Christ 101: How to Defend the Christian Faith with Reason and Evidence.

Lesson Twenty-Four – The Argument from the Resurrection of Jesus 3

Fact # 5: Empty Tomb of Jesus

Why do so many scholars accept this empty tomb stuff as a historical fact.

1. The empty tomb is multiply attested in early independent sources.
* All four Gospels speak of the empty tomb.
* In ancient history two independent sources make for a strong argument.
* The fifth source for the empty tomb is in 1 Cor 15:3-8. It is one of the earliest sources we have for the Resurrection of Jesus.

***“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sin in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all of the apostles. Last of all, as one born abnormally, he appeared to me.”*** *(1 Cor 15:3-8)*

1 Corinthians was written by Paul approximately twenty-five years after Jesus died.

* It was written by a prominent church leader, Paul, who knew the early disciples.
* The empty tomb is clearly implied in two places.
* “he was buried… he was raised…” 1 Cor 15:4
* “on the third day” 1 Cor 15:4 That is the day the tomb was discovered empty.
* Some make the assertion that the empty tomb is a latter addition to the story.
* We have good reasons to think Paul is speaking of an earlier tradition. Paul specifically says that he is passing on what he himself has received.
* The text here seems to back up Paul’s statement. 1 Cor 15:3-8 contains several “non-Pauline” traits.
* “According to the Scripture”, “On the third day”, “The twelve”. These are not phrases found anywhere else in Paul’s writings.
* Internal textual evidence supports Paul’s claim. This tradition goes back to the early Jerusalem church. This tradition goes back to eyewitnesses.
1. Paul says that spiritual teachings come from Jerusalem (Rom 15:25-27) (1 Cor 9:11)
2. Numerous passages in Paul show that the original church leaders were headquartered in Jerusalem. (Gal 1:17-18; Acts 1:8, Acts 4:16; Acts 6:7)
3. Paul visited Jerusalem three years after his conversion. (Gal 1:18)
4. Paul is very careful to distinguish his teaching from the tradition he has received. (1 Cor 7:10-13, 25)

Paul is concerned not to confuse his teaching with what he has received.

* Paul learned this tradition from the original disciples in Jerusalem.
* The Resurrection of Jesus and the empty tomb was an original teaching of the disciples of Jesus.
* It was not an addition that came about decades latter.
* The Resurrection of Jesus was an official and original teaching of the disciples.

Why the empty tomb of Jesus is an established historical fact.

1. Multiply attested in early independent sources.
* Four Gospels
* Peter’s sermon in the Acts of the Apostles
* 1 Corinthians 15:3-8
1. The empty tomb was reported to have been discovered by women.
* In ancient Palestine women were not taken to be reliable witnesses.
* Criterion of Embarrassment. If you are going to make up a story on the empty tomb you would not have women, be the eyewitnesses.
1. The earlies Jewish counter argument admit the empty tomb. “The disciples stole the body.”
2. Abandoning of the Sabbath by the early Jewish converts indicates an empty tomb. The Christian Sabbath was moved to Sunday.
* Something important must have happened on Sunday.
1. The Jerusalem Factor.
* The earliest Christian disciples preached the Resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem.
* If there was a body in the tomb, they would have been able to discredit the Resurrection, but they were not able to because the tomb was empty.

The empty tomb of Jesus is a well-established historical fact.