

Why Believe in Jesus?

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1. Halfway through a short teaching series on why the Christian faith is reasonable.
 - a. We've looked at evidence for the existence of God
 - b. Last week we looked at evidence for the reliability of the Bible
2. Tonight we're going to look at what is the central question of Christianity, and arguably the most important question ever presented:
 - a. WHY BELIEVE IN JESUS?
 - b. Why believe his claims
 - i. to be God incarnate
 - ii. to be the prophesied messiah come to save lost humanity by paying the price for our sins.
 - iii. to be the ONLY WAY to God and salvation
 - c. HUGE CLAIMS!
3. How can we Verify his claims?
 - a. Last week we showed how the Bible is reliable and how it all points to Jesus.
 - b. And what's more it records over 100 predictive prophecies specifically fulfilled in Jesus, most written hundreds and even more than a thousand years before Christ.
 - i. So from last week we saw that fulfilled prophecy does seem to uniquely authenticate not only the Bible, but the claims of Jesus as well.
 - c. But today we're going to build our case by focusing on other evidences for the central linchpin claim about Christ – that he rose from the dead!
4. Resurrection – everything comes down to his resurrection!
 - a. Because if he didn't rise from the dead, Christianity is completely false. No matter what!
 - b. We can agree with the Biblical author Paul (1 cor) when he says that if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, faith in him is utterly meaningless and useless
 - c. Did it happen?
 - i. Because if it didn't we can chuck EVERYTHING about Christianity and the Bible (since it all claims he did rise as a central tenant AND as linchpin confirmation of their claims).
 - ii. But if he DID rise, everything else would follow...
 1. Everything he taught is verified
 2. Everything the Bible teaches is true
5. Tonight: Focus on **Evidence for the Resurrection of JC**
6. Before we start, let's pray
7. Drawing heavily from 2 books:
 - a. Most of this From Habermas's book : "Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus"
 - b. Josh McDowell's New Evidence that Demands a Verdict
 - c. 2 more good books for those looking to supplement:
 - i. Case for Christ by Strobil
 - ii. The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus by Craig
8. Our Approach/Basics: 5 facts nearly ALL Scholars on this subject will agree on (even skeptical & atheist ones)
 - a. Using the Bible

- i. Compatible with how we've been doing this series: not quoting Bible verses as authoritative in a sort of circular reasoning fashion.
 - ii. However we CAN use the Bible to talk about Jesus
 - iii. If we don't, skeptics WILL
 - iv. But we WONT use them like a church would, as God's inspired holy word
 - v. Instead we'll use the Biblical books as we would any other ancient work
 - 1. Not assuming inspired
 - 2. Not assuming inerrant
 - 3. Not assuming unbiased
 - 4. Etc
 - vi. But it IS admissible as ancient sourceworks BY ANY SERIOUS CRITICAL SCHOLAR!
 - vii. This is in fact the BEAUTY of what we'll talk about tonight – the strength of this approach
 - viii. Things that support historical claims (Used by Historians):
 - 1. Multiple Independent sources
 - a. More than 1 independent source supporting an event or saying gives STRONG INDICATION OF HISTORICITY
 - b. Even when they disagree on some peripheral details
 - 2. Attestation by an enemy
 - 3. Embarrassing admissions
 - 4. Eyewitness testimony
 - 5. Early testimony
- b. 5 Strongly nearly universally Accepted, best attested, Historical Facts:
 - i. **Fact 1: Jesus died by crucifixion**
 - i. Multiply attested in the New Testament writings.
 - ii. Also attested from NonXian early writings:
 - iii. Josephus, Jewish historian, working for Romans, (37-100 AD)
 - 1. NOT A BELIEVER!
 - 2. "At this time there was a wise man called Jesus, and his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. Many people among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But 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 reported wonders. And the tribe of the Christians, so named after him, has not disappeared to this day."

- *Jewish Antiquities*, 18.63
 - 3. Confirms NT reports that JC was a real person in the 1st century who executed via crucifixion
 - 4. Tacitus, 1st century roman historian, regarded one of the most accurate historians of ancient world
 - a. Writing ~116AD
 - b. Says Christians are named for Christus, who was executed ("extreme penalty", referring to official Roman execution method: crucifixion) during reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus.

- c. "...called Christians by the populace. Christus, 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 Pilatus"
- 5. Talmud (70-200 AD) during Tannaitic Period
 - a. In Sanhedrin 43a, tells intent of Jewish leaders to kill Jesus and established the exact time and fact of his execution
 - b. "On the Eve of Passover, they hung Jesus of Nazareth for sorcery and enticing Israel [to idolatry]."
- 6. Lucian, 2nd century Greek writer, often sarcastic in critiquing Xty
 - a. "The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day – the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account ... You see these misguided creatures ... worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws."
- 7. IN SUMMARY, from these 4 extrabiblical sources, we can specifically corroborate the claims of the New Testament that:
 - a. JC was a real 1st century man
 - b. JC was executed by crucifixion
 - c. We can actually corroborate FAR MORE than that but for the sake of brevity and focus, this is all we need to build our "minimal facts" case.
- 8. John Dominic Crossan (Jesus Seminar, highly skeptical scholar) – "That he was crucified is as sure as anything historical can ever be."

iv. Fact 2: Jesus' disciples believed that he rose and appeared to them

- 9. Virtual consensus among scholars who study this! CRAZY RIGHT? Why is that:
- 10. Evidenced by:
 - 11. Early creedal statements
 - a. Early Christian Creed in 1 Cor 15:3-5
 - b. 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.**
 - i. Most likely datable w/in 6mo-3 years of cross.
 - 1. Gary Habermas writes, "Even radical scholars like Gerd Lüdemann think that 'the elements in the tradition are to be dated to the first two years after the crucifixion... no later than three years after the death of Jesus.'"
 - 12. The Gospel accounts
 - a. All 4 gospels accepted (even by skeptics!) to be written during 1st century (including Acts, =Luke pt 2)
 - i. Include multiple eyewitness testimony (GOOD!)
 - b. So all w/in 70 yrs of cross.
 - i. Pretty early testimony historically too (GOOD!)
 - c. And all report disciples' claims that JC rose from dead and appeared to them
 - 13. Early Church fathers' writings

- a. Most were discipled or at least close w/ original apostles
 - b. Strong likelihood their teaching can be traced back to apostles
 - c. All church fathers taught that the apostles were dramatically impacted by JC's resurrection
 - d. 2 examples:
 - e. Clement (bishop of Rome, ~30-100AD)
 - i. *Likely referred to in Phil 4:3 (though not conclusive)*
 - ii. *Likely instituted by Peter himself*
 - iii. *Have letter to Corinth church in 95AD where he writes that the apostles were fully assured of JC's resurrection*
 - f. Polycarp (~69-155AD)
 - i. *Reported by Iraneaus to have been instructed and conversed with Apostles.*
 - ii. *Talked w/ many who had seen JC resurrected*
 - iii. *Tertullian reports Polycarp was appointed by John*
 - iv. *Polycarp letter to Philippian church ~110AD mentions the truth of the resurrection of JC 5x*
 - g. All these amount to multiple early eyewitness testimony that the original disciples said they saw JC risen from dead
14. Disciples BELIEVED it – evidenced by their willingness to suffer and die for their claim
- a. After his death, the disciples were radically transformed from fearful, cowering individuals who denied and abandoned him at his arrest and execution into bold proclaimers of the Gospel of the risen Lord. They remained steadfast in the face of prison, torture, and martyrdom.
 - b. Clearly sincere belief in JC rising from dead
 - c. Sufferings and Martyrdom evidence
 - i. Some evidence that all apostles except John were martyred for their faith, But here are the BEST attested:
 - ii. Book of Acts!
 - 1. Stephen, James brother of John
 - iii. Peter & Paul both suffered and martyred
 - 1. Clement of Rome
 - 2. Tertullian
 - 3. Origin (~185-254) reports Peter, paul both martyred for faith, and that they claimed JC rose from dead
 - iv. Martyrdom of James, brother of JC
 - 1. Reported by Eusebius (c 263-339) first church historian (Ecclesiastical History), others
 - d. Doesn't prove what the believed was true, but rather they sincerely believed it.
15. Even atheist Gert Lüdemann, perhaps the most prominent current critic of the resurrection, admits, "It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus's death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ." [18]

c. Fact 3: Church persecutor Paul was suddenly changed

- i. Conversion of an enemy
- ii. Paul's radical conversion and transformation from enemy to Christian preacher is MULTIPLY attested
- iii. And that this happened precisely because he claimed to experience appearance of risen JC
 - 1. Luke's account in Acts 9
 - 2. Paul's own testimony in Acts 22 & 26
 - a. Where he states how he was previously very zealous against early Christians, believing their claims blasphemous.
 - b. He personally worked to imprison and kill early church leaders.
 - c. Then he personally encountered the risen and glorified Jesus on the road to Damascus
 - 3. Same Story that was circulated among Christians in Judea (referenced in Acts)
 - 4. Also multiply attested by Luke, Clement, Polycarp, Tertullian, Dionysius of Corinth, Origin.
 - 5. Certainly not a man predisposed to believe in the risen Jesus!
 - 6. Paul's conversion is unique from modern conversions because he converted based on FIRSTHAND experiences of risen Lord, rather than 2nd hand evidence leading to change of belief
 - 7. Died Martyr's death for his claim that risen JC appeared to him (as we've already shown)

d. Fact 4: Skeptic James brother of JC suddenly changed

- i. We know from both Biblical and extrabiblical sources that Jesus had other siblings.
- ii. One: James described in NT and in Josephus as a pious Jew who did NOT believe in his brother's divinity (nor, apparently did the rest of his siblings) before his death
 - 1. Mark 3, 6, John 7
 - 2. James, a pious Jew, was NOT predisposed to believe in his brother being God. Nor that he would be rising from the dead.
- iii. Ancient creedal stmt in 1 Cor 15 says JC appeared after his resurrection to James
- iv. Afterward, James is identified as leader of Jerusalem Church!
 - 1. Acts 15, Gal 9
- v. Not only did James convert to Xty, but died a martyr for his belief in JC's resurrection
 - 1. Attested by Josephus, Hegesippus, Clement of Alexandria

e. Fact 5: Jesus' Tomb was empty

- i. Jerusalem factor
 - 1. Public execution in Jerusalem
 - a. Everyone was talking about it (Luke 24)
 - 2. Burial location KNOWN
 - a. **Fact #5c (CRAIG): After his crucifixion, Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea in a tomb (rather than a mass grave for criminals).**
 - i. Specific well known public figure!
 - ii. Multiply attested
 - 1. According to the late NT scholar **John A. T. Robinson of Cambridge University, the honorable burial of Jesus is one of "the earliest and best-attested facts about Jesus."**

3. So, Jesus publicly executed and buried in Jerusalem
 4. Then Resurrection first proclaimed in Jerusalem
 5. IMPOSSIBLE to think how Xty could get off the ground in Jerusalem if the body was still available in tomb!
 6. Jewish (and Roman) leaders would simply have to roll away stone and present the corpse to be finally rid of this nuisance.
 - a. THEY NEVER DO!
 - b. Even after 50 days in tomb, JC's corpse would still be recognizable
 - i. Arid climate
 - ii. Hair, stature, distinctive wounds
- ii. Enemy Attestation
1. The agreements and compliments of someone's enemies makes that fact MORE likely to be true (no bias for, and even bias against!)
 2. JC's enemies indirectly admit the empty tomb
 - a. Earliest accounts of this from Jewish sources report Jews claiming the disciples stole the body (not that the tomb was not empty).
 - b. Indirect admission that the body was NOT available for display (no MATTER the condition)
 3. **If the tomb was not empty, Jewish leaders would have been showing his body to all the Christians claiming he'd risen!**
 4. **But instead they gave another narrative as to WHY the tomb was empty**
 - a. **Disciples stole the body**
 - b. **But tacitly confirmed the empty tomb!**
- iii. Testimony of Women – criterion of embarrassment
1. If story was an invention, it's safe to assume the inventor would NOT knowingly invent data that would hurt the credibility of their story
 2. Women listed as primary witnesses to empty tomb and the resurrection
 3. Women lowly esteemed in both Jewish and Roman Cultures
 - a. Their testimony regarded as questionable, far less credible as a man
 - b. Jewish Talmud and Josephus make CLEAR their testimony not even admissible in court
 - c. Corroborated by fact that male disciples initially scoffed and disbelieved the women's empty tomb reports!
 4. Very unlikely to be invented as primary witnesses unless it was what actually happened (a fact they were likely embarrassed of).
 5. Makes empty tomb account all the more likely historical
- iv. Empty tomb fact by itself doesn't prove resurrection (disciples could have stolen body!) but when standing together with the other facts (disproving the fraud theory, etc) it becomes quite convincing indeed
- v. **As skeptical scholar and author D. H. van Daalen points out, "It is extremely difficult to object to the empty tomb on historical grounds; those who deny it do so on the basis of theological or philosophical assumptions." [17]**

9. So, based on those five facts, all of which seem historically reliable based on historical methods,
10. What's the best explanation of the evidence?
 - a. Other theories (**go quickly**)
 - i. **It's just a fictitious story** – invented much later by Christians
 1. Doesn't deal with evidence for life and death of Jesus multiply attested including outside NT:
 - a. Doesn't deal with empty tomb
 - b. Doesn't explain conversions of enemies Paul and James
 - ii. **Legendary embellishment**
 1. Already shown not possible as we have record of multiple early original eyewitnesses who attest to JC's resurrection
 2. Additionally we've shown an early Christian creed even atheist skeptical scholars date to within just a few years after the cross.
 3. So can't be embellishments over time – just doesn't fit the evidence
 - iii. **Myth derived from other religions**
 1. Lots of problems with this one
 2. But simply, it also doesn't fit the evidence of the empty tomb or the conversions of enemies Paul & James
 - iv. **Fraud**
 1. Already covered
 2. This was the favorite theory claimed by Jewish authorities
 3. Doesn't make sense of the martyrdom of the original eyewitnesses
 4. Their martyrdom for their claims doesn't prove the truth of their claims, But does show they actually believed it – NOT FRAUD!
 5. Nor explains the conversions of enemy Paul & James
 - v. **Jesus wasn't really dead**
 1. Popular among Muslims as the Koran says in Surah 4
 2. Swoon theory / Apparent Death Theory
 3. JAMA March 21, 1986 famously looked into medical effects of JC's pre-crucifixion scourging and the effects of the crucifixion itself, using biblical, historical, and medical data, including the spear to the side causing a gush of blood and water
 - a. Piercing of pericardium and right side of heart
 - b. Confidently assert jc could NOT have survived it.
 - c. No possible credibility to Swoon Theory
 4. Neither accounts for conversions of Paul as result of GLORIOUS appearance of risen Jesus
 - vi. **Mass hallucination theory**
 1. Disciples so stricken by grief that they hallucinated risen Jesus out of overwhelming desire to see him alive
 2. 1st problem is that for this to happen, his disciples would need to be predisposed to believe Jesus would/could rise from the dead.
 - a. But this doesn't account for fact that 1st century Jews were ABSOLUTELY NOT PREDISPOSED to believe in resurrection of person before end of world
 - b. That's why they were so devastated at JC's death.
 - c. They were NOT predisposed to be looking for him to rise
 3. 2nd major problem: We now know all hallucinations are private experiences.

- a. Even rare accounts of mass hallucinations (same shared frame of mind, but still hallucinations are individual – and not the same. Contrary to popular misconception)
 - 4. Yet NT records multiple group appearances
 - a. 1 Cor 15 says JC appeared 1st to Peter, then to the 12
 - b. Then to more than 500 at once time
 - c. Finally to all the apostles (seeming to indicate same time)
 - d. All report seeing SAME THING
 - 5. Also doesn't account for evidence of empty tomb, conversion of Paul, conversion of James (neither grief stricken, looking for JC's resurrection!)
- vii. **Jesus had an identical twin brother**
 - 1. Dr. Robert Greg Cavin, a professor at the University of California, Irvine, scholar on the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. He had written his doctoral dissertation on the subject and was thoroughly familiar with the evidence
 - 2. In it, he argues that *Jesus had an unknown identical twin brother* who was separated from him at birth, came back to Jerusalem just at the time of the crucifixion, somehow stole Jesus's body out of the guarded grave, and presented himself to the disciples, who mistook him for their dear friend Jesus risen from the dead!
 - 3. It's utterly absurd
 - 4. Can be dismissed out of hand because there's absolutely no evidence for this. Rather it's the grasping of a desperate mind
- viii. Shows the lengths to which people must go to avoid what seems **the most REASONABLE conclusion:**
- ix. **that God raised Jesus from the Dead!**

11. So, if Jesus actually has been raised from the Dead, what does that mean?
- a. God exists (no naturalistic explanation)
 - b. Jesus was who he claimed to be: The Divine Messiah – Lord of all
 - i. No place for "he was just a good teacher" here.
 - ii. A resurrected Jesus is de facto the Lord.
 - c. **So, if it's reasonable to conclude that Jesus really did rise from the dead, as it seems we've shown, then it is therefore REASONABLE to believe in Jesus as Lord!**

12. Who do you say Jesus is?
- a. This is the absolute most important question you'll ever answer!

Applications:

13. If you are not yet a follower of Jesus,
- a. **(1) Consider the evidence we've shown today for his life, death, and resurrection**
 - b. Consider the most reasonable explanation for that evidence
 - c. And as we've shown tonight, Jesus is most reasonably still alive and able to engage personally
 - i. Why not open yourself up to him in prayer, ask him to reveal himself to you. Confirm the evidence.
 - d. Why not take that next step of faith and believe in him, put your trust in Him. Take that free gift!
 - i. "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." – Romans 10:9

14. For those of us who have chosen to believe in Jesus as Lord

- a. **(2) – Gain confidence in your faith by digesting this evidence!**
- b. **(3) – Take a step forward in being better able to explain to others who may ask why you believe in Jesus**
 - i. 1 peter 3:15 - ...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
- c. **(4) - Consider how you may need to believe MORE FULLY in Jesus as Lord.**
- d. The life of the Christian is a lifestyle of repentance.
 - i. Over and over turning again back to Jesus as our Lord
 - ii. We have to let Jesus be right about things, about us.
 - iii. How do you need to repent and believe MORE FULLY in the Lordship of Jesus?
- e. All of us who claim Christ are still in process of living more fully in line with that reality.
- f. Old habits are hard to break
- g. Especially habits of the mind, of the heart
- h. The way we actually live our lives betrays our truest beliefs
 - i. We may say we believe Jesus is who he claimed to be: God come to save and adopt us, but then live like practical atheists
 - 1. worrying over our provisions
 - 2. prioritizing the accumulation of earthly wealth over Kingdom investment
 - 3. insecure about your worth, your identity
 - 4. cold hearted towards neighbors
 - 5. unforgiving toward others
 - 6. joyless and anxious
 - 7. consumeristic toward church
 - 8. Pushing our kids toward worldly success over eternal greatness
 - 9. Choosing comfort time and time again over promptings toward good works that would include suffering or potential suffering
 - ii. We need to let Jesus be right about life
 - 1. Let HIM be Lord - More and More and more

15. Q&A

- a. Testimonies about your experience with Jesus
- b. Your journey of belief
 - i. What evidence has been helpful in building your faith in Jesus?
- c. What's an area of your life you're sensing the need to release to the Lordship of Jesus?