

## **Evidence of the Resurrected Christ**

Would you shoot a man in the head if three days later you knew he would knock on your front door? Or would you stab a man in the back if you knew that he would, a week later, confront you with the wound mark in his back as he sat down to eat at your table? It is not likely that you would.

That Jesus' public ministry took place around 27-30 A.D. is a fact of both Biblical and secular history. That he died around 30-32 A.D. is a fact no one disputes. Again, history attests to his death. But His was a very unusual death. "Truly never a man died like this man!"

That he was buried is also indisputable. Joseph of Arimathea donated his own garden tomb and assisted in His burial. The women wrapped His body in spices and tears and saw the soldiers as they rolled a stone over the passageway into the cave tomb, and then put the imperial seal of Rome on it. No one could go into that tomb without a soldier permitting him and assisting him. The record states that the Jewish authorities asked for and received a Roman guard which consisted of 16 soldiers who were stationed at the tomb for three to four days to guard the body of Jesus from being stolen by his followers. Matthew 27:62-66:

<sup>62</sup> The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. <sup>63</sup> "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' <sup>64</sup> 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."

<sup>65</sup> "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." <sup>66</sup> So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

Jesus lived – He died on a cross, and He was buried, and the burial place was guarded.

Then came Sunday morning – the third day. It was near dawn in that garden – during the 4<sup>th</sup> watch. The soldiers pulled their cloaks around them tightly. It was chilly. Only a few more hours and they would be off of this silly assignment. Whoever heard of guarding a dead body in a sealed tomb!?

*Then mysterious things began to happen.* Into a cold corpse lying wrapped on that stone slab life was poured. His eyes fluttered open. The man arose and came through the tomb. The open tomb permitted the soldiers and the women and others to enter into the sealed tomb.

Listen once again to this account of that event. <sup>2</sup> *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.* <sup>3</sup> *His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.* <sup>4</sup> *The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men* (Matthew 28:2-3).

Now after this had occurred a group of women followers arrived to finish the embalming process of adding more spices to the grave clothes. Here is Luke's account of their arrival and a subsequent event:

“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. <sup>2</sup> They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. <sup>5</sup> In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: <sup>7</sup> ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” <sup>8</sup> Then they remembered his words. <sup>9</sup> When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. <sup>10</sup> It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup> But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. <sup>12</sup> Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by

themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened” (Luke 24:1-12).

Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and he lives forevermore. The resurrection of Christ is based on solid historical evidence – one fact is indisputable and has been ever since it occurred. ***The tomb was empty!***

The belief in the resurrection of Christ lies at the heart of the Christian gospel. As believers in Him we do not symbolize our faith by images of a dead body on a cross. Rather, an empty cross symbolizes the Christian faith because the tomb is empty and Jesus Christ lives today. A dead Savior could never save but a living Lord who conquered death, sin, and the devil through His suffering death on a cross can and does save all who come unto God by Him.

***How do we know that the resurrection of Christ occurred? What evidence is there? How do you explain the empty tomb?***

That the tomb was empty and the body of Jesus was gone was attested to by the soldiers who guarded it, by the Jewish council of leaders, and by the disciples.

Now there exist only two logical explanations. Either the body was stolen, or Jesus arose from the dead and came out of the tomb on his own power. The resurrection is the only real answer.

Consider the theory of the stolen body. Who would’ve stolen it and how? Only the friends or the enemies of Jesus would have moved the body. The enemies could have moved it to a safer place in order to prevent the tomb from becoming a place of pilgrimage. But would they? The Jewish leaders were aware of his claim that He would rise. They had guards posted to keep his body in that sealed tomb. If they had moved it, then when the early Christians began to proclaim his resurrection, all they had to do was to produce the dead body and silence them forever. But they did not do this because they could not.

**His friends could not have removed the body because of the guards.**

Moreover, would they, if they could have? Emotionally they were not expecting His resurrection. The whole event bewildered them. Besides, would anyone lay down his life for what He knew was a deliberate deception?

The sequel to the Resurrection Story proves this theory wrong. It cannot account for the psychological change in the disciples. Prison, torture, and death could not alter their conviction that Jesus was alive!

There is a third way the body could be moved. The body of Jesus could have been supernaturally raised from the dead – Jesus could have gotten up from the grave and walked out of it as the Lord of life. ***That is just what happened!*** Death could not hold the Son of God who was sinless and who exhausted the Judgment of God against His people. Paul writes in Romans 1: the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures <sup>3</sup> regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life<sup>[a]</sup> was a descendant of David, <sup>4</sup> and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power<sup>[b]</sup> by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

Consider briefly some of the lines of evidence recorded in the New Testament for the resurrection of Jesus. **First, the material evidence** supported the claim. There is the displaced stone boulder – which could not have been moved except by the soldiers or someone greater than the soldiers.

And there is **the empty tomb**. Moreover, the witnesses were all surprised to find the stone door rolled back, and the grave empty. It was a shock to their system and some of them remained unconvinced for days.

Another important factor in the material witness is **the state of the grave clothes**. Jesus had been wrapped in clean linen cloth and about 100 pounds of spices. Now on the morning of the first day of the week the body of Jesus was gone – vanished – but the grave clothes were still there. This alone means the body was not moved by another for the grave clothes would have gone with the body or would have been unwrapped in a heap.

***Instead***, the account states that the clothes were lying just where they were when the body was in them, but the napkin or head cloth was separate from them. The shape of the body as still was present in the collapsed cloth, but the flesh and bones had disappeared. Jesus had risen, passing through the graveclothes which he left undisturbed was a silent proof that death could not hold him. The cocoon-like state of the graveclothes greatly impressed Peter [and John]. Here is John's account of their discovery. "So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. <sup>4</sup> Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, <sup>7</sup> as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. <sup>8</sup> Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed (John 20:3-8).

Another line of material evidence is the **many physical appearances of Jesus** to a number of people over a 40-day period. This involved a number of differing circumstances with great variation in time and place.

Consider the appearances to the eleven disciples, including Thomas one week later when He invited Thomas to put his finger into his scars and to be not faithless but believing (John 20:24-29). On another occasion Jesus cooked breakfast for his disciples and ate broiled fish and bread with them (John 21:1-14). In fact, Paul states that at least 500 people saw Jesus alive from the dead. (1 Corinthians 15:6)

Christ Jesus is risen from the dead. He is risen, indeed! The Christian gospel is grounded upon the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is alive today and He can change your life. He can forgive you of your sins and give you eternal life. You, too, can know that He lives by the salvation that He gives. The Bible says, "If you believe and confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9,10). Amen.