

“The Resurrection: True or False”

The Swoon Theory

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Those were the words of someone we will call “Alan the Atheist.” Alan put to voice what many in our world, the academic, scientific and non-Christian communities attempt to do: discredit Christianity and the historical and Biblical account of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Over the centuries there have been countless theories proposed to discredit and disprove the miracle of Jesus rising from the dead that first Easter morning. We will look at five of those theories during our midweek Lenten services. Today/Tonight we look at the swoon theory.

As we begin, let’s look at six minimal facts about the resurrection of Jesus that almost all New Testament scholars agree on, whether they are liberal or historic orthodox Christians, believers in a non-Christian religion, and even most atheists. Any theory about the resurrection needs to make sense of these minimal facts. 1) Jesus was crucified; 2) Jesus died on the cross; 3) Jesus was buried in a tomb; 4) 3 days after his burial, his tomb was found empty and the body was gone; 5) Many of Jesus’ followers believe they saw and spoke to him after his death; and 6) Some of Jesus’ enemies also believed they encountered him after his death.

Let’s take a closer look at the first theory or explanation that surfaced in the second century A.D. by the pagan philosopher Celsus, and was championed by rationalists and atheists in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries – the swoon or resuscitation theory. This theory proposes that Christ did not actually die on the cross, rather he swooned or fainted. After being taken down from the cross alive, perhaps in a comatose state and very close to death, he was then placed in a tomb. He then subsequently revived, perhaps through the cool air in the tomb, and later appeared to his disciples.

Peter wrote in his first letter in the 3rd chapter, “...but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect...” (1 Pet. 3:15). So, over the next 5 weeks we will hold some of these theories up to the light of the evidence documented in Scripture, so that we don’t try to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus rose from the dead, but rather make a defense of what we have become convinced of regarding Jesus, risen from the dead.

The swoon theory completely ignores the evidences of His death and would require a greater miracle than the resurrection. According to this theory: The cool damp air of the tomb, instead of killing Him, healed Him. He split out of His garments, pushed the stone away, fought off the guards and shortly thereafter appeared to His disciples as the Lord of life.

The Linen Wrappings - Matthew 28:6 The angel at the tomb said, “He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come; see the place where He was lying.”

Luke 24:12 In Luke’s account we hear this: “But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.”

The swoon theory cannot answer the problem of the linen wrappings lying undisturbed, exactly as they had been when around the body of Christ. Christ would have had to perform a miracle of wiggling out of the wrappings which were wound tightly about the body with over a hundred pounds of spices in the wrappings without someone to help unwrap Him, as in the case of Lazarus in John 11.

The Circumstances of the Cross - John 19:31-35 “Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. ³² So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. ³⁵ He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe.”

Mark 15:43-45 “Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴ Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. ⁴⁵ And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph.”

These circumstances proved Christ died. He was dead in the judgment of the soldiers, in the judgment of Pilate, in the judgment of the Jews who requested the guard for the tomb, and in the judgment of the women who went to the tomb to further prepare the body by heaping spices over the body.

The Physical Condition of Christ after Crucifixion - If Christ had only swooned, He still would have been half dead. A great deal of time would have been needed for recuperation. In His weakened condition He could not have walked the seven miles on the Emmaus road. It would have been impossible for someone (who had only resuscitated from the agonies the Lord endured with the beatings and crucifixion) to so quickly give the impression that He was the Conqueror of death and the grave.

In addition to the three things mentioned above, there are other circumstances that need to be explained like the removal of the stone and the guard over the tomb.

The German skeptic David Friedrich Strauss, who spent most of his life arguing against the fundamental truths of Christianity, famously discounted this theory in his book, *The Life of Jesus for the People*. He wrote: "To conceive of a man hanging on a Roman cross in a blistering sun for six hours, a spear put through his side, taken down from a cross and wrapped like a mummy, as was their custom, sealed into a tomb without air, that such a person could have found his way out of this, rolled away a stone of more than a ton, fought his way past a Roman guard and appeared as a hero seven miles away to his disciples is more fantastic than the resurrection itself!"

Lee Strobel in his book, *The Case for Christ*, interviewed several doctors asking them for a medical and physical description of what Christ went through before and during his crucifixion. They all described in detail what can only be described as agonizing torture. He then asked one of the physicians, Dr. Alex Metherell to speak from the heart. **Read from page 218...**

Those who seek to explain away the resurrection of Jesus by claiming that he somehow escaped the clutches of death at Golgotha need to offer a more plausible theory that fits the facts. Then they, too must end up pondering the haunting question that all of us need to consider: What could possibly have motivated Jesus to willingly allow himself to be degraded and brutalized in the way that he did? One word – *love*. In Jesus, Amen.