

## THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

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### *About the author...*

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Some of us put so much emphasis on the death of Christ that we neglect His resurrection. Without the resurrection of Christ, the gospel is nothing. Without the resurrection of Christ there would be no need for the church. Without the resurrection of Christ, we would never be able to spend eternity with God. But I'm here today to tell you that Jesus Christ lived, died and was resurrected from the dead by the power of God, and is now sitting at the right hand of the Father!

### **The Significance of the Resurrection of Christ**

I am going to touch on a few points of this great theme. This is a simple, straightforward message. What does it mean for us? Everything! Several texts prove this point, but none so eloquently as 1 Corinthians 15:20-26:

*But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.*

If Christ has not risen from the dead, the long course of God's redemptive acts to save His people ends in a dead-end street, in a tomb. If the resurrection of Christ is not reality, then we have no assurance that God is the *living* God, for death has the last word. Faith is futile because the object of that faith has not vindicated Himself as the Lord of life. Christian faith is then incarcerated in the tomb along with the final and highest self-revelation of God in Christ—if Christ is indeed dead. But if Christ is raised from the dead, then God is over all things, even death.

### ***The Resurrection of Jesus as Fulfillment of Jesus' Predictions and of Scripture***

(cf. Matthew 17:9; Luke 24:46; John 2:22; 20:9; 1 Corinthians 15:4)

Again, several texts point in this direction. Note one in particular, John 2:22;

*“When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.”*

After many hours of studying this subject, I have come to the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is either one of the most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever conceived, or it is the most remarkable fact of history.

### **Some of the Facts Relevant to the Resurrection**

Jesus of Nazareth, a Jewish prophet who claimed to be the Christ prophesied in the Jewish Scriptures, was arrested, was judged a political criminal, and was crucified. Three days after His death and burial, some women who went to His tomb found the body gone. In subsequent weeks, His disciples claimed that God had raised Him from the dead and that He appeared to them various times before ascending into heaven. From that foundation, Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire and has continued to exert great influence down through the centuries.

### **Living Witnesses Testified of the Resurrection of Jesus**

The New Testament accounts of the resurrection were being circulated within the lifetimes of men and women alive at the time of the resurrection. Those people could certainly have confirmed or denied the accuracy of such accounts.

The writers of the four accounts of the gospel either had themselves been witnesses or else were relating the accounts of eyewitnesses of the actual events. In advocating their case for the gospel, a word that means “good news,” the apostles appealed (even when confronting their most severe opponents) to common knowledge concerning the facts of the resurrection.

### **Background of the Resurrection of Jesus**

The New Testament witnesses were fully aware of the background against which the resurrection took place. According to Josh McDowell, the body of Jesus, in accordance with Jewish burial custom, was wrapped in a linen cloth. About 100 pounds of aromatic spices, mixed together to form a gummy substance, were applied to the wrappings of cloth about the body. After the body was placed in a solid rock tomb, an extremely large stone was rolled against the entrance of the tomb. Large stones weighing approximately two tons were normally rolled (by means of levers) against a tomb entrance. A Roman guard of strictly disciplined fighting men was stationed to guard the tomb. This guard affixed on the tomb the Roman seal, which was meant to prevent any attempt at vandalizing the sepulcher. Anyone trying to move the stone from the tomb’s entrance would have broken the seal and thus incurred the wrath of Roman law (89).

But three days later the tomb was empty. The followers of Jesus said He had risen from the dead. They reported that He appeared to them during a period of 40 days, showing Himself to them by many infallible proofs. Paul the apostle recounted that Jesus appeared to more than 500 of His followers at one time, the majority of whom were still alive and who could confirm what Paul wrote (1

Corinthians 15:6). So many security precautions were taken with the trial, crucifixion, burial, entombment, sealing, and guarding of Christ's tomb that it becomes very difficult for critics to defend their position that Christ did not rise from the dead. Consider these facts:

*C*     **Fact #1: Broken Roman Seal**

The first obvious fact was the breaking of the seal that stood for the power and authority of the Roman Empire. The consequences of breaking the seal were extremely severe. The Roman authorities would have been called into action to find the man or men who were responsible. If apprehended, it meant automatic execution by crucifixion upside down. People feared the breaking of the seal (McDowell 89-90)

*C*     **Fact #2: Empty Tomb**

Another obvious fact after the resurrection was the empty tomb. The disciples of Christ did not go off to Athens or Rome to preach that Christ was raised from the dead. Rather, they went right back to the city of Jerusalem, where, if what they were teaching was false, the falsity would be evident. The empty tomb was too notorious to be denied. The resurrection could not have been maintained in Jerusalem for a single day or hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact for all concerned.

*C*     **Fact #3: Large Stone Moved**

On that Sunday morning the first thing that impressed the people who approached the tomb was the unusual position of the one and a half to two ton stone that had been lodged in front of the doorway. All the Gospel writers mention it. Those who observed the stone after the resurrection describe its position as having been rolled completely away from the entrance of the tomb (See Matthew 28:2, Mark 16:4, Luke 24:2, John 20:1). Now, I ask you, if the disciples had wanted to come in, tiptoe around the sleeping guards, and then roll the stone over and steal Jesus' body, how could they have done that without the guards' awareness?

*C*     **Fact #4: Roman Guard Goes AWOL**

Matthew 28:11-15 says that the Roman guards, upon realizing the body was gone, ran to tell the chief priests what had happened. The Priests then offered them money to lie and say that Jesus' disciples had stolen the body. They said they would "secure" their lives if they lied. These Roman guards fled their post. They left their place of responsibility. How could their attrition be explained, when Roman military discipline was so exceptional? According to secular history this was one of the offenses that required the death penalty. The fear of their superiors' wrath and the possibility of death meant that they paid close attention to the minutest details of their jobs. One way a guard was put to death was by being stripped of his clothes and then burned alive in a fire started with his garments. If it was not apparent which soldier had failed in his duty, then lots were drawn to see which one would be punished with death for the guard unit's failure. Certainly the entire unit would not have fallen asleep with that kind of threat over their heads (Tucker 342)

*C*     **Fact #5: Grave Clothes Tell a Tale**

In a literal sense, against all statements to the contrary, the tomb was not totally

empty—because of an amazing phenomenon. John, a disciple of Jesus, looked over to the place where the body of Jesus had lain, and there were the grave clothes, in the form of the body, slightly caved in and empty. That's enough to make a believer out of anybody. John never did get over it. The first thing that stuck in the minds of the disciples was not the empty tomb, but rather the empty grave clothes—undisturbed in form and position (John 20:2-8).

### **C Fact #6: Jesus' Appearances Confirmed**

Christ appeared alive on several occasions after His resurrection. When studying an event in history, it is important to know whether enough people who were participants or eyewitnesses to the event were alive when the facts about the event were published. To know this is obviously helpful in determining the accuracy of the published report. If the number of eyewitnesses is substantial, the event can be regarded as fairly well established. For instance, if we all witness a murder, and a later police report turns out to be a fabrication of lies, we as eyewitnesses can refute it.

### **Over 500 Witnesses Confirm the Resurrection of Jesus**

Several very important factors are often overlooked when considering Christ's post-resurrection appearances to individuals. The first is the large number of witnesses of Christ after that resurrection morning. One of the earliest records of Christ's appearing after the resurrection is by Paul. The apostle appealed to his audience's knowledge of the fact that Christ had been seen by more than 500 people at one time. Paul reminded them that the majority of those people were still alive and could be questioned (I Corinthians 15:6). Let's take the more than 500 witnesses who saw Jesus alive after His death and burial, and place them in a courtroom. Do you realize that if each of those 500 people were to testify for only six minutes, including cross-examination, you would have an amazing 50 hours of firsthand testimony? Add to this the testimony of many other eyewitnesses and you would well have the largest and most lopsided trial in history.

### **Hostile Witnesses Confirm the Resurrection of Jesus**

Another factor crucial to interpreting Christ's appearances is that He also appeared to those who were hostile or unconvinced. I have read or heard people comment that Jesus was seen alive after His death and burial only by His friends and followers. Using that argument, they attempt to water down the overwhelming impact of the multiple eyewitness accounts. But that line of reasoning is so pathetic it hardly deserves comment. No author or informed individual would regard Saul of Tarsus as being a follower of Christ. The facts show the exact opposite. Saul despised Christ and persecuted Christ's followers. It was a life-shattering experience when Christ appeared to him (Acts chapter 9). Although he was at the time not a disciple, he later became the apostle Paul, one of the greatest witnesses for the truth of the resurrection.

### **Theories**

The following are some theories which some skeptics have promoted in an attempt to deny

the resurrection of Christ.

**C     The Wrong Tomb?**

This theory assumes that the women who reported that the body was missing had mistakenly gone to the wrong tomb. If so, then the disciples who went to check up on the women's statement must have also gone to the wrong tomb (John 20:3). We may be certain, however, that Jewish authorities, who asked for a Roman guard to be stationed at the tomb to prevent Jesus' body from being stolen, would not have been mistaken about the location. Nor would the Roman guards, for they were there! "If the resurrection claim was merely because of a geographical mistake, the Jewish authorities would have lost no time in producing the body from the proper tomb, thus effectively quenching for all time any rumor of a resurrection" (Geisler 74,75)

**C     Hallucinations?**

Another attempted explanation claims that the appearances of Jesus after the resurrection were either illusions or hallucinations. Unsupported by the psychological principles governing the appearances of hallucinations, this theory also does not coincide with the historical situation. Again, where was the actual body, and why wasn't it produced (McDowell 82,83)

**C     Did Jesus Swoon?**

"Another theory several centuries ago, is often quoted today. This is the swoon theory, which says that Jesus didn't die; he merely fainted from exhaustion and loss of blood. Everyone thought Him dead, but later He resuscitated and the disciples thought it to be a resurrection. It is impossible that a being who had been stolen half-dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening and who still at last yielded to His sufferings, could have given to the disciples the impression that He was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life" (McDowell 76-78).

**C     The Body Stolen?**

Then consider the theory that the body was stolen by the disciples while the guards slept. The depression and cowardice of the disciples provide a hard-hitting argument against their suddenly becoming so brave and daring as to face a detachment of soldiers at the tomb and steal the body. They were in no mood to attempt anything like that.

The theory that the Jewish or Roman authorities moved Christ's body is no more reasonable an explanation for the empty tomb than theft by the disciples. If the authorities had the body in their possession or knew where it was, why, when the disciples were preaching the resurrection in Jerusalem, didn't they explain: 'Wait! We moved the body, see, He didn't rise from the grave'? And if such a rebuttal failed, why didn't they explain exactly where Jesus' body lay? If this failed, why didn't they recover the corpse, put it on a cart, and wheel it through the center of Jerusalem? Such an action would have destroyed Christianity—not in the cradle, but in the womb! (McDowell 75,75)

### Real Proof: the Disciples' Lives

The most telling testimony of all must be the lives of those early Christians. We must ask ourselves: What caused them to go everywhere telling the message of the risen Christ? Had there been any visible benefits given to them for their efforts—prestige, wealth, increased social status or material benefits—we might logically attempt to account for their actions, for their whole-hearted and total allegiance to this “risen Christ.” As a reward for their efforts, however, those early Christians were beaten, stoned to death, thrown to the lions, tortured and crucified. Every conceivable method was used to stop them from talking. Yet, they laid down their lives as the ultimate proof of their complete confidence in the truth of their message.

### Conclusion

On the basis of all the evidence for Christ’s resurrection, and considering the fact that Jesus offers forgiveness of sin and an eternal relationship with God, who would be so foolhardy as to reject Him? Christ has risen. He is alive!

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