

Lesson 8: Jesus Christ—Evidence from the Resurrection

1. Why study the resurrection?
 - A) An empty tomb, by itself, does not prove a resurrection any more than a body missing from a morgue would
 - B) However, the resurrection is the key miracle that underpins our faith—Romans 1:4 says that Christ was “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”
 - a) Without the resurrection, ours would be just another one of many belief systems
 - b) There are only four major world religions that rely upon an historical figure as its founder—that is, they are not merely philosophical systems
 1. Those four religions are Christianity, Judaism, Islamism and Buddhism.
 - c) ONLY Christianity claims that its founder was raised from the dead
 1. Muslims stream to Medina every year to visit Mohammed's tomb (he died on June 8, 632 A.D.). You can still visit it today.
 2. Jews understand that Abraham is dead (he died circa 1900 B.C.), No resurrection of Abraham has ever been claimed
 3. Buddhists likewise understand that Buddha died “with the utter passing away in which nothing whatever remains behind,” a quote from one of the earliest accounts of Buddha's death. By necessity, for Buddha to be reincarnated (which Buddhists do claim), he had to first have been dead. Only his spirit is said to be in another earthly body.
 - d) The resurrection of Christ sets our faith apart entirely.
 1. Imagine what would have happened had Christ not been resurrected—the early disciples witnessed his torture and execution. They likely would have remained crushed and broken men and women. The cross would have forever remained the shameful end of Jesus' ministry.
 2. Christ's being raised from the dead was His crowning proof to His claim of being equal with the Father, that is, of being Deity.
2. The significance of the physical resurrection of Christ's body
 - A) Some critics—believers who have alternate views, unbelievers dismiss the resurrection altogether—claim that Christ's body after the resurrection was not actual living matter (that is, it was spirit only)
 - a) This view undermines Christ's Deity—it merely becomes an “incarnation” or something along those lines. There would have been no way to prove that Christ was actually resurrected.
 1. Here's a mind game to help you see this—there are claims that a 13-year old Buddhist somewhere in the East is the 11th reincarnation of Buddha himself (or some such number). He has spent weeks on end in a trance-like state, meditating, without food or water (supposedly). He claims it, his parents claim it, and many Buddhists believe it, apparently. But, it is

merely a claim—where's the proof? Do you believe he is the reincarnation of some dead guy from 15 or so centuries ago? I don't, but I would have difficulty proving that to a Buddhist. Anyone can make a claim to be someone they are not.

b) In stark contrast, Christ both claimed and offered direct proof that He was resurrected in the very body in which He died and the very body which was laid in that tomb.

1. Recall when Christ appeared among the disciples to give Thomas an opportunity to touch His side and put his fingers on the print of the nails
2. Just as the Buddhists' claims ring hollow, so too would ours if we did not have that direct physical proof.

c) Furthermore, if we can show and believe that the resurrection is true, then we can believe that all the other claims Jesus made are true

1. Recall that He foretold of His death and His resurrection—even the Jews were clear on that point, since they asked for His tomb to be guarded (see the end of Matthew chapter 27, for example).
2. To my simple mind, it is far easier to grasp turning water into wine or feeding a multitude with almost no food to begin with
3. The resurrection, however, is a different thing entirely. People saw Him die. People saw Him after He was raised. It's too incredible not to contemplate at some great length—which we will do today.

3. Proof of His death

A) This may seem silly, but in order for someone to be resurrected, he must first die.

a) There is a theory out there that claims Jesus did not actually die on the cross, he merely “swooned.” That is, because there was not great medical knowledge at the time of Christ, people didn't recognize that He was merely in shock and unconscious from the loss of blood. The cool air in the tomb revived Him and He got up and walked out. This theory first appeared in the 1800's—which itself is significant. All of the earliest attacks on the Christian faith, according to historians and apologists, were emphatic about Jesus' death.

B) Where's the proof?

a) First, it is important to understand that crucifixion was common within Rome's territories and certainly not uncommon even in Palestine. It is quite likely that the soldiers attending the crosses that day had been involved in other crucifixions. They knew a dead man when they saw one.

1. The soldiers' commanding officer, a Centurion, recognized Jesus as dead. Mark 15:37-39 reads “And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. So when the Centurion, who stood opposite Him [that is, Christ], saw that He had cried out like this and breathed His last, he said,

'Truly this Man was the Son of God!' “

2. The soldiers themselves also recognized that Jesus was dead. In John 19:30-33 says “So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.”
3. Just to make doubly sure that Jesus was really dead, one of the soldiers, of course, thrust a spear through Jesus' side. Not only would this piercing have done extensive damage in and of itself, but Jesus surely would have reacted to this had He not already been dead. No reaction was observed—had there been, they likely would have carried out their orders to break His legs, too. It evidently was unnecessary.
 1. The blood and water coming out of Jesus' side has significant medical implications as well. The spear probably perforated His lung (the source of the water, the asphyxiation that occurs on the cross is caused by the lungs filling up with bodily fluids, which is primarily water) and His pericardium and heart (obviously the source of the blood).
4. The centurion certified to Pilate that Jesus was already dead. Read Mark 15:43-45. Clearly Pilate was sufficiently convinced by the centurion's word.
5. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus both knew Jesus was dead. Joseph had to work up the courage to ask Pilate for the body, then they both prepared the body by wrapping it in linens with spices, and ultimately put the body in the tomb hewn out of rock.
6. The Jews who remained Christ's enemies also knew Him to be dead, otherwise, why would they allow Him to be put in a tomb over which they asked for guards to be placed?
7. The two Marys also believed Him to be dead. Why would they follow Joseph and Nicodemus to the tomb to observe how He was laid if they believed there was any chance of Him still being alive. Would you allow someone you thought to be alive to be wrapped in burial cloths and placed in a sealed tomb?
8. The guards over the tomb had to have believed Him to be dead—He was regarded as a criminal worthy of death. It is unlikely they would have allowed the job to go unfinished if there was any doubt in their minds. Further, Roman guards stood around that tomb for three days. The tomb would not have been very big (it was, after all, hewn out of solid rock).

A person alive inside would have died from carbon dioxide poisoning anyway, even if he had not endured the suffering that Christ did.

9. Even Christ's disciples knew Him to be dead. For example, Thomas would not have required the proof he did if there was a shred of doubt in his mind Christ had died to begin with. Why would Peter and John run to the tomb to see for themselves it was empty, if they didn't know He had died?
 - b) The historical evidence is clear that Jesus was truly dead when He was put into His tomb. Even honest skeptics admit that the "swoon theory" is nonsensical.
 1. A quote from skeptic David Strauss: "It is impossible that a being who had stolen half dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to his sufferings, could have given to the disciples the impression that he was a conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression that lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resuscitation [from a "swoon", JDS] could only have weakened the impression which he had made upon them in life and in death, at the most could only have given it an elegiac voice, but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship."
 2. In other words, the disciples' belief itself was proof that Christ had died. They would not have been enthusiastic for long had Jesus not actually died.
4. Proof of His Empty Tomb
 - A) There are only four possibilities that explain the empty tomb.
 - a) The Romans removed His body and hid Him
 - b) The Jews removed His body and hid Him
 - c) The disciples removed His body and hid Him
 - d) God resurrected Him
 - B) Roman removal and hiding:
 - a) Refuting this starts rather simply: ask the question "What was their motivation?" The Romans, in general, did not care about the goings-on in Jewish religious life beyond the problems it caused them in terms of Jewish uprisings. Recall that Pilate both literally and figuratively washed his hands of the whole affair shortly before Jesus was taken and crucified. When the Jews requested guards to watch the tomb, Pilate said "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how."
 - b) Beyond simple Roman apathy toward the Jews, remember that Pilate was likely spooked about whom he was dealing with.
 1. In Matthew 27:19, we see the first reason for his fear: "While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife [that is, Pilate's wife] sent to him,

saying 'Have nothing to do with that just man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of him.' “

2. John 19:7-9 “The Jews answered him [again, Pilate] 'We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.' Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, and went again in to the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer.”
 3. Exactly what Pilate was thinking is pure speculation, but clearly he saw or believed something was quite different about this man. Remember also that Herod was glad when Pilate sent Jesus to him, because he was hoping Jesus would perform a miracle for him—read Luke 23:7-8. It is unlikely that Herod had heard all these things about Christ but Pilate had not.
- c) Remember also that Pilate was, first and foremost, a politician. The Roman Caesars were not known for their patience or their mercy, so it is unlikely that Pilate would have provoked the Jews by stealing off with the body, allowing this new “Sect of the Jews” to gain momentum by being able to claim a resurrection. Pilate (as did all procurators and governors before and after him) had tremendous difficulty keeping peace in the region. Beyond the needling we see in the gospel accounts, Pilate would not have provoked further controversy.
 - d) The Jews themselves didn't believe that the Romans had anything to do with the whole affair. Recall the reassurances they gave the guards when they cooked up the lie about the disciples stealing the body when the Roman guards were asleep. Read Matthew 28:10-15. The Jews hated the Romans. If they believed, even a little, that the Romans had moved the body, they would have been the first to cry about it. We have no record of that accusation.
 - e) The Roman guards would not have taken it upon themselves to do such a deed. Recall they would likely have been in considerable trouble if Pilate believed they had fallen asleep while on watch—some writers claim that the penalty for such an infraction would have been death, though I have not been able to confirm that—otherwise, why would the Jews have to intervene on the guards' behalf to keep them “secure?”
- C) Jewish removal and hiding
- a) This one is even easier. Their motivation was to refute the “In the tomb three days and nights” prophecy, not help to perpetuate it. The last thing they would have done was moved the body. They went to great lengths to insure it remained right where they put it—recall it was the Jews who asked for the guards, specifically because of that prophecy! They didn't want the disciples to steal the body themselves!
- D) Disciple removal and hiding

- a) Clearly, this is the one that is easiest to swallow. The disciples, if Christ hadn't been who He said He was, would have been motivated to move the body so they could claim the resurrection had occurred. As we read in Matthew 28:10-15, that was exactly the story they helped spread. So, could it have happened that way?
- b) In truth, the story the Jews cooked up is totally nonsensical if you apply a little logic. The Jews themselves insured that by insisting that the tomb should be both sealed with a rock and guarded. Let's suppose the guards really had fallen asleep. How could they possibly have stayed asleep as someone rolled a large rock out of the way? The Talmuds mention the particular kind of stone used for tombs, and it was large enough that it required several men to roll it along its groove. In fact, the Bezae Codex records Mark 16:4 as reading "And when He was laid there, he [Joseph] put against the tomb a stone which twenty men could not roll away." Now, one could argue that this phrase was added by copyists later in order to refute the story the Jews circulated. However, recall that the gospels record Joseph as looking for the coming Kingdom of God. He knew the prophecy Jesus had made (he was a member of the council, after all), so it is just as logical that he would have used an extra large stone to help show that the resurrection was real, and not some manufactured story. Either way, there is simply no way to believe that these guards stayed asleep as the rock were being moved—this ain't Harry Potter and they didn't have invisibility cloaks!
- c) Thus, the disciples would have to have some way of buying the guards' silence. It is doubtful that most of the disciples would have enough money. After all, they were generally poor, many being fishermen or shepherds. It is not clear how wealthy Luke was being a doctor, but only Joseph of Arimathea is described as a rich man. Nicodemus was probably rich, too, being described as a leader of Israel. The 100 pounds of myrrh and aloe he brought to bury Jesus with would have been very expensive, too. They had the money to buy the guards off, but there are two problems with this.
1. First, they would have no reason to. Remember that they were both members of the council, among the religious elite in Jewish society, yet they both believed in Jesus and both were looking for the coming of the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus confesses that Jesus must come from God because of the miracles He was doing (John 3) and Joseph was a secret disciple for fear of the Jews (John 19:38). Being on the council, they would be well aware of the prophecies which had the Jews so upset. Their faith in Jesus and understanding of the meaning of His prophecy would negate that motivation.
 2. On a more practical note, however, when Joseph volunteered to take Jesus down and bury him in his own tomb, the rest of the council then

knew that he was a disciple (Nicodemus was “out of hiding by then” according to John 19:39). He or Nicodemus could not afford to give the guards the assurance they would have needed to say that they fell asleep for by having to intervene to their boss would have given away their role in the plot—thus foiling their attempt to “help” the prophecy come true.

- E) Thus, you must conclude that the resurrection was exactly as Jesus foretold. It was a miraculous act of God.
- a) However, Jesus' appearance after His resurrection is further proof. Even if you can somehow explain away the empty tomb, you cannot explain away appearing alive after death!
 - b) He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, Joanna, Cleopas and Salome, among others—they reported the news to the other disciples.
 - c) Later He appeared to the eleven and rebuked them for their unbelief (Mark 16:14).
 - d) He appeared to the eleven a second time, and allowed Thomas to feel His wounds (John 20)
 - e) And a third time, where Peter jumped into the sea to swim to Jesus (John 21)
 - f) Later, He appeared to over five hundred people at once (1 Corinthians 15:6). He also appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts, 1 Corinthians)
 - g) Now, the skeptic could say that these eyewitnesses were lying. It is true, they could have been lying, but other evidence doesn't support that. Namely, the persecution—often resulting in death—of Christians separated the wheat from the chaff. What motivation would say, Paul, have had to go through the tribulations he did if he were lying? What glory or motivation is there in being shipwrecked, being beaten, being under house arrest and ultimately (apparently) dying for his faith? What about other eyewitnesses? What was their motivation? There was ample opportunity for them to recant a lie, but the fact that innumerable Christians (many of whom would have been eyewitnesses) died for their belief in Christ's resurrection is enough proof for me.