

# Top Ten Convincing Reasons to Believe That Jesus Factually Rose From The Dead!

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Recently during the message time at our [church](#), I told the congregation that Good Friday and Easter (Resurrection Sunday) were the two most important holidays that Christians have. Now, don't get me wrong – I love Christmas like a child, and look forward to it every year with deep anticipation. The celebration of the birth of Christ is wonderful and amazing. But...without the death of Jesus on the Cross (Good Friday) to pay the price for our sins – there would be no way for any person to have eternal life in Heaven. As Paul writes in Romans, "ALL have sinned and fall way short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) Without the Resurrection of Jesus – there would be no resurrection for people – death would be final, the end. Therefore – as important as Christmas is...Good Friday and Easter Sunday are actually more important because they represent deliverance from eternal punishment and eternal life in Heaven for the believer. I had a young child (10?) come up to me after church apparently bewildered about what I said. He challenged me (respectfully) and asked how I could say that Easter was more important than Christmas, since Easter was just about a bunny and chocolate eggs and stuff, and Christmas was about the birth of Jesus. From that point, my friend Tamara and I were able to explain how Jesus was crucified on Friday – paying the price for our sins – and was gloriously raised from the dead on the original Easter Sunday morning. Does that sound too good to be true? Does it sound like typical religious clap-trap? Keep reading to find out TEN SOLID REASONS to believe that Jesus really did rise from the dead!

Think about it: If true, what are the implications of The Resurrection of Jesus? If Jesus of Nazareth factually and historically rose from the dead, then He would be the first to overcome or conquer death itself. If The Resurrection of Jesus factually happened, then skepticism of Jesus and His teachings is unfounded and unwarranted, because anybody with the power and authority to defeat death is somebody with great wisdom, intelligence and knowledge than the rest of us. If Jesus really rose from the dead, then His claim (written in the Bible's book of Matthew, chapter 28) to having ALL authority in Heaven and on earth rings true. All of humanity is winless against death. As is often said, Father Time is undefeated – death itself is undefeated. The collective win loss record of humanity is somewhere between 0-20 billion and 0-100 billion against death, which is a lot of losses stacked up against ZERO victories. The Bible claims that Jesus, on the other hand, is 1-0 – undefeated against death. If the resurrection is factual and historical. If Jesus won where nobody else has – then He has ALL authority. If not – If Jesus Did NOT ACTUALLY and historically rise from the dead, then Christianity is the greatest time waste and false hope and deception in the history of the world, and it is not even close. (See 1 Corinthians 15:17)

Read this from New York author and pastor Tim Keller: "The resurrection of Jesus is a major historical problem, no matter how you look at it. Most modern historians make the philosophical assumption that miracles simply cannot happen, and that makes the claim of the resurrection highly problematic. However, if you disbelieve the resurrection you now have the difficulty of explaining how the Christian church got started at all. "If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all 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." That is how the first hearers felt who heard reports of the resurrection. They knew that, if it was true, it meant that we can't

live our lives any way we want. **It also meant we don't have to be afraid of anything**, not Roman swords, **not cancer**, nothing. If Jesus rose from the dead, it changes everything. Most people think that, when it comes to Jesus's resurrection, the burden of proof is on believers to give evidence that it happened. That is not completely the case. The resurrection also puts a burden of proof on those who don't believe. It is not enough to simply believe Jesus did not rise from the dead. **You must then come up with a historically feasible alternate explanation for the birth of the church.** You have to provide some other plausible account for how things began. -Tim Keller"

The resurrection is the lynchpin of the Christian faith. It is the hinge that everything hangs on – the key doctrine. Reasonable men may not disagree here. It is THE key doctrine of the Christian faith. **If there is no resurrection, there is no Christian faith.**

I ask people that are reading this who identify as Christians – If a friend, family member or college professor asked you the question: HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT JESUS REALLY ROSE FROM THE DEAD? What would your answer be? I am afraid that most Christians don't have a great answer for that question. Would you say, "I believe Jesus rose from the dead because the Bible says it!" Or, "I believe that Jesus rose from the dead because the preacher taught us that in church." Or even, "I believe in the resurrection because my parents raised me to be a Christian!" Well, if I can write this gently but firmly – that's NOT enough! No skeptic or questioner would be convinced by such an answer! Christians should have better reasons for believing that Jesus rose from the dead beyond merely stating that the Bible says so, or that a church pastor said so. One must explain why the testimony of the Bible is actually reliable...and we will attempt to do that below:

**I believe there are two ways that a professing Christian can answer questions about The Resurrection of Jesus that are persuasive:**

1. Displaying the power of Jesus in your life that evidentially and beyond question shows the presence of God's supernatural power. Such as – supernatural power to love. Supernatural power to serve joyfully. Supernatural power to forgive when wounded beyond measure. Supernatural power to endure hardship. Supernatural power to do good works.

A. 1 Cor 3:3 "For you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?" (The Word of God calls Christians beyond mere humanity...and the Holy Spirit enables Christians to go beyond that) ALSO: The Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but power. 1 Cor 4:20

2. Giving a GOOD (persuasive) answer: An Apt answer...a convincing answer.

A. 1st Peter 3:15, "But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."

What I am writing about lays the groundwork for the beginnings of a good/persuasive/convincing answer. You might say that this kind of teaching is unnecessary, for it is God that opens the heart to receive the Gospel – not good teaching/preaching arguments. You'd be right, in a sense...but you'd also be IGNORING [1st Peter 3:15](#). One of the ways Christians honor Christ is by making a defense for our

hope! The Greek word there is *apologia* and it means to have an argument, defense, A legal term – to answer an accusation, essentially.

Think of the old hymn, He Lives – “You ask me how I know He lives...He lives within my heart.” This is NOT the good news – that Jesus *merely* lives within *my* heart. There are reasons to believe, beyond mere subjective feelings, that Jesus actually was resurrected on the first Easter morning. I contend, and the Word of God contends, that Jesus bodily and historically rose from the dead and ascended to the Father – it is not a merely a personal religious thing to experience, but a factual happening in history to believe in.

Note – as a critic of this post recently noted on Twitter, – the below list of reasons aren’t necessarily “facts” in the normal sense of the word. There is no video of Jesus rising from the dead, just as there is no video of Washington crossing the Delaware or most other historical events. Events in ancient history are established via eyewitness reports and other such means. In a certain manner of speaking – there is no factual way to prove that a historical event happened. For instance, historically speaking, there is very little doubt whatsoever that the Carthaginian General Hannibal defeated the Roman Consuls Lucius Paullus and Gaius Varro at the battle of Cannae in 216 BC. The vast majority of historians accept that the Battle of Cannae happened and that Hannibal was victorious – but how can this be FACTUALLY proven? We don’t have video (even if we did – video can be doctored!), and there are no living witnesses! However, it is possible to know and understand history without video and without irrefutable scientific factual truth. Eyewitness testimonies that are written down are important. Archaeological evidence is important. The bottom line is that there is enough evidence available to historians to convince them that Hannibal won the Battle of Cannae. Similarly, when the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is examined – the eyewitness testimonies, the archaeological evidence, the sociological impact of the early church – it becomes clear that there are abundant solid reasons to believe that Jesus factually rose from the dead.

## **TOP TEN REASONS TO BELIEVE JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD!**

No single one of these reasons will likely convince a skeptic that Jesus truly rose from the dead. Taken as a whole, however, these ten points give ten powerful reasons to believe that Jesus historically rose from the dead. Read, consider and believe!

**#1 THE NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS ARE RELIABLE: TOO EARLY TO BE MYTHICAL** It is not enough to say to a skeptic that we know that Jesus lives because the Bible says so. **While that is true, a skeptic needs to see and hear reasons WHY the Bible is reliable.** Reason #1 is that the Biblical texts were written EARLY – within a few short years of the death, burial and Resurrection of Jesus. This is historically very significant, especially when you consider that the earliest writings we have about major historical figures like Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Cleopatra and other unquestioned figures of antiquity date from decades and sometimes centuries after their death. Consider Paul’s information in 1 Corinthians 15: 3, “*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.*” Most scholars agree – even critical scholars – that this creed dates back to 35 AD. Within two years of Jesus’ claimed resurrection.

Richard Bauckham of Cambridge calls this the “consensus New Testament opinion.” Even Bart Ehrman – a skeptic on his way to atheism by his own words says that this passage dates to within one or two years of the cross. Written evidence from the ancient world that is recorded within a few short years of the event in question is far too early for widespread legend/myths to develop.

**#2 WOMEN AS THE FIRST WITNESSES IN ALL FOUR GOSPELS.** While it is not exactly true that women couldn’t testify in court in the Ancient Roman world, but it was rare, only under certain circumstances, and considered lesser quality testimony than the testimony of men – often it would take the testimony of two women to override the testimony of one man. In fact, some Pharisees would begin their prayers by thanking God that they weren’t gentile pagans or women. The only possible reason to have women as the first witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus (and prominent witnesses at His crucifixion) is that it factually happened. This stands strongly against the Resurrection as myth or exaggeration theory. Women discover the tomb, and are listed in all four Gospels as the first witnesses of the risen Jesus, despite the fact that women’s testimony was considered inferior in the first century. Why manufacture women as the first witnesses if the resurrection was a myth or intentional deception? Note: Josephus, a non-Christian Jewish man writing in the first century, wrote: “Let not the testimony of women be admitted because of the levity and boldness of their sex,” Similarly, the non-Biblical Jewish Mishnah (from the first centuries) did not admit the testimony of women in most cases, claiming that their menstrual cycles made them unreliable. Witness this excerpt from the Jewish Encyclopedia, “A particularly painful issue of difference between males and females (in the first century) is that of reliability in testimony. Women are not considered reliable witnesses when two kosher witnesses are needed, for example on monetary issues, capital crimes and sexual crimes; “ Here is an extremely high level scholarly treatment of this issue by Cambridge professor [Richard Bauckham](#), And a sermon treatment by N.T. Wright: <http://ntwrightpage.com/sermons/Easter06.htm>

**#3 THE NEW TESTAMENT IS RELIABLE: PRINCIPLE OF EMBARRASSMENT.** Peter is rebuked as Satan by Jesus. The disciples are bumbling. Peter denies Jesus. Thomas doubts. Other disciples doubt. The bumbling male disciples that wrote most of the New Testament rarely fully understand what Jesus is saying and doing, but women like the Syro-Phoenician woman and Mary of Bethany immediately grasp important teachings. Paul was an executioner and tremendous enemy of Christians, until he encountered Jesus. There are lots of little details in the New Testament accounts that are hard to explain if you accept the theory that the disciples made up the ministry of Jesus – or exaggerated it. While Jesus appeared to the women first, and His brother and Peter and 500 other believers. None of them are important! Why not Herod? Why not Pilate? Why didn’t Jesus seek revenge on His executioners? Wouldn’t that have been a better story? Heck – the first witness...Mary Magdalene had recently been possessed by seven demons, and was known in the ancient world as a significant sinner before meeting Jesus. The fact is that the writings of the New Testament do not often shine a positive light on the leaders of the early church. If these books are doctored or manufactured – why not make the disciples appear more heroic and less foolish? Why not “doctor” the evidence a bit to eliminate female witnesses, and have Jesus do more dramatic things after His resurrection?

**#4 THE NEW TESTAMENT IS RELIABLE: EVEN THE TEXTUAL VARIANTS SHOW THAT THE BIBLE IS TRUSTWORTHY!** Yes, there are 200000 variants found in the existing handwritten Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, which is a very large number on the surface. Former Evangelical Bart Ehrman has become a bestselling author by attacking the credibility of the Bible. He points out that,

among the Greek manuscripts of the Bible we have – the earliest and best texts – there are 200000 variant readings, and then makes the case that because of the variants, we can't be sure in knowing what the word of God really says. Well...even though that number is high, it is easily explainable, and not particularly troubling when you understand the transmission of the biblical text. First – the New Testament is the best ancient document we have in terms of reliability, closeness to its composition date, and number of manuscripts. Yes there are variants...all texts at the time were hand copied – some by professional scribes, some by blokes like you and me. But – since we have thousands of texts, we can determine the accurate/original reading of nearly every Bible text there is – with maybe three major exceptions, and a handful of minor ones (John 7:53-8:11, Mark 16:9-20 and 1st John 5:7-8 – the Comma Johanneum) I mention those particular texts because they are easy targets for college professors and good skeptics – but honestly, they are the big three. As Bart Ehrman himself has acknowledged, NO important doctrine or teaching of the New Testament is in doubt. For an academic treatment of this subject, read this from [noted New Testament scholar Gary Habermas](#).

Consider this: The best biography historians have of Alexander the Great was written by Plutarch. It was composed approximately 400 YEARS after Alexander's lifetime. The earliest information we have on Alexander the Great dates to roughly 300 years after his death. Further, the earliest extant manuscripts of Plutarch date to roughly 800ad – more than 1000 years AFTER Alexander lived, and yet no credible historian has doubts that Alexander lived and had a great impact during his day. The Bible manuscripts are much older than the earliest copies of Alexander biographies, and were written much closer to the time of Jesus than Plutarch's book was to the time of Alexander. From a manuscript/textual critical point of view – the New Testament is quite simply the best attested, most numerous and most reliable document of ancient history (pre-1000ad)

**#5 THE LITHUANIAN ARGUMENT:** Can anybody name (without Googling) which countries border Lithuania? What about the Capital of Lithuania? Most Americans know very, very little about Lithuania, even though it is approximately 3 times larger than the country of Israel. Consider this: The Roman Empire during the time of Jesus was approximately 60 percent the size of America. Therefore, Lithuania to America in 2016 very roughly corresponds to the size and influence of Israel to the Roman Empire in the first century. Therefore to get a vague understanding of how Romans in The Roman Empire viewed Israel – we can consider how Americans in the U.S. view the country of Lithuania. Imagine then that a teacher of a new and radically different religion rose up in Lithuania from 1910-1915 – about 100 years ago. Imagine that this particular teacher had no television shows, no books, nothing, but within 100 years of his ignominious death, his followers would be well on their way to dominating the religious landscape of America. This is what Jesus and His followers did. Historically and factually – a teacher and His followers from a largely unknown, small country came to dominate an entire empire within a short time after the death of that teacher. People MUST have a rational theory to explain how Christianity spread so far and wide in such a short amount of time without military power or economic riches! Such a thing has never happened before (Remember that there were many, many messiah claimants before Jesus and after) I propose that a public, bodily resurrection of Jesus is a plausible answer to how Christianity came to dominate the greatest civilization in world history. Skeptical theories (i.e. that Jesus never existed – which no almost no peer reviewed scholar, atheist or otherwise, believes...or that an impostor took His place, or that the resurrection was invented by His followers, or that they hallucinated Him) don't account very well for the explosion of Jesus' followers all across the world – permeating

multiple cultures and languages. FYI, the countries that border Lithuania are: Latvia, Poland, and Belarus. The capital city of Lithuania is Vilnius.

**#6 THE EMPTY TOMB** – The vast majority of scholars grant that the tomb of Jesus was really found empty. Not all believe that it was empty because of the resurrection, but they grant its emptiness. (Source: Gary Habermas survey of 3400 scholars...“vast majority” is not merely rhetoric Link:[http://www.garyhabermas.com/.../minimal-facts-methodology\\_08-...](http://www.garyhabermas.com/.../minimal-facts-methodology_08-...)) As a historical fact, this is hard to dispute. Was the tomb emptied by the disciples? If it was, then why die for Jesus on account of a hoax? Was it emptied by looters? Not likely – It was a capital offense to rob graves in Palestine! (And it still doesn't explain why the disciples gave their lives.) ALSO: Where is the tomb of Jesus? Why didn't they carefully mark the spot of His burial and treat it as a historical treasure? After all, we know the purported location of the tombs of hundreds of lesser known religious leaders of the ancient world. We don't know the location of Jesus' tomb, because the early church didn't care at all about it – Jesus was only there temporarily and its location was not considered important by the early church.

The Nazareth Inscription (in which the Roman emperor orders execution as the penalty for any who steal bodies from graves) does not prove that Jesus rose from the dead, but it is consistent with the biblical accounts. (More on the Nazareth Inscription: (<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/.../The-Nazareth-Inscription-...>) It also gives extra-biblical testimony to the growing impact of the church and its central message of the Resurrection soon after Christ's death. Again, Even Bart Ehrman agrees with this, writing, “We can conclude with some certainty that Jesus was in fact buried by Joseph of Arimathea in a tomb and that three days later the tomb was found empty.”

Could the empty tomb possibly have been a hoax? Is it possible that the disciples hid Jesus' body in order to perpetrate some sort of grand deception? This is highly unlikely, and quite illogical, considering the disciples' belief in the resurrection of Jesus would ultimately cost many, if not all, of them their lives. Philosopher William Paley, writing in the 1700s, asked a series of questions that would seem to provide prima facie evidence that the resurrection was not a hoax by the followers of Jesus: *“Would men in such circumstances pretend to have seen what they never saw; assert facts which they had no knowledge of; go about lying to teach virtue; and though not only convinced of Christ's being an imposter... bring upon themselves, for nothing, and with full knowledge of the consequences, enmity and hatred, danger and death?”* It is highly unlikely that the disciples of Jesus would stick by their story of the resurrection of Jesus unto their own deaths, unless they were thoroughly convinced that it actually happened beyond a shadow of a doubt.

Much more on the [empty tomb by noted scholar, philosopher and debater William Lane Craig,](#)

**#7 – WHERE IS THE POWER??** If Jesus didn't rise from the dead – what explains the spread of Christianity throughout the known world? How was this done by the bumbling we read about in the Gospels? Where did their change come from? What was their inspiration? If they just responded to grief with psychological visions of Jesus...how does that explain the POWER that they had to bring upheaval to the entire world!? Lots of Elvis followers (Tupac, etc) believe he is still alive, so why aren't they changing the world? Note: There were dozens of Jewish Messiah claimants other than Jesus. During their lifetime hundreds, if not thousands of people followed them zealously. After their death, however, their followers disbanded and dispersed in every case, but the case of Jesus Christ of Nazareth...whose

followers grew exponentially AFTER His death. This is difficult for a secular historian to explain. Worth review: [The Commitment of the Apostles Confirms the Truth of the Resurrection.](#)

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**#8 ENEMY ATTESTATION:** A fancy way of saying that what your enemy says about you that is positive, is likely true. For instance a group of my critics might say, “That Chase Thompson, boy is he trouble. He’s smelly...wears long socks with shorts, eats enough cereal for five elephants, is a Calvinist, has 400 boxes of stuff in his basement, attracts mold, and preaches too long...but, he does have good ears, so don’t talk about him behind his back.” Chances are, if all of that is said, then I really do have good hearing. Positive things your enemy says about you are strong testimonies.

Along those lines, we read in 1 Cor 15 that Paul mentions three eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus by name (Paul himself, James the brother of Jesus, and Peter) Two of those witnesses began as enemies of Jesus’ ministry: James, the brother of Jesus, wanted to have Him committed to a loony house; and Paul was a persecutor who breathed out murderous threats against the church, ultimately presiding over the murder of Stephen – the first martyr. Peter himself rejected Jesus before His death. If you can get your brother (i.e. James) to worship you as God...then that might be the best example of enemy attestation in world history! smile emoticon Here’s Gary Habermas with more on enemy attestation, “In the case of Jesus’ miracles, an example of enemy attestation is provided by the repeated Gospel testimony that those who opposed Jesus either witnessed these acts and failed to challenge them (Mark 3:1-6), or attributed them to Satan (Mark 3:22-27), thus acknowledging these events. Marcus Borg points out that this is one of the reasons that makes it “virtually indisputable that Jesus was a healer and exorcist.” In another instance, the Jewish priests are said to have paid the guards at Jesus’ tomb in order to have them report that the disciples stole Jesus’ body (Matthew 28:11-15), thereby agreeing that Jesus’ tomb had been discovered empty.”

**#9 SKEPTICAL ANCIENTS:** Our assumption is that the ancients in the first century would believe anything. If that was the case, why is it that, even though Jesus told them multiple times that He was going to rise again...they didn’t believe Him? The disciples didn’t show up at the tomb of Jesus on the third day. The faithful women came with burial spices, wondering who would roll away the tomb door. They came to prepare His body for eons of rotting in a tomb. Even when Jesus appeared to them in person after the Resurrection, the Bible states that “some doubted.” We might assume that first century people were much more likely to believe that somebody could rise from the dead, but the evidence shows that they would be just as incredulous – if not more so – than modern, scientifically oriented people. That they had a prompt change of heart about the possibility of resurrection demonstrates and gives some level of proof that something happened to change their mind and take away their doubts.

**#10 GARY HABERMAS MINIMAL FACTS ARGUMENT:** Gary Habermas is a professor and resurrection expert who has earned a Ph.D. in Philosophy (from Michigan State) and is a bestselling author and noted debater. He uses an approach called the Minimal Facts Argument to show that it is historically likely that Jesus rose from the dead. From his research Habermas has been able to show that of the 3,400 works that he studied, the majority of scholars (Christian, liberal, atheist and otherwise) accept the following 12 events as historical fact:

\*Jesus died by crucifixion.

- \*Jesus was buried.
- \*His death caused the disciples to despair and lose hope, believing that his life was ended.
- \*The tomb was empty a few days later.
- \*The disciples had experiences that they believed were literal appearances of the risen Jesus.
- \*The disciples were transformed from doubters who were afraid to identify themselves with Jesus to bold proclaimers of His death and Resurrection.
- \*This message was the center of preaching in the early church.
- \*This message was especially proclaimed in Jerusalem, where \*Jesus died and was buried shortly before.
- \*The church was born in Jerusalem and grew rapidly.
- \*Orthodox Jews who believed in Jesus made Sunday their primary day of worship.
- \*James, the half-brother of Jesus, converted to the faith when he saw what he believed was the resurrected Jesus.
- \*Paul was converted to the faith after his experience which he believed was with the risen Jesus.

From these “minimal facts,” Habermas believes it is not difficult to show that it is quite reasonable and not illogical to believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Here is a detailed explanation of [Professor Gary Habermas’ Minimal Facts approach to the Resurrection](#)

**CONCLUSION:** There is very real, very plausible evidence that Jesus rose from the dead. It is not a viewpoint that must be arrived at by a blind leap of faith, suitable for only religious wackadoos. On the contrary, there is compelling historical, philosophical and archaeological evidence that points to the reality that something remarkable and amazing happened to Jesus after He was crucified. Believing in the Resurrection as a historical fact does not make you a follower of Jesus. What does? Let’s allow Paul and Jesus to speak to that: 1 Cor 15:1-2 15 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. AND Mark 1:14-15 Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Paul is essentially saying that I gave you the Gospel (information/Good news) about Jesus – and how you respond to that determines whether you are in the Kingdom of Jesus or out of it. Jesus says – repent (turn away) from your old life and believe the good news that Jesus died for your sins and was raised to life.

Are you standing on the Resurrection of Jesus and the fact that Jesus paid the price for you on the cross? Are you holding fast to that belief? That is the Good news and by it we are saved. The Gospel IS the power of God unto salvation!

**BONUS! Two Extra Reasons to Believe in the Factual Resurrection of Jesus From the Dead:**



**11. The Gospel Accounts – and the specific accounts of the death and resurrection of Jesus – contain a level of detail that is substantially different than that found in ancient fiction and mythical literature.**

C.S. Lewis was not merely a writer of children's stories. His primary job during his lifetime was that of an Oxford professor of Philology and languages. He was an expert on mythical literature and the development of language. In discussing the literary detail of the Gospels during a speech at Cambridge university in 1959, Lewis challenged:

*"Turn to (The Gospel of) John. Read the dialogues: that with the Samaritan woman at the well, or that which follows the healing of the man born blind. Look at its pictures: Jesus (if I may use the word) doodling with his finger in the dust; the unforgettable hnd nux (8:30). I have been reading poems, romances, vision-literature, legends, myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know that not one of them is like this. Of this text there are only two possible views. Either this is reportage—though it may no doubt contain errors—pretty close up to the facts; nearly as close as Boswell. Or else, some unknown writer in the second century, without known predecessors or successors, suddenly anticipated the whole technique of modern, novelistic, realistic narrative. If it is untrue, it must be narrative of that kind. The reader who doesn't see this has simply not learned to read."* (Quote from: C.S. Lewis, "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism," an essay read by Lewis at Westcott House, Cambridge, on May 11, 1959)

As an example of what Lewis is discussing here – think about the seemingly insignificant details in the resurrection narratives of the Gospel. For instance – Jesus "giving" the care of His mother to John. This detail in the text doesn't seem to serve any purpose at all – there is no obvious underlying meaning and the situation between John and Mary is not mentioned again in the Bible. Literarily speaking – it is a detail that adds nothing to the story, and that sort of detail is foreign in ancient myth and legend writing. This incident only makes sense in the context of an eyewitness report that endeavors to record what actually happened at the death and resurrection of Jesus. Similarly, consider Simon the Cyrene, who appears in Matthew, Mark and Luke (chapters 27, 15 and 23, respectively) as the carrier of the cross when Jesus is unable to continue up the hill towards Golgotha. Simon never appears again in either account, nor in the rest of the Scriptures. If one is writing a mythical account, or a parable, or a moral-story, or really ANY genre of ancient literature other than eyewitness history, then it is difficult to account for Simon's appearance in the narrative. He doesn't symbolize anything significant, and the two details given about him (namely that he is Cyrenian, modern day Libya, and the father of two children named Alexander and Rufus), don't advance the plot in any way. These and other details found in the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection are ultimately superfluous and unnecessary from a fictional literature perspective (even in the genre of fable or parable) and are clear hallmarks of non-fiction historical material.

The Catholic apologist Peter Kreeft describes this dynamic further here, *"There are also telltale marks of eyewitness description, like the little detail of Jesus writing in the sand when asked whether to stone the adulteress or not (John 8:6). No one knows why this is put in; nothing comes of it. The only explanation is that the writer saw it. If this detail and others like it throughout all four Gospels were invented, then a first-century tax collector (Matthew), a "young man" (Mark), a doctor (Luke), and a fisherman (John) all independently invented the new genre of realistic fantasy nineteen centuries before it was reinvented in the twentieth."*

Finally, in his classic work on apologetics, **Reasonable Faith**, philosopher and author William Lane Craig offers an example of second century mythical writing (in this case, from the Gospel of Peter, a Gnostic writing) Note the difference in tone and substance between this example and the Gospel narratives:

*"In this account, the tomb is not only surrounded by Roman guards but also by all the Jewish Pharisees and elders as well as a great multitude from all the surrounding countryside who have come to watch the resurrection. Suddenly in the night there rings out a loud voice in heaven, and two men descend from heaven to the tomb. The stone over the door rolls back by itself, and they go into the tomb. The three men come out of the tomb, two of them holding up the third man. The heads of the two men reach up into the clouds, but the head of the third man reaches beyond the clouds. Then a cross comes out of the tomb, and a voice from heaven asks, 'Have you preached to them that sleep?' And the cross answers, 'Yes.'" William Lane Craig, Reasonable Faith (1994 edition) page 275.*

## **12. The 500 witnesses (and various other very early believers in the Resurrection)**

The biblical messenger Paul makes a startling claim in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of his letter to the Corinthians – that claim is, essentially, that all of Christianity hinges on the historical truth of whether or not Jesus rose from the dead. If He did not rise from the dead, then *"if Christ has not been raised [from the dead], then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain,"* Additionally, Paul says that Christians should be the people in the world most looked down on and pitied IF Jesus did NOT rise from the dead (vs. 19)

Those are strong words! To Paul, the historical resurrection of Jesus wasn't merely a belief, or facet of Christianity, it was the basis and foundation of the whole thing! This is why it is interesting that Paul mentions that over 500 people actually saw Jesus after His death. There were over 500 witnesses! (1 Corinthians 15:6 *"Then He appeared to over 500 brothers at one time ;'most of them are still alive, but some have fallen asleep."*) This is not a small claim! Paul is effectively challenging the Corinthians in the chapter by telling them that the historical/factual resurrection of Jesus is the central core of Christianity, and if any of them doubt that it happened, most of the 500 people who witnessed the risen Jesus are still alive and can give testimony of the fact that they saw Jesus after He died and was buried.

Additionally, as mentioned by Michael Licona and Gary Habermas, at least 42 writers (only nine of which are in the Bible), almost all of those ancient writers show clear evidence of believing in the factual and historical resurrection of Jesus. As a comparison, note that Tiberius Caesar, the famous and well known emperor of Rome during the time of Jesus, is only mentioned by TEN extant authors within 150 years of His death. Here are some examples of believers in the resurrection of Jesus that wrote about it shortly after His death:

- The Epistle of Clement: *"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.**"* AND, *"The apostles have preached the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ [has done so from God. Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in an orderly way, according to the will of God. Having therefore received their orders, and being **fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ**, and established in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand."* This letter was written by Clement, probably around 90ad and possibly before the book of

Resurrection. This is perhaps the earliest extant church letter outside of the Bible, and gives indisputable evidence that the early church not only believed in the resurrection of Jesus, but that they based their future hope AND proclamation of the Good news of Jesus on that hope.

- Flavius Josephus, a non-Christian Jewish historian that died in 97AD wrote, *“At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. **They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive;** accordingly, he was perhaps the messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.”* (from the Arabic translation of Josephus’ works)
- Ignatius of Antioch, writing around 110AD, *“Jesus Christ who was of the race of David, who was the Son of Mary, who was truly born and ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died in the sight of those in heaven and on earth and those under the earth; who moreover was truly raised from the dead, His Father having raised Him, who in the like fashion will so raise us also who believe on Him.”*
- Justin Martyr, writing to the Roman Emperor, in 150 AD, *“Accordingly, after He was crucified, even all His acquaintances forsook Him, having denied Him; and afterwards, when He had risen from the dead and appeared to them, and had taught them to read the prophecies in which all these things were foretold as coming to pass, and when they had seen Him ascending into heaven, and had believed, and had received power sent thence by Him upon them, and went to every race of men, they taught these things, and were called apostles.”*

**Some Objections to the Resurrection: (This section below will likely be expanded, polished up a bit, and made into its own post)**

What do Christians say to people who doubt Jesus actually existed?

John Dominic Crossan, an agnostic scholar, co-founder of the Jesus seminar, and huge Jesus skeptic, says that “the existence of Jesus is the best established fact of the ancient world.” Bart Ehrman, an atheist/agnostic scholar calls out people who doubt the existence of Jesus by saying that they don’t have good academic credentials, and they haven’t been published in peer reviewed journals. It is easy to be skeptical. It is quite prestigious in academia to be skeptical of religious claims. Hundreds of years ago, science was persecuted and disallowed by the church – religion persecuted science, in some narrow (and much blown up) places. Now, the tables have been turned, and science is well established in academia, and it looks down its nose at religion. I’ll be honest – I’m a fan of both. I read dozens of science works each week. I’m INTERESTED IN TRUTH. Craig Keener has recently written a book called Miracles that is 1200 pages long and contains hundreds of reports of medical miracles, complete with medical documents such as X-rays, doctor’s testimonies, MRI scans and much more. Sometimes skepticism does not add up to the evidence. Holocaust deniers, 911 truthers, conspiracy theorists – skepticism is not always right and beautiful. Go with the evidence! David Hume denied miracles, but he

did say, “Wise men choose probabilities” What is the most probable explanation of Jesus Christ? Of His followers dying for Him? I believe the evidence points to a miraculous and factual resurrection of Jesus.

Question: What if Jesus didn’t actually die? The Swoon Theory: Can you imagine Jesus appearing to the disciples a few days after His “death.” Bloody, broken, – barely recovered. That doesn’t sound like the kind of thing that could cause the despondent and defeated disciples to rally and spread the good news of the return of the limping and barely alive son of God! Recently a German doctor performed a crucifixion experiment with a few volunteers. Within 12 minutes of hanging them on a cross like implement (no nails!), they were unconscious. Once a person who is crucified slumps over – they will be dead from hypoxia very quickly. You cannot breathe without pushing up – even with no EKG machine, it was very obvious whether somebody was dead or not on the cross.

Michael Bird. “Some have great confidence in skeptical scholarship, and I once did, perhaps more than anyone else. If anyone thinks they are assured in their unbelief, I was more committed: born of unbelieving parents, never baptized or dedicated; on scholarly credentials, a PhD from a secular university; as to zeal, mocking the church; as to ideological righteousness, totally radicalized. But whatever intellectual superiority I thought I had over Christians, I now count it as sheer ignorance. Indeed, I count everything in my former life as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing the historical Jesus who is also the risen Lord. For his sake, I have given up trying to be a hipster atheist. I consider that old chestnut pure filth, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a CV that will gain me tenure at an Ivy League school, but knowing that I’ve bound myself to Jesus—and where he is, there I shall also be.”

Note: Some of the above content was taken from a message taught by Chase Thompson at Agape Fellowship. It is possible that some unintentionally unsourced material is found in this article. Please alert me if you find anything!