

## Resurrection, What Difference Does It Make Now?

April 20, 2014

Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Can we know that with any certainty? And if He did, as someone so famously asked about another situation, "What difference does it make now?" Most historians and scientists would tell us that the miraculous is outside of the natural realm so we can't investigate the supernatural. But is that true? While applying that rule to miracles, they don't seem as eager to apply the same rule to any other unexplainable occurrence. This seems to me to be the difference between faith and doubt. Each looks at the same data or evidence and comes to different conclusions. While faith is the evidence of things unseen (Hebrews 11:1), we are also told to give reasons for the hope that we have (1Peter 3:15).

Is it possible to set aside our prejudices and just look at the evidence and attempt to come to a reasonable conclusion? Did Jesus rise from the dead? The apostle Paul wrote, *14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. 15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.* 1 Corinthians 15:14-19 (ESV) If Jesus did not rise from the dead there is no reason for anyone to be a Christian. The message of the early church was that Jesus *had* risen from the dead. That is why we should repent and trust in Him for our salvation to receive eternal life (Acts 2:32-38). If it didn't happen, the whole belief system is based on a lie.

The resurrection was the seal of proof that Jesus' message was from God and His sacrifice accepted by God. When religious leaders asked Jesus for a sign to prove He was the Messiah, Jesus told them that the only sign He would give was the sign of Jonah. As Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of the great fish, so the Son of Man would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:39-40). In other words, **the main proof that Jesus' message was from God would be His death, burial, and resurrection.** So we see why Paul hung the Christian faith from this one nail.

Professor Gary Habermas has dedicated his professional life to the examination of the relevant historical, philosophical, and theological issues surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus. He has read every article available in English, French, and German, approximately 3500, on the resurrection. His conclusion is that the vast majority of scholars agree with three statements regarding resurrection. **1. Jesus'**

### Commented [notes1]: Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> • Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

### Commented [notes2]: 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)

<sup>15</sup> • but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

### Commented [notes3]: Acts 2:32-38 (ESV)

<sup>32</sup> • This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.  
<sup>33</sup> • Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

<sup>34</sup> • For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand,

<sup>35</sup> • until I make your enemies your footstool."

<sup>36</sup> • Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

<sup>37</sup> • Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

<sup>38</sup> • And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

### Commented [notes4]: Matthew 12:39-40 (ESV)

<sup>39</sup> • But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

<sup>40</sup> • For just 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.

crucifixion is a fact. 2. The disciples of Jesus truly believed that Jesus rose from death. 3. Jesus' enemies believed He rose from death.

There are those who believe that Jesus was never crucified. However, a number of non-Christian sources from the first century mention Jesus' crucifixion. The disciples would certainly not make up a story in which their leader died a shameful death by means that was considered a curse by their own culture (Deuteronomy 21:23). The apostle Paul recognized that a crucified Messiah was a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks (1 Corinthians 1:23).

One of the most popular arguments against Jesus' death is the swoon theory. This theory suggests that Jesus was given a drug that made him appear dead, and when the fresh air entered the tomb after the drug wore off, He revived. There are numerous problems with this theory. One reason this was not possible is the severe scourging that those sentenced to crucifixion would receive. The chords of the whips had lead and sharpened sheep bone tied to the ends. It would literally strip the flesh from the back, shredding the muscle and sometimes even exposing the organs. Jesus' scourging was probably of the more severe kind as Pilate asked the crowd if it was not enough, "Behold the man" (John 19:4-5)! The person would then carry the crossbeam naked through the streets. Jesus was so weakened that He was physically unable to complete the route while carrying the cross (Luke 23:26). A spike in-between the bones in the wrist would sever or extend the median nerve. You get a tiny hint of this pain when you strike your elbow in just the right way. The feet would be nailed with a seven inch spike so the person could with great pain push against it to breathe. The whole process was to prolong agony.

Historically, no one ever survived a full crucifixion. One man was taken down from the cross when a general recognized him. He is the only one reported to have ever survived a partial crucifixion. Crucifixion always ended with a death blow for one reason. If a soldier allowed a prisoner to escape, he could receive the person's punishment. This is why the knees were often broken at the end of a crucifixion (John 19:32-34). The crucified person could no longer push himself up to exhale and would then suffocate. Friends of Jesus had permission to take the body down after Jesus died (John 19:38). The soldier needed to be certain Jesus was dead. Rather than breaking the knees or shin bone and waiting, the experienced soldier pierced Jesus' heart so that they could be about their business. Drug or no drug, no person could survive this. Jesus death by crucifixion is an historical fact.

Now for the second point: the disciples believed Jesus rose from death. Some Bible critics claim that the disciples made up the resurrection story. They point to differences in the gospel accounts of who was there and what they saw. The problem with this argument is that 90% of all scholars recognize the disciples truly believed Jesus rose from the dead. They staked their lives on it. They went from cowering behind a locked

**Commented [notes5]: Deuteronomy 21:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> • his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.

**Commented [notes6]: 1 Corinthians 1:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> • but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,

**Commented [notes7]: John 19:4-5 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> • Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him."

<sup>5</sup> • So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!"

**Commented [notes8]: Luke 23:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> • And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus.

**Commented [notes9]: John 19:32-34 (ESV)**

<sup>32</sup> • So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him.

<sup>33</sup> • But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.

<sup>34</sup> • But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.

**Commented [notes10]: John 19:38 (ESV)**

<sup>38</sup> • After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body.

door to bold witnesses in the streets, willing to be imprisoned or martyred for their conviction (John 20:19; Acts 4:19-20). If Jesus' body was still in the grave, all their opposition had to do was produce the body. If the disciples stole the body, Roman power could certainly uncover where it was hidden.

One recent argument is that the body was eaten by dogs. Do you really think Jesus' adoring disciples would have allowed that? The New Testament account clearly states there was a Roman squad of soldiers guarding the tomb (Matthew 26:65-66). These soldiers were paid by the religious rulers to say the body was stolen.

That brings us to another point. How can we trust this record written by the disciples? Wasn't it written a long time later by others? The Learning Channel produced a documentary, *The Eyewitnesses of Jesus*, showing the evidence for at least one of the gospels being written around 50 A.D. or earlier. Paul's quotation of the message he had received is believed to be the earliest record of Christian teaching. Non-Christian scholars, including the radically liberal Jesus Seminar, believe it is an authentic record of early Christian belief. Most scholars place it as originating anywhere from months to five years after the death of Jesus. That means people that witnessed the events could confirm or deny what was written and taught by the early church. Listen to what the very early church taught.

*<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.* 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (ESV) This passage clearly expresses all three points believed today by the vast majority of scholars. Jesus died on the cross. The disciples believe He rose from death. The enemies of Jesus believe He rose from death.

The most popular explanation for the resurrection appearances believed by only 5% of skeptic scholars is **the hallucination theory**. People sometimes believe they have seen a loved one that died. These scholars argue that this is what happened to the disciples who couldn't come to grips with their Master's death; but what then about the 500 or other appearances to groups? Was it mass hallucination? It would be the only recorded group hallucination in history. That seems to be asking for a different kind of miracle, but wait, they don't believe in miracles. And there is an even bigger problem with the theory, how does it explain Jesus' enemies believing He rose from death?

This is the third overall agreement among scholars, that **the enemies of Jesus believed He rose from death**. In the gospel account we read that this is the very reason the

**Commented [notes11]: John 20:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> • On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

**Commented [notes12]: Acts 4:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> • But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge,

<sup>20</sup> • for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

**Commented [notes13]: Matthew 27:65-66 (ESV)**

<sup>65</sup> • Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can."

<sup>66</sup> • So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

religious leaders asked for Roman guards, they feared His promise of resurrection would come to pass (Matthew 26:63-64). They had more faith than the disciples.

Perhaps the most adamant opponent of the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus was a rabbi named Saul. He hunted down Christians to see that they were killed or imprisoned (Acts 22:4). He believed they were distorting the Jewish faith and needed to be silenced. The risen Jesus appeared to Saul, whose name was changed to Paul, on the road to Damascus to persecute Christ followers there (Acts 22:6-8). We read of that in 1 Corinthian chapter one passage. The reason Paul was so radically changed from an enemy of Christianity to its leading enthusiast was that he experienced the very message he resisted, the resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:8).

The religious leaders apparently made no attempt to find the body. They simply made up an excuse (Matthew 28:12-15). They knew what they feared had happened. And so we see **Jesus' enemies were convinced that He had risen.**

If we could come up with some other reason than the Gospel account to explain all three of these historical realities, we might reach some other conclusion than that of the early church. When scholars that do not follow Jesus are asked what they think happened, the vast majority simply fall back on, "I don't know." If you reject the possibility of a miracle and a miracle is the only explanation, then all they *can* say is, "I don't know."

I would add one more evidentiary fact to what we have looked at so far. **Two thousand years of transformed lives witness that Jesus' resurrection is real.** When we look at opinions of man, we have to consider that belief is usually based on personal benefit. It is easier to believe something when I gain something I desire from that belief. For example, if I want to believe that sleeping in every morning is good for my health, when I feel good I immediately associate it with sleeping in. If I feel bad, it must be some other cause. But Christians believe they should die to their own desire, serve others, and live a life that is a slave to the will of God (Romans 12:1-2). The writers of the New Testament referred to themselves as slaves of Jesus. There is no natural incentive to do that. Generations of missionaries have forsaken home and comfort to go to foreign lands and give their lives to share the good news of Jesus with others. There are missionaries of other religions, but they cannot compare with the hospitals, orphanages, medical assistance, and training provided by Christians. Even a famous atheist has said the only hope for Africa is Christian evangelism.<sup>1</sup>

Ultimately you and I will have to decide by faith whether or not Jesus rose from death. I have put the evidence before you, and there is much more, but evidence alone cannot change a heart. **Each of us must decide if we will honestly invite God to show us the truth.** If you come to God with an open heart and ask if Jesus is God's provision for

**Commented [notes14]: Matthew 27:63-64 (ESV)**

<sup>63</sup> • and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.'  
<sup>64</sup> • Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first."

**Commented [notes15]: Acts 22:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> • I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women,

**Commented [notes16]: Acts 22:6-8 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> • "As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me.  
<sup>7</sup> • And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'  
<sup>8</sup> • And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'

**Commented [notes17]:** <sup>8</sup> *Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.*

**Commented [notes18]: Matthew 28:12-15 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> • And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers  
<sup>13</sup> • and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.'  
<sup>14</sup> • And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble."  
<sup>15</sup> • So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

**Commented [notes19]: Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> • I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.  
<sup>2</sup> • Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

**Commented [notes20]:** Matthew Parris, award winning British newspaper columnist

eternal life, Jesus promised you would find the answer. He taught that if you seek, you will find. If you knock, the door will be opened to you (Matthew 7:7-8).

If we conclude that Jesus died and rose from death 2000 years ago, what does it matter now? Well, it means that what He taught was the truth. The resurrection was the sign He said would verify His message was directly from God. And here is the message: God loves you! He loves us so much that He sent His Son, one with Him in essence, but different in person, to take the punishment we deserve for our rebellion against Him (John 3:16-17). We know we have all done wrong. We know we are by nature selfish. A just and holy God could not have us in His presence; but God provided a way.

Jesus said again and again that we are invited to come to Him to have life everlasting (John 5:40; John 7:37-38). He promised that if we come to Him we would not walk in darkness but would have the light of life (John 8:12).

This is another reason I believe. He made claims that could only come from God or someone who was psychotic. I've never met anyone that thought Jesus was psychotic. His teaching changed the world. Love one another (John 15:12). Love your enemies. Do good to those who spitefully use you (Matthew 5:44). Forgive if you want to be forgiven (Matthew 6:14). I could go on and on. His words are still changing lives today.

What will you do with these facts? You can do what the majority are doing, put it off and say you just don't know. In spite of the evidence you can refuse to come to Jesus. Or you can come to Him and see. The Scripture invites us to taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8).

If you are still a skeptic but want to know the truth, I would encourage you to ask someone whose life you know has been changed since they came to Jesus. Ask them what happened to them. Ask them what is happening in their life now. Take the challenge to truly ask God to show you the truth. What difference does Jesus' resurrection make today? All the difference in this world and the next!

## Questions

- 1 Why is the resurrection of Jesus essential to the Christian faith?
- 2 What sign did Jesus give to prove He was from God?
- 3 What are the three conclusions most scholars agree with?
- 4 What is the weakness of the swoon theory?
- 5 Why did crucifixion end in a death blow?
- 6 Why should we believe that disciples knew Jesus rose from death?
- 7 Why should we trust the Gospel account?
- 8 What is the weakness of the hallucination theory?
- 9 What do most skeptic scholars think happened to Jesus?
- 10 What more recent evidence do we have?

### Commented [notes21]: Matthew 7:7-8 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup> • "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.  
<sup>8</sup> • For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

### Commented [notes22]: John 3:16-17 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup> • "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.  
<sup>17</sup> • For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

### Commented [notes23]: John 5:40 (ESV)

<sup>40</sup> • yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

### Commented [notes24]: John 7:37-38 (ESV)

<sup>37</sup> • On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.  
<sup>38</sup> • Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

### Commented [notes25]: John 8:12 (ESV)

<sup>12</sup> • Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

### Commented [notes26]: John 15:12 (ESV)

<sup>12</sup> • "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

### Commented [notes27]: Matthew 5:44 (ESV)

<sup>44</sup> • But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

### Commented [notes28]: Matthew 6:14 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup> • For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,

### Commented [notes29]: Psalm 34:8 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup> • Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

11 How should the resurrection of Jesus affect your life?