

# “CSI: The Resurrection”

Sermon Notes 3/31/2024

## What is the evidence for the resurrection of Christ?

**1<sup>st</sup> Witness: Mary** \_\_\_\_\_

Mark 16:9; John 20:10-18

**2<sup>nd</sup> Witness: The 2 Disciples at** \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 24:13-35

**3<sup>rd</sup> Witness: The 12** \_\_\_\_\_

1 Corinthians 15:3-5; Acts 1:3, 22

**4<sup>th</sup> Witness: Over** \_\_\_\_\_ **People**

1 Corinthians 15:6

**5<sup>th</sup> Witness: \_\_\_\_\_, the brother of Jesus**

1 Corinthians 15:7

**6<sup>th</sup> Witness: \_\_\_\_\_ of Tarsus**

1 Corinthians 15:8

**Exhibit A: The Empty** \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew 28:5-6, 11-15

**Exhibit B: The Roman** \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew 27:66

**Exhibit C: The Large** \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew 28:2

**Exhibit D: The Grave** \_\_\_\_\_

John 20:5-7

**Exhibit E: The Beginning of** \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 2:41; 8:1

**Exhibit F: Changed** \_\_\_\_\_

Romans 8:11; 1 Peter 1:3

# Life Group Discussion Notes

2024 Easter Lesson, March 31 – April 6

The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. And God has given us evidence to support our faith. After the resurrection, Jesus “gave many convincing proofs that He was alive” (Acts 1:3). Paul describes the resurrection as a message of first importance (1 Cor. 15:3-5). In this familiar passage, Paul is quoting an early church creed that “undoubtedly goes back to within a few years of Jesus’ crucifixion.”<sup>1</sup> The resurrection of Jesus is an essential and practical belief for all Christians. Later, Paul writes, “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17).

## How can we know that Christ is RISEN?

### Reliable Eyewitnesses

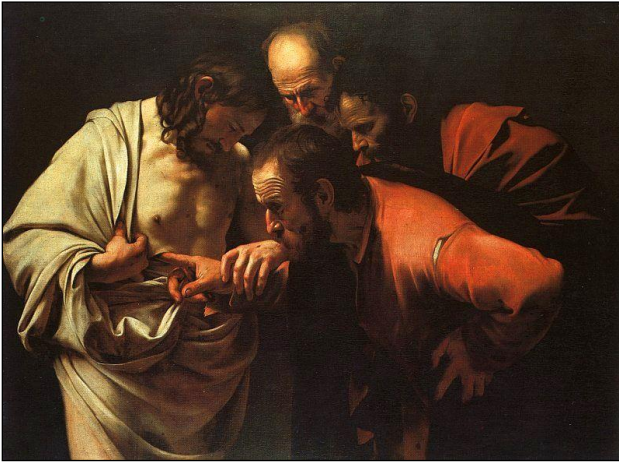
All four Gospels include specific names of people who saw the resurrected Christ. These books were written during the first century of Christianity, when people could have tracked down the names and locations of these eyewitnesses and asked them about the resurrection.

There are many passages in the Gospels that identify the eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ:

1. Mary Magdalene (John 20:10-18)
2. Other women (Matthew 28:8-10)
3. Cleopas and another disciple (Luke 24:13-32)
4. Eleven disciples and others (Luke 24:33-49)
5. The apostles without Thomas (John 20:19-23)
6. The apostles with Thomas (John 20:26-30)
7. Seven of the apostles (John 21:1-14)
8. The disciples (Matthew 28:16-20)
9. The apostles (Luke 24:50-52)

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist’s Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*, Updated edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 227.



After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples and told them that they would be His “witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This theme of the disciples being eyewitnesses of the resurrection continues throughout the book of Acts (See Acts 1:22, 2:32, 3:15, 4:2, 5:32, 10:41, and 13:31).

However, the most significant passage about the resurrection of Jesus is the early church creed quoted in 1 Corinthians 15. In this passage, Paul mentions Peter and the apostles as witnesses of the risen Christ. He also states that Jesus appeared to 500 people at one time. He says that many of them are still alive at the time he is writing the letter. This is an invitation for his readers to check out his story. They could have interviewed these eyewitnesses and found out whether Paul was telling the truth.

We should remember that these eyewitnesses had nothing to gain from lying about what they saw. They gained no political power by proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. They gained no wealth or popularity when they shared their testimony. In fact, they were persecuted, disowned by their families, kicked out of their synagogues, and even put to death for their belief in the resurrection of Jesus.

## Inadequate Alternatives

Many skeptics have suggested alternative theories to explain away the resurrection of Jesus. Before we consider these alternative theories, we must recognize what virtually all scholars (both Christian and non-Christian) accept as the historical facts concerning this event. All historians accept the fact that Jesus really was an actual man who lived in the first century. In his debate with Antony Flew, Gary Habermas listed 11 specific historical facts concerning the resurrection of Jesus that virtually all historians accept as true.

(1) Jesus died due to the rigors of crucifixion and (2) was buried. (3) Jesus' death caused the disciples to despair and lose hope. (4) Although not as frequently recognized, many scholars hold that Jesus was buried in a tomb that was discovered to be empty just a few days later.

Critical scholars even agree that (5) at this time the disciples had real experiences that they believed were literal appearances of the risen Jesus. Because of these experiences, (6) the disciples were transformed from doubters who were afraid to identify themselves with Jesus to bold proclaimers of his death and Resurrection, even being willing to die for this belief. (7) This message was central in the early church preaching and (8) was especially proclaimed in Jerusalem, where Jesus had died shortly before.

As a result of this message, (9) the church was born and grew, (10) with Sunday as the primary day of worship. (11) James, the brother of Jesus and a skeptic, was converted to the faith when he also believed he saw the resurrected Jesus. (12) A few years later Paul the persecutor of Christians was also converted by an experience that he, similarly, believed to be an appearance of the risen Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Terry L. Miethe, ed., *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead: The Resurrection Debate, Gary Habermas and Antony Flew* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987), 19-20.



None of the alternative theories about the resurrection of Jesus can account for all these historical facts. In their book, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Josh and Sean McDowell examine the most popular alternative explanations and shows why they are inadequate.<sup>3</sup> Here are five theories often given to argue against the resurrection of Jesus. As you consider each of these theories notice where they fail to line up with the accepted historical facts.

**1. The Theft Theory**—This is the first theory that skeptics invented to explain away the resurrection (Matt. 28:11-15). The modern version says that the disciples stole the body of Jesus and made up all the stories about the appearances of the risen Christ. However, this theory fails to explain how the disciples were changed from doubters who were afraid to identify themselves with Jesus to bold proclaimers of the resurrection. It also fails to explain how Paul went from a persecutor of Christians to a believer willing to die for his faith.

**2. The Hallucination Theory**—This theory says the disciples were hallucinating when they saw the risen Christ. One of the problems with this theory is that it fails to explain the multiple appearances of the resurrected Christ by groups of people.

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<sup>3</sup> Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Life-Changing Truth for a Skeptical World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017), 275-300.

**3. The Wrong Tomb Theory**—This theory says that Jesus was dead and buried but the disciples went to the wrong tomb. Josh McDowell shows just how absurd this theory is when he writes,

To believe the “wrong tomb” theory, one would have to say that not only the women went to the wrong tomb, but Peter and John ran to the wrong tomb; that the Jews then went to the wrong tomb, followed by the Jewish Sanhedrin and the Romans. You would then have to say that the guard returned to the wrong tomb and that Joseph of Arimathea, the owner of the tomb, also went to the wrong grave.<sup>4</sup>

**4. The Substitution Theory**—This theory claims that Jesus was not really crucified. It was just someone who looked like Jesus. This is a common belief among Muslims. This theory did not exist until 600 years after the resurrection, and it completely ignores all the historical evidence for the death of Jesus. Several non-Christian sources from the first and second centuries, including Josephus, the Talmud, Tacitus, and Pliny the younger, confirm that Jesus died by crucifixion under Pontius Pilate. The substitution theory also fails to explain why those who were closest to Jesus were willing to endure severe persecution and death for the sake of a lie.

**5. The Swoon Theory**—This theory claims that Jesus did not actually die on the cross. He just fainted and later in the cool air of the tomb He woke up, rolled back the stone in front of the tomb, and then told His disciples that He rose from the dead. Imagine a man beaten and whipped by Roman guards, crucified with spikes through his wrists and his feet, hanging on a cross for six hours, and then pierced through the heart with a spear. In this theory, Jesus not only survives the whole ordeal, but He wakes up three days later with the strength to roll away large two-ton rock and enough energy to go on a 7-mile hike from Jerusalem to Emmaus. This explanation has no evidence to support it.

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<sup>4</sup> Josh McDowell, *The Resurrection Factor* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1981), 80.

The swoon theory also fails to recognize that the Roman guards were professional executioners. They always made sure their victims were dead before they took them off the cross. In the case of Jesus, they pierced His side with a spear and blood and water poured out indicating that He was already dead (John 19:33-35).

### **Skeptics Converted**

In the first century, we see stubborn skeptics and passionate persecutors changing their beliefs and becoming committed followers of the risen Christ. In Mark 3:21, the brothers of Jesus accused Him of being “out of His mind.” In John 7:5, it says that “even His own brothers did not believe in Him.” But after the resurrection both James and Jude become Christians and leaders in the early church. What could cause the brothers of Jesus to change from being unbelievers who thought that Jesus was crazy, to committed followers willing to die for their faith? It was the resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:7).

Paul was a persecutor of Christians until he saw the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus. Three times in the book of Acts and several times in his letters, Paul gives his testimony of how he was converted from being a persecutor of the church to being a firm believer and preacher of the Gospel. And he says it happened because he saw the resurrected Christ (1 Cor. 15:8-9).

### **Empty Tomb**

Most historians agree that the tomb was empty on Easter Sunday. The fact that Christianity began just fifty days after the resurrection in the very same city where Jesus was tried, put to death, and buried is proof that the tomb was empty. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood before thousands of people in Jerusalem and boldly proclaimed that God raised Jesus from the dead. He quoted Old Testament prophecies that predicted the resurrection of the Messiah (Acts 2:29-32).

## **New Life in Christ**

Only the resurrection of Jesus can explain the changes that took place in the lives of those first century Jewish Christians. These Jews were willing to change the traditions that they had been following for centuries. They went from animal sacrifice to believing that Christ was the final sacrifice. They went from going to a synagogue on the Sabbath to meeting with Christians on the first day of the week, because that was the day Jesus rose from the dead. They went from the practice of circumcision to the practice of baptism. They went from the Passover feast once a year to the Lord's Supper once a week. In addition to that, they were willing to be rejected, disowned, and even persecuted by their own families and Jewish communities.

The most convincing evidence we have for the resurrection is the new life we have in Christ. It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ that gives us the assurance of victory over sin (Rom. 6:1-4; 8:11). It is the resurrection of Jesus that gives us the assurance of being reunited with our loved ones who have gone on before us (1 Thess. 4:13-14). And it is the resurrection of Jesus that gives us the assurance of our future resurrection and eternal life (John 11:25).

## **Discussion Questions**

1. How important is the resurrection of Jesus to you personally? Why?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. What evidence Paul did give to convince his readers that Jesus really was risen from the dead?
3. How are the conversions of James (the brother of Jesus) and Paul strong evidence for the resurrection of Jesus?
4. Read Acts 2:22-32. What evidence did Peter give to convince his audience that Jesus really was risen from the dead?
5. How can our lives as Christians provide evidence for the resurrection of Jesus?