

## I. Introduction

## A. LYTTLETON AND WEST

- B. In 1747, two brilliant English aristocrats sat in a massive library, poured a drink, and made a pact to destroy Christianity forever...
- C. They were educated, articulate, well-to-do, well-known, and popular.
- D. Their names were Gilbert West and Lord George Lyttleton (a member of Parliament).
- E. At this time, England was awash in the confidence of the Enlightenment.
  - 1. Reason, not revelation, was the reigning authority in educated circles.
  - 2. The old assumptions of Christendom were no longer taken for granted; instead, they were placed under the same critical scrutiny as any other ancient claim.
  - 3. Deism was fashionable among the elite—an elegant, rational religion that affirmed a distant Creator but rejected miracles, divine intervention, and the authority of Scripture.
  - 4. Christianity, with its supernatural claims and historical particularity, was increasingly dismissed as a relic of a primitive age.
- F. For young intellectuals like West and Lyttleton, skepticism wasn't rebellious—it was simply what thoughtful, modern people did.
- G. Against this backdrop, the two friends decided to examine what they saw as the most vulnerable points of Christianity: the resurrection of Jesus and the conversion of Paul.
- H. They agreed to strike at these two foundational pillars.
- I. One would write a book proving the resurrection was a hoax, while the other would write a book proving the conversion of the Apostle Paul was a psychological delusion.
- J. If these pillars could be shown to collapse under rational investigation, the whole structure of the faith would fall with them.
- K. Their project wasn't born of hostility but of confidence—confidence that the tools of Enlightenment reason would expose Christianity's foundations as weak.
  - 1. We will come back to Lyttleton and West.

## II. Welcome to Pathway

- A. My talk today is part of a series.
  - 1. The series is called, "Mysteries of the Resurrection."
  - 2. This talk is part 5 in that series: "The Mystery of Multiple Eyewitnesses."
- B. What do you do with the claim that so many people saw Christ after he rose from the dead? How do you reconcile that? Or explain it away?
- C. It's not an easy question.
- D. And to answer it, I invite you to think through this Scripture with me: there are some secrets here, hidden in plain sight.
  - 1. *"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time."* (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

## III. Creed

- A. Everybody needs a creed.
  - 1. A creed is a formal statement of truth. It's the ultimate reality you bank your life on, stated in formal and concise form.
- B. You have a creed, whether you realize it or not.
- C. Christianity is a creed.
- D. But not everyone likes the Christian creed. In fact, some people hate it.
- E. The two friends we met earlier, West and Lyttleton, certainly did. They believed that Christianity was a cruel fable that gave weak people false hope.
- F. So, over a few drinks, they made their pact.
- G. They shook hands. They went home to their massive libraries. And they gave themselves exactly one year to shut the door on heaven forever.
- H. I am going to leave those two men in their libraries for a few more minutes...
- I. Because before you find out what happened to them, you need to look at the creed they were trying to destroy.

## IV. The Chain of Custody (Unpacking the Creed)

- A. In our Scripture for today, the Apostle Paul is writing to a church that is a mess. To anchor them, he doesn't offer a self-help formula. He drops a historical anchor.
  - 1. *"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve."* (1 Corinthians 15:3-5)
- B. If you read that in the original Greek, it has a distinct, repetitive rhythm. Four specific clauses: That he died... That he was buried... That he was raised... That he appeared.
- C. You aren't just reading a letter; you are reading a Creed. A formal, concise statement of truths to be believed. Written for clarity. And written for memory.
- D. This is a creed.
- E. How do we know?
  - 1. Look at the very first sentence: "I delivered to you... what I also received."
  - 2. In English, that sounds informal. But in the first century, the Greek words *paradidōmi* ("delivered") and *paralambanō* ("received") were highly formal terms used by Jewish rabbis to pass down sacred tradition.

3. Those words indicated the ancient equivalent of establishing a Chain of Custody for evidence in a court of law.
- F. Paul is looking the skeptics in the eye and saying: "I did not invent this. I am handing you the official, untampered truth exactly as it was handed to me. There's a chain of custody here."
  1. In this paragraph beginning in 1 Corinthians 15:3, Paul is quoting an ancient Creed.
  2. But here is the most devastating detail for anyone who thinks the resurrection is just a legend that evolved over time. Legends take generations to grow.
  3. This Creed did not.
  4. If you trace the historical timeline, Jesus was crucified around AD 33. Paul converted shortly after that, and in his letter to the Galatians, he states that three years later, he traveled to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, he met with Peter and James—two of the primary eyewitnesses named in this very Creed.
  5. When Paul says, I'm delivering what I received, this is when he received it. A maximum of 2 years from the resurrection.
  6. Because of this and other facts, historians and scholars across the spectrum agree on something staggering.
    - a) And I'm not talking about just conservative Christian scholars, but skeptical, secular, and even atheist historians.
  7. They agree that this specific Creed existed and was being recited by the earliest Christians somewhere between 3 to 24 months after the crucifixion of Jesus.
  8. Get this. The exact words: "he was buried and he rose again the third day" became the Creed of the Christians within *months...* way too short a time for a so-called legend to percolate and form.
- G. James D.G. Dunn, a respected New Testament historian, stated that we can be "entirely confident" this creed was formulated within months of Jesus' death. Even the atheist scholar Gerd Lüdemann admits this tradition dates back to the very first years after the cross.
- H. There was no time for myth. There was no time for a game of telephone. This Creed was locked in, memorized, and handed off while the trauma of the cross was still fresh and the eyewitnesses were still walking the streets of Jerusalem.
- I. And look how this Creed answers your deepest human ache:
  1. "That Christ died for our sins." God didn't sweep your guilt under the rug; He paid for it.
  2. "That He was buried." He experienced our ultimate human finality.
  3. "That He was raised." Death does not have the final word because this space-time continuum is not all there is.
- J. But how do you know it wasn't just all theoretical? Theological? Just ideas and words?
- K. That brings you to the statement...
  1. "...and that He was seen."
- L. Paul doesn't just give you a philosophy. He gives you a witness list.
- V. The Witness List (The Breakthrough)
  - A. Paul even starts rolling out the names. And he doesn't start with the people who had the most faith; he starts with the people who had the most shame:
    1. "...and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve."
      - a) If you were inventing a religion, you wouldn't start your witness list with Peter. Peter was the guy who publicly denied he even knew Jesus three times on the night of the arrest.
      - b) And "the twelve"? That's the inner circle. Just days before, they were terrified refugees, suffering from what psychologists call acute traumatic stress.
      - c) Yet, something happened to these broken men that turned them from terrified hiders into fearless martyrs who stood in the streets of Jerusalem and shouted, "You killed Him, God raised Him, and we are witnesses!" You do not willingly face torture and death for a lie you invented.
  - B. But there's more:
    1. "Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep."
      - a) This is the psychological break in the case.
      - b) Modern psychology is clear: Hallucinations are individual events. I cannot induce my hallucination into your brain. To suggest that 500 people suffered the exact same spontaneous visual and auditory hallucination at the exact same time requires more blind faith than believing in the resurrection itself.
    2. And don't miss the audacity of what Paul writes next: "most of whom are still alive."
      - a) Paul is writing these words around AD 55. The events happened around AD 33. He is issuing a massive, public challenge to the skeptics of his day. He is saying: "You don't believe me? The evidence is still breathing. Go to Jerusalem. Go to Galilee. Knock on their doors. Cross-examine them yourself. I dare you."
        - b) You do not write that in a public document if you are making it up.
  - C. But Paul saves the most devastating piece of evidence for last. Look at verse 7:
    1. "Then he appeared to James..."
      - a) If you know the history, this is the mic drop. James was Jesus' own half-brother. And during Jesus' entire ministry, James did not believe in Him. In fact, the Gospel of Mark tells us Jesus' family thought He was out of His mind.
      - b) What could possibly cause a skeptical, cynical brother to suddenly change his mind, become the leader of the church in Jerusalem, and eventually be stoned to death for claiming his brother was the Son of God?
      - c) There is only one rational explanation. James saw something that shattered his skepticism. He saw his dead brother alive again.
  - D. And finally, verse 8: "Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me."

1. Paul. The terrorist. The man who made it his life's mission to hunt down and prosecute Christians. He wasn't looking for Jesus. He hated Jesus. Yet he encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, and it flipped his universe upside down.
2. When you look at this list—the coward Peter, the terrified Twelve, the 500 at once, the skeptic James, the enemy Paul—you aren't looking at a fairy tale.
3. The sheer volume and diversity of these witnesses crushes the myth or legend hypothesis.
4. This brings us back to our two English aristocrats, sitting in their libraries.

#### VI. Lyttleton and West

- A. Let's go back to 1747. Let's go back to those two brilliant English aristocrats sitting in their massive libraries, determined to shut the door on heaven forever.
- B. For an entire year, they buried themselves in the evidence. But they didn't find the fairy tale they were expecting.
- C. Instead, they ran headfirst into the Chain of Custody.
  1. They ran into the Creed.
  2. They ran into the coward Peter, the terrified Twelve, the skeptic James, the enemy Paul, and the 500 eyewitnesses.
- D. They tried to apply the "Creed of the Lab Coat."
  1. They tried to find a natural, scientific formula to explain away the empty tomb and the post-resurrection appearances.
  2. They tried the hallucination theory.
  3. They tried the stolen body theory.
  4. They tried the "it's just a myth" theory.
  5. They tried the conspiracy theory.
- E. But as brilliant legal and historical minds, they realized that the sheer volume, diversity, and independence of these witnesses made these all impossible.
- F. A year passed. The two men finally came back together to share their manuscripts and destroy Christianity.
- G. But when they sat down across from each other, they were both surprised.
- H. Without consultation, independently, they had both become Christians and they had both written books to support the Christian revelation claim, centered on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- I. Gilbert West, who set out to disprove the resurrection, wrote a book defending it.
  1. His book is called: *Observations on the History and Evidences of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*.
  2. He concluded that the evidence of the multiple eyewitnesses was so consistent and so unbreakable that it was intellectually impossible to dismiss. He wrote that trying to explain away the resurrection using human theories was like trying to move the planet Earth with your bare hands. The truth was simply too heavy.
  3. He wrote:
    - a) "The evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ... is so clear and convincing, that it is impossible for any man to read it with a mind free from prejudice, and not be convinced of the truth of it."
- J. His friend, Lord Lyttleton, who set out to prove Paul was a fraud, wrote a book proving Paul had truly met the risen Christ.
  1. *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul*
  2. He looked at the evidence and realized that a man who had money, power, and status had absolutely no motive to throw it all away, endure beatings, shipwrecks, and eventually a brutal execution, unless he had actually seen a dead man breathing.
    - a) "I shall endeavor to prove that St. Paul was not an impostor, who said what he knew to be false with an intent to deceive; that he was not an enthusiast, who by the force of an overheated imagination imposed upon himself; and that he was not deceived by the fraud of others."
    - b) "The conversion of St. Paul was not a work of man, but the work of God; and it is of itself a demonstration that the Gospel is not the invention of men, but a revelation from God."
- K. They started as skeptics. They ended as believers.
- L. They started as hard scientists, but ended with the stark discovery that it wasn't enough. It could never be enough to answer the deepest longings of the heart.
- M. So they found their magic in a risen Christ, just as countless millions of people have over the ages.

#### VII. Conclusion

- A. ...And this was not because they took a blind leap of faith in the dark, but because they followed the evidence into the light.
- B. That ache inside of you? That craving for something otherworldly, that echo of heaven you have never been able to silence? It is not a glitch in your psychology. It is the homing beacon of your soul.
  1. You were made for transcendent realms.
- C. And the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the exact moment the transcendent realm crashed powerfully and beautifully into our broken, material world.
  1. Jesus Christ shattered the mathematics of death. He broke the biology of the grave. He walked out of that tomb with a beating heart, with lungs full of fresh air, and with the keys of hell and death in His scarred hands.
- D. This is what your soul has been starving for. You don't need another formula. You don't need another self-help book telling you to look in the mirror and fix yourself.
- E. You need a Savior from another realm, who loved you enough to step down into the dirt of this one. His blood is powerful enough to wash away every ounce of your moral failure. His grace is entirely sufficient for your deepest shame. And His empty tomb is the absolute guarantee that your pain, your tears, and your death do not get the final word.
- F. Right now. In this exact moment, Jesus Christ is a living, breathing, ruling Sovereign, seated in majesty, reigning over the cosmos.
- G. And His story is not finished.
- H. Because there is a Coming Day.

1. The sky will roll back like a scroll.
  2. The heavens will break open.
  3. The King will come again.
  4. Every eye will see Him.
  5. History will be complete.
  6. The promises will be fulfilled.
  7. The Glory of the Lord will cover the earth.
    - a) Every mystery, solved.
    - b) Every tear washed away.
  8. The reign of death is over.
  9. The devil is cast out.
  10. All things become new.
    - a) Jesus will be crowned King of kings and Lord of lords.
    - b) In his presence is fulness of joy.
    - c) At his right hand are pleasures evermore.
  - (1) If you're looking for some magic, here it is.
  11. If you're looking for a Creed worth believing, may I suggest the Jesus Creed.
    - I. All reality in all the cosmos finds its origin and its endpoint in him.
    - J. By him, and for him, and to him, and through him are all things.
    - K. He is the way.
    - L. He is the truth.
    - M. He is the life.
      1. Find your rest in him.
      2. Find your forgiveness in him.
      3. Find your hope in him.
      4. Find your love in him.
      5. Find your life in him.
    - N. In Jesus, you are richly blessed, highly favored, deeply loved.
      1. Where else will you turn? Who else has the words of life? Why would you run from him for even one more day?
    - O. So, what is your Creed?
    - P. Are you going to bet your soul on a world that is passing away? Are you going to trust the broken formulas of a culture that has no answer for your grave?
    - Q. Or will you look at the empty tomb? Will you listen to eye witnesses? Will rest your heart in the Savior who is calling your name today?
    - R. Christ died for your sins. He was buried. He was raised. He was seen.
    - S. And He is coming again.
    - T. Make Him your Creed. Stake your life on it. And step out of the dark, and into the light.
- VIII. Salvation Prayer
- A. Lord Jesus,
  - B. I admit that I am a sinner and I need a Savior.
  - C. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead.
  - D. Right now, I choose to trust You as my Savior and receive You into my life.
  - E. Forgive me, save me, and make me Your child forever.
  - F. In Jesus' name, Amen.
- IX. PRAYER
- A. Father, I do not pray for an easy week for this congregation; I pray for an undeniable, battle-tested faith.
  - B. I ask that You take the historical reality of the empty tomb and forge it into a spine of steel within every single person listening to my voice today. I ask that You strip away our reliance on cultural approval, emotional highs, and weak assumptions, and anchor us entirely to the fact of the risen Christ.
  - C. As they leave this room, I ask You to execute three things in their lives this week:
    1. Eradicate the Middle Ground: I pray that You destroy their appetite for safe, lukewarm living. Give them a faith that refuses to blend in with a culture that has no answers for the grave.
    2. Systemize Their Courage: I ask that their belief is not just a Sunday feeling, but a Monday-through-Saturday execution of Your grace. When they face fear in their workplaces, their families, or their private lives, I pray the reality of the Resurrection overrides their anxiety.
    3. Weaponize Their Witness: I pray that You make them a bold, polarizing force for truth. I ask that they speak with the exact same unshakable confidence as the eyewitnesses who saw You breathe again.
  - D. I pray they walk out of these doors not as passive consumers of religion, but as fearless operators of Your Grace and Truth, knowing that death has been defeated and the King is on the throne.
  - E. In the name of the Savior who shattered the mathematics of death, Amen.