



Evidence for the Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the very heart of Christianity. In 1 Corinthians 15 St. Paul reasoned, "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. . . . We are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead." In that same chapter he says "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen sleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." But then Paul triumphantly declares, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:14-20).

What do we mean by the resurrection of Christ? Jesus Christ came into this world to die as our substitute for our sins. The sinless Son of God came to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). On that first Good Friday, Jesus was crucified. We know he died because one of the Roman soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear to ensure his death. Some of his disciples then buried his body in a new tomb (John 19:30-42).

While Jesus was alive, he had predicted that he would rise from the dead. He challenged his enemies: "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." He was speaking about his body (John 2:19-22). Jesus also told his disciples many times that he would be killed by the leaders in Jerusalem, but be raised to life on the third day. The leaders who killed Jesus were aware of this prediction that he would rise from the dead. Although they did not believe it, they wanted to ensure that it would not happen, so they set a guard around the tomb. In Matthew 27:62-66 we read, "The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 'Sir,' they said, 'we remember that while he was still alive, that deceiver said, "After three days I will rise again." 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.' 'Take a guard,' Pilate answered. 'Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.' So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard."

Did the strategy of the chief priests and Pharisees succeed? No! Despite their efforts, Jesus rose from the dead. Remember how Jesus had said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life"? During his ministry on earth, Jesus brought a number of people to life from the dead, including Martha's brother Lazarus, who had been dead for four days (John 11). But the resurrection of

Jesus Christ was different. It was not just resuscitation, as was the case with Lazarus, who later died again. On the third day Jesus was raised from the dead with a transformed body that was clothed with immortality and glory. His resurrection body could appear and disappear, go through material objects, and ascend to and descend from heaven.

On Easter morning some women and apostles went to Jesus' tomb, expecting to find his body. But the tomb was empty, and the angel at the tomb told them, "He is not here; he has risen!" Later they saw their risen Lord face to face. The gospels record these events, but the earliest written report concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ was written by St. Paul within twenty-five years of Christ's death in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8: "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep." Later St. Luke the historian wrote in his introduction to the book of Acts, "After [Jesus'] suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

UNBELIEF AND THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Many people do not believe in the resurrection. Even in New Testament times we find those who refused to believe in the resurrection. The Sadducees were materialists who did not believe in resurrection as the Pharisees did. Even in the church, some people did not believe in the resurrection. St. Paul wrote concerning this in 1 Corinthians 15. In 2 Timothy 2:17-18 Hymenaeus and Philetus were mentioned by Paul as people who did not really believe in the resurrection of the body.

Therefore, unbelief in the resurrection is not a recent idea, but especially beginning in the latter part of the seventeenth century, some in the church began to question putting faith in miracles, particularly in the miraculous resurrection of Jesus Christ. In England deists like John Toland refused to believe in the resurrection. Rationalists like H. S. Reimarus refused to believe in miracles, and questioned the authority of the Bible and the church. The theologian David Strauss systematically denied any miracles in his work, *Life of Jesus*, and in the twentieth century Karl Barth, along with Rudolf

Bultmann, also denied the resurrection of the body. Today most liberal churches deny the resurrection as well as any miracle as recorded in the New Testament.

Such people deny the resurrection. They do not say it is not historical, or it is not recorded in the text of the New Testament. They deny it simply out of unbelief. They reason that normally the dead do not rise, and therefore Jesus could not rise from the dead. In spite of all textual and historical evidence, such people refuse to believe in the resurrection because they trust in the ultimate authority of fallen human reason rather than in God's Holy Scriptures.

Although they may be members of churches, such people are really pagans who are without hope. St. Paul speaks about them in 1 Thessalonians 4:13: "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope." They are "without hope and without God in the world," Paul says in Ephesians 2:12. They will not believe the New Testament, which declares the resurrection of Christ with great clarity.

UN-REFUTABLE EVIDENCE

For centuries many of the world's distinguished philosophers have assaulted Christianity as being irrational, superstitious and absurd. Many have chosen simply to ignore the central issue of the resurrection. Others have tried to explain it away through various theories. But the historical evidence just can't be discounted.

A student at the University of Uruguay said to me. "Professor McDowell, why can't you refute Christianity?"

"For a very simple reason," I answered. "I am not able to explain away an event in history--the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

How can we explain the empty tomb? Can it possibly be accounted for by any natural cause?

A QUESTION OF HISTORY

Professor McDowell states - "After more than 700 hours of studying this subject, I have come to the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is either one of the most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever foisted on the minds of human beings--or it is the most remarkable fact of history."

Here are some of the facts relevant to the resurrection: Jesus of Nazareth, a Jewish prophet who claimed to be the Christ prophesied in the Jewish Scriptures, was arrested, was judged a political criminal, and was crucified. Three days after His death and burial, some women who went to His tomb found the body gone. In subsequent weeks, His disciples claimed that God had raised Him from the dead and that He appeared to them various times before ascending into heaven.

From that foundation, Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire and has continued to exert great influence down through the centuries.

LIVING WITNESSES

The New Testament accounts of the resurrection were being circulated within the lifetimes of men and women alive at the time of the resurrection. Those people could certainly have confirmed or denied the accuracy of such accounts.

The writers of the four Gospels either had themselves been witnesses or else were relating the accounts of eyewitnesses of the actual events. In advocating their case for the gospel, a word that means "good news," the apostles appealed (even when confronting their most severe opponents) to common knowledge concerning the facts of the resurrection.

F. F. Bruce, Rylands professor of biblical criticism and exegesis at the University of Manchester, says concerning the value of the New Testament records as primary sources: "Had there been any tendency to depart from the facts in any material respect, the possible presence of hostile witnesses in the audience would have served as a further corrective."

IS THE NEW TESTAMENT RELIABLE?

Because the New Testament provides the primary historical source for information on the resurrection, many critics during the 19th century attacked the reliability of these biblical documents.

By the end of the 19th century, however, archaeological discoveries had confirmed the accuracy of the New Testament manuscripts. Discoveries of early papyri bridged the gap between the time of Christ and existing manuscripts from a later date.

Those findings increased scholarly confidence in the reliability of the Bible. William F. Albright, who in his day was the world's foremost biblical

archaeologist, said: "We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after about A.D. 80, two full generations before the date between 130 and 150 given by the more radical New Testament critics of today."

Coinciding with the papyri discoveries, an abundance of other manuscripts came to light (over 24,000 copies of early New Testament manuscripts are known to be in existence today). The historian Luke wrote of "authentic evidence" concerning the resurrection. Sir William Ramsay, who spent 15 years attempting to undermine Luke credentials as a historian, and to refute the reliability of the New Testament, finally concluded: "Luke is a historian of the first rank . . . This author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians. "

I claim to be an historian. My approach to Classics is historical. And I tell you that the evidence for the life, the death, and the resurrection of Christ is better authenticated than most of the facts of ancient history . . .

E. M. Blaiklock
Professor of Classics
Auckland University

CONSIDER THESE FACTS:

FACT #1: BROKEN ROMAN SEAL

As we have said, the first obvious fact was the breaking of the seal that stood for the power and authority of the Roman Empire. The Roman guard affixed on the tomb stone the Roman seal, which was meant to "prevent any attempt at vandalizing the sepulcher. The guard was there to protect the seal. Anyone trying to move the stone from the tomb's entrance would have broken the seal and thus incurred the wrath of Roman law. The consequences of breaking the seal were extremely severe. The FBI and CIA of the Roman Empire were called into action to find the man or men who were responsible. If they were apprehended, it meant automatic execution by crucifixion upside down. People feared the breaking of the seal. Jesus' disciples displayed signs of cowardice when they hid themselves. Peter, one of these disciples, went out and denied Christ three times. Now, I ask you, if the disciples had wanted to come in, tiptoe around the sleeping guards, and then roll the stone over and steal Jesus' body, how could they have done that without the guards' awareness?

FACT #2: EMPTY TOMB

As we have already discussed, another obvious fact after the resurrection was the empty tomb. The disciples of Christ did not go off to Athens or Rome to preach that Christ was raised from the dead. Rather, they went right back to the city of Jerusalem, where, if what they were teaching was false, the falsity would be evident. The empty tomb was "too notorious to be denied." Paul Althaus states that the resurrection "could have not been maintained in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact for all concerned."

Both Jewish and Roman sources and traditions admit an empty tomb. Jesus' Resurrection and /or the persecution of His followers were documented outside of the Bible by the following historical authorities: Gaius Suetonius Tranquillas, Thallus, Pliny the Younger, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and the Jewish Sanhedrin.

Hostile source range from Josephus to a compilation of fifth-century Jewish writings called the "Toledoth Jeshu." Dr. Paul Maier calls this "positive evidence from a hostile source, which is the strongest kind of historical evidence. In essence, this means that if a source admits a fact decidedly not in its favor, then that fact is genuine."

Gamaliel, who was a member of the Jewish high court, the Sanhedrin, put forth the suggestion that the rise of the Christian movement was God's doing; he could not have done that if the tomb were still occupied, or if the Sanhedrin knew the whereabouts of Christ's body.

Paul Maier observes that ". . . if all the evidence is weighed carefully and fairly, it is indeed justifiable, according to the canons of historical research, to conclude that the sepulcher of Joseph of Arimathea, in which Jesus was buried, was actually empty on the morning of the first Easter. And no shred of evidence has yet been discovered in literary sources, epigraphy, or archaeology that would disprove this statement."

FACT #3: LARGE STONE MOVED

On that Sunday morning the first thing that impressed the people who approached the tomb was the unusual position of the one and a half to two ton stone that had been lodged in front of the doorway. All the Gospel writers mention it.

There exists no document from the ancient world, witnessed by so excellent a set of textual and historical testimonies . . . Skepticism regarding the historical credentials of Christianity is based upon an irrational bias.

Clark Pinnock
McMaster University

Those who observed the stone after the resurrection describe its position as having been rolled up a slope away not just from the entrance of the tomb, but from the entire massive sepulcher. It was in such a position that it looked as if it had been picked up and carried away.

FACT #4: ROMAN GUARD GOES A.W.O.L.

The Roman guards fled. They left their place of responsibility. How can their attrition be explained, when Roman military discipline was so exceptional? Justin, in Digest #49, mentions all the offenses that required the death penalty. The fear of their superiors' wrath and the possibility of death meant that they paid close attention to the minutest details of their jobs. One way a guard was put to death was by being stripped of his clothes and then burned alive in a fire started with his garments. If it was not apparent which soldier had failed in his duty, then lots were drawn to see which one would be punished with death for the guard unit's failure. Certainly the entire unit would not have fallen asleep with that kind of threat over their heads. Dr. George Currie, a student of Roman military discipline, wrote that fear of punishment "produced flawless attention to duty, especially in the night watches."

FACT #5: GRAVECLOTHES TELL A TALE

What convinced John when he looked into the tomb? Was it just the empty tomb itself? No, there was something strangely unusual about the grave cloth.

You see, great care had been taken to enbalm the body of the Lord Jesus. It was wrapped in linen cloths according to the Jewish custom of that day. The Jews used about 100 pounds of spices to apply to the deceased and then wrapped the burial cloth round and round the entire body.

The preparation of Jesus' body for burial was done properly. No shortcuts were taken. His body was placed in the tomb fully wrapped from head to toe. His head was wrapped separately with a napkin. This preparation for burial was done with respect and love by two men who came forward to show their love. These men were Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. They had not

just thrown his body into the cave and left it, but had spent their own money to give Jesus -- who was considered a common criminal -- an honorable burial. In fact, the grave where Jesus was buried belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, who had purchased it for his own burial place.

On the morning of the resurrection, Peter and John were startled when they viewed those same grave clothes. For you see, the linen cloth that had been glued together with all those spices had collapsed but was still intact. Wonder of wonders -- the body was gone!

You see -- the Lord rose right through the grave cloth wrappings and passed right through the wall in His resurrection body!

The evidence of the intact and not unwrapped grave clothes reveal that Jesus' body was not stolen by His friends or enemies either. That's because anyone wanting to take His body would have taken Him as he was -- embalmed. They certainly wouldn't have unwrapped the grave cloth, taken the body out and then rewrapped the grave cloth. His enemies wouldn't have wanted to unwrap the burial cloth either. If someone -- either friend or enemy -- would have tried to steal the body of Jesus, the grave robber would have been in a rush since time would have been of the essence. So Jesus's body was not stolen by friends or enemies either. The Lord Jesus Christ rose supernaturally!

FACT #6: JESUS' APPEARANCES CONFIRMED

Christ appeared alive on several occasions after the cataclysmic events of that first Easter . When studying an event in history, it is important to know whether enough people who were participants or eyewitnesses to the event were alive when the facts about the event were published. To know this is obviously helpful in ascertaining the accuracy of the published report. If the number of eyewitnesses is substantial, the event can be regarded as fairly well established. For instance, if we all witness a murder, and a later police report turns out to be a fabrication of lies, we as eyewitnesses can refute it.

OVER 500 WITNESSES

Several very important factors are often overlooked when considering Christ's post-resurrection appearances to individuals. The first is the large number of witnesses of Christ after that resurrection morning. One of the earliest records of Christ's appearing after the resurrection is by Paul. The apostle appealed to his audience's knowledge of the fact that Christ had been seen by more

than 500 people at one time. Paul reminded them that the majority of those people were still alive and could be questioned. Dr. Edwin M. Yamauchi, associate professor of history at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, emphasizes: "What gives a special authority to the list (of witnesses) as historical evidence is the reference to most of the five hundred brethren being still alive. St. Paul says in effect, 'If you do not believe me, you can ask them.' Such a statement in an admittedly genuine letter written within thirty years of the event is almost as strong evidence as one could hope to get for something that happened nearly two thousand years ago." Let's take the more than 500 witnesses who saw Jesus alive after His death and burial, and place them in a courtroom. Do you realize that if each of those 500 people were to testify for only six minutes, including cross-examination, you would have an amazing 50 hours of firsthand testimony? Add to this the testimony of many other eyewitnesses and you would well have the largest and most lopsided trial in history.

Hostile Witnesses

Another factor crucial to interpreting Christ's appearances is that He also appeared to those who were hostile or unconvinced.

Over and over again, I have read or heard people comment that Jesus was seen alive after His death and burial only by His friends and followers. Using that argument, they attempt to water down the overwhelming impact of the multiple eyewitness accounts. But that line of reasoning is so pathetic it hardly deserves comment. No author or informed individual would regard Saul of Tarsus as being a follower of Christ. The facts show the exact opposite. Saul despised Christ and persecuted Christ's followers. It was a life-shattering experience when Christ appeared to him. Although he was at the time not a disciple, he later became the apostle Paul, one of the greatest witnesses for the truth of the resurrection.

If the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt.

F. F. Bruce
Manchester University

The argument that Christ's appearances were only to followers is an argument for the most part from silence, and arguments from silence can be dangerous. It is equally possible that all to whom Jesus appeared became followers. No

one acquainted with the facts can accurately say that Jesus appeared to just "an insignificant few."

Christians believe that Jesus was bodily resurrected in time and space by the supernatural power of God. The difficulties of belief may be great, but the problems inherent in unbelief present even greater difficulties.

The theories advanced to explain the resurrection by "natural causes" are weak; they actually help to build confidence in the truth of the resurrection.

THE WRONG TOMB?

A theory propounded by Kirsopp Lake assumes that the women who reported that the body was missing had mistakenly gone to the wrong tomb. If so, then the disciples who went to check up on the women's statement must have also gone to the wrong tomb. We may be certain, however, that Jewish authorities, who asked for a Roman guard to be stationed at the tomb to prevent Jesus' body from being stolen, would not have been mistaken about the location. Nor would the Roman guards, for they were there!

If the resurrection-claim was merely because of a geographical mistake, the Jewish authorities would have lost no time in producing the body from the proper tomb, thus effectively quenching for all time any rumor resurrection.

HALLUCINATIONS?

Another attempted explanation claims that the appearances of Jesus after the resurrection were either illusions or hallucinations. Unsupported by the psychological principles governing the appearances of hallucinations, this theory also does not coincide with the historical situation. Again, where was the actual body, and why wasn't it produced?

DID JESUS SWOON?

Another theory, popularized by Venturini several centuries ago, is often quoted today. This is the swoon theory, which says that Jesus didn't die; he merely fainted from exhaustion and loss of blood. Everyone thought Him dead, but later He resuscitated and the disciples thought it to be a resurrection. Skeptic David Friedrich Strauss--certainly no believer in the resurrection--gave the deathblow to any thought that Jesus revived from a swoon: "It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, and who still at last

yielded to His sufferings, could have given to the disciples the impression that He was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resuscitation could only have weakened the impression which He had made upon them in life and in death, at the most could only have given it an elegiac voice, but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship."

For the New Testament of Acts, the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. Any attempt to reject its basic historicity, even in matters of detail, must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted.

A. N. Sherwin-White
Classical Roman Historian

THE BODY STOLEN?

Then consider the theory that the body was stolen by the disciples while the guards slept. The depression and cowardice of the disciples provide a hard-hitting argument against their suddenly becoming so brave and daring as to face a detachment of soldiers at the tomb and steal the body. They were in no mood to attempt anything like that.

The theory that the Jewish or Roman authorities moved Christ's body is no more reasonable an explanation for the empty tomb than theft by the disciples. If the authorities had the body in their possession or knew where it was, why, when the disciples were preaching the resurrection in Jerusalem, didn't they explain: "Wait! We moved the body, see, He didn't rise from the grave"?

And if such a rebuttal failed, why didn't they explain exactly where Jesus' body lay? If this failed, why didn't they recover the corpse, put it on a cart, and wheel it through the center of Jerusalem? Such an action would have destroyed Christianity--not in the cradle, but in the womb!

THE RESURRECTION IS A FACT

Professor Thomas Arnold, for 14 years a headmaster of Rugby, author of the famous, History of Rome, and appointed to the chair of modern history at Oxford, was well acquainted with the value of evidence in determining

historical facts. This great scholar said: "I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead." Brooke Foss Westcott, an English scholar, said: "raking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ. Nothing but the antecedent assumption that it must be false could have suggested the idea of deficiency in the proof of it."

REAL PROOF: THE DISCIPLES' LIVES

But the most telling testimony of all must be the lives of those early Christians. We must ask ourselves: What caused them to go everywhere telling the message of the risen Christ?

Had there been any visible benefits accrued to them from their efforts--prestige, wealth, increased social status or material benefits--we might logically attempt to account for their actions, for their whole-hearted and total allegiance to this "risen Christ ."

As a reward for their efforts, however, those early Christians were beaten, stoned to death, thrown to the lions, tortured and crucified. Every conceivable method was used to stop them from talking.

Yet, they laid down their lives as the ultimate proof of their complete confidence in the truth of their message.

THE EARLY MARTYRS

Since the apostles and many of the early disciples were eye-witnesses to the life of Jesus, their story was not just based on religious belief, but actual historical events. It's one thing to die for a religious belief, such as an Islamic fundamentalist or a follower of David Koresh. It's quite another to die for a known lie. Here is a list of eye-witness martyrs as compiled from numerous sources outside the Bible, the most-famous of which is Foxes' Christian Martyrs of the World:

Stephen was preaching the gospel in Jerusalem on the Passover after Christ's crucifixion. He was cast out of the city and stoned to death. About 2,000 Christians suffered martyrdom during this time (about 34 A.D.).

James, the son of Zebedee and the elder brother of John, was killed when Herod Agrippa arrived as governor of Judea. Many early disciples were martyred under Agrippa's rule, including Timon and Parmenas (about 44 A.D.).

Philip, a disciple from Bethsaida, in Galilee, suffered martyrdom at Heliopolis, in Phrygia. He was scourged, thrown into prison, and afterwards crucified (about 54 A.D.).

Matthew, the tax-collector from Nazareth who wrote a gospel in Hebrew, was preaching in Ethiopia when he suffered martyrdom by the sword (about 60 A.D.).

James, the Brother of Jesus, administered the early church in Jerusalem and was the author of a book in the Bible. At the age of 94 he was beat and stoned, and finally had his brains bashed out with a fuller's club.

Matthias was the apostle who filled the vacant place of Judas. He was stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded.

Andrew, the brother of Peter, preached the gospel throughout Asia. On his arrival at Edessa, he was arrested and crucified on a cross, two ends of which were fixed transversely in the ground (thus the term, St. Andrew's Cross).

Mark was converted to Christianity by Peter, and then transcribed Peter's account of Jesus in his Gospel. Mark was dragged to pieces by the people of Alexandria in front of Serapis, their pagan idol.

Peter was condemned to death and crucified at Rome. Jerome holds that Peter was crucified upside down, at his own request, because he said he was unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord.

Paul suffered in the first persecution under Nero. Because of the converting impact he was having on people in the face of martyrdom, he was led to a private place outside the city where he gave his neck to the sword.

Jude, the brother of James, was commonly called Thaddeus. He was crucified at Edessa in about 72 A.D.

Bartholomew translated the Gospel of Matthew in India. He was cruelly beaten and crucified by idolaters there.

Thomas, called Didymus, preached in Parthia and India. He was thrust through with a spear by pagan priests.

Luke was the author of the Gospel under his name. He traveled with Paul

through various countries and was supposedly hanged on an olive tree by idolatrous priests in Greece.

Barnabas, of Cyprus, was killed without many known facts about 73 A.D. Simon, surnamed Zelotes, preached in Africa and Britain, where he was crucified in about 74 A.D.

John, the "beloved disciple," was the brother of James. Although he suffered great persecution, including imprisonment where he wrote the book of Revelation, he was the only apostle who escaped a violent death.

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OUTSIDE OF THE BIBLE

Often people are uncertain about the existence of Christ, but few scholars would disagree that a man named Jesus lived roughly between 2 BC and about 33 AD. History documents that this man was not a myth but a real person and the historical evidence for this is excellent. For instance, the Roman historian Tacitus, writing in about 115 A.D., records the events surrounding Emperor Nero in July of A.D. 64. After the fire that destroyed much of Rome, Nero was blamed for being responsible:

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus [Christ], from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition [Christ's resurrection] thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. (Bettenson, p. 2)

In about 112 A.D. the Roman governor of what is now northern Turkey wrote to Emperor Trajan regarding the Christians in his district:

"I was never present at any trial of Christians; therefore I do not know what are the customary penalties or investigations, and what limits are observed. . . whether those who recant should be pardoned. . . whether the name itself, even if innocent of crime, should be punished, or only the crimes attaching to that name. . . . Meanwhile, this is the course that I have adopted in the case of those brought before me as Christians. I ask them if they are Christians. If they admit it I repeat the question a second and a third time, threatening capital punishment; if they persist I sentence them to death. For I do not

doubt that, whatever kind of crime it may be to which they have confessed, their pertinacity and inflexible obstinacy should certainly be punished. . . the very fact of my dealing with the question led to a wider spread of the charge, and a great variety of cases were brought before me. An anonymous pamphlet was issued, containing many names. All who denied that they were or had been Christians I considered should be discharged, because they called upon the gods at my dictation and did reverence. . .and especially because they cursed Christ, a thing which it is said, genuine Christians cannot be induced to do." (Bettenson, p. 3)

These passages indicate that Christianity was wide spread in the Roman empire within 80 years of Christ's death. Again, these are eyewitness accounts, not historians looking back years later.

The popular historian Will Durant, himself not a Christian, wrote concerning Christ's historical validity, "The denial of that existence seems never to have occurred even to the bitterest gentile or Jewish opponents of nascent Christianity" (Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, vol. 3, p. 555). And again, "That a few simple men should in one generation have invented so powerful and appealing a personality, so lofty an ethic and so inspiring a vision of human brotherhood, would be a miracle far more incredible than any recorded in the Gospels" (Ibid., p. 557).

It is a substantial thing that an historian who spends his life considering historical facts should affirm the reality of Christ's existence as well as the rapid growth of the early movement.

The Jewish historian Josephus, writing for the Roman government in the 70's A.D. records some incidental things regarding Christ and the church. He confirms that John the Baptist died at the hand of Herod (this same incident is recorded in the gospels) as well as the death of, "The brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James. . . he delivered them to be stoned" (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XVIII, ch. V, p. 20; Book XX, ch. IX, p. 140). Again we have sources external to the Bible that demonstrate the historical reliability of the text. Josephus, who was probably alive during the time of Christ, is attesting to the reality of his existence. What this also tells us is that within 40 years of Christ's death, the knowledge of who he was widespread enough that Josephus could reference him to his readers.

SEE BY MILLIONS IN MODERN TIMES.

For the past decades, (1990-2009) a phenomenon has been recurring in the Muslim world. Men and women – without any knowledge of the Gospel and without any contact with Christians – have been forever transformed after experiencing dreams and visions of Jesus Christ. Reports of these supernatural occurrences often come from “closed countries” where preaching the Gospel is forbidden and where converting to Christianity can invoke the death sentence. A common denominator appears to be that the dreams come to those who are seeking to know and please God.

The Risen Lord Jesus is visiting the Muslims through dreams and visions in fulfillment of Joel Chapter 2, which proclaims that in the Last Days the Holy Spirit will be poured out on all peoples, and young and old alike will experience dreams and visions.

According to the dictionary, a dream is defined as “a sequence of images, passing through a sleeping person’s mind,” whereas a vision is simply a “mental image.”

A typical “Jesus dream or vision” with innumerable variations is usually described by Muslims as a peaceful face that they somehow recognize as Jesus. Often they encounter a compassionate figure in a white robe, calling them to come to Him. Sometimes His hands and arms are extended wide, or Jesus reaches toward them in love and invitation. Many dreams are preparatory experiences to encourage Muslims with the possibility of following Jesus. Other visions or dreams are “epic” experiences of such magnitude that the person knows unquestioningly that he or she is destined to walk the lonely path of faith, even martyrdom, with Jesus.

According to Muslim leadership in Saudi Arabia, over 6 million Muslims have converted to Christianity because of having dream or visions of Jesus. The question dear reader that you have to answer is - Can six million former Muslims be wrong?

QUOTES FROM GREAT MEN REGARDING JESUS.

Jesus is Lord - Excerpts from "One Solitary Life"
(author unknown)

"Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter shop until

He was thirty and then for three years was an itinerant preacher. He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put his foot inside a big city. He never traveled more than two hundred miles from the place where He was born. He never did one of those things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself....

"While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed on a cross between two thieves. While he was dying his executors gambled for the only piece of property he had on earth - His coat. When he was dead, He was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

"Nineteen long centuries have come and gone and today He is the centerpiece of the human race and the leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever were built, all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life."

Joseph Parker (1830-1902)

"There are other men who do not come to worship Christ; who simply come to speculate upon him... The patronage they offer the Son of God! It makes me sad to hear how they damn Him with faint praise. What I dread among you is not that you will destroy Christ, but that you will patronize Him. Jesus Christ is nothing to me if He is not the Savior of the world... You will know what Jesus Christ is most and best when you are in greatest need of such service as He can render.

No man can entertain an opinion of indifference regarding Jesus. If he has considered the subject at all, he must worship Christ or crucify Him. Where there is earnestness in the inquiry or the criticism, that earnestness ends in homage or in crucifixion."

Strong Words" from Bill Bright
(founder of Campus Crusade for Christ)

Questioning whether Jesus is Lord of our lives...

"One day I was talking to a young man who was somewhat of a prodigal. I said to him, "Do you believe in Jesus?"

"Yes."

"Do you believe He died for your sins?"

"Yes."

He had grown up in the church and even gone to Christian schools, but he had turned his back on the Lord. I replied, "What is going to happen to you when you die?"

He said, "I'll go to heaven."

I said, "Are you sure?"

"Absolutely sure."

And I said, "Are you willing to do God's will and surrender your own will to His will?"

Quite bluntly, he answered, "No."

I had to be totally honest with him, and replied, "Then you are not a Christian."

He said, "That's your opinion against mine."

I said, "No, that is what God's word says." I explained to him that if anyone is not willing to do God's will, he had better take inventory because the Scripture clearly teaches: "And how can we be sure that we belong to him? By looking within ourselves: are we really trying to do what he wants us to? Someone may say, 'I am a Christian; I am on my way to heaven; I belong to Christ.' But if he doesn't do what Christ tells him to, he is a liar. But those who do what Christ tells them to will learn to love God more and more. That is the way to know whether or not you are a Christian. Anyone who says he is a Christian should live as Christ did" (1John 2:3-6).

"That was strong language, but that is the holy, inspired word of God. If you are not able to make the Bible the basis of your standards, what are the alternatives?"

WHO IS JESUS?

Is Jesus God? Many people have dealt with this "spiritual" dispute by intellectually accepting Jesus as a great man, great teacher, or great prophet. However, Jesus and His inspired followers didn't mince words when they declared Him to be God (John 10:30-38, Matthew 16:13-17, Mark 14:61-64, John 14:6, Hebrews 1:8, Colossians 1:16, John 12:40-41 [quoting Isaiah 6:1-10]). Therefore, any type of intellectual compromise calling Jesus a "good man" is logically inconsistent. Why? Because there are really only three legitimate alternatives for the identity of Jesus Christ. He is either a liar, a

lunatic or our Lord and God. Since Jesus claimed to be God, His claims are either true or false. If false, He must have been a liar, deliberately misleading the multitudes. Or, He was a lunatic, sincerely believing Himself to be God, when in reality He was just a man. However, if Jesus was a "good man," as most people now agree, how then could He be both good and crazy, or good and a liar? There is only one logically consistent alternative - He must have been telling the truth. In addition to the logical inconsistency, the remarkable historical, archaeological and manuscript evidence shows that Jesus was neither a liar nor a lunatic. Again, the only position left is that His claim is true. Jesus is Lord and God.

IS JESUS GOD? THE ONLY ANSWER

How Jesus implied he was God:

"Your father Abraham rejoiced as he looked forward to my coming. He saw it and was glad." The people said, "You aren't even fifty years old. How can you say you have seen Abraham?" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I Am!" At that point they picked up stones to throw at him. But Jesus was hidden from them and left the Temple. John 8:56-59

"The Father and I are one." Once again the people picked up stones to kill him. Jesus said, "At my Father's direction I have done many good works. For which one are you going to stone me?" They replied, "We're stoning you not for any good work, but for blasphemy! You, a mere man, claim to be God." John 10:30-33

Jesus shouted to the crowds, "If you trust me, you are trusting not only me, but also God who sent me. For when you see me, you are seeing the one who sent me. I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark." John 12:44-46

After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet." John 13:12-14

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you had really known me, you would know who

my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!" Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you?" John 14:6-9

Is Jesus God?

Once you have asked all your questions, weighed all the evidence, and tested all the arguments, you will ultimately be confronted with this question. In Mathew 16:15, Jesus put it this way, 'But who do you say that I am?'

Your answer to that question will forever change your life and eternal destiny. It will change your life because Jesus did not die on the cross so that you could go to Heaven; He died to get heaven into you. It will change your eternal destiny because you are already a citizen of God's Kingdom and heaven is your home.

WHERE DO YOU STAND?

How do you evaluate this overwhelming historical evidence? What is your decision about the fact of Christ's empty tomb? What do you think of Christ?

When I was confronted with the overwhelming evidence for Christ's resurrection, I had to ask the logical question: "What difference does all this evidence make to me? What difference does it make whether or not I believe Christ rose again and died on the cross for my sins!" The answer is put best by something Jesus said to a man who doubted--Thomas. Jesus told him: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6).

On the basis of all the evidence for Christ's resurrection, and considering the fact that Jesus offers forgiveness of sin and an eternal relationship with God, who would be so foolhardy as to reject Him? Christ is alive! He is living today.

You can trust God right now by faith through prayer. Prayer is talking with God. God knows your heart and is not so concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. If you have never trusted Christ, you can do so right now.

The prayer I prayed is: "Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and trust You as my Savior. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be. Thank You that I can trust You."

Source materials are from articles written by
Josh McDowell and P. G. Mathew, M.A., M.Div., Th.M.
Edited by Rev. Thomas Knight



HE TOOK YOUR NAIL
SO THAT YOU COULD RECEIVE
HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS

HOW TO PRAY.

If you are not sure how to pray, read Psalm 51 and make it your prayer. Or you can pray something like this —

“Dear God, today I turn from all my sins (name them), and I put my trust in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I Believe that Jesus took on Himself my personal sin and that Your Holy judgment of my sin was just and right. Holy Father, I believe that you raised Jesus from the dead and in doing so, declared that the judgment of your Holy Law, against me, was fully satisfied.

I thank you for covering my sin by the precious blood, of the Lamb of God, Jesus, your son. Please forgive me, and grant me your gift of everlasting life. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and receive me as your child. From this moment forward, you will be my Father, Jesus my Savior / Lord, and the Holy Spirit my companion and guide. Amen.“

There is nothing magic about these words, it is the attitude of your heart that God cares about. As your first act of obedience to God, join yourself in His death and resurrection through water baptism.

Rom 6:3-5 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? (4) Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

Now allow His Holy Spirit and Word
guide you throughout your life.

AMEN