

Life From the Tomb

Tyler Velin | July 29, 2012 | John 19:31-20:10

My name is Tyler, I'm one of the pastors here, and I also have my undergrad degree in journalism. With that said, I'm not too big into conspiracy theories.

I had a group of people over to watch a documentary the other day, it was on Mermaids. Apparently this group of scientists had found an actual mermaid body in the stomach of a great white shark in South Africa, but the American and South African government confiscated all of their stuff, and wouldn't let them publish their research, and all they have now is this cell phone video of a kid getting grabbed by cheesy looking alien thing.

Now when the documentary started they had the main witness, a Ph.D, saying, "As a scientist I've never believed in conspiracy theories. I believe Al Qaeda was behind the 9/11 attacks, I believe we landed on the moon, and I believe Oswald shot J.F.K." But we then find out he believes the government is covering up mermaids.

Even though I don't believe in conspiracy theories, you can easily say the same thing about me. I believe all of that, but I believe a God-man, died for my sins and came back to life three days later. I guess you could say I'm a conspiracy theorist. Yet I don't think that is true.

Not because I don't think they are possible, or that I blindly believe everything that people tell me, but I honestly don't think people are smart enough or strong enough to keep a true conspiracy theory hidden for a long time. Eventually the truth comes out.

Being a journalist I see this because through questions and reasoning and evidence, people tend to have their masks removed. As a Christian I realize this because sin eventually destroys the sinner.

So what we are going to do today, is see John's account of the burial and resurrection of Jesus, and we are going to let John make the case for us. We are going to see if this whole faith thing is simply the world's oldest conspiracy. So let's pray.

Now before we go any further, I want to give us some background on what kind of culture John was writing to. In the early days of the church, there was a movement that was growing, the first heresy that the Christian church would face, and that would be gnosticism.

The Gnostic religion really took off around 100 A.D. so a little bit after the last book of the Bible was written, which was probably between 85-95 A.D. But during the time of the New Testament authors they definitely saw the groundwork being laid for this false religion.

Actually in Acts 8, we see the story of Simon the Magician who is credited with being the founding father of the gnostic systems. One of the first big things gnosticism developed was a theory called docetism. The summary of this belief is that everything that is spiritual is good,

and everything that is physical is evil. Therefore Jesus could not have been fully man and fully God, because the human part would have corrupted the divine part and therefore made him unholy.

John writes to directly combat this thought in his gospel. Just look back at the opening lines of this book. **John 1:1,14**. John clarifies by saying even though Jesus was divine, dwelling with God, he also became flesh, Jesus was fully man and fully God. Scandalous not sinful.

Now as docetism developed, it got extremely weird and science fictiony. There were all these demigods, and secret bundles of knowledge and enlightened thought. Because they drove such a wedge between the physical and the spiritual world, they realized that if Jesus wasn't really human, he couldn't really die. So according to the gnostic tradition, Simon of Cyrene, who was the man who helped Jesus carry his cross, actually was crucified in place of Jesus. The Gnostics refused to believe that the death of Jesus was a historical event.

John also wrote to combat this thought process in the first lines of 1 John. **1 John 1:1-3**. While John started out as a fisherman, we see here he ended up as a journalist. John was stressing eye witness accounts. That which we have looked at, which our hands have touched, this we proclaim to you. He is stressing the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

So with this thought of proof lingering in your head, let's take a look at the first part of today's passage. **John 19:31-37**.

So again, as we saw last week, there are a lot of explicit prophecies fulfilled in this passage in John. And again, because of time we won't have time to dive into all of them, but there is a blog up now that goes through and discusses all of the prophecy that John alludes to or mentions in chapters 18 and 19.

But there are a few specific things I want to key on in this passage.

If we go back to the Old Testament we see (**Deut 21:23**), and it was prophesying Jesus' death on the cross, that God commanded that if anyone was hanged on a tree, they should not remain there overnight.

So the Jews, even though they just crucified Jesus, they didn't want to break the law and let Jesus and the other two criminals stay on the cross over night. So what they did was suggest to Pilate that the legs of the criminals be broken. This was common practice back then. Because when you break the legs of the men on the crosses, they can no longer push themselves up to breath and they eventually die from either suffocation or blood loss. It was to speed up the dying process.

So the soldiers go and break the legs of the other two criminals, then they get to Jesus, and it is so obvious that he is dead, that they don't even think to break his legs. It was clear to see to these Roman guards who were trained in execution that this man was dead. So they did not break his legs, and in so doing fulfilled a prophecy of the OT.

But there was one soldier who maybe wasn't so sure that Jesus was really dead, or maybe this was just his routine as a final stab at the deceased. Look back at **John 19:34-35**. So this soldier impales Jesus with a spear. Now if Jesus wasn't dead before, he certainly would have

reacted to this. And if he wouldn't have reacted to this, he certainly would have died from this.

In fact some scholars think that this soldier went under the rib cage with the spear and punctured the pericardium and heart of Jesus, and this is what accounted for the water and blood that flowed out of Jesus' side.

John makes a big deal about this. He is being journalistic here. He has emphasized twice now, once with the soldiers not breaking his legs and now with him being stabbed, that Jesus was really dead. And now, by the water and blood pouring out of Jesus' side, we see that Jesus wasn't this God-like ghost who merely appeared to be a man, but Jesus died a human death. The God-man, fully God, fully man, really died. His human body ceased to live. And everyone who was on the scene bore witness to this. . Jesus was not passed out, or in a trance, faking his death so he could rise again. The word became flesh, and died

John continues to establish the point of Jesus' death as we see his burial. **John 19:38-42.**

So we see a new character here, Joseph of Arimathea, and an old one in Nicodemus. Now at this point in the story, the disciples have dispersed. I cannot imagine the fear, and terror, and heartbreak that they are experiencing. At this point they have just watched their savior die, and that is all they know. All their hope, all their promise, all their life has just been crucified and now they are in hiding.

But two unexpected men come up to take care of the body. We don't hear of Joseph of Arimathea outside of the burial scenes in the gospel, but Luke and Mark tell us that he was actually part of the Sanhedrin, or religious court, he was a member of the body who was responsible for putting Jesus to death. And yet we learn here of a secret devotion, where upon the death of Jesus, he no longer fears the views of others, and he steps out, and uses his money to buy the tomb, and his reputation to lay the body in it.

We also see Nicodemus, we have seen him before in chapter 3 of John. In that passage we see that Nicodemus is also a member of the pharisees. Because he fears what the Pharisees would do if they found out, he snuck over to Jesus' house at night. Then he asks Jesus who he is. He says you are doing signs that only one who is God can do. Jesus then gives him a little sermon and all of it goes right over the head of Nicodemus. Jesus is talking about being born again, and only being able to see who he is when you believe who he is, and the last time we see Nicodemus, we have no idea where his heart is, we just know he is confused. But here we see that over the last three years, the holy spirit has brought Nicodemus from a covert sceptic, to a believer who puts his credibility on the line by assisting in the burial of Jesus.

Now if this were to be a conspiracy theory. Wouldn't it make sense that we would see Peter and John take the body. Wouldn't it be easier to set up a mock resurrection if the disciples chose where the tomb was, and perhaps had a back exit, or some sort of strategy. Yet the disciples are nowhere to be found right now, and two members of the religious court take initiative to bury Jesus.

In this text we see very clearly that they don't believe Jesus is alive. Nicodemus has brought 75 pounds of embalming material to put on the dead body. If you have any reservations that this person could be alive the last things you want to do is encase him in a bed of formaldehyde. This would have been a very expensive and time consuming act if this were

true. Also, why would Joseph choose a tomb so close to the city, where it was easy for the Roman guards to look after. Why would he choose a tomb in which such a large stone was rolled over the front, making it impossible for a couple little fishermen to open it.

Jesus legs were not broken, his side was pierced, his body embalmed and wrapped, his tomb sealed, and his disciples were in hiding because Jesus was dead. This is how each of the characters chose to deal with this reality. Some fled, some lingered, some labored. But Christ was dead.

And just like normal mourners do. Mary Magdalene and some friends went on Sunday morning to visit the grave. Why, because that's what you do when someone dies. Look at the story that follows: **John 20:1-2**.

So Mary comes up to the tomb and sees that the stone is rolled back, and the first thing that hits her mind is panic. Someone has stolen the body of Christ. So she immediately runs back to Peter and John, and tells them. The dead body of Jesus was stolen!

John 20:3-5

The disciples race to the scene, and John pauses outside of the tomb. Can you imagine the anxiety he has. What does he expect to find in here? Did some zealots sneak in and further mutilate the body, is the body still in there, is he going to re-live the horrible events he witnessed three days ago, are the robbers still in there. But then Peter catches up, and Peter is not nearly as contemplative as John, and he runs full bore into the tomb.

John 20:6-10

Now I want you to imagine this moment with me. Time and time again Jesus spoke to his disciples about his death and resurrection and they never got it. In fact in Matthew, Jesus brings it up and Peter takes him aside and rebukes him for it, that was crazy talk. All the parables, all the prophecy, all the language that Jesus used. It now clicked. They got the picture I want you to get right now.

They understood for the first time that Jesus came for something bigger. They understood that Jesus was so much more than they ever thought he could be. Jesus was more than a man, more than a fairytale. They understood that the OT spoke directly to who Jesus was. They understood that the cross was not an end but a beginning. Death was not a defeat but a victory. They understood that in the resurrection of Christ not only was the wrath of God satisfied, but it was the Lamb of God defeating sin and death.

Their hearts became overwhelmed, they were warmed to worship in ways they had never been before. That's because the resurrection proved that Jesus is bigger than everything.

If Jesus would have stayed dead, we could have been freed from the wrath of God, but unable to enter the new life of God. But because Jesus died and rose again, that means that not only is our record of wrong erased, but we have new life through the resurrection of Jesus because no sin is able to stand up against who Jesus is.

Jesus beat sin. Sin has no hold on him. And because as Paul says, those who have died with Christ, have been raised with Christ, sin has no hold on you. Now Jesus beat sin, Jesus

triumphed over sin. The chief of all sin is unbelief. Upon birth we sin and reject God as our savior, but through Christ Jesus, the choke hold of unbelief is broken. If Christ so chooses to awaken your heart to the beauty of himself, sin becomes inept to hold any unbelief over you because Jesus is Lord over unbelief. Skepticism and unbelief died at the empty tomb.

That's why I love that Nicodemus is in this passage. He is proof of the new life that the resurrection of Christ brings. It took Nicodemus three years to come from his midnight skeptic to a bold believer, yet all of Nicodemus questions, beliefs, concerns, worries and defenses were worn down by the newness of life that comes from a risen and resurrected savior.

I love the words of Paul in **1 Corinthians 15:16-19**. If Jesus did not die, if Jesus did not rise again. If the History of Christianity is false, then we are of people most to be pitied. Now I used to think otherwise. I used to use the logic of, "Hey, if you become a Christian and it turns out in the end that we did evolve and there is no after life, what's wrong with knowing you lived a moral and joyful life."

According to Paul everything! That's because in being a Christian I don't care about morals I care about Christ, in being a Christian I am eternally joyful, but my joy is not in my lifestyle, my joy is in my life giver, Christ. If you take a risen Christ from me then I have no joy. I lived self sacrificially for no means, I died to myself for no reason, I abstained from the passions of the flesh for tradition sake. But if Christ is alive and risen, I have neglected all of these for the immense joy and satisfaction that comes from knowing I have a savior who came and died, and rose again, and conquered my debt and defeated sin, and is ascended to the right hand of the father, who intercedes for his people, who gives life and joy abundantly, who deserves all glory and honor and praise, and in him alone do I live and move and have my being.

We are here today because the message of risen savior cannot be contained. Immediately upon seeing the empty tomb, Peter and John, stirred by the holy spirit, went home and shared it with the other disciples. What was seen initially by two, became a world wide phenomenon that still stands to this day.

In the book of Acts, the Pharisees were deciding what to do with some of the apostles who were running about the city preaching the resurrection of Christ. A Pharisee named Gamaliel stood up and delivered this message. **Acts 5:35-39**

The life of Jesus was not a conspiracy theory constructed by man. The belief in Christ is not a revelation of the weak. The faith in Christ is not a misguided group of bigoted individuals. The Christian faith exists because we serve a real God, who really took on human flesh and died for the sins of his people. And by conquering death, and rising from the dead, he allowed those who put their trust in him to also have a newness of life through Christ Jesus.