

Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus

1. **Jesus predicted his own death, and even more importantly, his resurrection.**

There are a dozen or more references in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in which Jesus clearly predicts that he himself would be condemned to death and crucified, but that he would be raised to life again on the third day. Jesus **KNEW** what was going to happen, and he explained it to his disciples on several occasions. As an example, consider Matthew 16: 21. “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” Jesus’ condemnation to death and crucifixion were **NOT** topics the disciples wanted to hear. Although he never predicted his death without adding that he would **RISE** from the dead, the disciples seem to have missed the latter part of his prediction, as we too probably would have done!

Usually, when Jesus was speaking to his disciples about his upcoming death and resurrection, he admonished them to tell no one about these predictions. However, as you might imagine, the word did get out, and the Jews who were also aware of Jesus predictions took him very seriously. In Matthew 27: 63-64, after the crucifixion of Jesus, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate saying, “ ‘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.’ ” In the next two verses, Pilate did just that! He assigned a guard to make the tomb of Jesus as secure as it could be made, he placed a seal on the stone, and posted the guard.

2. The death of Jesus.

The death of Jesus was a terrible experience for anyone to endure, let alone one this Jesus who was guilty of NO crime. Many authors have written and theatrical presentations and movies have attempted to present descriptions of the torture that Jesus suffered before he finally died on that cross. As graphic as these descriptions are, the reality of His suffering must certainly have been much, much more. Jesus suffered a sleepless night, the mockery of two trials, the floggings by cruel Roman cat-o'-nine-tails, the torture and humiliation of public execution, finally dying of a broken heart, in order to provide the ultimate sacrifice to pay the sin-debt, not just for the Jews, but for ALL mankind. There can be no doubt that Jesus actually died on that cross—for YOU and for ME!

“Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes back on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.”
Mark 15: 15-20.

If proof were actually needed Jesus actually died on the cross, it is provided medically by the following description from the book of John: “The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.”
John 19: 32-34.

According to Samuel Houghton, M.D., of the University of Dublin, “Death by crucifixion causes a condition of blood in the lungs similar to that produced by drowning and strychnia. . . . [A copious flow of blood, succeeded by a copious flow of water, follows the wound] would occur in a crucified person, who had died upon the cross from a rupture of the heart. (Houghton, as cited in Cook, Frederick Charles, ed. *Commentary on the Holy Bible*. London, John Murray, 1878, p. 349-50)

3. The disciples at the crucifixion and death of Jesus.

The disciples of Jesus had lived with, traveled with, and learned from the greatest teacher who ever lived for three years. Jesus had performed great miracles including the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead in their presence. He had calmed the sea and fed thousands of people. He had taught them, predicted the future with 100% accuracy, including prophecy about his own death and resurrection. Nevertheless, at the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus, his disciples, except for John, his mother Mary, and a few women, ran away in fear! Lest we be too critical of his disciples, perhaps we should ask the uncomfortable question, “What would we have done?” Would we have stood with John and his mother Mary at the foot of the cross, or would we have run away like the rest of the disciples? As difficult a time as I have even thinking about the violence and pain inflicted upon our beloved Jesus, I can’t imagine how difficult a time this must have been for Jesus and His followers.

4. The tomb and burial of Jesus, the stone, the seal, and guard at the tomb.

After the death of Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea requested that his body be taken down from the cross. The following account is given in the book of Matthew: “As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had

cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.” (Matthew 27: 57-61)

The next day, the chief priests and Pharisees, remembering the teachings of Jesus to his disciples that he would rise again after three days, were fearful that these disciples might steal the body and tell people that he had been raised from the dead. In order to prevent this, they asked Pilate to make “the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.” (Matthew 27: 66). It is uncertain exactly how many soldiers were posted, and whether the posting was of a Roman Guard or a Temple Guard. A “watch” probably consisted of at least four men, and there were probably several watches. In Matthew 28:11-15, after the resurrection, “some of the guards went into the city” and were paid by the chief priests to devise a plan explaining that “his disciples had come during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.” Of course, the disciples were probably still in hiding, and falling asleep on guard duty was unlikely, since the penalty for falling asleep on duty was severe!

Now think about this! We should thank the chief Priests, the Pharisees, and Pilate for securing the tomb as they did! Without these security measures, a body might have been stolen by someone or dragged away by animals. The security measures (the tomb, stone, the seal, the guard at the tomb) actually helped to confirm the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

5. The empty tomb, grave clothes, stone, seal, and guard

From the book of John, “Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. [According to Matthew and Mark, she was accompanied by “the other Mary” or “Mary the mother of Jesus” respectively. According to Luke, “the women took spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.”] So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved [i.e., that would be John, the author of this book!], and said, “They

have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him! So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally, the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)" (John 20: 1-9)

Notice first that it was the WOMEN, not the disciples, who first went to the tomb of Jesus, and they were certainly NOT expecting a resurrection early that morning! Their reaction to the empty tomb was that they were upset that someone had stolen His body! In spite of all of Jesus' teaching to the disciples and these faithful women that He would be raised from the dead, in spite of seeing and even entering the empty tomb, except for John, they still didn't understand WHY Jesus' body was NOT in the tomb! And even for John, he had to think about it for a few minutes before the concept of "resurrection" finally dawned on him! It was NOT the empty tomb, but it was Christ's post-resurrection appearances (see the next paragraph!), that persuaded His followers that Jesus had actually risen from the dead!!

By the way, what ever happened to the stone and seal that blocked the entrance to the tomb? The answer is in Matthew 28: 2-4. "There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men." Notice that the stone and seal posed no problem for the angel, who simply "rolled" it out of the way and sat on it!! Now, the whole idea about rolling the stone away was NOT to let Jesus OUT of the tomb—He was long GONE from there—but rather to allow the women and disciples to get INTO the tomb, to experience the EMPTINESS of it!! Also, notice that the

appearance of the angel to move the stone was enough to make those rugged Roman guards “shake and look like dead men!”

Back to the book of John for the rest of the story: “Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb, crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying?’ ‘They have taken my Lord away,’ she said, ‘and I don’t know where they have put him.’ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ‘Woman,’ he said, ‘why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?’ Thinking he was the gardener, she said, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means Teacher).” (John 20:10-16).

It seems that John was the first person to suspect that the resurrection might have taken place, but apparently, he didn’t tell anyone. It seems that the men went home, leaving Mary crying at the tomb, still wondering what had become of the Jesus’ body. When Mary bent over to look inside the tomb, where the men had just been, she saw two angels in white. Did the men not see these angels? Did Mary realize that these were angels? Possibly not. Was this, a conversation with angels, Mary’s reward for being faithful at the foot of the cross AND for staying at the tomb after the men went home?

But there was more for Mary! When she turned around from seeing the angels, she saw Jesus, but she did not recognize Him, supposing that he was the gardener. He even talked with Mary, and she did not recognize Him. However, when Jesus called her by name “Mary,” only then did she recognize Him! There can be something very special about hearing your name called! And no one calls your name like Jesus!!!

6. Post-resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ

In *The NEW Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, 1999, p. 250, Josh McDowell lists 15 distinct post-resurrection appearances (that are listed below!) of Christ in the lives of individuals or groups of individuals. It may be important to notice that Jesus appeared to the disciples at least 3 times each, and on one occasion to over 500 believers. Due to the frequency of these appearances and the number of people involved, these were NOT merely dreams or visions! Also notice that, with the exception of Saul, who after a dramatic conversion became the Apostle Paul, Jesus NEVER physically appeared to non-believers!

Post-resurrection Appearances of Jesus as listed by Josh McDowell.

- 1. To Mary Magdalene: Mark 16: 9; John 20: 14**
- 2. To women returning from the tomb: Matthew 28: 9-10**
- 3. To Peter later in the day: Luke 24: 34; 1 Corinthians 15: 5**
- 4. On the road to Emmaus: Luke 24: 13-34**
- 5. To disciples without Thomas: Luke 21:24:36-43; John 20: 19-24**
- 6. To disciples with Thomas present: John 20: 26-29**
- 7. To seven at Sea of Tiberias: John 21: 1-23**
- 8. To multitude of 500+ : 1 Corinthians 15: 6**
- 9. To James: 1 Corinthians 15: 7**
- 10. To the eleven: Matt 28: 16-20; Mark 16: 14-20; Luke 24: 33-52; Acts 1: 3-12**
- 11. At the ascension: Acts 1: 3-12**
- 12. To Paul: Acts 9: 3-6; 1 Corinthians 15: 8**
- 13. To Stephen: Acts 7: 55**
- 14. To Paul in the temple: Acts 22: 17-21; 23: 11**
- 15. To John on Patmos: Revelation 1: 10-19**

In John 21, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, seven of the disciples had decided to go back to work as fisherman on the Sea of Tiberius, which is also known as the Sea of Galilee. “Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, ‘Friends, haven’t you any fish?’ ‘No,’ they answered. He said, ‘Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.’ When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the Disciple whom Jesus loved [i.e., John] said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’ As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, ‘It is the Lord,’ he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish you have just caught.’ Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ None of the disciples dared ask him, ‘Who are you?’ They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.” (John 21: 4-14)

According to the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have [died]. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I but the grace of God that was with me.” (1 Corinthians 15: 3-10)

In Acts 1: 3-12, we have “After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John [the Baptist] baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?” He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.’ “ (Acts 1: 3-12)

By the way, the promise of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled in Acts 2, and the disciples and other followers of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, turned their world upside down!!

7. Disciples after the resurrection and believers through the ages.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence for the resurrection is the contrast of the behavior and attitudes of the disciples BEFORE and DURING the crucifixion of Jesus to the behavior and attitudes of these same disciples AFTER the crucifixion. Remember that John was the only disciple who dared to remain close to Jesus at the foot of the cross, together with a few women, three of whom were named Mary (see John 19: 25). The rest of the disciples, all filled with FEAR, fled for their lives! Even Peter denied Jesus three times. However, after the crucifixion they were ALL filled with BOLDNESS and conviction, as they lived and died in FAITH to the finish. Of the eleven disciples (excluding Judas

who betrayed Jesus and took his own life!), only John survived to old age. Nevertheless, he was boiled in oil, and banished to the Isle of Patmos, where he received “The Revelation.” The other ten disciples who ran away at the crucifixion each died a violent martyr’s death, not “fighting to the finish” as war heroes might do, but “faithful to the finish,” refusing to deny their faith in Jesus Christ.

What caused this dramatic change from fearful to fearless? I believe there were two differences. First, the followers of Jesus had seen the resurrected Lord. Second, the followers received by the Holy Spirit that was prophesied in Joel 2:28, that Jesus promised them in Luke 24: 40, and that was delivered to them at Pentecost in Acts 2. This was the beginning of the church! In spite of persecutions and executions of believers following the death and resurrection of Christ, faith in Him could not be stopped. When men and women have something to live for, FEAR is gone—they are not afraid to die. Now, almost 2000 years and literally MILLIONS of changed lives later, faith in Christ continues to thrive—especially in hard times! In the next paragraphs I will try to be specific about the TRUE heroes of our faith, about men and women whose lives were changed by the Lord Jesus Christ, men and women who lived sacrificial lives and many who died martyr’s deaths. Only in Heaven will ALL the stories be known! My hope is to present a FEW of them here!

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