

## Explore the Evidence

### *Acts 1:1-11*

I heard a story the other day about a man that went on vacation to the Holy Land with his wife and mother-in-law. Half way through their trip, the mother-in-law dies, so this guy goes to a funeral director who explains that they can ship the body home, but it will cost \$5,000 or they can bury her in the Holy Land for \$150.

The son-in-law says, "Let's just go ahead and ship her home." The funeral director said, "Are you sure? That is an awfully big expense and I can assure you we do a very nice burial here." The son-in-law said, "Look, two-thousand years ago they buried a guy here and three days later, he rose from the dead. I just can't take that chance!"

The man in that joke does beg a question. Was there a man two-thousand years ago that really came back from the dead? That is the question that does indeed beg for an answer.

In college I seriously considered being a lawyer. I even scheduled the entrance exam to enter law school but on the day of the exam I decided not to go because I believe that God had called me to be minister.

Today, I want to present to you the case for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even though Jesus Himself doesn't need me to defend Him, there is a lot on the line as to whether or not He was raised from the dead and even a doctor named Luke, who wrote two books in the Bible, believed a legal defense was in order as you are going to see.

Dr. Luke evidently was also very interested in the law and in legally defending the resurrection, because he says in *Acts 1:3*, **"After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive." (Acts 1:3, NIV)**

I believe this is a subject worthy of the most detailed scrutiny and examination for this reason. The Resurrection is either the greatest fact or the greatest farce in human history. Two billion people in the world today have staked their eternal destiny and their entire lives on this one truth that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. Yet for four billion other people in the world the jury is still out. Let us explore the evidence for Easter.

### Why Should I Believe In The Resurrection Of Jesus?

I want to give you four, in my mind, incontrovertible, absolute, conclusive reasons why Jesus was raised from the dead.

#### **His Body Was Buried**

Obviously, before Jesus Christ could come back from the dead, He had to be actually dead. There are many today, who say that Jesus really didn't die on the cross. Many believe in what is called the "swoon theory". It suggests that either Jesus Christ fainted on the cross or perhaps went into shock and fell unconscious, but He didn't really die, it is just that everybody thought He was dead. Then when He was taken to the tomb, the cool air revived Him and somehow He got out alive. In other words, He wasn't resurrected, He was just resuscitated.

There are several problems with this line of thinking. First of all, we are told in *John 19:34* that just to make sure that Jesus Christ was dead, a Roman soldier thrust his spear into His side between His ribs that punctured the sac around His heart, as well as His heart itself, causing a clear water-like fluid and blood to come out. This

was medical proof in and of itself that Jesus Christ died, because the blood had already begun to clot and separate from the watery serum.

In case you doubt this, an article in the Journal of the American Medical Society concluded, "Clearly the way that historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to his side was inflicted and supports the traditional view that the spear probably perforated not only the right lung, but also the pericardium and heart, and thereby, insured His death. Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge."

## **The Tomb Was Empty**

Remember we saw that Dr. Luke proudly said there were many *"convincing proofs"* of the resurrection of Jesus Christ? One thing that has never been disputed in 2000 years is this - on that Easter Sunday morning, the tomb was empty. From the very first time the tomb was reported as empty it was not denied.

Those Roman guards who were put in charge of guarding the tomb reported to the chief priest that the body was missing. Here was their reaction. *"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.'"* (Matthew 28:12-13, NIV) Immediately, the response was to try and explain the resurrection away.

Now think about how absurd this cover-up was. The guards were told to spread the story that the body of Jesus had been stolen by His disciples while they were asleep. I don't know of any court in the world that would allow a witness to testify what happened while he was asleep. In fact, if the soldiers were asleep how did they know that His disciples came and stole the body away?

We have to ask the question, "Why would the chief priest come up with this kind of a story?" It is very simple. If the tomb was empty, if Jesus Christ was not in that grave after three days, then either man took Him out of that grave or God took Him out. Let's suppose that human beings took Jesus out of the tomb. Then there are only two options. It either had to be His friends or it had to be His foes. What is the possibility that His friends stole the body?

There are three obstacles to that possibility. First of all, there were the soldiers guarding the tomb. These soldiers were the best the Roman army had to offer. They were the "special forces" if you will. Sixteen well trained and highly disciplined men each carrying a 6 foot spear, a 3 foot sword, a dagger on one side and a shield on the other side. It is a far stretch to think that these disciples, who just three days earlier with yellow streaks down their backs a mile wide, ran from Jesus like cowards, would now come back and attempt to overpower these Roman guards to take the body of Jesus.

Beyond the soldiers, there was the stone. A stone was rolled in front of that tomb that weighed many tons, sat in a groove and rolled downward in front of the door. Modern scientists say that it would have taken up to 20 men to move such a stone a few feet. Yet, the New Testament tells us this stone was picked up and moved away with a tremendous force at a good distance.

There was also the seal. We are told that when the stone was rolled in front of the tomb, it was given a Roman seal. Once that stone was in place, it was sealed with sealing wax and stamped with the Roman sign. Those Roman soldiers knew that if they went to sleep on their watch or if that seal was broken, they would be burned alive with their clothes on, because the penalty of going to sleep or allowing a Roman seal to be broken was death.

There is another possibility. If the body was not removed by His friends, then maybe it was removed by His foes. Of course, that is absurd. His foes were doing everything possible to keep Him in the tomb, not get Him out of it. If they indeed did take the body all they had to do was produce the body to show that Jesus hadn't been raised from the dead. The truth is - His friends could not remove the body and His foes would not remove the body.

### **Lives Were Changed**

There were a tremendous number of different people who were willing to bear witness they had seen Jesus Christ alive. In fact, when you put all the scriptures together, we are told that Jesus appeared on 10 different occasions over a period of 6 weeks to at least 516 witnesses. He appeared in the morning, in the afternoon, and in the evening. He appeared indoors. He appeared outdoors.

Now when you stop to think that if each of these witnesses was brought into a courtroom and assumed the witness stand and testified for only 30 minutes each about what they had seen and heard and experienced, you would have over 250 hours of testimony. Can you imagine the verdict of the jury if over 500 witnesses testified to the same thing, corroborating one another 500 different times?

May I also remind you that many of these witnesses sealed their testimony with their own blood? They suffered torture. They were beheaded. They were imprisoned. They were crucified.

Think about what happened to the disciples. History says that before Easter they were dejected because they thought Jesus was dead. They were hiding behind closed doors. They were scared for their lives and yet after Easter these same disciples went out boldly proclaiming that Jesus Christ was alive. All but one of these disciples suffered violent deaths, yet none of them ever disavowed their testimony that Jesus Christ was the Son of God who literally and bodily appeared to them after He had died.

Now it is a psychological fact that no one will willingly give his life for what he knows to be a lie. Many people will die for what they think is true, such as these suicide bombers, but no one will ever die for something they know is not true.

### **The Church Was Born**

There is no other explanation of the church than the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is no other explanation that Christians uniquely worship on Sunday, the first day of the week, than the resurrection. There is no other explanation that before you can join a true New Testament church, you must confess that Jesus Christ is the risen Lord and accept the resurrection.

I am not a lawyer (as you well know) so maybe you would like to hear from the most successful trial attorney in the entire world. The Guinness Book of World Records says that the most successful attorney in history is a man named, Sir Lionel Luckhoo, who succeeded in getting 245 consecutive murder acquittals in his legal career. Nobody has ever come close to that. This man, who was knighted twice by Queen Elizabeth, took his expertise in law and went through the question of whether the resurrection of Jesus Christ would stand up to the test of legal evidence. This is what he concluded.

"I say unequivocally that the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt."

You don't have to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but you do have to deny overwhelming evidence to the contrary if you reject it. If I were a skeptic, I would still have one simple question - "So what?" I've

answered the question of why I should believe in the resurrection of Jesus, but then I'll answer one last question.

## **Why Should I Receive The Jesus Of The Resurrection?**

Everyone on this planet that dies, will die either having rejected Jesus Christ or having received Jesus Christ. I want to share with you four simple reasons why you should receive Him.

### **So My Sins Can Be Forgiven**

*Romans 4:25 says, "He was handed over to die because of our sins, and He was raised from the dead to make us right with God." (Romans 4:25, NLT)*

Don't miss what that verse says. Anybody can claim to die for the sins of the world and anybody can claim that Jesus died for the sins of the world, but think about this.

Jesus died on the cross, as the payment for the sins of the world, but how do I know that God accepted His sacrifice? How do I know the check didn't bounce? How do I know He really was the Son of God, who could pull that off? The empty tomb is proof that God accepted that payment. *Romans 1:4 says, "And Jesus Christ our Lord was shown to be the Son of God when God powerfully raised Him from the dead by means of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 1:4, NLT)*

### **So I Can Live A Life Of Purpose**

The vast majority of people in this world, including the vast majority of people that live right here in this county are not living; they are just existing. I hope you understand that you were not put here on this earth to get up in the morning, go to work, come home, watch TV, go to bed, retire and die. There is something more to life than just physical existence. God put you here for a purpose. He has a plan for your life and it starts with you living a real life, the life that can only be found in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

That is why Jesus said in *John 10:10, "My purpose is to give life in all its fullness." (John 10:10, NLT)* You can't even understand or experience what real life is all about until you find it in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

### **So I Can Conquer Death**

You see the fact that Jesus Christ came back from the grave and that Jesus Christ came out of that tomb tells me that death does not have to have the final say in my life. Death does not have to conquer me. I can conquer death.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ means that when I come to that time when my life is coming to an end and I am about to breathe my last breath, when I have seen my last sunrise and enjoyed my last sunset I can say,

*"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (I Corinthians 15:55, NASB)*

### **So I Can Receive Eternal Life**

You cannot receive eternal life and you cannot go to heaven unless (a) Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and (b) You believe He was and receive Him as your Lord. *Romans 10:9 says, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9, NASB)*

We have explored the evidence. Now, you have to make a decision. Who are you going to invest your hope in for eternal life? The evidence screams out at us that Jesus Christ told the truth when He said in **John 11:25, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;" (John 11:25, NIV)**

I have given you evidence that demands a verdict. Now you need to decide not only whether or not the evidence is true, but what are you going to do about it?