

The Missing Body of Jesus: Stolen or Raised?...

(by Bob Pulliam)

No rational, informed person rejects Jesus as an historical character. And yet there are still some who would suggest that Jesus did not exist, and that all was invented by the Catholic Church. Below, you will find my answer to this little absurdity (*The Successful Invention...*).

Rejection usually begins when we speak of the miracles performed by Jesus. And the greatest miracle rejected by people is His resurrection. Such an occurrence is beyond their comprehension, so they fully reject it as a lie. Their major obstacle, in denying the resurrection, is the fact that Jesus' body was missing from the tomb. Many theories have been set forth to explain what happened to Jesus' body. Below, you will find answers to the best theories proposed to explain the missing body of Jesus (*Missing Body Theories...*)

The Successful Invention...

Did the Roman Catholic Church invent the trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus? The Catholic Church dates from the year A.D. 606. Before that time, the New Testament was already in existence. Fragments from the trial of Jesus in the Gospel of John have been found that date to around A.D. 125. The entire New Testament can be found in the Latin Vulgate which dates to A.D. 375. The existence of the New Testament before the formation of the Catholic Church is well attested, and only denied by unreasonable souls.

That the gospel was being proclaimed in the days of the apostles, as declared in Acts, is confirmed by secular sources. Josephus was a Jewish historian who records the existence of many characters found in the Bible. Pilate, Herod, Felix, Festus, Caiaphas, Ananias, and many more are found in his works. His histories provide an excellent means of verifying the historical authenticity of the Bible. The character of each historical figure in the Bible is always in line with the profile presented by Josephus. We may read of the deaths of John the baptist, and James; not to mention the events surrounding Herod's unlawful marriage, about which John accused him.

Josephus gives us details on the uprising of Judas in Acts 5; the famine mentioned in Acts 11; and the death of Herod Agrippa in acts 12. Josephus also speaks of Jesus, and while some doubt the authenticity of statements regarding Jesus, none doubt that Josephus did mention Him.

Another early source is the historian Thallus, who wrote in the mid-first century A.D. While none of his works exist in their entirety, we have references to his work by later writers. One such reference is to the third book of his histories, and tells of him trying to explain away the darkening of the sun as a natural eclipse at the time that Jesus died (which is impossible since the Passover occurred at the full moon). A Roman historian named Tacitus (born A.D. 52), wrote concerning the great fire of Rome in A.D. 64. About the rumor that Nero had started the fire, which was widely spread, Tacitus wrote:

Therefore, to scotch the rumour, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, from whom they got their name, had been executed by sentence of the

procurator Pontius Pilate when Tiberius was emperor; and the pernicious superstition was checked for a short time, only to break out afresh, not only in Judea, the home of the plague, but in Rome itself, where all the horrible and shameful things in the world collect and find a home. (Cornelius Tacitus, Annals, xv. 44)

Another historian, writing around A.D. 120 said:

Punishment was inflicted on the Christians. a class of men addicted to a novel and mischievous superstition.
(Suetonius, Life of Nero, xvi. 2)

The bottom line is this: Jesus was, at the least, an historical character (not a myth), deserving of attention that would evaluate the claims made concerning him. Those who will not give honest evaluation are less than honorable in their application of logic.

Missing Body Theories...

Now what about the claim that Jesus was raised from the dead. There is no reason to doubt that one like unto Jesus would be put to death, and by the circumstances called forth in the gospels. It is the resurrection that causes trouble in the minds of so many, and so we examine the possibilities for explaining the missing body. "The body was not missing", you say? The claim (that the body was missing) must have been made to have instigated the stir that was created by Christianity in the first century. To the most imminent of Bible critics the question is not, "Was the body missing?"... It is, "What happened to the body?" They recognize that if the body was not missing, then no stir would have resulted for the authorities needed only to produce the body. With this I agree. What did happen to the body of Jesus after His crucifixion? Here are the most plausible answers, evaluated for you:

The Authorities Removed the Body...

Some have theorized that either the Roman or Jewish leaders took the remains from the tomb before the women arrived on the first day of the week. But why would the Romans take the remains? They couldn't have cared less about the matter (Mt 27:62 - 66). And even if they had, the temple guard, placed at the tomb, would have alerted the High Priest that this had happened. Whether the Jews or Romans took the body, the Jewish leaders would have come forward with the remains when Peter stood up on Pentecost and proclaimed Jesus as raised. Yet the Jewish leaders never came forth to expose the "hoax". Why? Because the body was missing. That doesn't make sense when you realize that the tomb was only a thousand yards or so from where Peter first proclaimed Him raised from the dead.

Joseph of Arimathea...

One theory suggests that Joseph of Arimathea removed the remains, and placed them in another tomb. The idea is that Joseph only placed Jesus' body in a temporary resting place because of the Sabbath (Jn 19:3 1 - 4?). After the Sabbath had ended, Joseph returned and moved the body to a permanent location.

Joseph obviously would have needed helpers to move the stone (weighing hundreds of pounds) and transport the body. He also would have needed the priest's permission to get past the guards that had been set (Mt 27:62 - 66). Now you have Joseph, his helpers, the

guards, and the leaders, all privy to this act; and yet not one of them came forward and produced the remains in Acts 2 where Jesus was first proclaimed risen. How absurd! The leaders were powerless in Acts 4:15-18. Not one of them said, "Look in this tomb over here! We moved Jesus' body to a permanent resting place!" They couldn't because they hadn't. The body was missing.

Women At the Wrong Grave...

Another theory supposes that the women, who came to the tomb on the first day of the week (Jn 20:1), came to the wrong tomb. They found it empty and jumped to the natural conclusion that Jesus had made good his promise to rise from the dead.

It seems unlikely that the women would have come to the wrong tomb when two of them had been looking on when Jesus was laid to rest (Mk 15:47). But even more important is the problem of a body still being where the leaders could produce it. Once the disciples began making these "false" claims, the leaders could simply direct them to the correct tomb and stop the whole thing. But they couldn't, because the body was missing.

Jesus Didn't Really Die...

The most widely held theory is that Jesus never really died on the cross. He simply fainted to a near-death state. He revived in the cool of the tomb and came forth. He slipped past sleeping guards and appeared to his disciples. Although this is the most "plausible" of all the theories, it falls into the realm of impossibility as the evidence is examined:

How could a man who couldn't carry a cross (Mt 27:32) move a stone weighing several hundred pounds? His hands, feet and side had been pierced between the time of this inability to carry a cross and moving the stone. How could we conclude that this man was in a better condition than before he had been nailed to a cross?

Tombs in the first century were built to keep the stench in (Jn 11:39), and the only way to do that was keep the air out. If Jesus had been alive in the tomb, he didn't have much air to work with.

Had he managed the impossible, and moved the stone; how did he get past the guards? Moving a massive rock up an incline is no silent act. If all of the guard had been sleeping (which I can't imagine at a grave site), Jesus would have awakened them with the sounds of stone scraping stone.

And why weren't those guards executed? That was standard policy (Acts 12:18 & 19). Instead these were bribed to say that the disciples had stolen the body while they slept. Something impossible for them to confess. For had it been the truth, they would have been executed! This point also bears on the less plausible contention that the disciples stole the body while the guards slept. There is no way the stone could have been moved without waking several men; and if it had been true, they would have been executed!

Finally, why didn't they conduct a search for the "heretic"? Why wasn't Jesus returned to the cross and executed in accordance with the original sentence? It's really very simple. The body was missing.

Conclusion...

As amazing as it may seem, these are the best theories that man can devise to explain away the resurrection. They are futile attempts to excuse selfish people from accountability to God. These have vain motives for not wanting the resurrection accounts to be true. But what motives did the disciples have for their story? Was it riches?... Which one of the apostles became a millionaire? Was it power?... Which of the apostles escaped persecution and humiliation? Was it glory?... Which of the apostles ever saw glory before his death? There's only one other explanation for why these men did what they did... The body was missing! And it was missing because Jesus was raised from the dead. They knew this because they were witnesses of His life after His death (Jn 21). They convinced the multitudes of this because the multitude had already seen much of the evidence before Pentecost ever arrived, and they exhibited the miraculous power of God which confirmed their astounding message.

In the final analysis, The resurrection declares the power and glory of God. The gospel records of this event are a compelling evidence for our faith!