

Mark 16:1-8; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 15:1-11

## No Foolin'

### Introduction

It cannot have escaped your notice that today is "April Fools' Day." No one is actually able to say where this light-hearted custom began. Alex Boese, who is the curator of something called the On-line Museum of Hoaxes says we have the Dutch to thank for the tradition of tricking people on this day. (Oh, those playful Dutch.) Perhaps the greatest April Fool's trick occurred in 1957. The normally stuffy British Broadcasting Corporation had a popular television news program at that time called *Panorama*, hosted by (I am not making this up) Richard Dimbleby. Dimbleby was a British Walter Cronkite. He was loved and trusted. He was, steady, urbane and authoritative. One of his colleagues said of him "He had enough gravitas to float an aircraft carrier." Here's what happened,

On April 1, 1957 ... *Panorama* broadcast a three-minute segment about a bumper spaghetti harvest in southern Switzerland. The success of the crop was attributed both to an unusually mild winter and to the "virtual disappearance of the spaghetti weevil." The audience heard ... the show's highly respected anchor, discussing the details of the spaghetti crop as they watched video footage of a Swiss family pulling pasta off spaghetti trees and placing it into baskets. The segment concluded with the assurance that, "For those who love this dish, there's nothing like real, home-grown spaghetti."

But there's more,

The Swiss Spaghetti Harvest hoax generated an enormous response. Hundreds of people phoned the BBC wanting to know how they could grow their own spaghetti tree. To this query the BBC diplomatically replied, "Place a sprig of spaghetti in a tin of tomato sauce and hope for the best."

[Source:

[http://hoaxes.org/archive/permalink/the\\_swiss\\_spaghetti\\_harvest](http://hoaxes.org/archive/permalink/the_swiss_spaghetti_harvest)]

People will believe anything, especially if they see it on TV or read it on the internet. And there are some today who look upon Easter as no different than the great Spaghetti Tree Hoax. The gospel accounts of the

empty tomb, and the earnest words of Paul, **I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins ..., and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day....** these are dismissed as impossible, irrelevant, or outright trickery.

### **Hard Core Skeptics**

Admittedly it isn't easy to believe in the resurrection. It goes beyond our everyday experience. We are constantly confronted with hundreds of tragic deaths whenever we pick up a newspaper or go on-line. Reports of a resurrection, on the other hand, never occur. If it happened to Jesus then why not to someone else, why can't modern science find a way to reverse death? We are naturally unlikely to believe in the report of a resurrection, whether it is reported from the Philippines dateline 2018 or in the Bible. More on this later!

For now let's deal with the fact that when we sing our Alleluias on Easter hard core skeptics look at us as a group of delusional dupes, controlled by a small cynical batch of priests, ministers, and bishops.

Lee Strobel was an investigative journalist for the Chicago Tribune in the 1970's. He had written several compelling pieces that made the front page and won a UPI Editors Association Award for public service because of his reporting. In 1980 his wife converted to Christianity which distressed her husband who was an avowed atheist. It created great stress for their marriage and Lee finally decided to investigate the claims made about Jesus in the bible. He interviewed scores of people, forensic investigators, doctors, historians, psychologists, biblical scholars, and linguists. Over a period of about a year he did little else but read the Bible, talk to experts and evaluate the claims that Jesus really lived in the first century, believed himself to be the Messiah, and was resurrected as reported by his disciples. All of the evidence he accumulated at first frustrated him. He had supposed that his skills as an investigative reporter would give him the ability to disprove the assertions of Christianity quite easily. Instead he found a disturbing consistency in the written accounts about Jesus and in the behavior of both Jesus and his followers. He could find no glaring errors, no conclusive evidence of fakery or conspiracy regarding his death and resurrection. And, yes, as you might have imagined, after months of disquiet and resisting his own research he became a believer and was baptized in 1981. His work was finally

brought together in a book published in 1994, entitled The Case for Christ.

Lee Strobel's story is a personal journey of discovery. He is one of those rare individuals who, although a skeptic, tested what he thought he knew against the weight of evidence. It is far more common for people to pay attention only to the facts or opinions which confirm what they already believe. Many, for instance dismiss Jesus without ever having read the Bible, or because of what they think they know about him. Worse, some people reject the claims of Jesus Christ not from ignorance but because of actual cases of sexual misconduct or embezzlement or some other lurid sin in the church, reported by the press. Such incidents undermine the faithful and confirms those already hostile to the Church. If you are convinced all religion is a con game you will not accept so bold a claim as resurrection.

### **Wannabe Believers**

Many others however, sincerely want to believe, but cannot jump over the hurdle of doubt. The early disciples saw him, that's one thing. But have we? Do we know someone who we can interview who saw Jesus raised? Even if we did the problem remains that no one can convince another on the basis of their own decision. We can only report what we believe. People are not talked into faith, they must find it for themselves. A good place to start is the resurrection. It is so large a claim that it forces a decision. Either we accept it or we reject it. Without the resurrection, Jesus appears to be a misguided, tragic figure. But with it the whole picture changes.

100 years ago radio was in its infancy and motor cars were a novelty. Television hadn't been invented and airplanes were made of wood and canvas. There is a confidence now in the wonders we have made, even when we can't begin to explain them. We accept without question the convenience of electrical lighting and computer technology, not knowing in the barest sense (most of us anyway) how the lights go on or an e-mail travels across the continent in a split second. Can we not see something important in this that would help us over the hurdle of doubt? The explanation of how a thing works is not as essential as the thing itself. No fifteen year old teenager would forsake using a cell phone merely because she does not understand how it works.

Before we get an explanation we need to recognize a fact. The resurrection is. It changed the lives of all who knew Jesus before his death. Paul reports that more than 500 of his disciples saw him after the resurrection. John who ran away terrified from the Garden of Gethsemane 55 days later was in the Temple announcing his resurrection. Peter who had denied Jesus three times was there with him.

Earthquakes were inexplicable by science until 1970. For all those thousands of years when the ground trembled and heaved people had no idea what was going on. Finally we sent two men to the moon and put a laser target on its surface. With it geologists could measure with extreme precision the movement of the continents, and a whole new science called plate tectonics was born. But for all those years beforehand, the entire length of human history, people had believed that the solid ground could break apart, buckle and slide, even those who never had lived through such an experience.

## **Conclusion**

But here is the real problem about the resurrection. It cannot be proven. Not by an archaeological discovery, not by the Shroud of Turin, not by patient step by step working of a mathematical theorem. It is as illogical and unexpected as the cross. Christians see in the cross of Christ the power of God to save us. We could not pay the price of our sins, but God can, and did. Was it logical for God to love us so? To send the Son to die for us? Certainly not. And whom did he choose to take that message to the world? Clever men with silver tongues who could reduce thousands to tears? No, fishermen and a tax collector; a political revolutionary, and others so non-descript we don't even know what they did for a living. Tilemann Hesshus, a Lutheran pastor in the Reformation era once preached:

**God chose fishermen, common and uncultured people, and the poor to be apostles so that by them he might call the world to repentance. When establishing his kingdom, God passed over the wise and powerful, and chose instead the lame, deaf, blind, lepers, and paupers. God commanded his only-begotten son to suffer death on the cross. These and innumerable other things seem absurd and foolish to our reason. But God expressed his**

**exceptional wisdom to his people through these things, which surpassed by far all of the wisdom of human intellect.**

No foolin'.