

“Proving that Jesus Was the Christ” (Part 3)

Introduction

The Text

¹⁹ For some days he [Saul/Paul] was with the disciples at Damascus. ²⁰ And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” ²¹ And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?” ²² But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. (Acts 9:19b–22)

Part 3

- A. This is now the third sermon in this little mini-series I’m running entitled “Proving that Jesus Was the Christ.”
- B. You may recall, I’m taking my cue for this from what we see the newly converted Paul doing there in v. 22: “But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.”
 - 1. As I’ve said, so often, in our day, faith is seen as something opposed to reason.
 - a. If you’re going to believe in Jesus, well, you’re going to have to turn off your brain.
 - b. But that’s not the way the Bible ever sees it.
 - i. So Paul here is giving good reasons for placing one’s faith in Jesus as the Son of God, as the Christ.
 - 2. And these sermons are just my attempt to help us see what it might look like in our day to do something similar—to prove that Jesus was the Christ.
- C. For those of us who are not yet Christians—we’re maybe a bit curious about Jesus but we haven’t made our mind up yet—I hope these sermons show you how reasonable (and beautiful!) the Christian faith really is.
- D. And for those of us who are already following Jesus, my hope is that these sermons help strengthen our faith and equip us to share with others.
 - 1. I hope as I said back in the first sermon of this little series, that all of this serves in some ways to “earthquake-proof” your faith.

- a. We all live in California, we know the “Big One” is coming and, even though we know that sometimes we fail to prepare, because it doesn’t seem immediately pressing or as important as other things we have going on.
- b. And the same is true spiritually. We know we live in an increasingly secular culture. People are “deconstructing” their faith and “de-churching,” as they say, left and right. The “Big One” is coming for us at some point, right? Where the ground will start shaking beneath us.
 - i. And I want us to have done the work ahead of time to “earthquake-proof” our faith so that we don’t go down with all the skepticism. We know there are good reasons for our faith—no matter what the university prof says from his lectern, no matter what the History Channel documentary claims to have discovered about Jesus and his wife or whatever, and so forth.

14 Proofs

- A. So, with this in mind, I’ve finally landed on 14 “proofs” in total that I’m looking to share with you over the course of these 4 weeks.
 - 1. We’ve seen six of these proofs so far.
 - 2. Today I hope to bring out another four.
- B. But before we dive in, let me briefly summarize the first six for you again:
 - 1. Proof #1: Scholarly Consensus: In our day, before we can prove “that Jesus was the Christ” we have to prove “that Jesus was” at all. For this I showed you that virtually all scholars, Christian and non-Christian alike, come together in acknowledging the fact that Jesus of Nazareth really was a historical person. Whatever else he was, we know at least that he was.
 - 2. Proof #2: Extrabiblical (Non-Christian) Sources: One of the reasons we know that he was an historical person is because we have these Extrabiblical (Non-Christian) Sources that reference Jesus and early Christians. These are guys writing in and around the first century AD talking about Jesus—his life, his death, his family, his followers, etc. And what they say overlaps wonderfully with what we already know about Jesus from the NT itself.
 - 3. Proof #3: Clear Literary Form: All of this prepared us to then begin looking at the Christian sources themselves—to look at the NT in particular. And what we see there is that the records we have in the NT concerning Jesus and his life and ministry, they are clearly not written in the form of myth or legend, but as history.
 - 4. Proof #4: Eyewitness Testimony: The NT writers weren’t just claiming to write history, they are clearly attempting to base what they wrote on eyewitness testimony. In the ancient world this was the primary means you had of establishing fact and making a case. That’s why, in the NT, it’s a major point of emphasis.

5. Proof #5: Early Composition: Some like to imagine that much time had passed between when Jesus was here and when they actually got around to writing about him. And so, as it goes, understandably, people later started embellishing things and making up stuff about his miracles and resurrection and all this. And people started believing it because it was circulating well after time any of it could actually be verified.
 - a. But this doesn't square with the facts. We know that all the Gospels were written before the end of the first century AD and that Paul's letters came before that—some just 15-20 years after Jesus' death. So all of this stuff was hitting the press and making the rounds during the lifetime of these eyewitnesses, at a time when people could rise up and easily contradict what's being claimed if it were false.
6. Proof #6: A Mountain of Manuscripts (literally): Then we came to face the challenge of whether we can even really know what the original authors of the NT wrote, because, frankly, we don't have the original documents. We have copies of copies of copies.
 - a. And, while this is true, we saw that, in light of the massive amount of NT manuscripts still around today—some dated to just decades after the original compositions—we can actually have great confidence that what we have today is what they wrote back then.

C. Now we come to proofs 7-10 . . .

Proof #7: Fundamental Improbabilities

- A. Okay, so maybe these NT writers—they're truly attempting to write history; they're trying to base what they put forward on eyewitness testimony; they wrote early and close to the events themselves; and maybe we do have access through the mountain of manuscripts to the original documents . . .
 1. . . . but, even still, we must deal further with the question: Why should we trust them? Why should we believe them when they claim that Jesus is the Christ?
 - a. The eyewitness piece from last time helps with this, but there is more we can say on this point.
- B. One of the roundabout proofs for this is actually based on the sheer unlikelihood that such an idea would ever take root in and among this Jewish band of disciples in the first place. They wouldn't make this up. They wouldn't want it to be true.
 1. As human beings, as I often say here, we tend to twist the truth to serve what we want.
 2. But these Jewish disciples wouldn't have wanted this crucified man from Nazareth to be the Christ, to be, even, God. Such an idea would have been detestable to them at first. It was only later that they saw it to be good.
 - a. And so it makes their testimony all the more credible, I think.

C. Let me show you what I mean . . .

A Human God?

A. Again, let me reiterate, Jesus was Jewish. His disciples, at least at the beginning when all this was getting started, were Jewish.

1. And the Jews, as is well known, were rigorously monotheistic—more so than any other people in history. By this, of course, we mean that they had it drilled into them from day one that there is only one true God and there can be no other.

- a. So recall the very first commandment God gives them at Sinai: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:2–3).

- b. And, on top of this, every morning and evening the faithful Jew would recite what’s known as the Shema, taken from Deut. 6, that begins in v. 4 like this: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”

B. And yet these are the folks who start talking about Jesus as a divine being and elevating him, worshiping him “as . . . a god” as we saw the Roman governor, Pliny the Younger, say of the early Christians. It’s an astounding development!

1. We could imagine, perhaps, the Romans dreaming up one of their men to be a god. They essentially did just this with their various emperors with what’s become known as the Imperial Cult.

2. But, for the Jews, again, such a thing would have been detestable.

- a. This is why, for the early Christians, it was so often their fellow Jews who were trying to chase them out of town and put them to death on account of their apparent blasphemy. That’s what so much of the book of Acts is given over to the persecution of these now Christian Jews by their own Jewish people.

- i. Because they’re breaking God’s law, they’re contradicting his clear word, they’re leading others into grave error—or so they thought.

C. C.S. Lewis, responding to this idea that Jesus’ first followers just exaggerated his claims and dreamed up some of these stories that put him on par with God, sums it up for us as follows: “This is difficult because His followers were all Jews; that is, they belonged to that Nation which of all others was most convinced that there was only one God—that there could not possibly be another. It is very odd that this horrible invention about a religious leader should grow up among the one people in the whole earth least likely to make such a mistake. On the contrary we get the impression that none of His immediate followers or even of the New Testament writers embraced the doctrine at all easily” (“What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?”).

1. So it is virtually unthinkable that all these Jewish disciples would suddenly start calling a man God unless, in fact, he really proved himself to be so.

A Crucified Christ?

- A. Beyond all of this, we must also remember that Jesus was not the sort of Messiah these Jews were expecting.
 - 1. They thought he would come and conquer—not come and be crucified. That’s not the kind of Christ they anticipated, nor is it the one whom they even wanted, at least not at first.
 - a. As Paul says in [1 Cor. 1:23](#): “[W]e preach Christ crucified, [which is] a stumbling block to Jews . . .” Why? Because they want power and he just looks pathetic.
- B. This is why, throughout the Gospels, we see that Jesus is always having to push back on his disciples’ false notions.
 - 1. So, for example, you may recall, he immediately follows up Peter’s confession of him as “the Christ” ([Matt. 16:16](#)) by disclosing the fact that he, as the Christ, must die: “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (v. 21).
 - a. He is pushing back here on their mistaken sense that he has come to overthrow Rome.
 - b. He’s not come to take down an emperor and an empire. He’s come to take down Satan, sin, and death. He’s not doing less. He’s doing more.
 - 2. Nevertheless, for the Jews at this time, and for many still today, a crucified Christ was a contradiction in terms!
 - a. In fact, do want to know what Peter does when Jesus does tell him he’s come to die? He rebukes him: “And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you’” ([Matt. 16:22](#)).
- C. All of this to say: these early followers of Jesus were not in any way predisposed to the ideas of Jesus we now have today. In fact, for a number of reasons, they would seem to be the least likely to ever consider them.
 - 1. How or why they would ever come to imagine this crucified peasant from Nazareth to be their Christ—their Lord and their God (cf. Thomas in [John 20:28](#))—is beyond an answer . . . unless, of course, it’s just the way things really went!

Proof #8: Counterproductive Content

- A. There is more we can say in a similar vein that adds credibility to the NT authors, I think. And that is this idea of counterproductive content. What I mean is, these authors are writing things, recording details, that wouldn’t have been easy for them to write.
 - 1. On the surface, some of this stuff would not have immediately seemed to help their cause.
 - 2. In fact, in many ways, one would assume it really might have hindered it.

- a. But they were willing to put it in anyways. They were willing to be honest.
 - b. They don't seem to be embellishing or twisting or lying or propagandizing to get power for themselves or something like that—otherwise a lot of this stuff would've been edited out. They seem to be telling the truth.
- B. I only have time to give you just one of the more prominent examples. It's what I call the Foolishness of the Founders . . .

The Foolishness of the Founders

- A. Think about it. If you are trying to get people to buy into a movement and follow along with you, well, one of things you really need to do is puff up the leaders. Make them look as good as you can.
 - 1. For goodness sake, isn't that what we just witnessed with the Republican and Democratic National Conventions?
 - a. "Look at how great we are! I've done this, I've done that. We're going to do this, we're going to do that." And everyone applauds.
 - b. And you get all these people to come on stage and puff up your candidate and their team.
- B. But when the Gospel writers are telling the story of these guys who are essentially at the head of this new Christian movement, the apostles, the apostles look like a joke. (It's literally the kind of stuff you're political opponent might put out there in an effort to discredit you.)
 - 1. Imagine the national convention held for the Apostle Peter as he's presented in the Gospels:
 - a. "Oh my boy Peter, let me tell you. He's the man for the job. If you want an overconfident blowhard in the oval office, he's your guy. He's the first to speak and the last to get it. He's always putting his dusty foot in his mouth. He presents bold but he's a true coward. He couldn't even stand up for Jesus before a little servant girl. Whatever it takes to save his own skin. He'll betray his closest friends if he has to. I'm telling you, he's going to turn this nation around. Vote for Peter come November!"
 - i. You just don't run a campaign like that. No one would vote for you. No one would want to join your crew. No one would fund your campaign. You look like a fool.
 - ii. But that's how the Gospels present the apostles.
- C. Let me actually show you some of this in the NT documents themselves. And we'll keep using Peter as an example because, remember, he is probably the most prominent of all the apostles.
 - 1. Jesus called him the "rock" (Matt. 16:18) after all. And, as is clear from the book of Acts, he came to be regarded as head of the apostolic band.

D. Nevertheless, again, in the Gospel accounts, he, above any other, is shown to be a fool:

1. So, for example, on the night of Jesus' betrayal, when he tells his disciples that they are all going to scatter and fall away because of what's coming for him on the cross, Peter quickly fires back, with all the confidence in the world: "²⁹ Even though they all fall away, I will not. . . ³¹ If I must die with you, I will not deny you" (Mark 14:29, 31).
2. It sounds noble. He means well, perhaps. We can give him that. But when we go next with them to the Garden of Gethsemane, we're already immediately given the clear indication that Peter is not made of the stuff he thinks he is.
 - a. There Jesus tells his disciples to stay awake and keep watch while he goes off to be alone with his Father and pray.
 - b. And when he comes back, in Mark's Gospel, it's Peter who is actually singled out as the privileged recipient Jesus' rebuke: "And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, 'Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour?'" (Mark 14:37).
 - i. Some of you are like: "Yes and amen! I'm right there with you Peter. Pastor starts preaching and I start sleeping. I can't stay awake either."
3. But it gets worse. It looks momentarily like Peter is ready to rouse himself and prove he's got what it takes, but again it just ends in utter embarrassment.
 - a. So Judas comes in with others to arrest Jesus and Peter unsheathes a sword and, of course he's thinking: "This is my moment. I'm going to save the Savior!"
 - i. So he lifts the sword up over his shoulder, and he proceeds to swing that blade with all his might, and as he brings it down, anticipating the glory he'll gain for himself from this peerless act of unbridled bravery, to his great disappointment and dismay, when the adrenaline settles and the smoke clears, he soon realizes that all he's managed to do is cut off an ear of one of the guys who was laying hold of Jesus (Mark 14:47; cf. John 18:10).
 - (1) He got an ear. And let's be clear: no one aims for the ear, alright. You don't swing for the ear. You swing for the head, or the side, or something significant like that. But Peter got an ear.
 - (a) And Jesus turns to him and just says: "Put it away, man. Good try there, buddy."
4. And then, of course, you have his infamous three denials, where by the end he's invoking a curse on himself and swearing on God's name: "I do not know this man of whom you speak" (Mark 14:71).

- a. “[T]his man”—he doesn’t say Jesus’ name.
 - i. Jesus had chased him down in love, brought him in, made him family, and was in the process of going to the cross for him, for his salvation.
 - ii. And, not only is Peter not going to stand up for Jesus as he said he would, he can’t even bring himself to say his name in public.
- E. And here’s the craziest thing: Most of all I just recounted for you is found in the Gospel of Mark.
- 1. Mark, as you may know, is widely believed to be the earliest of the Gospels, composed sometime in the 50s AD.
 - 2. And, interestingly, it’s also widely believed that Peter was actually Mark’s primary source for all that he wrote. In other words: Mark got what he got because Peter recounted it to him.
 - a. Which means, of course, the only reason Mark knew that Peter was such a fool in all of this, was because Peter himself shared the stories.
 - i. Don’t you see? He’s not spinning things to make himself look better. He’s not trying to get people’s admiration or praise. He’s not after power or manipulating folks to serve him.
 - ii. He’s willing to say it like it is, to tell it like it happened, regardless of how it makes him look, because it’s not about him—it’s about Jesus.
- F. And lest you think that the play here on the part of the Gospel writers is simply to show how these men were magnificently transformed by Jesus—so you go from accentuating their faults before the cross to whitewashing them after—let me say this: while it is true, we will see a magnificent transformation in these men (and next time I will make the case that this too is proof of the fact that Jesus is the Christ), nevertheless, we see quite plainly that even after their transformation, there is no effort to make these disciples look better than they really are.
- 1. So, with regard to Peter again, for example, in Galatians, Paul tells us that even after all of this wonderful stuff in Acts, where he’s stood courageously for Jesus in the face of rejection and at threat of death, he again falls back into self-concern and the fear of man, and he’s watering down the gospel, and he “stands condemned.”
 - a. He once stood courageously, now he stands condemned.
 - b. And those are Paul’s words not mine: “¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. . . . ¹⁴ [For his] conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel . . .” (Gal. 2:11, 14).
 - i. This great apostle, the Rock, the Dwayne Johnson of the Twelve, even after the Spirit has gotten ahold of him, he’s stumbling back into sin, and he’s to blame for this hypocrisy that’s starting to take root in the church.
- G. So, even still, he doesn’t look all that great. If you’re trying to get people to donate to your campaign and join your cause, this is not the kind of stuff you’d want out there in the press. This is a movement killer. No one’s going to come to your church. You’re a hypocrite.

1. Listen, no one would want to make this up about themselves.
2. Our lies always move in the opposite direction—they make us look better than we truly are.

a. But they put it in there. Why?

- i. The most reasonable conclusion is that they put it in there, though it makes them look bad, because it actually happened. They're just being honest. It makes them trustworthy sources, I think.

Thank God!

A. And, you know, on a personal level, I thank God that the Holy Spirit did inspire them to put that in there.

1. Because—while on the one hand, you could find it disappointing that the founders of the faith look like such fools—I, for one, find it incredibly encouraging.

- a. Because it means there's room for me in this movement. There's a place for me beside Jesus.
- b. If Jesus could grab hold of and love and use guys like this—hallelujah!—there's hope he can do the same with me, and with you.

B. The subtext running underneath all of this is just so sweet.

1. We don't have to try to cover up our junk or project an image or act like we're better than we are. We don't have to hide or censor or propagandize for ourselves.
2. The gospel frees us to talk openly about our issues, to be honest about who we really are and where we struggle.

- a. We're not worried about the opinions of man because we know the opinion of God, we know the grace of God for us in Jesus.
- b. He sees us. He knows us. Truly. And he loves us. He's for us. Fully.

C. So what seems at first to be a pretty significant vulnerability to the Christian cause—namely, the foolishness of the founders—in the end only serves to validate it all the more.

1. The only reason they'd think to write all this embarrassing stuff is if it actually happened.
2. And the only reason they'd be willing to include all this embarrassing stuff is because they knew Jesus' love is just that good! They're not worried about it.

Proof #9: The Threat of Persecution

Nothing to Gain and Everything to Lose

A. Here's another piece of evidence that seems to accent the trustworthiness of the apostles and NT writers. If they were making up a lie about Jesus as the risen Christ, when you look closely at the facts, you soon realize: they really had nothing to gain and everything to lose.

1. As Peter Kreeft puts it: "Why would the apostles lie? . . . If they lied, what was their motive, what did they get out of it? What they got out of it was misunderstanding, rejection, persecution, torture, and martyrdom. Hardly a list of perks!" (as quoted in Geisler and Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, 275).
 - a. Remember, they didn't get power for themselves from this. They didn't get material wealth or prosperity. They didn't rise in popularity or go up in the polls of public opinion.
 - b. They got killed.
 - i. Tradition has it that all the apostles were killed for their faith except for John. It's believed he died of natural causes, but this was only after they tried to kill him and then finally banished him to the isle of Patmos.
- B. And it's important that I remind you: This isn't just recorded for us in the NT documents themselves, like the book of Acts, for example. It's also verified in the extrabiblical non-Christian literature of the time.
 1. The Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius write about it—they both explicitly mention the persecution under Emperor Nero in the 60s AD.
 2. The Roman governor Pliny the Younger talks about his own efforts to get Christians to recant.
 3. The Jewish historian Josephus mentions Christians being killed by Jewish leaders in the first century as well.
 - a. The Romans hated them. The Jews hated them. Why?
 - i. Because for the Romans, proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Christ is a threat to Caesar.
 - ii. And for the Jews, proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Christ is a threat, as they saw it, to YHWH.
- C. So these apostles were proclaiming Jesus to be the risen Christ at risk of their own life.
 1. Why would they make that up?
 2. And further, when it became plain that they weren't going to get power or admiration for it all, but instead death, why wouldn't they recant? Why would they die for what they knew to be a lie—a lie of their own making?
 - a. Such a thing makes no sense and cuts against the grain of human nature as we know it. When we tell lies, we tell them to benefit ourselves, and we certainly don't hold onto them to our harm.
- D. Listen to Greg Gilbert on this: "Because they believed these things, they rearranged their lives so that they could proclaim their beliefs—abandoning careers, leaving homes, and ultimately refusing to back away from those beliefs even as (according to tradition) they were, one by one, beheaded, crucified, impaled with spears, flayed, and stoned. Something happened to cause all that.

. . . [N]obody dies for a hoax. If you're just trying to pull one over on the world, when the jig is up and the axe is about to fall—or the nails are about to pierce your wrists, or they're about to drop you in the boiling oil or throw you off the top of the temple—you don't keep on saying, 'I tell you, the man is alive!' The only way you stick by the story under those circumstances is if you really believe it's true" (Why Trust the Bible?, 118-19).

Genuine but Mistaken?

- A. Now, after all this, I still hear someone raising the objection: "Isn't it possible, that they really believed it was true, but they got it wrong? Jesus wasn't risen. They just went to the wrong tomb or mistook a dream they had of him for the real thing, or something like this? Whatever it was they genuinely believed it but they were mistaken."
- B. This sort of thing happens all the time with martyrs in other religions—like with extremist Muslims for example.
 - 1. Those suicide bombers, they don't blow themselves up knowing it's all a lie and they're actually going to hell.
 - 2. They think they're going to paradise and 72 virgins will be waiting for them.
 - a. They hold to such a thing even in the face of death. Because they really believe it. They're just dead wrong.
- C. How do we know that's not where these apostles are. Genuine but mistaken? They thought Jesus was risen and alive and the Lord, but they're just mixed up in the head or something?
 - 1. Well, John Stott puts it in such simple terms for us in his little book *Basic Christianity*: "[W]ithin a few weeks of Jesus' death the Christians were boldly proclaiming his resurrection. The news spread rapidly. The new Nazarene movement threatened to undermine the bulwarks of Judaism and to disturb the peace of Jerusalem. The Jews feared conversions; the Romans riots. The authorities had before them one obvious course of action. They could produce the remains of the body Instead, they were silent and resorted to violence. They arrested the apostles, threatened them, flogged them, imprisoned them, vilified them, plotted against them and killed them. But all this was entirely unnecessary if they had in their own possession the dead body of Jesus. The church was founded on the resurrection. Disprove the resurrection, and the church would have collapsed. But they could not The authorities' silence is as eloquent a proof of the resurrection as the apostles' witness" (*Basic Christianity*, 63-4).
- D. In other words: if both the Jews and the Romans so badly wanted to quench this new religious movement—to the degree that they were resorting to such extremes of violence—and if all they had to do to stop it was put forward the dead body of Jesus, why didn't they do it?
 - 1. Answer: they didn't do it, because they couldn't do it. And they couldn't do it, because they didn't have it and, try as they may, they couldn't find it.

- a. If the disciples had simply hid the body of Jesus, they wouldn't have died for this, because they knew it was a lie.
 - b. And if the disciples didn't hide it, the Romans or Jews would have easily found it.
 - c. So the fact that the disciples didn't hide it and the Romans and Jews couldn't find it, means it's really not there—which means, conclusion: Jesus is really alive . . . and, therefore, he really is the Christ!
- E. It's amazing isn't it? When you believe something so intently, on the basis of sound reason and clear evidence no doubt, that you are willing to give your life for it.
 - 1. I wonder: is that where you are with your faith in Jesus?
 - a. That's part of why I'm going through all these proofs.
 - b. So that when the gun is held to your head, you won't hesitate to say with Paul: *"For . . . me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).*

Proof #10: The Historical Fact of the Church

No Reasonable Alternative

- A. This last proof is simply related to the previous and it won't take but a minute. With this I'm just getting at the fact that historians can't come up with a reasonable alternative for how the Christian church got started and established in the world apart from the fact that Jesus really did die and rise from the dead—that he really is the Christ as recorded in the NT documents.
 - 1. So notable historian Philip Schaff writes: *"The Christian church rests on the resurrection of its Founder. Without this fact the church could never have been born, or if born, it would soon have died a natural death" (History of the Christian Church, I.2.19).*
 - 2. Kenneth Scott LaTourette, a late historian and once professor at Yale, writes: *"Why among all the cults and philosophies competing in the Greco-Roman world did Christianity succeed and outstrip all others? Why did it succeed despite getting more severe opposition than any other, why did it succeed though it had no influential backers in high places but consisted mainly of the poor and slaves? How did it succeed so completely that it forced the most powerful state in history to come to terms with it and then outlive the very empire that sought to uproot it? It is clear that at the very beginning of Christianity, there must have occurred a vast release of energy perhaps unequalled in our history. Without it, the future course of the Christian religion is inexplicable. . . . Something happened to the men who associated with Jesus. That burst of energy was ascribed by the early disciples to the founder of their faith."* Namely, to Jesus—his resurrection from the dead, and the outpouring of his Holy Spirit!
- B. That's why we are here this morning, gathering as a Christian church in the 21st century. Our worship service, then, in a roundabout way, interestingly enough, is actually proof that Jesus is the Christ!

1. Historians cannot come up with a more reasonable alternative for how the church got started and gained traction on into today.
 2. Jesus must be risen. Jesus must be the Christ. Every alternative actually requires more faith to accept, not less.
- C. So let's worship Jesus with all that we are this morning knowing that there are, in fact, good reasons for our faith!