

Did Jesus Rise From the Dead?

[Matthew 28:6 HCSB](#) He is not here! For He has been resurrected, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay.

Today, I would like to address one question...Why should anyone believe in Jesus?

- [1 Peter 3:15 HCSB](#) but set apart the Messiah as Lord in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

If you have: listened to the radio; watched TV; read the newspapers ANY TIME IN THE LAST 20 YEARS, you might have noticed that the world does NOT hold Christianity in the highest regard. In fact, Christians are commonly the object of ridicule by skeptics in politics, TV, and legal circles. These powerful circles of influence give the appearance that there is no reason to believe in Jesus.

The question is: ARE THEY RIGHT? For our own faith, and the faith of others, it is critical for us to be able to give a reason why we believe in Jesus.

My goal is to give you good sound reasons to believe in Jesus. Let me begin by reading to you seven words from the Bible; words that capture the central reason why anyone should believe in Jesus. They were spoken by an angel...to a small group of broken-hearted women. These women had just returned from a tomb where a few days earlier, their master, their cherished friend – Jesus – had been buried. However, now his body was missing. And these women didn't know where it was or who had taken it. And in the midst of their grief and confusion, an angel appeared. And in the heart of his message were seven of the most powerful words that the world has ever heard. The angel said:

- [Matthew 28:6 HCSB](#) He is not here! For He has been resurrected, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay.

These words have profound implications, for they tell of the first and only person in all of history who had conquered death. These words conveyed an idea totally contrary to mankind's belief in the absolute permanence and finality of death.

Yet, the angel proclaimed that what was impossible for man had been accomplished by God: "*He (Jesus) is not here; he has risen!*"

For 20 centuries, the world has wrestled over the truth of these seven powerful words. The greatest attacks on Christianity have been against the resurrection ... and for good reason. Believers and Non-believers alike understand that the resurrection is the cornerstone of Christianity. If Jesus rose from the dead, then Christianity is true. If he did not, then it is false. It is that simple.

So, the question of whether we can or should believe in Jesus is dependent upon whether the resurrection actually happened. Are the seven words of the angel true? Did Jesus really die and come back to life? Is there evidence to support our belief?

One of the worst things that can be said about a preacher is that he preached as if NOTHING were at stake. So, in my attempt to avoid such an accusation, let us briefly consider what is at stake. The implications are huge!

If the resurrection did happen... then it proves:

a. Jesus has power over death.

b. You can personally trust him with your eternal destiny. Because he predicted and fulfilled his own resurrection, you can trust the promise he made to you about his intention to raise you from the dead.

c. All other religions are false. We've all heard someone say "It doesn't matter what you believe so long as you are sincere". But that's not true. I can be sincere and still be absolutely wrong. I can sincerely believe that the airplane I am flying in will land just fine. But if the wheel falls off during landing, no amount of sincerity will prevent the plane from

crashing. It's the same thing with our belief in Jesus. Either he rose from the dead... or he did not. Sincerity is irrelevant.

If Jesus claimed to be the ONLY way to God (which he did), then his rising from the dead is the stamp of approval from a completely truthful God saying that Jesus is in fact the only way to Heaven. EVERY OTHER RELIGION IS FALSE. I find it amazing that every religion claims to know how to conquer death, but none except Christianity claims a leader who actually did conquer death.

If, however, the resurrection did NOT happen... Then the implications are summed up by the apostle Paul in

- **1 Corinthians 15:14 HCSB** and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is without foundation, and so is your faith.
 - a. Jesus is a liar or at a minimum a lunatic.**
 - b. Christianity is false.**
 - c. You have wasted your life believing in Jesus' supposed ability to save you from death.**

There is a lot at stake here! So, did he rise from the dead? To answer our question, we first need to examine:

1. Evidence for the resurrection

We do not have a "blind faith". God does NOT ask us to believe things for which there is no evidence. But, instead, He has graciously given us an abundance of evidence. Let's begin by reading an account from Luke...

- **Luke 24:1-12 HCSB** On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared. (2) They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. (3) They went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. (4) While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothes. (5) So the women were terrified and bowed down to the ground. "Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" asked the men. (6) "He is not here, but He has been resurrected! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, (7) saying, 'The Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day?'" (8) And they remembered His words. (9) Returning from the tomb, they reported all these things to the Eleven and to all the rest. (10) Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them were telling the apostles these things. (11) But these words seemed like nonsense to them, and they did not believe the women. (12) Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. When he stooped to look in, he saw only the linen cloths. So he went home, amazed at what had happened.

John 20:14-18 adds that after meeting the angels, Jesus revealed himself to the women --- they were eyewitness. Let's examine the evidence

a. Empty tomb

You would expect that if a resurrection occurred, then the tomb must be empty, right? Of course. But is the "empty tomb" enough evidence – by itself -- to convince us that Jesus rose from the dead? The answer is NO. Neither the empty tomb nor the testimony of the women – by themselves – convinced even the apostles. The women were convinced,.... But the disciples needed more proof. And they – like we – will get it.

b. The change in the disciples' attitudes after the resurrection. (John 20:19-20)

Before the resurrection, they were cowards. Hiding in shadows...afraid of being discovered as followers of Jesus. AFRAID OF BEING KILLED. After the resurrection, they were fully committed. Boldly claiming Jesus' resurrection in the presence of enemies. (Acts 2)

What caused such a radical change in their attitudes? Was it the empty tomb? The testimony of people who talked to angels? The Bible tells us in

- [John 20:19-20 HCSB](#) In the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were *gathered together* with the doors locked because of their fear of the Jews. Then Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "**Peace to you!**" (20) Having said this, He showed them His hands and His side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

THEY SAW HIM WITH THEIR OWN EYES! No other explanation can account for such a complete turnaround in their behavior.

Is their change in attitude good evidence that they in fact saw him alive? ABSOLUTELY... BUT WE HAVE EVEN MORE. Let's look at the next piece of evidence...

- c. Disciple's willingness to suffer. (cp Job 1:9-11)

At one point in the Old Testament Book of Job, God tells Satan to look at Job. God is pleased with Job because he seeks to do what is right in God's eyes. So, Satan asks the question of God...

- [Job 1:9-11 HCSB](#) Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? (10) Haven't You placed a hedge around him, his household, and everything he owns? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions are spread out in the land. (11) But stretch out Your hand and strike everything he owns, and he will surely curse You to Your face."

In essence... You've given him all good things. THAT's why he follows you. NOT because he loves you. As we know Job passed the test.

Nothing shows others the sincerity of your beliefs ...more than your willingness to suffer and sacrifice for it. And the disciples suffered for their testimony that Jesus had risen from the dead. They suffered whippings, stonings, hunger, shipwreck, beatings, poverty, slander, imprisonment, and finally even martyrdom.

They could have easily avoided all of this BUT they REFUSED to stop telling people that Jesus rose from the dead AND that they personally saw Him. Not that they HEARD Jesus was alive, but that they SAW him themselves.

- d. Disciple's willingness to die. (Hebrews 11:1)

As if a willingness to suffer years of persecution were not enough evidence of the apostle's conviction to the risen Christ, the Bible and church history give us the confirmation of their willingness to gladly die rather than deny the resurrection.

Some people might suffer and die for what they *believe* to be true, but no one in religious history was ever willing to gladly suffer and die for what they *knew* to be a lie. If anyone ever recants a false story – heck, if anyone ever recants a TRUE story – it is when they are faced with certain death. The apostles could have denied the resurrection and saved themselves. However, they knew it was true and therefore considered this life of little value compared to their commitment to Jesus.

If the disciples knew the resurrection was a lie, would they have died for it? Of course not. They saw him with their own eyes. Touched him with their own hands. They KNEW he was alive and had conquered death. And THAT accounted for their change in attitude, their willingness to suffer, and their willingness to die as martyrs to prove to the world that the resurrection actually happened.

- [Hebrews 11:1 HCSB](#) Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.

None of us saw Jesus after the resurrection. We weren't there. But THE APOSTLE's faith in the resurrection is OUR evidence of something we were not there to see... namely the truth that Jesus conquered death.

- e. Disciple's miracles after the resurrection. (Mark 16:20)

- [Mark 16:20 HCSB](#) And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the accompanying signs.]

Jesus performed miracles and so did the apostles. Thousands of people joined the church because of the testimony and the miracles performed by the disciples in Jesus' name. Could a dead Jesus perform miracles? Of course not.

f. Conversion of Paul.

I love this piece of evidence... Primarily because of its irony: the greatest hater of Christianity, turns into its greatest friend and defender. Suffering for many years and giving his life for his testimony that he too saw the risen Jesus. More excellent compelling, eyewitness evidence.

g. The existence of the Church.

There must be a reason it exists today. Christians say it exists because Jesus rose from the dead, and his eyewitnesses – the apostles – spread that message. Atheists and skeptics say the church (i.e. belief in Jesus) got its start because of some other reason.

We've just seen the evidence supporting the resurrection, now let's see what arguments the skeptics can throw up against it.

2. The best of the false arguments against the resurrection.

To deny the resurrection, these false arguments must:

- Give a reasonable explanation for the existence of the church OTHER THAN the resurrection of Jesus.
- Give a rational explanation as to why the apostles believed.
- Explain what happened to the body of Jesus (if he didn't rise from the dead).

a. The "Jesus fainted" theory

Now the "Fainting" theory suggests that:

- Jesus did not actually die on the cross.
- He simply fainted while on the cross.
- The soldiers thought he was dead and took him down.
- Put him in a tomb
- Revived by the cool air
- Got out of the tomb
- Went to his disciples...
- Who then believed he had conquered death.
- Thus, the Christian church was born

Sounds possible right? Wrong! There are huge problems the theory that Jesus fainted on the cross? Notwithstanding the fact that it's pure speculation without a shred of historical evidence to back it up. It is not believable because of three reasons:

1) Jesus' physical condition

Before the crucifixion, Jesus was whipped to the point that he needed someone else to carry the cross to the area of execution. During crucifixion, Jesus' hands and feet were pierced with heavy nails about the width of my finger. A Roman soldier stabbed Jesus in the side with a spear to make sure he is dead. And we are supposed to believe that someone in this condition – in desperate need of medical attention – convinced his followers that he had conquered death? It doesn't make sense.

The next problem with this theory is

2) "The Roman soldiers" themselves.

These men were killing machines... skilled at inflicting death. I mentioned that one of them put a spear into Jesus' side to make sure he was dead... There's a reason for that. In ancient Rome:

if a Roman soldier took a criminal off the cross before he was dead, the Roman soldier had to take his place on the cross. Therefore, is it likely or in any way believable that the Roman guards would have taken Jesus off the cross before he was REALLY dead?...knowing that they would have to take his place? No.

The final problem with this argument is

3) The tomb itself.

This argument would have us believe that while this “fainted Jesus” was in the tomb, the cool air revived him. He then :

- took off his grave clothes
- found the tomb opening -- in the dark.
- rolled a 2,000 pound stone away from the opening
- fought off a group of highly-trained Roman guards – by himself.
- walked on spike-pierced feet – to find the apostles.
- And then in his tortured, horribly disfigured condition, proves to them that he had conquered death.

Who would have believed a Jesus who came to them in this condition? Would you? I certainly would not have. Yet, somehow Jesus came to them in such a way that the apostles did believe and gladly laid down their lives for him after years of hard service spreading the word of his resurrection.

Does it sound at all possible that Jesus fainted on the cross and that’s how the disciples mistakenly thought he had risen from the dead? No, of course not.

b. The “people looked for Jesus in the wrong tomb” theory.

This theory can be dismissed very quickly because of what would be necessary for it to be true: Let’s follow the logic here:

Jesus is laid in the tomb. The Gospels tell us at various places that everyone knew which tomb it was. The women knew, the apostles knew, the Jews knew, and the Roman guards guarding the tomb knew. But this theory would have us believe...

1. The women went to the wrong tomb.
2. Then the disciples went to the wrong tomb?
3. Then the Jewish leaders...?
4. Then the roman soldiers ...?
5. Did no one remember where they buried Jesus?!!
6. Then to top it off...no one looked in any other tomb?

Certainly, if there was any question about which tomb it was, the Jews and the Romans would have opened up every other tomb in the area. However, they didn’t, because they knew which tomb he had been buried in. The fact that no one searched the other tombs is all the evidence we need to dismiss this false theory.

c. The “disciples stole the body” theory.

This theory can also be dismissed quickly...If they had stolen the body, would they have suffered and died to try to convince people to believe in a dead man who had lied to them. No one in all of religious history has willingly suffered for years and then died as a martyr while knowing all along that what they believed in was a total lie. This theory is nonsense.

d. The “unknown person(s) stole the body of Jesus” theory.

If this happened, the disciples would still know that their testimony was a lie. They died for their testimony, which was that THEY saw Jesus after the resurrection. Not that they heard about it from someone else. We can trust their testimony. This theory as we see doesn’t hold up to even a bit of scrutiny.

e. The “wild dogs ate Jesus’ body” theory. ... (Under the general heading of “nobody knows where the body is”.)

The skeptics are grasping at straws now. They just don’t want to believe. Instead of admitting that the evidence for the resurrection is insurmountable, this argument says simply “We don’t know what happened to Jesus’ body, but He couldn’t possibly have risen from the dead because we just don’t believe in miracles”.

It is interesting to note that often this last argument is what is at the heart of atheism and skepticism – a refusal to believe in God or anything miraculous. So because they refuse to believe in Jesus, they look elsewhere.

Man searches the stars with powerful telescopes... looking for the starting point of the universe... but refusing to come to Jesus – the one who set the universe in place.

Man uses powerful microscopes to probe the depths of the atom...trying to find order in life but refusing to come to Jesus – the one who brings order to life.

Archeologists probe the earth digging through layers of dirt...searching for the origin of man but refusing to come to Jesus, the Author of Life.

As we have seen, the atheist is willing to believe, without firm evidence, in ANY attempt to deny the overwhelming evidence of the truth of Jesus’ resurrection. Consider the fact that Richard Dawkins, one of the leading atheists of our day, is perfectly willing to think that life in our solar system was seeded by aliens.

Why don’t skeptics want to believe in the resurrection?

1. A total refusal to believe in miracles – REGARDLESS of the evidence. (And the resurrection certainly qualifies as a miracle).
2. Because they love sin.
 - a. Christianity mandates repentance from sin.
 - b. They choose sin over submission to Christ.

Conclusion:

I believe in Jesus because the evidence shows that he rose from the dead. Because he conquered death, I can trust that his claims about the way to eternal life are true.

If a lack of evidence has stopped you from trusting Jesus with your soul and your future, I hope my words today have helped you see that there is overwhelming evidence proving that Jesus rose from the dead.

If a desire to hold on to your sin is what is stopping you from giving your life to Christ, then no amount of evidence will change your heart.

If either situation applies to you, my advice is

1. Let your sin go (Repent)
2. Confess to God that you are a sinner unable to save yourself and unworthy of heaven.
3. Accept the fact that Jesus died to pay the penalty for your sins, and that he rose from the dead as proof that he will save those who believe in Him -- And that includes you... but only if you put your faith in Him. Only this way can you experience the sweet forgiveness of a God who loves you. Won’t you accept His offer of salvation now? Let’s pray.