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Why the “Swoon” Theory’s Explanation of Jesus’ Death and Resurrection Is Wrong

Eric V. Snow, sermonette notes, 03-12-2011, Ann Arbor, MI, UCG

Did Jesus really die on the cross? Did our Savior survive physically through the ordeals of scourging, nailing, and spearing? Did the cool, dark air of Joseph’s tomb resuscitate Christ? One old skeptical theory that tries to explain away Jesus’ resurrection claims that He didn’t actually die during the crucifixion, but merely fainted. But actually there’s good historical evidence for faith in Christ’s resurrection.

S.P.S. Today, we will see why the “swoon” theory of Jesus’ death and resurrection is false.

Of all the miracles described in the Bible after the original creation, why is the

resurrection of our Savior the most important?

I Cor. 15:15-19

Unlike most other major religions, the truth of Christianity hangs on a particular historical event. In this regard, Christianity is very different from Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, and even Islam. If that specific event didn't actually happen, we shouldn't believe in any other Christian teaching or doctrine by faith alone.

For over two centuries in Western culture, many skeptics have attempted to explain away the Bible's miracles as not miraculous, but as natural events. The "swoon" or fainting/reviving theory of Jesus' death and resurrection is merely one more example of this old tradition.

So I'll give two basic points about why the "swoon" counter-explanation of Jesus' death and resurrection is false.

1. Crucifixions were public spectacles performed carefully and brutally by professional executioners to ensure the victims wouldn't survive.

When capital punishment is imposed today in America, it's done almost secretly, with a few people watching behind the prison walls. By contrast, the crucifixion of Christ happened publicly; anybody could stroll out of Jerusalem and watch Him die. This wasn't done in a corner.

First, our Savior was scourged. Jesus wasn't likely lashed using a standard horse- or bullwhip. The Roman flagellum often had one or more leather cords attached to a handle, sometimes with pieces of metal or bones inserted in order to increase its flesh-cutting effectiveness. According to the early church historian Eusebius, the standard scourging laid bare the victim's veins and "the very muscles, sinews, and bowels of the victim were open to exposure."

Because Jesus couldn't carry the beam of the cross all the way to His place of execution, the whipping had already gravely weakened Him.

Isaiah 53:5

The four stakes used to affix Jesus to the boards were around 5 to 7 inches long each. Two were hammered into the median nerve of the wrists, and two others driven into similar nerves in the feet. Dr.

Alexander Metherell, as interviewed by Lee Strobel in "The Case for Christ," described the pain this way. He compared it to how your "funny bone," or ulna nerve, feels when you mistakely bang your elbow the wrong way: "Well, picture taking a pair of pliers and squeezing and crushing that nerve.

That effect would be similar to what Jesus experienced." Then think about the jarring pain inflicted as his flesh ripped some more when the cross was lifted up, and dropped into the hole in the ground dug out for holding it up.

John 19:31-34

These professional, presumably experienced executioners knew Jesus clearly was dead when told to speed up the demise of their victims. “All in a day’s work.” They didn’t need to be modern doctors equipped with beeping EKG machines to know Christ wasn’t alive.

One of these Roman soldiers speared Jesus in the side. Blood and water poured out of His body. So it was doubly clear that Christ was dead. Even if the scourging and nails wouldn’t have finished the job, the spear sure did.

Crucifixion victims seldom lived, even after being rescued from their crosses before death overtook them. While putting down the A.D. 66-70 Jewish revolt, the Romans crucified three friends of the Jewish historian Josephus. He asked Titus, the Roman general in charge (and future

emperor) to take them down. Although they were, two of them still soon died later on.

2. A mere physical resuscitation wouldn't have inspired Jesus' disciples to go into all the world and preach about their triumphant Savior. They wouldn't have died for a lie as martyrs while knowing that it was a lie. One has to explain these men's dramatically transformed behavior. Think of Peter's especially. During Jesus' trial and crucifixion, he was so afraid that he denied knowing Jesus three times. But less than eight weeks later, this simple fisherman publicly preached Jesus was the Messiah before thousands of people and accused them of killing their Savior. Peter soon defied his nation's leadership when on trial before the Sanhedrin.

Despite being a famous skeptical higher critic, David Strauss logically buried the "swoon theory," in "The Life of Jesus for the People," by writing:

[Omit??] “It is impossible that a being who has stolen half-dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to his sufferings, could have given to the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resuscitation . . . could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship.” [Omit??]

So in Conclusion: Clearly the swoon theory is a bad natural explanation of Jesus’ death and resurrection. The Gospels’ basic historical facts prove that the crucifixion painfully and gruesomely killed our Savior. The utterly transformed behavior of His leading disciples afterwards proves that Christ was dramatically resurrected miraculously, not merely revived physically. In the weeks before the Passover, let us meditate on our Savior’s suffering for us even as we realize it’s perfectly rational to have faith in His resurrection.

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