

*“<sup>1</sup> Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. <sup>2</sup> But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. <sup>3</sup> Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. <sup>5</sup> Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup> **He is not here, but is risen!** ...” -- Luke 24:1-6a (NKJV)*

### **JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS FOR OUR SINS AND WAS BURIED ... AND HE ROSE AGAIN THE THIRD DAY!**

***There is no single event more central to the Christian faith than the resurrection.*** It serves as the keystone to several of our deepest hopes: the notion that God is both powerful and trustworthy; the doctrine of eternal life; even the very belief that Jesus and the Father are one: it’s all rooted in the resurrection.

Paul made it clear when he said ... that if our hope in Christ is only for this life—that is, if the resurrection was a ruse, and we have been fooled into believing in a life-after-death that will never come—then we are *“of all people most to be pitied”* (1 Cor. 15:17-19). The resurrection is foundational.

***The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Christian faith.*** Without the resurrection, the belief in God's saving grace through Jesus is destroyed. When Jesus rose from the dead, he confirmed his identity as the Son of God and his work of atonement, redemption, reconciliation, and salvation. **The resurrection was a real, literal, physical raising of Jesus’ body from the dead.**

Once again we are reminded in the scriptures to contend and defend our faith ...

- *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, **and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.**” (1 Peter 3:15)*
- *“Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you **to contend earnestly for the faith** which was once for all delivered to the saints.” (Jude 3)*

In the current world culture of skepticism and relativism ... it is more critical now than ever, that our generation and the next be equipped to defend our beliefs as true! **‘Apologetics’** is: “systematic argumentative discourse in defense (as in of a doctrine).”

## Does The Resurrection Really Matter?

**First**, the resurrection is proof that Jesus is who He said He is and that He can do what He said He can do. Jesus Himself staked His divinity on the resurrection (Matt. 16:1–4), and Paul affirmed it in Romans 1:4. Without the resurrection, then, Jesus is at best a teacher or prophet—and at worst, a complete fraud, someone who preached righteousness but made blatantly false claims to divinity.

**If, however, He is in fact the first and only human being to come back from death without aid, we can be confident that He is truly the Son of God** because the proof He offered fits the claim (that is, rising from the dead is something that history shows no human can achieve, so it must be something only a superhuman or deity can do, and therefore the proof actually is sufficient evidence for His claim to divinity).

**Second**, the resurrection is our confidence that death will not be the end for us. Jesus is “*the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep*” (1 Cor. 15:20), “*the resurrection and the life*” (John 11:25), and the source of God’s promise of eternity (1 John 5:11–12). **The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death (1 Cor. 15:26), but that’s only true if our God has truly defeated it already.**

**Finally**, the resurrection gives us confidence that our King is still alive and involved. Jesus arrived in Israel after a 400-year period of divine silence; the Israelites were subjects to a brutal empire and hadn’t heard from God in generations. Was God still there? Was He still paying attention to them? We hear echoes of these questions in our own lives sometimes—and in those of our kids. But if Jesus has risen, if He is still sitting at the right hand of the Father and interceding for us, we can be confident that God is not only still around, but involved in the lives of all His children.

## SEVEN (7) EVIDENCES OF THE RESURRECTION

### #1: The Empty Tomb of Jesus – **“God’s paid receipt!”**

**The empty tomb may be the strongest proof Jesus Christ rose from the dead.** Joseph of Arimathea put Jesus’s body in his new tomb and rolled a large stone across the entrance (Matt. 27:57-61; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53-54; John 19:39-42). **Concerned that someone might steal the body, the Jews requested a guard at the tomb** (Matthew 27:64-66). Christ’s body remained there until Sunday morning.

Anyone in Jerusalem at the time could have visited the tomb and verified that it was empty. Jesus’ followers are recorded to have spread the story of the resurrection very soon after it happened. Yet we have no accounts from the time claiming that the disciples were caught in a lie — that Jesus’ body was still buried and could prove that He was still dead, or that He had never been buried.

Also, Roman guards were posted outside the tomb and the entrance was sealed. Roman officials would not have bothered to guard a tomb that was not occupied. The most convincing argument for the empty tomb was the fact that Romans and high-ranking Jewish officials accused Jesus' followers of stealing the body. By making such an accusation, they confirmed they were in agreement with this fact: that the tomb was occupied by Jesus' body at one time but later was not!

If the body never came to the tomb, they would have said so ... and if the body never left the tomb, they could have just pointed to the fact that the tomb they were guarding had been left undisturbed. They would have been able to say, "***The body is still there. Look for yourself.***" But rather than disputing that the tomb was empty, they accused others of taking the body which was completely untenable ...

- The tomb was guarded and sealed – Matthew 27:66
- ***The tomb is still empty!***

## #2: The Grave Clothes

On that Sunday morning the evidence at the tomb was compelling. The stone was rolled away, the guards fled, the body likewise was gone. But strangely the evidence was not one which pointed to theft. Had the body been stolen the thieves would surely not have taken the time to unwrap the body there. ***The wrappings were neatly arranged not flung aside in haste but simply collapsed like a cocoon!***

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-- *like the empty chrysalis of a caterpillar's cocoon. 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 20:3-8)

- ***The body of humility into which He came in order to die for the sin of the world was changed at resurrection into glorious body without limitations. Our Lord could simply pass through them as He later did through the bolted door of the upper room.*** (John 20:19, 26)

## #3: Post Resurrection Eye-Witnesses

If the accounts had been made up, no ancient author would have used women for witnesses to Christ's resurrection. Women were second-class citizens in Bible times; their testimony was not even allowed in court. Yet the Bible says the risen Christ first appeared to Mary Magdalene and other holy women. Even the apostles did not believe Mary when she told them the tomb was empty. (John 20:14-18)

Some of the witnesses of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ are listed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8.

A large crowd of more than 500 eyewitnesses saw the risen Jesus Christ at the same time. **The Apostle Paul** records this event in 1 Corinthians 15:6. He states that most of these men and women were still alive when he wrote this letter, about 55 A.D. Undoubtedly they told others about this miracle.

Today, psychologists say it would be impossible for a large crowd of people to have had the same hallucination at once. Smaller groups also saw the risen Christ, such as the apostles, and Cleopas and his companion. They all saw the same thing, and in the case of the apostles, they touched Jesus and watched Him eat food. The hallucination theory is further debunked because after the ascension of Jesus into heaven, sightings of Him stopped.

#### **#4: Changed Lives of James and Others**

**Changed lives are yet another proof of the resurrection.** The transformation of the disciples resulted from their experiences with the risen Lord. They went from doubters (John 20:19) to fearless proclaimers of Jesus's resurrection. They even died for their faith.

#### ***The conversion of Paul records the most drastically changed life in the Bible.***

As Saul of Tarsus, he was an aggressive persecutor of the early church. When the risen Christ appeared to Paul on the Damascus Road, Paul became Christianity's most determined missionary. (Acts 9:1-6)

James, the brother of Jesus, was openly skeptical that Jesus was the Messiah. Later James became a courageous leader of the Jerusalem church, even being stoned to death for his faith. Why? The Bible says the risen Christ appeared to him. What a shock to see your own brother, alive again, after you knew he was dead. (1 Cor. 15:7)

***We have good evidence from the gospels that neither James nor any of Jesus' younger brothers believed in him during His lifetime.*** There is no reason to think that the early church would generate fictitious stories concerning the unbelief of Jesus' family had they been faithful followers all along. But it is indisputable that James and his brothers (Jude) did become active Christian believers following Jesus' death. With such zealous eyewitnesses, the early church exploded in growth, spreading west from Jerusalem to Rome and beyond. ***For over 2,000 years, encounters with the resurrected Jesus have changed lives!***

#### **#5: The Presence of The Holy Spirit ... and the spread of Christianity**

The final important fact of the Resurrection account really took place after Resurrection Sunday in the rapid growth of the Church. Fifty (50) days after the Passover on which Jesus was crucified was the feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem. **On that day the Holy Spirit fell upon 120 believers who were gathered praying. "The rest is history," as they say!** The Holy Spirit prompted the apostles to preach that Jesus had been raised from the dead -- in the very city where He had been crucified and buried.

***There are lots of good reasons why the Church should never have started!*** For instance, the first church was predominantly made up of Jews. Jews are monotheistic (Deut. 6:4), yet they proclaimed that Jesus (a man) was God!

The church grew to 3,000 on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41), then to 5,000 men (Acts 4:4), one fifth the population of Jerusalem, then the New Testament records that many among the priests of the city believed (Acts 6:7). When the Jews began heavy persecution against the Christian church, they preached the resurrection wherever they went!

### **#6: Sunday Became the Primary Day of Worship Instead of the Jewish Sabbath On Saturday**

Jesus's resurrection was on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1). So Christians made Sunday their primary day of worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).

### **#7: The Fulfillment of Prophecy**

The death and resurrection of Jesus was not a random event. Jesus predicted that He would die by crucifixion, be buried, and rise from the dead. His prediction that He would die from crucifixion is very significant. He could not control that. Crucifixion was a means of death reserved to the imperial Roman authorities. Jesus claimed that His death by crucifixion and His resurrection on the third day would be a “*sign*” that vindicated who He was, what He taught, and what He would accomplish by His death and resurrection. (Genesis 3:15; Psalm 22; Jonah 1:17 / Matthew 12:40; Isaiah 53)

The death and resurrection of Jesus also took place in the context of centuries of prophecy that such a Messiah would come from God, and die and rise. Jesus Himself claimed that His life, death and resurrection was a fulfillment of these prophecies.

## **THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE EVIDENCE**

Taken individually, the various details of Jesus' resurrection would be powerful. But taking all the evidence together, the case for the resurrection is compelling. No alternate theory of the resurrection explains the remarkable facts of:

- The empty tomb,
- The undisturbed grave clothes,
- The eye-witnesses,
- The post-resurrection appearances of Christ,
- The disciples' psychological state, and
- The spread of Christianity.

***What seems to some as too good to be true indeed is true! We all face death, but Christ's resurrection is the Good News that we Christians can proclaim to our world. Death is not the end. As He was raised, so we will be also!***