

“Why I Believe in the Resurrection”

Message 5 of 5 in the Sermon Series “Key Questions: God, Creation, Scripture, Jesus, the Resurrection”

Acts 17:26-34 | Pastor Christian Newsome

1 Peter 3:15—“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...”

“If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all he said; if he didn’t rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead. That is how the first hearers felt who heard reports of the resurrection. They knew that if it was true it meant we can’t live our lives any way we want. It also meant we don’t have to be afraid of anything, not Roman swords, not cancer, nothing. If Jesus rose from the dead, it changes everything.”

Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* [Penguin: New York, 2008], p. 210

Acts 17:26-34—“And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,²⁸ for ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’²⁹ Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”³³ Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, ‘We will hear you again about this.’³³ So Paul went out from their midst.³⁴ But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.”

Resurrection Fact #1: The Historical Testimony.

“Skeptics must provide more than alternative theories to the Resurrection; they must provide first-century evidence for those theories.

1. *Jesus died by Roman crucifixion.*
2. *He was buried, most likely in a private tomb.*
3. *Soon afterwards the disciples were discouraged, bereaved, and despondent, having lost hope.*
4. *Jesus' tomb was found empty very soon after his internment.*
5. *The disciples had experiences that they believed were actual appearances of the risen Jesus.*
6. *Due to these experiences, the disciples' lives were thoroughly transformed. They were even willing to die for their belief.*
7. *The proclamation of the Resurrection took place very early, from the beginning of church history.*
8. *The disciples' public testimony and preaching of the Resurrection took place in the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified and buried shortly after.*
9. *The gospel message centered on the preaching of the death and resurrection of Jesus.*
10. *Sunday was the primary day for gathering and worshipping.*
11. *James, the brother of Jesus and a skeptic before this time, was converted when he believed he saw the risen Jesus.*
12. *Just a few years later, Saul of Tarsus [Paul] became a Christian believer, due to an experience that he also believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus."*

Norman J. Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don't have enough faith to be an Athiest* [Crossway: Wheaton, 2004], p. 299-300

"The 'minimal facts approach' considers only those data that are so strongly attested historically that they are granted by nearly every scholar who studies the subject, even the rather skeptical ones. They are well evidenced and nearly every scholar accepts them."

Gary R. Habermas & Michael Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* [Kregel: Grand Rapids, 2004], p. 44

"When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified..."

Josephus Flavius, *Antiquities 18.64. Josephus in Ten Volumes*, vol. 9, Jewish Antiquities, [Loeb Classical Library, Louis H. Feldman, trans.] (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981)

“Nero fastened the guilt [of the burning of Rome] and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty [i.e. ‘crucifixion’] during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus.”

Tacitus, *Annals 15.44* (c. A.D. 115)

“On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged.”

Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a (probably late 2nd century). The Babylonian Talmud, I. Eipstein, ed. and trans. [London: Soncino, 1935-1952]

Acts 5:34-39—“But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. ³⁵And he said to them, ‘Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. ³⁶For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. ³⁷After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. ³⁸So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; ³⁹but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!’”

Resurrection Fact #2: The Biblical Testimony.

“The subject of Jesus’ resurrection occupies more than three hundred verses in the canonical New Testament.”

Dr. Gary R. Habermas

The Bible gives 2 primary testimonies about the Resurrection from 5 unlikely sources:

- Testimony #1: The empty tomb.
- Testimony #2: The eyewitness testimony.

Unlikely Source #1: The first written biblical accounts of the resurrection came from an enemy of the ministry of Jesus: Paul.

1 Timothy 1:12-13a—“I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service,¹ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent...”

1 Corinthians 15:3-4; —“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.”

Unlikely Source #2: The first eyewitness biblical accounts of the resurrection came from those with no cultural credibility: Women.

“Each gospel states that the first eyewitnesses to the resurrection were women. Women’s low social status meant that their testimony was not admissible evidence in court. There was no possible advantage to the church to recount that all the first witnesses were women. It could only have undermined the credibility of the testimony. The only possible explanation for why women were depicted as meeting Jesus first is if they really had. N.T. Wright argues that there must have been enormous pressure on the early proclaimers of the Christian message to remove the women from the accounts. They felt they could not do so—the records were too well known.”

Keller, 213.

Matthew 28:5-7a—“But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead...”

John 20:18—“Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’—and that he had said these things to her.”

Unlike Source #3: The Jewish Guards.

Matthew 28:13—“and said, ‘Tell people, “His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.””’”

Unlikely Source #4: The first leader of the Jerusalem church was both a brother of Jesus and a skeptic of his claims until the resurrection: James.

John 7:4—“Now the Jews’ Feast of Booths was at hand. ³So his brothers said to him, ‘Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. ⁴For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.’ ⁵For not even his brothers believed in him.”

James 1:1—“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...”

1 Corinthians 15:3-5; 7—“Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve...⁷Then he appeared to James...”

Unlikely Source #5: The 500 ‘normal’ people.

1 Corinthians 15:3-6—“Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.”

Resurrection Fact #3: The Changed Lives Testimony.

‘Minimal Facts’ History Revisited:

5. The disciples had experiences that they believed were actual appearances of the risen Jesus.
 6. Due to these experiences, the disciples’ lives were thoroughly transformed. They were even willing to die for their belief.
- Before: The post-crucifixion disciples were hiding because of their faith in Jesus.
 - After: The post-resurrection disciples were dying because of their faith in Jesus.

“When Jesus was crucified, his followers were discouraged and depressed. They no longer had confidence that Jesus had been sent by God, because they believed anyone crucified was accursed by God. They also had been taught that God would not let his Messiah suffer death. So they dispersed. The Jesus movement was all but stopped in its tracks. Then, after a short period of time, we see them abandoning their occupations, regathering, and committing themselves to spreading a very specific message—that Jesus was the Messiah

of God who died on a cross, returned to life, and was seen alive by them...They faced a life of hardship. They often went without food, slept exposed to the elements, were ridiculed, beaten, imprisoned. And finally, most of them were executed in torturous ways. For what? For good intentions? No, because they were convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that they had seen Jesus rise from the dead. There's no other adequate explanation."

Dr. J.P. Moreland, Interview with Lee Strobel in *The Case for Christ*
[Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1998], p. 332-333

"Virtually all the apostles and early Christian leaders died for their faith, and it is hard to believe that this kind of powerful self-sacrifice would be done to support a hoax...No other band of messianic followers in that era concluded their leader was raised from the dead—why did this group do so?"

Keller, 218-219

Acts 5:36-39—"For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. ³⁷After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. ³⁸So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; ³⁹but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them."