

# APOLOGETICS: GIVING A REASON FOR OUR HOPE

TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (PCA)

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# THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

- Review

- The existence of God

- Outline

- The resurrection and the Christian worldview
- Arguments against the resurrection: impossibility or improbability
- The reasonableness of the resurrection within a Christian worldview
- The unreasonableness of the alternative explanations

# THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

- Question to ask to get our biblical bearings
  - Question: *On what basis did the apostles expect unbelievers to accept the fact of Jesus' resurrection?*
  - Question: *On what basis did the apostles expect unbelievers to understand the significance of Jesus' resurrection?*
  - Question: *What do the answers to both question share in common?*

# THE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW AND LIFE AFTER DEATH

- The Christian worldview and its teaching about life, death and life after death
  - Death is not a part of the original creation
  - Death is a consequence of our rebellion against God – a just penalty for sin
  - Good news: God has provided a solution through his Son
    - Jesus became one of us so that he could suffer the penalty of death in our place
    - Jesus died, but he didn't *stay* dead. He rose on the third day and appeared to many people.
    - Jesus suffered death, but in doing so he *conquered* death, and he now lives forevermore.
    - Because Jesus is the Lord of life, he has the power and authority to give *eternal* life to those who trust in him.

# THE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW AND LIFE AFTER DEATH

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  - Good news: God has provided a solution through his Son
- The importance of the resurrection of Jesus
  - Central to the gospel
  - Paul: If Jesus is still dead and buried then Christianity is worthless.
  - Simply: Christianity stands or falls on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

# THE RESURRECTION: AN UNBELIEVABLE CLAIM

- Skeptic's challenge: "The claim that Jesus rose from the dead is simply unbelievable."
  - Christopher Hitchens: If a stranger on a bus said to you, "I used to be dead, but now I'm alive."
  - David Hume (18<sup>th</sup> century): Since the resurrection of Jesus flies in the face of all our past experience, it would actually take a miracle for someone to believe that it happened.

# THE RESURRECTION: AN EXTRAORDINARY CLAIM

- Skeptic's challenge: "The claim that Jesus rose from the dead is unbelievable."
- Short Answer: Because the Bible says so.
  - (1) The Bible is divinely inspired and authoritative.
  - (2) The Bible affirms the bodily resurrection of Jesus as a historical event.
  - (3) Therefore, the bodily resurrection of Jesus was a historical event.

# THE RESURRECTION: AN EXTRAORDINARY CLAIM

- Skeptic's challenge: "The claim that Jesus rose from the dead is unbelievable."
- Christianity teaches that the Bible is divinely inspired
  - The Holy Spirit gives people the ability to hear the voice of God speaking in the words of the Bible (1 Corinthians 2:14)
  - A central claim of the Bible is that God raised Jesus from the dead.
  - In a sense, therefore, Hume was right that it *does* take a supernatural work of God for someone to believe that the Bible says about the resurrection.



# THE RESURRECTION: AN EXTRAORDINARY CLAIM

- Skeptic's challenge: "The claim that Jesus rose from the dead is unbelievable."
  - The Short Answer ("Because the Bible says so") does not mean that Christians believe on the basis of blind faith, without reason or proof.
  - The reports of Jesus' resurrection in the New Testament are grounded in apostolic eyewitness testimony.
  - The NT was written either by people who claimed to have seen Jesus alive following his crucifixion or by people who personally knew such eyewitnesses.
    - These accounts based on eyewitness testimony come from multiple sources and those sources together give a consistent report

# THE RESURRECTION: AN EXTRAORDINARY CLAIM

- Longer Answer: “There are no good reasons *not* to believe in Jesus’ resurrection and many good reasons to accept it. Once we understand the resurrection in the broader context of the Christian worldview, and we consider the various alternative theories about what happened to Jesus, the Christian claim that Jesus was raised from the dead actually makes perfectly good sense.”
- Two main objections to the resurrection
  - The impossibility of miracles objection
  - The improbability of miracles objection

# DEFENSE: THE POSSIBILITY OF MIRACLES

- The Impossibility Objection: “Miracles are impossible. Every event has a natural cause. A miracle would violate the laws of nature, but the laws of nature can’t be violated; if they could, they wouldn’t be laws.”
- The supernatural nature of the resurrection
  - Resurrections aren’t *natural* events: the natural course of events is for dead people to stay dead!
  - Therefore, if Jesus returned from the dead, that would be a supernatural, miraculous event.
  - The impossibility objection says such an event is by definition impossible.

# DEFENSE: THE POSSIBILITY OF MIRACLES

- Responding to the Impossibility of Miracles Objection
  - The objection assumes a *naturalist* worldview (dismisses the Christian worldview from the outset without even considering the evidence for it)
    - Laws are not by definition inviolable (“laws of logic”)
    - The “laws of nature” only describe how things proceed *naturally*
      - The laws of nature by definition don’t tell us anything about *supernatural* causes

# DEFENSE: THE POSSIBILITY OF MIRACLES

- Responding to the Impossibility of Miracles Objection
  - The explanation of a *Christian* worldview
    - Since the universe is created by God, God is the author of the laws of nature
    - Therefore, God has the authority and the power to suspend or bypass those laws when it suits his purposes.
    - In other words, if God created this universe, then miracles *must* be possible.

# DEFENSE: THE PROBABILITY OF MIRACLES

- The Improbability Objection: “Even if miracles are possible, it doesn’t follow that it’s reasonable to believe any bizarre miracle claim. In fact, we ought to be skeptical of all miracle claims. If there’s a plausible *natural* explanation, we should prefer it over a *supernatural* explanation.”
  - Miracles are so improbable that a *natural* explanation should *always* be preferred over a *supernatural* explanation.
- Response: the probability that an event has occurred can be *raised* when we have specific evidence for it.
  - Illustration: your friend winning the lottery

# PROOF: THE REASONABLENESS OF THE RESURRECTION

- What we want to avoid: arguing for the resurrection as an abstract fact of history
  - The resurrection wasn't a freak supernatural event that happened out of the blue with no connection to other events.

# PROOF: THE REASONABLENESS OF THE RESURRECTION

- What we want to argue: the resurrection makes perfect sense within the context of a Christian worldview.
  - The resurrection of Jesus is a probable, even necessary event, in light of:
    - Old Testament background
    - The teaching of Jesus himself
    - The eyewitness testimony of the apostles
    - The message of the Bible as a whole



# PROOF: THE REASONABLENESS OF THE RESURRECTION

- Old Testament Background to the Resurrection

- Isaiah 53: the suffering servant poured out his soul to death (12), yet he makes intercession for the transgressors.
- Psalm 16: “You will not abandon me to Sheol [the realm of the dead], nor will you let your faithful one see decay.”
  - Jesus’ disciples later pointed out that although this was written by David before Jesus was born, it couldn’t apply to David himself because David died and his body did decay. It looked forward to the one who would die, but not stay dead.

# PROOF: THE REASONABLENESS OF THE RESURRECTION

- Jesus' Own Teaching about His Resurrection (See also Mark 9:9, 9:31, 10:34)
  - Mark 8:31: "And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again."
- Putting Jesus' prediction in context
  - When we put Jesus' predictions in the context of everything else he said and did – his teachings, his moral character, his reputation as a miracle worker – then it should raise our expectations that he did in fact die and rise again like he said he would.

# PROOF: THE REASONABLENESS OF THE RESURRECTION

- Eyewitness Testimony

- Precautions were taken to guard Jesus' body precisely because of his resurrection predictions!
  - Stone was rolled in front of the tomb
  - A guard was posted outside the tomb
  - Jesus' opponents did not believe he would rise from the dead, but they didn't want his disciples to steal the body and fake his resurrection
- Despite the precautions, the disciples discovered an empty tomb.
  - In the weeks that followed, many disciples had encounters which they were convinced were real meetings with Jesus, physically raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:6).

# PROOF: THE REASONABLENESS OF THE RESURRECTION

- Eyewitness Testimony

- Some eyewitness testimony comes from people who rejected or were skeptical about Jesus prior to his crucifixion

- James, Jesus' half-brother

- Paul, a violent persecutor of the church

- Also important: Paul is an *independent* witness (Galatians 2)

# PROOF: THE REASONABLENESS OF THE RESURRECTION

- Eyewitness Testimony

- The combined eyewitness testimony to Jesus' resurrection is remarkable.

- Apostles, hundreds of disciples, former skeptics

- All of them said they saw the risen Jesus and were prepared to die rather than renounce their testimony.

# PROOF: THE REASONABLENESS OF THE RESURRECTION

- Putting it together
  - Prior expectation of the Messiah's resurrection (OT)
  - Jesus' own teaching that he would rise again
  - Substantial credible testimonial evidence that he was raised to life after his crucifixion (eyewitness testimony)
- Final piece: the broader context of the Christian worldview and message

# PROOF: THE REASONABLENESS OF THE RESURRECTION

- Christ's resurrection and the Christian worldview
  - The resurrection of Jesus isn't some kind of 'super-miracle' thrown in just to make things interesting.
  - The resurrection is an integral part of the biblical storyline.

# PROOF: THE REASONABLENESS OF THE RESURRECTION

- Christ's resurrection and the Christian worldview
  - The resurrection is an integral part of the biblical storyline.
    - Death entered the world through sin (Romans 5:12)
    - The mission of the Christ was to make atonement for sin and restore us to a right relationship with God.
    - The work of the Christ, therefore, dealt with both the guilt of sin and the consequences of sin, including death.
    - Jesus could not conquer death while being defeated by death himself.
    - Jesus could not supply eternal life unless he possessed eternal life himself.



# PROOF: THE REASONABLENESS OF THE RESURRECTION

- Christ's resurrection and the Christian worldview
  - Christianity *without* the resurrection of Jesus would make no sense.
  - The resurrection of Jesus considered in the context of a Christian worldview makes perfect sense.
    - (a) The four Gospels present as historical accounts (and in fundamental agreement)
    - (b) The four Gospels do not present as political propaganda for the early church

# PROOF: THE REASONABLENESS OF THE RESURRECTION

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- Contra Walter Bauer, *Heresy and Orthodoxy in Early Christianity* (1934, 71)

- *Example:* the general dullness of the disciples (e.g., Matt. 16:8-9; Luke 24:25)

- *Example:* Peter's denials of Jesus

- *Example:* Thomas's doubts about Jesus' resurrection (cf. Matt. 28:17)

- *Example:* reliance on women's testimony about the empty tomb

# PROOF: THE REASONABLENESS OF THE RESURRECTION

- Christ's resurrection and the Christian worldview

- (c) Paul's testimony and ministry as presented in his letters

- Paul's testimony is independent of and earlier than the Gospels!

- How do you explain Paul's ministry if the resurrection of Jesus did not occur? Hallucination? Paul, founder of Christianity?

- (d) The documentary evidence about the apostles and their ministry.

# PROOF: THE REASONABLENESS OF THE RESURRECTION

- Christ's resurrection and the Christian worldview

- (e) The claims and practices of the early church (e.g., worship on Sunday)

- The first Christians were Jewish Sabbatarians. Why the shift to Sunday, the first day of the week (Acts 20:7)?

- (f) The remarkable growth of the early church against all the odds

- What did the church have to offer the world? Not wealth, prestige or an easy life. There had to be something truly remarkable for people to make a profession.

# OFFENSE: THE UNREASONABLENESS OF THE ALTERNATIVES

- What are the alternative explanations for the evidence?
  - The Christian worldview provides a coherent explanation of the OT, the teachings of Jesus, and the eyewitness testimony of the authors of the NT.
  - But if you reject the Christian explanation, what *did* happen? What alternative explanation can adequately account for the testimonies of the New Testament and the historical origins of the Christian church?
    - If you reject the supernatural explanation (“God raised him from the dead”), then you must offer some alternative *natural* explanation.
- The argument: Alternative (naturalistic) explanations for the historical and documentary evidence are incoherent or highly improbable on their own terms.

# OFFENSE: REFUTING THE ALTERNATIVES

- Some alternative (naturalistic) explanations for the evidence:

(1) “The disciples had hallucinations of a resurrected Jesus.”

- The most popular explanation among *scholars* today.
  - It’s adopted because it’s difficult to deny historically that the apostles had some kind of experience of seeing Jesus raised from the dead.
- Problems?
    - (i) Hallucinations are by nature subjective/individual; we have no basis for believing that a *group* of people had the same hallucination simultaneously and on repeated occasions!
    - (ii) Hallucinations tend to align with a person’s expectations, but many of the first believers didn’t expect Jesus to come back from the dead (Paul or James)
    - (iii) Myth of hallucination could have been easily debunked (“Hey guys, do you think we should maybe check the tomb?”)

# OFFENSE: REFUTING THE ALTERNATIVES

- Some alternative (naturalistic) explanations for the evidence:

(2) “The disciples stole the body and made up the story of the resurrection. Christianity is based on a gigantic hoax.”

- Problems?

(i) What’s the motive? Why would the disciples be willing to suffer persecution, even death, for claims they knew were false?

(ii) What about the other converts like James and Paul who weren’t believers before the crucifixion yet claimed also to have seen Jesus alive?

## OFFENSE: REFUTING THE ALTERNATIVES

- Some alternative (naturalistic) explanations for the evidence:

(3) “Jesus’ body was removed by the Jewish or Roman authorities.”

- Problems?

(1) What reason would they have for doing that?

(2) Doesn’t explain all the evidence. What about the appearances?

(3) If they had moved the body somewhere else, surely they would have whipped it out as soon as the disciples started making up stories.



# OFFENSE: REFUTING THE ALTERNATIVES

- Some alternative (naturalistic) explanations for the evidence:

(4) “Jesus just passed out and regained consciousness in the tomb.”

- Problems?

(i) Somehow Jesus managed to survive the crucifixion, recovered sufficiently from his injuries to push away the stone from the tomb, overcome the guards, and then persuade his disciples he’d been raised from the dead (“God raised me from the dead, now get me to the hospital!”)

(ii) Roman soldiers knew how to execute people.

# OFFENSE: REFUTING THE ALTERNATIVES

- Some alternative (naturalistic) explanations for the evidence:

(5) “The women went to the wrong tomb on the Sunday morning.”

- Problems? (i) The location of the tomb was well known. (ii) Fails to explain the appearances. (iii) Other disciples visited the tomb.

(6) “The entire resurrection account is a legend that developed over time.”

- Problems? (i) The early date of the NT documents (i) Letter to Galatians, recognized as Pauline even by critical scholars, is dated to 48 AD. That puts Paul’s first meeting with Peter and James, fourteen years earlier (34 AD)!

(7) “We don’t know – and can’t know – what actually happened.”

- Problems? (i) Theological/worldview prejudice (ii) This is not an explanation! It is an admission of defeat.

# OFFENSE: A CASE FOR THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

- Argument for the resurrection from the skeptic's own position

(1) Skeptic's principle for historical investigation: All ancient documents should be evaluated by the same standards.

(2) If the NT is evaluated by the same standards as other ancient documents, then it is at least historically reliable in its major claims.

(3) If an ancient document is historically reliable, then we have reason to believe its major claims.

(4) The bodily resurrection is one of the major claims of the NT.

(5) Therefore, we have good reason to believe the bodily resurrection is a historical event.

- Note: we are not recommending the unbeliever treat the NT like any other historical document.

- The Point: if the skeptic is going to treat the NT that way, at least be consistent about it.

# CONCLUSION

- The only serious objection to the idea that Jesus rose from the dead is the objection that miracles *just don't happen*.
  - This objection is tantamount to denying God's existence
  - But if we deny God's existence we can't make sense of *anything* in this world
- So why should someone believe in the resurrection of Jesus?
  - (1) The resurrection of Jesus is an integral part of the Christian worldview, and only the Christian worldview makes sense of the things we take for granted about the universe and our place in it.
  - (2) Only the resurrection of Jesus makes sense of what we know about the life of Jesus, the lives of his earliest followers, the writings of the New Testament and the origins of the Christian church.