

INTRODUCTION

Jesus made some pretty amazing claims ... to be the Son of God who came to save the world ... how did He back up His claims ... with His miracles AND His resurrection from the dead.

Matthew 12:38-40 (NKJV) ³⁸ Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." ³⁹ But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Is there enough evidence for His resurrection to compel acceptance that leaves littler room for doubt? Indeed, I believe there is! We can use the evidence to help lead people toward faith in Christ.

Two Kinds Of Evidence Used In Courtrooms

1. **Direct Evidence** - facts that directly support a case. For example, in a robbery, the testimony of a witness who saw the man pull out a gun and shoot the clerk is direct evidence.

2. **Circumstantial Evidence** - evidence from which other facts can be inferred. For example ... (1) the man was seen entering the store immediately before the shooting; (2) a sales slip demonstrates that he had purchased the gun; (3) his fingerprints are on the gun and cash register; and (4) a ballistics report shows the bullet came from his gun.

Transition: Both kinds of evidence are found with respect to the resurrection of Christ. We'll consider the direct evidence for His resurrection first.

I. Direct Evidence For The Resurrection

Transition: There are two pieces of direct evidence for the resurrection. The first piece is the empty tomb.

A. The Empty Tomb

What evidence is there for the empty tomb?

First, it would be impossible for a movement founded on proclamation of the resurrection to have come into existence if the tomb was not empty.

On the day of Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus had died on the cross, Peter boldly proclaimed the resurrection of Christ to thousands of people in the very city where Jesus had been crucified and buried ... in his message He proclaimed ... **Acts 2:32 (NKJV)** ³² **This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.** As a result of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost 3,000 Jewish people believed (**Acts 2:40-41**) ... shortly thereafter 5,000 more believed (**Acts 4:1-4**).

Could all those converts have been made if Jesus had not been raised from the dead? Could the early church have survived for a week in its hostile surroundings if the tomb was not empty? After all, they were only a few minutes walk from Joseph's tomb. Surely there were some skeptics in the crowd ... if the tomb was not empty they could have simply made a brief trip to tomb to discredit Peter and the other disciples who were making the claim.

Dr. Paul Maier, professor of ancient history at Western Michigan University, adds this commentary, "*Where did Christianity first begin? To this the answer must be: Only one spot on earth – the city of Jerusalem. But this is the very last place it could have started if Jesus tomb had remained occupied, since anyone producing a dead Jesus would have driven a wooden stake through the heart of an incipient Christianity inflamed by His supposed resurrection.*"

Paul Althaus, professor in a University in Germany adds, "*The resurrection could not have been maintained in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact for all concerned.*"

Second, the soldiers, chief priests and elders acknowledged an empty tomb ... Matthew 28:11-15 (NKJV) ¹¹ Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. ¹² When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, ¹³ saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.'" ¹⁴ And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure." ¹⁵ So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

The best argument for the empty tomb that they could come up with was the ridiculous story that the disciples had stolen the body ... but their explanation assumed an empty tomb!

Why couldn't the enemies of Christ who had sought His death debunk the empty tomb proclamation? ... Because it was EMPTY!

What about their claim that the disciples stole the body? Could this be possible?

First, He had been placed in a solid rock tomb with a 1 ½ - 2 ton circular stone rolled over the entrance. Before it was rolled into place it was uphill ... held by a wedge ... once in place it would have taken 20 men to move it.

Second, the tomb was secured with a Roman guard which was usually 4 – 16 highly trained men. They were a fighting machine ... risked execution if they fell asleep on duty ...

Third, the tomb was secured with a Roman Seal. The Roman Seal stood for the power/authority of Rome ... there were severe consequences for breaking the seal ... the FBI of the Roman Empire were called into action ... those found guilty of breaking the seal and robbing a grave would face capital punishment.

Fourth, the grave clothes were left in the form of Jesus' body. It is extremely unlikely that they disciples would have taken the time to unwrap the grave clothes and leave them in that way. Furthermore, it was unthinkable for Jews to touch a dead body in this way.

There have been other proposed theories to explain away the empty tomb ... each breaking down quickly after simple scrutiny:

1. Moved By Authorities
2. Unknown Tomb
3. Wrong Tomb

All four Gospels record that Jesus was buried in the new tomb of Joseph of Aramethea (**Matt. 27:57-60**) ... he was part of the Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus ... his name would have been known like a US Senator today ... people would have known where the tomb was ... significant that it was not a family member or the disciples ... a very embarrassing fact to the early church, yet recorded ...

4. Spiritual Resurrection
5. Swoon Theory ... **claims that Jesus fainted from exhaustion or given a drug that made him appear to die** ... revived by the cool, damp air of the tomb ... **this theory is not new** ... in fact, the idea that Jesus never really died on the cross is found in the Quran which was written in the 7th Century.

Is it possible that Jesus really didn't die? Not with what Jesus went through.

1. Severe flogging with a **flagrum** ... sturdy handle with leather thongs of varying lengths ... sharp jagged pieces of bone and lead were woven into them ... Jews were limited by their law to 40 lashes ... for the Romans ... when a prisoner is near death the beating is finally stopped (**Mark 16:15**)
2. Wore a crown of thorns ... stiff like nails or spikes ... more blood lost ...
3. They mocked, spat upon and beat Jesus with a rod ...
4. Crucified with nails driven through His feet and hands
5. Death slowly came through suffocation and insufficient blood circulation ... usually broke legs to speed up the death ... didn't do this with Jesus because He was already dead ... His death was certified ...
6. One of the executioners thrust a spear into Christ's side ... **John 19:34** says "**immediately there came out blood and water.**" **Medical doctor C. Truman Davis** says that with this we have "rather conclusive post-mortem evidence that

Christ died ... of heart failure due to shock and constriction of the heart by fluid in the pericardium.” Basically, evidence that as Jesus suffered on the cross His heart had ruptured.

7. No way the Romans would have released Him if He was not dead. They were very effective at killing people ... they prided themselves in it.
8. After that he was wrapped in grave linens from the feet to the head ... up under arms, then around the arms to neck ... they used a separate piece around the head ... aromatic spices were placed between the folds ... altogether the encasement probably weighed around 120 pounds ...

There was no way a cold tomb was going to revive Him ... no way that He could then brake out of the grave cloths ... and move a 1 ½ - 2 ton stone ... and then overtaken the Roman guard ... and declare that He had risen!

Transition: The second piece of direct evidence is the eyewitnesses.

B. The Eyewitnesses

There is a wealth of sightings of Jesus recorded in the Gospels ... not fleeting views of a shadowy figure by one or two people ... but multiple appearances to numerous people over a 40 day period ... some to individuals ... most of them to groups ... some to tenderhearted people like John ... some to doubting skeptics like Thomas ...

The Gospels record the following appearances in this order:

FIRST DAY

1. Mary Magdalene
2. Other women
3. Cleopas and another disciple on the road to Emmaus
4. Simon Peter
5. Ten of His disciples and others late Sunday night in the Upper Room ... Judas was dead and Thomas was absent

REMAINING 40 DAYS

6. A week later to Eleven disciples in the *Upper Room* ... this time doubting Thomas was there
7. Peter and six other disciples at the *Sea of Tiberias* after they had spent an unsuccessful night fishing
8. Eleven disciples on *Mt. Tabor* ... gave them the Great Commission
9. Again in the *Upper Room*
10. At the Mount of Olives to His disciples before His ascension (40 days after His resurrection)

There are many good reasons to believe these eyewitness Gospel accounts:

First, there is strong evidence that source material for the Gospel of Mark which was also used in the other Gospels was written within 20 – 25 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection ... this is way too early for a legend of any kind to develop.

Second, the resurrection accounts in all the Gospels have unadorned simplicity that fictional stories do not have. In fact, fictional accounts that were written in the 2nd Century (called the Gnostic Gospels) contain all kinds of flowery narratives in which Jesus comes out of the tomb in glory and power, with everybody seeing Him, including the priests and Jewish authorities.

Third, the Gospel accounts indicate that empty tomb and the resurrected Christ were first seen by women. This fact would have certainly been covered up if it were legend because women were invalid witnesses according to Jewish principles of legal evidence (i.e. they did not have a right to give testimony in a court of law). If you were going to invent an account of an empty tomb you would not have included women as prime witnesses ... especially a woman with a shady past (i.e. Mary Magdalene). The early church stuck to these stories even though they were criticized for it. They didn’t “air brush” Mary out under criticism. This has enormous ramifications!

Dr. Luke records the last appearance of Christ before His ascension in **Acts 1:1-3 (NKJV)** ¹ The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, ² until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, ³ to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. Luke goes on to record specific dialogue with His disciples ... then the ascension of Christ.

Seven days later Peter stood up on Pentecost and proclaimed ... **Acts 2:32 (NKJV)** ³² This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. In response to his message 3,000 Jewish people believed. Why? Because they saw them as credible eyewitnesses.

1 Corinthians 15 provides us with another significant piece of eyewitness evidence ... there is much evidence that these words are part of a very early creed that Paul had received after he was converted on the road to Damascus. He either received it in Damascus or shortly thereafter ... **1 Corinthians 15:3-7 (NKJV)** ³For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. ⁶After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. ⁷After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.

Here we discover that Jesus appeared to “over five hundred brethren at once.” That is a lot of witnesses ... Paul adds, “of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.” Paul’s initial preaching in Corinth probably occurred in the fall of **52 AD** ... less than 20 years after the resurrection of Christ. Most of the eyewitnesses were still living ... the witnesses could have been checked out.

1 Corinthians was written in the early to mid-50s. Paul said that he had “received” this oral tradition back when he was converted in the 30s. This pushes the accounts of the resurrection to a very early date. The resurrection stories were not something that evolved over 30 or more years.

If each of these 500 people were to testify for six minutes each you would have over 50 hours of firsthand eyewitness testimony.

Paul continues in **1 Corinthians 15:8-9 (NKJV)** ⁸Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. ⁹For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Here we discover an extremely credible eyewitness ... the Apostle Paul himself ... why such a credible eyewitness? ... because he had been persecuting the church of God as a zealous Pharisee ... Luke records Paul’s conversion in **Acts 9** ... and Paul’s testimony in **Acts 22 and 26** ... he was dead set against Christianity ... the only explanation for the change in Paul’s behavior is that he actually saw the resurrected Christ.

Transition: Direct evidence for the resurrection of Christ centers on the empty tomb and the eyewitnesses. There is also circumstantial evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

II. Circumstantial Evidence

Circumstantial evidence is evidence from which other facts and be inferred.

A. Transformed Disciples

The disciples went from being cowards who had left Jesus and fled ... who had hid themselves in an Upper Room with the doors locked because they were afraid ... they were confused ... they were disappointed ... thought Jesus was going to usher in the Kingdom of God. Something turned them into a bold band of preachers who were willing to face a life of hardship and persecution ... Peter, who denied Jesus, was later crucified upside down for proclaiming the death and resurrection of Christ ... in fact, most the disciples were executed in torturous ways. They were willing to suffer and die for the message they were proclaiming!

Paul and the other disciples did this for 25-30 years. For what? For good intentions? For a lie? Very few people are willing to die for something they know to be a lie.

Somehow you need to explain the explosive turnaround in the disciples? The only rational explanation is that something happened to them after the death of Christ. Their own explanation was that they had seen the resurrected Christ.

B. Conversion Of Skeptics

The Apostle Paul went from zealously persecuting the church to proclaiming the death and resurrection of Christ ... willing to lose all of his social status and prestige ... willing to be persecuted, suffer shipwrecks, go without adequate food, etc. ... willing to be imprisoned ... willing to die a martyr’s death ...

2 Corinthians 11:23-28 (NKJV) ²³ Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. ²⁴ From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; ²⁶ in journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; ²⁷ in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— ²⁸ besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

James and the other brothers of Jesus became believers after rejecting and mocking Jesus' claims ... 50 days after His resurrection we find them in the Upper Room with the other disciples waiting for the Holy Spirit to be sent ... eventually James died a martyr's death by stoning ...

These men did not believe in Jesus until after his death ... they rejected His claims ... but something happened.

These men were beaten, stoned to death, thrown to lions, tortured and crucified ... nothing could stop them from talking. **Hard to believe that they would be willing to do all of this to perpetrate a lie!**

The transformation of these men is hard to explain except for the resurrection.

Harvard law professor Simon Greenleaf who lectured for years on how to determine if a witness is lying says: *"It was therefore impossible that they could have persisted in affirming the truths they have narrated, had not Jesus actually risen from the dead, and had they not known this fact as certainly as they knew any other fact."*

Atheists, agnostics and skeptics are still be converted today ... including renown Harvard Law School professor **Simon Greenleaf** ... and **Lee Stobel** who graduated Yale Law School and became an award winning journalist for the Chicago Tribune ... converted after two years of personal investigation ... and **Josh McDowell** who spent over 1,000 researching the evidence ... each were challenged by others to investigate the evidence ... each came to the same conclusion ... Jesus Christ had indeed risen from the dead ...

C. Sunday Worship

The early Christian was comprised mainly of Jewish people who had been taught and raised to strictly observe the Sabbath. They believed they would incur God's wrath if they broke it.

Why did they change their day of rest/worship from the Saturday to Sunday? To honor the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Their decision to change had huge implications ... in their minds they risked the judgment of God.

D. Other Changes Converted Jews Were Willing To Make

- Stopped going to the Temple to offer animal sacrifices ...
- Stopped seeing themselves as under the Mosaic Law ... now able to eat unclean animals ... started eating with Gentiles ...
- Began to embrace the concept of the Trinity ...

These beliefs, practices and traditions were some of the very things that helped them survive persecution and captivity by other nations.

E. The Existence Of The Early Church

The early church was birthed in the most hostile environment that you could possibly find. Not only did they face persecution from zealous Jews like Paul ... but eventually from the Roman Empire. Despite the hostile environment the church spread to Asia Minor and to Rome within 20 years ... eventually overwhelming the entire Roman Empire.

Nothing but the resurrection of Christ can explain its birth and incredible growth.

CONCLUSION

I conclude that the evidence is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves little room for doubt. What about you? What is your conclusion? The evidence demands a verdict!

If you are not yet convinced, I encourage you to study the evidence yourself.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the heart of the Christian faith.

1 Corinthians 15:12-19 (NKJV) ¹² Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. ¹⁴ And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty. ¹⁵ Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. ¹⁶ For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. ¹⁷ And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! ¹⁸ Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

If you know Christ, then I encourage you to rest confidently in the evidence ... share the evidence with others ... defend your faith ... be an ambassador for Christ!

If you have never received the benefits of His death and resurrection, then I invite you to trust in Christ as your Savior.