he was the Messiah, the Son of God.

Atheists will say that he was just a good man. Other religious groups will claim that he was just another prophet. During his ministry, Jesus performed many miracles, from healing the sick and the blind, to raising Lazarus from the dead. But miracles are not sufficient to prove that you are indeed the long awaited Messiah, many Old Testament prophets also performed great miracles such as Moses and Elijah. Performing miracles does not prove that you are the Messiah, but defeating death does. No prophet, religious leader, or any other person in history has ever predicted that he would come back from the dead, and then actually returned from the dead. None except Jesus. Let's take a look at the groups of people involved.

In Jerusalem after Jesus' death, there were three main groups that were interested in his body. They were the Sanhedrin, which were the Jewish political and religious government of Judea, the Romans, and Jesus' disciples.

After his death on the cross, Jesus was placed in a tomb that was closed off by a huge stone. Jewish tombs of that time had an entrance of 4 1/2 to 5 feet high. Modern engineers have taken the type of stone used in that time and calculated the size of the stone needed to roll against a 4 1/2 to 5 foot doorway. Their calculations estimate that a stone of those proportions would have to weigh a minimum of 1 1/2 to 2 tons. These stones were placed in front of the tomb in a slight incline and were held in place by a wedge. When the wedge was removed the stone rolled slightly forward and sealed the tomb (Evidence that Demands a Verdict). In order to enter the tomb after it had been sealed required that the stone be removed, which required a lot of effort and man power.

The Sanhedrin was aware of Jesus' claim that he would return from the grave after the third day. They definitely did not want to find an empty tomb after three days. They wanted to open the tomb up after three days and produce Jesus' body and end all the talk of Jesus being the Messiah. Since they did not believe (for the most part) that Jesus was the Messiah, their biggest fear was that Jesus' disciples would come during the night and take his body away and then claim that he had indeed resurrected. In order to prevent this, they went to the Roman Governor himself, Pontius Pilate, and asked him to place a guard detachment at the tomb so that nobody could remove Jesus' body. The Governor agreed, and a guard detachment was placed at the tomb and the Governor's seal was then put on the tomb's entrance (Matthew 27:62-66).

The penalty for anyone breaking the Governor's seal was by upside-down crucifixion. This form of death was even more gruesome than the regular crucifixion because death was caused by your internal organs eventually dislodging from their normal places and then moving towards your throat causing you extreme pain, and eventually choking you to death slowly. There would have to be an extremely good and desperate reason for someone to break the Governor's seal and risk upside-down crucifixion.

Before going on, something must be said about the Roman guards. The Romans at this point in history controlled much of the known world. Their armies were considered to be the best in the world because the Roman soldier was considered to be the best in the world. This was due mostly to excellent training and harsh discipline. The Roman guards that were placed at Jesus' tomb were probably the Governor's Custodian Guards, which were the elite of the elite in the Roman army. It would be today's equivalent of the Green Berets or Navy Seals. (Smith, RE., *Service in the Post-Marian Army* (Manchester, 1958). These were the ones that were usually chosen for special assignments such as this, but any Roman unit would have been a most formidable force, especially for men such as the disciples who were not trained in the art of war.

One of the customs in the Roman army as well as in most armies of that day, was that if you were ordered to guard a prisoner and he escaped, the penalty was death. In Acts 12:19 when Peter escapes from jail, Herod questions the guards and then has them executed. This might sound harsh, but it was just the way it was in those days. In the Roman army, the penalty of death for this offense was carried out by stripping the guard of his clothes, and then burning him alive with a fire started with his own garments (Speidel, MP., *Guards of the Roman Armies*, Bonn, 1978). This was a harsh punishment, but it produced incredible vigilance and also discouraged bribery. After all, you cannot spend bribery money if you are dead.

These guards were ordered by none other than the Governor himself, so one can deduce that these guards were highly motivated to perform their duty. They knew their lives depended on it!

Roman procedure required each Roman guard to be able to defend 6 feet of ground. Using this fact, and knowing the size of most Jewish tombs, there were probably about sixteen Roman guards assigned to guard Jesus' tomb. Sixteen very

disciplined, and very motivated Roman Custodian Guards. Roman procedure for standing guard at night was the following: with sixteen guards, four guards would stand in front of the tomb's entrance, while the other twelve would sit six to each side in front of the entrance, forming a sort of parenthesis in front of the tomb. These twelve would sleep while the four in front of the tomb would stand watch. Every hour they would rotate the guards that were in front of the entrance so that there would always be four alert guards, with all the others a few feet away in case of trouble (Speidel, MP., Roman Armies Studies 2 (Stuttgart, 1992), MAVORS 8 reviewed in JRS84 (1984).

Out of the three groups that were interested in the body of Jesus, the disciples were definitely not interested in taking his body. They were themselves skeptics. They were waiting to see if what Jesus had predicted would happen. It seems highly illogical that the Apostles would want to take his body and thus deny themselves of that certainty. The Apostle Thomas (now known as doubting Thomas) did not believe that Jesus had resurrected even after the other ten Apostles told him that they had seen the resurrected Jesus. When they told him, he said in John 20:25:

"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

A week later he got his chance.

The Romans wanted to find his body after three days and put all this behind them, they definitely did not enjoy all this talk of a Jewish King and his kingdom. To the Romans, talk of a kingdom and king sounded too much like rebellion.

A resurrection would also compromise their whole belief system of multiple gods, which in time, is exactly what happened.

The main argument against the resurrection is that the disciples took Jesus' body from the tomb. This argument is very weak to say the least. Let us review the facts.

The Bible states in Matthew 28:2-15 that the guards at the tomb felt an earthquake and saw an angel of the Lord roll back the stone. It says his appearance was like

lightning and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid, they shook and became like dead men (maybe paralyzed with fear). It then states that afterwards some of the guards went into the city and reported what had happened to the chief Jewish priests. When the priests had devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money and told them to say that Jesus' disciples came in the night while they were sleeping and stole the body. Also in return, the chief priests would talk to the Governor and keep the guards out of trouble. Remember that this is exactly what the Pharisees were trying to prevent by having guards placed at the tomb.

This argument is logically flawed from every direction. If the disciples had indeed decided to take Jesus' body for whatever irrational reason, how could they have gotten past the Roman guards. They would have had to wait until ALL the guards had fallen asleep, which because of their training and procedure for standing watch at night makes this option almost impossible. Let us suppose for arguments sake that all the guards somehow did fall asleep, I would then have to believe that the disciples quietly stepped past the guards, and moved a two ton stone without the guards waking up. This possibility is almost laughable!

A final contradiction to this argument is that if we use the excuse that all the guards did fall asleep, then how do the guards know that it was the disciples that took the body. It would stand to reason that if one of the guards had awakened and seen the disciples, he would have sounded the alarm and awakened the rest of the soldiers. You can't have it both ways.

It would have been a much better argument if the guards had been found dead. Then one could argue that the disciples had killed the guards and taken the body. But that is not what happened, all the guards were perfectly alive.

And what about the Governor's seal? Do you honestly think that a group of ordinary men would risk death at the hands of the guards, or worse, by upside-down crucifixion for breaking the Governor's seal for the sole purpose of stealing his body? For what purpose? To create a hoax?

So basically, if you do not believe that Jesus resurrected, you are left with the choice that sixteen Roman Custodian Guards placed personally by the Governor under a penalty of death for failure to carry out their duty, all fell asleep, and did

not wake up as the Apostles moved a two ton stone, or did wake up to see them, but did nothing to stop them. I personally find these options extremely hard to believe, if not just plain insulting to one's intelligence.

But there is still one more piece of evidence that is even more convincing than what has already been presented. This is the Apostles themselves. Not in what they said or wrote, but in what they did.

The Bible tells us that in a period of forty days, Jesus appeared to his apostles together and individually nine times. The lives of the Apostles has been documented by Roman and Christian historians. Nobody disputes their evangelistic journeys. You can still go to Rome and see where Paul was imprisoned and later beheaded.

The proof of the resurrection is in the lives of the Apostles. It is in how they lived and in how they were treated. I use to ask myself, "Why didn't God help the Apostles during their journeys?" They went through such hardships. All of them were beaten, tortured, imprisoned, and all except John were brutally killed. Let us take a quick review of some of their lives starting first with Paul.

Paul is probably the most powerful witness to the resurrection of Christ. One must carefully analyze the steps that he took after that fateful day on the road to Damascus. You MUST ask yourself WHY? Why what, you might say?

WHY would someone who was openly against the followers of Jesus Christ to the point of standing by and condoning the stoning of another human being (Stephen), someone who as a Pharisee held an esteemed position among his people, WHY would this person suddenly want to be one of those people that he was persecuting, knowing that because of his choice to follow Jesus he would be considered an outcast by his family, friends and the community. That his choice would be socially and economically devastating.

Imagine if that happened to you today. You must ask yourself, What would it take for me to be willing to give up my family, all my friends and my livelihood?

Let me put it in an easier way to understand. If you were at a criminal trial in which

a defendant was accused of murder and the defense attorney came up to you and said that the defendant was not guilty, would that convince you? Of course not, defense attorneys are supposed to say that, that is their job. But what if the defense attorney came up to you and said that his client was really guilty, would that convince you? It would me, the reason is because the defense attorney has nothing at all to gain by saying this. On the contrary, he has everything to lose by saying this. This is why it is so believable. And this is the same reason Paul's testimony is so powerful. Paul had everything to lose and nothing to gain (except salvation) by suddenly switching sides. Do you have any alternate suggestions as to why Paul did what he did? I have none. Let us now take a look at some events in Paul's and the other Apostle's lives.

(1Corinthians 4:11-13) Paul - To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clad and roughly treated, we wander about homeless and we toil, working with our hands. When ridiculed, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we respond gently. We have become like the world's rubbish, the scum of all, to this very moment.

Paul was whipped at least five times, beaten countless times (2 Corinthians 11:23), imprisoned at least twice for years (2 Corinthians 6:4), left for dead after being stoned (Acts 14:19), and finally beheaded during the persecution under Emperor Nero.

Peter was also martyred during Nero's persecution. He was crucified upside down at his request, because they were going to crucify him the same way as Jesus, and he did not feel he was worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

Andrew went to the "land of the man eaters," in what was formally known as the Soviet Union. Christians claim him as the first to bring the gospel to their land. He also preached in modern-day Turkey, and in Greece, where he is said to have been crucified.

Thomas was most active in the area east of Syria. Tradition has him preaching as far east as India where the ancient Marthoma Christians revere him as their founder. They claim that he died there when he was pierced through with the spears of four soldiers.

Philip had a powerful ministry in Carthage in North Africa and then in Asia Minor, where he converted the wife of a Roman proconsul. In retaliation the proconsul had Philip arrested and cruelly put to death.

Matthew the tax collector and writer of a gospel, ministered in Persia and Ethiopia. Reports say that he was stabbed to death in Ethiopia.

Bartholomew had widespread missionary travels attributed to him by tradition: to India with Thomas, back to Armenia, and also to Ethiopia and Southern Arabia. There are various accounts of how he met his death as a martyr for the gospel.

James the son of Alpheus is one of at least three Jameses referred to in the New Testament. There is some confusion as to which, but this James is reckoned to have ministered in Syria. The Jewish historian Josephus reported that he was stoned and then clubbed to death.

Simon the Zealot, ministered in Persia and was killed after refusing to sacrifice to the sun god.

Matthias was the apostle chosen to replace Judas. Tradition sends him to Syria with Andrew and to death by burning (Christian History Institute, Whatever Happened to the Twelve? Glimpses Issue #8).

It stands to reason that if the Apostles had stolen Jesus' body from the tomb, then they would surely have known that he had not resurrected. Why then would they go through years of incredible hardship for? Because they enjoyed getting a beating or being imprisoned? Do you think they would have done it for a lie? Would you (as Paul did) be ostracized by everyone you know and love, and then go into towns for about thirty years, getting whipped, tortured, stoned, and imprisoned every time you preached the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ if you knew it was a lie?

Would you, like Peter watch your wife be killed and then request to be crucified upside-down because you did not feel worthy to die in the same manner as Jesus, if you knew that he had not really resurrected and thus was not truly the Messiah? Of course not!

I cannot think of any reason why these men did what they did unless what they claim is true, that Jesus Christ after his death appeared to them. Would you go through what they went through if you knew it wasn't true? I for one would not! If I went into a town knowing that Jesus Christ had not resurrected and said to the people, "Jesus of Nazareth has resurrected," and someone put me to the whip, you can bet your life that I would never say that again.

The reason that the Apostles lived such a hard life, and died such gruesome deaths is because they had to. It was part of God's plan. This is the indisputable proof that God left for future generations. You see, if the Apostles had walked into towns and people had welcomed them in, fed them, given them money, and treated them as important and distinguished people, then people in the future would look back and say that they did it for their own selfish reasons, because it was a good way of life.

God designed it so that the Apostles would live the kind of lives that they for our benefit, in order for us to have proof of the resurrection in the years to come. There was absolutely no human reward for what they did. There is no logical explanation of how you could get these men to do what they did for so many years unless they had really seen the risen Jesus. Think about it, what would it take to get you to do what they did? I certainly would not do it for a lie! Can you think of another reason why they did what they did? I have tried, and I have come up with zero. As a matter of fact, nobody that I have ever asked this question to has been able to come up with a plausible explanation.

This is the beauty of God's plan, a natural act proves a supernatural act. Have you ever wondered why Jesus appeared to only a few men? Why didn't he just appear to all of Jerusalem and end the argument once and for all? There are two reasons why.

First, if had appeared to everyone in Jerusalem, then everyone in Jerusalem would have believed in him as the Messiah. Their proof would have been their own eyes. The Apostles would not have been necessary, anyone could have spread the news to other Jews living outside of Jerusalem. This would have eliminated the proof for future generations that we mentioned above, the lives of the Apostles.

Now as soon as a few generations pass and there are no more people left alive who actually witnessed the supernatural event of Jesus' resurrection, people will start to

question it. They will say, "Can you prove it really happened?" Or, they will say that it is just a myth like the Greek myths of old. It is basically impossible to prove a supernatural act in itself. Can you prove the Red Sea actually parted? Unfortunately no. This is what would have happened had Jesus appeared to all of Jerusalem. It would eventually have become a myth with no concrete proof that it actually happened. In order to believe it people would have to have blind faith, which is a very weak faith.

The second reason is that if Jesus would have appeared to all of Jerusalem, then all the Jews would have become Christians. Judaism would have evolved into Christianity. Christianity would therefore have been a Hebrew religion. The world would never have accepted a Hebrew religion as their own. If the world had never accepted Judaism why would they have accepted Christianity?

By the Hebrews rejecting Jesus and Christianity, it made Christianity a non nationalistic religion. It was not considered a Hebrew religion so it became acceptable to the world at large.

These are the reasons why the Apostles had to live such harsh lives, it was necessary for us and for all future generations. This proof has no time limit. It is plain to see today as it will be plain to see in 50,000 years. God's plan is truly perfect. Everything has been worked out to the smallest detail.

Conclusion: God through the prophets, the Apostles, history, and logic, testify to the fact that God resurrected Jesus Christ. Christianity is based on faith, but a faith that is based on hard evidence. The Bible itself is full of fulfilled prophecies, and prophecies that God will fulfill in the future. This is where faith comes in. We know that God is true because of what he has shown us, therefore we believe (have faith) in his promises for the future.

Jesus Christ did resurrect from the dead, and the secular evidence agrees with this fact. And if Jesus resurrected from the dead, then so will his followers. See you at the resurrection!

If you have any questions or comments please feel free to contact us at: 767juan@compuserve.com