



RESURRECTION 101

Introducing Reasons for Confidence

3 ~ Thinking About Evidence and Testimony

Making the case for the resurrection requires that we show the believability of two related claims, both included in Peter's sermon on Pentecost (cf. Acts 2.29-32).

1. An empty tomb — this is *necessary*, but not *sufficient* to make the case (why?).
2. Witnesses to the risen Jesus — this is *necessary* and *sufficient*, but not unassailable (why?).

Before we consider the evidence for the resurrection, we need to think more about:

1. The relationship between knowledge and faith (belief).
2. One of the ways we come to know things.

Comparing One Aspect of Ancient and Modern Belief

Consider: Did first-century people have an advantage over modern people in finding Christianity believable? Explain.

Think more about that question in light of this New Testament passage.

³ “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope *through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, . . . ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1.3-4, 8-9).

1. What do we learn in this passage about the readers? What was the basis of their faith and hope? How do their circumstances compare with ours?
2. Note also that even some of the New Testament authors were second-generation believers and not eyewitnesses to Jesus' ministry, death, or resurrection (Luke 1.2; Hebrews 2.1, 3).

Think about this familiar passage:

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. . . . ²⁴ Now Thomas . . . was not with them when Jesus came” (John 20.19-20, 24).

Resurrection Image by TC Perch from Pixabay

²⁶ “Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. . . . ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.’ ²⁸ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ ²⁹ Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’” (John 20.26-29).

1. What was Thomas asking for? Was it different from what the other disciples had experienced?
2. Was Jesus criticizing Thomas or making a point about how people outside the apostolic group would come to believe?

Thinking About One Way We Come to Know Things

1. Have you ever been to Beijing? How do you know it really exists?
2. Have you been to the moon? Do you believe someone has? How do you know?
3. Were you a participant in the World War II Allied battle for Italy in 1943? How do you know it really happened?
4. Have you ever seen George Washington? Did he really live? Was he president? How do you know?
5. Romans 10.17 says, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” In other words, faith comes from testimony.
6. To “accept something on faith” is to accept/know it based on *testimony* (what is revealed/said/written by a witness).

Why This Is Important for Our Study

In the preface to the printed edition of a 1985 debate between Gary R. Habermas (theist) and Antony G. N. Flew (atheist) (*Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate*), David Beck wrote:

“In the current view, religion is not an issue of knowledge, of what the facts are, but of faith, of what is believed. This notion of the Resurrection as ‘existential meaning-making’ makes its actual occurrence irrelevant. . . . Thus the factuality of the Resurrection is deserted, . . .” (emphasis added).

1. If we are talking about our belief in the resurrection with people in the world at large, it is likely that we will encounter some who accept that “religion is not an issue of knowledge, but of faith.” We will need to help them work through the ideas that faith/testimony is a way we know many things in our world and is important for being confident about what we believe (in the manner encouraged in 1 Peter 1.3-4).
2. Christians live in a world where the idea that “religion is not an issue of knowledge, but of faith” is in the air. We can expect that some disciples will be influenced by society's accepted thinking. Some counter-teaching will be necessary if they are to have a “faith [that] is sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11.1; NIV 1984).

Next Time: Some Things That Must Be Explained

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV