

Week 5: The Resurrection - Evidence, History, and Power

Objective: Present compelling historical, archaeological, philosophical, and logical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, demonstrating that Christianity is grounded in verifiable history and carries unavoidable personal implications.

Introduction - 10 minutes

Opening question: If conclusive evidence were found tomorrow disproving the resurrection, would Christianity survive?

- Or put another way, why is the resurrection essential to Christianity?
 - Read **1 Corinthians 15:14-17** And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.
 - Christianity is falsifiable; without the resurrection, faith is empty.
 - Emphasize: Remember, biblical faith is not blind faith; our faith is confidence rooted in historical events.
 - In courtrooms, verdicts are based on the best explanation of the evidence, not absolute certainty.
 - The resurrection explanation:
 - Explains the empty tomb
 - Explains the appearances
 - Explains the transformation of witnesses
 - Competing theories explain one fact at best, never all.
 - In a court of law, we don't ask for absolute proof - we ask which explanation best fits the evidence.
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- Richard Carrier's article, *"Why I don't buy the resurrection"*: "No amount of argument can convince me to trust a 2,000-year-old second-hand report, over what I see, myself, directly, here and now, with my own eyes... I see no one returning to life after their brain has completely died from lack of oxygen. I have had no conversations with spirits of the dead. What I see is quite the opposite of everything this tall tale claims."
 - He is saying whatever evidence you give him is not good enough – he will never buy it.
 - What is his reasoning for not believing? 'It doesn't happen today' – he has not seen or experienced anything like that, so he can't believe it.

- Pause and think about that – Jesus was supposed to be the Messiah. The one predicted to come and save people from their sins.
 - In those predictions (and His life), there were several things that separated Him from any other person that has ever lived.
 - One of those was the resurrection. Mr. Carrier says he doesn't believe in the resurrection, why? *Because he has never seen one.*
 - Isn't that the point? That Jesus accomplished something no one else has ever or could accomplish?
 - Suppose that others did come back from the dead – suppose that we were trying to prove Jesus' divinity by the fact He had come back from the dead, but there were others who had done the same thing.
 - Take it one step further: suppose Mr. Carrier had seen someone come back from the dead. Would he then believe in the resurrection of Jesus? Maybe. But would he then believe Jesus was the son of God?
 - The whole point that the disciples were trying to make about the resurrection of Jesus was that Jesus had done something that no one else had ever done.
 - And that's what makes the resurrection something worth talking about.
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The Central Claim of Christianity - 5 minutes

- Read **1 Corinthians 15:3-8** For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.
 - Paul cites an early creedal tradition using technical language (“received/delivered”).
 - Most scholars date this creed to AD 30-35 (within 2-5 years of the crucifixion).
 - Paul personally verified this message with Peter and James:
 - **Galatians 1:18-19** Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles - only James, the Lord's brother.
 - This is not anonymous tradition - it's named eyewitness transmission
 - Legends require generations; the resurrection proclamation arose while eyewitnesses were alive. This isn't legend – it's testimony.
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Minimal Facts Supporting the Resurrection - 15 minutes

Minimal facts accepted by the majority of critical scholars:

1. Jesus died by crucifixion
 - a. Roman execution practices ensured death – they were thorough and professional
 - i. This was a brutal, lethal punishment reserved for the worst criminals.
 - ii. Cicero (Roman statesman, 1st century BC): “The very word ‘cross’ should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes, his ears.”
 - iii. This was a humiliating death, not one likely to be ‘promoted’ by his followers.
 - iv. Josephus on Roman crucifixion methods: “They nailed those they caught, one after one, to the crosses, by way of jest, when their rage and hatred were at their height.”
 1. Victims were nailed
 2. Death typically occurred through asphyxiation, shock, blood loss
 3. Roman soldiers were professional executioners (failure meant punishment)
 - v. Dr. William Edwards, MD, (Journal of the American Medical Association, 1986): “Crucifixion was a lethal form of execution, and survival was virtually impossible without immediate rescue.”
 - b. Archaeology: Yehohanan heel bone (a Judean man, his ossuary was discovered in 1968 in north Jerusalem)
 - i. Heel bone pierced by an iron nail
 - ii. Legs broken, consistent with Roman practice
 - iii. Archaeological report (Vassilios Tzaferis) “The ankle bones of Yehohanan were transfixed by an iron nail, conclusively demonstrating the practice of crucifixion in first-century Judea.”
 - iv. Why this matters:
 1. Physical, forensic confirmation of crucifixion
 2. Matches Gospel descriptions (nails, broken legs, burial)
 3. Shows crucifixion was not symbolic or survivable
 - c. Jesus’ crucifixion confirmed by
 - i. **Tacitus** (Roman historian, c. AD 116) Annals 15.44: “Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus.”
 1. “Extreme penalty” is a standard Roman reference to crucifixion
 2. Hostile, non-Christian source

3. Confirms execution under Pilate
 - ii. **Josephus** (Jewish historian, c. AD 93) Antiquities 18.3.3: "Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, condemned him to be crucified."
 1. Explicit mention of crucifixion
 2. Independent Jewish source
 - iii. **Lucian of Samosata** (Greek satirist, c. AD 170) The Death of Peregrine: "The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day - the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account."
 1. Mocking, hostile tone
 2. Confirms crucifixion as common knowledge
 3. No theological motivation
 - iv. **Babylonian Talmud** (compiled AD 200-500) Sanhedrin 43a: "On the eve of Passover Yeshu was hanged."
 1. "Hanged" in Jewish usage refers to execution on a tree, consistent with crucifixion (cf. Deut. 21:22-23; Gal. 3:13)
 2. Hostile Jewish source
 3. Confirms execution timing and method
 - v. Point: Even without the New Testament, we would still know Jesus lived, was crucified under Pilate, was worshiped as God, and that his followers believed he rose from the dead.
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2. The tomb was empty
 - a. Recorded in the earliest Gospel (Mark).
 - b. Joseph of Arimathea's tomb is named - easy to disprove if false
 - c. Women as witnesses indicate authenticity (women's testimony was inadmissible in Jewish courts)
 - i. In 1st-century Jewish culture, women's testimony was commonly viewed as less authoritative than men's.
 - ii. The Gospel writers are trying to persuade audiences that the resurrection happened.
 - iii. Inventing women as the primary witnesses would be a poor rhetorical strategy if credibility were the goal.
 - d. Resurrection proclaimed in Jerusalem - where a body could refute it.
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3. Disciples believed they saw the risen Jesus
 - a. Multiple group and individual appearances.
 - i. Paul, the Gospels, and Acts all report post-death appearances.
 1. E.g. **Acts 1:3** After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.
 - ii. Appearances include physical interaction (eating, touching).
 - b. 1 Corinthians 15:6 mentions over 500 witnesses at once - many still alive at the time of writing.
 - i. Where are the refutations from those 500?

- ii. Furthermore, what was Paul's intention in saying this? 'Go ask them!'
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4. Cowards became courageous witnesses
- a. After Jesus' death, his followers re-emerged publicly and preached resurrection despite persecution (even to the point of execution)
 - b. People may die for false beliefs, but not for what they know is a lie
 - c. The disciples weren't inheriting a tradition - they were claiming firsthand experiences
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5. Sudden conversion of skeptics
- a. James and Paul converted suddenly
 - i. Paul
 1. Former persecutor of Christians
 - a. **Acts 8:1** And Saul approved of their killing him. (Stephen)
 - b. **Acts 8:3** But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.
 2. Undisputed letters (Galatians, 1 Corinthians, Philippians)
 3. Claims a resurrection appearance as the reason for conversion (Acts 9)
 4. Gained nothing socially, in fact he lost status, safety, and freedom
 - ii. James (brother of Jesus)
 1. Not a follower during Jesus' ministry
 - a. **John 7:5** For even his own brothers did not believe in him.
 - b. **Mark 3:20-21** And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, 'He is out of his mind.'
 2. But transforms to become a leader of the Jerusalem church
 - a. **James 1:1** James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ
 3. Paul explicitly states James experienced a resurrection appearance (1 Cor 15:7)
 4. Josephus confirms James' later execution
 5. James was a skeptic turned leader;
 6. Had a Jewish worldview: resurrection at the end of time, not in the middle of history
 7. Something dramatic must explain the shift

Teaching emphasis:

- The gospel is news, not advice.
 - Faith arose from the resurrection - not the reverse.
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Alternative Explanations Refuted - 5 minutes

- **Swoon theory:** Claims Jesus only appeared to die on the cross and later revived
 - Roman soldiers were professionals
 - Medically implausible (also spear wound in John 19)
- **Hallucination theory:** Suggests the resurrection appearances were subjective visions
 - Hallucinations are individual, not shared
 - Does not explain group appearances or empty tomb.
 - Also doesn't explain **Luke 24:39** See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.
- **Stolen body theory:** Argues that Jesus' body was taken to fake a resurrection
 - What would be the motive?
 - Why would the disciples be willing to suffer and die?
 - Roman guards risked death for failure
 - Jewish leaders never produced a body
 - Remember, the Jewish leaders had anticipated this! **Matt 27:62-66** The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first." "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.
 - They remembered Jesus' own prophecy!
 - **Matt 28:11-15** While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed.
 - No need for this plan – all they had to do was point to the body!
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Furthermore... think of the logistics of removing the stone
 - Diameter: ~4-5 feet
 - Thickness: ~10-16 inches
 - Shape: Roughly circular, like a thick stone wheel
 - Gives a rough weight estimate of 1-1.5 tons
 - Roughly equivalent to a Honda Civic
- **Legend theory:** Proposes the resurrection developed as a myth over time

- Refuted by early creeds and eyewitnesses
- Timeline:
 - AD 30: Crucifixion
 - AD 30–35: Creed (1 Cor 15)
 - AD 50s: Paul's letters
- Too early for myth development
- C.S. Lewis argues that Christianity doesn't feel like myth - it reads like history.
 - Myths feel timeless and vague. The Gospels feel specific, awkward, and historically grounded.

Summary: Only the resurrection accounts for all the data.

Power of the Resurrection - 5 minutes

- Resurrection establishes Jesus' authority as the Son of God
 - **Romans 1:1-4** Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God - the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.
 - Hope of our resurrection
 - **1 Corinthians 15:20-22** But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.
 - Motivation for holy living
 - **Romans 6:4** We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.
 - Courage in witness
 - **Acts 4:33** With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them.
 - Resurrection validates:
 - Jesus' claims (**John 2:19** Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.")
 - Final judgment (**Acts 17:31** For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.)
 - Christianity isn't about moral improvement - it's about new life
 - The resurrection doesn't just change how we die - it changes how we live.
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Application and Encouragement - 5 minutes

- Christianity invites honest investigation and examination.
- Our faith rests on historical reality, not feelings or legend.
- The resurrection is our anchor in grief, doubt, and fear
- If this were a courtroom, what would the verdict be?"
 - Remember, our faith is a response to faith, not blind belief!
- Assignment: Read Acts 2:22-36.

Class Discussion - 5 minutes

1. Which evidence do you find most convincing?
2. How would you respond to "People don't rise from the dead"?
3. If the resurrection is true, what does Jesus deserve from us?

Next week... Why Trust the NT Canon?