

## **Evidence for the Resurrection**

There is much evidence proving that Jesus existed - but that doesn't necessarily prove anything about who he was. Jesus is known for many things, but the most extravagant claim about him is that he came back from the dead. This claim is what all of Christianity hinges on. Jesus foretold that he would be killed (any controversial public figure can foretell that) but he also foretold that he would rise from the dead (which is impossible to arrange!).

If Jesus rose from the dead, it would validate his teachings, and we'd be foolish to ignore them. If he didn't rise from the dead, then we could disregard Christianity as a fantasy. Whether we like the person of Jesus or not is irrelevant. Whether or not we agree with Jesus' teaching doesn't matter. What we feel about Christianity isn't the issue. If Jesus rose from the dead, then we must pay attention to what He taught.

1 Corinthians 15:14-20 TPT

And if Christ has not been raised, all of our preaching has been for nothing and your faith is useless. [15] Moreover, if the dead are not raised, that would mean that we are false witnesses who are misrepresenting God. And that would mean that we have preached a lie, stating that God raised him from the dead, if in reality he didn't. [16] If the dead aren't raised up, that would mean that Christ has not been raised up either. [17] And if Christ is not alive, you are still lost in your sins and your faith is a fantasy. [18] It would also mean that those believers in Christ who have passed away have simply perished. [19] If the only benefit of our hope in Christ is limited to this life on earth, we deserve to be pitied more than all others! [20] But the truth is, Christ is risen from the dead, as the firstfruit of a great resurrection harvest of those who have died.

Even the Bible itself tell us that if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then the Christian faith is a useless fantasy. This is like saying: if you can disprove the resurrection of Christ, then forget about all of this "Jesus stuff" and go live as you please. But if Jesus did rise from the dead and is alive today, we have to consider the call of the gospel to receive him as Lord and live for him.

There can be no resurrection without a death - and so let's consider the death of Jesus first. The Roman authorities carried out the execution of Jesus in public with many witnesses present. Jesus was a well-known public figure and news of

his fame, and of his execution, was widespread. Remember that the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) are considered to be historically reliable eye-witness accounts. You can read the account of Jesus' suffering and death in Matthew 27:27- 56; Mark 15:16-42; Luke 23, and John 19.

Consider the Roman soldiers who put Jesus through his suffering and death; they would have been professional executioners, and very serious about their work. They would have been trained to inflict pain and suffering and knew how to execute someone. They knew when their task of execution would be complete. They were merciless and would have left no room for any mistakes. They would have made sure that Jesus was dead.

To quicken the death of the criminals being crucified with Jesus, the soldiers broke their legs. This ensured that they would not be able to push themselves up and breathe easier. However, when the soldiers came to Jesus, they didn't break his legs because they knew that he was already dead. As a precaution, and to leave no room for error, the Bible records that they thrust a spear into his side which released a mixture of blood and water. This would have made sure that resuscitation was impossible. The Roman soldiers made sure that Jesus was dead.

Matthew 27:50 TLB

50 Then Jesus shouted out again, dismissed his spirit, and died.

Mark 15:37 New King James Version (NKJV)

And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last.

Luke 23:46 New King James Version (NKJV)

And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said,  
—Father, \_into Your hands I commit My spirit.'ll Having said this, He  
breathed His last.

John 19:30 New King James Version (NKJV)

So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, —It is finished!  
And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

John 19:33-34 New King James Version (NKJV)

But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs but one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.

Medical experts say that if He were not already dead, this would have killed Him. Others have concluded that the pouring out of water and blood from His side was proof that Jesus was no longer alive.

Mark 15:43-45 Amplified Bible (AMP)

43 Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent and respected member of the Council (Sanhedrin, Jewish High Court), who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God—and he courageously dared to go in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time [only six hours after being crucified], and he summoned the centurion and asked him whether He was already dead. 45 And when he learned from the centurion [that Jesus was in fact dead], he gave the body to Joseph [by granting him permission to remove it].

When Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body of Christ so he and Nicodemus could bury Him, Pontius Pilate ordered a centurion to verify that Jesus was dead. The Roman governor would not have released the body to Joseph until the centurion was certain that all signs of life were gone. We can be sure that an officer in the Roman army would not make a mistake about an important matter like this, especially with such a high-profile execution.

Justin Martyr, a Christian debater in the second century, said that the record of Jesus' crucifixion was sent to Rome and stored in the Roman archives and was available for anyone to see as a matter of public record. Jesus was killed by the Romans.

The day after Jesus was buried, Jewish religious leaders again met with Pilate to make sure that the gravesite was secured. They told Pilate that Jesus had predicted his resurrection from the dead on the third day. They knew that Jesus was dead, but were expecting Jesus' disciples to conspire in a resurrection hoax by stealing the body. Pilate helped to prevent this and ordered the official seal of Rome to be attached to the tomb which was a warning to any grave robbers. In addition to this, Pilate stationed Roman soldiers at the sealed tomb to stand

guard. Any disciple who wanted to tamper with the body would have had to get passed Roman guards – men of war who were serious about their job. We must take note that the soldiers standing guard were serious about their work. They were not kind and gentle men standing guard at the tomb. These were rough men. They knew that the penalty for falling asleep while on watch would have been death, and they would have avoided this at all costs.

Matthew 27:62-66 New King James Version (NKJV)

On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, 63 saying, —Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise.’ 64 Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night[a] and steal Him away, and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead.’ So the last deception will be worse than the first.

65 Pilate said to them, —You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how. 66 So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.

### **Even though the tomb was under strict Roman guard the grave was found empty!**

Both the Jewish and Roman authorities did their best to keep Jesus in his tomb. The mere fact that they sealed the tomb and placed guards to protect it - a highly unusual act - indicated that they were determined. If they had been able to keep the body in the tomb, the Sanhedrin and other officials would have certainly been the first to use the knowledge of an occupied tomb as evidence against the announcement of the disciples that they had seen Jesus alive. Unfortunately for the Jewish and Roman officials, the problem was that there was an empty tomb. The officials did not know where Jesus' body was.

Some people say that the disciples overpowered the Roman soldiers and stole Jesus' body. Have you ever watched the movie *Gladiator*? I doubt that the men who all forsook Jesus like cowards would have suddenly had the courage to overpower the Roman soldiers and steal a body.

"The resurrection proclamation could not have been maintained in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact" -Paul Althus, a German Lutheran theologian

**There were eyewitness accounts from people who saw the empty tomb.**

The first to see and report on the empty tomb were the women that came early in the morning to the tomb with spices in order to anoint the dead body (Mark 16:5-6). They didn't arrive at the tomb expecting it to be empty.

John and Peter were the next to see that the tomb was empty. When Mary and the other women told them the unbelievably good news, they raced to see for themselves. John wrote as an eyewitness of this event in John, chapter 20.

The way that the authorities reacted when they received news of the empty tomb reveals that something significant certainly happened. The authorities couldn't explain it but had to respond to it. The Bible records that this is how they responded to it:

Matthew 28:11-15 NKJV

Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. [12] When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, [13] saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' [14] And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure." [15] So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

They couldn't explain why there was an empty tomb, and they couldn't find the missing body. They had to resort to bribery and lies. Their collusion with the guards is solid proof that there was no body in the tomb. It would have been foolish for them to spread rumors that the disciples had stolen the body if Jesus were still in the tomb.

Jesus died and was buried. In a short time, His tomb became empty.

## Many People Claimed To Have Seen Him Alive

1 Corinthians 15:3-8 Living Bible (TLB)

I passed on to you right from the first what had been told to me, that Christ died for our sins just as the Scriptures said he would, 4 and that he was buried, and that three days afterwards he arose from the grave just as the prophets foretold. 5 He was seen by Peter and later by the rest of —the Twelve. 6 After that he was seen by more than five hundred Christian brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died by now. 7 Then James saw him, and later all the apostles. 8 Last of all I saw him too, long after the others, as though I had been born almost too late for this.

The historical accounts we have from this period indicate that many, many people claimed to have seen Him alive. The following list provides them, with the references:

- Mary Magdalene – Mark 16:9-11; John 20:11-18
- The other women at the tomb – Matthew 28:8-10
- Peter in Jerusalem – Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5
- The two travellers on the road – Mark 16:12, 13
- Ten disciples behind closed doors – Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-25
- All the disciples, with Thomas (excl. Judas) – John 20:26-31; 1 Corinthians 15:5
- Seven disciples while fishing – John 21:1-14
- Eleven disciples on the mountain – Matthew 28:16-20
- A crowd of 500 – 1 Corinthians 15:6
- Jesus's brother James – 1 Corinthians 15:7
- Those who watched Jesus ascend into heaven – Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:3-8

Acts 1:3 Amplified Bible (AMP)

To these [men] He also showed Himself alive after His suffering [in Gethsemane and on the cross], by [a series of] many infallible proofs and unquestionable demonstrations, appearing to them over a period of forty days and talking to them about the things concerning the kingdom of God.

If one or two people saw Him, we might have disregarded them. But with all of the above, we have strong reason to believe that Christ was indeed seen alive after His death.

### **Hallucination theory**

In an effort to disprove the resurrection, some people say that the disciples who “saw” Jesus experienced a hallucination induced by grief. By definition, a hallucination is “a profound distortion in a person's perception of reality, typically accompanied by a powerful sense of reality. An hallucination may be a sensory experience in which a person can see, hear, smell, taste, or feel something that is not there.” (Medicinenet.com)

A hallucination is a personal experience of something that is unreal. If you hallucinate something, I cannot experience the same thing. If we did experience the same thing together it would not be a hallucination. Individual witnesses of the risen Christ can possibly be explained away as a hallucination, but Jesus appeared to groups of believers as well. At one point he even appeared to a crowd of 500 people (1 Corinthians 15:6).

### **His Apostles Were Dramatically Changed**

All of Jesus’ disciples (those closest to him) forsook him when he was arrested. When they realized that their association with Jesus put their own lives at risk, they ran and hid, and even denied him. We do see that Peter had a moment of boldness with a sword in an effort to defend Jesus. Peter cut off a soldier’s ear - but after Jesus healed the soldier’s ear, Peter still fled, and then publicly denied Jesus three times.

But here is the amazing part: after the disciples encountered Jesus *after* he rose from the dead, all of them were suddenly as bold as lions. It seemed as if they were no longer concerned about the consequences of knowing Him, and as if they now feared nothing, not even death. They became unstoppable in their determination to sacrifice everything for Jesus and his mission. And because of their boldness for the gospel message and mission, they were imprisoned, threatened, and beaten. Authorities forbade them to speak in the name of Jesus, but they responded boldly, saying “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Even after being beaten for their disobedience to Jewish religious

authorities, they did not cease to teach and preach Jesus as the Christ (Acts 5:42).

Acts 5:29 New King James Version (NKJV)

But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: —We ought to obey God rather than men.

Acts 5:42 Amplified Bible (AMP)

And every single day, in the temple [area] and in homes, they did not stop teaching and telling the good news of Jesus as the Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed).

The disciples transformed from being cowards to being as bold as lions. No one would suffer for something they knew to be a lie. It's difficult for anyone to suddenly have boldness about something they once were afraid of. The transformation of the disciples is proof that they truly believed that Jesus rose from the dead.

### **Witnesses were willing to die for their claims about the risen Christ.**

History is full of martyrs (people who suffer and are killed for their faith). Countless men and women have died for their beliefs from many different religions. They believed in something to the degree that they were willing to lay down their lives for it. But just because someone is willing to die for something doesn't make it true. However, while many will die for what they believe to be the truth, hardly anyone will die for what they know to be a lie.

Many people say that the disciples were conspiring to promote a lie that Jesus rose from the dead. These people believe that the disciples somehow stole Jesus' body (which was under very strong Roman protection) to fake his resurrection. Why would they do that if it meant that they would likely be punished or killed for it? There was no financial, political or other gain for promoting such a lie. They died for their claims that they had seen Jesus alive; risen from the dead! They died for their claim that Jesus Christ had not only died for their sins but that he had physically risen from the dead, which proved His deity. They weren't just standing for some information that they were told but they were standing for a truth that they had seen and experienced personally.



1 John 1:1 NLT

We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life.

Peter would never have hung upside down on a cross for a story that he had made up in order to try and deceive people. Mark would not have been drug through the streets to his death if he knew that what he was promoting was a fairytale. James would not have been beheaded for something he knew to be false. Thomas wouldn't have been pierced with a lance for a lie. And yet history tells us that these men (and many others) all suffered horrible deaths because they had encountered the risen Christ and would not keep quiet. Their boldness in the face of death is a testimony to the truth they stood for.

**The Jewish believers changed their day of worship after converting to follow Jesus.**

The Sabbath day is a day of rest and worship held from Sunset on Fridays to Sunset on Saturdays. The Sabbath is an important religious observance for the Jewish people. Any Jew who does not honour the Sabbath was guilty of breaking the law of Moses. But Jews who became followers of Christ began worshiping with Gentile believers on a new day – Sunday. This was a huge change which would separate them from their Jewish heritage.

The first day of the week (Sunday) is the day that Christ rose from the dead, and so believers chose to gather for worship on a Sunday to replace the Saturday Sabbath. Christianity was more than a renewal of Judaism and early converts from Judaism to following Christ believed that the death and resurrection of Christ made the way for a new relationship with God - not based on the law of Moses but on the sin-bearing, life-giving sacrifice and the victory over death of the Promised Messiah, Jesus.

**Although Jesus' resurrection from the dead was unexpected, it was clearly predicted in the Old Testament and by Jesus Himself.**

Isaiah prophesied about a suffering servant who would be rejected by his people.

Isaiah 53:3 New King James Version (NKJV)

He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Matthew 27:1-2,23-25 NKJV

When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. [2] And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor. [23] Then the governor said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!" [24] When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it." [25] And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children."

In the Old Testament Scriptures, we also find specific details concerning the coming Messiah, his death and resurrection. For example, it was also predicted that He would be crucified with thieves.

Isaiah 53:12 New King James Version (NKJV)

12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Mark 15:27 NKJV

With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left.

There are more than 300 prophecies in the Old Testament Scriptures concerning Jesus; His life, death and resurrection.

Jesus Himself said, many times, that it he would go to Jerusalem and die but that he would be resurrected from the dead on the third day (Matthew 9:15; 12:40; 16:21-23; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). He clearly predicted his death and he also clearly predicted his resurrection.

### **The explosion of Christianity is evidence pointing to the miracle of Jesus being raised from the dead.**

Jesus' death should have been the thing that stopped Christianity before it even got started. But history shows us that the number of converts multiplied exponentially and increased daily, and that it continues to do so, today.

The Canadian scientist G. B. Hardy one time said, "When I looked at religion I said, I have two questions. One, has anybody ever conquered death, and two, if they have, did they make a way for me to conquer death? I checked the tomb of Buddha, and it was occupied, and I checked the tomb of Confucius and it was occupied, and I checked the tomb of Mohammed and it was occupied, and I came to the tomb of Jesus and it was empty. And I said, There is one who conquered death. And I asked the second question, Did He make a way for me to do it? And I opened the Bible and discovered that He said, 'Because I live ye shall live also'. Argue as you will, there is no point in following a loser."

### **Why is the Resurrection so important?**

The resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate proof of the accuracy and truth of his message: the gospel. It also serves to prove that he is who he said he is: God. This means that we should take note of and accept as truth what he said. This leads should lead us to believe his gospel message and start living a gospel life.

The resurrection of Jesus makes Christianity different from every religion because we are dealing with a real, alive person, not just principles. As John said in:

1 John 1:1-3 New King James Version (NKJV)

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— 2 the life was manifested, and we

have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Christianity is a relationship with a real person who is alive.

1 Corinthians 15:17-19 (KJV)

And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

Since Christ is raised from the dead, we are not in our sins. All sins have been cancelled (Hebrews 9:12 and 1 John 2:2). And when we believe in Jesus – who he is, and what he did for us – we are rescued from eternal perishing and receive the gift of eternal life (John 3:16), and by his Spirit he comes to live in us forever (Ephesians 1:13; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19).

### **Questions for reflection**

1. Question for group discussion: Is there anything that you didn't understand from this lesson?
2. What stands out for you from this lesson?
3. Do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead? Why?
4. What does the resurrection of Christ mean for you, personally?