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The Empty Tomb ... was it a hoax?

**The fact was undisputed - even to the Jewish authorities:
The tomb was empty. The body of Jesus had disappeared!**
by James McBride

Since the hour of the discovery of the 'missing' body of Jesus, much has been penned to explain - or to explain away - this startling discovery.

That Sunday morning, at first light, the rock tomb in which Jesus of Nazareth had been laid after his crucifixion was bare and empty. Indeed it had lain empty all night. Within hours of the first report by the women, the guards had roused from their coma and staggered into Jerusalem bearing a weird tale of an earth tremor followed by a blinding light. And, after they recovered, they said Jesus' body was gone. The authorities disputed the story. But it was true - the tomb was really empty.

How could it be possible? Was Jesus spirited away by some cunningly contrived human plot? Were the disciples hallucinating? Had Jesus merely swooned? What really did take place?

Too Many Questions

The Jewish authorities admitted the fact that Jesus had gone - and they "knew" the answer: the body had been stolen by the disciples. They had pierced the almost impenetrable defense set to forestall this very act.

Thus were doubts smoothed away and conscience eased! Such explanations were widespread even a century later in the time of Justin Martyr. Later still, Tertullian reported the account extant in his time: The gardener had stolen the body to protect his lettuce!

More seriously, in modern times a variety of ideas has circulated among scholars. For family reasons, Joseph of Arimathea buried the body elsewhere without telling anyone (Holtzmann). The women, in the darkness, went to the wrong tomb (Lake). It was all a clever invention by the disciples (Reimarus). Jesus had swooned on the cross,

recovering later in the coolness of the tomb (Venturini, Schleiermacher). The Gospel story was a myth (Arthur Drew: The Christ Myth). Or the resurrection appearances were merely visions: There had been no resurrection (S.V.McCasland).

Of course, all such attempts to explain away the Bible record are designed to eliminate the miraculous. The aim - to negate the intervention of a divine Creator. Yet, aside from this, they fail to account for the facts as recorded by eye-witnesses.

These facts pose too many questions. Who moved the stone? When? How? What about the missing body? And the wraps? And the guards? Why the strange reaction of the disciples in the tomb? What then, is the answer?

Let's look at one convincing proof that Jesus did rise and was not spirited away by the machinations of any group of men, no matter how determined. Here's proof that the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah was real.

The Impossible Answer

First reports of the disappearance of the body of Jesus were very skeptically received by the disciples, who discounted them as "idle tales." Even though they had heard Jesus tell them time and time again that He would rise from the dead, none of them were convinced. So how can we account for the dramatic turnaround in attitude evoked by what they saw inside the dim tomb?

One Bible account reads, "Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first went in, too, and he saw and believed." Seconds before he deemed the idea preposterous! What was the convincing proof? Could a mere empty tomb work such an instantaneous, such a profound, intellectual somersault? An empty tomb proves

The Empty Tomb

little. John had witnessed a phenomenon that convinced him of the impossible.

There had been a resurrection!

This was no physical resurrection such as John had witnessed when Lazarus had stumbled from the tomb bound hand and foot in his grave clothes. This resurrection was different, unique.

John's first glimpse of the shadowy sepulchre through a narrow slit of a window seemed to confirm that the women bore a wild and nonsensical tale. The body appeared undisturbed. John saw the faint whiteness of the wrapped body gleam against the blackness of the rock wall. But, when he went inside and had a close look, he believed. Why? What had disturbed his scepticism? What startling proof of a resurrection did he now have?

The evidence rests in the appearance of the clothes in which Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had wrapped Jesus' body. The custom of the time was to wrap the body from neck to toe in a long "bandage" and with many pounds of blended spices. The head was separately wrapped, leaving visible the face.

(Incidentally, this negates the notion of the one-piece "Turin Shroud" as the burial cloth of Jesus. The long-cherished fiction has been disproved by scientific testing.)

Gone!

Picture then what John saw as he stood by the body.

On the bench hewn from the living rock lay the grave clothes, as if Jesus' body were still within. In a depression in the rock lay, separately, the head napkin. But...the body was not there! The grave clothes were empty.

If, somehow, Jesus had recovered, where were the tangled yards of linen evidence? If somehow, the disciples had stolen past or bribed, the guards, would they have stopped to unwrap, then rearrange, the wraps? Could they?

The bandages were not in disarray. Nor had they been removed. We are left with the rather uncomfortable fact that Jesus' human flesh had been transformed as spirit - and had passed through the wraps as easily as he later passed through a solid door. *He had risen!*

This was no human plot. The infinite power of the Almighty Creator had worked a miraculous change and released His Son from the bands of death forever. Jesus was - *and is* - alive!

Challenge

The proof convinced those men and women of the first century. Jesus was with them on numerous occasions in the six weeks following that memorable morning. When the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians some twenty years later, he cited the living testimony of almost five hundred witnesses of the greatest miracle ever to shake our world. The resurrection was the central teaching of the New Testament Church of God, and upon it is based the enduring religion of Christ.

The record of that momentous event remains preserved for 21st century man in the Holy Bible. And the fact of the resurrection remains as much a challenge to us as to those men in the cold sepulchre some nineteen centuries ago.

It's a challenge none of us can afford to ignore.

It irrefutably proves Jesus is alive, that God is alive, real. It is evidence that He intervenes in human affairs. It affirms His intense and loving concern for every human on this planet. It testifies to the happy knowledge that we are not alone in this universe, that our Creator will not allow His creation to drift to utter destruction.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an uncompromising challenge to each of us. It is a challenge to you to search out His plan for your own life!

Since God raised Jesus Christ from cold death and transformed him from flesh to spirit - *then you must face what that means for you.*

Since Jesus Christ was without doubt raised from the dead, then God exists. There is life after life. And that means you must respond to Him - *for He holds you accountable.*

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