

Americans love conspiracy theories. They ask questions like who shot President Kennedy, did astronauts really land on the moon, is Elvis really dead and are there are aliens being held captive in Area 51? There are a lot of different conspiracy theories about the Corona Virus. China claims that the Corona Virus was brought to China by a U.S. military cyclist participating in the Military World Games in Wuhan. Another group claims that the radio waves from the 5-G network are causing COVID like symptoms. A few claim that it is all a hoax, that there is no Corona Virus.

Still 30% of Americans reportedly believe in conspiracy theories. Political scientist Michael Barkun identifies three reasons why conspiracy theories are popular.

1. They claim to explain what institutional analyst can't.
2. They do it in an appealingly simple way.
3. They are often presented as special, secret knowledge

Conspiracy theories have been around since the day Jesus rose from the dead trying to explain it away. The religious authorities who condemned Jesus paid the soldiers who were guarding the tomb to lie and say that Jesus body was stolen by His Disciples. Another theory is that Jesus didn't die on the cross. He just passed out and was buried before He revived. The Romans were pros when it came to execution. No one ever came down from a Roman cross alive. Two other theories are that the women went to the wrong tomb or that there was a mass hallucination. But the women saw where Jesus was buried and no one would die for a lie or for an hallucination.

John was one of the Disciples who looked inside the tomb. He was also with nine of the Disciples on Easter night hiding out in the upper room because they were afraid of what the Jewish authorities might try to do to them. That is when Jesus appeared to them and showed them his hands and his side. These were the leftover marks from the crucifixion, signs that it was really Jesus.

Jesus gave them two gifts when He said, "Peace be with you" and "Receive the Holy Spirit." This is the very first time Jesus greeted or gave the gift of Peace to His Disciples in the Gospel of Jesus. Jesus won that Peace on the cross. He gives us the Peace the world cannot give. Jesus had promised to send the Holy Spirit to the Disciples before his arrest. In His first appearance to a group of Disciples He gives them the gift of the Spirit. They would need the Spirit to believe in Him. The public gift of the Spirit would take place 50 days later on Pentecost.

Jesus also gave them two missions that day. First He sent them out to continue His work, to tell everyone they met that Jesus was alive, that He defeated sin and death. The second mission was to forgive sins in Jesus' name. They were the first messengers of Jesus' Gospel.

Thomas must not have gotten the text message about the meeting because he got there too late to see Jesus. When the other Disciples told Thomas they had seen Jesus, he answered **“I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side.”** (vs. 25) Thomas doubted their witness just as they had doubted the women’s witness. He wanted the same proof the other Disciples got before he was ready to believe. He wasn’t ready to accept some “Fake News.”

Thomas was a seeker who wanted the truth. One week later Thomas was back in the same place with the rest of the Disciples when Jesus appeared and said to him, **“Peace be with you. ... Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!”** (vss 26-27) Thomas, like the rest of the Disciples, doubted until he saw Jesus with his own eyes. Thomas’ response was a confession of faith, **“My Lord and my God!”** (vs. 28)

The truth about Jesus’ resurrection is compelling. It is hard to believe it was made up.

- Jesus’ enemies didn’t dispute the fact that the tomb was empty
- Women were not considered reliable witnesses at that time. The Disciples would have never made up a story about the women being the first to see Jesus.
- The Greeks and the Romans considered the soul sacred, but devalued the body. They could accept that Jesus’ spirit lived on, but not that his body came back to life. The resurrection made no sense to them.
- The Jews viewed crucifixion as a curse. The message of the cross didn’t make any sense to them.
- The large number of people who claimed to see Jesus after the Resurrection seems impossible, but it is true.

Is the evidence great enough for us to believe? Do we believe that Jesus is with us now, that nothing can separate us from Him? Do we believe John’s eyewitness account of the witness of the Holy Spirit who calls us to faith?

Chuck Colson, one of the Watergate conspirators, claims that his own criminal conviction proved the resurrection to him. Colson wrote, **“I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren’t true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world — and they couldn’t keep a lie for three weeks. You’re telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.”**

John wrote His Gospel to not only give us evidence for Jesus, but also to bring us to faith in Him. John summarized the purpose of his Gospel account this way. “These are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.” (vs. 31)

Ultimately, our belief in the resurrection of Jesus is a matter of faith, backed by evidence. When we believe, we begin to see all that God has done, all that God has made possible through the resurrection of Christ from the dead. When we live out that belief, we become living examples proving that the gospel is more than a theory. It’s a way of life and the way to life!