



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Death, Burial and Resurrection of the Christ

Guest(s): Dr. Gary Habermas

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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: Hello and welcome to this very special Good Friday edition of Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Family Talk, of course, is the listener supported broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. We hope you find some time today to be in prayer, alone or together, to honor and acknowledge the sacrifice and the suffering that Jesus endured for our sins. Just over 2000 years ago during the Passover celebration, Jesus Christ, God's son, was crucified. In His death, Jesus stood in our place and took the punishment for the sin of the world. Three days later, He was resurrected and now He sits in glory at the right hand of the Father, offering salvation to anyone who believes in Him.

Every year on Easter weekend, Christians around the world celebrate the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We take it on faith that what is written in the gospels is true, but did you know there is overwhelming physical and historical evidence that back up what we believe about this world-changing event? Well, our guest today on Family Talk, Dr. Gary Habermas, is going to walk us through that evidence today. Dr. Gary Habermas is a distinguished professor of philosophy and theology at Liberty University. He is highly regarded as a New Testament scholar who frequently writes and lectures on the resurrection of Jesus. Dr. Habermas received his Ph.D. in philosophy from Michigan State University with a thesis entitled, "The Resurrection of Jesus: A Rational Inquiry." Gary has written several books on the historical Jesus and the resurrection as well. Today on Family Talk, Dr. Tim Clinton and Dr. Gary Habermas will have a moving and powerful discussion about why and even if Jesus had to die. Let's get started.

Dr. Tim Clinton: This weekend, over 2 billion Christians around the world are commemorating and they're celebrating the death, the burial, the resurrection of Christ. Today on our program we're going to ask questions like, "why did Jesus have to die? Did He really die? What kind of evidence do we have on the resurrection of Christ? And what does it mean if I believe that He has risen?" Gary, thanks for stopping by on this special day.

Dr. Gary Habermas: No problem. This is like you say, an exciting weekend. It's my favorite weekend of the year.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Gary, why did Jesus have to die?

Dr. Gary Habermas: Well, to me it's not so much our being able to explain why He did or whatever. The way I think of it is like this. God decreed from way back in the Old Testament, as we learned, without the shedding of blood, there's no remission of sins, and for whatever reason God chose that in His economy. That's the way it would have to be. And His son was sinless, so just as it was typified in the Old Testament by the lamb without blemish, Jesus in effect was a human without blemish, the only one ever. And He's the only one who could die for our sins. That's what this weekend's all about. But not just His death, but most of all His resurrection, the most triumphant event in history whereby God indicated that Jesus was who He claimed to be and Christianity's true.

Dr. Tim Clinton: In Isaiah 53, Gary, it says, "He was despised and rejected of men. A man of sorrows acquainted with grief." Goes on to say that "He was despised and we esteemed Him not and surely how He has borne our griefs, He's carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed Him, stricken, smitten of God and afflicted," but here it is, "but He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities and upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace." What does that mean, Gary?

Dr. Gary Habermas: Well, I think it's in a way whenever I hear language like that, be it from Scripture like what you just read or a sermon, I think about how sobering this event is. We dare not ever try to preach a Christianity which has left out this suffering of Jesus. In this day and age, it's not popular to say that somebody had to die or people talk about the Father doing something immoral. I mean, it's just no such thing. We also have to remember that Jesus went willingly, so it's the front half of what we celebrate is Easter, because obviously if He hadn't been dead, He wouldn't have been raised. And the first half has significance too because it's our salvation. Paul says, without the back half, the front half doesn't mean anything. The death of Jesus doesn't mean anything if it's not for the resurrection, but together there's nothing like it in the history of religions.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Gary, the agony that Jesus suffered, I know this is Good Friday and many slow way down and just think about what he went through. Why the death on the cross? Why did He have to go through such a gruesome death?

Dr. Gary Habermas: Yeah, great question. I don't think there's any logic that says it has to be this and nothing else. What I mean is if the Lord had arranged in some other way, of course there will be shedding of blood to fulfill the Old Testament type, but the way it came down, I mean, you got to think if you were one of the disciples, it would just be a huge shock. I mean, when Jesus predicted several times that He would rise from the dead, they didn't believe, they didn't understand, they thought it was something else and then all of a sudden, He's torn from them. And Paul describes it as a stumbling block to Jews because the Old Testament

law tells us that cursed is the man who hangs on a tree. In effect, that's what Jesus was doing.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Often people talk about that passage out of Philippians 2, where it says that Christ left the glories of Heaven and became our redeemer by the way of the cross and that He did not have to do this, but in sovereign love He reaches toward us, Gary. What does it mean that He emptied himself?

Dr. Gary Habermas: If you put five theologians in a room, you might get three different responses on that one, but to me, I think that the text there says that although He existed in the form of God and the Greek word for form, in English, form doesn't mean much. I mean, here we're locked in this house. That's a form of a house over there, but in Greek, the primary meaning of this word, morphe, means the essence of, the nature of. So the contrast of Philippians 2 is between this person, Jesus Christ, who though He had the essence of God, very next verse, took on the essence of a servant. So you've got morphe of God. Next verse, morphe of a servant. So right there is what Christianity is about. When we say the God man, it'd be hard to pick a couple verses from Scripture that say it any better than those right there.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The death of Jesus. Some have questioned whether or not He died. Gary, how do you know that He died?

Dr. Gary Habermas: If somebody asked me that, I would say that we have evidence that comes in from a wide variety of directions. Let me take the three best known skeptical theologians in the U.S., all pretty far to the left. Two of them, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, they say almost the same comment. They say the fact that Jesus died by crucifixion is as well established as any fact in the ancient world. Now, that's an incredible statement. As well established as any fact in the ancient world. Now, one of the reasons for that is because we have a fair amount of medical information on what happened. I mean, people were crucified as recently as World War II and we have a lot of information about what happened. So much so that about 25 years ago, an article on this subject was published in the Journal of American Medical Association, so that's a medical book.

Now on the other side, the third skeptic, Bart Ehrman, who's probably the best known skeptic in America today, former evangelical and now as he calls himself, an agnostic leaning toward atheism. And he says the best way to get an event is to look at independent sources. How many independent sources do we have? And in ancient world, two. Two sources is plenty to establish many events and many events are established by one source alone. Well, Bart Ehrman, the skeptic, counts 11 different historical sources, early sources for the death of Jesus. So you put all of that together, the medical reasons, the historical reasons, it's quite a combination that makes even skeptics say this death of Jesus, no matter what we might hear popularly from people, deserves no doubts whatsoever.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Gary, I know you've spent a lot of time studying about the shroud. Can you explain some about that evidence and why it's significant?

Dr. Gary Habermas: We started the program by giving a little bit of a biography, and when I started going through doubts in my teen years and these lasted for 10 or more years, family, friends, would start bringing things to my attention that they thought were good evidences. And they'd say, "Well, look at this archeology. Whoa, look at this creation evolution. Don't you think there's some good evidence here?" And one of the things that was brought to my attention by a friend was the Shroud of Turin. And I read about it for the first time in the late sixties and I thought, wow, this is really incredible. It seems like there's checks and balances for almost every question you can ask. Well, now, many, many years later, I've put a lot of time into studying this subject too. Couple co-authored books with one of the fellows who was involved in the research, and I tell people I'm not here to say that the shroud has to be the burial garment of Jesus.

I try to be cautious, but there are sure a lot of indications that it is what it is, including the most popular view of what causes the image on the shroud, which looks like two different kinds of radiation coming out of a dead body. Now, how do you get radiation coming out of a dead body? Well, if it turns out to be Jesus, the man buried in the shroud was definitely crucified, now you've really got a mystery on your hands. If He's dead, He's in a state of rigor mortis, the man in the shroud, that is, and it looks like X-rays are coming out from the body onto the cloth. There's nothing like that on earth. It is the most studied archeological artifact, religious or secular in human history.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Gary, have you had a chance to see it?

Dr. Gary Habermas: I have not. My co-author was part of the investigation team and he spent days with it. He asked me to come aboard with him and co-author these two books, and my job was sort of to read the data and say, "All right, what does this mean in terms of historical possibilities? Who could this be? How close is it to the death of Jesus? What does it say about resurrection?" So I basically was asked to take the data and make comments about its meaning.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Gary, if someone was to walk up to you on the street and say, "How do you know that Jesus has risen from the dead?" How can we say with boldness, confidence that He has risen from the dead? The Apostle, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15 said, if Christ be not risen, everything we're believing is basically baloney.

Dr. Gary Habermas: I tell people, how far do you have to read the New Testament before an author says dot, dot, dot, then faith is vain. Faith is how we come to Christ. And so how does faith become vain? And I think Paul's saying if it's not grounded. The resurrection is what grounds our faith. It's what gives us reasons to believe God doesn't shy away from providing those, whether it's Paul on the way to Damascus or whether it's Thomas who required a sign. James, a brother of Jesus who in all probability was an unbeliever until he met the risen Jesus. I mean, these are special kind of skeptics. A brilliant thinker, Paul, who was a persecutor

thinking he was doing God a favor. He tells us to persecute these folks. To a James who was part of the family members and Mark 3 who tried to get Jesus out of the way because he was embarrassing the family.

And then all of a sudden, surprise, he goes from thinking his brother's got mental problems, I mean, really the Greek says, "In two minds." So he's got issues all the way to being Lord and Savior when James comes to believe and becomes the pastor of the largest church in the ancient world. It's a beautiful combination of accounts that come to this. Personally, I think, to answer your question, I think the best evidence, the answer for me when I finished my doctoral dissertation, because I did it on the resurrection, was to argue that even on the skeptics' information, even on the skeptics' data, if we use, so to speak, the skeptics' Bible, if we used only their data, we have enough to show that Jesus was raised from the dead. So I think we have reason to think that Jesus was raised even on the skeptical view, and that's powerful.

There are some ancient historical sources, non-Christian sources, that report the deity of Christ, report that he was raised from the dead. Some of them are pretty obscure, but skeptics don't mind you using the New Testament. And in fact, I tell people if you don't bring it up, they will, because they will use Scripture. The only catch is they use it differently than believers do. They don't just cite a text because they think it's authoritative. They only cite texts which they think can be shown to be true. And so that's what I was referring to a moment ago. Those are the texts I use. Their texts, in effect. The ones that can be shown to be true. Those are the texts I use to show that Jesus is raised in the dead on their understanding of Scripture.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I'm going to go back to 1 Corinthians 15, Gary, for a moment.

Dr. Gary Habermas: Sure.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Paul says, "But He is risen. He is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man came also the resurrection of the dead, for as in Adam all die. So also now in Christ shall all be made alive." And they would greet one another, Gary, and say, "He is risen." And they would answer, "How?"

Dr. Gary Habermas: He is risen, indeed.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It's everything, Gary, isn't it?

Dr. Gary Habermas: It is. It sure is, Tim. I mean, I speak on this topic thousands of times. I teach an entire Ph.D. course on this topic at Liberty and I do it at other schools. And so you think, oh, come on, it's got to get a little bit dull, but it doesn't. No matter how often I do it, it's exciting and I give God the praise for the fact that I get fired up so that when I've done lecturing for the 1500th time, I'm thinking, this is really incredible. Many years ago when I'm just kind of coming out of my

doubt, I was walking around the house and I was considering certain evidences and I said to myself, wow, He really is raised from the dead. Well, I knew that, but I mean that's how it hits me sometimes just to say, look at this. Can you beat this?

I tell people, what if God gave us this kind of evidence, but for an unimportant area. I mean, non-central area of the faith, and then ask us to take the gospel, the deity, death, resurrection of Jesus, totally on faith, but He doesn't. And for those who need this sort of thing, He gives the best evidence at the most central point. And as I tell my students regularly, if all we knew was the deity, death and resurrection of Jesus, if that's all we knew, that He's the son of God who died on the cross for our sins, He was raised from the dead. The amazing thing is Christianity stands.

So when students go away to secular schools and the polls say that 60 to 90% of them lose their faith when they go to these universities, it's almost always because somebody hits Christians at a periphery point. Or maybe doesn't even hit them at all, just makes fun of them. Peer pressure, emotions, that kind of stuff. But if all we know, if we keep this close, if we have reasons to believe that Jesus died, was buried, raised again, He's the son of God. I might not be able to answer all the questions. Christians themselves differ from other Christians, but I could know that Christianity's true. There's just nothing like it.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Gary, the sayings on the cross, like "Woman, behold thy son." "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me." When he screamed, "It is finished." What did that mean, Gary?

Dr. Gary Habermas: Yeah, those are amazing. I just finished speaking and those words that you just cited, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me," were the centerpiece of what I was saying. And I was trying to tell people we think if Christianity's true, then why am I suffering? And my question I ask them was, you cannot define the gospel without talking about suffering. God never belittled suffering. God never says you're not going to suffer anymore. God never says, I'm going to take it all away. Because if he did, why did His son have to suffer? So the question I was asking them was, do we deserve to suffer any less than Jesus Christ did?

In the book of Hebrews, not only read the better known verse, tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin, but just a chapter removed from that is the reference that Jesus learned obedience by the things He suffered. A truly amazing comment. He learned obedience by what He suffered. When He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" To think that somehow helped Him to grow in some way. He learned it, learned obedience. I have to stop and wonder, who says I should get away from suffering? Do I deserve to suffer any less than my Lord? And so I think you're right that those passages on the cross, including, it is finished, are just incredible because nobody tries to sugarcoat that with Christianity.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Gary, last Sunday we celebrated Palm Sunday where the crowds or the masses were crying out, "Hosanna." They saw the exalted one. Yet, John chapter one, verse 11 says that He came to His own and His own received Him not. By later in the week they had turned and said, release Barabbas, let Him suffer for what He's claiming to be. Gary, how could they have witnessed the Christ and rejected Him?

Dr. Gary Habermas: Tim, you folks understand this as well as anyone. So often in life, we do not make our most cherished decisions based on sheer evidence. We're not people who say, "well, there's 10 arguments for this, so I'm going to believe this." Usually, our first response is to respond emotionally. It's to respond with actions which may or may not be God-honoring actions. And so many times, humans, they make their bed and they have to sleep in it, as the old phrase says. If we fall away from the Lord or sin or whatever, we end up making God in our image. Well, all of a sudden when that happens, God must be the kind of God, not the one I believed last week, but must be the kind of God who would allow my actions of this week and we recast Him in our own mind.

Or our emotions. We go through some pain and we get mad at Him for allowing this or that. I think a lot of those responses are no different in the first century. They've responded to Jesus because for other reasons, they're repulsed by Him or whatever. Or their leaders tell them they should be repulsed by Him and they respond without the full data. But it's really sad because we're human beings and we respond with anything but our reasons sometimes. We go on how we feel and it almost always get us in trouble.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Gary, sometimes pain also blinds our eye. We not only get angry, we just deny God.

Dr. Gary Habermas: Tim, in a recent survey, I believe it was secular, one of the people groups that expressed the most anger toward God are atheists, 19%. And when the people ask me about website, X, Y, Z and young people who believe this or that, or why are young people going here? I think a lot of it, it's an expression of an emotion. It's anger, it's upset. It's, "Well, if you're the God my parents believe in, why did I flunk this exam? Why did I have this car accident? Why did my girl or boyfriend break up with me?" And we blame these things on God.

But like I said a moment ago, you can't take suffering out of the Christian message. It's fully admitted. It's the heart of the Christian message as well as God having an answer for this. Man, I mean, when Paul says, "Step back. Let him that stand up take heed lest he fall," I just think we have to evaluate a little better. We all do it, we all go off. We all get emotional about everything. But for those who want to look and see what the evidence says, I think it is so clear. The older I get, I'm more and more convinced that Christianity's true.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Paul referred to himself as an apostle, Gary. That means he what? He saw the risen Christ?

- Dr. Gary Habermas Right. Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen the Lord? 1 Corinthians 9:1.
- Dr. Tim Clinton: Philippians 3:10. Then he makes this statement, Gary, "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection." What does that mean for each and every one of us?
- Dr. Gary Habermas: You know, Tim, it's amazing we're talking about this. That same passage, Philippians 3:10, he goes on to say a few verses later that our citizenship is in Heaven. It's not here on earth. But when he mentions that comment, "that I may know him in the power of his resurrection," right there in the exact same text, he says that I may know the fellowship of his sufferings. And you go, Paul, do you have issues or something? You want to know his power, but you also want to know his sufferings? And Paul, I think, had the right perspective.
- He realized that this life was not going to be exempt from suffering. But he goes on to say that I may know the power of his resurrection. A couple times, Paul says that same resurrection power that raised Jesus is sufficient for us to break away from our sin, to live a powerful life. And somehow Paul wanted to experience that victory. And then again, he goes on to say just a few verses later, our citizenship is in Heaven and Jesus will change our lowly bodies to be likened to His glorious body. Paul looked ahead to that resurrection.
- Dr. Tim Clinton: Gary, the resurrected one, the Messiah, the Christ, the Jesus that you know and love. Would you close us out by encouraging us and challenging us to know him?
- Dr. Gary Habermas: For people who want evidence, it's there. There's more evidence for this event than about anything in religion. But for those who are more feelers who just want to say, "Hey, I want a relationship. I want to know he's there." They could know him that way too. And I never argue with people who say, "I don't need the evidence. I can just see the reality of my life." There's different strokes for different folks there. Jesus said, "If you both don't believe me for my word's sake, believe me, for my work's sake." And works usually mean miracles. It's there. It's all things to all people. Paul says He became all things to all people.
- It's a great encouragement this time of year, like as if Jesus were coming from the tomb and extending His scarred hands wide and saying, I'm here, and wanting people to come to Him. It may remind us of that verse in Luke, where He tells us He weeps over Jerusalem and says, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I came to you like a mother hen tries to comfort her chicks and you would not. You wouldn't have anything to do with me." But He's still there wounded and now healed, and now raised, inviting us to come to Himself because whoever comes to Jesus is not cast out, John tells us.
- Dr. Tim Clinton: John 19:11, "But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb and as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb. She saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet, and they said to her,

'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away, my Lord. I don't even know where they've laid him.' Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she didn't even know it was Jesus. And Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be a gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you've carried Him away, tell me where you've laid Him and I will take Him away." And then Jesus said to her, "Mary." And she turned and said to Him in Aramaic, [foreign language 00:24:18]. He is risen. Gary, He is risen.

Dr. Gary Habermas: He has risen, indeed.

Roger Marsh: What an incredible reminder for us on this Good Friday. I was so encouraged to hear that even skeptics admit that there is overwhelming evidence for the physical death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To learn more about Dr. Gary Habermas, his books and his ministry, visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. Now, if you missed any part of today's program or you want to revisit it in its entirety, you'll find that there as well, drjamesdobson.org/broadcast.

You can also give us a call. When you contact us, a member of our staff will be happy to suggest a resource for you, answer any questions you might have about Family Talk and even take some time to pray with you. Our number is 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. And remember, we're here for you 24/7. Thank you for joining us here on Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh and on behalf of Dr. And Mrs. Dobson and the entire team here at the James Dobson Family Institute, we hope you have a blessed Easter weekend. He has risen. Christ is risen, indeed.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.