

Soon after Thomas Jefferson was elected president in 1800 he began editing a work that he hoped would demonstrate that he was, in fact, a Christian.

During the election his religious beliefs had been the subject of frequent attacks. In response to critics such as Alexander Hamilton, who went so far as to label Jefferson as an atheist Thomas Jefferson felt compelled to set the record straight. For Jefferson, the issue was not a lack of belief in the existence of God.

For Jefferson, the rejection was a rejection of the God of the Bible. Having been influenced by Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire, Jefferson came to view God as, just a watchmaker over creation who operated in and through the natural laws of matter and motion. Jefferson didn't believe that God would supernaturally intervene in human history through miracles.

And as a result, Jefferson therefore came to believe that many of the miracles recorded in the Bible had been added later as an effort to mislead or even control the public by the state churches. Acting on these beliefs, Thomas Jefferson, he quite literally took a razor and glue to the New Testament.

He removed he removed every account of supernatural miracles. The virgin birth? Snip. The feeding the 5,000? Snip. The resurrection? Removed. Over the course of roughly 20 years, Jefferson continued to chop away at the New Testament until a work that he entitled *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* was complete.

Years later, his work would become known as *The Jefferson Bible*. And just fun fact, *The Jefferson Bible* was actually given to every incoming U.S. congressman from the year 1904 until the mid-1950s Throughout his work, Jefferson presented Jesus as a profound moral teacher, but nothing more. There were no miracles, there were no angels, there was no victory.

There was only life lessons, moral teachings, and unfair tragedy. In fact, the last line in the *Jefferson Bible* reads like this: "Now, in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new sepulcher, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus, and rolled a great stone to the door of

the sepulcher, and departed."

The end. That's how the Jefferson Bible concludes. Although Jefferson's goal was to defend his Christianity by, by producing a version of the New Testament that was grounded in reason and moral philosophy, sadly, the only thing that Jefferson actually proved was that he simply was not a Christian at all. Because as Paul would make clear in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 that without the resurrection, there is no Christianity.

Paul says this in chapter 15 verse 14, **"And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain."**

Jumping ahead to verse 20, **"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead."**

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." Without the resurrection, there is no hope. There is no living hope. See, Thomas Jefferson, he attempted to accomplish the very thing that the chief priests and the Pharisees were unable to accomplish. He attempted to keep Jesus in the tomb. But whether Thomas Jefferson liked it or not, Jesus is alive.

Amen? Amen. Jesus rose from the dead. How many of us are thankful that Jesus is alive this morning?

How many of us are here this morning because Jesus is alive?

In fact, the reason that we gather every Sunday is because Jesus is alive. We no longer celebrate the Sabbath on Saturday because Jesus is alive.

He rose from the dead on the first day of the week, and so every time we gather together as the body of Christ, the church, the ecclesia gathered together, we are celebrating and witnessing to the fact that our Lord and Savior arose from the dead. And as heartbreaking as this might seem to learn about Thomas Jefferson, he is not the only person in history who has wrestled with believing some of the things that the Bible teaches.

He is certainly not the only one to search for the certainty that Jesus is alive. In fact, ever since the morning that Jesus did raise from the dead, there have been people who have wrestled with doubt and unbelief. Luke tells us that even the women who went in the tomb they were perplexed.

Even some of Jesus' closest followers, they seemed confused when they first saw that the tomb was empty. They thought someone stole the body

And maybe there's even someone who comes to your mind this morning who's close to you. Someone that you know who, who wrestles with wondering if they can believe what the Bible has to say Maybe there's someone in here this morning who came to church, to a local church on a Sunday morning, maybe it's 'cause it's what you grew up doing.

And maybe, it's the pattern of life that your parents kinda drilled into you that on Easter we, we get up and we go to church. It's what we're supposed to do But maybe you're sitting here this morning and you're wrestling with, " "You know, I don't know if I can, I don't know if I can really get into all this Jesus stuff.

I'm here, but I don't know what I really think about it I want you to know that you're not the only one, and I also want you to know that I'm really glad that you're here this morning. I'm really thankful that you chose to come See, because what we're gonna talk about this morning is that it is possible to prove with observable, verifiable facts that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, that he is alive.

It is possible to prove this. See, one of the biggest struggles that people today have with believing in the resurrection or even believing in Jesus altogether is they feel as if, they feel as if the Bible is trying to ask them to just step out in blind faith. And people think, " , "Well, I don't know if I can...

I don't know if I can really step out in blind faith. I wanna see it before I believe it." You're not the only one to think that. Thomas thought the same thing, one of Jesus' disciples. He thought to himself, it's not that I'm saying I'm unwilling to believe, but guys, I gotta see some evidence first."

And so some people they wrestle with feeling as if the Bible's asking them to just place their eternity on some unknown fact, some blind faith. But guys, I wanna be clear that the Bible never asks you To trust in the resurrection of Jesus based on

blind faith alone The Bible actually provides historical verifiable evidence to the truth that Jesus is alive.

In fact, Dr. Luke, in his two-volume work in the Bible we call volume one the Book of Luke, we call volume two the Book of Acts. All right?

Dr. Luke, in his two-volume work, he introduced the Book of Luke like this. He's writing to Theophilus and he's telling Theophilus that what he's about to read is actually a thoroughly researched historical record of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ according to the eyewitness accounts of the people who were there.

See, we have to remember a little bit about Luke's setting. Luke is a travel companion with Paul. Paul has this gospel ministry to the nations. Luke is traveling around with Paul, and I personally am somewhat convicted about the fact that it's while Paul is held prisoner there possibly maybe in Caesarea Philippi, that Luke is kinda traveling around and he's gaining eyewitness evidence.

Why? Because up to this point, the gospel that they've been carrying around is the one that Matthew had written, and they're going around they're sharing the Word of God. They're preaching. They're testifying to the truth that Jesus is alive. And Luke decides that, it's time to compile a list of eyewitness evidence that we can take even to the nations so that all will believe what's going on here.

And so I believe that Luke begins going around and he's asking questions. Luke is the very first 60 Minutes interviewer. He's asking questions, he's taking notes, he's talking to people who were there. Two, three witnesses, four witnesses at a time. He's working through. I'm certain he talked to Romans, he talked to Jewish people.

He, he's just he's a reporter. He's getting information and he's writing it down. See, but he tells Theophilus that he's brought together this eyewitness evidence so that he might provide Theophilus with certainty concerning the things about which he had been taught Luke says that he wrote so that we might have certainty concerning the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And then at the beginning of volume two, Luke introduces us to the fact that, one of the ways that we can have certainty is because after Jesus rose from the dead, that he presented himself to others with infallible proofs of his resurrection And so if you are here this morning, first of all, thank you.

Welcome to Westside Fellowship. But if you are here this morning and you're possibly wrestling with or questioning, asking the question of, "Okay, you've got my attention. What evidence is there that Jesus is alive?" That's what we're gonna look at this morning. All right, in order to get a robust understanding, we're actually gonna go through the events that transpired there on Resurrection Sunday.

We're gonna begin in Mark. We're gonna flip all throughout, and we're probably laying in Luke the longest, so if you have your Bibles and you wanna turn to Luke, that's great. But we're gonna flip between all four of the Gospels, and we're gonna seek to harmonize them to the best of our abilities. This is what we see in Mark 16:1.

"When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint Him," talking about Jesus. "And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?'"

All right, let's stop right there, and let's kinda get a little context, right? Once again I'm assuming that all of you guys know what we're talking about as I start in Mark 16, so just in case someone's not up to speed with what's going on, let me explain. All right Jesus had an earthly ministry for about three years.

All right? During this earthly ministry, He made some pretty audacious claims, right? He said some stuff that really turned some people's attention to pay a- to, to wonder, who is this man and why is He saying these things? All right? During this time, He actually validated a lot of these claims. He validated all of these claims, rather, by performing miracles.

All right? We always see that God's word, God's message, and God's messenger are always validated by miracles in the Bible. In fact, that's the purpose of

miracles is to validate God's message and validate God's messenger. All right, so Jesus comes and He's saying some really audacious things and He selects 12 men to, to follow Him, to be his disciples.

And so they do. They follow Him. They're learning as His apprentices. In the meantime, other people begin to follow Him also. Some of them are in it just because they like to eat. They like the bread and the fish and the parties, and so when things get hard, they kinda turn away and go elsewhere.

But the others, they actually get it. They stay in and they follow Jesus. Then ultimately, Jesus has made the Sadducees, who are over the temple, and the Pharisees, who are over the rural areas, the synagogues, Jesus has offended them so greatly that they conspire together to find that they have to put this man to death, right?

No longer can they allow this man to go around saying what He's saying. So the Sadducees, who are in political cahoots with the Romans, they actually come up with this plan, "We need to have Him killed. He needs to be crucified." Why crucifixion? We're gonna talk about that in a moment. So they go to Pilate and they ultimately they bring Jesus on, put Him on trial.

They bring Him before Pilate, and they accuse Him of sedition against Rome. Seditious at that time would be crucified. So in fact- Jesus was crucified. He was tried, he was scourged, he was beaten, he was crucified. And after his death, two men from the Sanhedrin, who is the kind of the religious leaders in Israel the council.

Think of them like the Supreme Court, but they would've been Supreme Court members in Israel at that time. Two members, a- they actually got it. They loved Jesus. Once, o- one guy was by the name of Joseph of Arimathea, the other was by the name of Nicodemus. And see, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, they took Jesus' body down from the cross, and they went and laid him in a tomb that Joseph had recently acquired.

Joseph was a pretty wealthy man. He had recently acquired this tomb, and i- we had all the preparations made. Jesus I'm certain, ha- had him and encouraged him making these preparations along the way. So now the body of Jesus has been brought down from the cross, and Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, they

wrap Jesus' body and they lay him in the tomb A great stone is rolled across the entrance, not to keep Jesus locked in there because He's dead, but to prevent grave robbers from getting in.

All right, that's something you have to consider at that time in history. And see, they had to work quickly because Jesus is crucified on a Friday. And see, the way that the Jewish calendar works is that the next day begins at sundown on the previous day. So by the time the sun set on Friday, it would then be Saturday.

And something that you need to know about Jewish culture is that Jewish people, they observe something called the Sabbath, right? God had instructed them to observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. So they would do no work on the Sabbath. So whatever that these men were going to accomplish, they had to get it done on Friday.

They had to wrap Jesus' body, they had to lay Him in the tomb, they had to have the stone rolled over, they had to be out of there by Friday before sundown because the Sabbath began once the sun went down. See, we actually learn in Matthew and Luke, they give us these tidbits of information that the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee, see, they were there.

They were there sitting across the way, kinda looking at Joseph and Nicodemus laying Jesus' body in the tomb. See they were witnesses. They saw it. But because time was running out on Friday, they didn't have enough time to actually anoint Jesus' body with the odor-preventing ointments and aromatic fragrances as you normally would in that culture for a dead body that is going to begin to decay.

They didn't have time to anoint His body, so they had to go back home in mourning and in preparation, preparing all of the ointments and different things, and they were waiting for the first day of the week so that they could come back to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. See, something I need for you all to consider right now is that even these women at that time did not expect for Jesus to rise from the dead.

Why else would you anoint a dead man's body with odor-preventing ointments unless you thought He was going to lay there and decay? They didn't expect for him to rise from the dead, not at this time And so then Saturday is over and the

next day, the dawn of the first day of the week, while it's still dark...

Y'all, y'all know that scene, the sun is just popping up, but it's still really dark outside. They set out. They set out from where they were staying. The women set out for the tomb to go and anoint the body of Jesus. And as they were on their way to the tomb, they were having a conversation, Mark tells us, about who will roll away the stone from the grave.

That's a great question. A- as these ladies are walking to the tomb, they're wondering, "How in the world are we going to get in? We were watching as Joseph and Nicodemus laid Jesus' body in the tomb, and we saw the stone rolled in front of this tomb. We can't move the stone. How are we gonna get in to anoint his body?"

See, there's something else that happened that the women didn't understand yet either. See, there's a piece of information that Matthew gives us as we're harmonizing all of this, that at some point in the morning hours, maybe it was before these women had left or maybe it was even while they were on their way.

Remember, the tomb wasn't right next door to where they were staying. This is a pretty good walk. That there was an earthquake and an angel of the Lord, he descended and rolled the stone out of the way See, they're wondering who's gonna roll the stone out of the way, but see, they didn't know that the stone had been rolled away And now, for someone who's here a- and might be just a little bit skeptical about me talking about angels and the supernatural...

if I've told you that we're gonna prove the resurrection of Jesus, certainly I'm not gonna just talk about angels and the supernatural, 'cause then you're gonna ask me how can you even prove that?" Okay? So that's where we go to eyewitnesses, and we go to eyewitnesses that certainly would not have lied about the matter because they weren't even followers of Jesus.

I'm not talking about the women, I'm not talking about Peter and John, I'm talking about Roman soldiers. See, something else that happened on the Sabbath while the women and Peter and John, the disciples, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea after Jesus' body had been laid in the tomb and the Jewish people go and they're all resting on the Sabbath.

I'm certain that Jesus' closest followers were mourning, they were fearing, they were wondering, "What has just happened?" They're grieving. See, the chief priests actually take it upon themselves to go to Pilate. You see the chief priests, they go to Pilate a- and they tell Pilate, I'm paraphrasing, but they say, Pilate

That guy Jesus, he was saying a lot of stuff about the fact that he was gonna die and that he was gonna rise from the dead on the third day. See Jesus talked about that numerous times as you read throughout the gospel records. And see, even though they did not believe that Jesus was Messiah, they were a little bit nervous about the fact that, This guy's done a lot of stuff that's kinda been impressive.

Just what if? Just what if? So they asked Pilate, they said, "Hey, Pilate, here's what w- here's what we're asking. Just in case this guy does in fact rise from the dead, hey, can we actually send some Roman soldiers to go guard the tomb?" See, this happened on Saturday. This is after the tomb had been sealed.

The women would not have known this. As they're asking who's gonna roll the stone away, they wouldn't have known there, there were even guards there. So Pilate tells them, he's "You know what, guys, I'm kinda dire- tired of fooling with you guys. Y- y'all have been a big thorn in my side. You've got guards, right?

You're the s- you're the Sadducees. You have temple guards. Go set the guard yourself." He says, "But I'll authorize it," right? Because he gives him he gives them his seal, and so they go and they set a guard a- and the door the stone that's rolled across the opening to the tomb it's sealed, right?

And what that means is i- in this culture, in the Roman culture, there was like a soft clay that would be placed that a small object like a ring or some other signet would be placed into the clay, and it would mark the seal of the governor, of the emperor, or whomever was in charge, the authority.

It's kinda like us sending registered mail today, right? And just like it's still the same for us, if we open someone else's registered mail, that's a felony. You can't do that. In the same way if you were to break the seal of a Roman authority, and you're not the authorized person to break the seal, look, you're liable potentially up to penalty of death.

It's an authorization that the tomb is closed, there's a guard set, and it has been sealed. And it's so important that we understand that happened on Saturday because this is what we see in Matthew 28:2, "Behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.

His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow, and for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men." At some point in the morning while the ladies were walking to the tomb, maybe even before they left the house, an angel of the Lord came and he took this stone that, that would've taken many men to set in place, and he just kinda kicked it out of the way like a pebble, and he just sat on it like you sit on the edge of the dock fishing.

Just kinda, I imagine, just kinda kicking his legs, whistling the Andy Griffith tune.

But see the guards, this is the point that we don't need to miss. The Roman soldiers were eyewitnesses because look at what happens in verse 11. Some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, "Tell people his disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.

And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So they took the money and did as they were directed, and the story has been spread among the Jews to this day. Matthew's talking about in his time when he's writing this. I want you to see what happens to eyewitnesses, the Roman soldiers, those who were not followers of Jesus.

The Roman soldiers went and told the chief priests, "Hey guys, there's been a change of plans." We were keeping guard and this supernatural figure, he came and yeah, he broke the seal, and he moved the stone out of the way. And the body's not in the tomb and at this point, the chief priests are kinda like ah, what do we do?"

And to show the hardness of heart of rebellion, rather than believing that maybe Jesus was telling the truth, they say let's figure out a way to cover it up." Politicians never lie, do they? Let's figure out a way to cover it up And so he says, "I tell you what, tell people that his disciples came by night and stole him away

while we were asleep."

Now, this is preposterous on two claims. First of all, we're not talking about two, two soldiers standing by a stone like we used to see in Sunday school on the flannelgraph with a cardboard sword. That's not what we're talking about, okay? We're talking about a, possibly a battalion, but at least an entourage.

We're talk- we're talking about a lot of people, okay? maybe 20, maybe 30, maybe 15. I don't know, but it's more than one. It's more than two certainly. All right, if you think that the number-one seditionist in the Roman Empire might be stolen out of his tomb, you're sending more than one or two guys, okay?

So the simple thought that all of them fall asleep and don't keep their watch over the tomb, that is absurd, especially when falling asleep on someone's post could be penalized by pain of death. At the minimum, they're gonna lose their career. Probably, they're gonna lose their life They didn't go to sleep.

The second reason this is preposterous is that if they did go to sleep, how did they know that Jesus' disciples stole the body? They were sleeping. Y- you know what I'm saying? That doesn't even make sense. But nevertheless, whatever amount of money that was offered to them, it was enough to do the trick.

Perhaps the chief priests were like look. I know we're asking you a big one but listen here. We will take care of you for the rest of your lives. You will never have to work again. Welcome to retirement. Name your price, we've got it. Blank check here. Fill it out. And if the governor finds out what's happened, guys, we got that.

We will take care of this. We will smooth everything over. You guys just go and tell everyone that you messed up and that his disciples stole the body."

See, that brings us to something else that we have to understand is that if they're making up this lie that the disciples stole the body, do you know what that means? It means that the body wasn't in the tomb. And more than just the women and Peter and John and the followers of Jesus saw that.

See, the Roman soldiers saw that. The chief priests saw that. They were willing to, they were willing to bet their lives on the bribe for this. They knew that the body was gone. See, not only do we have eyewitness testimony, historical eyewitness

testimony of people who were not Christians, we have eyewitness testimony to the fact that the tomb was actually empty And so now we pick up and the ladies ha- have left the house.

It's Sunday morning and they're coming, and they're coming towards the tomb. They're walking towards the tomb. They're making their way. A- and they look up. Mark 16:4 tells us they look up, "And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back and it was very large." All right, now I imagine, and I'll explain why.

I imagine that at this point that Mary Magdalene, she sees that the stone has been rolled back an- and she just stops and kinda turns on her sandals and she takes off, "I gotta tell, I gotta tell Peter and John that, that the stone's rolled away. Somebody broke into the tomb.

Somebody stole the body of Jesus." See, the reason that I think that is because by the time we look at John chapter 20, it says Mary Magdalene rushed up to John and Peter and says, "They've taken the body of our Lord. Come and see." So I think perhaps Mary Magdalene had already turned before they had this little conversation with the angel.

But if she had not, if she was there, then she's just having a hard time really processing what's going on because this has been a big day. It's been a long 72 hours in her life. But I think that the women are walking up and they're beginning to see in the distance... It's not that they're standing right over top of the tomb at this point.

They begin to see the stone's rolled away, and they know, and I think she turned, and I think she took off. But the angel, Matthew 28 tells us that the women as they proceeded, the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He's not here, for he is risen as he said.

Come, see the place where he lay." Luke 24 verse 3: "But when they went in, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this..." They were confused. What? "Behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel, and as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, 'Why do you seek the living among the dead?

He's not here, but is risen. Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful man and be crucified and on the third day rise?" The angel said, "Ladies, he told you this was gonna happen." How many of us from time to time need to be reminded that God knows what he's doing, and that we can trust his word?

I can trust His word because He is faithful to keep His word. And that's what we see right here. Once again, it just blows my mind that the New Testament is absolutely clear in establishing that even some of Jesus' closest followers simply did not believe the prophecies about Jesus concerning His own resurrection. And we see that the women, when they went back and told when they went back and told, we see this in Luke 24:8, they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all these things to the 11 and to all the rest.

So certainly there's even more than just the 11 that we know about. But look at verse 11 of Luke 24, "But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them." Even when the closest followers of Jesus heard that his body was not in the tomb, they thought, "What? No. H- how long have you girls been awake?

Ah no, that, it doesn't make any sense. No." This is silly. They were skeptical. But see, in the meantime, once again, I believe that Mary Magdalene had already arrived at Peter and John, and I think they took off. We see this in John 20:3. So Peter went out with the other disciple.

May, may, maybe it's following this when the women showed up. I wasn't there, so I'm, we're trying to put together the timeline here. Either way, they heard this. They're a little bit skeptical. Peter and John, they take off. So Peter went out with the other disciple, John 20, and they were going toward the tomb.

All right, the other disciple is John. He's the one writing this book. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first, right? Simple plug there that he's faster. And stooping in, stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.

All right? So John and Peter they hear Mary Magdalene says, "Hey they've taken the body of the Lord. The tomb is empty." Peter and John take off running. John's a little bit faster. He's younger. He- he's a little more athletic. He gets there

first. He stoops in 'cause the entrance of the tomb is lower.

He stoops in, he looks, and he sees that the body is not there And then Simon Peter came, and following him, he went into the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth which had been on Jesus's head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded up in a place by itself. So see Peter just comes busting on up in the tomb.

He didn't care about being defiled. He didn't care about getting unclean or anything like that. He just goes right in, in typical Peter fashion, and he looks, and he sees the body's not there, but the grave cloths are still lying where they were. But not the face cloth not the napkin that they used to wrap his face.

No. It's actually folded, laying somewhere else. So somebody's been in here. Somebody's been moving around But it's hard to imagine that thieves came and stole the body because the cloths are still lying there and they're still in the same place where they were when Jesus was wrapped in them.

And if someone had stole the body, certainly they would've just picked up the whole body with the cloths and everything and ran. And certainly they wouldn't have taken time to stop and do some laundry. Fold the face napkin and lay it down. Highly unlikely

And so the other disciple, verse eight, who had reached the tomb first, ha-ha wink punch, I'm faster than you, Peter, also went in and he saw and believed. See, Peter goes in and he's kinda looking around and he's a little bit perplexed. John goes in. This word believe is pisteuo. It's the same word translated as faith.

John, I believe, John was saved at that moment He walked in, he saw, bam. Jesus is Lord. Jesus is alive. Jesus has risen from the dead. Jesus is Messiah. He believed. He saw the evidence and believed. For as yet they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes But then something really amazing happens.

All this has been amazing, but something really special happens. See, I think that when Mary came to tell Peter and John that that they've, someone's stolen our Lord's body. It's not in the tomb. The body is gone, and Peter and John took off running. I think that Mary, very winded after getting to Peter and John quickly,

that she turned around and she starts tailing it right behind Peter and John, but she can't get there quite as quick.

She's already been back and forth, and she's worn out, and she's tired and she's just exhausted. And so Peter and John, we have this scene with them in John 20. I think they go in, and they look around, and they see the stuff going on, and then they leave. And they have to get back 'cause they gotta tell everybody else that Jesus is alive.

Jesus is not in the tomb. And then I think Mary, after they've left and they've gone, I think Mary is just kinda getting back to the tomb, and she stops outside the door, and she starts weeping

She just starts weeping. She's exhausted, guys. It's been a long 72 hours

Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head, one at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" I believe that to kinda give us the context here, I believe this woman it's like ma'am.

Ma'am, why are you crying, ma'am?" She said to them they've taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they've laid Him." Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she didn't know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her ma'am, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you've laid Him, and I'll take Him away." And Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni," which means teacher. Jesus said to her, "Don't cling to me. Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.

But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and that he had said these things to her Put yourselves there. Put yourselves in Mary's shoes She's weeping outside the tomb, and she probably has to draw up the courage and the strength to look in.

And remember she watched as Joseph and Nicodemus wrapped His- Jesus' body and laid Him in the tomb And so she has to draw up the strength even just to glance in and see where Jesus once had lain

And as she looks in there's two angels and they say ma'am, why are you crying?" But I want you to notice this. She tells them, "I'm crying 'cause they've taken my Lord. I don't know where they've laid Him." But notice the angels don't respond. They don't answer I think it's because right after they've said, "Ma'am, why are you crying?"

That Jesus walks out right behind her. And I think the angels see him standing there, and they're thinking, "Oh, this is gonna get good. This is about to get good." She says, they've taken my Lord. I don't know where they've lain Him." And the angels, I imagine they're just kinda looking back.

And Jesus says, "Mary." She turns around and she doesn't know it's Him. She thinks it's the gardener. But then when it clicks, I imagine she lunges forward and wraps Him up and just grabs Him. "Lord Jesus, Teacher." May- maybe she's like the other women that we see in Matthew later that, that they just grab His feet, grab His ankles.

May- maybe she just dove right at His feet and wrapped up His feet. "Lord." And I think that's why Jesus says, "But don't cling to me now, Mary. I've got other work to do. I'm going to the Father to intercede on your behalf. You've got work to do, too, and we're gonna find out a little bit later. But don't worry, 'cause the promise of the Father is coming and the Holy Spirit is coming to indwell you to carry out all that I have commanded you to."

See, when we read this text it's really kinda harsh that she's "Teacher," and Jesus is like, "Don't cling to me." I don't think it's like this initial response. He is a compassionate and gracious Lord. I imagine, this is me, but I imagine that he just let her have a minute, weeping, falling on Jesus.

"Come to me, all who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." She just stands there holding onto Jesus, weeping. And I believe it's a few minutes even that pass, and he just gently says, "But Mary, don't cling to me now."

I'll be on Earth for a little while longer, but I still have work to do "Remember I said I'm going to prepare a place for you, and where I am, you'll be with me. I'm coming back. Don't worry, I'm coming back

And it's not just Mary who saw Jesus. On that same day, the Bible tells us that the other women who had arrived with Mary at the tomb, they too would see Jesus. They would take hold of His feet and worship Him. Two disciples traveling to Emmaus, they would see Jesus, and Jesus would unpack to them all of the Old Testament scriptures regarding Him and His death and His resurrection.

Jesus would appear to Simon Peter on that same day. We don't have an account of this in the text, but Luke tells us that it's on that day that He appears to Peter. And in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul also says He appeared to Peter and then to the 12. F-15, I'm sorry, 1 Corinthians 15:5. On that same day, Jesus appears to the astonished disciples.

Minus, minus Thomas. Thomas wasn't there, not this time, but Thomas will see Him later And so we clearly see the testimony of the personal encounters with the resurrected Jesus And over the next 40 days, Jesus will continue to appear to many people In fact, that's why at Westside b- beginning today and next week, we're starting a sermon series entitled The Fif- 50 Days That Changed the World.

We're gonna look at the 40 days that Jesus was on Earth, and then we're gonna look at that 10 that, that they all waited for the Holy Spirit to come and the church to be born See, Paul tells us in First Corinthians 15 that Jesus appeared to a lot of people in the next 40 days. He says this, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas," that's Peter.

"That he appeared to Cephas, then to the 12, then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time," very possibly when he gave the Great Commission, right? "Most of whom are still alive," Paul says. If you don't believe me, just go ask them. "Though some have fallen asleep," verse seven. "Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me," Paul says, "for I am least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the

church." And so we see very clearly from the text of scripture that we have eyewitness evidence, we have clear evidence of an empty tomb, and we have evidence of personal encounters that people had with a resurrected Jesus.

Thomas Jefferson just couldn't seem to grasp that. So since he couldn't make sense of the fact that there's no way to deny the supernatural, he decided to just cut it out of the Bible. Let's just remove it so I don't have to deal with it

However, if we simply take the evidence, if we simply take the evidence in a, what I'm gonna call a minimal facts argument We can prove with historical, objective, verifiable fact that Jesus Christ is alive

Follow me. Four things that I want you to consider are these. First, Jesus died, okay? That's undeniable. It's undeniable that Jesus died. How do you ask? How do you say that, you might ask. Jesus was crucified. See, that's an essential detail because no one survived a Roman crucifixion. The Persians had invented crucifixion, the Romans had perfected it No one came down from the cross alive, period.

Which is why when the day was drawing to an end on Friday and some of the religious leaders went to Pilate and went to, to, yeah, to Pilate and the Romans, and they were complaining saying, "Hey, we need to get these guys down from the cross 'cause we don't want to defile the Sabbath," the order was given, "All right, fine.

Go break their legs so they can suffocate faster and we can get them out of here. You guys can get on with the Sabbath. That's fine." It wasn't an option to take them down and say, "We'll re-crucify them." No, sirree. No one came down from the cross still alive, period. That is a historical fact known to both Chri- both Christian and non-Christian scholars.

No one survived a Roman crucifixion because the point of a crucifixion was to minimize future sedition against the Roman Empire. They didn't just wanna kill somebody. They wanted to make a point. Do you see?

So the Roman soldiers go to break Jesus' legs, but they realize that he's already dead. So they drive a spear into his side and out comes blood and water verifying that he is dead and fulfilling the prophecy that not a bone would be broken. They

did not break his legs because he was already dead. Then consider this.

When Joseph of Arimathea goes to Pilate and asks for Jesus' body, Pilate-- Mark tells us this, that Pilate's "Is he dead already? Really? How did he die so quickly? This is normally a really long and slow process." So Pilate actually sends a centurion to go verify the facts 'cause they wanna be sure that Joseph of Arimathea's not pulling something over on him.

So Pilate sends a soldier to go check, and the centurion comes back and says, "Yeah, he's dead." Pilate's okay. Sure. Take his body down. Do what you want to." Jesus was dead. Jesus died. Do not pay attention to anyone that tries to assert that Jesus just got weak and passed out and woke up in the grave three days later and had the strength to roll the stone away by himself and undress himself and walk out.

Come on. I stump my toe, I'm out for three days. Four, maybe. I go through what Jesus went through, ain't no way that less than 72 hours I'm getting up and I'm CrossFitting that thing Just think about it. It's illogical. Doesn't make sense. Jesus died. Secondly, Jesus was buried in a tomb. Fact, Jesus was buried in a tomb.

How do I know this? 'Cause J- both Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two well-respected men of the Sanhedrin, they laid him there. Had Jesus not been buried in the tomb those boys have to explain something

We know that Jesus was buried in a tomb because several of the other women saw where they laid him. We know that Jesus was buried in a tomb because the chief priests were concerned that someone might rob that tomb. We know that Jesus was buried in a tomb because Pilate allowed the chief priests to send the temple guard to post at the tomb.

Pilate allowed them to seal the tomb with his seal. It is without a fact that not only Jesus died, but Jesus was buried in a tomb, period. Some people claim they just went to the wrong tomb." Really? All these Roman soldiers went to just the wrong tomb? Whoops. It's like a pretty big mistake. What do you think?

The angels showed up at the wrong tomb? Ah, come on. I think they've got a better GPS than that Eh, it wasn't the wrong tomb. No, Jesus was buried in a

tomb. Jesus was buried in that tomb. Third, Jesus' tomb was found empty on the third day. Undeniable fact. How in the world do you say that's a fact?

I'm gonna go back to the eyewitnesses of the Roman soldiers. It is an undeniable fact because they would've had no dog in the fight to try to keep a lie together that Jesus was not in the tomb. Why would they do that? By keeping a lie that Jesus was not in the tomb, they are literally putting their lives on the line.

No. That's why they went back to the chief priest and said, "Guys we got a problem. We have a problem. We were standing there, and an angel showed up and broke the seal of Pilate. He completely disrespected Caesar, and when the stone was rolled away, guys, the body wasn't in there." How do I know that they knew that the body wasn't in there?

Because the whole lie that was made up was to tell people the body was stolen. They knew that the tomb was empty because they saw it. The chief priests knew that the tomb was empty because they tried to cover it up. Peter and John knew that the tomb was empty because they saw it, and the women knew that the tomb was empty because they saw it.

Some people have tried to claim that perhaps Jesus' disciples did steal His body. Okay, I find it very hard to believe that if a small group of people conspired to steal the body of a man who claimed to be God, that for then the next 2,000 years you would have people dying readily over the truth that Jesus is alive.

Somebody's gonna crack at some point. That's the way it goes, is you got two kids at school, one of them stole somebody else's Bubble Gum, and you're trying to find a snitch, and you ain't gonna get the snitch. That is until you say, "I'm gonna call your mama." "Oh, Johnny did it. Don't call Mama."

No, man. People don't get burned alive over a made-up story. Some people say that then his followers didn't steal it but other people stole it." Guys, the body of Jesus is the highest commodity on the face of the planet. You don't think it would've been produced up to this point? You don't think somebody would've come forward and said yep.

There it is"? It's never been produced. The tomb was empty. The last minimal fact is that Jesus was seen. He was encountered physically by multiple eyewitnesses

after the resurrection. He was seen. He was touched. He ate some fish He interacted with people in only the way that a physical person can

He appeared to Mary Magdalene, the other women, to Peter, two disciples, 10 disciples without Thomas, to the 11 again later. He appeared to the seven beside the Sea of Galilee. He appeared to over 500 believers at once. He appeared even to two of his enemies One was his brother James, his half-brother James.

James wasn't a follower of Jesus, not while Jesus was alive. John 7 tells us that. John 7 makes very clear that Jesus' half-brothers were like, "Bro, stop calling yourself the Messiah. It's getting on my nerves." Y'all know how if you have siblings, you know how brothers are

But then something changed in James. What changed? For a man who grew up with Jesus as his half-brother, certainly getting annoyed at Jesus walking around, to then flip-flop and become the elder of the church in Jerusalem and write the book that we call James, something happened in that man's life.

Paul tells us that he saw his brother alive after he had seen his brother executed. That'll change a man, won't it? And then there's Paul. There's Saul of Tarsus, a man who hated Jesus. He was a Pharisee of Pharisees, a Benjaminite. According to the law, he's blameless. Persecuted those who believed in Jesus.

Something happened that changed that man. And we see in Acts chapter 9 that it says he's on his way to Damascus, that Jesus shows up to him and he sees the risen Savior and his life changes on the spot. Jesus not only showed up to his followers, he showed up to two of his enemies, and Paul became the most prolific missionary and church planter in church history

See, throughout his ministry, Jesus said a lot of things that couldn't necessarily be fact-checked. Here's what we have to remember. He made a lot of relatively audacious claims, if you will To be the Son of God? What? To have the ability to forgive sin? What? Destroy this temple and on the third day it'll raise from the dead.

What?

"Bro, that's audacious for you to say that." Yeah, it is audacious to say that until He walks on water, and feeds 5,000, and heals the blind, and heals the lame and cleanses lepers. Oh, and then comes back to life Oh, you have a point, sir. I see what you've been saying. Son of God. Okay. I got you

See, it is undeniable that Jesus rose from the dead And it can be proven through historical, objective, verifiable fact. Which means that for someone to choose not to believe that Jesus is alive then that's a choice it's not because you've not had the facts presented to you. I just presented them to you It's because perhaps you're just choosing not to stand face to face with the Lord Jesus Christ and realize that if Jesus is alive, then that means that everything he said is true.

Yep, you're right Because Jesus lives, God's word is very true. It's accurate in all things. Every dot and iota will be fulfilled If Jesus is alive, boy, that means I, I should probably start doing things a little bit different, huh? Yeah

But the biggest thing that we need to understand is that if Jesus is alive, then that means that He truly is the Son of God. That means that He truly did come to pay for sin, and that means that He truly is coming back And see, now we have another decision to make Not only do I believe that Jesus is alive But will I therefore then trust that his death on the cross actually did pay for my sin?

and allow me the opportunity to be reconciled back to a God who desires a relationship with me

Because Jesus is alive, it means that we truly can have forgiveness of sin by grace through faith alone, in Christ alone Guys, if Jesus is alive, that should change everything about your life. But I'm not gonna say if, I'm gonna say because. Because the facts are there. Because Jesus is alive, that changes everything.

Do we understand that? It changes my purpose in life. It changes the way I interact with my wife. It changes the way I parent my kids. It changes the way I, I do stuff at work. It changes the way I talk to other people 'cause it changes my whole life to recognize that even death in itself has no power over Jesus Christ.

And to think that someone who is in Christ, such as I Likewise needs not to fear even death That changes everything There's an old hymn that we used to sing at church when I was growing up on Easter Sunday. It goes like this: He lives. Christ

Jesus lives today. He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.

He lives, salvation to impart. You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart And my prayer is that each and every one of you can say the exact same thing before you leave here this morning. Amen? Let's pray as the band comes forward. Heavenly Father, God, thank you. Lord, thank you for your graciousness.

God, thank you for your loving kindness. God, I'm so thankful for the truth of your Word, that we have your Word, that we know your Word. God, I'm so thankful that we can know for certain that Jesus is alive, and that changes everything

God, I pray that if there's anyone here this morning, honestly, who has just come to church, just kinda walked in, God, I pray that you're working in their heart. God, maybe for the first time they, they heard in a convincing way where they think, "You know what? There really might be something to this."

God, my prayer is that they not only see that there is something to this, but that they see that if this means anything at all, that this means everything If there is any truth to this, then this means our absolute and total surrender. God, and because that this, because this is true, God, then I pray that we will be a people surrendered unto you

God, if someone in here is yearning to know you, God, would they see that all that they have to do is trust that when Jesus Christ died, that He died for them. He paid for their sin. But that He didn't stay dead. That He rose from the dead unto life, and because He lives, we too might live through Him

God, would they see that this morning all, all that is required to be reconciled to you is to trust in your Son, whom you offered as a sacrifice in our place, and whom you rose from the dead to verify that his payment of sin was enough. God, would they be so bold as to pray this morning, "God, forgive me.

Forgive me for rejecting you for so long. Forgive me of my sin, oh Lord." God, I trust that Jesus has died for me and that He rose from the dead. God, save me from my sin.

God, teach me to walk in the newness of life that is mine in Christ Jesus, because I believe that Jesus is alive and that He's my Savior

Oh God, we love you God, we thank You, we praise You. In the name of Christ, we all said amen