Your Greatest Doubts and Fears

How to Keep the Faith When Facing Life's Toughest Questions

#9: What if the Gospels are just made-up stories? Is it possible everything we believe is a lie?

Intro: The Gospel of Thomas

I. The Canonical Gospels are the Earliest We Have

A. All the Canonical Gospels are dated c.50-90 A.D.

B. No Apocryphal Gospel is dated to the First Century

II. The Canonical Gospels Have a Credible Connection to the Apostles

A. We have good reasons to connect the Canonical Gospels to the Apostles

Example: John. Irenaeus knew Polycarp who knew John Personally.

Example: Mark. Widespread testimony (as early as Papias) that Mark contained the apostolic teaching of Peter

Implication: Gospels contain <u>authoritative</u>, <u>eyewitness</u> testimony

B. Not a Single Apocryphal Gospel Could Have Been Written by an Apostle

III. The Canonical Gospels Lack the Legendary Embellishments of Later Gospels

A. The Canonical Gospels Speak in a Restrained, Manner-of-Fact Manner

B. Apocryphal Gospels Often have Extensive Legendary Embellishments

IV. The Canonical Gospels Were Recognized as Authoritative from a Very Early Date

A. The Canonical Gospels Were Recognized as Scripture Very Early

B. Most of the Apocryphal Gospels Were Expressly Condemned Or Simply Ignored

V. The Canonical Gospels show impressive familiarity with First Century Israel/Palestine

- Geography of Israel
  - Towns, regions, bodies of water, special locations (Golgotha, Gethsemane, Solomon's Colonnade)
  - Travel between locations is accurately described (e.g., going "up" to Jerusalem, or "going down" to Jericho)
  - "Other" Gospels reflect very little geographical awareness

- Names in Israel
  - From other sources, we know the most popular male names in Palestine were Simon, Joseph, Lazarus, Judah, John, and Joshua (Jesus)
  - How could the Gospel authors have gotten this right if they wrote from outside Palestine? Names in Egypt and other locals are decidedly different!

- Customs/practices in Israel
  - Authors deeply immersed in Jewish thoughts and aware of distinctively Jewish customs and practices (e.g., Mark 7:1-4)
  - Gentile authors writing later or outside Palestine would never know these details

- Unnecessary Detail
  - Mark tells us that Simon of Cyrene's sons were Alexander and Rufus (15:21)
  - John refers to Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (3:1; 19:38)
  - These details could easily be checked!

Big point: Knowing these details doesn't prove that what the Gospel authors wrote is true. But it is what we would expect from eyewitness/firsthand accounts.

Class Schedule:

Jan 9: Doubting Christian: What Role do Doubts and Fear Play in the Christian Life?
Jan 16: [Class cancelled for snow]
Jan 23: If Christianity is True then Why do so Many Intelligent People reject it?
Jan 30: Does saying Jesus is the Only Way Make us Arrogant or Intolerant?
Feb 6: Does the existence of evil and suffering in the world mean that God doesn't exist?
Feb 13: Some parts of the Bible seem morally troubling—are we sure it's a "good" book?
Feb 20: How Do I Deal with Depression and Anxiety About the Future?
Feb 27: Missions Week, Combined Sunday School
Mar 6: If Christianity is true, then how we do explain the bad behavior of Christians?
Mar 13: Isn't Christianity just the same as all the other religions? What makes it different?
Mar 20: What if the Gospels are just made-up stories? Is it possible everything we believe is a lie?
Mar 27: Lots of Christians are "deconstructing" their faith? Does that mean Christianity isn't true?
April 3: What do I do if Christianity Just isn't working for me?
April 10: What if I am Not a Christian? How Can I Know for Sure?