

To God Alone Be The Glory

Some people say that all religions are about the same, which is kind of like saying all movies are about the same, or all homes are about the same. If you look at surface issues, you do see a lot of similarities among the religions. Show love, honor your parents, don't murder, don't cheat on your spouse, show respect for others, don't take your neighbor's stuff. So, yes, there are similarities in pretty much every religion.

But what about the differences? The differences should never be used as an excuse for harming others. But should we sweep the differences under the rug? If I wanted to be confrontational, I could ask the people who assert that all religions are about the same, "How many religions have you actually studied? And do you really understand Christianity?" I don't mean any denomination's version of Christianity, whether it's Lutheran or Catholic or Baptist or whatever. I mean the Bible's version of Christianity. Have you actually read the Bible for yourself more than once? It's pretty hard to read the Bible and the literature of other religions, and then come to the conclusion that all religions are about the same. You kind of have to ignore a bunch of stuff in order to park your boat in that marina.

Case in point: the resurrection of Jesus from death. Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Baha'i, Sikh, Jehovah's Witness, Shintoism, Confucianism—none of these religions claim that their leader rose from the dead, not physically. Some claim reincarnation, but that's when a spirit takes up a different body.

If none of these other religions teach Christ's resurrection, why do Christians believe Jesus rose from the dead? Maybe he didn't really die but woke from a coma later. Or if he died, maybe his followers just looked in the wrong tomb. Maybe one or two of the disciples were so grief-stricken that they just dreamed they saw Jesus alive, and none of the others wanted to appear unfaithful to their Master, so they all just went along with the story about the resurrection to salvage some kind of victory from Jesus' obvious defeat. Or, as was seriously proposed some years ago, maybe dogs ate Jesus' body on Saturday and that's why he wasn't there in the tomb on Sunday. How do you know Jesus really died and rose from the dead? Shall we consider some of the evidence?

Late on Good Friday afternoon the Jewish leaders decided that they didn't want the those three bodies up on the crosses during the Sabbath celebration on Saturday. So they requested that the legs of all three men be broken—that

way they could hurry up and die. But when the soldiers came to Jesus, they noticed he was already dead. Instead of breaking Jesus' legs, one soldier thrust a spear up into Jesus' side (John 19:34). It's pretty hard to survive a punctured heart.

Later when Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for permission to bury Jesus, Pilate summoned the centurion to see if Jesus were already dead. As someone who had risen through the Roman ranks to be commander of a hundred men, the centurion knew what dead looked like. After Pilate verified Jesus' death, then he gave the body to Joseph (Mark 15:44).

Even the chief priests and the Pharisees admitted Jesus was dead. They wanted to make sure he stayed dead—not just in reality but in folklore too. So *the next day, [Saturday], the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate.*

“Sir,” they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day.

Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead...”

“Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go make the tomb as secure as you know how.” So they...put a seal on the stone and post[ed] the guard. What were they afraid of? Hadn't Jesus disciples

scattered when he was arrested? Had any of them demonstrated any kind of ingenuity or cleverness? It's widely understood among students of the Bible that the apostles were not the sharpest knives in the drawer. So then we're left to wonder if maybe the chief priests and Pharisees were a little worried that He who, by their own admission, raised Lazarus from the dead might just raise Himself from the dead as promised.

This guard they posted turns out to be one of the proofs that Jesus died and rose from his grave. A Roman guard-unit typically consisted of sixteen soldiers. Four soldiers at a time took turns standing watch for three hours while the others relaxed or even slept nearby, ready to spring into action should the need arise. No one was going to steal this body away from sixteen Roman soldiers. No one would be foolish enough to try.

Consider the quality of the Roman army. Josephus writes in his *The Wars of the Jews*, “Every soldier is every day exercised, and that with great diligence, as if it were in time of war, which is the reason they bear the fatigue of battles so easily: for neither can any disorder remove them from their usual regularity, nor can fear affright them out of it, nor can labor tire them.”

Okay, but guard duty at night is a little different, right? At night, the hours

crawl by with mind-numbing silence. But in the Roman army there was ample incentive to carry out orders faithfully. The historian Polybius reports that fear of the strict discipline in Roman camps caused soldiers to perform their duties meticulously. Soldiers could be sentenced to die if they broke any of 18 Roman military laws, including falling asleep on their night watch. We can be certain the soldiers standing guard at Jesus' tomb did not fall asleep.

But if these burly soldiers thought they were ready for a fight, they would discover a new definition of fear by the dawn's early light. As the sun peaked it's eyes above the horizon, *there was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.* Breaking the seal on the tomb was a crime worthy of death in Rome's eyes. Apparently the angel wasn't too worried. He even stayed at the scene of the crime to claim responsibility. That's how important it was to show that Jesus had already risen. *The guards were so afraid of [the angel] that they shook and became like dead men.* Roman soldiers fainted! Their swords and pikes and shields could provide them no protection here.

We don't know when the soldiers left the tomb, but I imagine them blowing past the women who were on their way out to the tomb. The rushin' Roman

soldiers went...and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. *The chief priests...gave the soldiers a large sum of money. "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' If this report gets to the governor, we will...keep you out of trouble."* Isn't that beyond amazing? The high priests, who had pushed hard for Jesus' execution because they refused to believe that Jesus is the Messiah—they were among the first to learn about the resurrection from their own eye-witnesses! And yet they still stubbornly refused to put their trust in Jesus.

More evidence: How about the large sum of money the chief priests paid the soldiers to spread that lie about Jesus' resurrection? If Jesus had not risen from the dead, all the priests needed to do was present the facts—*habeus corpus*. But when the truth is not stacked up in your favor, what do you do? You either admit it, or you try to lie your way out of it. They opted for the lie and in so doing gave us one of the strongest testimonies to Jesus' resurrection.

This evidence for Jesus rising should come as no surprise. A few days before Holy Week Jesus took his disciples aside and told them, *"We are going up to Jerusalem, and...the Son of Man will be...handed over to the Gentiles. They*

will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again” (Luke 18:31-33). It all happened as Jesus predicted.

See where this is leading? If Jesus said he would rise from the dead, and then kept his promise, what other promise is Jesus powerless to fulfill? He overcame death. He has promised, *“Because I live, you also shall live”* (John 14:19). When we lay our loved ones to rest, or when our loved ones lay us to rest, that is not the end. We will see them again. All the dead will rise bodily. Believers to a happy afterlife. Unbelievers, not so happy.

If the penalty for our sins has been paid by Jesus’ death, then we are right with God through faith in Jesus, no matter what bad things we have done. As a result, we may stand before holy God today or on the Final Day, owning our sins, yet having full confidence of acquittal, not because of how good we’ve been, but because of how good Jesus was in our place. Because of Jesus’ resurrection, we anticipate many blessings from God in this life, and we have sure hope for a better life to come in God’s heavenly home.

See how JESUS’ RESURRECTION FORMS THE FOUNDATION OF OUR FAITH? Without Easter, Jesus’ birth would be the birth of a Savior wanna-be. Without Easter, Jesus’ death

would be an example of a good man unjustly sentenced to death. The resurrection underpins every truth we believe from the Bible. Fellow redeemed, if the resurrection is not true, you might as well believe that all religions are about the same.

“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15). Jesus keeps his promises! That’s why you’re forgiven. That’s why you can forgive those who hurt you. That’s why you can show love to those who disrespect you. That’s why you can help those in need as if you are helping Jesus. That’s why you can live your life with the Lord as your Master, continually turning away from all that he calls evil. The resurrection is a great reason to come church every Sunday. It’s a great reason to read your Bible daily at home and live by it. It’s a great reason to get involved in the ministry of your church. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!