

Five Reasons to Believe in the Bodily Resurrection of Christ

Outline:

- Opening:
 - 5 Reasons
 - He Lived
 - He Died
 - The Roman Army
 - The Empty Tomb
 - Embarrassment
- Closing prayer

Opening prayer: “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,” – Lord may the words of my lips and the thoughts of my heart be pleasing in Your sight. Amen.

There is a “Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster”. Unsurprisingly, they poke fun at organized religion – Christianity, especially, because poking fun at Muslims is too scary. They have no evidence of a Flying Spaghetti Monster because they feel we have no evidence for our faith.

In today’s sermon, I would like to revisit Easter, since it is still fresh in our minds and be true the quote from 1 Peter 3:15 that I opened with. You see, I would like to give you five reasons, five secular reasons, five ‘evidences’ of the bodily resurrection of Christ. It is the most important event in our faith. But, is there any way we can convincingly talk to them about real evidence from this faith of ours?

I think there is.

I will tie one hand behind my back, figuratively speaking, by *not* relying on the Bible to tell us Jesus rose, but rather by using what a detective would call “evidence”. It makes a compelling story. So, here it goes:

Number 1: He lived

No why would I begin with a blindingly obvious thing like “He lived”? Because up until, say, the Second World War no one talked about Jesus not existing – there were debates about his deity, but not about his existence. So, if we can, let us prove that he lived:

Just as an aside: Years ago, I asked my son, Winston, if William of Orange existed. he said, “Yes!” - well, how do you know? “He was in my Donald Duck!” He was about 6 years old then and agreed that Donald Duck was not completely reliable.

But what about, say, Alexander the Great? The earliest history we have of him was written 350 after his death! Yes, and Julius Caesar? Anyone want to say, “He was a mythical figure!”? The first account we have of him was written 160 years after his death by Suetonius - *He was the son of Jupiter and born of a virgin.*

To be sure, there were earlier writings, but we don't have them.

We do have Early, Eyewitness accounts from:

Mark +40, Matthew +50, Luke +55, John +65; Paul: 1 Cor. 15:3-? Early Creed

Josephus – (Shlomo Pines, Hebrew Univ. Jerusalem – not interpolated: Paraphrased:)
“about this time there was a wise man called Jesus and his conduct was good and he was known to be virtuous; ... Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die, but those who had become his disciples did not abandon their discipleship, they reported that 3 days later he arose from the tomb alive. Accordingly, he could have possibly been the Messiah

Pliny the Younger (Governor of Asia Minor): “What do I do about these Christians? They are in the habit of singing hymns to Christ, as if he were a god, ...

Babylonian Talmud (70-200) a central text of Rabbinical Judaism – has Jesus' arrest warrant: On the eve of the Passover Yeshu ha Notzri was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, an arrest warrant went out, "He is to be stoned because he has practiced **sorcery** and enticed Israel to apostasy." (Sorcery is an interesting word, it is the same as a miracle, but an evil miracle)

So those are three non-Christian sources from the Jewish hierarchy, a Roman historian, and a Roman Governor. There are dozens more like these.

He Lived – no doubt about it.

Number 2: He Died

He died: No accounts suggest he didn't. Nevertheless, there are plenty of modern writers suggesting Jesus did not die. Most often, they put forward fantastic ideas about him "fainting" on the Cross. Oh, sure: he was whipped till you could see his bones, forced to carry a heavy cross 700 meters to Golgotha, nailed to it, and hung there suffocating and bleeding for 3 hours; but then he fainted and revived.

Our Muslim friends would refer to the Koran:

Sura 4:157-158: The Jews boasted, "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah";- but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them,

...

This is explained in Muslim writings that actually Judas was crucified and Allah just put Jesus' face on him so everyone would think that Jesus had been crucified.

So could it be true? Could He have fainted? I found my answer in an improbable place: The Journal of the American Medical Association (March 1986). The article: On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ. It is like reading 4000 words of alphabet soup but conclusively shows the impossibility of Jesus surviving the cross.

Not only did He live, He died – no doubt about it.

Number 3: The Roman Army

Now don't forget, the Romans were expecting to crucify Barabbas; Matthew calls him a "notorious prisoner"; Mark and Luke record that he "took part in a riot". In other words, here is someone with some military power and the will to use it, so the Roman Army wasn't going to let anything go wrong. Indeed, he was the sort of Messiah the Jews were expecting. Send in the Marines!

After the crucifixion the Chief Priests, who had listened to Jesus' claim that he was going to return in 3 days, go to Pilate and ask for guards to ensure that nothing goes wrong. "Nothing is going to happen, but, you know, just in case..."

In Matthew 27, Pilate says "You have a watch". The word for "watch" is the Greek: *kustodia*. We know a *kustodia* was a group of 16 Roman soldiers on a constant rotation of duty.

Who were these guys? These are some very tough men: They had boot camp for 6 months – today's armed forces are about 3 months. The penalty for cowardice or disobeying orders was decimation; Decimation means that all the soldiers line up, and every 10th soldier is beaten to death by his comrades.

The penalty for falling asleep on guard duty was Stoning – so, these soldiers had a lot to lose.

And now it has all gone wrong and to whom do they go? – the Chief Priests! And they tell them that "sorcery took him". There's that word "sorcery" again. Matthew writes: "the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men". We might just as accurately read – "a miracle took him".

The Marines of their day, tasked to keep Jesus behind a 2 ton rock, were unable to keep Him there and, by their own admission, lost him due to a miracle.

We can tell those who don't yet believe: He lived - no doubt about it, he died - no doubt about it, and the 'Marines', helped by a 2-ton rock, couldn't keep him in the grave.... Which leads to:

Number 4: the Empty Tomb

The easiest way for the authorities to disprove the Resurrection was to produce a body! But no one – on any side – ever claimed this.

William Lane Craig, the Canadian Christian apologist says: “The earliest Jewish claim that the disciples had stolen Jesus’ body (Matt. 28.15) shows that the body was in fact missing from the tomb. [When the disciples proclaimed], “He is risen from the dead!” [the Jews did not] point to his occupied tomb and to laugh them off as fanatics, but claimed that they had taken away Jesus’ body. Thus, we have evidence of the empty tomb from the very opponents of the early Christians.”

Well, wasn’t the risen Christ just a hallucination? This is also a criticism of the resurrection. I mean, let’s be honest, these are a bunch of religious fanatics that just saw what they wanted to see, right? The evidence is against that as well:

- 1) Hallucinations don’t happen to between 12 and 500 people *identically and simultaneously* (that would be a miracle to rival the resurrection itself!)
- 2) Hallucinations would mean the body was still in the grave, but no one disputes that it wasn’t
- 3) Hallucinations must be *expected*, but the actions of the Disciples shows that this was not the case

He lived, He died, the Marines and big rock couldn’t keep him in the grave, and everyone agrees the tomb was empty. This is shaping up just like a cold case detective novel, but we have one more bit of evidence to complete the package!

Number 5: Embarrassment

The Gospels are embarrassing. No one would write it that way if it didn't happen.

Let's take the subject of women. One first-century rabbi, Eliezer, casts light upon a particularly embarrassing position of the time: "Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman ... "

"Praised be God that he has not created me a gentile; praised be God that he has not created me a woman; praised be God that he has not created me an ignorant man."

Gloriously, Paul controverted in his letter to the Galatians: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, *meer, slaven of vrijen, mannen of vrouwen - u bent allen één in Christus Jezus.*" Amen!

But Jesus revealed himself as the Messiah, plainly - for the first time - to the woman at the well. (John 4) This is an awkward fact for someone like old Eliezer!

Roman soldiers first reported an empty tomb, but Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Christ = a Marketing disaster!

And where were the disciples? Peter showed cowardice and confusion, they had been dispersed, followers were walking home like those on the Emmaus road, and Thomas had left the scene entirely! They should have been camping outside the tomb, singing praises, praying and waiting for Christ to appear and.... Well, no, they didn't. How embarrassing.

The Criterion of Embarrassment suggests that if the Gospel story were artificial it would read more like the story in the gnostic Gospel of Peter: *they saw three come forth from the tomb, two angels supporting Jesus, and a cross following them. And the heads of the two angels reached to heaven, but the head of Jesus overpassed the heavens. And they heard a voice ... saying, You have preached to them that sleep. And the cross responded: Yes.*"

So a giant – gigantic, COLOSSAL – Christ and a talking Cross – that might sound more “god-ish”, but it isn't true.

What *is* true is that He really lived and really died – the Roman soldiers could do nothing about the empty tomb and no one would cast the heroes of a first century story as women, main characters as cowards, and followers as clueless.

Ending:

I'd like to end now, if I may, by stating another thing most of you may know. It is not careful and compelling rationalization, deep psychological analysis, or clever Bible exegesis that brings people to Christ. It is necessary, but not sufficient. We need the work of the Holy Spirit and we – you and I – need to be examples of the Christian path, and we need to be ready to give an account of the hope we have Christ Jesus.

As you stay seated, let us end in a short prayer:

Father, we thank You for the insights into Your Word and the blessing that that brings.

We pray for those who know You: that today may have been a blessing and that we may go out with a renewed confidence to our witness.

We pray for those who believe You, but haven't 're-ceived' You: that this lesson's fellowship may awaken embers from ash.

And finally, We pray that by being your workmen and women our witness may water a mustard seed of faith in those searching for truth.

In the name of Christ Jesus, Amen.