

Transcript 90 Dr. Gary Habermas

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Question podcast. On today's episode, I was just telling him a few minutes ago that last year when we started the podcast, we kind of discussed as a team of who would we like to have on the podcast and if so, on what topic.

Shea Houdmann

And one of the people I mentioned was Doctor Gary Habermas. He's the world foremost expert on evidence for the resurrection and the meaning of the resurrection. Today here we are about approximately a year later they're launching the podcast we're finally able to make it work. So Doctor Habermas, welcome to the show.

Dr. Gary Habermas

Well, thank you very much. It's a good week for it and a great talk.

Shea Houdmann

Yes, so for those who may not be very familiar, Doctor Gary Habermas has dedicated his professional life to the examination of the relevant historical, philosophical and theological issues surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus. His extensive list of publications includes on 45 books. He's also contributed more than 60 chapters or articles to additional books and over 100 articles and reviews and journals and other publications. In recent years he has been a visiting or adjunct professor at about 15 different graduate schools and seminaries in the United States and abroad. Doctor Habermas, as a distinguished research professor of apologetics at Liberty University.

Shea Houdmann

So the resurrection is a doctrine of the Christian faith that is crucially and vitally important. But I hear many, many people when they're sharing the gospel that they do an excellent job of explaining the meaning of Christ's death. And but they just kind of mention the resurrection in passing, so why would you say? Why is the resurrection so important? Why is any gospel presentation that lacks a thorough explanation of the resurrection inadequate?

Dr. Gary Habermas

Well, I'm glad you asked that because I mean the main reason I give a lot of verses saying a lot of things. But the apostle Paul says if Christ hasn't been raised he says our faith is vain. Not been forgiven of our sins. So I assume the death by itself gains nothing. By Paul saying you can't even be forgiven for your sins. Twice in that passage, different Greek words, but same meaning he says that teaching the resurrection without it, Christian in vain. In fact, he ends his passage by saying we are of all persons, both most miserable. So you know it's pretty clear what's going on.

Shea Houdmann

But Doctor Habermas, to your book *The Case For The Resurrection of Jesus* was hugely helpful for me because I mean, I believed in the resurrection and I even knew, to a certain extent the importance of it that I never really heard good presentation of the arguments for it. How much historical evidence there is for it, but my question well, what kind of wanted to lead off with for you? What leads you to dedicate much of your ministry life, your teaching life to the resurrection?

Dr. Gary Habermas

Well, for me, the important thing was that it's the center of everything. I mean when the when the New Testament's given a definition of the gospel, the resurrection is giving top billing. It says without it, nothing else works. Nothing else is true. It's tide to almost every area of practice. Almost every area of theology in the New Testament over 300 verses on the subject. Everything points to it, but as the key event in the gospel presentation, which I usually say is whenever you look at the definition of New Testament the deity death and resurrection of Jesus. But the resurrection I think it's gotta be right there at the top because Paul says with it we've got nothing. So that's it.

Dr. Gary Habermas

I got into it not because even not because of this deduction not thinking oh wow, let's go over the most important thing. I got into it because I went through years and years and years, many years of doubt and the rest the resurrection is what got me through the doubts so. So most of all, it was a move to help me with my own struggle, but as it came along and was clearer and clearer like I was saying, thank you, Lord, for letting me spend all my time doing the thing that's at the center of the universe and the gospel presentation.

Shea Houdmann

Exactly, so let me throw you a softball here, something that I know is definitely in your wheelhouse. What would you say are some of these strongest arguments or evidence is for Christ resurrection?

Dr. Gary Habermas

Well, I use what I call a minimal facts argument and I teasingly say, university campuses, I'll say it's a heads I win tails you lose argument because I use data which are allowed by critical scholars and I've surveyed thousands of them and even if they are atheist, agnostic, other skeptical or even by their own definition, non Christian commentators. They allow these facts and so I'm saying, well, if you allow these facts then you ought to be prepared to deal with them. You ought to be, you know, tell me what your interpretation is. What do you do with them? And that usually gets us going, so I'm using their data. Which data are also found throughout the New Testament. So it's not that during the New Testament, so I don't you. I used the New Testament critically. I used the New Testament the way critics would use the New Testament and my point is, if you've got this much data on the critics New Testament, you certainly have that and more on a more conservative view of the New Testament.

Shea Houdmann

Give our listeners a few examples. If someone were to come to you and say why should I believe in Christ's resurrection? What are some of the steps you take them through?

Dr. Gary Habermas

Well, I usually do 6 facts are always the same. I've used others over the years, but I've been using six for a long time. I would say it's a fact that Jesus died by crucifixion that doesn't prove the resurrection, but it's a prerequisite, so he died by crucifixion. The disciples had real experiences that they believed were appearances of the risen Jesus. Thirdly, this event was proclaimed very early. One New Testament atheist who unfortunately just passed away recently, but Garrett Louderman says that the resurrection message was preached immediately after the occurrences. I mean that's pretty early. Can't beat that. Immediately is immediately. Four, their lives are transformed. The point of being willing to die, and sometimes critics jump on your being willing to, and I say, my typical responses is I'm not reading their minds. I'm watching their feet. And when you go into cities that you've already been in and gotten beat up, or you go into a sister city that's a short distance away and you know you had a really bad experience a few miles away and you keep going in there. It means they're more interested in presenting this message than they are worrying about what's happening to him, so their lives were really transformed and we do have early martyrdom texts. Or the three. Maybe the three biggest, most influential names, mostly Peter, Paul and James the brother of Jesus. So that's #4 that their lives were transformed, and five and six two skeptics, James the brother of Jesus and Paul both became believers from Paul for sure, and everything we can tell about James, they both became believers because they had experiences too just like the rest, and they thought those experiences were appearances of the risen Jesus.

Dr. Gary Habermas

Those are six I use. There's many other things. Talk about the empty tomb. You talk about the female testimony. You talk about the Jerusalem origin of the preaching, because that's important, because people couldn't disprove the empty tomb and other parts of the message by, you know, an afternoon walk to go to the tomb. And that's all all that figures in. But I think those six things are the key.

Shea Houdmann

And what I love how you present it is that these are things that are generally accepted among skeptics, people who don't necessarily believe in the Bible that these six things are historically reliable. And it's interesting at lunch today I was discussing with someone and he said, you know, I almost find the conversion of James, the brother of Jesus to be more convincing than Paul, because for James, who the Gospels describe him and his brothers and sisters as someone they did not believe in Christ until after the resurrection. Something amazing and powerful would have happened to happen to convince someone that their older brother was God in the flesh, so that conversion of James and what he did in his life from that point forward is a powerful testimony to something happened to change the trajectory of his life.

Dr. Gary Habermas

Yeah, and right up until just shortly before the cross, there's no. Well, there's no evidence that James became a believer until he shows up in what we call the upper room in Acts chapter one after the Ascension, and says over 100 Christians were gathered together and there it says Mary and the brothers of Jesus, so they're right there in the room, and I wonder what they're doing in the room with the earliest Christians that they were still unbelievers. They didn't want to come to their town because they were embarrassed, I mean the Greek, the Greek there Mark three and then again not too helpful in

Mark 6, John 7 there's three passages and it says that when he came to town, the townspeople are basically embarrassed, saying, you know what's this guy coming back to us? Isn't this Joseph son.

Dr. Gary Habermas

But more importantly, the Greek indicates that they thought he was mentally ill. The Greek says he was beside himself like he was like 2 persons like you know schizophrenic or something. So it was pretty bad view and the brothers the text seems to say that they moved him out. They wanted to move Jesus out of their view and the suggestion is that they were embarrassed by his being there. You know they were going to be branded and he'd leave town, and they'd be called losers. You know who knows the reason, but the gospel this brother seemed to side with the townspeople.

Shea Houdmann

So another interesting way to approach this faith in the resurrection. What in your experience, are some of the most common attacks on the resurrection and sense of people who reject it? What are some approaches that they take and maybe how can Christians be prepared to respond to those?

Dr. Gary Habermas

There's a really really major difference in the way people who are not trained in the area respond versus those who are trained, and it makes no difference to me whether the unbelievers are, let's say, whether they're well, I could say anyway, you want to. If they don't know the subject matter, they make things up that skeptical scholars would never say. The skeptics who are not trained will come up with different statements, and the skeptics who are trained, and the skeptics who are trained will allow a whole bunch of material because I see the reason for it. Skeptics are not trained frequently get upset with the skeptics. Seem like they're atheists and agnostics. They say you're allowing too much and and so it depends on who you're talking about. If it's a skeptic who's not trained, they'll say, well, don't read verses back to me because it's a prejudice text and I don't accept your text and I really don't think it even makes a difference if you gave reasons for the reliability of Scripture because no matter how you say it, they see it as a prejudice piece of material and right down to anything you say that they can't explain you know it could have been made up, could have been factitious as all kinds of problems and the most the most common critique going back to before 1800 up until the present, the most common critique by skeptics is there are contradictions and other problems in the Gospels.

Dr. Gary Habermas

And the problem with the problem is these same critics at their scholars the the critics who think there's problems in the text still think some of them still think he was raised in the dead. So what I mean is they don't think the the problems rule out the data. I'm gonna give you an example. If you were doing a report on George Washington, first president of the United States and you go to the library, maybe there's a couple things in his life that everybody knows didn't happen. I mean, did he cut down the Cherry Tree and then tell his father, I have to tell the truth. Yes, I cut it down. Well, they'd say, well, anything good, anything you can give in, you know. George Washington was an honest guy. He told his dad the truth, but he probably made it up to make him look good.

Dr. Gary Habermas

Our believers probably made it up to make him look good, so I don't think you're going to improve their view by giving evidence in scripture. So they think that by citing the text it's prejudice. Now Bart Ehrman, the well known atheist New Testament scholar. Virtually every other skeptic, they're going to tell you whenever you do a report, you go to the earliest sources, and Bart Ehrman says the best sources for these teachings are Paul. They're in the New Testament. And he says, so I get asked once in a while. Do I accept these things because quote on quote the Bible says so and Bargman says I don't accept anything because the Bible said so.

Dr. Gary Habermas

But the reason I accept the XYZ versus I'm using is because I know where the accounts are evidence to where they're not. And I'm only using the evidenced accounts, and then he makes a comment. He said if I'm studying the civil war I, a George Washington or somebody similar. He said if I'm studying the Revolutionary War or the Civil War or whatever he says I'm not going to stop from reading the letters from the soldiers or taking their interviews because they're prejudice. You know they've got to be lying. They're Americans, so therefore everything they say is exaggerated.

Dr. Gary Habermas

He said, that's not how you work. He said if there's issues you work with the issues, but you have to use the earliest sources you have, and the Gospels are early and the epistles are even earlier.

Shea Houdmann

That's an excellent example, just of how, even if you don't believe the New Testament is the inerrant, infallible word of God, like we do from a historical perspective, doesn't mean it can be just be thrown out. 'cause it is literature speaking to the proper subject in the proper time period. So it has some weight to it.

Dr. Gary Habermas

Yeah, back to the story of you doing a report on George Washington. What if you pulled all the books on George Washington a lot from the library and they're on your desk and someone tells you, you know there are errors in every one of those books about George Washington. Would you go oh my and get up and walk away? No, you would use the sources if there's two sources that tell how he did something, or two sources that say how he did something else, you try to get to the bottom of it and figure it out and maybe one source says this guy was involved in blah blah blah and you find out the guy died before the Revolutionary War started. Well, you're answering the questions yourself, so we we dig in and we do the research. We don't. We don't say I won't use the text, but my point is, no book that you get history from in library is going to be inerrant. It's going to report I, I mean, unless it's a paragraph long and that's the end of it. I mean, you're going to fall into problems and if you reject all sources like that, you're not gonna do any research, so we have to be, every reporter, everybody investigating a murder, everybody in a bank robbery or whatever you've got to deal with witnesses that say it was a red car. No, it wasn't. It was a green car. We've got to sort these things out, but doesn't stop you from getting data, even these critics. They'll raise problems, but they don't think the problems keep you from learning what happened.

Shea Houdmann

So here's kind of a dream question for me, so I consider you the world foremost expert on evidence for Christ's resurrection. But for you, you personally what is most convincing to you if you were to narrow it down to one thing, what to you is the most convincing evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Dr. Gary Habermas

I would say that what I call the 2nd minimal fact that the disciples had experiences that they believed were appearances of the risen Jesus, and no other theories or suggestions can explain what else they saw other than a resurrection.

Shea Houdmann

Nothing else can explain how their lives still radically transformed.

Dr. Gary Habermas

Well, we know that, that radical life change can happen for a bunch of reasons that aren't always very good. And I wouldn't say that the transformation alone proves it, but I would say what really shows it is those experiences which can't be explained away.

Dr. Gary Habermas

Next thing I would tell you would be the earliness of the proclamation. We have resurrection proclamations from the 30s AD the 30s. Now would you have the 30s. Mark is 40 years later often said to be the earliest, the Epistle of First Thessalonians is probably the earliest at plus 20. Mark at plus 40 is the normal date. Why do you say years later, when the earliest is plus 20 First Thessalonians? And the reason is because scholars know how to trace the account.

Dr. Gary Habermas

I said earlier that Garrett Ludemann, the atheist New Testament scholar, said the reports of Jesus resurrection happened immediately after the appearance is not enough. Immediately means two days, five days, 10 days. And Acts, the first sermon is you've got Pentecost, and if Luke is right and Acts one that Jesus appeared for 40 days and Pentecost, is 50 days. Nobody as far as we know nobody is talking for 10 days, so I don't know how long immediate is, but it was right after the fact. In fact, some critics will even say the story started that year, or it started within one year at the latest, so.

Dr. Gary Habermas

I'd say that's probably the next most important thing is how early the account is, but the fact that the disciples had experiences that can't be explained away, they all work together. They have experienced that can't be explained away. Their lives are transformed. They're reported very early. And how about these two skeptics you know who Paul persecuting James being a family member, each kind of skeptic is different.

Dr. Gary Habermas

You know, to James grew up with him, you know, can you imagine James, yeah Mom, I didn't make my bed this morning, but how come you don't yell at Jesus and she said 'cause his beds always made. I mean, how much would you have to hear that before you get upset, you could understand James's

attitude, I guess. But the fact that he came and the fact that Paul was a persecutor, he came. I mean, all six are very important.

Shea Houdmann

Obviously I'm very into apologetics. You're a professor of it, and much of your writing has been on their defense of the resurrection or even other issues in the Christian faith. Often I will tend to go towards defending it, especially this time of year where we see lots of questions of why do you believe this stuff or why should I believe in the resurrection. But to you what is the key to arguing defending the resurrection, but doing as First Peter 3:15 says to do so with gentleness and respect. This sadly in the Christian community I see a lot of people even making really good arguments, to the resurrection but not doing it with gentleness and respect. And every time I've heard you speak and share on it, that's something I would describe of you. You're very gentle and respectful and how you respond to atheists, critics and skeptics. So what is the key to doing that the right way?

Dr. Gary Habermas

Well, I mean thank you, I'm I'm glad to see that. My grandmother used to say you're going to catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. And I don't think going off on people and getting angry at them, I think it's happened one time in hundreds of interviews where I got upset with an interviewer that was trying to trip me up and it's only after about the 4th time he did it that I got upset. Generally, I don't I, I mean, in hundreds interviews you don't see it some go on for more than an hour. If the person were local I I told some skeptics, I wish you lived next door to me. I wish you liked football. You'd be welcome to come over on a Sunday afternoon to watch it with me.

Dr. Gary Habermas

I told one of I told one of the best known skeptics in the world, an atheist. He was a big football fan, still is and I said to him, if you come over on Sunday and sit with me. I said you and I can talk and talk and talk during the game and I said at the end of a season someone is going to be converted and it's not going to be me. I said that to him and he just laughed. He said, that's funny. He said I'd love to watch football with you. So I I try to get that kind of spirit of, you know, not being belligerent and starting fights before you even start the discussion.

Shea Houdmann

That's that's powerful and other verses on may our speech be grace seasoned with salt.

Dr. Gary Habermas

While you're talking, if the person says something like, I mean this won't happen. But if the skeptic says something like alright, I'll grant the resurrection, but I don't think he was the Son of God. I think where the the season with salt thing comes in is you can't just say alright well, I understand and let it go. I think you have to kindly, but I think you have to confront it and say, well, here's several evidence cases where Jesus thought he was deity. Why don't you tell me what you think is going on here and my guess is they're going to get themselves in a corner pretty soon, but but what I mean is I can't just let it go.

Dr. Gary Habermas

They might tell me something like, well, I don't believe in errancy or something. I'd say, well, I never expected you to do that and and I wouldn't. I may not say something to everything. But especially if the person is going to say something about the deity, crucifixion, resurrection, I'm going to challenge them nicely and ask them as you would a friend. What you have to say back about it

Shea Houdmann

Doctor Gary Habermas. Thank you so much for being on the show again, I cannot recommend your book *The Case For The Resurrection of Jesus* more highly is hugely impactful for me. I know will be for others and we'll include some links where you can learn more about Doctor Habermas and his ministry, his writings, his publications is hugely beneficial if you have any doubts, any concerns about trusting the resurrection, I cannot recommend a better source. And if you're wanting to know how to better defend it to others and do so winsome in some manner. Doctor Habermas is well worth emulating there as well. So Doctor Habermas thank you again for being on the show today.

Dr. Gary Habermas

Thank you if I can add real quickly my website is GaryHabermas.com easy to remember here we have also have YouTube channel. There are hundreds of items combined in those two. Apparently some people like them 'cause I've had I don't know, I think it's over 7,000,000 hits on my website. So people are getting the information, that's what it's there for. I don't sell a thing. If somebody wants a book, I send them to one of the distributors. I don't, you know, I don't have them on my website or YouTube. It's not advertised. It's all about the gospel. So they get a lot of questions answered too, so I hope it's it's all about ministry and and not about me trying to make money or something. I think that's ridiculous.

Shea Houdmann

Fantastic and we'll include links to where you can learn more, including its website, its books, and so far the the show notes for episode at podcast.GotQuestions.org and also at the description on YouTube when this video goes live. So thank you again Doctor Habermas it's been a privilege, having you on the show.

Shea Houdmann

This has been the Got Questions podcast. You've got questions. The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.