



We envision a congregation whose love for Jesus and one another leaves a clear and compelling witness for Christ.

Evidence for the Resurrection by Brian Watson

What follows is a very brief defense of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For the full document, including much more detail, specific references, and citations, go to www.pinehurstbaptist.org/evangelism.asp, then look towards the bottom of the page and click on "The Resurrection of Jesus." That will open up a PDF file that you can save and print. If you don't have Internet access, I would be glad to give you a hard copy. I would also recommend another online source for the defense of the resurrection: www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2013/03/evidence-for-the-resurrection-of-christ-in-a-nutshell/. You can find other articles regarding the resurrection on this website.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The easiest way to grasp the importance of the resurrection is to imagine what would have resulted had Jesus not risen from the grave. If he had been crucified and sealed in a tomb, never to be seen again, how would we know that he was the Son of God, the Messiah, truly God and truly man? If he had remained in the grave, how would we know his death on the cross accomplished anything? If he didn't rise in an immortal body, how could we have any hope for life after death?

Fortunately, Jesus did rise from the grave. He "was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4; notice also the presence of all three Persons in the Trinity in that verse). In that way, the resurrection proves who Jesus is and demonstrates that he reigns in power.

Additionally, Jesus "was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). This shows that he paid the sentence for our sins in full and walked out of the prison of the tomb a free man.

When Jesus rose from the grave, he rose as "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20). That means that his resurrection insures ours. Though Jesus is the

only one to be resurrected so far in history (as opposed to revived, which is what happened to Lazarus and a handful of others who were brought back to life, only to die again), all who are united to Christ by faith will be raised in the future when Jesus returns. Like Jesus, we will have an immortal, glorified body, one that cannot get sick and die. This is the great hope for Christians everywhere. The resurrection shows that God is making a new creation, one that began with Jesus, continues with our spiritual rebirth, and will culminate in resurrected bodies in a new heaven and earth.

That is the meaning of the resurrection in a nutshell.

But how do we know it's true? If someone could somehow prove that Jesus never rose from the grave, Christianity would be refuted. For as Paul writes, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep [i.e., died] in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor. 15:17-19). Certainly, if the resurrection were false, then Christianity would be, too. Fortunately, we have several lines of evidence that show that the resurrection is an historical event.

The Bible

The best witness to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is the New Testament. This is not one witness to the resurrection, but many. After all, the New Testament consists of twenty-seven different books written by nine authors, at different times, in different locations, and to different destinations. What is amazing is the fact that these many different witnesses proclaim a single, unified message regarding Jesus. It is important to note that these

books were all written in the first century A.D., within seventy years of Jesus' death and resurrection, and that they were written by eyewitnesses or those associated with eyewitnesses. The New Testament is the best-attested book from ancient history, in the sense that we have much greater manuscript evidence for these writings than we have for any other ancient text. For more information on the Bible, go to www.pinehurstbaptist.org/evangelism.asp and click on "Defending Scripture."

All four Gospels show that Jesus was raised from the dead. First, they claim that after being beaten, flogged, and made to wear a crown of thorns, Jesus was crucified (Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19).

The Gospels also report that Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, and that some women witnessed the location of this tomb (Matt. 27:67-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42). This tomb was sealed and guarded by soldiers (Matt. 27:62-66). Some women returned to the tomb on the third day and found that it was empty, a fact corroborated by John and Peter (Matt. 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-10). The risen Jesus was then seen by various groups of people. Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" saw him and touched his feet (Matt. 28:9). He appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus and he ate with them (Luke 24:13-30). Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples (Judas, the twelfth, had betrayed Jesus and then committed suicide) multiple times, showing that he had risen in a glorified body (Luke 24:36-40; John 20:19-20, 26-27). He even ate with them and prepared breakfast for them (Luke 24:41-43; John 21:12-14). Jesus died, and then he was alive again, able to appear

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Evidence for the Resurrection (*continued*)

and disappear at will. His resurrected body later ascended into heaven (Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9).

The apostle Paul was also a witness to the risen Jesus. He had a very unique encounter with Jesus on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus (Acts 9). Additionally, Paul witnesses to the resurrection several times in his letters. In some of his letters, written roughly twenty to thirty-five years after Jesus' death, Paul seems to quote early creeds or hymns that date back to the earliest years of Christianity. These include Romans 1:3-4, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, and Philippians 2:5-11. The first two passages clearly speak of the resurrection, while in the third passage, the resurrection is implied.

Extra-biblical Christian Evidence

Many of the early Church Fathers, leading figures in Christianity in the two or three centuries after Jesus' death, bear witness to the resurrection. One such witness is Clement of Rome. He was the first bishop of Rome at the end of the first century. In *1 Clement*, he writes of the resurrection: "Let us consider, beloved, how the Lord continually proves to us that there shall be a future resurrection, of which He has rendered the Lord Jesus Christ the first-fruits by raising Him from the dead." This letter was written perhaps before A.D. 70, though the traditional date is 95-97.

Another early Christian witness to the resurrection is Polycarp (c. 69-c. 155). In his *Epistle to the Philippians*, written around A.D. 110, he writes these strong words: "For whosoever . . . says that there is neither a resurrection nor a judgment, he is the first-born of Satan." Clearly, Polycarp thought the resurrection was of first importance.

Non-Christian Evidence

There are several non-Christian historians who mention Jesus and the early Church. We should consider this evidence, too. The Jewish historian Josephus (c. 37-c. 100) mentions Jesus twice in his *Jewish Antiquities*. In describing the fate of James, he states that this apostle is "the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ." We have no indications that Josephus became a Christian, but here he acknowledged that Jesus was called Christ, or

Messiah, by some.

In another, longer passage in the *Antiquities*, Josephus states Jesus was a wise man known by his virtue, that he had followers, that he was condemned by Pilate to die, that his disciples reported that they had seen him alive after three days, and that they continued to follow him.

The Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus (56-117) also wrote of Jesus. He refers to Jesus as "Christus" and remarks that Jesus died during the reign of Emperor Tiberius, under the watch of Pontius Pilate. He also notes that Christianity was "checked for the moment" after Jesus' death, but "broke out not only in Judea . . . but even in Rome."

Another witness is Pliny the Younger (61-c. 112), who was a Roman senator and the governor of Bithynia (part of modern-day Turkey). In one of his letters to Emperor Trajan (reigned 98-117), he mentions that he persecuted certain Christians, forcing them to abandon their faith. He observes that Christians worshiped Jesus as one who is divine.

There are other references to Jesus from Roman writers such as Suetonius, and the Syrian Stoic philosopher, Mara bar Serapion.

Summary of the Evidence

If we were to take only the non-biblical, non-Christian evidence regarding Jesus, we could still establish certain facts. Jesus lived. He was a teacher, a wise man, and a virtuous man. He had followers. He was crucified during the reign of Emperor Tiberius, under the Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate. The disciples later had claimed that after three days they saw a resurrected Jesus. The Church grew quickly and spread to Rome. And Christianity continues to thrive today.

Of course, if we add to this account what we know from the New Testament, we can say much more about Jesus. The only reason to refuse using the New Testament as an accurate collection of historical documents is an anti-Christian bias, or perhaps an anti-supernatural bias (refusing to believe in the miracles of

Jesus, including the resurrection). However, if Jesus is God, the one who created the universe from nothing, no miracle is impossible.

Arguments for the Resurrection

In addition to observing the facts above, we can offer a few supporting arguments in favor of the resurrection of Jesus.

One is the Jewish expectation of resurrection. Jews believed in a general resurrection at the end of history (Daniel 12:2; John 11:24), not the resurrection of an individual in the middle of human history. The disciples didn't expect that Jesus would be resurrected, though he had told them he would. It seems that several of the disciples had doubts (see Matthew 28:16-17; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:24-25). Since this resurrection was not anticipated, it is highly unlikely that anyone would make this story up.

Another argument is the transformation of the disciples. Reading through the Gospels, one gets the sense that they are sincere but rather thick-headed. They were also cowardly, fleeing when Jesus was arrested. Yet when we read Acts, we read of a group of bold witnesses to Jesus, willing to die for their faith. Only the resurrection (and the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit) could transform them in such a way.

Paul had a similar transformation, though perhaps even more dramatic. He was changed from a persecutor of the Church to its greatest evangelist and missionary. Jesus' brothers also were converted from unbelievers to pillars of the church and writers of New Testament letters (James, Jude).

Finally, there is the dramatic outgrowth of Christianity from its Jewish roots. Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism, yet several Christian worship practices are dramatically different from Jewish ones. This dramatic change in religion can only be accounted for by something as dramatic as the resurrection.

The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is impressive. It is one of the best-attested facts in ancient history. The only question left is, Will we believe it?