

April 24, 2022
The Second Sunday of Easter
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He is God Alone. The Resurrection Factor

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This Easter season, our sermon series is going to be based upon the book of Isaiah, in particular the last half of it, where in chapter 41 for instance we see God saying, “Listen to me in silence, oh coastlands. Let the peoples renew their strength, let them approach and then let them speak. Let us together draw near for judgment.” The picture that is being painted here is one of a courtroom. But this time it's the heavenly courtroom and God is saying to the people, to the coastlands, to the gentiles, as well as to the unfaithful Israelites, “you may approach the bench.” You may approach the bench, for what? Let them speak. In other words, make their case. I wonder how often an attorney feels really good when the judge says come on up here? But now look at what the Lord says about it. Let us draw in there together for judgment. Come up here, make your case to me, to my face. Make your case about your reasoning, your gods, their strength. And I'll make my case. I am God. I am the Almighty One and here is my rationale.

From there God goes into explaining who He is. He is the one who is in control, not the pagan gods. And then He says, and listen carefully to this, I, the LORD, who the first and with the last, I am He. Those of you who have studied Revelation or are in the Revelation study right now probably picked up, God speaks of Himself three times there. He begins with I; He's God, YHWEH, I AM. The first and the last. He's the beginning of time and with the very end of time. I am He. It is a huge statement of God saying, “I alone am God.”

And He's the one who's saying, “come forward.” It's almost like a warning to those who are going to approach. But I want you to think now if God were to come and say, “Alright, let's sit down,” I'd like you to think what would the peoples say of the 21st century? And actually, they've been working on the case for about 2000 years. I can tell you what they

would say. Here is the mainstream thoughts of the educated elite, the philosophical prowess of our time. Number one-God, Jesus don't really exist. In fact Jesus, who didn't exist; even if he did exist he didn't rise from the dead because his disciples stole his body and invented a story about his resurrection. And if they haven't, Jesus actually didn't die on the cross. We call that the 'swoon theory.' He looked like he died, but he really just passed out and went into a state of a coma and from there the cold tomb revived him. And then you have the Jesus Seminar that dares use the name of Jesus, as if they, the educated elite within the theological realm, really believe in Jesus at all. They say we've misinterpreted the scriptures.

Let's take those on. Let's see if they have any validity before the throne of God. Number one Jesus, God doesn't exist and even if he did exist Jesus didn't rise. What is this based on? It would be very interesting to know. Because when it comes to history or historicity there are standards that must be met for something to be considered factual. One, there needs to be multiple attestations; that is primary sources, eyewitnesses who saw. And secondary sources who talked to those eyewitnesses. And when we look at the New Testament, we see right away that John and Matthew the Gospel writers we were both eyewitnesses. But as we continue through the New Testament, we see that Peter was an eyewitness and he wrote; James is an eyewitness he wrote; Jude was an eyewitness he wrote. Paul was also an eyewitness to Jesus on the road to Damascus and he wrote.

Now you might say pastor I noticed you left out Luke and Mark the other two Gospel writers. Luke would be a secondary source. He went on a mission to find out what was going on with Jesus, this Christ. He was doing it for some sort of government official named Theophilus. And he went and he talked to the apostles themselves as we read in the book of Acts. Meanwhile Mark was companion of Peter on some of his trips. And we read both from Papayas, a first century writer and Clement of Alexandria a second century writer that Mark took what Peter said and wrote it down word for word. So just the New Testament itself, is filled with multiple historical attestations, witnesses to Jesus.

But it goes way beyond that. We also have Josephus, a Roman historian who was a Jew, who was given the responsibility to chronicle what was happening in Judea during the time of Jesus, the 1st century. He mentions Jesus, he mentions His death, he mentions His resurrection. He mentions that He claimed to be the Messiah.

Then there was Tacitus, another Roman historian who just so happens to also be a Roman senator. He also speaks of the execution of Jesus because of the superstition that followed Him. He was shocked for a moment when He was executed, but again the superstition broke out and made its way even to Rome. I like you to think about the word superstition it starts with super. It's beyond our knowledge or capability. What is beyond our knowledge or capability? That Jesus rose from the dead. This is what Tacitus was talking about.

Another Roman historian, Suetonius who wrote the book the Twelve Caesars, also 1st century; speaks about the Christians. And the Christians were punished because of a new and mischievous superstition. They were expelled from Rome for this superstition in A.D. 49 which is also chronicled in the book of Acts chapter 18. What was this superstition? That Jesus died and rose.

There's even a prisoner from the 1st century, a Roman prisoner of A.D. 73 Mar Bar Surapong who writes of the wise king of the Jews who was executed by the Jews and as a result of that were overrun by the Romans in the year 70. But he points out that Socrates, the great philosopher still remembered because he has a stone statue of him. And Jesus, this is what he said: "or did the wise king die for good, He lived on in the teaching He had given." And what was the teaching he had given? Well, the members of Sanhedrin went to Pilate and told him what that teaching was he thought that he would be crucified and on the third day rise.

I'd like you to compare that kind of attestation from secular, the Romans, from Jesus's contemporaries, His followers, the apostles. Compare that to, for instance, to well Caesar writing 'the Gallic wars,' those are accepted as factual. What kind of attestation is there for that?

There really is none yet it is totally accepted even though, the first mention or the first copies of the Gallic wars come 900 years after Caesar. Compare that to what we just talked about with Jesus. All of those were first century at the time of Jesus.

Or how about the Iliad written by Homer? It is accepted in the educational circles, in literary circles as accurate. Yet we have nothing about it until 400 years afterward. We could even apply this to religion. Buddhism. Did you know we have nothing from Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha? There is nothing until 800 years after him. There's the very first writings that we find about him 800 years afterward.

Or even Islam, 200 years after Mohammed, when Muhammad died there were two Caliphs that were in competition on who was going to take over. Both of them had everything that had been written about Muhammad burned and they wrote what they believed Muhammad had said. But they were then replaced by other Caliphs who burned what they wrote. And this went on for 200 years. Generations of Caliph after Caliph burning everything from the previous generation, writing down what they believed Muhammad had really said.

Now look at the Bible. We are looking here historically, at fragments of writing and stuff that date to within 25 years of Jesus. The actual books of the Bible, from 100 years after Jesus, the 2nd century. And the books of the New Testament; all listed in varieties of ways by the 3rd century, 235 years after Jesus. There is no other historical figure, or historical book, so well documented from a historical standpoint. So, the idea that Jesus didn't exist because He doesn't meet the historical standard is absolute nonsense.

But what about that claim that the disciples stole His body and invented the story? Honestly, think about what we read in the Gospel of Matthew. The religious leaders went to Pilate. "Oh yeah, we remembered that this man said that on the third day he would rise, so please could you post a guard? And Pilate tells them, 'You have a guard of soldiers, take them.' And what does he say? 'Go make it as secure as you can.' It wasn't 'hey go on and camp out guys.' No! "Make it as secure

as you can.” First off, they put a wax seal on the tomb. That would have been a cord that went from the rock to the stone face, a coat of wax over it. If anybody broke that seal, it was punishable by death. Since they were to make it as secure as possible, they would have positioned themselves; and this is a military unit, in a defensive stance so that anybody who came in and tried to get to the tomb would be cut down. They would be killed. They would be funneled into killing zones. This is how military works.

And what do we read when Peter and John we're speaking about Jesus and the resurrection? Gamaliel in Acts chapter five, a member of the Sanhedrin says; “Take care what you are about to do to these men. If it's the undertaking of man, they will fail. But if it is of God, I quote, “You will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God.” Gamaliel understood. There had been soldiers and when Jesus rose, something happened that scared those soldiers. Something remarkable. But we'll get to that. The other thing the Gamaliel understood is men don't die for lies. Peter and John were willing to die right there.

Which brings us to the swoon theory. Seriously? The Romans were experts at execution. They didn't bury undead people. So, when they saw that Jesus had died on the cross, they made sure he was dead. They took a spear, which was the practice, they put it underneath the rib cage on Jesus' right side pushed upward and to the left. Whereby that spear would pierce the pericardial sack. That sack of fluid around your heart that's kind of like an airbag and then the heart itself. And when they pulled it out, if water and blood drained out, they knew they had pierced both. The person was dead-dead.

And then misinterpretation of the Gospels. Again, seriously? This is nothing more and quote, unquote, “scholars” looking for degrees and dollars by putting forth new things that are totally from their imagination and ignoring everything just mentioned. So, let's go back to that courtroom, to the judge who is sitting there and saying to the people: “strengthen yourself, come forward and talk to me, the God who is God, the One who says, I, I AM. I am God. The God who knows that when He

sent an Angel down on that Easter morning, it made the earth shake and it made those soldiers scared to death. Why? Because we read in Mark that the Angel came down and rolled back the stone. Literally, it is rolled back to a great distance. It wasn't that it was just nicely rolled back in its track and a wedge put there to keep it. No this rolled out of the track and away from the tomb. That's why John records, it was taken away, or the Angel came picked it up and tossed it away. And what did he do then? He (quote from Matthew) "sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing as white as snow." And those Romans soldiers who were in defensive positions, set up to bring anybody that was coming into killing zones, and to kill them; suddenly realized that Angel just picked up a stone that it would take twenty of us to roll and he threw it, and he's sitting there, and he's basically challenging us to try to do something. But he has made the whole earth shake, and so we read that those soldiers did the smartest thing possible. "For fear of him, the guards trembled and became like dead men." They were there to defend against outsiders. They had no concept of an Angel, of the Son of God, coming out of that tomb behind their ranks. And they were not going to mess with that.

So, we go back to God's courtroom. These are the best arguments that man has over the last 2000 years of preparation time to stand before God almighty and face to face confront him. And I ask you- whose side do you want to be on when we were really are called to stand before the Judge? Do you want to be with the educated elite, with the in crowd of society that tells you Jesus is a myth? Even though he passes every one of their standards of historicity.

Or do you want to stand with I, YAHWEH, I AM He, I AM God, the Father Almighty, who sent my Son? He died for your sins. He rose from the dead. He redeemed you. Put your trust in Him. In fact, there is where the great news is. Jesus Himself, tells us that "if we confess Him before men, He will confess us before His Father. We won't have to go before the Judge when He says come up here and reason with Me. His son will go on our behalf. In His name, Amen.