

CHRISTIAN HEADS, HEARTS, AND HANDS

ARTICLES TO FORM US AS FOLLOWERS OF “THE WAY”

Let Us Never Grow Weary of the Cross

Kevin DeYoung

It was one of the things I loved most about my previous church. And it’s one of the things I’m already seeing that I will love about my current church: They love the most basic sermons the best.

I don’t mean “basic” as in “simplistic.” As far as I know, I’ve never been accused of dumbed-down messages. By “basic” I mean bread-and-butter sermons. Keeping the plain things plain, and keeping the main thing the main thing. I love that the people I serve love to hear the old, old story one more time. They’ll be interested in millennial views, but they’ll thrill to hear about the God who saves.

You’ve probably heard the quip that the first generation believes the gospel, the second generation assumes the gospel, and the third generation loses the gospel. That’s true, and sadly, it happens. But I think there’s another step in there somewhere. It’s called getting bored with the gospel. Maundy Thursday no longer moves us. Good Friday doesn’t feel that good. Easter isn’t a big deal. It’s just the same passages, the same services, and the same kind of sermons.

Beware when the cross and the empty tomb cannot compete with March Madness and The Masters.

Many of us will turn to the old familiar hymns this week. I hope we are paying attention to the words. We’ll sing of that sacred head now wounded and of surveying the wondrous cross. We’ll shout Hallelujah! to the man of sorrows. We’ll wonder again how can it be that I should gain? We’ll remember the one who was stricken, smitten, and afflicted. We’ll ask how our holy Jesus has offended. And then two days later we’ll announce that Christ the Lord is risen today. What a privilege to rehearse the good news in song for yet another year.

Sometimes the people get bored, but too often the preacher gets bored first. Careful, pastor, this is not the week for trying new things and introducing new themes. It’s the week for celebrating old things that still have the power to make us new. Let us not wander far from sin, salvation, and judgment. Let’s not strain to make ourselves relevant to the politics, the pop culture, or the presidential controversy of the day. Christ’s death and resurrection will be relevant on its own. The message of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is still the message people need. They need to see the cross—who was hanging there, why he had to die, and why he could not stay dead.

Sin is worse than you think. The good news is better than you imagine. That’s what our people need to hear.

Jesus lived. Jesus died. Jesus lives again.
Christ arose. Christ reigns. Christ will return.
We have sinned. We will die. We can live forever.

Keep is simple. Play it straight. Preach Christ and him crucified.

As Christians, this is our Holy Week, and this is our Happy Week. Joy in suffering. Victory in defeat. From darkness into light. We must not shrink back from singing and sharing and savoring the whole counsel of God, and especially the gospel delivered to us as of first importance (1 Cor. 15:3). It is, after all, the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16).

The gospel still saves. We have no reason to be ashamed of blood and wrath and death, for without them there can be no cleansing and forgiveness and life. Let us not tire of singing the same old songs. Let us not be bored in preaching the same good news. And let us never grow weary of the same rugged cross.

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Can a Scientist Believe in the Resurrection? Three hypotheses.

by Ian Hutchinson

I'm a professor of nuclear science and engineering at MIT, and I believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. So do dozens of my colleagues. How can this be?

Hypothesis one: We're not talking about a literal resurrection. Perhaps it is just an inspiring myth that served to justify the propagation of Jesus' exalted ethical teachings. A literal resurrection contradicts the known laws of nature. Maybe scientists can celebrate the idea of Jesus's spirit living on, while his body remained in the grave.

But the first disciples attested to a physical resurrection. How could an untruth logically support high moral character? How could it have sustained the apostles through the extremes of persecution they experienced founding Christianity? And is celebrating a myth consistent with scientific integrity?

Hypothesis two: We really believe in the bodily resurrection of the first century Jew known as Jesus of Nazareth. My Christian colleagues at MIT – and millions of other scientists worldwide – somehow think that a literal miracle like the resurrection of Jesus is possible. And we are following a long tradition. The founders of the scientific revolution and many of the greatest scientists of the intervening centuries were serious Christian believers. For Robert Boyle (of the ideal gas law, co-founder in 1660 of the Royal Society) the resurrection was a fact. For James Clerk Maxwell (whose Maxwell equations of 1862 govern electromagnetism) a deep philosophical analysis undergirded his belief in the resurrection. And for William Phillips (Nobel prize-winner in 1997 for methods to trap atoms with laser light) the resurrection is not discredited by science.

To explain how a scientist can be a Christian is actually quite simple. Science cannot and does not disprove the resurrection. Natural science describes the normal reproducible working of the world of nature. Indeed, the key meaning of "nature", as Boyle emphasized, is "the normal course of events." Miracles like the resurrection are inherently abnormal. It does not take modern science to tell us that humans don't rise from the dead. People knew that perfectly well in the first century; just as they knew that the blind from birth don't as adults regain their sight, or water doesn't instantly turn into wine.

Maybe science has made the world seem more comprehensible – although in some respects it seems more wonderful and mysterious. Maybe superstition was more widespread in the first century than it is today – although the dreams of today's sports fans and the widespread interest in the astrology pages sometimes make me wonder. Maybe people were more open then to the possibility of miracles than we are today. Still, the fact that the resurrection was impossible in the normal course of events was as obvious in the first century as it is for us. Indeed that is why it was seen as a great demonstration of God's power.

To be sure, while science can't logically rule miracles in or out of consideration, it can be a helpful tool for investigating contemporary miraculous claims. It may be able to reveal self-deception, trickery, or misperception. If someone has been seen levitating on a supposed flying carpet in their living room, then the discovery of powerful electromagnets in their basement might well render such claims implausible. But if science fails to find defeating evidence then it is unable to say one way or the other whether some reported inexplicable event happened, or to prove that it is miraculous. Science functions by reproducible experiments and observations. Miracles are, by definition, abnormal and non-reproducible, so they cannot be proved by science's methods.

So if science is not able to adjudicate whether Jesus' resurrection happened or not, are we completely unable to assess the plausibility of the claim? No. Contrary to increasingly popular opinion, science is not our only means for accessing truth. In the case of Jesus' resurrection, we must consider the historical evidence, and the historical evidence for the resurrection is as good as for almost any event of ancient history. The extraordinary character of the event, and its significance, provide a unique context, and ancient history is necessarily hard to establish. But a bare presumption that science has shown the resurrection to be impossible is an intellectual cop-out. Science shows no such thing.

Hypothesis 3: I was brainwashed as a child. If you've read this far and you are still wondering how an MIT professor could seriously believe in the resurrection, you might guess I was brainwashed to believe it as a child. But no, I did not grow up in a home where I was taught to believe in the resurrection. I came to faith in Jesus when I was an undergraduate at Cambridge University and was baptized in the chapel of Kings College on my 20th birthday. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are as compelling to me now as then.