The Case For The Resurrection

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# Text:

# Introduction:

# Many things contribute to our faith and give us confidence. It is difficult - perhaps impossible - to pinpoint single facts or details that are more essential or vital than others. Everything God chose to reveal is critically important. But one fact IS definitely crucial – the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

# If the resurrection never occurred, then your Bible, your God, your faith is useless (1 Corinthians 15:12-20).

# But prove it, and then you have proved that God is the only true and living God, and Jesus is "both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).

# HOW CAN WE PROVE THE RESURRECTION?

## Not by science.

### Scientific proof is based upon showing that something is a fact by repeating the event in the presence of a person that questions the fact.

### Since the resurrection cannot be repeated, science is ineffective in regard to proving or disproving it.

## The resurrection is a historical fact if a fact at all.

## There is abundant historical evidence. Consider these quotes from experts:

### "I have been used from many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead." – Thomas Arnold, chairman of history, Oxford University**[[1]](#endnote-1)**,

### "Taking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ. Nothing but the antecedent assumption that it must be false could have suggested the idea of deficiency in the proof of it." - B. F. Westcott, English Scholar**[[2]](#endnote-2)**,

### "I know pretty well what evidence is; and I tell you, such evidence as that for the resurrection has never broken down yet." – J. S. Copley, Attorney General of Great Britain**[[3]](#endnote-3)**

### "No intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in a verdict that the resurrection story is true." - Lord Darling, Chief Justice of England**[[4]](#endnote-4)**

# It is this historical evidence which we will examine in this study.

# Body:

# **THE DEATH, BURIAL, AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS WERE PREDICTED.**

## Jesus’ death on the cross was not the result of his failure, but rather an essential part of God’s eternal plan.

## The Old Testament prophets had foretold the events hundreds of years before. A minor sampling of the prophecies include:

### Christ would be sold for 30 pieces of silver. (Zech. 11:12 - fulfilled, Matt 26:14,15)

### The money would be cast to the potter. (Zech. 11:13 – fulfilled, Matt 27:3-10)

### He would be crucified with thieves. (Isa. 53:12 – fulfilled, Mark 15:27)

### His bones would not be broken. (Psalms 34:20 – fulfilled, John 19:33,36)

### He would be buried in a rich man’s tomb. (Isa. 53:9 – fulfilled, Matt 27:57-60)

### He would be resurrected. (Psalms 16:10 – fulfilled, Luke 24:1-9)

## Jesus prophesied of these things himself. (Matt 16:21; Luke 9:22; John 2:19-21)

# **PRE-CRUCIFIXION EVENTS**: A cruel mixture of physical and emotional torture.

## A sleepless night of prayer in the garden. (Luke 22:39-46)

### There is some controversy about Luke’s statement that “his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (vs. 44)

### However, “bloody sweat” (technically “hematidrosis”) has been recorded in rare instances.

### “Every attempt imaginable has been used by modern scholars to explain away this phrase, apparently under the mistaken impression that this just doesn’t happen. A great deal of effort could be saved by consulting medical literature. Though very rare, the phenomenon of Hematidrosis, or bloody sweat, is well documented. Under great emotional stress, tiny capillaries in the sweat glands can break, thus mixing blood with sweat. This process alone could have produced marked weakness and possible shock.” - C. Truman Davis**[[5]](#endnote-5)**

## Betrayal by a “friend". (Matt. 26:47-50)

## Desertion of all his closest friends. (Mark 14:50; Matt 26:56)

## The equivalent of six trials in a matter of a few hours.

### He was questioned before Annas, Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod, and finally Pilate again.

### He was subjected to lies and false charges. (Mark 14:55-65; Luke 23:2)

### He was humiliated and mistreated. (Matt 26:67,68)

## Scourging (Matt 27:26)

### "The heavy whip is brought down with full force again and again across the shoulders, back and legs. At first the heavy thongs cut through the skin only. Then, as the blows continue, they cut deeper into the subcutaneous tissues, producing first an oozing of blood from the capillaries and veins of the skin, and finally spurting arterial bleeding from vessels in the underlying muscles. The small balls of lead first produce large, deep bruises which are broken open by subsequent blows. Finally, the skin is hanging in long ribbons and the entire area is an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissues. When it is determined by the centurion in charge that the prisoner is near death, the beating is finally stopped." - C Truman Davis**[[6]](#endnote-6)**

### While there is considerable controversy over this matter, some believe that the scourging prior to the crucifixion was an unusual case of double punishment. That being the case, it would serve to explain why Jesus died much sooner than the two thieves who were crucified with him.

### Pilate’s words may confirm this double punishment. (John 19:1-6)

## The purple robe and the crown of thorns. (Matt. 27:27-31)

## He was forced to carry his own cross. (John 19:17, Mk. 15:21, Lk. 23:26)

# **THE CRUCIFIXION**

## The brevity of the gospel accounts, and the relatively sparse information concerning the actual methods of crucifixion show that this was a common form of execution.

## It was common to hang the victim to the cross with arms outstretched, but with knees bent. This was done in order to prolong the agony and delay death.

### "Hanging by his arms, the pectoral muscles are paralyzed and the intercostal muscles are unable to act. Air can be drawn into the lungs, but cannot be exhaled. (The victim) fights to raise himself in order to get even a short breath." - C Truman Davis**[[7]](#endnote-7)**

### Finally, when the authorities were ready for the victim to die, the legs were broken, thus preventing the movement necessary to exhale. Rapid suffocation would result.

## For years many doubted the Bible record of nailing the hands and feet to the cross (John 20:24-28). It was claimed instead that the victims were always tied to the cross with ropes.

## In June 1968, an archaeological discovery in cave-tombs just north of Jerusalem proved that nailing victims did sometimes occur.

### Notes concerning the discovery included this statement regarding one of the skeletons: "Both the heel bones were found transfixed by a large iron nail. The shins were found intentionally broken. Death caused by crucifixion." - N. Haas**[[8]](#endnote-8)**

### This also confirms John’s statement in regard to the practice of breaking the legs to hasten death. (John 19:31-37)

# **POST-CRUCIFIXION EVENTS**

## Any possibility that Jesus might have survived this ordeal, is quickly dispelled when we consider the final mistreatment of Jesus’ body by a Roman soldier at the scene.

## John 19:32-37

## Medical authorities have concluded that this outpouring of water and blood could only have come from the pericardium, which is the sac of fluids which encompasses the heart. Therefore, the soldier’s spear most likely pierced through Jesus’ heart.**[[9]](#endnote-9)**

# **FINAL CONFIRMATION OF DEATH**

## All doubts that Jesus actually died on the cross are removed by the Roman authorities themselves. (Mark 15:43-45)

## Death by crucifixion at the hands of the Romans was an extremely efficient method of execution, as the following incident will prove: "True, there is a recorded instance of a victim being taken down from a cross and surviving. The Jewish historian Josephus, who had gone over to the Roman side in the rebellion of 66 A.D., discovered three of his friends being crucified. He asked the Roman general Titus to reprieve them, and they were immediately removed from their crosses. Still, two of the three died anyway, even though they apparently had been crucified only a short time. In Jesus’ case, however, there were additional complications of scourging and exhaustion, to say nothing of the great spear thrust that pierced his rib cage and probably ruptured his pericardium. Romans were grimly efficient about crucifixions: victims did not escape with their lives." - Paul l. Maier**[[10]](#endnote-10)**

# **THE BURIAL** – Luke 23:50-56

## The burial place:

### The crucifixion occurred at "Golgotha" – meaning "the place of the skull." (John 19:17)

#### Some say that the hill itself resembled a skull when viewed from a distance.

#### But others say that it was called this because the place was littered with the skulls and skeletons of men who had been crucified there.

### The latter case being true, if Joseph had not begged for the body, it might have been left for the dogs and wild beasts to devour.

### The burial place was very near to the crucifixion site – just outside the city of Jerusalem – John 19:41.

#### This fact effectively removes the possibility of foul-play on the part of Jesus’ disciples.

#### If the body had been carried to some distant place for burial, critics would have been able to claim that some mischief took place.

### The tomb was "hewn in stone". (Luke 23:53)

#### It was not a typical cave-tomb, as was frequently used in that region. (ref. Abraham/Sarah, Genesis 23:1-20)

#### This tomb was man-made, actually carved out of a solid rock wall.

#### Therefore, there could have been no second "secret" entrance by which someone could have entered to tamper with the body.

### It was a new tomb.

#### "Wherein never man before was laid". (Luke 23:53)

#### Thus, an empty tomb meant that Jesus was resurrected – it could be no one else.

## The burial methods:

### John 19:38-40

### With the help of Nicodemus, Joseph prepared the body of Jesus for burial using 100 pounds of spices which Nicodemus supplied.

#### Myrrh: "a fragrant substance derived from the liquids of various plants and trees… an odorous resin which exudes from the branches of the Cistus Creticus." **[[11]](#endnote-11)**

#### Aloes: "a costly and sweet-smelling substance used for perfume, evidently extracted from a tree." **[[12]](#endnote-12)**

### The normal procedure would have required binding the body in strips of linen, the spices enclosed in the layers of cloth. The body was wrapped up to the arm pits, then the arms were lowered, and the body wrapped again.

### The head was generally wrapped in a separate cloth. (John 20:6,7)

### This resulted in an encasement so tight that it could hardly be removed. In fact, it was nearly airtight.

## The huge stone:

### Mark 15:46

### The stone was so large that the women who returned to anoint the body on the first day of the week were concerned about finding someone to remove the stone for them. (Mark 16:1-4)

### How big was the stone?

#### The entrance to the tomb was obviously big enough for a man to enter through it, but it required stooping down to look inside. (John 20:3-5)

#### Say then that stone was 4 ½ feet in diameter.

#### Engineers from Georgia Tech have studied the type of stone native to that region, and based upon a 4 ½ foot diameter, have stated that the stone could not have weighed less than 1 ½ to 2 tons.- Josh McDowell**[[13]](#endnote-13)**

#### Such a stone would have been prepared ahead of time, placed in a trough, and wedged in place. It would have rolled by gravity to its resting place in front of the tomb once the wedge was removed.

# **SECURITY PRECAUTIONS**

## Roman Guards

### Matthew 27:62-65

### A Roman guard force generally consisted of 16 heavily armed men trained to protect and hold 36 square yards of ground against the attack of an entire battalion**[[14]](#endnote-14)**

### The discipline of these soldiers was so strict that failure to securely hold an assigned post brought the death sentence.

### A New Testament example of this kind of rigid discipline is found in Acts 12:19

## The Roman Seal

### Matthew 27:66

### The Romans thus testify to us that the body was there, in the tomb, and under heavy guard.

# **EVIDENCE OF THE RESURRECTION – THE TOMB WAS EMPTY!**

## Matthew 28:1-15

## Both the Jews and the Romans here admit that the tomb was empty.

## This is "positive evidence from a hostile source, which is the strongest kind of historical evidence. In essence, this means that if a source admits a fact decidedly not in its favor, then that fact is genuine." - Paul L. Maier**[[15]](#endnote-15)**

## "If the Christians and their Jewish opponents both agreed that the tomb was empty, we have little choice but to accept the empty tomb as an historical fact." - Ron Sider**[[16]](#endnote-16)**

## The Jews never denied the empty tomb (Acts 5:34-39) and be sure that they would have if they could have.

# **EVIDENCE OF THE RESURRECTION – EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY**

## Eyewitness testimony is significant in any court of law. It is important in this study as well (2 Peter 1:16).

## In such a study, it is important to consider the number of eyewitnesses who were alive and present at the time the historical account was published.

## 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

### In this case we have an abundance of eyewitnesses – over 500.

### They were still alive at the time these reports were being circulated, and their testimony could be confirmed. Basically, Paul says, "If you don’t believe me, just ask them yourself!"

### If each eyewitness were given just 6 minutes to testify in a trial proceeding, there would still be in excess of 50 hours of eyewitness testimony. This is overwhelming evidence!

## A brief summary of Jesus’ appearances following the resurrection is as follows:

### Early on Sunday morning to Mary Magdalene near the tomb. (Mark 16:9; John 20:11-18)

### On Sunday morning to the women returning from the tomb. (Matt 28:9,10)

### On that same day to Peter alone. (Luke 24:34)

### Later that day, to two disciples on the road to Emmaus.  (Luke 24:13-31)

### At evening on the same Sunday to all the apostles except Thomas. (John 20:19-25)

### One week later to all the apostles, including Thomas.  (John 20:26-29)

### To seven disciples fishing in the Sea of Galilee.  (John 21:1-13)

### To eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee.  (Matt 28:16-20)

### To above 500 brethren at once.  (1 Cor. 15:6)

### To James only.  (1 Cor. 15:7)

### To all the apostles at the ascension on the Mount of Olives near Bethany. (Luke 24:50,51; Acts 1:6-12)

### To Saul of Tarsus. (Act 9:3-6; 1 Cor. 15:8)

## "It is noteworthy that these appearances are not stereotyped. No two of them are exactly alike. The appearance to Mary Magdalene occurred in early morning; that to the travelers to Emmaus in the afternoon; and to the apostles in the evening, probably after dark. He appeared to Mary in the open air. Mary was long when she saw Him; the disciples were together in a group; and Paul records that on one occasion He appeared to more than 500 at one time. The reactions also were varied. Mary was overwhelmed with emotion; the disciples were frightened; Thomas was obstinately incredulous when told of the Lord’s resurrection, but worshipped Him when He manifested Himself. Each occasion had its own peculiar atmosphere and characteristics, and revealed some different quality of the risen Lord." - Merrill C. Tenney**[[17]](#endnote-17)**

## Some criticism has been offered that Jesus only appeared to friends and followers. But, of course, this is not true. Consider:

### James (John 7:5; 1 Cor. 15:7)

### Saul of Tarsus. (Gal 1:13,14; Acts 9:3-6)

# **EVIDENCE OF THE RESURRECTION – CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE**

## Circumstantial evidence is "proof of facts offered as evidence from which other facts are to be inferred". **[[18]](#endnote-18)**

## Circumstantial evidence can be just as valuable as direct evidence. In fact, strong circumstantial evidence may be more trustworthy than direct evidence, because it cannot be as easily fabricated.

## Consider the circumstantial evidence of the resurrection:

### The church

#### It experienced remarkable early growth.

#### And it all started in Jerusalem!

### Baptism as practiced in the early church.

#### It is symbolic of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. (Romans 6:3-6)

#### It is a meaningless sham if the resurrection did not occur.

### The Lord’s Supper

#### It celebrates the terrible death of Jesus.

#### There is no reason to celebrate if Jesus did not rise again.

# **EVIDENCE OF THE RESURRECTION – CHANGED LIVES**

## The apostles and disciples of Jesus had no earthly benefit to be gained by preaching the resurrection. In fact, the opposite was true – they stood to lose everything, even their lives.

## “In the absence of circumstances which generate suspicion, every witness is to be presumed credible, until the contrary is shown; the burden of impeaching his credibility lying on the objector. . .men ordinarily speak the truth, when they have no prevailing motive or inducement to the contrary . . . (these witnesses) went against all their worldly interests . . . They could expect nothing but contempt, opposition, revilings, bitter persecutions, stripes, imprisonments, torments and death. Yet this faith they zealously did propagate; and all these miseries they endured . . .” – Simon Greenleaf**[[19]](#endnote-19)**

## But notice:

### Jesus’ own family

#### John 7:2-5

#### Acts 1:14

### Peter and the apostles

#### Matthew 26:56

#### Acts 4:18-20

### Paul – the ultimate proof (1 Tim. 1:12,13)

# Conclusion:

# What can possibly explain the abundance of evidence, both direct and circumstantial? Only the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the grave. It really happened.  He rose again!!!!

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**End Notes**

1. *Sermons on the Christian Life – Its Hopes, Its Fears, and Its Close*, p. 324. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. *The Gospel of the Resurrection*, 4th ed., London, 1879, pp. 4-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *Therefore Stand*, Wilbur Smith, Grand Rapids, Mich., Baker Book House, 1965, pp. 425, 584. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. *Verdict of the Empty Tomb*, Val Grieve, London, Church Pastoral Aid Society, 1976, p. 26. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. “The Passion of Christ From A Medical Point of View”, Arizona Medicine, March, 1965, p. 185. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. *Ibid*. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. *Ibid*. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. "Anthropological Observations on the Skeletal Remains from Giv’ at ha-Mivtar", *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 20, 1970, p.39. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Edwards WD, Gabel WJ, Hosmer MS. “On the physical death of Jesus Christ.” JAMA 1986; 256:1455-63. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. *The First Easter*, p.112. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. *The New Smith’s Bible Dictionary*, Garden City, New York, Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1966, pp. 250-251. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. *Ibid*, pp. 16-17. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. *The Resurrection Factor*, San Bernardino, Cal., Here’s Life Publishers, Inc., 1981, p. 54. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. *Ibid*, p. 56. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. "The Empty Tomb as History", *Christianity Today*, Vol. XIX, March 28, 1975, p. 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. *A Case For Easter*, p. 29. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ", *Prophecy in the Making*, Carl Henry, ed., Carol Stream, Ill., Creation House, 1971, p. 59. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. # *The Testimony of the Evangelists: The Gospels Examined by The Rules of Evidence*, Eastford, CT., Martino Fine Books, 2019 Reprint of 1874 Edition

    [↑](#endnote-ref-19)