

Born to Win

The Resurrection of Jesus

by Ronald L. Dart

There is *one event* upon which all of history turns. It's an event attested well enough that *millions* of people believe and accept it, and yet it's vague enough that some do not. (Although I will confess most of those who do *not* accept it have never really looked at the evidence.)

There was a man who was *dead and buried*. He was *stone-cold* dead. He had a spear thrust into him and the blood drained from his body. He'd been carefully prepared for burial—his body tightly wrapped in a shroud with burial spices in place all around him. He was laid in a tomb in the rock, and a *great stone* was rolled over the entrance to the tomb. Guards were placed there to ensure that he *stayed* dead. He laid in that sealed tomb for three days and three nights. And at the end of that 72 hours there was a great earthquake, the stone rolled away, and the man walked out of that tomb *alive*. This is the man who looked death in the face and won. And, as you know, his name was Jesus.

Now, what makes this the most important event in history is that he defeated death for *all of us*. Paul, writing in Hebrews, had this to say about this. You'll find it in Hebrews 2, and beginning in verse 14:

Hebrews 2

AKJV

¹⁴ For as much then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he [*that is, Jesus*] also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

¹⁵ And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Him who had the power of death—the devil—was destroyed *through* death. Well, how in the world does *that* work? Well, it works in the fact that Jesus died and was resurrected.

Now, there's another reason why this event is so crucial in human history. If it were only a rumor, maybe we could disbelieve it. But this event is no rumor; it is *far* too well attested. One of the great themes of the Bible is the importance of *testimony*. In the law this is a *crucial* principle of jurisprudence and rites. It is laid out early in the Bible—in Deuteronomy 17, verse 6:

Deuteronomy 17

AKJV

⁶ At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.

We're not going to have any *he said/she said* in this law. We've got to have at least two witnesses (and preferably three) in order to execute a criminal. This is cited all the way down in the New Testament in Matthew 18, verse 15, where Jesus is talking about relationships between people in his church. He says:

Matthew 18

AKJV

¹⁵ Moreover if your brother shall trespass against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone: if he shall hear you, you have gained your brother.

¹⁶ But if he will not hear you, then take with you one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

And this concept of testimony and witnesses and the belief of witnesses really is shot through the entire Bible. So this being the case, *witnesses* are *crucial* to the truth of the resurrection of Jesus and whether we can believe it or not.

So I call to the stand a man named John to testify. He was one of Jesus' *closest* disciples, and he tells us what happened. You'll find his account beginning in John 19, along about verse 31. He says:

John 19

KJ2000

³¹ The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was a high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.

Jesus has been on the cross for hours. He has suffered *terribly* there. And so the time coming, with a new holy day coming up (the first Day of Unleavened Bread, or the first day of Passover), the Jews wanted none of this going on on the festival day. "So let's get these men down off the stakes."

John 19

AKJV

³² Then came the soldiers, and broke the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him.

³³ But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they broke not his legs:

³⁴ But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and immediately came there out blood and water.

Now, he goes on to tell us:

John 19

AKJV

³⁶ For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.

So we have established in testimony that he is dead. Not only is he dead, he got stabbed and all the blood rushed out of him.

John 19

AKJV

³⁷ And again another scripture said, They shall look on him whom they pierced.

³⁸ And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, sought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus.

³⁹ And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight.

⁴⁰ Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.

⁴¹ Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulcher, wherein was never man yet laid.

Apparently, it was Joseph of Arimathea's *own* sepulchre.

John 19

AKJV

⁴² There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; [...]

The Sabbath was coming on fast, and they had to get this done, so they put him there...

John 19

AKJV

⁴² [...] for the sepulcher was near at hand.

So we have testimony now on record that Jesus died, that he was carefully prepared for burial, and buried. John picks up his testimony in the 20th chapter, with a Sunday morning.

John 20

KJ2000

¹ The first day of the week came Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulcher, and saw the stone taken away from the sepulcher.

So whatever happened had already happened while it was still dark.

John 20

KJ2000

² Then she ran, and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved [*probably John*], and said unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him.

You have to understand, at this point all the disciples had *no idea* what had happened. They thought somebody had rolled the stone back, and somebody had taken Jesus' body away and thrown it into some dump.

John 20

KJ2000

³ Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulcher.

⁴ So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulcher.

⁵ And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen cloths [*the shroud, with no body in it*] lying there; yet went he not in.

⁶ Then came Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulcher, and saw the linen cloths lying,

⁷ And the cloth, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.

⁸ Then went in also that other disciple, who came first to the sepulcher, and he saw, and believed.

This was the first time it dawned on these men what had happened:

John 20

KJ2000

⁹ For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.

¹⁰ Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.

¹¹ But Mary stood outside at the sepulcher weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulcher,

And to her startled amazement, she...

John 20

KJ2000

¹² [...] saw two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

¹³ And they said unto her, Woman, why weep you? She said unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.

She *still* doesn't have any idea.

John 20

KJ2000

¹⁴ And when she had thus spoke, she turned back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

She did not recognize him; did not realize it was him. And Jesus said to her:

John 20

KJ2000

¹⁵ [...] Woman, why do you weep? whom do you seek? She, supposing him to be the gardener, said unto him, Sir, if you have borne him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.

And Jesus called her by name:

John 20

AKJV

¹⁶ [...] Mary. She turned herself, and said to him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

¹⁷ Jesus said to her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brothers, and say to them, I ascend to my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the LORD, and that he had spoken these things to her.

¹⁹ Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the middle, and said to them, Peace be to you.

Mary was the first person to see Jesus alive after the resurrection. It's fascinating, in a way. I suppose it's possible that it was merely a coincidence that Mary happened to be there at the time that Jesus happened to be there. But I think far more likely Mary was an important person to Jesus (he had apparently cast seven demons out of the woman [Mark 16:9, Luke 8:2]), and that there was a spiritual bond—perhaps an emotional bond—between them. (I don't think there was anything more than that.) But the first person he presented himself to, after he was raised from the dead, was a woman—Mary Magdalene—out of whom he had cast seven demons.

So now we have this affidavit; I have in my hands the affidavit of John. *You* probably have it in your home; it's in the Bible. Now, some of the witnesses testimony that we read here is second-hand. Mary Magdalene, for example, wrote no book; so we don't have what she wrote about all this. But her story is told, nevertheless, because John heard her. And since she can't come to court to testify, John testifies on her behalf what she saw and what she experienced.

I now call the stand Matthew (also known as Levi), who was formerly a tax collector but became a disciple of Jesus. Matthew's testimony is quite similar. He mentions Joseph of Arimathaea, he mentions him taking the body down off the stake and wrapping it in a clean linen cloth, and he adds that he:

Matthew 27

AKJV

⁶⁰ [...] laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed.

Actually, if you visit Jerusalem, there's a place called the Garden Tomb that you can go and see; which some believe was where Jesus was buried. I think most, probably, don't think there's enough proof of that; but it's a *very* good example of the kind of tomb—*precisely* the kind of tomb—that is described here. In any case:

Matthew 27

AKJV

⁶¹ [...] there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulcher. [*Watched what he was doing.*]

⁶² Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation [*This is on the holy day.*], the chief priests and Pharisees came together to Pilate,

⁶³ Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.

⁶⁴ Command therefore that the sepulcher be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say to the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.

Now, Matthew's testimony here is very important; because it is not only certain that people *would have* said that his disciples stole his body away, that in spite of the fact that there were soldiers there for three days and three nights, people *to this day* will say that the disciples of Jesus stole his body away. Matthew's testimony? "It wasn't possible. There were soldiers put to guard the tomb. We couldn't have done it if we wanted to do it. And what would have been the point? Who would have believed us? (Hardly anybody did anyway.)" In Matthew, the 28th chapter now, the story continues according to Matthew:

Matthew 28

AKJV

¹ In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary

Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher.

² And, behold, there was a great earthquake: [...]

Now, I presume that earthquake did not come as they arrived, but had already happened.

Matthew 28

AKJV

² [...] for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it.

³ His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

⁴ And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

I should think so. And these angels, still there:

Matthew 28

AKJV

⁵ [...] said to the women, Fear not you: for I know that you seek Jesus, which was crucified.

⁶ He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

⁷ And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goes before you into Galilee; there shall you see him: see, I have told you.

⁸ And they departed quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

Now, what's interesting about all this: Anytime there is a *really* significant event that has taken place (especially a traumatic one), witnessed by a number of people, you'll find that the stories you get from different witnesses vary—oftentimes in important details. They will have the core issues correct; but they will differ based upon, in some cases, where they were standing; in some cases on what impressed them the most. Because, you know, we all bring to anything we see or anything that happens our own past, our own predilection, our own fears, our own hopes, our own worries about things. And so, consequently, we interpret what we see *instantly*, and we see certain things and don't see other things. And so it's only when you pull your witnesses together that you begin to get a much more complete picture of what happened. And even though the witnesses do not tell you *precisely* the same thing, they are still giving you the truth of what it was that took place here.

And the truth? Well you know, Christian people have differed down through the years about a lot of things. In fact, you almost get the impression there isn't very much that Christian people *do* agree on. But there is one thing that is universal across the Christian faith: We all believe that Jesus was *dead*, and that he rose from the dead and is alive. Without those, you don't even *have* Christianity; you've got something else.

Matthew's testimony continues; and you can open your Bible and read it for yourself, but now I want to call Mark to the stand. His testimony is in Mark 16, verse 1:

Mark 16

NIV '84

¹ When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body.

So you have the women named in this account. Mark apparently knew them and had talked to them.

Mark 16

AKJV

² And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came to the sepulcher at the rising of the sun.

³ And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher?

That was a *big* stone. These four women did not anticipate that they could do it.

Mark 16

AKJV

⁴ And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great [*huge*].

Now, notice the difference in this story from what we read before? Now, exactly what happened here you would have to piece together carefully from the stories. It may well be that there was more than one group of women. It may be they didn't all arrive at the same time. Some saw one thing; some saw something else. And while these may appear to some people to contradict, the one thing they do accomplish for us: They *establish* the fact that Mark and Luke and Matthew and John weren't sitting around a table together getting their stories straight that they're going to tell us. They weren't woodshedded, they weren't straightened out, they weren't prompted. Each of them got to tell his own story. And even though they differ, we get to look at them and decide for ourselves.

Well, very early in the morning they got there, and they said, "Who's going to roll this stone away?" And it was open.

Mark 16

AKJV

⁵ And entering into the sepulcher, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.

⁶ And he said to them, Be not affrighted: You seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.

⁷ But go your way, tell his disciples[....]

Now, I want to call your attention to a discrepancy in the accounts. And it isn't surprising, with so many witnesses of the event, that we would have some variances in points of view, in the sequence of events, and so forth. I want to call Luke to the stand. Luke was a physician. He was a careful, contemporary historian. We are indebted to him for the systematic way in which he pulls the story together.

Now mind you, as we read these affidavits, as it were, we're only hearing directly from four people. But these four people will tell us the testimony of others who were there and what they learned. And I believe we can afford to admit this into the argument, because what these other people are saying is attested *also* by more than one witness, and so we can take their accounts into consideration. But here's what Luke says. He says:

Luke 23

AKJV

⁵⁰ And, behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counselor; and he was a good man, and a just:

⁵¹ (The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them;) he was of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews: who also himself waited for the kingdom of God.

⁵² This man went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus.

⁵³ And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulcher that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid.

⁵⁴ And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on.

⁵⁵ And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulcher, and how his body was laid.

⁵⁶ And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.

Did you catch the variance? Mark told us the women *bought* the spices *after* the Sabbath. They had no opportunity to do so before the Sabbath; the burial was too quick. But now Luke tells us they prepared the spices and then rested *on* the Sabbath. So they bought and prepared their spices *after* the Sabbath, but then they rested on the Sabbath. Is this an error in the accounts?

Now, if I were an attorney, I would point this out to you to demonstrate the *independence* of the testimony. Mark and Luke did not get together and go over their story to get it straight before they gave it to us. And it in no way undermines the central truth of their testimony. Now that said, there is one more thing I need to point out to you. The day of Jesus' crucifixion was the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish calendar. The 15th day of that month—the day after Christ was crucified—was the first day of Passover (also called the first Day of Unleavened Bread), and it was a Sabbath day; not necessarily a Saturday Sabbath, because every one of the *annual* holidays of Israel were Sabbath days, *as well as* the weekly Sabbath which fell on a Saturday. You with me? Okay.

So the 15th day of that month was a Sabbath day—not necessarily Saturday. And it was after that Sabbath that the women bought and prepared their spices, and then they rested on the Sabbath. How can this be? Well, if the day of crucifixion was a Wednesday, the first day of Passover was Thursday—a Sabbath day—then the women could have bought and prepared their spices on Friday before another Sabbath fell on Saturday. Thus, we not only reconcile the contradiction in the witnesses' account, we establish that Jesus was indeed in the grave for three days and three nights as he said he would be.

Now I must return to something I said earlier. And the reason I have to go back there is because I think some people may disagree with my assessment that the resurrection of Jesus is the one event upon which all of history turns. They may argue that it was the *passion* of Christ, his crucifixion, and his death that changed the world. Well, probably we would want to say that it's the whole event; but in answer to that, I'm going to call an expert witness—a theologian of the first water. His name is Paul (and anyone who has ever read his Bible know Paul). The testimony that he's going to bring us is found in First Corinthians, chapter 15, and in verse 3. Paul says:

1 Corinthians 15

AKJV

³ For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

⁴ And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

⁵ And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:

⁶ After that, he was seen of above five hundred brothers at once; of whom the greater part remain to this present, but some are fallen asleep.

That is, some of the witnesses have died. What Paul is telling us is that, at the time he wrote this letter, there were still *hundreds* of people wandering around from church to church and around about the Middle East who actually had seen Jesus alive after his resurrection. "Then finally", he says, "he was seen by me." Verse 12:

1 Corinthians 15

AKJV

¹² Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?

¹³ But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:

¹⁴ And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

¹⁵ Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.

¹⁶ For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:

¹⁷ And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; you are yet in your sins.

¹⁸ Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.

It's kind of hard to get your mind around: The sacrifice, the suffering, and the death of Jesus Christ—to forgive us of our sins and reconcile us to the Father—would have been *pointless* if he had not been raised from the dead. That's what Paul is telling us. And he goes on to say:

1 Corinthians 15

AKJV

¹⁹ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

²⁰ But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.

In other words: He's not the end; there are going to be *more*. And that "more" who are going to be in the resurrection can include you and me.

1 Corinthians 15

AKJV

²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

Until next time, I'm Ronald L. Dart.

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ID: 04ROJ