

I Rest My Case: Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus

First Corinthians Chapter 15, beginning at verse number 13, it says this:

13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. **14** And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty. **15** Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. **16** For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. **17** And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! **18** Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. **19** If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

These verses make it clear that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was of central importance to the early church. Without it, we'd have no foundation for our faith, no rock upon which we could build our lives and our futures and our families. We'd have no testimony of God's saving grace.

Resurrection in the New Testament

When we hear the word resurrection, we usually think of one resurrection, the Lord's. It's the one that we have come here to celebrate. But let's just take a moment to remember that in the New Testament, other people were raised from the dead as well. The daughter of Jairus was raised in Matthew nine. The widow's only son was raised in Luke seven. We hear Jesus in John Chapter 11, telling Lazarus, "Hey, Lazarus, get out here. Come forth." In Acts nine, we see Tabitha raised.

When Jesus was crucified, the Bible says the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. The earth quaked, the rocks split, and the graves were opened. Many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised and coming out of the grave. After Jesus' resurrection, they went into Jerusalem and appeared to many people.

Well, every one of these saints who died and was raised had one thing in common. They all will die again. But the Lord's resurrection was unique. He never went back into the grave. The Bible says he died once and for all.

In Acts 1:3, we read that he presented himself alive by many infallible proofs. Infallible means incapable of making mistakes or being wrong, or absolutely trustworthy. As an attorney, if you want to build an airtight case, you need infallible proof.

Before we look at the external evidence of Jesus' resurrection, let's examine several theories that have been presented intended to discredit it.

The Swoon Theory

This theory states that Jesus didn't actually die. He simply passed out. Once he was laid in the coolness of the tomb he revived, and came out of the tomb.

But listen, as believers, we're not buying it. Why? Jesus cried out with a loud voice from the cross, yielded up his spirit, and He died. The Pharisees wanted the tomb sealed, so Jesus' disciples couldn't steal His body away.

Even the soldiers who started to break his legs realized that it wasn't necessary, because he was already dead. They would break the legs of those who hung on the cross just to speed up the process.

No one who had just awakened from passing out could have removed his grave clothes, pushed back the stone, overpowered the guards, and walked for miles on feet that had been pierced.

Stolen Body Theory

The earliest theory promoted for the empty tomb by the world was that the disciples simply stole the body. In Matthew 28:13, we find these desperate religious leaders bribing the guards to say his disciples came at night and stole him away while they were sleeping. Listen, if they had fallen asleep, how could they possibly know that it was Jesus' disciples? And then they slept through the moving of a two ton stone? Absolutely ridiculous.

If his enemies had stolen his body, especially in the face of the apostles' bold preaching about his resurrection, all they had to do was just present His body and parade it down Main Street. In one fell swoop, they could have smothered Christianity in its cradle. It would have never gotten off the ground.

Jesus was Resurrected

The disciples didn't steal his body. His enemies didn't have his body. The spirit of a living God had come on the third day and raised his body. The only reasonable explanation is that Jesus died, He was buried, He arose, and after rising from the dead, he walked with his disciples again for 40 days. He was seen by them. He was touched by them. He ate with them and talked with them. Their lives were gloriously transformed forever. Jesus will prove himself alive to everyone who will allow it to be.

The Race to Faith

In John chapter 20, you find a famous foot race to faith. The ladies came back from the tomb and told the disciples, "We've seen him. He's alive. We went to the cemetery, and the angel said to go tell His disciples He's alive!" So John and Peter lace up their sneakers and ran out the door, heading for the tomb. John left Peter in the dust and arrived at the tomb first.

But amazingly, Peter went into the tomb first. I honestly believe, though, that the reason Peter went into the tomb first was because he was pushed. John stopped at the door, and here came Pete, huffing and puffing, and John just pushed him in.

Once inside, what did Peter see? He saw the linen grave clothes lying there with no body inside. The napkin that had been around Jesus's head was neatly folded and deliberately set off to one side.

In the ancient world, when a king got up from a banquet table, if he was planning to come back, he would neatly fold his napkin and place it alongside his plate. The servant would come in and see the folded napkin, and he would know that his master was coming back. If the napkin, however, was all crumbled up and just tossed aside. He knew that he could go ahead and he could clear the table. The napkin told the story.

But the folded napkin was a statement made by God that the story isn't over. The king is coming back, and He shall reign forever and ever. The folded napkin means the king is coming back. He didn't buy that tomb, he borrowed it. I mean, why buy something that you're only going to use for a couple of days?

Jesus was Seen by Others

Here's some infallible proofs of the resurrection for you to tuck away. There was the testimony of the witnesses, the women who spoke to the angel, and the two men on the road to Emmaus who were walking home after the crucifixion thinking Jesus is dead. All of a sudden, a stranger interrupts their conversation and says to them, "What are you guys talking about?" They later found out that the stranger was Jesus.

There are 12 different occasions when Jesus appeared to people. At one time alone, he popped in on 500 people.

Jesus said to Thomas, who doubted his resurrection "Reach your finger here, on my hands. Put your hands into my side." What was that touching all about? Touching was tangible proof, physical evidence.

The Effects of the Resurrection

Confronted with a tremendous transformation of the apostles. They went from fearful, timid cowards to bold proclaimers of the gospel. Check out the before and the after pictures of their lives.

Even the day on which we worship was changed from Saturday to Sunday to celebrate His resurrection. In the early church, believers greeted one another by saying, "Christ is risen." The others would shout back. "He is risen indeed!"

Transformed lives, solid evidence, infallible proof that will stand up in any court of law today. There were 500 witnesses at one time. Bring them up one by one, and let them take the witness stand. Ask them, "What did you see?" and they will say that they saw the Lord.

The foundation of Christianity. Its foundations are so established that they are absolutely unshakable, unstoppable, and unbeatable. If there is no empty tomb today, there can be no faith, hope, and no redemption. A dead savior can't save anybody, but on that third day, Jesus burst out of the tomb so that he might step into our lives and live within our hearts. If we are just willing to confess our sins and simply place our trust in Him as our living Savior.

Here's the question: Is he alive in you? If you don't know Jesus as your personal savior, ask Him to step into your tomb, and bring you out. Let him speak into that darkness and hopelessness, to turn the light on and say, "Come on, let's get out of here. There's something better than those shackles, chains, and those addictions that hold you back and keep you as a prisoner in your mind and in your life.

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I present to you, based upon eyewitness reports and infallible proof, Jesus Christ alive and well and coming again.