

HE IS ALIVE!

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I. Introduction

A. Scripture

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also (1 Corinthians 15:1–8 NASB).

- B. The early Christians greeted each other on Easter with *Christos anestē* ("Christ is risen")! The reply was *Autos anestē en alētheia* ("He is risen, indeed")!
- C. That reply could also be translated, "He is risen in truth!" The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not a mere religious story; it is the bedrock upon which our faith stands.

II. The Resurrection is the greatest **FEAT** in history!

A. The Resurrection is a **FACT** of history

1. Jesus repeatedly predicted His Resurrection on at least nineteen occasions in the gospels (Matt 12:40; 16:21; 17:9, 22–23; 20:18–19; 26:32; Mark 8:31; 9:9–10, 31; 10:32–34; 14:28, 58; Luke 9:22; 18:31–33; John 2:18–22; 12:34; 14:19; 16:16, 22).
2. The Jewish authorities witness to Christ predicting His Resurrection when they said to Pontius Pilate , "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.'" (Matt 27:63).
3. Paul taught that the Resurrection was foundational:

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied (1 Cor 15:17–19).

4. Early Church witnessed to it.
 - a. Ignatius (c. AD 50–115)
 - b. Clement of Rome in his Epistle to the Corinthians (c. AD 95)
 - c. Polycarp in his Epistle to the Philippians (c. AD 110)
 - d. Justin Martyr (c. AD 100–65)
 - e. Tertullian (c. AD 160–220)
5. Even non-Christian writers such as Flavius Josephus reported that Christians believed it.¹

6. As N. T. Wright says, "The idea that faith must never have anything to do with history, so popular in certain circles for many years, is long overdue a decent burial."²

7. *Christ is risen!*

B. **EMPTY TOMB**

1. Before the Resurrection

a. Jesus was assuredly dead.

i. He was scourged.

1) John records "Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him" (John 19:1).

2) Jewish law restricted whipping to forty lashes (Deut 25:3; see 2 Cor 11:24). Therefore, the Jews limited whippings to thirty-nine lashes.

3) However, Roman *lictors* had no such limitation.

4) The Roman *Flagrum* had several lashes with pieces of bone and metal embedded in them. It was designed to tear off pieces of flesh.

5) I think there were two whippings, the second one, the more extreme, would have been administered right before crucifying Him.

6) Jesus was beaten within an inch of His life.

- ii. He was forced to carry His cross.
 - 1) Jesus would have had to carry the crossbeam of His cross, the *patibulum*, to Golgotha.
 - 2) The crossbeam would weigh close to one hundred pounds.
 - 3) Depending upon the locations of the Praetorium and Golgotha, the distance was between a quarter and a half mile.
 - 4) However, Jesus was so weakened by the whipping that He had received that He could not carry the crossbeam Himself, and Simon of Cyrene was pressed into service to carry it (Matt 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26).

- iii. He was crucified.

- 1) Roman executioners were professionals with a lot of practice.
- 2) Medical doctor, C. T. Davis, explains crucifixion:

The cross is placed on the ground and the exhausted man is quickly thrown backwards with his shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire feels for the depression at the front of the wrist. He drives a heavy, square wrought-iron nail through the wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly he moves to the other side and repeats the action, being careful not to pull the arms too tightly, but to allow some flex and movement. The cross is then lifted into place.

The left foot is pressed backward against the right foot, and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arch of each, leaving the knees flexed. The victim is now crucified. As he slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating, fiery pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain—the nails in the wrists are putting pressure on the median nerves. As he pushes himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, he places the full weight on the nail through his feet. Again he feels the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the bones of his feet.

As the arms fatigue, cramps sweep through the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push himself upward to breathe. Air can be drawn into the lungs but not exhaled. He fights to raise himself in order to get even one small breath. Finally carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream, and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically he is able to push himself upward to exhale and bring in life-giving oxygen.

Hours of this limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue is torn from his lacerated back as he moves up and down against the rough timber. Then another agony begins: a deep, crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart.

It is now almost over—the loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level—the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues—the tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air.

He can feel the chill of death creeping through His tissues.... Finally he can allow his body to die.

All this the Bible records with the simple words, "And they crucified Him" (Mark 15:24).³

3) Jesus was certified dead by the executing Roman Centurion

(Mark 15:44–45)

iv. He was stabbed by a spear.

1) John relates that blood and water came out.

2) This indicates asphyxiation and a burst heart.

b. Jesus was buried.

i. The tomb was carved from rock with a 1-ton stone for a door

(Mark 15:46).

ii. Jesus' body was wrapped in linen and 100 lb. of spices (Matt

27:59; John 19:38b–40).

iii. Without medical attention, air, water, or food, Jesus could not have survived three days in the tomb.

iv. The tomb was sealed and guarded by a detachment of Roman soldiers (Matt 27:62–66).

1) The fact that the guard was in danger from Pilate and had to be authorized by him (Matt 28:14) indicates that it was a Roman guard and not the Temple police.

2) The Gk. word translated "guard" (*koustodia* is from the Lat. *custodia*) means a four-soldier guard one of whom was always on watch.

3) In the Roman army, deserting your post or sleeping on your watch was punishable by death.⁴

4) The tomb was sealed by the governor to guard against tampering (Matt 27:66).

v. The disciples had run away (Mark 14:50).

2. After the Resurrection

a. The guards had run away and were spreading the story that the disciples stole the body (Matt 28:2–4, 11–15).

b. The tomb was empty!

3. This is truly a case of *habeas corpus*; the false explanations fall into two categories.⁵

a. The tomb was occupied.

i. Jesus was buried in an unknown tomb.

1) This contradicts the gospels that a known tomb was empty.

- 2) This also contradicts the early Jewish claim that the disciples stole the body from a known tomb.
 - 3) All four gospels identify the tomb as the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.
 - 4) Exhumation and production of the body would have ended early Christianity.
- ii. Everybody went to the wrong tomb.
- 1) If it was too dark to see which tomb was the correct tomb, it was too dark for a gardener to be working, and yet the risen Christ was mistaken for the gardener by Mary Magdalene (John 20:15).
 - 2) Again all four gospels identify the tomb as the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.
 - 3) Those opposed to early Christianity would have corrected the misunderstanding.
 - 4) Again, exhumation and production of the body would have ended early Christianity.
- b. The tomb was empty.
- i. The disciples stole the body.
 - 1) This is the theory of Hugh Schonfield's book, *The Passover Plot*.
 - 2) This is also the earliest explanation (Matt 28:11–15).

- 3) This stayed a popular explanation in both Justin's (c. AD 100–65) and Tertullian's (c. AD 160–220) day.⁶
- 4) This explanation admits to the empty tomb.
- 5) The Roman guard is the problem.
 - a) The guards admit to being asleep.
 - b) The punishment for sleeping on your watch was death.⁷
 - c) How did they know who stole the body, if they were asleep?
 - d) How did they know what had happened, if they were asleep?
- 6) The disciples would not have moved the body.
 - a) They did not expect the Resurrection (Luke 24) so they would not be trying to make it happen.
 - b) The disciples lacked the courage to face a Roman guard and had all ran away.
 - c) They would have had to die for the lie.
- ii. The Jews would not have moved the body.
 - 1) They asked Pontius Pilate for the guard.
 - 2) They could have produced the body at Pentecost and killed the early Church.
- iii. The Romans would not have moved the body.
 - 1) They would have had all of the same reasons as the Jews.
 - 2) They would not want to cause civil unrest.

iv. The swoooooon Theory

- 1) This theory is that Jesus merely fainted on the cross, and later revived in the tomb.
- 2) Roman executioners knew a dead man when they saw one.
- 3) The tomb was sealed and Jesus was wrapped in linen and 100 lb. of spices. He would have suffocated.
- 4) Three days without food or water would have killed Him.
- 5) He would have bled to death from the spear wound.
- 6) How could He, after all this, crawl to the door still bound in grave clothes, shove aside the 1 ton stone in His weakened state, fight four Roman soldiers, and appear to the disciples as the victorious risen Lord of Life?
- 7) Here is a letter written to a local advice column along with the response:

Dear Eutyclus:

Our preacher said, on Easter that Jesus just swooned on the cross and that the disciples nursed Him back to health. What do you think?

Sincerely,
Bewildered

Dear Bewildered:

Beat your preacher with a cat-of-nine-tails with 39 heavy strokes, nail him to a cross; hang him in the sun for 6 hours; run a spear through his heart; embalm him; put him in an airless tomb for 36 hours and see what happens.

Sincerely,
Eutyclus

4. *Christ is risen!*

C. Post-Resurrection **APPEARANCES**

1. The eyewitnesses include:
 - a. The women at the tomb (Matt 28:9, 10)
 - b. Mary Magdalene (John 20:14; Mark 16:9)
 - c. Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5)
 - d. The disciples on road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–33)
 - e. The apostles without Thomas (Luke 24:36–43; John 20:19–24)
 - f. The apostles with Thomas (John 20:26–29)
 - g. James the brother of Jesus (1 Cor 15:7)
 - h. 500 plus believers in Galilee (1 Cor 15:6)
 - i. Paul (Acts 9:3–6; 1 Cor 15:8).
2. False explanations of the post-Resurrection appearances
 - a. Some claim that the resurrection accounts are legends.
 - i. There is not enough time between the events and the writing of the gospels for the development of legends.
 - ii. The resurrection did not fit either Jewish or pagan expectations.
 - 1) Jews expected a resurrection, but only at the end of time.
 - 2) Pagan myths had gods coming to life and dying in synch with the seasons. Jesus Christ conquered death and lives forever more.
 - b. Some claim that these appearances were hallucinations.
 - i. The disciples did not expect the Resurrection (Luke 24).

- ii. The appearances were physical not mystical visions (John 20).
 - iii. There are too many witnesses.
3. C. S. Lewis writes, "The first fact in history of Christendom is a number of people who say they have seen the Resurrection. If they had died without making anyone else believe this 'gospel' no gospels would ever have been written."⁸
4. *Christ is risen!*

D. **TRANSFORMED** lives

1. The disciples: The disciples that had run away took the message of Christ to the entire Roman world and beyond at the cost of their lives. All except for John suffered martyrdom.
- a. Saul the destroyer of the Church
 - i. Here is his testimony given at one of his trials:

I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.

But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And I answered, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said to me, "I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting." And those who were with me saw the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. And I said, "What shall I do, Lord?" And the Lord said to me, "Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do." But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus.

A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing near said to me, "Brother Saul, receive your sight!" And at that very time I looked up at him. And he said, "The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard" (Acts 22:3–15).

ii. *Saul the destroyer of the Church became the Apostle Paul.*

b. Thomas the doubter

i. Here is what happened:

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 20:24–29).

ii. *Thomas the doubter became Thomas the believer.*

c. Peter the denier

i. As Jesus had predicted on the night of Jesus' arrest, Peter had

betrayed Jesus three times.

ii. At the Sea of Galilee, the risen Christ confronted Peter:

"Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep.

Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!" (John 21:15–19).

- 1) Jesus used the Gk. word *agapaō*, the highest form of love, the first two times.
- 2) Peter used the Gk. word *phileō* ("to love as a friend") all three times.
- 3) On the third time, Jesus used the Gk. word *phileō* also.
- 4) Peter had denied Jesus three times, and Jesus affirmed him three times.

iii. *Peter the denier was forgiven and restored.*

2. Modern examples

- a. Frank Morrison, a lawyer, set out to disprove the Resurrection. He ended up writing the classic, *Who Moved the Stone?*, defending the Resurrection.
- b. Lew Wallace, the author of *Ben Hur*, was brought to faith by the evidence for the Resurrection.
- c. Me!

3. *Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!*

III. Applications

- A. The Jesus that died for our sins on the cross did not stay dead.
 - 1. Christians do not serve a dead martyr.
 - 2. We serve a living Lord! He conquered death and still lives today.
 - 3. *He is risen indeed!*

- B. You may be a Thomas refusing to believe until you have seen the evidence.
 - 1. The evidence is there.
 - 2. Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).
 - 3. The risen Christ calls you to place your faith in Him, and be reborn.
 - 4. *He is risen indeed!*

- C. You may be a Saul out to destroy Christianity.
 - 1. Paul wrote, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).
 - 2. Consider the evidence for the Resurrection honestly, place your faith in Him, and be reborn.
 - 3. *He is risen indeed!*

D. You may be a Peter.

1. You may have let Christ down.
2. John wrote, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).
3. Confess your sin, receive His forgiveness, and be restored.
4. *He is risen indeed!*

¹ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.3.3 (64).

² N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003) 716.

³ C. Truman Davis, M.D., "Crucifixion Described," *Bible.org: Sermon Illustrations* [on-line], Adapted from *EBC*, vol. 8, accessed April 24, 2010, <<http://bible.org/illustration/crucifixion-described>>.

⁴ See Dionysius Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates romanae* 8.79; Polybius, *Hist.* 6.37–38.

⁵ See Frank Morrison, *Who Moved the Stone?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.) 88–102; Josh McDowell, *The Resurrection Factor* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1981) 90–103; William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984; reprint, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994) 255–98.

⁶ See Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 108; Tertullian, *Apology* 21.

⁷ See Dionysius Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates romanae* 8.79; Polybius, *Hist.* 6.37–38.

⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1960) 149.