

RESURRECTION FACTS TO BE RECKONED WITH

Whatever one believes about Christ and his resurrection, everyone has to admit that something significant happened on that morning – significant enough to alter the course of history. That “something” was so dramatic that it completely changed 11 men’s lives, enabling them from that time on to endure abuse, suffering and even death. That something was an empty tomb!

If you wish to rationalize away the events surrounding Christ and his resurrection, you must deal with certain facts. Let’s consider these historical facts for a moment:

Fact #1: The Roman Seal Was Broken

On Easter morning the seal that stood for the power and authority of the Roman Empire was broken. No one denies this fact. The stone [in front of the tomb] could be sealed only in the presence of the Roman guards who were left in charge. The purpose of this procedure was to prevent anyone from tampering with the grave’s contents.

After the guard inspected the tomb and rolled the stone in place, a cord was stretched across the rock and fastened at either end with sealing clay. Finally, the clay packs were stamped with the official signet of the Roman governor.

Because the seal was Roman, it verified the fact that Christ’s body was protected from vandals by nothing less than the power and authority of the Roman Empire. Anyone trying to move the stone would have broken the seal and thus incurred the wrath of Roman law and power. The consequences for breaking that seal were severe, even resulting in death! Would Christ’s disciples have broken the seal? Hardly! After his arrest they showed signs of craven cowardice and hid themselves. Peter even denied that he knew Christ.

Fact #2: The Tomb Was Empty

Another obvious fact that Sunday morning was the empty tomb. On one ever denied that the tomb was empty. It is significant that after the resurrection, the suddenly emboldened disciples of Christ did not go off to Athens or Rome to preach that he had been resurrected; they went right back into the city of Jerusalem where, if what they were claiming was false, their message would have been easily disproved. The resurrection claim could not have been maintained for a moment in Jerusalem if the tomb had not been empty.

One of the most compelling pieces of evidence showing that the tomb was empty is the fact that it was first discovered by women. In first-century Palestine, women had a low status as citizens or legal witnesses. Except in rare circumstances, Jewish law precluded women from giving testimony in a court of law. Why would those who wanted to advance Christianity have contrived a legend that embarrassed the disciples by having *them* flee during the crucifixion and yet have *women* discover the empty tomb? Common sense tells us that the only reason women were reported as the first witnesses is because it was the truth.

Fact #3: The Large Stone Was Moved

The first thing that impressed the people who approached the tomb was the unusual position of the two-ton stone that had previously been lodged in front of the doorway. All of the gospel writers mention the removal of this enormous stone.

In fact, the stone was in such a position up a slope away from the entire massive sepulcher that John had to use a different Greek verb, *airo*, which means “to pick something up and carry it away.”

If the disciples had come and tiptoed around the sleeping guards, why would they have moved the two-ton stone up a slope away from the entire massive grave to such a position that it looked like someone had picked it up and carried it away? The needless effort would have been noisy and taken valuable time and energy. Those soldiers would have been deaf not to have heard the commotion.

Fact #4: The Roman Guard Went AWOL

The Roman guard fled and left their place of responsibility. This is a very odd fact that must be explained.

Dr. George Currie, who carefully studied the military discipline of the Romans, reports that the death penalty was required for various duty failures such as desertion, losing or disposing weapons, betraying plans to the enemy, and leaving the night watch. To the above, one can add “falling asleep.”

One way a guard was put to death was by being stripped of his clothes, and then burned alive in a fire started with the garments. The history of Roman discipline and security testifies to the fact that if the tomb had not been empty the soldiers never would have left their position. Fear of the wrath of their superiors and the ensuing death penalty meant they paid close attention to the most minute details of their job.

Dr. Bill White, formerly in charge of the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem, makes several critical observations about the Jewish authorities bribing the Roman guard:

“If the stone were simply rolled to one side of the tomb, as would be necessary to enter it, then they might be justified in accusing the men of sleeping at their posts, and in punishing them severely. If the men protested that the earthquake broke the seal and that the stone rolled back under vibration, they would still be liable to punishment for behavior which might be labeled cowardice.”

But these possibilities do not meet the case. There was some undeniable evidence which made it impossible for the chief priests to bring any charges against the guard. The Jewish authorities must have visited the scene, examined the stone, and recognized its position as making it humanly impossible for their men to have permitted its removal. No twist of human ingenuity could provide an adequate answer or a scapegoat and so they were forced to bribe the guard and seek to hush things.”

--Taken from **Evidence for the Resurrection** © 2009 Josh McDowell Ministry and Sean McDowell, Chapter 16 and **Jesus: Dead or Alive** © 2009 Josh McDowell Ministry and Sean McDowell, Chapter 6