

“If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that 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.” (Tim Keller)

What are the stakes? 1 Corinthians 15:14-17 (“**14** And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. **15** We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. **16** For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. **17** And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”) tells us that everything about Christianity is at stake. If the resurrection is not true, our faith is futile! Give up, go home, stop wasting your time, energy, and money on this fraudulent faith.

And according to Romans 10:9, belief in the resurrection of Jesus is necessary for salvation. You can't just say, “Jesus had some cool teachings, I'll follow some of those and be good to get to heaven.” No, if you deny His substitutionary death and resurrection, then you will not be saved.

-What's the difference between Christ's resurrection and the other resurrections in the Bible (such as Lazarus, Ezekiel 37, widow's son by Elijah, Jairus' daughter by Jesus)? Those others were only temporary – they would all still die later. But Jesus rose for good, never to die. Others were raised by a prophet or by Jesus. Jesus rose by His own power.

When talking to someone who does not believe in the resurrection of Jesus, first find out what their main objection is: is it the fact that scientifically it's impossible to come back from the dead? Or is it the fact that they don't believe the historical record about Jesus is trustworthy? You'll probably have to dip into some other areas of Apologetics (“How do we know the Bible is historically trustworthy?” “Hasn't science disproved the Bible and miracles?”). But you'll also have to find out if you can go on the Offensive – putting forth the case for the truth and plausibility of the resurrection. Or if you have to be Defensive – defending the Gospel accounts against

### **OFFENSE – a case for believing the resurrection happened<sup>1</sup>**

- 1) The resurrection is testified to by 5 independent sources – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul. One might object that they are not independent since they're all in the Bible, but they were all separate accounts that were eventually collected into one place, like any anthology. The fact that the four Gospels have very different details and what even seem like contradictions doesn't work against their being true, it works for their being true. Each of the testimonies has more unique material than it has material in common with the others. If the resurrection never happened, you'd expect them all to mimic each other.
- 2) The location of Jesus' tomb was well-known by all, so if Jesus had not risen from the dead, this could have easily been checked out. Both His followers and His opponents would have a motive for checking this out, and they all agreed. (“Wrong Tomb Theory” debunked)

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory & Edward Boyd, *Letters From A Skeptic* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008), pp. 127-130.

- 3) The Christian church began in Jerusalem just a few weeks after Jesus' crucifixion, exploding in growth because people realized that the resurrection of Jesus confirmed all He had claimed about Himself.
- 4) The resurrection accounts don't read like legendary narratives, and if you're making something up you don't name-drop prominent people like Joseph of Arimathea. And you certainly wouldn't have women be the first people to the tomb, since in that society a woman's testimony would not count for anything.
- 5) The conversions of Paul and James are only explained by Jesus appearing to them. Paul was killing Christians until Jesus appeared to him and he does a 180. James was an unbeliever until Jesus appeared to him.
- 6) 1 Cor. 15 mentions that Jesus appeared to over 500 people, and that most of them are still alive; you can go ask them if you don't believe.
- 7) The disciples were transformed from fearful to absolutely fearless in preaching to hostile audiences and the basis they give is that Jesus rose from the dead.
- 8) There is no motive for the disciples to fabricate the story- nothing to gain and everything to lose. Nothing suggests they were inclined to lie, and nothing suggests they could have pulled it off if they wanted to.

### **DEFENSE**

1	Jesus died	Jesus rose	Christianity
2	Jesus died	Jesus didn't rise—apostles deceived	Hallucination
3	Jesus died	Jesus didn't rise—apostles myth-makers	Myth
4	Jesus died	Jesus didn't rise—apostles deceivers	Conspiracy
5	Jesus didn't die		Swoon

(Chart and much discussion is from: Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli, *The Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (InterVarsity Press, 1994).

The first thing that needs to be establish for a resurrection is a death. Did Jesus actually die?

**-The Swoon Theory** - The first false theory (Schleiermacher and 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century rationalists) about the resurrection is called "The Swoon Theory" – that Jesus didn't really die, that he just passed out from all the pain or slipped into a coma and seemed dead. But the cold air of the tomb revived him, then he got up and walked out.

Tacitus was a Roman historian, recorded that Jesus was killed after suffering the most extreme penalty at the hands of Pilate.

And the Bible records torture, whipping, agony, his struggle to take breaths, a considerable loss of blood. The Romans were so sure that he was dead that they didn't bother to break his legs like they normally did, and they thrust a spear into His side to make sure (blood and water meant that his lungs had collapsed and he died of asphyxiation). Every physician who has studied the crucifixion has said he died. It is inconceivable that He survived. The Roman soldiers were experts at execution. The final absurdity is that a man hurt that badly would be able to get up, move the massive stone and walk past the guards. Plus, as he appeared to his disciples as a beat-up mess, he would not have inspired them to lay down their lives for Him.

**-The Conspiracy Theory**- the disciples stole the body, lied about His appearance, faked the resurrection. This is actually a pretty old theory from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but modern scholarship has given it up. The disciples who were so scared when Jesus was arrested suddenly became bold enough to go past Roman troops and steal Jesus' body? Doesn't explain any of the evidence. Of course, Matthew tells us that the Jews told the Roman soldiers to say exactly this, "the disciples stole the body." Roman soldiers could have been put to death for falling asleep.

**-The Wrong Tomb Theory-** the idea that Joseph of Arimathea put the body in a different tomb, so when everybody was circulating stories that Jesus' tomb was empty, he was just a few burial plots away. The problem is that this would be such an easy mistake for the Romans and Jewish authorities to correct; they all knew where the body was placed. Synoptics all record that the women had carefully noted where the tomb was; they would have passed by an empty tomb because they would have been looking for a sealed one.

**-Hallucination Theory-** The disciples had a group hallucination that they wrote down. Or that it was just a myth/legend that grew over time. Discredits all the 500+ witnesses, doesn't address why the tomb was empty, was easily discredited. Jewish authorities could have easily produced the body. For people to have the same hallucination stretches reason & credibility. The disciples, as Orthodox Jews, were not expecting the resurrection, they viewed death as final.

**-Mistaken Identity** – Since Jesus' followers first thought he was a gardener, or a fellow traveler on Road to Emmaus, or a spirit, then they were just seeing Jesus in other's faces. But why would the Biblical accounts start with them mistaking Him? And none of them went away with any doubt that they had seen Jesus. Doesn't account for empty tomb, transformation of disciples, and the sheer number of people fooled.

**-Spiritual Resurrection** – that the disciples only meant to convey that Christ rose spiritually, in their hearts. Then all the accounts of Jesus being touched by Mary, Thomas, & eating with the disciples were a mistake to include. The enemies of Christ were never able to produce the body nor disprove the resurrection.

So, basically, all of these theories are just intellectual ways of saying, "Well, I can't actually say the Bible is lying because there's no evidence of that, but I have to come up with some way to explain away the ridiculous notion that a man was God and that He came back from the dead." But the only explanation that makes sense in light of the historical facts is that Jesus Christ was crucified by the Roman authorities, buried in a guarded tomb, was raised by the power of God, and appeared to over 500 witnesses afterwards.

And that resurrection makes all the difference in our lives! Because Jesus defeated death, those who are saved in Him will defeat death. We will rule and reign with Him for eternity because our sins will not be counted against us.