

Christ Was No El Cid¹

Luke 24:1-11

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One of the national heroes in Spanish history is a knight by the name of Rodrigo Diaz; sometimes known as El Cid. He lived from 1044-1099 AD. And he really is a hero for the Christians, because, even though there is a lot of mythology written about him, El Cid was an amazing defender against the Islamic invasion. Charlton Heston's movie incorporates elements from both legend and history. I guess it makes for a more interesting story. But on any version of the story, El Cid and his horse Babieca are amazing. And so, it is a story that I really enjoy. History tells us that five years before his death he captured the fortress city of Valencia from the Moors and turned it into his kingdom. When he died of wounds at the age of 56, his wife took over and continued to fight the Moors for another three years. But the mythical version is much more interesting. It has his wife dressing the corpse and mounting it with the help of generals onto his faithful steed, Babieca, standing rigid and imposing. The Generals figure they need El Cid in one final Harrah. So, emerging from the fortress at full charge, Babieca leads the Christian armies into battle. When the Moors see El Cid, they are scared to death because they think that El Cid has risen from the dead. So they all flee to their boats and Spain is saved from the invaders. Thus, El Cid's last battle, after his death, was also a successful battle. *But it was all based on deception.* There was no resurrection. And the last laugh goes to the generals who maintain control.

Well, this is the accusation that many people have brought against Christianity all down through history. The only reason that Christianity is a success is that the apostles pulled an El Cid stunt to maintain control. They deceived the people into thinking that Jesus was raised from the grave. It was an elaborate ruse. And all we have in Christianity is a dead leader, dressed in armor, propped up on a horse with a lance in hand. If you turn to Matthew 28, you will see that the chief priests and Pharisees were the first to spout this very creative theory. In verse 12 they bribe the soldiers with a large sum of money. Then in verse 13 they instruct the fearful soldiers to spread this story: **Tell them, His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will**

¹ The illustration and some of the thoughts for this sermon were taken years ago from rough notes I took of another person's sermon. Unfortunately, I didn't record the preacher's name. Thanks go to this unknown preacher for giving me seed for this sermon.

appease him and make you secure. Now it doesn't surprise me that the priests came up with that theory in desperation. But it does surprise me that people continue to spout the same lame story to this day.

This morning we want to see that that interpretation is impossible. It doesn't fit the facts. We are not so much going to look at the proofs of the resurrection, as we will at the tremendous changes that took place in the disciples' lives.

I. The Disciples' Loss

Please turn back to Luke 24. And I want you to notice first the demoralized state that these disciples were in on that first Resurrection Sunday. They felt deeply the loss of Christ. Unlike El Cid's faithful officers, the disciples had no grand illusions about what they might accomplish with a dead body. In Luke 24:21 they say, "**But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel.**" Notice those words: "we were hoping." Their hopes had been dashed. They were stunned by the sudden turn of events and were not in a mood for rallying the troops. Instead, the disciples were in hiding - fearful that the soldiers would come for them next. When He sees the other disciples in verse 36-43 they are terrified. They don't think they are seeing a body. They think they are seeing a spirit. They don't know what to make of the appearance. This was no El Cid.

And Christ warned the disciples even before He died that they would be demoralized and scattered. He knew their nature, and He told them that they would flee rather than fight. Mark 14:27 says, "**Then Jesus said to them, 'All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'**" Unlike El Cid's courageous generals, these people were not capable of creating an El Cid hoax. They were a disappointed, discouraged, defeated lot on that first resurrection morning. It would be difficult to imagine them mounting *any* kind of crusade that would succeed in turning the world upside down.

II. The Disciples' Encounter

But someone might object, "Perhaps these disciples were *themselves* deceived in some way. Perhaps they hallucinated. Perhaps the women had convinced them that Christ had been raised and they were merely the troops riding behind El Cid, and because they were convinced, it was a successful endeavor." But even a cursory reading of the passage indicates that all of

Christ's followers were hard to convince. They did not believe until they had irrefutable evidence. Some have given the impression that the women believed from the start, and that the apostles were harder to convince than the women. So this was a deception started by ignorant women. But look at verses 3-8. **"Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.** [They weren't looking for a resurrected Savior. They were looking for his *body*, right? And when they couldn't find the body it says] **And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." And they remembered His words."** The women needed convincing, and each one of the disciples needed convincing. Apparently they were all from the "show me state", and just because the women were convinced did not mean the apostles were. They were so demoralized that in verse 11 it says, **"And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them."** And there are some today who continue to believe that the resurrection is an idle tale. Unfortunately, they are not willing to do some of the research that Frank Morris did. Frank Morris started off wanting to write a book to disprove the resurrection, but as he did more and more research he became convinced that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead and became converted. His book, *Who Moved the Stone*, gives his conclusions. And in the same way, these disciples were skeptics who had to be convinced by the evidence.

One by one these disciples began to be convinced of the resurrection because they saw, handled, and talked with Christ; they had Him explaining the Scriptures, and they found that it was all consistent. Peter went to investigate in verse 12, and reported to the other followers of Christ, but look at the results in verses 21-26. **"But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see."** They felt that the story about the *tomb* was correct, but they still hadn't bought into their report of the angels. And Christ's response is, **"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have**

spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" The Scriptures ought to have been sufficient to convince you of this. And yet, in spite of the reports of one after another of the disciples, each one had to be convinced by himself. Look at verse 33. **So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"** [Apparently nobody had believed Simon, but now at least these two were convinced. "Hey, what Simon said is true after all. We've seen Him with our own eyes."] **And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how it was known to them in the breaking of bread. Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you." But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit.** [The first thought to come to their minds is not that Simon and Mr. & Mrs. Cleopas are right, but that they are seeing a *spirit*, not a body.] **And He said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But when they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, "Have you any food here?" So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence.** The Gospel of John tells us that these disciples are now excited and try to convince Thomas: **The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."** (v. 25) Thomas has been given a bad rap for being a doubting Thomas, but can you see how all the disciples were doubters? In Mark 16 the words "they did not believe" is almost a refrain. Mary Magdalene tells them she saw Christ, but "**they did not believe**" (v. 11). Two others tell them, and Mark says, "**they did not believe them either**" (v. 13). In Mark 16:14 it says, **He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.**

God in His mercy gave a superabundance of evidence over a period of 40 days to over 500 people. Acts 1:3 says, **to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.** Can you see how there is no way that this could be

another El Cid? You can't change a demoralized group of people into the zealous crusaders with a dead body. As one man remarked when he was looking down into the Grand Canyon, "Something happened here!" And it did! He is risen! He is alive! And the fact that there is a spiritual Grand Canyon there; an empty tomb with many infallible proofs cannot be explained away.

III. The Disciples' Transformation

But it is not enough to merely believe that Christ rose from the grave. Scripture tells us that Satan believes that doctrine, and it has not changed him. On that first Resurrection morning there were two very different reactions amongst the witnesses of the resurrection. The disciples fell on their knees before Christ; they embraced Him and they worshipped Him. There was a personal, heartfelt tie between them and the Lord. But the guards who witnessed the same events as the women were not changed in the least. It was life as usual. Turn to Matthew 28. Matthew 28 tells us that the guards were witnesses of the angel moving the large stone away from the grave opening. They were witnesses of the angel telling the women in verse 5, **Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold I have told you.** Those guards were so terrified that they couldn't move until the episode was over; they became like dead men. They were forced to be witnesses. They were paralyzed. And Matthew 28:11 says, **Now while they [that is, the women] were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. [all the things. They saw the earthquake. They saw the angels move the stone. They knew what the angel had told the women. And yet they did not follow Christ. That's the amazing thing. Matthew tells us.]** **When they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure." So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.** Here were guards who were spreading the very opposite of what they knew to be true. And that whole group of people was living a life that denied what they knew to be right. They knew that Christ had been raised. They had witnessed it with their own eyes, but it did not change them. Isn't that remarkable?

We might marvel that people could so willfully reject the evidence. How could anybody have such hardness of heart? How could anyone ignore such evidence? And yet Scripture indicates that this is the condition of every human heart until Christ touches it. It illustrates the truth of the doctrine of Total Depravity. It illustrates Romans 3 **there is none who seeks after God** (v. 11). No one wants to submit to God until their hearts are changed.

What was it that made these disciples worship Christ? Was it that they were better than the guards? No. Turn back to Luke 24. Look at Luke 24:16: **But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.** Then look at verse 31: **Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him.** God in His mercy was drawing these people in. He opened their eyes. And David several times in the Psalms asks God to open our eyes that we may behold great and wondrous things out of God's law; so that we don't just see it as a dead letter, but so that we can recognize the personal character of God speaking to us. Apart from God's grace there are shades on our eyes that hinder us from seeing spiritual reality. Look at verse 32: **And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"** Not only did God open their eyes, but also He opened the Scriptures and opened their hearts so that their hearts were warmed and moved by those Scriptures. Look at verse 45: **And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.** When we see all that had to happen to the disciples before they believed, we should not be surprised by the reaction of the guards. They had not had hearts that had been touched; they had not had their understandings opened or their eyes opened so that they saw things in a different light. Apart from God's grace none of us would have responded with worship and adoration. We would have been just like the guards. The guards didn't need more evidence, they needed changed hearts. And this morning, if your eyes have been opened to love and follow Christ, thank God and worship Him, because He alone gets the glory. As Jonah said, **Salvation is of the Lord.** Who but the Lord could make an entire city of Nineveh be converted? Who but the Lord could make my blind eyes see?

Romans 1 tells us that God has placed within the heart of man a knowledge of right and wrong, a knowledge of God, and he has shown that evidence in creation, yet men seek to ignore the evidence. It's exactly the same thing as what was happening with the guards. They seek to suppress that knowledge of God and to serve themselves rather than to serve the Lord. Apart from grace we can all listen to a sermon and go on with life as usual without having been changed one bit. When I realize how easy it is for any

of us to become blind and hardened I plead with God, “Lord, do not let me go. I need your grace every day. Please, do not let me stumble.”

But you know what, when I realize that God’s grace is greater than the hardness of men’s heart, I don’t give up on any person either. Romans 3 tells us **there is none who seeketh after God**. Christ told the Pharisees in John 8:44, **You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do**. Men do not need more evidence. I know of a Jewish philosophy teacher in California who has been convinced that Christ rose from the dead, but he doesn’t care to follow Christ. When I heard that, I was kind of blown away. Here was a Jewish professor who is convinced that Christ rose from the dead. But his conclusion is not to bow at Christ’s feet in worship. His conclusion is, “Well, there are a lot of other strange things that we can’t explain in this universe too. It doesn’t prove a thing.” That is hardness of heart speaking.

You see, salvation is not a case of the Valencians following a corpse into battle. That professor knows that Christ is not a corpse, but he has no intention of following Christ into battle anyway. Polls have shown that 72% of Americans say they believe the Bible is the Word of God. 51% say they believe in the full authority of the Bible. 69% say they believe in the divinity of Christ. But only 36% prayed regularly and only 10% saw themselves as “highly spiritually committed.” For most of these people, a belief in these doctrines has had absolutely no affect upon their lives; it has not changed them; and they are no more saved than those guards were. Those guards believed that Jesus rose from the dead, did they not? Christ made clear in John 6:44, **No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him**. Has your heart been drawn to God?

That is the difference between the disciples and the guards. One group saw the evidence, and yet were not drawn by the Father with the cords of love to Christ. The other group saw the same evidence and was drawn by the Father to love Christ, to fall at His feet and worship Him, to say to Him as Thomas did, **My Lord, and my God!**; to personalize the resurrection message and make it theirs. What is your reaction to Christ? After hearing God’s Word is it just life as usual, or have you had a personal encounter with the living Lord that has transformed you and made you want to worship; made you want to serve Him? If there has been no transformation, you need to plead with God to change your heart.

Some of you young people have probably never questioned the evidence of Christ’s resurrection. You believe the doctrines of your catechism. But can you honestly say that you have a heart for God; that you have been drawn to follow His ways? Perhaps the only reason you come to

church is because your parents tell you to. Perhaps the only reason you obey God's laws is because it is easier for you to do so. The difference between you and the guards is only one of degree. Certainly you might not have told the lie that these guards did, but is your life a lie that denies Christ? Do you claim that Christ is Lord, and yet refuse to let Him tell you what He wants you to do? Do not think that He will let you off any easier than those guards? No way. God says that the opposite is true: to whom much is given, much will be required. Perhaps like those guards, you know about Christ, but you do not know Him personally. Those who know Christ personally have a confidence that because Christ rose, He will lead us in triumph over death to a new life. Those who only know about Him, have a misplaced hope. It is the hope of the Valencians who followed after a corpse into battle.

It is imperative that you know the difference between a dead faith and a living faith. Faith is the key that gets us into heaven - that opens a new relationship with God on earth. But faith has many counterfeits. My key chain has keys that look alike, but each key will only fit one lock. And there are many things that have been masquerading as genuine faith, but which will not open the gate of life. Some believe in Jesus as a historical person, just like they believe that George Washington was a historical person. But it has no impact on their lives. James says, **You believe there is one God? You do well, the devils also believe and tremble.** He's basically saying, "So what? What makes you different from the devils?" That is not going to save. Others are a little bit more personal and they are willing to trust Christ with their finances and pray that God will help them to break even. Others are willing to trust Him when they fly and pray that God will help them to land safely; or maybe when they drive on the road. Those are all good things. I pray every time my plane takes off and every time it lands. But there are many unsaved people who pray with a temporal faith. Did you know that there are several Scriptures which describe people who believe in Christ but they are not saved? In John 2 it says, **Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them** [it's the same Greek word - "He didn't believe in them"], **because He knew all men.** Here they were, church members, and Christ would not commit Himself to them. Why? Their faith was a temporal, historical faith. What is unique to all of these expressions of faith is that they are temporal. Traveling faith, financial faith, historical faith; healing faith. Saving faith is different. D. James Kennedy likens it to sitting in a chair. I can have faith that that chair will hold me up, but until I actually sit

in the chair, I have not exercised my faith personally. Even if I put my wallet on that chair and trust Him for my finances; and place my keys there when I drive, I am still not on the chair. And trusting Christ for our salvation involves getting off the chair of trust in our good works; in our self-efforts; getting off the chair of trusting my church attendance, or my relationship to other good people; and going over to rest myself in the chair of all that Christ has done for me.

Let the doctrine of Scripture lead you to embrace the risen and living Christ, and having embraced Him, you will know first hand why you want to worship Him and cry out with Thomas, “My Lord and my God.” Let’s pray.

I charge you to put your trust in Christ alone for your salvation and to follow Him with all your heart. Amen.