

From Prophecy to Proof

The Power and Praise

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

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Is it strange to anybody else? If you really think about today, you and I are here because of a man who walked the dusty streets of Judea in the Middle East nearly 2,000 years ago, claiming to be the Son of God. Now, I'm not naive. I know that's not why everybody is here. Some of you are here because your parents made you come. Some of you are here because you just wanted to keep the peace in your home today.

I know that some of you are potentially here because of guilt or tradition, or maybe you just think it's the right thing to do on Easter because you live in America. But the truth remains that this church and this body of believers exists because we believe what this man said. We believe that he was the Son of God. But why? Why have we come to that conclusion?

This man was not the first person to make that claim, nor would he be the last person to claim to be somebody great. But something was obviously different about this man, Jesus, and his claims because today there will be over 2 billion with a B, people worldwide who will gather to remember and celebrate one of the most audacious claims in human history. He made the claim to be resurrected, to come back to life.

These other men who claimed to be something great, claimed to be divine, eventually died. And so the movement died with them. The difference is when Jesus died, He didn't stay dead. His disciples, His followers, and many others made the claim that Jesus rose from the dead, and over the course of the next 40 days, He would eat with them, walk with them, and talk with them.

And then Mark tells us after that 40 days in chapter 16, verses 19 through 20, that after the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples decided to go out and preach everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by signs that accompanied it. This is what Scripture tells us, but can the story be trusted?

Do people really believe that someone can come back to life? Let me just answer personally and say yes. I do believe that Jesus rose from the dead, and I put my hope in that same resurrection for my own life. And I want to take the rest of today to share with you why I believe that. Some people will choose to appeal to emotion on Easter, to appeal to your heart.

But today, it is my desire to appeal to your mind, to appeal to your logic. I cannot deny the fact that believing in the resurrection of Jesus does take a level of faith. But I want to share with you why it also can be a logical conclusion with the facts that you and I have. Unfortunately, there was no camera recording the tomb 24/7 after Jesus was laid in it.

We don't have video evidence of the resurrection. But you know what? Today, in the world in which we live, even if we did have video evidence, do you think people would believe it with all the AI that we have? Probably not anyway. I know for a long time, people used to say, "Why wouldn't Jesus just record it? Why wouldn't we just have evidence?" And now today I can answer that question because people wouldn't believe it anyway. We will never have video evidence or proof, but the reason that there are going to be two billion people worldwide celebrating the resurrection of Jesus is because it is the most logical conclusion.

And if it is true, if Jesus was raised from the dead, then it changes everything. If, in fact, Jesus did come back to life, then I don't know about you, but personally, I'm going to go with what he says. I'm going to follow his instructions, and I'm going to take life more seriously. That only seems like the logical conclusion.

And so today, as I appeal to your hearts, but also to your minds, I pray that God would open up our eyes to see the truth, that Jesus was, in fact, resurrected, that even though it was an audacious claim, he pulled it off, and you and I can put our faith in him. Let me pray, and then we will look at some of the history. Heavenly Father, we come before you today. Many of us have gathered around the world to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We have put our faith and our hope and our trust in you as a loving God that sent Jesus Christ, your Son, to die on the cross in our place. But that was not the end of the story. Today, we do celebrate that the grave could not hold him and that he was resurrected. And so we offer our hope as well in that same resurrection power.

Father, continue to open our minds and open our hearts today as we hear from you and from Your Word. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen. I want to start with four facts that are so strongly supported by data that the vast majority I wish virtually all, but there's always some crazy people, all right? But I'm just going to tell you, virtually all, almost all critical scholars have been willing to grant these next four things I'm going to share with you as historical fact.

Whether they believe in Jesus as the Messiah or not, these are things that history and historians believe. First, Jesus was a real man, and he walked on the streets of Judea in and around the first century. And not only did he walk those streets, they also believe it was a fact that he was crucified on a Roman cross. There is too much evidence to prove that Jesus was, in fact, a man, that he did walk the streets of Judea in and around the first century, and he was crucified on a Roman cross.

Nearly all critical scholars will grant us that. That must be true. The second fact that they will grant is that shortly after his death on that Roman cross, a number of his disciples and followers had experiences both individually and in collective group settings that they believed or interpreted were appearances of the risen Jesus to them. Now, obviously, those that are skeptics would claim they don't believe that they actually had those experiences.

They just interpreted it wrong, whatever happened. But they would definitely say based on the historical records, these followers of Jesus definitely had experiences that radically transformed their lives. They believed it was the resurrection of Jesus. The third fact that we have is that James was in fact a brother of Jesus. And throughout his entire life, leading all the way up to the death of Jesus, James was a skeptic and an unbeliever.

He did not believe that his brother was the Lord or the Messiah. Now, that's not hard for us to imagine. How many of us would want to believe one of our siblings is the Son of God? That would be very difficult for us to swallow. And so it makes sense that James was a skeptic the entire life of Jesus leading up to his death. But then scholars agree something happened with James, that he ends up becoming a believer.

And at one point, not just a believer that Jesus is the Son of God, but the leader of the church in Jerusalem. And then if that's not enough, not only would Jesus' brother James profess Jesus as the Messiah, he dies as a martyr because he would not deny that his brother was the Lord. Historical scholars would say this is all true. Now, they think many would say he was misled or just believed something to be false, but they would claim, yes, this is all true of this man named James, the brother of Jesus.

And fourth, the fourth thing that all historical critical scholars will admit to is that there also was a man named Paul, originally Saul, who was a persecutor or an enemy of the church and Jesus, who also had an experience in his life that he interpreted in such a way to be the appearance of the risen Jesus that it would radically alter the direction of his life.

It would transform his life from being a persecutor of the church to being one of its most able defenders and the person who has written the majority of what we call the New Testament, which most of you would know are

simply letters that he wrote to the churches that he had planted as he would go around and spread the good news of Jesus. Now there is a fifth fact that I don't include with those four because this one I would say is not virtually all historical critics, but I would say most, the overwhelming majority.

But there are some that would deny this truth. But this is the fact that the majority of historical critical scholars believe that there was, in fact, an empty tomb, that the body of Jesus was no longer there. And so those that are skeptics have to come up with what happened then? How do they answer the question of the empty tomb? Because there's plenty of historical critical scholars that believe in an empty tomb, but they don't believe in a risen Jesus. And so there are these theories that have developed to try to explain how the tomb was empty.

Naturally, how did this happen? What is an idea? And I always find it interesting as I have conversations with skeptics and individuals that don't believe in Jesus that they think they've come up with some new idea to explain the empty tomb, all right? This has been going on for 2,000 years. There's probably no new ideas. They've all been discussed. They've all been talked about. And I am here to share with you today that all three of these theories based on natural experiences do not stand up to critical questioning.

So much so that even these historical critics would say, "These are not good arguments against the empty tomb." The first argument, and you've probably heard this one before, because it's also mentioned in Scripture, is the idea that somebody stole the body. The explanation of the empty tomb, yes, Jesus, he lived. He was crucified. He died. He was placed in the tomb. But the tomb was empty because somebody stole the body. Now, the number one idea as to who would have done that would have been the disciples.

The interesting thing, though, as this tries to stand up to scrutiny, is that many of these men and women who made this claim in the belief that Jesus was resurrected, also gave their lives for that belief. And most historians would believe and admit that liars don't make good martyrs. When it comes to life or death, you're going to eventually go back on it and say, "Okay, we made it all up. You know We did this." And so logically, that doesn't make any sense.

If they stole the body, it's not logical to believe that even their lives would have been drastically altered or changed for this belief. They went on to do things that no normal human being would have done. It's interesting that even as you read in the Gospel of John, that this theory that somebody stole the body actually comes from them. The disciples and the women were the first to suspect that someone had taken Jesus' body. They weren't waiting for a resurrection. Remember, they asked, "Who took him?

Where did he go?" It wasn't the empty tomb that convinced them of his resurrection. It was their personal encounters afterwards. It was those experiences that they had with what they interpreted as the risen Jesus. Other people will make the claim that maybe the Romans or somebody else took his body out of the tomb, but with everything that happened afterwards and the spread of this religion, this faith in Jesus as the Messiah, definitely the Romans would have produced the body of Jesus if they could to stop the movement.

And that never happened. Doesn't stand up to criticism. The second naturalistic explanation for the empty tomb is this belief that Jesus didn't actually die on the cross, that he was just severely injured or beaten to the point of death, but later he would heal. We have similar logical questions that we would ask then. Why would Jesus' followers proclaim a risen Jesus if, in fact, he didn't actually die and was just severely injured and somehow healed?

I highly doubt that they would have been going around proclaiming a risen and resurrected Jesus if their Messiah was limping around from almost dying on the cross. It doesn't make any logical sense for that. Some believe that he was brought back to health through months of rehabilitation, but virtually all, again, critical historical scholars agree based on the descriptions that are given in the historical text that Jesus was, in fact, dead when they took him off the cross.

And you can read the stories in the Gospels. Doctors have gone back and explained what would happen during the crucifixion, and it is very clear from our historical documents that Jesus was, in fact, dead when they took

him off the cross. And now finally, there are some that would say, "Okay, fine. Jesus existed. We understand he was killed on the Roman cross. He was placed in the tomb." But we understand all of these weird appearances simply as hallucinations, that all of these individuals just hallucinated Jesus coming back to life because they desired it and they wanted it so much.

And it's what they were looking forward to, which if you know the scriptures at all, is not true. They were not looking forward to the resurrection. And also just logically, that's not the way hallucinations work. You don't have 500 people all hallucinating the same thing. And later today, we're going to look in 1 Corinthians where the apostle Paul says, "There was this occasion where 500 individuals saw the risen Lord." And he says, "Many of them are still alive." In essence, inferring, "Go talk to them if you don't believe me." They were still alive. These facts could be checked.

Hallucinations don't work that way. They are private experiences in the mind of an individual. And if that weren't enough, why would somebody like Saul have this experience with a risen Lord when he was actually out trying to persecute those that believed it to be true? Why would his brother James have an experience with the risen Lord when he did not believe that his brother was the Messiah or the risen Christ? This was the last thing they wanted or expected, and yet they all would admit to it.

Therefore, most critical scholars and skeptics today don't appeal to these naturalistic explanations. They don't try to say somebody stole the body, he wasn't dead, they were hallucinating. Instead, most of these historians will say they can't investigate miracle claims because a miracle, if it did occur, involved God, and historians have no tools to detect God, which is true, right? So they basically say we can't give an answer as to what actually happened because we can't go back and test it, which is true.

This shows that the naturalistic explanations have failed miserably over the last 2,000 years. There is no great explanation other than the fact that Jesus was, in fact, raised from the dead. Because what we end up with then, based on historical facts and criticism, is we have a guy named Jesus who objectively lived, he objectively died on a Roman cross, and then individuals close to his inner circle as well as deniers and enemies claim that they see him not dead again.

This claim is followed by these individuals by a drastic life change and many of them willing to die for that belief. And so here is the question then that all of us need to answer. What most accurately explains why these 11 scared disciples, as well as one-time enemies, go on not just to proclaim Jesus' resurrection, but they go on to risk their lives in persecution.

How do we explain the disciples going back to Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost to proclaim at the scene of the crime that Jesus was resurrected? Why would you go back to the place where they could so easily show the dead body of Jesus if it were still there? Why would you go back to the place where people knew what happened if you were going to make up some huge lie or scheme? Certainly, it's understood. There would have been risks politically. There would have been risks religiously.

There would have been risks to your own life, and yet the disciples go on to proclaim these truths to the detriment of their own lives. But what are these texts that we have? What do we have according to history that explains these truths about who Jesus is? Why do historical critics say, "Yeah, we have to believe some of these things and what really took place?" Well, it's because you and I have seven different eyewitness accounts written historical documents that surround the idea of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And we have one biography that is written by Luke that follows this suggested writing style for a biography that was suggested by the very first historians, Josephus and Quintillion, and Lucien, to ensure the accuracy and reliability of what he is writing. And so you will notice in the Gospel of Luke that you have locations that are mentioned, people and rulers that are mentioned, very specific details about what he is writing to prove this is meant to be historical documentation.

And so we have Luke, we have other eyewitnesses, we have Paul, we have Peter, we have Jude, we have James, we have Matthew, Mark, and John all writing independent historical texts that come from firsthand experiences at the time it happened. Now, I understand that when I talk with people about this, as I love debating and defending my faith in what I believe, it is very difficult to take these documents as independent and as separate accounts because now you and I have these texts that have been kept and they've been put in now what we call the New Testament of the Bible, right?

But understand, these are all individual writings, individual separate eyewitness accounts. And if you are a historical critic and you want to know about someone from the ancient world, the best that you can do is go back to the earliest sources that are available to them. And can I tell you, unequivocally, there is no other person in ancient history that we have more information about than Jesus of Nazareth. We have more information about Him than anybody else in ancient history.

You personally might not want to believe these old eyewitness accounts, but if we are going to be consistent, this is our only way of looking at history. Many people want to argue the reliability of these historical documents that we have about Jesus for various reasons. But I am here to share with you that if you can't accept what Mark writes in his gospel as true, then you cannot accept any historical document. None of them can be trusted. And if that's where you want to go, then I can't argue with you.

But the reason is because what we have is so vast that compared to anything else that we know about history, we have so much more about Jesus. One quick example, the Gospel of Mark. It was written only a couple decades after Jesus' death. And people will say, oh, well, a couple decades. There was time for stories to change before it happened, and he writes it down. Okay, that's true. But did you know that the earliest writings we have about Alexander the Great from Greece are hundreds of years after his death.

And yet, never once have I ever been in an argument or a discussion where somebody has said, "Well, I'm not really sure I believe about that Alexander the Great guy." Nobody argues that because you accept it as historical documentation. We have so much more about Jesus that if you can't believe that, you can't accept anything. So let's real quickly look at some of these accounts that we have. And remember, these are individual documents. I know they're all in the Bible today, but these are individual documents that make their claims.

The first one is Matthew chapter 28 verses 8 through 10, where Matthew says, "So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid, and yet filled with joy, and they ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly, Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said, "and they came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. "Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid.

Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." Mark says in his Gospel chapter 16 verses 14 through 15 that later Jesus appeared to the eleven as they were eating, and he rebuked them for their lack of faith and for their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. Is this something that you would write about yourself if you were making this all up? Oh, by the way, we were so dumb that we missed it. And so Jesus had to rebuke us. No, they're being honest.

They're explaining, "Listen, this is not what we were looking for." And so Jesus had to rebuke us. And so He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." John says this, "Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" And this woman named Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news, "I have seen the Lord." And she told them that he had said these things to her.

One of my favorite sections about the crucifixion and the resurrection comes from the apostle Paul when he writes a letter to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 15:3. Paul says, "For what I received, I pass on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, Peter, and then to the 12.

And after that, he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some, he says, have fallen asleep. And then he appeared to James, the brother of Jesus, then to all the apostles. And last of all, Paul says, "He appeared to me also as to one abnormally born." And then Peter, in 1 Peter chapter 1, writing his letter to the church says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In His great mercy, He has given us new birth into a living hope through what? The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Peter proclaiming he believed in the resurrection. These books were written at a time when their claims could be fact-checked. These accounts make the claim that Jesus was resurrected, that these experiences were not some blurry image in the distance. They claimed to have walked with him, talked with him, touched him, ate with him. This wasn't just a one-off experience, right?

I mean, this happened over a period of 40 days. And I am here to tell you, truly, if you look at the historical evidence, the best explanation is that Jesus did, in fact, rise from the dead. That's the best explanation. And so there's really only three options for us to choose. As we look at the historical facts, you can either deny it and believe this whole thing is made up. It's some conspiracy. You can believe that. You can ignore it. And you can just go on with your life and fake like it doesn't exist and never happened.

Or you can believe it and proclaim Jesus as your Lord and Savior, as many have before. And the reason why this is so important to talk about and discuss on Easter and in our lives is because I believe and Scripture teaches that what you decide to do with this information will determine your eternity. It's that important.

And so I would hope that as you go home today, next week, and the next month, that you would at least promise me one thing, that you would go home, and even if you don't enjoy it like I do, I love learning, I love growing, I love expanding my understanding of things, even if you don't enjoy that, that you would spend some time doing some research and investigating the facts, that you would put some time and energy into this and come to a fair conclusion because I think it's pretty important. And the apostle Paul was very clear that if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

This is the promise that is available to you today. And I encourage you not to leave today without knowing where you stand on the resurrection of Jesus. Because if it's true, it changes everything. I stand before you today as a different person than I was before Jesus. Many of us here could testify to the fact of what Jesus has done for us and that it's real and that we have felt His presence and that we have experienced Him. And that's great. But I want you to experience Him.

I want you to make that proclamation that you would put your faith in Him, that you would put your hope in Him, that you would put your trust in the resurrection. And so today, you would come before a holy, a righteous, and a good God, and you would ask for forgiveness for your sins, that you would proclaim Jesus as Lord, and that you would say, "I am putting my hope and I am betting my life and my eternity on the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead. And I believe that He can do the same for me." As always, the altars are open. There'll be people that would love to pray with you afterwards.

But if you make that decision today, if you want to make that proclamation again, I know I appealed to logic. I appealed to mind today. But I pray that God would speak through your mind to your heart, that He would call you to Him. Let me close in prayer. Heavenly Father, thank you for today and for the celebration of Easter, the resurrection of Jesus. As those of us who have put our faith in Him, look forward to the day that we will be resurrected, and we will spend an eternity with you in heaven where there will be no more tears and no more suffering, no more sorrow, no more pain.

Lord, if there are any here that are wrestling through that, I pray that you would reveal yourself to them in real ways that they could not deny, and that their lives would be radically altered as well. I ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

