

AUTHENTICATED BY RESURRECTION

- A. Introduction: We've started a series on the importance of becoming a regular Bible reader. Christians struggle with reading the Bible for a number of reasons. It's difficult to read regularly if you don't know what you are reading, why you're supposed to read it, or what it will do for you. We're taking time to address some of the issues that keep people from reading effectively. Let's review some key points.
1. The Bible is a collection of 66 books and letters that together tell the story of God's desire for a family and the lengths to which He has gone to obtain His family through Jesus. Each book adds to or advances the story in some way. The Bible reveals that:
 - a. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters and He made the earth to be home for Himself and His family. Both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin, beginning with the first man, Adam. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18; Gen 2:7; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; etc.
 1. Adam's disobedience altered the human race. Men and women became sinners by nature, disqualified for the family. And the earth was infused with a curse of corruption and death.
 2. God immediately promised the coming of a Redeemer (Jesus) who would undo the damage done to the family and the family home. Gen 3:15
 - b. God directed men to begin to keep written records as He gradually unfolded His plan to deliver mankind and the earth from sin, corruption, and death through Jesus.
 1. The Bible was written over a 1500 year period (roughly 1400 BC to AD 100) by over 40 authors. The books reflect the language and the customs of the time and place in which they were written. That's one reason the wording is sometimes strange and hard to understand.
 - A. The Bible is divided into the Old and New Testaments documents. The Old Testament was written prior to Jesus' birth and predicts and anticipates His coming. It is mainly the history of the people group Jesus was born into (the Jews). The New Testament was written after Jesus returned to Heaven, following His death, burial, and resurrection.
 - B. The Bible is 50% history. It is redemptive history, meaning that it records people and events connected with God's unfolding plan of redemption. These people lived and the events occurred in the Middle East (primarily in what is now the nation of Israel).
 2. The Bible narrative is rooted in historical reality. It chronicles people and events that are verifiable through secular writings and archeological discoveries.
 - c. The Bible is a book from God—He inspired the words recorded in its pages. God breathed out or imparted His thoughts and words to men who wrote them down. The authors repeatedly stated that they were recording the Word of God. II Tim 3:16; II Pet 1:21
 2. The Bible is ultimately a revelation of Jesus Christ since He is the Redeemer, the One through whom God obtained His family. Jesus said that the Scriptures testify of Him. John 5:39
 - a. Jesus is called the Word of God, the Word made flesh. Jesus is God become man without ceasing to be God. John 1:1; John 1:14
 1. Two thousand years ago, God entered time and space and took on flesh (a full human nature) so that He could die for our sin and open the way for all who put faith in Him to be transformed from sinners into sons and daughters of God. Heb 2:14-15
 2. While on earth, although Jesus was fully God, He did not live as God. He veiled His deity, limited Himself to all the constraints of being human, and lived as a man in dependence on God.
 - b. God, Who is invisible, wants relationship with men and women. He opened the way to relationship with Himself through Jesus. And He reveals Himself through Jesus.
 1. Jesus is the visible manifestation of God. Col 1:15—He is the exact likeness of the unseen God—visible representation of the invisible (Amp).
 2. The Greek word translated likeness means image and has the idea of the visible representation

of the invisible God. It's more than we see God with our eyes—we know God through Jesus.

- c. We know Jesus through the pages of the Bible. Jesus, the Living Word of God, is revealed to us today through the written Word, the Bible (John 14:21). The Bible is the only fully reliable source of information about Jesus.
3. For the rest of the lesson we're going to begin to examine why we can trust the Bible to be what it claims to be—the Word of Almighty God, a revelation of Jesus Christ. Last week we considered how the Old Testament began to develop. This week we move on to the New Testament.

B. Christianity is unique. It stands apart from every other religion or faith system in that it is not based on its founder's dreams and visions or his ideology and belief system. Christianity is based on a verifiable historical reality—the resurrection of Jesus.

1. When the resurrection of Jesus is examined with the same criteria used to assess other historical events, or in the same way that evidence is examined in a court of law, the evidence for the resurrection makes a powerful argument for the reality of what happened.

a. Through the centuries, there have been many accounts of skeptics and unbelievers who set out to disprove Jesus' resurrection, but came away as believers in Jesus when they realized that the evidence overwhelmingly confirms that He did in fact rise from the dead.

b. Two good examples are Josh McDowell who wrote *MORE THAN A CARPENTER* and *THE RESURRECTION FACTOR*, and Lee Strobel who wrote *THE CASE FOR CHRIST*.

2. We could do many lessons on this topic, but consider just a few examples from surviving historical documents and records. It's the kind of evidence that is used in courts of law to prove cases and that is used to prove events that occurred in the past.

a. The empty tomb. No one disputes that Jesus' tomb was empty. The argument is over what happened to His body. Everyone in Jerusalem knew that Jesus' tomb was empty. That's why the Jewish authorities paid the Roman guards to say that Jesus' disciples stole His body. Matt 28:11-15

b. No one was able to produce a body and no one came forward with testimony saying that they saw the disciples move and dispose of the body. This silence is deafening since it would have been in interests of the authorities to produce a body and stop this new movement before it began.

1. Women were the first to see the empty tomb and the risen Lord—and the first to spread the news. Women were not highly regarded in that culture. If you were going to make up a story, you would not select women to be the source of your story. Matt 28:1-8; John 20:11-16

2. When Peter and John went to the empty tomb they saw something that made them immediate believers—undisturbed grave clothes. Jesus' body was wrapped, according to Jewish custom, like a cocoon with strips of linen and more than 100 pounds of spices and ointments. His body couldn't have been removed without destroying the cocoon. John 20:4-8; John 19:39-40

c. A movement based on resurrection could not have taken root in the same city where Jesus was publicly executed and buried if people knew there was a body or could produce one. The tomb Jesus was laid in was only 15 minutes from where He was crucified. Anyone could visit the tomb.

1. Yet, within five weeks over 10,000 Jews were converted and gave up or altered religious practices observed for centuries, traditions they believed came from God. Acts 2:41; Acts 4:4

A. They no longer participated in animal sacrifices, the Sabbath was changed from Saturday to Sunday, and the Law of Moses was abandoned.

B. The Jewish people were monotheists (believed in only one God), and the idea that someone could be both God and man was heresy. Yet they began to worship Jesus as God.

2. To the Jews, resurrection was physical. It was their custom, once the flesh was rotted away, to gather up the bones and place them in boxes until the coming resurrection of the dead foretold by the Old Testament prophets. They believed a literal resurrection occurred.

- d. Jesus made numerous post-resurrection appearances to a variety of people, including 500 at once. He also appeared to hostile witnesses like Saul (who became Paul) and James (Jesus' half brother), both of whom were convinced of the resurrection by what they saw. I Cor 15:4-8; Acts 9:1-5
- e. Some try to say that the apostles made up the story of Jesus' resurrection. That makes no sense because their profession of faith in Jesus did not make them wealthy or famous. They were rejected by much of society and the prevailing religious establishment. Some were ultimately executed. No one suffers and dies for something they know is a lie.
3. There is a sense in which the reliability of the Bible as the Word of God stands or falls on Jesus. Jesus authenticated everything He said about Himself and the Scriptures by rising from the dead.
- a. Jesus claimed that the Old Testament writings were from God and referred to specific people and events as actually living and occurring (Matt 19:4; Matt 23:35; Luke 17:26-29; etc.). He put His own teachings on the same level as the Word (Law) of God (Matt 7:21-27).
 - b. Jesus claimed to be God. Not only did He accept worship and forgive sins (which only God can do) He stated that He was God (made Himself equal with God), John 4:25-26; 5:18; 8:58; 9:35-37; etc.
 - c. The resurrection confirmed His claim. Rom 1:3-4—(Jesus) was declared to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead (NIV).
 1. We misunderstand the term Son of God. To us, son means created by and subordinate to or less than. In the culture Jesus was born into, the phrase son of sometimes meant offspring of.
 - A. But it more often meant on the order of or one who possesses his father's qualities. I Kings 20:35; II Kings 2:3; Neh 12:28
 - B. They understood the phrase to mean sameness of nature and equality of being (Eph 2:2-3; Eph 5:6-8). That's why the Jews picked up stones to kill Jesus when He called God His Father (John 10:30-33).
 2. The name Son of God is used two ways in regard to Jesus. It refers to the fact that Jesus is God Incarnate (Matt 14:33; Matt 16:16; John 1:49). It also refers to the fact that God is the Father of Jesus' humanity (Luke 1:32-35).
 - d. Matt 16:21; Matt 20:17-19—Jesus predicted His own suffering, death, burial, and resurrection. If He could accurately predict an event of this magnitude, we can surely trust everything else He said.
4. Luke 24:44-46—On the day of His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His original twelve apostles (minus Judas). He went through the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms (the Old Testament) and explained to them how, over the previous three days, He fulfilled everything that was written about Him.
- a. Luke 24:47-48—Then Jesus commissioned them to go out and tell the world what they witnessed (Jesus rise from the grave) and what His resurrection means (wiping out or remission of sins). Sin has been paid for and men and woman can now be reconciled to God through faith in Him.
 - b. These men obeyed Jesus' command. The Book of Acts is a record of how they took the good news of Jesus' resurrection, first to Jerusalem, then throughout Israel, and finally to the known world.
 1. These men were not founders of a new religion. They were eyewitnesses of something spectacular and life changing—Jesus' resurrection. Their claim was not—we had a dream or had a vision that Jesus came back to life. Nor did they claim He had a spiritual resurrection.
 2. They said: We saw Him! We heard Him speak! We touched Him! We ate and drank with Him! That was their message. Acts 2:32; Acts 3:15; Acts 4:33; Acts 5:30-32; Acts 10:38-41
 - c. As part of fulfilling their commission to tell the world about Jesus and His resurrection, they wrote the New Testament documents. They could only be in one place at a time, but written accounts of what they witnessed expanded their reach. All of the New Testament documents were written by eyewitnesses of Jesus or a close associate of an eyewitness.
 1. Matthew, John, and Peter were part of the twelve apostles and were with Jesus for three plus years, up to His crucifixion and resurrection and ascension. Matt 10:2-4

2. James and Jude were half-brothers of Jesus. They did not believe in Jesus until He came back from the dead—they thought Jesus was crazy. Matt 13:55; Mark 3:21; I Cor 15:7; etc.

3. Paul was a persecutor of Christians. He became a believer when Jesus appeared to him three years after the resurrection. Jesus appeared to Paul a number of times after that initial encounter and taught Paul the message He preached. Acts 9:1-6; Acts 26:15-16; Gal 1:11-12

4. Mark lived in Jerusalem when Jesus ministered there. At some point he was converted, possibly through Peter's influence, and later traveled with Paul. I Pet 5:13; Col 4:10; Acts 12:25

5. Luke was not an eyewitness. He traveled with Paul on his missionary trips and did extensive research for his writings, interviewing people who interacted with Jesus. Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:3

d. These men did not write a religious book. They wrote eyewitness accounts of their interactions with Jesus for three plus years—what He said and did, up to and including His resurrection. They wrote the New Testament books and letters based on their belief that He rose from the dead. 1. Because of the supernatural element of both the Old and New Testament, critics maintain that the Bible is a book of fables and myths. Consider the testimony of an eyewitness of Jesus—the apostle Peter who was willing to die rather than deny what he saw.

2. Peter wrote the following words as he was about to be executed by crucifixion for his faith in Jesus: For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty (II Pet 1:16, ESV).

C. Conclusion: We have more to say more about the reliability of the New Testament next week, but consider these thoughts as we close.

1. The Bible does three things for us as we read it. We will elaborate on each point over the next several months.

a. The Bible reveals God to us. True peace and joy in this life come from knowing God. Jer 9:23-24

1. God's Word also reveals His plan for us—to become His sons and daughters and live in loving relationship with Him forever, on this earth once it is renewed and restored.

2. God's plan gives us a future and a hope that not only provides us with purpose and meaning in this life, His plan outlasts this life. The best is yet to come for those who know the Lord.

b. The Word of God (the Bible) produces change and transformation in us as we read it and hear it preached and taught. God, by His Spirit through His Word, works in us to impart strength, peace, hope, and joy to us. Matt 4:4; I Thess 2:13; II Cor 3:18

c. The Bible protects us from false christs and false gospels. Jesus is coming back soon, and He Himself said that one of the hallmarks of the years preceding His return will be false christs and false prophets who preach false gospels. Our only completely accurate source of information about Jesus is His written Word—the Bible. John 5:39; Matt 24:4-5; 11; 24

2. I urge you to become a regular, systematic reader of the New Testament. We begin with the New Testament because it is the fulfillment of what the Old Testament pointed to. And, the Old Testament is easier to understand when it is filtered through the light of the New Testament.

a. Regular reading means reading as often as possible (preferably every day) for 20-30 minutes.

Systematic reading means read each document from start to finish. The Bible is not a collection of verses. It is a collection of books and letters that are meant to be read from beginning to end. b. Don't worry about what you don't understand. Just keep reading. You're reading to become familiar with it. Understanding comes with familiarity and familiarity comes with regular repeated reading.

c. If you commit to regular, systematic reading God's Word will change you for the better and equip you to handle this very difficult life in the most godly and productive way. More next week!