

SO: Evidences for the Resurrection of Jesus (Lee Wildman)

The significance of the resurrection of Jesus cannot be overstated.

- The resurrection is the foundation of our faith.
 - Our faith is based on the historical fact of the resurrection.
- Jesus predicted His resurrection on the third day. (**Mt. 16:21**)
 - If he was not raised, then He is a false prophet. (worthy of the death he suffered)
- The resurrection is the ultimate proof that Jesus is the Son of God. (**Romans 1:3-4**)
 - "The resurrection is God's vindication of Jesus' radical personal claims to divine authority." (William Lane Craig, *The Resurrection of Jesus*)¹
- His resurrection is the very reason we live in such a way that folks would ask us the "reason for our hope." (**1 Peter 3:15**)
- We must be able to give objective evidence that supports what we believe.

"And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God...." (1 Cor. 15:14-15)

The resurrection was the focal point of the preaching of the apostles.

- Peter on Pentecost – "whom God raised up" (**Acts 2:24-32**)
- Peter at Solomon's Porch – "whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses." (**Acts 3:15**)
- Peter before the council in **Acts 5:30-32**
 - "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus ... we are His witnesses...."
- Peter to Cornelius in **Acts 10:40**
 - "Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly."
- Paul in Antioch of Pisidia in **Acts 13:30**
 - "But God raised Him from the dead."
- Paul in Athens in **Acts 17:18, 31**
 - "preached to them Jesus and the resurrection"
 - "He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."
- Paul before the council in **Acts 23:6**
 - "Concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged"
- Paul before Agrippa in **Acts 26:23**
 - "the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead"

Our task is not unlike that of the apostles.

- They were given "many infallible proofs." (**Acts 1:3**)
 - "a token (as defining a fact), i.e. criterion of certainty:--infallible proof." (Strong's)
 - "...an expression indicating the strongest type of legal evidence."²
- They preached Christ in Corinth and Athens (Gentile/Greek/Roman world), using evidences to convince them that Jesus was the Christ.

¹ www.reasonablefaith.org/the-resurrection-of-jesus

² Ramm, Bernard, quoted in *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell

- Paul appealed to eyewitness testimony (non-scriptural evidences) when challenging the Corinthians among whom some were saying that there is no resurrection. **(1 Cor. 15:3-8)**
 - "Dr. Edwin M. Yamauchi, associate professor of history at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, emphasizes: "What gives a special authority to the list (of witnesses) as historical evidence is the reference to most of the five hundred brethren being still alive. St. Paul says in effect, 'If you do not believe me, you can ask them.' Such a statement in an admittedly genuine letter written within thirty years of the event is almost as strong evidence as one could hope to get for something that happened nearly two thousand years ago."³

(Josh McDowell, Evidence for the Resurrection)
 - Manuscript studies indicate that this was a very early creed of the Christian faith, written within a few years after the death of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it's dramatic that Paul ends the passage with "most of whom are still living." Paul was inviting people to check out the facts. He wouldn't have included a statement like that if he was trying to hide something like a conspiracy, hoax, myth or legend.⁴

We appeal to eyewitness testimony to know what really happened.

- "The resurrection of Jesus is challenged today on evidentiary grounds. Therefore, to be fair, the evidence should be judged like any other historical event. Based on standard rules of evidence, consistent eye-witness testimony from multiple credible witnesses would be considered the strongest form of evidence available to a litigant. Therefore, if we find such testimony present in credible accounts of the historical record of Christ's resurrection, we have satisfied a major evidentiary challenge under traditional rules. In fact, we do have multiple eye-witness testimonies regarding the resurrection of Jesus."⁵
- The author of a book about the Titanic was asked in an interview if he thought his book told the real story. His reply was that it contained the words of those who were there. (testimonies of the survivors during the trials that followed the catastrophe)
- From the Atlanta Journal Constitution (late 90's): A question was asked, "what was the black hole of Calcutta?" (an 18x14 foot room that the French-supported Nawab of Bengal, thrust 146 British prisoners into on the hot night of June 20, 1756. Only ventilation was two small air holes. 123 of these men died before the next morning.) The article stated that "several Indian writers have claimed it was a British hoax, perpetrated to rouse patriotic sentiments, but three witnesses testified to the story and none of the 23 survivors ever denied it."
- Cal Thomas, commenting on the shroud of Turin, Indy Star, 10/24/88: "Faith asks simply that one believe the testimony of those who were there, as we believe that George Washington delivered his farewell address, absent of video or audio confirmation, because of the testimony of those who heard him."

³ www.leaderu.com/everystudent/easter/articles/josh2.html

⁴ www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/resurrection-of-jesus.htm

⁵ www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/resurrection-of-jesus.htm

CONSIDER THE CREDIBILITY OF THE APOSTLES AS WITNESSES

- An apostle had to be “*a witness ... of His resurrection.*” (Acts 1:22) (See Acts 10:40-41)
- After Jesus was killed, they *mourned and wept* and hid *for fear of the Jews* (Mk. 16:10; Jn. 20:19).
 - When first told by the women that Jesus was risen, they did not believe.
 - ◆ “*these words appeared to them as nonsense*” (Luke 24:11, NASB)
 - They did not believe the two who walked on the road either (Mark 16:13). Thomas would not believe, unless he could see and feel the scars.
 - When Jesus first appeared to them, they were terrified, believing they had seen a spirit (Luke 24:37).
- They stole the body?! When they didn’t believe he would be raised in the first place?!
- This was not a band of disciples that were interested in going into all the world and preaching that Jesus was the Christ! BUT THAT’S EXACTLY WHAT THEY DID!!
- John saw the linen cloths and the face cloth and believed. Why? (John 20:3-8)
 - Allen Dvorak suggests that the grave clothes were not unwrapped.
 - Ken Chumbley’s similar thought is that the clothes were still in the shape of the body.
- “These were not men who were plotting how they could formulate an elaborate story to deceive the multitudes. These were men who were so grieved they thought all their hopes were gone. These were men who were too shocked to believe the news as they began hearing evidence. These were men who required strong evidence to convince them Jesus was alive - but they received that strong evidence! There was no question left in their minds when they saw Jesus. We can believe their testimony.” (Bob Waldron, *Sir, We Would See Jesus*, p.191)

They were willing to suffer and even die for their faith.

- “With the most powerful office in the world at stake, a small band of hand-picked loyalists, no more than ten of us, could not hold a conspiracy together for more than two weeks. Think of what was at stake: Each of us involved - Erlichman, Haldeman, Mitchell and the rest - believed passionately in President Nixon. To enter government service for him we had sacrificed very lucrative private law practices and other endeavors; we had sacrificed our family lives and privacy.... Yet even the prospect of jeopardizing the President we’d worked so hard to elect, of losing the prestige, power, and personal luxury of our offices was not enough incentive to make this group of men contain a lie.”⁶ (Charles Colson)
 - Ken Green commented on this quote in *Searching the Scriptures*: “Is it even rationally possible then to believe that the eleven apostles, with the complicity of at least five hundred others, were all willing to undergo the burden of being ostracized by friends; tortured and imprisoned by authorities; beaten, stoned, and placed in daily anticipation of death, to maintain a conspiratorial silence? Is it not probable that at least one of the apostles would have renounced Christ before being beheaded or stoned?”

⁶ Charles Colson in *Loving God*, quoted by P. Earnhart in CM, Feb. 1993

- Why didn't James stop the executioners? (**Acts 12:2**)
- Why didn't Peter, being the coward he had been previously, when thrown into prison and beaten, stop all that? What changed him?
- "What advantage did the "conspirators" derive from their "lie"? They were hated, scorned, persecuted, excommunicated, imprisoned, tortured, exiled, crucified, boiled alive, roasted, beheaded, disemboweled and fed to lions—hardly a catalog of perks!"⁷
- The gospel is not the best ideas of a bunch of religious philosophers speculating about how they think we can be reconciled to God. The gospel is a matter of revelation and historical fact. Jesus really lived. His teaching and miracles are truthfully recorded in the gospels. He died on the cross and was raised physically from the grave before He ascended bodily into heaven. Many eyewitnesses saw these things and recorded them for us. If they were fictional stories, those in that day who read these accounts would have laughed the apostles out of town. But rather, these witnesses held to the truth about Jesus, even when cost them their lives. (Steven Cole)⁸
- Henry Morris, in *Many Infallible Proofs*, quotes Simon Greenleaf, developer of the Harvard Law School and noted authority on what constitutes sound evidence:
 - "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."

HOSTILE WITNESSES AND AN EMPTY TOMB

- They preached the resurrection in the very city where Jesus had been crucified and buried.
 - The hostile witnesses could not deny the resurrection.
 - ◆ They tried to hide (cover up) the fact of the empty tomb. (**Matt. 28:11-15**)
 - Why didn't the Sanhedrin for example (agitated by the preaching of the resurrection, **Acts 4:2**), bring out the body of Jesus and put an end to the spread of the gospel?
- "The earliest Jewish response to the disciples' proclamation, "He is risen from the dead!" was not to point to his occupied tomb and to laugh them off as fanatics, but to claim that they had taken away Jesus' body. Thus, we have evidence of the empty tomb from the very opponents of the early Christians." (Craig)⁹

THE CONVERSION OF JAMES, JESUS' BROTHER

- "According to the first century Jewish historian Josephus, James was martyred for his faith in Christ in the late AD 60s. Now most of us have brothers. What would it take to convince you that your brother is the Lord, such that you would be ready to die for that belief? Can there be any doubt that this remarkable transformation in Jesus' younger brother took place because, in Paul's words, 'then he appeared to James?'" (Craig)¹⁰

⁷ www.peterkreeft.com/topics-more/resurrection-evidence.htm

⁸ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-4-danger-drifting-spiritually-hebrews-21-4>

⁹ www.reasonablefaith.org/the-resurrection-of-jesus

¹⁰ www.reasonablefaith.org/the-resurrection-of-jesus

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

- It is reasonable to believe that the evidence which convinced such a man of the out-and-out wrongness of his former course, and led him so decisively to abandon previously cherished beliefs for a movement which he had so vigorously opposed, must have been of a singularly impressive quality. The conversion of Paul has for long been regarded as a weighty evidence for the truth of Christianity. Many have endorsed the conclusion of the eighteenth-century statesman George, Lord Lyttelton, that 'the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation.'¹¹
- "Professor J.P. Moreland presented circumstantial evidence that provided strong documentation for the Resurrection. ... Second, apart from the Resurrection, there's no good reason why such skeptics as Paul and James would have been converted and would have died for their faith."

(Appendix: A summary of *The Case for Christ*, Lee Strobel)

"Taken together, I concluded that this expert testimony constitutes compelling evidence that Jesus Christ was who he claimed to be - the one and only Son of God. The atheism that I had embraced for so long buckled under the weight of historical truth."

(Appendix: A summary of *The Case for Christ*, Lee Strobel)

"A student at the University of Uruguay said to me, "Professor McDowell, why can't you refute Christianity?" "For a very simple reason," I answered, "I am not able to explain away an event in history--the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

(Josh McDowell, *Evidence for the Resurrection*)¹²

My friends, either the gospel is true or it is not. Whether it is true depends upon whether the apostles really did know Jesus as a person and see Him after His resurrection. Sitting in the "jury box," we'll have to make up our minds WHETHER THEIR STORY HAS THE RING OF TRUTH. I have read the record for a long time now, and I can tell you this: the eyewitness testimony to Jesus and His resurrection is rock-solid. I have tried to poke holes in it. I have tried to find weaknesses in it. But at the end of the day, there are just too many things that can't be explained except on this premise: THESE PEOPLE REALLY DID SEE WHAT THEY SAID THEY SAW. (Gary Henry)¹³

"This thing was not done in a corner."

(Acts 26:26)

¹¹ Bruce, F.F., *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* p. 76

¹² www.leaderu.com/everystudent/easter/articles/josh2.html

¹³ Henry, Gary, *Real People Actually Saw the Resurrected Jesus*, Wordpoints.com

INVITATION: What are you and I going to do with this truth?

- Judgment to come. (**Acts 17:30-31; 24:25**)
 - Accountability, responsibility, repentance, obedience
- It makes a difference in how we talk, how we dress, how we live at home and at work, what we do with other believers in local churches. It moves us to live strange and peculiar lives.
- Gives significance to being baptized. (**Romans 6, Col. 2**)

Disturbed Tombs

(by Ken Chumbley)

Somewhere around 2500 BC, an Egyptian king ordered that a gigantic mountain of stone be built over his coffin. When completed, the resulting pyramidal structure contained 29,500,000 cubic feet of limestone. Each side of the base stretched 736 feet. When the last stone was set in place, the peak towered nearly fifty stories above the desert; it would be the tallest man-made structure in the world for the next 3800 years. Built with sheer muscle power, the engineering was such that even to this day neither needle nor hair can be inserted between the blocks.

We really don't know why the pyramids were built, but a couple of things seem obvious. First, it's hard to imagine them being built without pride being a motive. Surely, they were meant to impress the living with the deceased's importance. Second, they likely reflected Egyptian theology about the afterlife—but exactly what isn't clear. An old theory was that the Egyptians believed they could take it with them; thus, a pharaoh was buried with things needed for his happiness in the hereafter: clothes, food, furniture, chariots, consorts, servants, and a palatial house (i.e., the pyramid). But if a pharaoh needed a house in the afterlife, why not build a palace? It seems that the pyramidal shape was significant to the superstitious Egyptians, but here again, we're not sure what the significance was. A recent theory is that the pyramids were *resurrection machines* that acted as way stations in which the pharaohs were transfigured into their eternal spirit.

Regardless of their spiritual purpose, there was a problem: grave robbers saw the pyramids as giant X's that marked the spots of unimaginable treasure. The builders foresaw this possibility and used every architectural trick in the book to thwart intruders: hidden entrances, walled-up passages, blind cul-de-sacs, etc. But almost without exception, the subterfuges failed and looting was relentless. It got so bad that Thotmes I (1545-1515 BC) broke a seventeen hundred year tradition by declining a pretentious tomb and ordering that he be buried in a hidden rock chamber carved into the face of a cliff. Eventually, a number of royal mummies were removed from their ostentatious mausoleums and secretly placed in hidden burial sites in an area that came to be known as the Valley of the Kings (to keep the gravesites secret, workers involved in the reinterment of royal mummies were usually killed; in 1871, a shaft was discovered that led to an underground chamber containing the remains of more than forty royals—including Ramses the Great—who had been buried in the secret, subterranean cemetery).

About two thousand years ago, just outside Jerusalem, there was discovered another disturbed tomb. What was odd about this one, however, is that it held no gold or jewels that invited plunder; the only thing it contained was the body of one who had been crucified. Yet, three days after burial, the body was gone. The initial explanation for this was that grave robbers were to blame (Matt. 28.11- 15), but this was so patently false that in 1930 Frank Morison would write, So far as I know there is not a single writer whose work is of critical value today who holds that [the stolen body theory] is even a case for discussion (*Who Moved the Stone?* 88).

It is a surprise to no one that the Great Pyramid is empty; it was a surprise to everyone that Jesus' tomb was empty the third day. Despite the testimony of the prophets and the repeated promises of Christ, no one expected it. But the tomb was empty and two historical facts — the *disappearance of Jesus' body from the tomb* and the *subsequent appearances of Jesus to unimpeachable witnesses* — argue beyond a shadow of a doubt that it was empty because Christ was raised from the dead!

The pyramids may have been wonders of the ancient world, but as something meant to facilitate their occupant's transition to the next world, they were worthless. Spend some time thinking about what is truly the greatest wonder of the world—the empty tomb of Jesus. Unlike the pyramids, it offers genuine help and hope for what lies ahead.

Copied from *The Sower*, August 26, 2018, edited by Allen Dvorak