

Why We Believe Jesus Rose from the Dead

“Because for those who believe in Jesus and His resurrection, it is potentially the wonderful gateway into an everlasting life. But for those who reject the notion, it is possibly the one-way ticket to an eternity of unimaginable misery.” (Alex McFarland)

Did Jesus die and rise from the dead?

- This may be the most important question in the world!
- Everything hinges on the answer to this question.
- If the answer to that question is “no” ... then Paul explains how foolish we are as Christians.
 - o 1 Cor 15:14 – “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.”
 - o 1 Cor 15:17 – “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.”
 - o 1 Cor 15:18 – “Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.”
 - o 1 Cor 15:19 – “If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.”

How do we know Jesus existed at all?

- See Michael Cohen’s notes from last week

Who is Jesus according to the Bible?

- See Michael Cohen’s notes from last week

Who is Jesus according to ancient writers hostile to Christianity?

A few important things to keep in mind when considering historical figures from ancient history:

1. Very few texts exist from Jesus’ time
2. Historians in Jesus’ time wrote very little about religious people
3. Jesus’ active ministry only lasted for about three years
4. He ministered in a very remote part of the Roman Empire

“Now, given that these facts are true about the life of Jesus and the people who were recording history two thousand years ago, it would be surprising to find much ancient material related to Jesus at all. But, there ARE a number of ancient non-biblical records that tell of Jesus!” (J. Warner Wallace – str.org)

Hostile non-biblical pagan witnesses

- Thallus (52 AD)
- Pliny the Younger (61-113 AD)
- Suetonius (69-140 AD)
- Tacitus (56-120 AD) – “Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.”
- Mara Bar-Serapion (70 AD)
- Phlegon (80-140 AD)

- Lucian of Samosata (115-200 AD)
- Celsus (175 AD)

Hostile non-biblical Jewish witnesses

- Josephus (37-101 AD)
- Jewish Talmud (400-700 AD) – *It was taught: On the day before the Passover they hanged Jesus. A herald went before him for forty days (proclaiming), “He will be stoned, because he practiced magic and enticed Israel to go astray. Let anyone who knows anything in his favor come forward and plead for him.” But nothing was found in his favor, and they hanged him on the day before the Passover.* (b. Sanhedrin 43a)
- The Toledot Yesu (1000 AD) – Completely anti-Christian Jewish retelling of the life of Jesus

If we did not have the Bible, but only these hostile historical accounts, this is what we would know about the historical Jesus:

Jesus was born and lived in Palestine. He was born, supposedly, to a virgin and had an earthly father who was a carpenter. He was a teacher who taught that by repentance and belief, all followers would become brothers and sisters. He led the Jews away from their beliefs. He was a wise man who claimed to be God and the Messiah. He had unusual magical powers and performed miraculous deeds. He healed the lame. He accurately predicted the future. He was persecuted by the Jews for what he said, betrayed by Judah Iskarioto. He was beaten with rods, forced to drink vinegar and wear a crown of thorns and crucified on the eve of the Passover. His crucifixion occurred under the direction of Pontius Pilate, during the time of Tiberius. On the day of his crucifixion, the sky grew dark and there was an earthquake. Afterward, he was buried in a tomb and the tomb was later found to be empty. He appeared to his disciples resurrected from the grave and showed them his wounds. These disciples then told others that Jesus was resurrected and ascended into heaven. Jesus’ disciples and followers upheld a high moral code. One of them was named Matthai. The disciples were also persecuted for their faith but were martyred without changing their claims. They met regularly to worship Jesus, even after his death. (J. Warner Wallace – str.org)

“Now think about this reconstruction for a minute. This is a TON of information about the man we know as Jesus and all of it comes from witnesses who were HOSTILE to the truth claims of Christianity! ... it is amazing that there is ANY extra-Biblical information about Jesus at all, let alone this MUCH information about Him. That’s why so many of us who have come to trust that Jesus really did live and really was who He said He was, find that the hostile historical witness is a powerful evidence of the truth of the Bible.” (J. Warner Wallace – str.org)

Reference: <https://carm.org/there-are-no-non-biblical-accounts-resurrection>

How do we know that Jesus rose from the dead and why is that so important?

- Why is proving this so important?
 - o We already discussed its importance as explained by the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor 15.

- "... either the resurrection happened and Jesus is who He claimed to be, or it didn't and we are under no obligation to any of His teachings or example. We can— and should!— do as we please." – McFarland
 - If the resurrection is true then it proves all that Jesus said about Himself, and all that others in the Bible claimed to be true of Him.
- "I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better, fuller evidence of every sort than the great sign that Christ died and rose again from the dead." —**Thomas Arnold, professor of history at Rugby University in Oxford, England**
- The following men attempted to disprove the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In their efforts they came to believe exactly the opposite and instead became followers of Jesus Christ.
- **Gilbert West (1703-1756)**
 - **George Lyttelton (1709-1773)**
 - **Albert Henry Ross (Frank Morison) (1881-1950)** - Albert Ross was a lawyer, journalist, and novelist who grew up in Stratford-on-Avon, England. He was deeply affected by the skepticism of the times, particularly the attacks on the Bible by theological liberalism and Darwinism. After becoming a lawyer, he set out to write a book to disprove the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Instead, he was converted and wrote a book in defense of the resurrection entitled *WHO MOVED THE STONE?* -- which is still in print today. He wrote the book under the name of Frank Morison.
 - **Simon Greenleaf (1783-1853)** - Simon Greenleaf, Royall Professor of Law at Harvard University, was one of the most celebrated legal minds in American history. His *Treatise on the Law of Evidence* "is still considered the greatest single authority on evidence in the entire literature of legal procedure."
As a law professor, he determined to expose the "myth" of the resurrection of Christ once and for all, but his thorough examination forced him to conclude, instead, that Jesus did rise from the dead. In 1846 he published *An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists by the Rules of Evidence Administered in the Courts of Justice*.
 - "No intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in a verdict that indeed the resurrection story is true." —**Lord Darling, former chief justice of England**
 - **Sir Lionel Luckhoo (1914-1997)** – "Sir Lionel Luckhoo (of The Guinness Book of World Records fame for his unprecedented 245 consecutive defense murder trial acquittals) epitomized Christian enthusiasm and confidence in the strength of the case for the resurrection when he wrote, "I have spent more than 42 years as a defense trial lawyer appearing in many parts of the world and am still in active practice. I have been fortunate to secure a number of successes in jury trials and I say unequivocally the evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt."
 - **Josh McDowell (1939-present)** - <http://www.josh.org/video-2/joshs-testimony/> (see also "Evidence That Demands a Verdict")

Points of evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ

- **Eyewitness accounts** – Jesus showing Himself alive to over 600 people - Luke, the master historian explains in Acts 1:3 what Jesus did after He died and rose again.
 - Acts 1:3 – “To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of forty days* and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.”
 - The Greek word for “convincing proofs” is “tekmerion”. This word means “technical evidence, criterion for certainty”. In other words, Jesus presented Himself to His disciples in such a manner as to prove to them, in a very technical manner, that He in fact had risen from the dead.
 - Resurrection appearances of Jesus
 - To Mary Magdalene (John 20: 11)
 - To “the other” women (Matt. 28: 9-10)
 - To Peter (Luke 24: 34)
 - To two disciples (Luke 24: 13-32)
 - To 10 apostles (Luke 24: 33-49)
 - To ****Thomas and the other apostles** (John 20: 26-30)
 - To seven apostles (John 21: 1-23)
 - To all the apostles (Matt. 28: 16-20)
 - To all the apostles again (Acts 1: 4-9)
 - To 500 brethren at once (1 Cor. 15: 6)
 - To James (1 Cor. 15: 7)
 - To Paul (1 Cor. 15: 7) (Who was Paul/Saul? A hater)
 - *“3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.” (1 Cor 15:3-8)*
 - “If Paul is lying here, his first readers will certainly know. To be able to make a claim like this, you had better be confident that your readers will be able to substantiate it. This single claim is an important piece of evidence in itself, and this testimony of the scriptures would lead us to believe that many people OTHER than the writers of the Bible were also eyewitnesses to the life of Jesus Christ.” (J. Warner Wallace – str.org)
- **The life altering responses** of those who watched Jesus die and then saw Him alive are convincing testimonies to the validity of resurrection claims
 - Liars don’t make good martyrs – “With the exception of John, the disciples each endured

horrific deaths. They were variously crucified, boiled in a vat, and subject to other tortures and horrific ends. No sane person would willingly go through such torment simply to publicly “validate” a lie he had concocted.” (McFarland)

- “It was therefore impossible that disciples could have persisted in affirming the truths they have narrated, had not Jesus actually risen from the dead, and had they not known this fact as certainly as they knew any other fact . . . The resurrection of Christ is the most verifiable fact of ancient history.” —(Simon Greenleaf, founder of Harvard School of Law, after thorough investigation of whether or not Christ rose from the dead)
- “While the September 11, 2001, suicide hijackers undoubtedly believed what they professed (as evidenced by their willingness to die for it), they could not and did not know if it was true. They put their faith in traditions passed down to them over many generations. In contrast, the early Christian martyrs were the first generation... What makes the earliest Christian martyrs remarkable is that they knew whether or not what they were professing was true. They either saw Jesus Christ alive-and-well after His death or they did not. This is extraordinary. If it was all just a lie, why would so many perpetuate it given their circumstances? Why would they all knowingly cling to such an unprofitable lie in the face of persecution, imprisonment, torture, and death?” (GotQuestions.org)
- “In a matter of days, these cowards became fearless men, willing to die for the sake of what they’d seen.” (McFarland)
- “Paul was of his own admission a violent persecutor of the early Church. After what he described as an encounter with the resurrected Christ, Paul underwent an immediate and drastic change from a vicious persecutor of the Church to one of its most prolific and selfless defenders. Like many early Christians, Paul suffered impoverishment, persecution, beatings, imprisonment, and execution for his steadfast commitment to Christ’s resurrection.” (GotQuestions.org)
- **Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus recounted in his Annals of Imperial Rome (published just a generation after the fire):** “Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.”

- “What evidence do we have for the resurrection of Christ beyond testimonies of the empty tomb, the numerous appearances of Jesus corroborated by several credible eyewitnesses, the instantaneous and absolute change in the disciples, and the complete silence of Jewish and Roman authorities (ever wonder why they were unable to silence the Christians?).” McFarland
 - Within 400 years Christianity became the official Roman religion

- Despite constant worldwide persecution Christianity has grown and thrived
- The main day of worship changed from Saturday (Sabbath) to Sunday (The Lord's Day). Why?
- All the NT authors claim the resurrection of Jesus
- Early writings claiming the resurrection of Jesus
 - Pliny (Roman governor) (107 AD)
 - Ignatius (145-150 AD)
 - Justin Martyr (150 AD)
 - Irenaeus (152 AD)
 - Dionysius (170 AD)
 - Clement (194 AD)
 - Tertullian (200 AD)

Reasonable answers to claims that the resurrection was a fraud

- Claim #1 - The body was stolen – the resurrection was a fraud – Jesus is still dead
 - By the Jewish leaders
 - By the Roman soldiers
 - By the Disciples
- Response #1
 - Jewish leaders would have no motivation to steal or hide the body – just show the body and Christianity is instantly dead.
 - “Jesus was publicly executed and buried in Jerusalem. It would have been impossible for faith in His resurrection to take root in Jerusalem while His body was still in the tomb where the Sanhedrin could exhume it, put it on public display, and thereby expose the hoax.”
(GotQuestions.org)
 - The Roman soldiers lives were at stake if the body was stolen – they would have been motivated to show the dead body.
 - The disciples would have no reason to promote a lie with the kind of suffering and martyrdom that they experienced. Would they have really been able to convince so many others?
 - How would the disciples move a 2-ton stone in front of the tomb without the Roman guards knowing about it?
- Claim #2 - Jesus never actually died at all – Fake death, so fake resurrection – Christ was never actually dead. Life never left His body on the cross, and that somehow in the cold, dank tomb, He revived.
- Response #2
 - “It is a fairly well-established fact that Jesus Christ was publicly executed in Judea in the 1st Century A.D., under Pontius Pilate, by means of crucifixion, at the behest of the Jewish

Sanhedrin. The non-Christian historical accounts of Flavius Josephus, Cornelius Tacitus, Lucian of Samosata, Maimonides and even the Jewish Sanhedrin corroborate the early Christian eyewitness accounts of these important historical aspects of the death of Jesus Christ. (GotQuestions.org)

- Flawed Reasoning
 - Flogged and whipped with 39 lashes
 - Carried 150lb cross across Jerusalem
 - Had his hands and feet nailed to the cross
 - Remained motionless for several hours (no signs of breathing)
 - Stayed this way while women wrapped his body head to toe in cloth, anointing it with 75 lbs of spices
 - He then moved a 2-ton stone
 - Snuck by armed guards
 - Despite being wounded by a spear in his side, bloody, dehydrated
 - Convinced everyone he defeated death
 - ** But actually he had only been merely unconscious and had revived!
 - ** He was in critical condition like any other human would have been.
 - ** The disciples and women were extremely stupid because they could not tell the difference.

- Archaeology confirms that crucifixion was not survivable – “In Jesus’ case, Pilate sent a soldier for this specific reason, yet He was pronounced dead upon examination. Just to make sure, Jesus’ side was pierced by a massive spear, which if He weren’t already dead, would have surely killed Him. The heart is surrounded by a sac of water called the pericardium. Any breach of this membrane would have meant instant death. In fact, the pleural fluids that gushed out of Jesus’ side were medical evidence of this. The mix of blood and water clearly proved to everyone present that day that Christ was indeed dead.” – McFarland

- “Jesus’ death as a consequence of crucifixion is indisputable.” —(Gerd Ludemann, German New Testament scholar, who claims to be an atheist)

Conclusion

- “As a lawyer, I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter. To me, the evidence is absolutely conclusive. Over and over in the court I have secured the verdict on evidences not nearly so compelling.” —(**Sir Edward Clarke, nineteenth-century English lawyer**)
- “It can be asserted with confidence that men and women disbelieve the Easter story not because of the evidence but in spite of it.” —(**J. N. D. Anderson, lawyer and institute director at the University of London**)

- The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are reasonable and irrefutable facts.
- Jesus chose (willed) the moment of his death
 - Lk 23:46 – “And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.” Having said this, He breathed His last.”
 - Matt 27:50 – “And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.”
 - Jn 19:30 – “Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.”
 - He willed his own death – the separation of his body and soul
 - “He exerted control over life and had victorious power over death. No other figure in all of history can list these abilities on their résumé. Jesus stands alone.” McFarland
- The only logical conclusion is that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, Son of God in human flesh, Creator God, One who needs to be reckoned with. (This is our message to the dying world!)
- The proof is overwhelming... May the Holy Spirit persuade you!