

November 6, 2005 by Steve Brandon



Denying the Resurrection

Matthew 28:11-15

- 1. Some say that His body was stolen (Matt. 28:11-15).**
- 2. Some say that He didn't die upon the cross.**
- 3. Some say that His body was in another tomb.**
- 4. Some say that He resurrected in the minds of the disciples.**

I want to begin this morning by reading to you a lengthy quote from Philip Schaff, one of the most renowned Church historians. He wrote, ...

The resurrection of Christ from the dead is reported by the four Gospels, taught in the Epistles, believed throughout Christendom, and celebrated on every "Lord's Day," as an historical fact, as the crowning miracle and divine seal of his whole work, as the foundation of the hopes of believers, as the pledge of their own future resurrection. It is represented in the New Testament both as an act of the Almighty Father who raised his Son from the dead, and as an act of Christ himself, who had the power to lay down his life and to take it again. The ascension was the proper conclusion of the resurrection: the risen life of our Lord, who is "The Resurrection and the Life," could not end in another death on earth, but must continue in eternal glory in heaven. Hence St. Paul says, "Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that he died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God" (Rom. 6:9-10).

The Christian church rests on the resurrection of its Founder. Without this fact the church could never have been born, or if born, it would soon have died a natural death. The miracle of the resurrection and the existence of Christianity are so closely connected that they must stand or fall together. If Christ was raised from the dead, then all his other miracles are sure, and our faith is impregnable; if he was not raised, he died in vain, and our faith is vain. It was only his resurrection that made his death available for our atonement, justification and salvation; without the resurrection, his death would be the grave of our hopes; we should be still unredeemed and under the power of our sins. A gospel of a dead Saviour would be a contradiction and wretched delusion. This is the reasoning of St. Paul, and its force is irresistible (1 Cor. 15:13-19).

The resurrection of Christ is therefore emphatically a test question upon which depends the truth or falsehood of the Christian religion. It is either the greatest miracle or the greatest delusion which history records. [\[1\]](#)

Josh McDowell makes a similar conclusion after extensive study on the subject. He said, "After more than 700 hours of studying this subject, and thoroughly investigating its foundation, I have come to the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the *"most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever foisted upon the minds of men,"* or it is the most fantastic fact of history." [\[2\]](#)

Regarding the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there is no gray area. Either Jesus Christ rose from the dead and it is the greatest fact of all time! Or, Jesus Christ didn't rise from the dead, and its legend has become the greatest fable of all time. It is either history, or it is a hoax! It is either fact, or it is fiction.

Ever since the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, there have been those who have refused to believe that Jesus actually rose from the dead. They don't want to believe. And so, they don't believe. "Dead people don't rise from the dead," they say. "Certainly, Jesus didn't rise from the dead either." Many times, people aren't even willing to think about the evidence. There are also people who have thought about the evidence and have refused to believe it, often inventing many theories to justify their unbelief. Some say that His body was stolen. Some say that He didn't die upon the cross. Some say that His body was in another tomb. Some say that He resurrected in the minds of the disciples. Some say that he was resurrected only as a spirit. Some say that the resurrection is a myth or fairytale. All of these theories are merely efforts to suppress the truth (Rom. 1:18).

In my message this morning, I want to show you how every theory ever invented to explain away the resurrection has very serious deficiencies if the Bible is to be taken at face value. To refute these theories, you don't even have to believe that the Bible is inerrant. You simply need to believe that the Bible is an historically reliable document. As it turns out, this is a fair assumption. We have far more physical evidence to the historicity of the Bible than we have for any other ancient manuscript. Each one of these theories has to deny the truthfulness of the Bible in many places. But, none of them do an adequate job of explaining the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

My aim this morning is to take you to the cross-roads on the resurrection and to show you that the best explanation is that Jesus rose bodily from the dead. I'm doing this because our text puts forth in clear terms one of the invented theories for denying the resurrection of Christ. I'm going to spend quite a bit more time on the first theory, as it comes straight from the pages of the Bible.

- 1. Some say that His body was stolen (Matt. 28:11-15).**

This was the very first theory invented to deny the resurrection. We read about it in the Bible. If you haven't done so already, I invite you to open your Bibles to the end of the book of Matthew. Though our text this morning will be in chapter 28, verses 11-15, it will do us well to pick up the entire context of the story by beginning back in Matthew 27, with verse 62.

Matthew 27:62-28:15

Now on the next day, which is the one after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.' "Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, lest the disciples come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.

Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his garment as white as snow; and the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. And the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. 'He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying.' And go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going before you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you."

And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they shall see Me."

Now while they were on their way, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. And when they had assembled with the elders and counseled together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' "And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble." And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day.

a) The report (verse 11).

In verse 11, we see the time-frame for these events. They took place "while they were on their way." With these words, Matthew is referring to the women, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, who had seen and worshiped the resurrected Jesus. They were on their way to tell the disciples to head up for Galilee, where they were to see the resurrected Christ. And while these women were on their way to speak with the disciples, another group of people were on their way to report what they had seen and heard to the high priests. It was "some of the guard" who came to report to the high priest. We read in Matthew 27 about why these guards were at the tomb in the first place. The Jews were troubled about the events of the death of Jesus. They had thought through a scenario that gave them great fear. They feared that the disciples of Jesus might pull off a fake resurrection. They told Pilate (in verse 64), "Give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, lest the disciples come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate told them, "You have a guard; go make it as secure as you know how" (verse 65).

There is some uncertainty as to who made up this "guard." They may have been Jewish policemen who normally guarded the grounds of the temple under the oversight of the chief priests. They may have been Roman soldiers, who regularly sought peace among the Jewish people. There is some uncertainty as well in terms of the number of guards that were at the tomb. Based upon ancient history and the word here used to describe the "guard," some say that there may have been up to 16 soldiers were sent to guard the tomb. From the biblical account, we know that there were at least three. We read in verse 11 that "some of the guard" came to report the facts of what they had seen. "Some of the guard" is at least two, possibly more. And "some of the guard" is not "all of the guard." Which means that there were one or more soldiers still stationed at the tomb. And so, we have at least three soldiers, probably more, guarding the tomb on the morning of the resurrection of Jesus. They were stationed at the tomb with the specific goal of preventing the disciples from coming and stealing the body away. They had failed in their task.

And now, they had to report it to the chief priests, who certainly wouldn't be happy. I'm sure that as these soldiers presented their case to the chief priests, they were as honest as they could be, trying to explain what happened. Their explanation might sound something like this:

Sirs, we know that you gave us only one assignment: to guard the tomb of a dead man. You certainly gave us enough men to guard the tomb under normal circumstances. But this was far from normal circumstances! For the most part, all was quiet. During the Sabbath, not a soul came near the tomb. And then, just as our watch was ending, there was a severe earthquake, which grabbed all of our attention. Soon, we saw a bright light come from the heavens and descend upon the tomb (28:2). None of us have ever claimed to have seen an angel before, but this must have been an angel! He was clothed in brilliant, flashing white (28:3). He came down and began to roll the stone away (28:2). And then, he sat right upon the stone, as if to declare victory (28:2). I know that we are soldiers, trained to fight, but this was different! We have never seen such a creature before. We didn't know what to do. Almost immediately, some women came to the tomb, carrying spices and the angel spoke to her, saying, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying" (28:6-7). These women looked in the tomb to see what was inside. The look on their face was unforgettable! They seemed a bit stunned. They seemed happy, and yet, very much confused and afraid. And then, they turned to run away. When they left, so did the angel. After a few seconds, we simply looked at each other and walked over to the tomb to see what was inside. The body was gone! We didn't know what to do. We left some of our squadron at the tomb, and we came to tell you what we

saw and experienced. What I have told you is the testimony of all of us. What shall we do?

What shall we do? Indeed, that was the question. And so, we see the chief priests convening a counsel, which comes in verse 12.

b) The counsel (verse 12).

This counsel would have been similar to that which gathered a few nights before when they sought to find Jesus guilty so as to put Him to death. It was crisis time for the council. Their worst nightmare had come true. They knew that Jesus said, "After three days I am to rise again." (This is what they quoted to Herod in Matthew 27:63). They tried to prevent any possibility of this taking place, by assigning a guard over the tomb. But now, the tomb was empty. They had heard the testimony of the soldiers. Upon cross examination, they would have found the story to be completely verified by all of the soldiers who were at the tomb. They knew that there was no reason for these soldiers to lie about these things that they had seen. All the facts had lined up. The earthquake had been felt in the city, which was only a few hundred yards from the tomb. There were eyewitness reports of having seen a bright light descend from heaven upon the cemetery. They had to act fast. The best that they could come up with would be a bribe. And so, "they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers" and told them to tell a lie, which comes in verse 13.

c) The lie (verse 13).

The soldiers were instructed to say, "The disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep" (verse 13). It must have been a lot of money given to these soldiers to have given in to such an excuse. Soldiers are paid to keep their post. Soldiers are trained to keep their post. Soldiers are trained to rotate their watch throughout the night. The chances of them falling asleep are very slim. Besides this, the difficulty of performing such a task of stealing the body would have been incredible!

These guards were given one task to perform: protect the body of Jesus from thieves. As in all security situations, if the security task is a narrow task, the job is easy. Should the security task be large, it would be more difficult. For instance, protecting our country against terrorism is practically impossible, because the enemy may attack from all sides. However, to guard a single door, which is approximately four feet high by a few feet wide in a secluded area is a simple task to perform.

For the disciples to have even dared to come near the tomb while these soldiers guarded it would have been an act of bravery in and of itself! But, bravery was not among the characteristics of the disciples. When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, "all the disciples left Him and fled" (Matt. 26:56). The apostle John tells us in His gospel that these disciples were hiding away in a room with the door shut, "for fear of the Jews" (John 20:19). They weren't about to show themselves in public, much less near the tomb of Jesus which was surrounded by guards.

Now, suppose that they did come and did find them asleep. The stone that was rolled in front of the tomb was very large. It would have been about five feet in diameter and a foot or two thick, weighing in at more than 1,000 pounds! You don't just roll a stone of that size without causing a minor earthquake. The noise of stone on stone, or the tremors caused in the ground would have been sufficient for the soldiers to have been awakened.

And then, think about carrying the body out of the tomb. The body of Jesus would have easily weighed 250-300 pounds by the time you include the weight of the spices that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea initially applied to His body (John 19:39). You don't just carry something that heavy without making any noise. Yesterday, there were more than 30 of us who showed up to help the Guske's who were moving. When some of the larger things were carried by the men, do you know what they did? They grunted. They strained. They set it down. They bumped into the wall. Carrying heavy things is no easy task. And so, carrying the body of Jesus out of the small entrance of the tomb would have made sufficient noise to awaken these soldiers.

Furthermore, the grave clothes were left behind in the tomb (John 20:7). If the disciples had sought to carry away the body in secret, they wouldn't have neatly folded up the linen wrappings. They would have taken the body to another location, where they might unwrap the body.

On top of that you need to consider the character of the disciples. Throughout the entire New Testament, their testimony is that they were honest and honorable men. To have stolen away the body of Jesus and kept it secret for all of their days would have been entirely contrary to the teaching of their master. Jesus told His disciples to speak the truth. "Let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; and anything beyond these is of evil" (Matthew 5:37). The testimony of all the disciples is that they were upright and righteous men. The same is true of the early church. Unbelievers in Jerusalem "held them in high esteem" (Acts 5:13). They simply weren't the type to deceive the governmental authorities like this.

This lie would be a tough one to sell. And yet, it was the best that the counsel could come up with their limited time to think about it. It would have been very difficult for the soldiers to propagate this lie. Not only would they need the "large sum of money" as noted in verse 12, but they also needed assurance from the high priests that such a plan would indeed work. This comes in verse 14.

d) The assurance (verse 14).

The high priests told these soldiers, "And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble." The soldiers knew that the high priests were pretty influential people. They had some assurance that such a promise could be kept. Certainly, at some point, Pilate must have found out about what took place. It would be almost impossible for the Romans not to notice the numbers of followers of Christ arising in his own city. Fifty days after these things, three thousand people were converted and began to roam the streets of Jerusalem (Acts 2:41). And a short time later, several more thousand came to faith in Christ (Acts 4:4). From the perspective of the religious leaders, the apostles, "have filled Jerusalem with [their] teaching" (Acts 5:28). The political turmoil that came about as a result of these things was intense! When Peter and John preached, the temple was buzzing with activity and chaos. The Sadducees felt threatened and imprisoned Peter and John (Acts 4:2).

Though the Jews had a measure of independence from the Romans, they took note when there was trouble. The Roman guards kept constant surveillance over the temple complex from their high towers in the Antonia Fortress. For they had a great desire that the Jewish people be at peace with themselves. The Romans were poised and ready to come in and establish peace at any time. Certainly, Pilate knew and heard about this trouble that was brewing. How he responded is unknown to us. I suspect that the chief priests "won him over" just as they promised (verse 14).

e) The plan worked (verse 15).

The result of everything was that the plan worked. This we see in verse 15. The soldiers "took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day." Most evangelical scholars date Matthew's gospel some 30 years after Jesus rose from the dead. And so, this theory propagated for many years after the fact. A hundred years later, Justin Martyr, who was born about 100 A. D., made mention that this theory was still circulating during his time. ^[3] And yet, I trust, as I have demonstrated, you might clearly see how this theory doesn't hold much weight. It has many difficulties.

Those who say that His body was stolen (Matt. 28:11-15) have a difficult time fitting such a theory into the facts surrounding the resurrection. The disciples weren't brave enough to try such a feat. The noise that they would have generated in opening the tomb and carrying the body would have easily awakened the guards, if indeed, the guards were sleeping. The disciples wouldn't have left the grave clothes in the grave. The character of the disciples doesn't match with such an underground plot. I would go so far as to say that it's impossible for the disciples to have stolen the body of Jesus Christ!

Let's turn our focus now to another theory that those who deny the resurrection attempt to put forth to explain what happened on that Easter morning.

2. Some say that He didn't die.

This theory holds that Jesus merely "fainted" upon the cross. He didn't really die. He just looked like He was dead. But, just think about what Jesus experienced. Before Jesus was placed upon the cross, He was whipped and scourged and beaten by a Roman cohort (Matt. 27:26-31). He had a crown of thorns pressed painfully upon His head. So badly was He beaten that He wasn't strong enough to carry His own cross to the place of the crucifixion (Luke 23:26). When crucified, Jesus had iron nails driven into His hands and His feet, upon which He hung for six hours, losing much blood. He certainly became dehydrated, and at one point requested something to drink (John 19:28). Because the day of preparation was almost at hand, the Jews asked Pilate for the legs to be broken, lest the three criminals remain upon the cross during the holiday. But, those crucifying Him, "saw that He was already dead" (John 19:33). Just to make sure that He was dead, "one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water," which is a clear sign of death (John 19:34). The executioners, who had seen many deaths before, were all agreed that Jesus was dead and willingly handed His body over to His friends (John 19:38-42). And then, Jesus had 100 pounds of gummy spices attached to His body, while being wrapped with some linen sheets. These sheets would have wrapped completely around His head, face, and mouth, making it nearly impossible for Him to breathe. He then would have been placed upon a cold, stone slab in a dark tomb which was closed by a 1,500 pound stone. A seal would have been placed upon the stone on the outside, which would have to be broken before the stone was rolled away. Outside, there were soldiers standing guard.

The theory that says that Jesus didn't really die would have you believe that the incredible suffering He endured wasn't enough to kill Him. You would have to believe that even after crucifixion, Jesus retained enough bodily fluids to live. You would have to believe that He was able to breathe through the wrappings around His body. You would have to believe that the cold stone upon which He was placed helped Him to resuscitate. You would have to believe that He was able to free Himself from the linen wrappings and burial spices. You would have to believe that He was strong enough to roll away the rolling stone from inside, where it was impossible to get any leverage. You would have to believe that the soldiers outside the tomb didn't notice that the stone had been rolled away and that Jesus was able to make a sneaky exit. Furthermore, you would have to believe that Jesus recovered enough to give His disciples great hope in the power and reality of the resurrection. The disciples went from seeing Jesus risen from the dead to proclaiming the power of the resurrection to all who would listen. A weak, sickly, feeble man would not have turned them so!

3. Some say that His body was in another tomb.

Those who believe this would have us believe that the women were so distressed that they couldn't find their way back to the correct tomb. They claim that there were many tombs around Jerusalem during the time of Christ, which is true. But, as each of them would have been hewn in the rock, they all would have had their own distinctive look and feel which would be easily recognizable.

A few weeks ago, we saw how Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were "sitting opposite" the grave (Matt. 27:61). Surely, they knew where Jesus was laid to rest. When the angel told them to "See the place where He was lying" (Matt. 28:6), they would have noticed whether or not it was the same location. But, think with me a moment about what it would take for this theory to be true. The women went to the wrong tomb. Peter and John ran to the wrong tomb. The soldiers were guarding the wrong tomb for several days. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus went to the wrong tomb. The entire Jewish counsel went to the wrong tomb. The Romans went to the wrong tomb. The angel appeared at the wrong tomb. To believe this theory, you need to believe that the whole world went to the wrong tomb!

All it would have taken to stop the propagation of Christianity was for one person to go to the right tomb and produce the body of Jesus. Someone could have even gone to the right tomb several weeks or months later, only to discover a body that shouldn't have been there. They would have alerted the cemetery authorities and the matter would have been straightened out! But, nobody ever claimed to have found the body of Jesus.

Such a theory is difficult to believe. In fact, I would say that it takes more faith to believe that everyone went to the wrong tomb than it does to

believe that Jesus raised from the dead. They went to the right tomb.

4. Some say that He resurrected only in the minds of the disciples.

Perhaps you are familiar with the cartoon, Calvin and Hobbes. Calvin is a creatively imaginative little boy with a stuffed tiger named Hobbes. When nobody is around, Hobbes comes to life. And he becomes Calvin's playmate. However, when others are around Hobbes is shown for who he really is, a stuffed tiger toy. When people say that Jesus resurrected only in the minds of the disciples, they have a similar idea. They say that Jesus didn't rise from the dead, but the psychological state of the disciples of Jesus was such that they only believed that Jesus rose from the dead, when, in fact He didn't. And so, all of the appearances of Jesus are understood as the fruit of their imagination.

Such a theory really picked up steam in the 1800's in Europe. One of the reasons why it was so popular is that those who didn't believe in the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus could still sound like they believed in the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus. In other words, when they were asked, "Do you believe that Jesus rose again from the dead?" They could say, "Absolutely." Such an affirmation would satisfy many doctrinal statements and churches. "Our pastor (or our professor believes in the resurrection of Christ!" What they don't have to tell their churches or their schools is what they mean when they say that they believe in the resurrection from the dead. Should they explain what they mean, they would explain it this way. "I believe that that the disciples believed that Jesus raised from the dead. Since the disciples believe that Jesus raised from the dead, for them, He did rise from the dead, if only in their head. And thus, I can affirm that Jesus rose from the dead, because He rose from the dead in the minds of the disciples." But, should you ask these people, "Do you believe that Jesus rose again bodily from the dead?" They would say, "No. I don't believe that."

This is the doctrine of many liberals in the church today. They are called, "Neo-evangelicals." They are "evangelical" in the sense that they can affirm the old evangelical creeds. They are "Neo" or "new" in the sense that they have an entirely different (and new) approach to these doctrines. They appear to affirm the historical doctrines of the faith, when in reality they deny them.

This is illustrated in William Barclay's autobiography. His commentaries are widely used by many evangelicals, as he has some excellent insights into the history of the days when Jesus lives. Furthermore, many of the doctrines that he expounds sound very good. But, in reading his autobiography, I remember how he exposed his true beliefs, as a neo-evangelical would do. He said, "I had always had difficulty in repeating the Apostles' Creed for there are items in it which I could not hold" (i.e. like "I believe in the resurrection from the dead."). But, Barclay continues that a big breakthrough came when he realized that in the original introduction to the Apostles' Creed, the wording was not "I believe," but "*We* believe." Thus, he reasoned, "When I am reciting the Creed, I am not claiming that all this is without exception *my* personal belief; but I am stating that it is the *Church's* belief, and this of course I can do." [\[4\]](#)

Regarding this theory that Jesus only raised from the dead in the minds of the disciples is so clearly against the clear testimony of Scripture that it hardly needs to be refuted. The Scripture speaks about Jesus returning in bodily form to see and experience. He talked with His disciples. He ate with them. He let them feel Him and touch Him, to make sure that He was real. It wasn't merely in their minds that he appeared. He was really there.

We have covered a couple theories that have been put forth to explain away the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are several other theories that we might discuss, had we the time. Some say that He resurrected only as a spirit, sort of a ghost. Some say that the resurrection account is entirely fiction, added on years after Jesus died. It was so long ago, that none could refute it, because all eye witnesses were gone. Some say that the body of Jesus was discarded from the cross and thrown into a pit, along with other executed victims. They claim a body was never produced because the body was impossible to identify.

Everything we believe in is at stake in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Consequently, theories about what took place on that Easter morning will continue to go on and on. When you take the account recorded for us in the Bible at face value, there is only one conclusion that you can come to. Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead! This is the only theory that can take into account the entire transformation of the disciples from fearful men to bold witnesses. To believe that the body was stolen wouldn't have given such boldness to the ones who stole the body. To believe that Jesus didn't actually die upon the cross would not have persuaded the disciples of an unbelievable future hope. To believe that they got the wrong tomb would never have resolved their doubts. To believe that Jesus only resurrected in their minds doesn't help either. Deep down, they would have known that they were deluded. They wouldn't have been willing to die for their faith. The physical bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the only plausible theory that you can derive from the facts.

Let me tell you the story of Frank Morison. "Frank Morison" was the pen name of Albert Henry Ross, who lived from 1881-1950. He was a journalist, who set out to write a book about the life of Christ. Mr. Ross had always been fascinated by the story of Jesus. He wasn't a Christian. He had been amazed at how composed Jesus was, while being so cruelly beaten. And so, he set out to figure out what it was in Jesus that allowed Him to act this way. He said that he wanted to "come at the truth of why this man died a cruel death at the hands of the Roman power, how He Himself regarded the matter, and especially how He behaved under the test." And so, Albert Ross picked up his Bible and began studying the account of the life of Jesus. As he researched into the Biblical accounts, he found that his interpretation of the life of Christ underwent a change. He said, "not suddenly, as in a flash of insight or inspiration, but slowly, almost imperceptibly, by the very stubbornness of the facts themselves." The book that Albert Henry Ross has set out to write simply couldn't be written. Instead, he wrote a book entitled, "Who Moved the Stone?" His very first chapter was entitled, "The Book That Refused to Be Written." Though he tried to write a book about a good, moral man, the facts prohibited him from doing so. In his first chapter, he wrote, "It was as though a man set out to cross a forest by a familiar and well-beaten track and came out suddenly where he did not expect to come out. The point of entry was the same; it was the point of emergence that was different" (p. 9). By the end of the book, he confesses his faith in the veracity of the resurrection of Christ. He wrote,

"Personally, I am convinced that no body of men or women could persistently and successfully have preached in Jerusalem a doctrine involving the vacancy of that tomb, without the grave itself being physically vacant. The facts were too

recent; the tomb too close to that seething center of oriental life. Not all the make-believe in the world could have purchased the utter silence of antiquity or given to the records their impressive unanimity. Only the truth itself, in all its unavoidable simplicity, could have achieved that" (p. 176). ^[5]

The facts of the resurrection speak for themselves. The facts come from the Bible. This is why there is a great battle that wages on the inspiration of the Scriptures. Those who believe that the resurrection didn't take place will deny the Scripture to justify their own theories. But please realize that though they pick and choose which Scriptures they want to keep, their theories are still filled with contradiction and cannot explain the facts. This is no way to explain Christianity apart from the resurrection. But, arguments, sermons, logic, and explanations will never satisfy those who refuse to believe.

A great illustration of this is seen in Luke 16:19-31. In this passage of Scripture, Jesus tells the story of two men. One was a rich man, who lived in luxuring, ignoring the things of God. The other man was a poor beggar, named Lazarus. Lazarus longed to enjoy the delicacies of the rich man, but never had the opportunity. Finally, they both died and found the tables turned. Lazarus was in a comfortable place called "Abraham's bosom." The rich man, on the other hand, found himself suffering pain and torment in a place filled with flames. When he discovered that it was impossible for him to ever exit the place, he pleaded with Abraham, ...

Luke 16:27-31

"I beg you, Father, that you send him to my father's house--for I have five brothers--that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment." But Abraham said, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." But he said, 'No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' But he said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead."

It is normally said that "misery loves company." In this instance, the misery was so bad that this rich man wanted to insure that his brothers wouldn't share in his sufferings! He thought that surely if his brothers witnessed someone rising from the dead, they would certainly repent and avoid the place of suffering in which he had found himself. And yet, Abraham told him that the Scriptures gave adequate testimony for them to repent and believe. In fact, so sufficient were they that if one would refuse to believe the Scriptures, they would also refuse to believe in tangible proof of a resurrected man.

This has great application for us today. Those who refuse to believe in the resurrection simply need to be presented with the simple testimony of the Scriptures. If they refuse to believe in the Scriptures, neither will anything else persuade them to believe. The Scriptures reveal the truth about God and those who refuse to believe will simply "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). No amount of logical proof will persuade them. No amount of nice sounding, soft preaching will persuade them. No experience of quality worship music will persuade them. If they are hard to the Scriptures, they simply won't be persuaded, unless God, in His mercy, grants them repentance, leading to the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 2:25).

Do you believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead? Or, are you still denying the resurrection?

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 6, 2005 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. 1, pp. 172-173.

[2] Josh McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, volume 1, p. 179 (italics, his).

[3] Dialogue Against Trypho, Chapter 108.

[4] William Barclay, A Spiritual Autobiography, p. 98 (italics, his).

[5] All quotes are taken from Frank Morison's book, Who Moved the Stone (pp. 8, 9, 11, 176).