

In our last installment we talked about the truthfulness of the historic documents (The Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). We have used the tools used by secular historians to determine that the documents tell the truth. One last point on their truthfulness. Many people have died for what they believe to be true, but no one dies for what they know to be false. All of Jesus' disciples, save one, died for their testimony. That fact alone should lay to rest any discussion of the disciples fabricating the accounts of Jesus.

So, if the documents are early, accurate, and truthful, it is time to look at what they say about Jesus. Jesus himself is the center point of the Christian faith. In fact, Paul (the author of most of the New Testament documents) says himself, "And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." (1 Corinthians 15:14–17, ESV)

Christianity is the only historically falsifiable religion. All you must do is show that Jesus did not rise from the dead and the religion vanishes. But this is not as easy as you suppose. You must discount the historic documents and eyewitness accounts, and especially what Jesus says about himself, and the proof that he offers.

In the historic documents Jesus claims to be God himself in human flesh. Even his enemies recognized what he said. It was, in fact, why he was killed. In the earliest document of Mark, Jesus begins by forgiving sins (Mark 2). The common refrain from the critics is, "Who can forgive sins but God alone!" By their own account they understand what Jesus claims. When he stands before the High Priest at his trial Jesus says, in response to the question, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?", "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." (Mark 14:61-62, ESV)

Now, a person claiming to be God, himself, is not extraordinary. People do this all the time. We put them in the same category as those who claim to be Napoleon. The author C.S. Lewis says you have three choices. Jesus is insane; Jesus is the greatest scam artist in history; or Jesus is who he says he is. He leaves you no other options. If he is insane then what he says is meaningless. If he is a scam artist, nothing he says can be trusted. But if he is who he says he is, he is the most important person who ever lived. And everything he says must be understood and followed. Jesus also doesn't leave the question there. He offers proof of what he says, his resurrection from the dead.

Why should we listen to what Jesus says? First, it is recorded in the eyewitness accounts (we have already discussed their accuracy). Secondly, Jesus' crucifixion is recorded in detail, leaving no doubt that he did die on the cross (see JAMA 1986; 255:1455-1463). Thirdly, after the resurrection, his appearances are described in detail, and are very physical. Fourthly, Jesus appeared over a forty-day period and to over 500 witnesses, "most of whom are still alive", asserts Paul (1 Corinthians 15:6, ESV). Fifthly, the events of Jesus' crucifixion, death and burial were events of very high interest. They were in public during the Feast of the Passover. This alone would have made them impossible to fabricate.

Jesus' resurrection answers the most difficult problem facing human beings. We will all die. He could have done many miracles as proof of who he was (as he did!), but this one speaks directly

to the primary human problem. If Jesus is indeed God, himself in human flesh, if his life, death and resurrection are true historical facts, then Jesus has the answer for your death. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16, ESV) Christianity invites you to investigate for yourself.