

Jesus said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your mind? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see: a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.' Luke 24.38-39.

There are a few phrases doing the rounds at the moment which are particularly irritating: 'evidence-based' and 'follow the science'. They're not irritating because they're wrong, but because they're used too much by non-scientific politicians to force their flakey policies on to us. What I would like to do now is to 'follow the science', to see where the evidence leads us. And the evidence I'm talking about is the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection.

So often it is merely assumed that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ just couldn't happen. It's unscientific. It's incredible, yes, but just because something is incredible doesn't mean it's impossible. And also, while we're on the subject of logic, just because something has never happened before, it doesn't mean it can't happen in the future.

So let's follow the evidence as we find it in the Bible. What is very startling is the fact that in all four gospels the first people to discover the empty tomb were *women*. You can see that in *Luke 24.1-3*, on p1061 ... We also see that not one of the first disciples believed that Jesus had actually been raised from the dead. They dismissed it as womanly hysteria, vv9-11... Peter was just confused, v12...

One of the most famous accounts of Christ's resurrection appearances is of his visit to Doubting Thomas. Luke includes an account of Cleopas and his companion going to Emmaus on the very first Easter Day. They also did not believe it, and dismissed it as womanly nonsense, 24.22-24...

The third piece of evidence I want you to note is the sheer physicality of the resurrection. When Jesus appears to the disciples in v36, he makes it very plain that he is not a ghost, not an illusion, but real flesh and blood. Luke the doctor, who was used to bodies, and was himself a scientist, is at pains to record Christ's words to the disciples, vv37-40... Luke goes on to record how the disciples *still* do not believe that this is Jesus. So Jesus asks for something to eat, v41. And just to ram the point home, Luke records that Jesus ate it *in their presence*, v43...

Now a lot of modern churchmen don't really believe in the actual resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's more a *spiritual* sort of thing, a *metaphor* of the indestructibility of love, and that sort of thing. Well, I don't know where they get that from, but it's not what Dr Luke and the other gospel writers record. Luke makes plain that Jesus was anxious to say that he was *not* a ghost. He invited them to touch him; he ate with them. He asked Doubting Thomas to touch his very wounds. As I have said hundreds of times before, people are entitled to reject the Bible, but they are not entitled to rewrite it. The four gospels plainly go out of their way to say that it was a physical resurrection. Let's follow the actual evidence. Let's follow what the gospel writers actually say, rather than what some people would *like* them to have said.

Of course, it would have been much easier to convince the people if the disciples had claimed that Jesus was a ghost; that his appearances to them were reverie and visionary. And that brings me to something extraordinary which demands our

attention. If these disciples were working a con on the people, why did they make it so hard? Why claim that the first people to discover the empty tomb were *women*. Jewish courts in those days considered the testimony of women to be worthless. So, if they were trying to deceive the people, and the whole thing has been made up, why make it up that it was *women* who found the big stone rolled away. Why did they weaken their own case - unless, they were simply telling the truth?

Now what we *can* be sure of is that a few years after that first Easter, disciples like Peter, John, Mark were very high up in the fledgling church. These were now the leaders. Even if they were out to con the people, and they knew the whole thing was make-believe, they would still have wanted the people to look up to them. So why did they allow these stories about them not believing the resurrection to be included in the gospel accounts? Again, what did they have to gain from publishing documents which undermine their authority - unless it was true?

And if they wanted to con the people, why did they make it harder to believe? Why say that Jesus *bodily* arose? Just say that his *spirit* arose. It was unnecessary to go on about these *bodily* appearances - unless, of course, it was true.

We're trying to be evidence-based. The evidence doesn't point towards a con. But perhaps the disciples *themselves* were conned. Well, that's possible, but surely, not *all* of them. There could be one or two nutters among them, but not every single one of them, even the 500 that Paul talks about who saw Jesus and some of whom were still living as Paul wrote.

I've said many times before that no-one could say that Saul of Tarsus was a friendly witness. He hated Jesus. He made his name persecuting Christians. What on earth was in it for him to claim that he had actually met the living Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus? He stood to gain only ridicule from his former Christ-hating colleagues, and rejection.

And we know that most of the disciples were later martyred. Why die for something, if they knew it was a lie? Well, again, you'll always have a few nutters, but the whole lot of them? I don't think so. I think that if we follow the science, the evidence points to the conclusion that these at first unbelieving disciples had a real encounter with the risen Jesus. Once they had actually touched him, they knew it was true, and they were willing to die for this great truth. They had the evidence of their own eyes, ears and touch.

I actually think a lot of people who claim to be evidence-based are very selective. They don't always follow the science, because they don't *want* to accept the conclusion. You see, *if* this resurrection is true, then there is an amazing God running the show. By defeating even mighty death itself, he has shewn his lordship. A lot of people don't want to believe that there is a God who has a claim on their lives. Many people want to be free to do what *they* want and answer to no-one but themselves. They cannot *afford* to follow the evidence to the conclusion that Easter is true, because it means life-style changes. But once you've got past wanting to control your own life, you find in the risen Christ the glorious One who has conquered death and sin and hate.