

Think It Through: #1 -- 4/24/2011

Dr. Matt Cassidy – 1 Corinthians 15:20

[Opened with video which can be viewed on You Tube. It was stopped at 2:05.]

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3F1V2fZS7yA> -- “Think: The Life of the Mind & the Love of God”

Well, good morning. He is risen! He is risen indeed! Good Easter to you.

Like the video showed, we are going to spend some time together, talking about how to use our minds and think about our faith. We will spend a fair amount of time in upcoming weeks talking with people who apply reason to their vocation, the thing that God made them do well. The subtitle of the series *Think It Through* is called “Smart People” but none of the people we will have up here wanted to be called Smart People. So we are calling it *Think It Through*. We will have somebody from the business community talk to us. We will have somebody from the field of psychology, from the field of hard science, and from the field of philosophy. Each one of these individuals will be interviewed and they will answer these questions: How do you use your mind with your faith? How do you apply reason to what we believe? Are there contradictions or do they actually work in harmony with one another?

The bedrock for all Christian faith is what we will talk about today on Resurrection Sunday. The foundation that the faith of Christianity is built upon is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the historical, verifiable, life in time, literal resurrection of a human being from the dead. People have appealed to this history and the evidence of this historical event.

They did not appeal to sentimentalism or pragmatism when they were living in caves, when they were being buried alive, when they were giving as great generous givers or as great forgivers. When they were being put on a pile of kindling, they were not saying – *Do you feel that buzz? Is it working for you?* It is not working. No, it is not and there is no buzz.

They appeal to this. They went back and said – There is an uncanny amount of physical and eyewitness evidence that proved that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and that verified everything He said was in fact true. That is what people have to think about when they are in difficult situations – of generous giving or generous forgiving, and everything in between. When people are putting their careers to the side so that they can serve Christ first and get off the career ladder, they have to go back to something to help them reason this thing out and the Resurrection does that.

I spent a number of weeks looking at the materials for today. I have to tell you that I was pretty bored with it because it was so simple.

Then it occurred to me that I would like to look at things a little differently today. I look at it like this. God had a playbook ahead of time. He arranged the whole death and resurrection from eternity past. Then when it came time for game day, it was as though God ran up the score. I don't know what happened but He just kept giving overflowing evidence upon evidence, different angles and ways of verifying that Jesus was dead, that Jesus was buried in that tomb, that it had a seal and a guard, that there were so many eyewitnesses for so long.

I starting thinking – Wait a minute. This isn't about the death and resurrection any more. God is trying to verify and help us think and reason about much deeper things than the historical event. We will look at the historical event but I want you to see that there is so much more to the story. That is the only way I could explain all the ways that God showed that it is a reasonable faith. But it is beyond the reason of *what happened* at a place and in a time in Jerusalem a number of years ago – but more *the meaning* of those things.

When you look at the evidence itself, it is so compelling that if you don't have an assumption ahead of time, if you haven't already decided that *miracles are impossible*, then you have to come to some pretty obvious conclusions. Unless you have already decided that *there is no God* or *God cannot move in His creation, that He has tied His own hands*, then there are only about five things that you have to look at to wonder what actually happened. The things are pretty obvious and the responses to those facts, the doubt itself, is embarrassing. I would put a fourth grader against the facts we are going to look at just to defend the faith.

1. Jesus was VERY Dead – Swoon Theory

The first one is that Jesus was very dead. I am using the word “very” to mean very because one of the early theories, called the Swoon Theory, said that Jesus did not actually die; He was just mostly dead. He lost consciousness, maybe went into a mild state of coma, and then got better in three days.

A. Now, the problem with that is that historical verification would ask who killed Him? Well, the Roman soldiers did and these Roman soldiers were professional killers. That is what they did and they were very good at it. They needed to be very good at it because if they were assigned the execution of someone and that someone did not die, they would be executed in the same manner that they were supposed to use. So they had a lot of motivation involved. They were professional killers and they knew a dead person when they saw one. They saw a lot of them. That is why they broke the legs of some of the men who were crucified with Jesus and punctured His side because they wanted to make sure that the

blood and water would come out separately to insure that His heart was no longer working. They were good at their job. They were pro's.

B. Second, think about it. It [the Swoon Theory] can't be done. Let's walk through the story and I will use words, not graphics because this is a happy day. When you look at Good Friday – and you have seen footage of this in various films, I will bet -- it starts with Him being tortured many times, a crown of thorns was put on His head, He was up for several hours. His back was ripped up. His face was bloodied beyond recognition, as it says in one of the passages. He has to carry a cross across Jerusalem and He cannot do that. He is nearly dead at this point. Then His hands and feet are pierced with giant nails. He is hung on a cross which makes it all but impossible to breath – for several hours this happens. Then He is speared in the side and pronounced dead by professional death authenticators.

Now let's go into the burial where it says that He was wrapped in linens and cocooned in about 75 pounds of myrrh, put inside of a tomb, with this disc of a stone that was rolled down a hill into a giant socket where it would sit. So the Swoon Theory goes like this. After lying in the cold cave, in this cocoon state for 2 ½ days, He got better, somehow got out of the cocoon or hopped over and then moved a two ton stone. If you could just picture moving a Suburban – not rolling a Suburban on wheels but pushing a Suburban over – uphill – after a very bad Friday. I just don't think that can be done. So the pro's said He was dead and what He went through probably killed Him.

C. But even if He got through all of that, He would have to convince some rather cowardly followers that He is all better, that He just got over that whole thing, and that He was healed.

Have you visited a friend in the hospital after some sort of recent injury -- car wreck, motorcycle accident, or falling out of a tree or whatever it might be? Sometimes before a person walks you into the hospital room they say – Listen, you don't want to make eye contact. He doesn't know what he looks like yet. – It takes a while for things to heal. I just can't imagine His men being inspired by this 'swooned Jesus' coming back and saying -- Well, I'm okay now.

Let's just back it up and say that He actually did die. I want to say – Why did God in His scripting of this story, why did He go to all the trouble of having Jesus die this way – so publicly, so brutally? If He is going to die for people's sins, couldn't He just choke on an olive pit or something? Think about it. He is just running up the score. He is making it a little too blatant. There is no subtlety in this little thriller we have here. So why did He do that? Why did He have Him die that way in that public of a manner? God wanted us to know that we would have historical, verifiable evidence that our sins are paid for.

Look at what it says. The passion of the Christ says this in Colossians when Paul is writing to the Colossians about the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 2:13, 14 When you were dead in your sins ... God made you alive with Christ. [How?] He forgave us all our sins, [How?] having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us; [How did He cancel them?] He took it away, nailing it to the cross.

The pardoning program of God is to take all of your sins and write them up in script, in detail, and put them on a cross with Jesus, and nail those sins to Jesus' cross. Graphically, Jesus' hands were not empty. They contained scripts of grievances against you towards God. When His hands were pierced, those scripts were pierced. Jesus died the way He did, in that public forum, so that you would never doubt whether your sins were paid for. There would be no question about whether there was a punch pulled. -- *Do you know what I have done?* -- I don't but I know what Jesus did. You are paid for.

On this Resurrection Sunday, I want you to think this through. How much more could God have done to convince you that your debts are paid? Think this through. You are relationally forgiven. You are ethically paid for. The wrath of God is demonstrated on Jesus and your sins are no more. How about this Resurrection Sunday, you walk out those doors knowing and convinced because of the historical evidence that Jesus was beaten on your behalf. How about you leave here with your head held high because you have a Priest who goes and speaks to the Father for you. He paid – oh, He paid.

That is what the evidence is pointing to. I think there is very little doubt that He died. He was very dead.

2. The Tomb was VERY Known – 'Wrong Tomb' theory

Another opposition to the story is that the disciples merely went to the wrong tomb.

A. The tomb was very well known. I am using the word *very* there to mean very. There is a theory that the women and later the disciples went to the wrong tomb. There are problems there. Again, let's turn it over to the fourth grader. This is not like Arlington Cemetery where there are rows and rows and rows of burial sites. It was a specific tomb that a person owned and he was a rather notorious person – not bad but well known – Joseph of Arimathea. They knew where he owned the land and where he and his family were going to be buried. So there is little doubt about where to go.

B. That tomb was sealed with the Roman seal and guarded with a Roman guard. The reason that was so because in the playbook before Jesus even died said – *Listen, death is not going to keep Me down. You had better watch that grave. Do you think death can keep Me hidden away? Only love can confine Me.*

So, there He is. How do you know which tomb to go to? It is the one that is being guarded; no other tombs are being guarded this weekend. No other tombs have a Roman seal. You break the seal, you die.

C. If they went to the wrong tomb, wouldn't it be pretty obvious that the people who were against the followers of Jesus would go to the right tomb? Get that corpse. It is not like they are sheepish about this. They would parade the dead body all the way through Jerusalem. *This is your Messiah and He is very dead – still.*

So why the drama? Why would you write in the script ahead of time that we are going to need a tomb that is owned by someone so that people will know where it is? We will have Jesus warn them ahead of time – *I won't be there long.* – That way we will have a Roman guard guarding this and have it sealed so that everyone would ever doubt which tomb it was. Why do you do that? Because Jesus said this about himself:

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

It is an outrageous claim – unless it is true, unless you can verify it.

He does not say: I am *a* way, I am *a* truth, and I am *a* life. Today it is very popular to think there are many ways to heaven. But if you think about it, there are books written now that point out how illogical that is because the various religions contradict each other. Many religions don't even promote salvation. But Jesus says: I am *the* way, *the* truth and *the* life.

Thinking there are many ways to heaven is like saying – There are many ways to call home. You just pick up the phone and dial just any old number and it will get you to your home number. But what if you dialed sincerely? Oh, that will change everything. No. There is one number that will get you home and this is how to dial it. Jesus wanted to make sure that you knew with confidence that He was *that* way. So He arranged things way ahead of time. He wanted to make sure that you knew that He was that way. So He told people ahead of time. – I am going to die and then I am going to rise again in three days. You don't even have to hire these guys [Roman guards] the fourth day. You better mark the tomb. You better make sure you are guarding it – because He wants us to be certain about our future.

3. The Grave of Jesus was Secure – Stolen Body theory

A third response to the story of Jesus and the Resurrection is that the tomb was very secure. That is a positive way of saying that some people believe that His body was stolen, probably by the disciples.

The more history you know, the better. The tomb was sealed and if you break a Roman seal, you die. So no one is going to break a seal unless they are willing to die for that.

They also put a Roman guard on it. Let me define a Roman guard. That is four soldiers, part of the whole Roman army, but four men were expected to hold off 100 men for a half day.

If they were watching a tomb and someone inadvertently broke the seal, those four men would die. The original story that went out said that the soldiers fell asleep. If Roman soldiers were found sleeping or were asleep, they would die. If they disobeyed an order, they would have their clothes taken off and they would be burned alive in front of the other men. They did not disobey orders.

If four Roman guards were jumped and abducted by a band of fishermen and an accountant, they would take their own lives. Their wives would beat them to death. That is not what happened.

If you can imagine, these men trying to move the tombstone, the problem of the Suburban that you have to turn over --- *ssssh, they are sleeping*.

Here is a description of it in Matthew. Listen to how extreme it is, the flash and panache here.

Matthew 28:2-4, 11-15 “And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his garment as white as snow; and the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men [fell as though they were dead].

Here is my question on this. Why didn't God just do this in a more laid back way? Like Yoda would have done it – just move the rock with the Force, set it down. These are not the drones you are looking for. I am just going to walk by these guys.

Severe earthquake – and the angel of the Lord shows up and he is like lightning – and he rolls the stone away. Look at what it says. And he sat on the stone. Can you imagine an angel with his legs crossed, looking at the Roman guards and his garments were as white as snow. The guards saw him and trembled and fell as though dead. Why? Now God is just showing off and there is historical evidence for this fact. It is not disputed. So why do this? Why this display of power? Because God does not want you to doubt the Resurrection, He doesn't want you to doubt the power of the Resurrection.

God has had many occurrences where people have been powerless and they have needed something beyond their own ability. They could not find it anywhere but in Jesus Christ and in the power of the Resurrection.

Some people with addictions understand that they have no power over that addiction and then they find themselves in a church and name that power – His name is the Holy Spirit and they conquer that addiction.

There are people gripped with paralyzing loneliness and they find there is power in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and they are never alone.

Some people just get bored with life. I mean they have done everything and they realize there is nothing else. Then they stumble upon the life of Jesus Christ and they trust Him for their sins and for their lives. The next thing you know, they are on an adventure because of that power.

There are some people who are just shriveling, like Gollum [*from The Hobbit*] with bitterness and they cannot conquer the bitterness and then they meet Jesus and realize how much they have been forgiven and now they are overflowing with that forgiveness towards other people and they are light hearted and enjoyable.

In Ephesians 1, this is the prayer that Paul prays for the Ephesians about the power of the Resurrection.

Ephesians 1:18-20 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know ... His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms ...

You have that power – he says. I pray that the eyes of your heart would see that the power of this Resurrection is real and available still to this day. I want you to be convinced of that and so much so that I am going to put a Roman seal on it, I am going to put a Roman guard on it, and there won't be any way to explain why there was an earthquake and an angel whose appearance was like lightning, sitting on a stone, with a garment like snow, causing four hardened, driven, wrecking machines to faint like little girls. That power is there still.

There are hundreds of people in this room that know about that power; I am one of them. God does not want you to leave this room without knowing about that power. He laid all this history out for a reason. He wants to give you confidence that you can conquer the things that are destroying you, even if it is just life. He wants you to thrive. He wants you to live an abundant life. That is what Resurrection Sunday is all about.

4. Witnesses Were Abundant

One of the five things that people talk about is the amount of witnesses to the Resurrection was abundant. After Jesus Christ raised himself from the dead, He appeared twelve different times to over 500 people over 40 days. Again, that makes it legally incontrovertible. It is like beyond a shadow of a doubt

which is what a court case would be. You have 500 witnesses over 40 days, 12 different situations – some of those people He appeared to were skeptics.

So, why the overflow? Why have that many people see a resurrected body? What is He really trying to prove besides the historical fact there? It is this. The things here are not like things there.

1 Corinthians 15:20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

He showed off to so many people for so long in so many different contexts in this resurrected form because you and I usually have the last impression of the people that we love so dearly to be the worst in their life. Do you understand what I mean? Whether it is a parent or a grandparent and they are dying from the gravity of aging on them and we see this person who was noble and healthy and honorable in this last form and we wonder. Is that it?

Some of our men and women who have died in combat and their physical bodies have been torn up. Jesus shows up in this resurrected form to 500 people in 12 settings over 40 days to say – *This is what the future looks like. Do you remember what I looked like on Friday? This is what I look like on Sunday and Monday and forever.* The scars are now healed and they help us remember a great life that we lived.

Looking at life like this body compared to the future body is like looking at a little acorn and trying to imagine a 300 year old oak tree. It is very hard to do. Jesus shows up and says – *This is what an oak tree looks like. I want to make sure everyone sees this because you guys are going to need this kind of hope later in life. I want you to be absolutely certain about where those who die in Christ, where they end up and how they look when that happens.* -- You are supposed to be encouraged.

5. The Message of Jesus' Resurrection is Life-Changing

The last it talks about in the Bible when we wonder about whether Jesus Christ actually died and rose again is just the power of changed lives. It is absolutely amazing when you think about what happened to the people who were on the ground when it happened.

You have a cowardly Peter. Let's pick on him. A little servant girl, like we would call a babysitter, questions Peter with a single sentence. *I think you used to hang around with Him.* And Peter denies ever knowing Jesus and starts cussing like the sailor he used to be. He storms off and runs away. He is no Jack Bauer. [reference to a hero of a television show: 24] A little girl says a single sentence and he cracks. ---- A month later he is standing up in front of 1000's of people, claiming that Jesus Christ had died and rose again.

There was nothing in it for these men and women who followed Jesus originally and saw Him after the Resurrection and the way they lived their lives. They were persecuted. It was not like they were the television preachers where they get big houses and notoriety and good income. Are you kidding me? They were poor. They were without food. They were living in caves. They were persecuted. Their families were killed. There was nothing good happening to them because of their following Jesus Christ. But their lives were changed. They went from kittens to tigers. Only Jesus could have done that, transforming living.

You see this happening in people's lives where instead of going on an extravagant vacation, they find themselves in third-world countries, shampooing lice out of some kid's hair. What happened to you? Jesus, that is what happened.

Again, some of the people we will have up here on stage the next few weeks, they have stepped down in their careers because of their claiming Jesus Christ, in academia especially, but sometimes in business as well, because of who they live for. Why would you do that? You know the rules of the academy? -- *I don't play by those rules. I just want to follow Jesus Christ and He has changed me.* -- They trade maybe integrity for a bigger bonus.

Application to Your Life

So, how about you, today? There are two plans. There is Plan A where forgiveness of sins, well you have to try never to sin. Where do you get certainty of salvation? I don't know. You just hope, I guess, but you better think that through. How do you know what it will be like on the other side? Wishful thinking.

Then there is Plan B which goes like this. Forgiveness comes because it was nailed to a cross. It was completely paid for and there were a lot of people to see that was a dead Christ. How do you know with certainty? Because Jesus rose from the dead and a lot of people saw that resurrection. You can know your sins are forgiven.

It is like, if there is just one guide who has gone all the way to the mountain top and says there is just one road that makes it all the way to the top, and that guide is Jesus Christ, He would know. He is the only person that has gone and come back to tell us about death and life.

Where does the power come from? In Plan A, you just keep trying harder. In Plan B, you relinquish your pride and your desire for control and you say -- *I want the power of the Holy Spirit, the one that rose Jesus from the dead. I want that earthquake in my soul.* -- The hope of tomorrow comes

from believing in those many witnesses who saw a resurrected Christ. A life change happens for those who follow Jesus Christ.

The Gospel, the Good News in a nutshell is one verse from Peter, of all people, who says it rather succinctly like this.

1 Peter 1:3, 4 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth [*born again*] into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

It is hard for Peter to mention Jesus without mentioning that He rose from the dead. And what do you get?

... and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, ...

That is it. You can't just *know* that. You have to *believe* that. You have to put your *faith* in that.

I am asking you today – would you go with Plan B? Plan B is that Jesus does everything. Would you consider thinking that through? If today is too fast or you are getting too much information at once, then just keep coming. Maybe we could talk later. But this Resurrection Sunday, think this through – that Jesus' death and resurrection was to forgive sin, to give you certainty, to give you power, to give you hope, and to change your life.

The reason Resurrection Sunday has so much evidence delivered behind it is to say this. You are not crazy to follow Jesus Christ. With your foot pegged to the floor, you are not crazy to show up and to serve at a church like this, greeting people, and helping in children's ministry, and investing in marriages that need help. You are not crazy to give generously and to do crazy things like go to other parts of the world and start seminaries in Baghdad or churches in the Middle East and go on mission trips to South Africa and to Haiti and to Mexico over spring break. You are not crazy to do these things because they make perfect sense because of all the evidence that Jesus has left behind. You are not crazy to give your life to the One who gave His life and then rose again. Resurrection Sunday says – it makes sense to live for this Messiah. This Sunday, why don't you choose to do that for the rest of your life?

Dear heavenly Father,

We are inspired by Your reckless use of evidence, not to just prove that this thing happened, but to prove the deeper things that give us purpose and direction and certainty and hope and that can change our lives.

So, God, on this Resurrection Sunday, this Easter in 2011, I pray for those who for the first time are seeing life the way it really is because they have thought it through. I pray they put their trust in you for the payment of their sin in full and for the power of the Resurrection to live out the rest of their lives.

Those who have made that decision already, Lord, I pray that we would live boldly and courageously because we can.

In Jesus' name, Amen.