

Proving The Resurrection of Jesus

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The Logical Lutheran

This morning I'm going to do something I've never done before. I'm going to preach the message that brought me back to Christianity.

I grew up Lutheran. So, I knew the liturgy. I knew the order of service. I knew when to stand up, sit down, fight, fight, fight. I knew all the stuff. But, I didn't know anything about Christ Himself. I certainly didn't know much about the Bible. You can be a Lutheran – or, any religion, for that matter - your whole life and never really have to know the Bible, because they give you little snippets of it in the back of the hymnal that you can just turn to and recite back and forth. So, as it turns out, you never really have to have any sense of how the Bible works or what's inside it and you can still be a good practicing Lutheran.

And, I was for many, many years - until college, where I was very influenced by a sociology professor who practically made a socialist of me. Everything he said to me made sense because it was logical. And I am, more than anything, a very logical person - almost to a fault. I don't buy into things, I don't believe things, I don't embrace things, unless you can show them to me factually. Lay it down in front of me. I'm very pragmatic. I just want to know the facts, the details, and then I will be driven to a conclusion. The only conclusions that I am dogmatic about are the inescapable conclusions. I like an inescapable conclusion.

So, I had been convinced by my professors and academia in general that the Bible wasn't true; it was just a lot of fables, myths, and old wives' tales. It had been passed down through so many generations, there had been so many translations, and so many people had put their hands on it, that you couldn't really trust it. It wasn't reliable. I was swayed by all the lies that people tell you when you are pursuing a "higher education." They want you to be "intellectually honest" enough to admit that maybe the faith you grew up with isn't actually all it was cracked up to be.

So, I had effectively lost my faith and, out of college, sold my soul to rock and roll. I went off and did my records and concerts. And, all during that time, I would have told you, if I was pressed to the wall, if somebody said, "Do you believe in God?" I would say, "Well, yes. He's up there somewhere, you know? He certainly exists."

But, if you had said, "Well, what about Jesus?" I couldn't tell you what the relationship was. I really couldn't tell you how it all worked. I just knew God was

up there somewhere. I assumed He liked me and that if I needed anything, He'd come through for me in a pinch. That was really as much as I knew by the time I was 24 or 25.

Anyway, I was in my apartment in San Francisco late one night, Easter of 1982. I turned on the TV and saw a preacher that I had oftentimes made fun of, as I did all preachers. But, it was two in the morning and it was quiet and I was by myself. The preacher was teaching on the proof of the resurrection. And, he was doing it the way I would approach things. He approached it logically. He approached it on the basis of historic evidence. And when he got done an hour later, he had convinced me that Jesus had actually come out of the grave.

That was the starting point that led to me, at forty-five, devoting my life to telling other people about it. I became convinced by the evidence, pragmatically. I became convinced by the historic evidence that there is no other answer - Jesus came up out of the grave!

What Do You Believe?

Now, usually when you tell people about your faith, especially when you are talking about Christianity, it's difficult because there are so many versions of Christianity out there and so many people talking about Christianity in so many different ways. Try this sometime: ask people, "Well, *why* do you believe what you believe?" It's tough. Most people don't know *what* they believe, any less *why* they believe it.

The word "believe" in our lexicon has become so twisted that people think that what they believe is legitimate based solely on the fact that they believe it. That's all you really need as evidence, anymore. "Well, I believe it because I believe it." And, you are expected to respect whatever they believe. They can be part of a sect that believes their gods are blue elephants and you're supposed to go, "Okay, I'm fine with that." In this day of broadmindedness and political correctness, we're not supposed to step on anybody's belief, simply because they believe it.

But, the fact that you believe something is not sufficient reason for me or anyone else to join you in that belief. The fact that you're convinced does not convince me. And I, of all people, know that - because I preach a theology that is difficult for some folk to grasp.

I preach the Pauline theology that most people are not familiar with. I'm not afraid of the fact that Paul uses words like *elect*. And, I'm not afraid of the fact that he uses the word *predestination* oftentimes, or that the God of the Bible says, "I am the Almighty." That means omnipotent, all-powerful, and I'm okay with that.

“I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.” (Rev. 1:8)

God says that He decides the end from the beginning.

“Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.” (Isa. 46:9-10)

God says that He has wrote certain names in the Book of Life before the foundation of the world.

“And, all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him (the beast), whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” (Rev. 13:8)

These are concepts that really make people go haywire unless you take the Bible at face value and admit that God really says such things.

So, I don't ever ask anybody to believe what I believe on the basis of the fact that I believe it. Instead - those of you who have been here awhile know - I just lay down the evidence. I say, “The Bible says this. Now you and God go work it out.”

The Bible dogmatically, absolutely states some things categorically that you cannot escape and you cannot ignore. So, I tell people, “You've got one of two choices. You either face God head-on the way He represents Himself in His Word and deal with that God, or at least acknowledge that that's the God found in the Bible and then understand what you're rejecting.”

But, there's no gray area in the middle. You either have to say, “This is the God revealed in scripture and I'm for Him.” Or you say, “This is the God revealed in scripture and I don't buy it.” Then, walk away. But most people won't even look at the evidence.

I came back to the Christian faith because the facts and the evidence drove me to it. So, since this morning is Resurrection Sunday 2001 - and it was Resurrection Sunday 1982 when this message was preached to me - 19 years later, I'm going to share it with you.

Just the Facts, Man

Now, when it was preached to me, I thought the essential elements of this message were unique to the preacher who taught it, because I'd never heard

anybody else teach it. Since then, I've heard and read various forms of this essential message. And, I'll tell you up front; it's not unique to me.

The great part about Christianity is that for 2000 years, although society has changed, people have changed, our morals have changed, history moves on, people march forward into new technologies and new ways of transferring knowledge and all of that, the facts remain the facts! The details remain the details and they don't change. So, even though 2000 years have gone by, and despite all those things my professors used to tell me about how there have been different interpretations and different people handling it, and there's a lot of myths and so on and so on, it turns out that the facts still exist! The historic details are still there and you can go back and look at them for yourself. And, through the last 2000 years, lots and lots of people have done that.

There's a great book written by a fellow named Thomas Sherlock in 1729. The text of the book is in the Old English, kind of rough to read. It's called, The Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus. In it, Sherlock conjures up an old English court and had lawyers bring their evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. He treated it exactly the way you would treat a court case. The lawyers would state their propositions and defend them with evidence and facts. Once they'd established their positions by facts, they'd move on to the next point of contention and continue the debate. Brilliant approach.

More recently there's a book called, The Case for Christ, by Lee Strobel. He's doing the same thing, only he's approaching it as a journalist going around to different theologians and saying, "Okay, here are the historic arguments against Jesus and His resurrection. What are your responses?" He's coming to the same conclusions.

Similarly, Josh McDowell's book, Evidence That Demands A Verdict, follows Sherlock's lead in looking at the historic accounts and reaching the same conclusion.

Perhaps the most famous treatise along these lines was written by Simon Greenleaf (1783-1853). Prior to examining the evidence concerning Christ, Greenleaf had served as professor of law at Harvard University from 1833-48. He was instrumental in organizing the university's law program. His three-volume work, A Treatise on the Law of Evidence, is considered a classic of American jurisprudence. Utilizing the selfsame laws of evidence, he approached the resurrection of Jesus and ended up writing one of the most compelling defenses of the veracity of the biblical accounts ever composed - An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists by the Rules of Evidence Administered in the Courts of Justice,

And, you can go back into the early church history. Saint Thomas Aquinas dealt with these exact same facts in this exact same way and came to the exact same

conclusions, because the facts are the facts. You cannot escape the facts. If you're willing to face the facts, they will drive you to a conclusion.

My point is that many different people have approached these historic details and drawn the same conclusion. I'm just one of many. But, I want you to be familiar with the arguments and I want you to settle these matters for yourselves.

I don't ever expect anybody to believe what I tell them just because I tell them. I want them to face the facts because, just like in a court of law, if you're one of twelve jurors, you'll be driven to a conclusion. That's an interesting phenomenon. Think about that. You get twelve people who first have to prove that they don't know anything about the case they're about to hear. They haven't read any papers. They haven't seen any news reports. They know nothing about it. Then you take these twelve seemingly neutral people and put evidence in front of them that is supposed to be so strong, so conclusive, and so inescapable, that they will be willing to take on the moral decision of whether the accused lives or dies. They walk in knowing nothing and they leave determining the fate of a human based on the facts.

Facts will drive you to a conclusion - a psychological conclusion that's inescapable - and that's what happened to me. I sat there and listened as the preacher went through his facts and I kept thinking, "Okay, I'm alright with that one." And then he came to his next fact and I would think, "I'm okay with that one, too." He'd go to his next point and I'd say, "Alright, that makes sense." He clicked down through his facts and I was following along, accepting his points and agreeing with the rationality of his arguments.

Then he drew his conclusion: Jesus came up out of that grave. And I was cornered. That preacher looked into the camera and said, "Now settle it!" I, not knowing what else to do, walked out into the garden outside my apartment, looked up at the sky and - not knowing any Christian words or Bible language, and not knowing what else to say - I literally looked up at the sky and said, "Checkmate, you win!"

Ever since then I've been chasing after this God, learning about His Son, and trying to figure out what goes on inside this Book, because every time I'd ask people they'd say, "Well, I just believe what I believe."

I say, "Not good enough! I want to know *why* you believe what you believe!"

I have evidence! So today, I'm going to bring the evidence to you.

The Essential Message

The essence of the Christian message comes down to this: Christ died, resurrected and ascended. In the early Church, anywhere that you find the

Christian message preached, these essential elements were proclaimed. In fact, the gospel message was preached within 50 days of the actual event of Christ's resurrection. That's how early this preaching began – Pentecost. Seven weeks went by. Within 50 days, this message, in its complete form, was already being preached.

That's really important. That means that whoever concocted the message, wherever the message came from, it was fully formed, fully understood, doctrinally established and ready to go in seven weeks. You understand what I'm saying? There was very little time for any "historic development."

Christ died on Passover, was laid in the grave just as the Old Testament Feast of Unleavened Bread began, and rose on the first day of the week, on the Feast of Firstfruits. 50 days later was Pentecost. That day, Peter got up and preached facts. Let's start there. Let's take a look at that - Acts 2.

The first time I came across this in Acts 2, I was really moved by Peter's approach. Peter was standing in front of Jewish leaders who did not believe that this Christ person could possibly have risen from the dead. Now, they knew that they were responsible for killing Him. We're going to get to that. But, the last thing they expected was that He was actually alive again. Noticeably, Peter did not stand up and say, "You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart." That was not Peter's answer. Instead, he stood up on Pentecost and the Church was established by the statement of didactic facts.

Listen to what he said, starting at verse 22:

"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man ..."

He started right there. He started with a basic fact. Jesus of Nazareth. Here's His name. Here's where he's from. Here's who he is. He's Jesus. He's from Nazareth. He's a man. They would all agree, "Okay, I'm with you so far, Peter."

"... approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:"

So far, Peter hasn't stated anything they didn't already know. Jesus was a man, He was from Nazareth, and He did signs, wonders and miracles that you witnessed. You saw it! Blind people seeing, deaf people hearing, lame people getting up and walking on the Sabbath, which really upset you. You saw all of that with your own eyes and you know it for a fact! He hasn't asked anybody to take anything on faith yet. He laid out the facts.

Continuing with verse 23. Now, here is the part where the Jews are going to start disagreeing -

“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:”

They knew they'd taken Him, and they knew they'd slain Him. But, they were likely to disagree that it was the determinate counsel of God that had them do that. And, they certainly weren't going to agree with that “wicked” comment.

But, there's foreknowledge. There's predetermination. There's God's sovereignty on display. They might disagree with the notion that their hands were wicked when they did it, but nobody could deny that it was done.

So, Peter laid out facts: he's a man, here's his name, here's where he's from, he did miracles, and you saw the miracles. That means God approved Him and you killed Him. Undeniable facts.

“Whom God hath raised up, ...”

That was brand new to them. Verse 24 continues:

“... having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.”

Then, Peter went on to talk about David's proof. He went back into their own Scripture and showed the Jews that everything happened exactly the way it was supposed to. Look at verse 25.

“For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day.”

Now, watch what he's doing. This is so clever. Peter's so good at this. He said, “I'm going to tell you about our scripture and you know that David himself preached this very thing. He said that God would not leave His Holy One in the ground to see corruption, but would raise Him up again.” Then Peter said, “Now, when David wrote that, he wrote it in the first person, but he wasn't speaking of himself because David's sepulcher is right over there and he's still in it.”

So who was David talking about when he said that?

“Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him [David], that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he

would raise up Christ [the Messiah] to sit on his throne; He [David] seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.”

Notice the term he used. It's a legal term. He said, "This Christ is alive and I'm here to tell you about it because I and all these people that are with me have all *witnessed* Him up walking, talking, being alive. So, if you want to examine the evidence, examine us because we are the witnesses.”

It's a great argument. He essentially said, "I've got scripture saying that the Messiah was going to die and rise up. I've got evidence that Jesus died and I've got evidence that Jesus rose again." There's the message, right from the beginning: Christ died and has resurrected. Now look where Peter goes with it:

“Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.”

In other words, when Peter said, "He is lifted up to the Father's right hand," that's the ascension. So, within 50 days of His death, the encapsulated message of Christianity was, Christ died, He was resurrected, and He ascended. Within 50 days! That's how early the message was complete and preached openly.

The Real Jesus

Now, people who can't deal with this fact don't want to deal with the Jesus of history. There's only one Jesus in history, but they have created a Jesus after their imagination. Paul talked about that. He said in his epistle to the Galatians that there were some who preached a different gospel and a different Christ - another gospel, another Christ (Gal. 1). Which he said, "Is not another!" He used a word in the Greek that means, *is not equal with*, something qualitatively different. They preached the lesser gods of their imagination. For that reason, Paul concluded that if any man were to preach any other gospel than that which Paul preached, that man was to be "accursed" (Gal. 1:8). There is only one genuine message of Christianity; the true gospel of Christ - and the essence of it is that He died, that He resurrected, and that He ascended.

But, people have other ideas or imaginations of Jesus. You can turn on the TV - especially on channels like the *Learning Channel* - and they'll show you "The Historic Jesus." Or, there's the Jesus Seminar; a group self-proclaimed, self-appointed scholars who got together and went through the Gospels to determine for themselves the validity of every quote attributed to Jesus, deciding whether or not He said it. They voted on each individual verse through the cunning use of marbles. And they came to the conclusion that roughly 18 percent of the total

things ever attributed to Jesus were possible quotes, with only 2 percent of Jesus' words considered genuine.

They took out everything that was miraculous; everything that they thought was above human, everything that would have given Him 'insider knowledge' or would have made Him Godly. They began with the premise, the presupposition, that Jesus could not be God and, based on that assumption, they went through and voted out everything He said that made Him sound like He might have been God. They came away with this Jesus of their imagination.

Their conclusion was a common one that has been offered up by critics and quasi-intellectuals down through the year. They say He was a good and a wise teacher. That's all He was. He was a good Rabbi whose followers were deluded into believing that He was more than that. So, they corrupted the record in keeping with their desire to make Jesus seem like God. After He was dead and gone, they wrote a fanciful account of his life, invented miraculous tales, put words in his mouth and created a Jesus who was more to their liking, in the hope of keeping their sect alive.

But again: 50 days. They had 50 days to concoct this story, if it's a story. If it's not true, they concocted it within seven weeks. Keep that mind.

Now, the only Jesus you'll find in history cannot be a "good and wise teacher." Are you aware of that? I heard this all the time in college. It's funny that I look back on it now and didn't see how silly it was. People don't seem to be able to write Him off completely, so they want to eulogize Him in some way without admitting to His deity or Lordship. They give Him a backhanded compliment by claiming, "Well, I'm not saying He was bad. I'm just saying that He was a good and a wise teacher." But, He can't be. Jesus cannot be both good and wise at the same time.

He could be good, in that He could be deluded. But, the only Jesus you find in history - look anywhere, look at the earliest preaching, look at the earliest hymns, go back and look at the earliest fragments, find the earliest writing about Jesus, go to the First Century church fathers that knew the apostles, read people who walked and talked with John, like Polycarp - they all declare that Jesus said things about Himself that are impossible if He's not God.

He said things like, "Before Abraham was, I am," (John 8:58). Well, that's an impossible statement. He said that before Abraham ever lived, He pre-existed. Or, He said, "I saw Satan cast down out of Heaven." (Luke 10:18) Well, that's crazy, unless it's true.

The point is, we don't naturally gravitate toward people who talk like that. Right? We lock them up! If your neighbor suddenly told you, "Before Heaven and Earth was, I was in glory." (John 17:5) you'd conclude that you were dealing with a

delusional person. But, Jesus talked about Heaven like it was His living room. He knew it intimately! And He wasn't afraid to say so. He talked about angels, and said that the angels worshipped Him! That's utterly incredible, in the truest sense of the word, if it's not actually true.

There are some scholars who say, "Well now, wait a minute. What about that time when the rich young ruler came to Jesus and said, "Good Master what must I do to be saved (Mat. 19:16; Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18) and Jesus replied, "Why callest thou Me good? There's none good but God."? They say, "See, right there, right there! He said He wasn't God! He said there's none good but God! So, Jesus never claimed to be deity!"

But, that's not what Christ was saying. Jesus would not allow the young ruler the limited concept that He was *only* good. He wanted the young man to go the rest of the way and admit that He was God. The young man came and said, "What must I do to be saved?" He obviously wanted to know from Christ – Look; you obviously have some insider knowledge that I don't have. But, if you read the rest of it, you'll discover something remarkable. You'll find that Jesus had a sense of His own moral perfection. You never see anywhere in anything He does or says that He ever had any sense of any lack within Himself. Read it. He has this complete boldness about Himself that He is absolute authority. For instance, Christ said, "All authority in Heaven and Earth is given unto me." (Mat. 28:18)

What if your neighbor said that? You'd think he needed to be put away. If your neighbor claimed, "All authority in Heaven and Earth is given to me and I will judge the quick and the dead" (2 Tim. 4:1) you'd be convinced that your neighbor needed to be put in a padded room.

You never, never once see in Jesus that He had any sense - at all, ever, anywhere – of even the slightest moral imperfection. He told us, "Judge not lest ye be judged." (Mat. 7:1) Then He went around judging like mad. Complete separation. You guys, don't you judge! Then He goes to the Pharisees and says, "You are dead men's bones and all uncleanness." (Mat. 23:27) "You are children of the devil." (John 8:44) "How will you escape the fires of Hell?" (Mat. 23:33) Well, that's judging, pretty pure and simple. He drew a distinction between Himself and everybody else in the world. That's a fact.

So as rich, young ruler - Jesus said to the young man, "You know the commandments..." and He listed them (Mat. 19:18; Luke 18:20). And, the rich young ruler replied, "Yes, all these commandments I've kept from my youth up." (Matt. 19:20; Luke 18:21) But, Jesus looked right through the young man to what his core problem was and said, "Well then, sell everything you have and give it to the poor." And, the Bible tells us that the rich young ruler went away sad because he had great wealth (Mat. 19:21-22; Luke 18:22-23). He couldn't part from it. This fellow came looking for salvation and was talking to the One who

was salvation! But, Jesus looked right through Him and made his problem evident. So, far from being evidence that Christ considered himself to be merely mortal, the story of the rich, young ruler bolsters our evidence that Christ was indeed God. And He refused to allow the young man to call Him “good master” without realizing that (inasmuch as He was truly good) only God could be good.

Here’s another evidence of Christ’s absolute sense of moral perfection. He never preached – now catch this - He never preached an ethic apart from Himself. He never said, “Do this, do this, do this, do this, and you’ll be saved.” Instead, He made Himself the center of the religious universe and your eternal destiny was wholly and completely dependent on what you did with Him. “I’m the way. I’m the truth. I’m the life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6) “Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.” (John 6:45)

He made Himself the center of the religious universe. That’s completely unique in the history of organized religion. Look at Buddhism; Ghautama Buddha came to the realization of *vanta*, which was the natural tendency in men to do evil, to do sinful things. He decided that he wanted to break out of that. He believed in the karmic wheel of life - that we live several terrestrial lives, life after life, working off our *karma* - paying for the things we did in our previous life, trying to find redemption; trying to find a way out. The Buddha was aware of the fact that men are inherently evil.

So, searching for a way out, he tried the path of a stoic for a while and he tried the life of a sensualist for a while. Finally, he came up with what he called the *Eight-Fold Path* whereby he could reach *Nirvana*, which was the complete extinguishing of himself. He could get all his thoughts down to one thought – *om* - erase that thought, and he would not exist any more. And, according to legend, he then ceased to exist. He left *The Way*. That’s what it was called - *The Way*: The Eight-Fold Path..

Jesus never left “a way.” He said “I am the way.” (John 14:6) You see the difference? Jesus never left an ethic or a religion or a system behind and said, “Now do this.” Instead He said, “Me. I’m it. I’m the center. What you do with Me determines your eternal destiny. “

What’s the biggest religion in the world right now? Islam. Mohammed never claimed to be deity. Mohammed said, “There is one God, Allah. Mohammed is his prophet.” He never claimed to be a deity.

Jesus walked around saying, “I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30) I and the Father are one! “I do always those things which please the Father.” (John 8:29) And, “I’m going to go to prepare a place for you that where I am you may also be.” (John 14:2-3) I will come back and get you. We will all be together, but I’ll send you the Spirit of God. Then, when He spoke of the Spirit of God coming,

the Comforter, he said, "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you." (John 14:18)

Jesus saw Himself as the complete and utter embodiment of the Trinity walking on Earth. He considered Himself equal with the Father (Phil. 2:6). Once, Philip came to Him and said, "Show us the Father and it will suffice us." (John 14:8) But, Jesus said, "Phillip, have I been so long with you and you still don't know me?" (John 14:9) He said, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father."

So, this idea that Jesus didn't claim to be God, which a lot of people want to argue, is groundless. Yes He did, over and over and over again.

So, one of two things is true when you reach that crossroad. In Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis said that when you deal with Jesus on this level you have to liken Him to a man who thinks He's a poached egg, or you have to admit that He is God.

He cannot be a good and wise teacher because He can be good and be deluded and say all these things, but then He's not very wise because He doesn't know He is deluded and that He is saying things about Himself that are impossible.

Or, He could be wise and be very deceptive, but He's not good. He could be wise, telling these lies and go about telling people, "Hey, I'm God" and delude them into believing it, but that's not very good.

He cannot be a *good* and *wise* teacher at the same time. He's one or He's the other. He can only be both a good and a wise teacher if everything He said about Himself is true. And, if it's true, then that's the starting place you need for God. Or, admit that He's a nut, a fraud, a charlatan, a liar and a fake. Those are the options! He's either a mental case, or He's God. There are no other options.

He is not merely a good rabbi who deserves our attention, but not our adoration. He is not simply a clever teacher who earned our admiration, but not our worship. Look at what He actually said about Himself, face what He actually said about Himself, recognize what He said about Himself and then deal with it or walk away from it. But, dealing with a God of your imagination and a Christ of your imagination is of no value. If you create a straw man and knock him down, what have you accomplished? Nothing at all!

I've had so many people argue with me about Christianity that don't know what Christianity is to start with, who don't know the historic Jesus or what He said, and then think that when they've knocked down their straw man, they knocked down my Lord. But, they didn't. They knocked down their own imagination. The only Jesus of history is the One who did walk around making these kinds of claims about Himself. Deal with it.

The Sign of Jonah

So finally, the Pharisees came to Jesus and said, "By what authority do you do these things?" (Mat. 21:23; Mark 11:28; Luke 20:2) What authority do you have to say these things or drive moneychangers from the temple? In essence, who do you think you are? They even went so far as to say that He did miracles by the devil. They claimed that the spirit of Beelzebub was driving out demons. (Mat. 12:24) They simply could not figure out what to do with a man who went about doing these miraculous works and then claiming essentially, "I'm the Son of God." (Luke 11:20) That was more than they could handle. In their minds, it was utter blasphemy to equate yourself with God. That was one of the claims they used to justify killing Him. It was truly blasphemy ---

Unless He is in fact God.

They demanded a sign. They wanted evidence that nobody could deny. Jesus replied, "God has deigned to give one sign, the sign of Jonah. As Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of the whale, so the Son of Man will be three days and nights in the belly of the Earth and then He will rise again." (Mat. 12:40)

That's the sign. It all comes down to that.

The Apostle Paul's entire theology came down to the resurrection. He said, "Christ, yes, died for our sins, died for our redemption ..." but then he added, "He was raised for our justification." (Rom. 4:25) See, our salvation is not merely that Christ died for our sins. All that does is leave you morally neutral. All that does is clean up your bad stuff. That still doesn't make you positively righteous.

You need positive righteousness as high and as good as the righteousness of God to stand in God's presence. So, if Jesus died and stayed dead, if He died for your sins and that was the end of it, you still don't have anything. That's why Paul said that we are yet in our sins if He died and didn't raise again (1Cor. 15:17). And Paul said, "We are false witnesses of God because we have testified that God has raised up the Christ whom if He has not raised up, we are false professors, false testifiers, false witnesses." (1 Cor. 15:13-15).

It all comes down to that! Either Jesus got up out of the grave or He didn't.

If He did, that is the single most amazing fact in human history. If He did, then you can be satisfied that God is satisfied. You can feel free. You can understand that God is no longer angry at you and that your relationship with God has been completely set right by this once-for-all sacrifice that the book of Hebrews says "perfected forever" those for whom He died (Heb. 10:14). You are "perfected forever" - ready to go - if He got up out of the grave.

But, if He did not get up out of the grave, then everything else He said was a lie and He deserves to be written off.

So what do you do about it? You look at the evidence. Either He did or He didn't get up out of the grave.

Making the Case

If you are in a court of law, it is not sufficient to merely state your conclusion and expect the members of the jury to agree. You must lay out your evidence and facts, because the facts will drive the jury to a conclusion. You have to start with the fundamentals -- provable, known facts. For instance, the first point we have to establish and gain agreement on is –

Fact 1 - Jesus actually lived.

If we don't agree that Jesus is a verifiable, factual historic figure, we're nowhere. What is the point of arguing that He died and resurrected if we do not first agree that He lived?

One of the historical arguments against the claims of Christianity is that Jesus never lived. But honestly, there is not a single legitimate, respected historian any more who disagrees with the fact that Jesus was an actual living person. Tacitus, the Roman historian, admits that Jesus lived, that He was a man and that He was crucified. He even goes so far as to say that Jesus was crucified by Pontius Pilate during the time of Tiberius Caesar.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, admits that Jesus lived and that He was held to be a prophet. Pliny the Younger wrote about the spread of Christianity around 111 AD, admitting that they considered Christ a God. These would be astounding reports if Jesus were just a figment of someone's overactive imagination.

An offshoot of the "Jesus never lived" argument claims, "Well, the only stories you have about Jesus are in the Bible. You don't have any extra-Biblical evidence. You don't have any secular evidence." This argument only proves that they haven't bothered to do any real research and also that they haven't thought about the way that the Bible was constructed.

During the First Century, the Bible – the Holy Scripture - was made up only of what we consider the Old Testament, plus a few books that have since gone by the wayside - the apocryphal books. What we call the Old Testament were the Scriptures of the day, which is why the New Testament authors took so much time in their writing to go back and say, 'It is written, it is written, it is written ...' They were referring back to their Bible. They were referring to their Scriptures.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote what we call the Gospels, which were written as individual documents and later assembled into the canon. Of the four of them, two were first-person eyewitnesses' - Matthew and John, two of the apostles. Luke wrote under the tutelage of Paul, who was not a firsthand eyewitness to Jesus' earthly ministry. He likely got most of the early stories from the other apostles - James and John primarily. Mark, the shortest gospel, was written under the tutelage of Peter. Peter - being a fisherman, not a good writer - got young John Mark, who later traveled with Paul, to write out his account of Christ's life and ministry.

Now, they each wrote in different places to different audiences at different times. The earliest gospel account was likely Mark, which some say was written as early as 40 AD. The last of them, John's gospel, was written sometime after 92-94 AD, after John was on the Isle of Patmos receiving the Revelation. Then later, he wrote his three epistles and finally his gospel before the end of his life.

So, you have a roughly sixty-year span here, during which these different letters were written. And, they were written as letters, not as Scripture. They were written at different times and different places to different audiences by different men. And, the authors supported their writing with their Scripture, the Old Testament. But, they did not set out to write new Scripture. Later Church councils assembled those letters and agreed that they were inspired; they belonged as part of the Bible, on par with the ancient Hebrew Scriptures. But, originally, they were not Scripture. They were independent accounts written by people who had actual knowledge of historic events.

In other words, originally the gospels were extra-Biblical sources. They were individual people recounting their experience, writing their history, writing what happened, giving their accounts, and they all wrote to different audiences at different times in different places under different circumstances.

The New Testament as we have it now was not canonized for several hundred years, which means that these were extra-Biblical sources that were then all put together and attached to the Old Testament Scriptures and we now call all of it, the Bible - the *biblios* (from which we get the word "bibliography"). The books! It is a compilation of books.

Let's say that we took all the books, letters and documents that were ever written about George Washington and we put them all together so that we had the quintessential compendium on our first president. Would it be fair to say, "Well, there's no proof that George Washington lived because the only place you find him written about is in that book."? No, that's not logical. Nobody would do that. But, they do that to Jesus as if it's a solid argument.

The New Testament authors felt compelled to write because they had undergone remarkable things and they had been told to spread the good news. So they did.

They were extra-Biblical sources until they were combined and attached to what was the then-known Bible. So, the argument that only the Bible testifies of Jesus is specious at best. Nonetheless, we also have Tacitus, Josephus, and other non-Christian writers attesting to the reality of Jesus as a living, breathing human being.

Even the earliest critics of Christianity never denied that Jesus existed, they only argued about the meaning and actions of His life. Early heresies erupted arguing that the resurrected Jesus was not a genuinely physical man, but an entirely spiritual entity that appeared as a man. But, even the heretics agreed that He lived.

The fact that He lived was never debated until centuries passed and the eyewitnesses were no longer around to interrogate. And, given the early persecution of the Church by civil and religious authorities contemporary to the rise of Christianity, it is impossible to believe that Jesus never lived when the whole movement could be shut down by the simple claim, "Your leader doesn't even exist." Yet, we find no such claim by the earliest enemies of the faith. It seems obvious that someone would have mentioned it, considering the level of hatred and persecution the earliest believers endured for what they must have known was merely an imaginary character and the concerted effort to halt the spread of Christianity when the persecutors would also have known the lie behind the claims.

All the evidence, physical and psychological, drives us to the conclusion that Jesus was an actual, living person.

Fact 2 - He was crucified.

Like I said, Tacitus, the Roman historian, agrees that Jesus was crucified. There are no historians - even the people who want to denounce Christianity - who disagree with the idea that He was crucified. They may argue about the effects of the crucifixion; but the event itself is central to the story of Jesus of Nazareth. They all agree that He was nailed to a cross, a tree, an upright stake, some form of Roman death torture. Now, they may not agree with anything past that. They may end the story right at "He was crucified," despite the fact that the Biblical account does not end there. But, the crucifixion is a vital part of the earliest preaching concerning Christ.

So, for the moment, can we agree that He was crucified? Historically, it's a "given." Everybody who writes about Him, if they agree that He lived, they agree that He was crucified. It was a public event and it was a notorious event. The story even made its way to Rome as Christianity spread. It is a key ingredient of the story and it is part of the earliest preaching about Him. But, if you don't agree that He was crucified there's no point in going on. We need to settle that detail before we start arguing about a resurrection.

Now, a vital point concerning this fact is that He was crucified at the hands of the Romans, under the instigation of the Jewish leaders. Both Rome and Israel had a hand in this deed.

Fact 3 - He was considered to be dead.

That's an important point. He was considered to be dead. Joseph of Arimathea, knowing that the High Day was coming, knowing that the next day was the first day of Unleavened Bread, went to Pilate - because he was a wealthy, influential guy - and said essentially, "We need to get that body down because the High Holy Day is starting at evening." According to John's gospel, the Jews also wanted the bodies down, so they asked Pilate to have the legs broken on the three malefactors so their bodies could be entombed before the sun went down. That's the way people on crosses typically died. When their legs were broken they could no longer push themselves up to take a breath and they would suffocate. The centurions went out to break Jesus' legs and when they got there it says the centurion marveled that He was already dead. He died quickly.

The Apostle John, an eyewitness to these events, wrote, "But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken." (John 19:33-36)

But, that's because Jesus did not die an ordinary death. He told His apostles, "I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." (John 10:18)

Now, the Biblical record is clear. The centurion pierced his spear into Jesus' side and out ran blood and water. Doctors have concluded that the sack around the heart naturally fills with water during suffocation or asphyxiation, and the spear went through His ribs, piercing that sack. Consequently, out of His heart ran blood mixed with water.

Now, for the moment, although we have all this evidence, set aside the argument about whether He actually was dead. My point at his juncture is simply that He was considered to be dead. The centurion was satisfied that He was dead. And, Joseph put Him in a tomb. You don't normally wrap people in burial linen and anoint them with burial spices - which Joseph and Nicodemus did, after the manner of Jewish burial - and put them in a grave unless you're convinced that they're actually dead.

So again, Jesus was considered dead. The historical record is without contradiction. The people around Him, the eyewitnesses, the Jews, and even the Romans considered Him to be actually, literally, genuinely dead. And, the physical evidence drives us to agree with their assessment.

If you don't agree that He was dead, there's really no point in arguing about the resurrection. If He wasn't dead, He didn't really resurrect. But, the witnesses who pierced Him and buried Him certainly believed He was dead. That's the record.

Fact 4 - He was buried in a known, accessible tomb.

That's deceptively simple-sounding; but it's actually very important. The tomb in which Jesus was laid belonged to Joseph of Arimathea. No one had ever been buried in that tomb. Joseph apparently bought it for himself, but – since Jesus died so unexpectedly – Joseph put Him in it. There has been speculation about whether Joseph intended to leave the body there during the Holy Days and then move it, but he never had the chance.

Joseph was clearly a prominent figure in the social circles around Jerusalem and had the financial clout to buy and maintain a private grave, hewn out of a rock, in an area where mass graves were common. We know that Golgotha was outside the city walls, and if the archeologists have correctly identified the site, it's very close-by. But, that makes sense. If you force tortured criminals to carry their own crosses to the hill, it has to be close or they won't make it.

Now, the apostle John tells us that there was a garden in the place where the crucifixion took place, and the new sepulcher was in that garden (John 19:41). So, the tomb was very near Golgotha hill, which was right outside the city walls. And, John also tells us that they laid Him there because it was the preparation for the high day and the tomb was close at hand (John 19:42).

Meanwhile, the women who followed Jesus watched to see where the body was laid. They obviously planned to wait the traditional three days and come anoint the body, following the custom. So, they needed to know where He was.

Without question, the historical record makes it plain that the tomb was close by, well-known and completely accessible. Hang on to that. Plant it in your memory and we'll get back to it.

Fact 5 - Jesus was then preached as raised from the dead.

That preaching happened immediately. As early as Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection, the message of Jesus' bodily appearances was circulating. That's a vital part of the message. Wherever you read the gospel message, the fact of the resurrection is an integral component. He died, He raised, He walked and

talked with the apostles, and He ascended into Heaven. That's the whole message and it was preached in its complete form almost immediately.

Now, we don't need to argue about whether He actually did rise from the dead, at this point. All I want you to agree with is that the earliest message included the preachment that Jesus raised from the tomb. He was preached as raised; the risen Lord. Again, the record is clear: the earliest hymns, the earliest creeds, the most reliable historic sources. Fundamental to the earliest versions of the gospel message was this component – He is raised. In fact, the women who came to the tomb three days later were told by an angel to promote that very message.

Fact 6 - The Jewish leaders had a vested interest in disproving His resurrection.

This one takes a little brainpower, but it's axiomatic at some point. If you take into consideration the Jewish leaders' love of power, both religious and political, then you have to assume that any message that claims that Jesus – the very man they killed – actually got up again, spells big trouble for them! Jesus had said that the miracles He performed were adequate proof that He was sent from God. If He rose from the dead, then that single miracle alone was enough to condemn these Jewish leaders for their part in the murder.

But, even more importantly, if Jesus got up from His grave and could not be killed, then their entire religious system was undermined and their whole gig was finished. They were no longer the leaders of Israel. If Jesus actually was the Messiah, then the system of sacrifice – the system that perpetuated their job – was no longer necessary. And, to be honest, they had a very zealous streak where their religion was concerned. One of the claims they held against Jesus was the blasphemy of a man equating himself with God. They couldn't abide such a thing. And, I'm certain that they felt they were defending God's honor when they killed the supposed heretic.

But, if He got up again ... well, that doesn't make them look very good. Clearly, they misjudged Him and were going to be held accountable. So, while there are plenty of critics of Christianity running around today, their interest in disproving the events that occurred two thousand years ago are nothing compared to the motivation the Jewish leaders had to disprove it. Their necks were on the chopping block, and they desperately wanted this preaching stopped. That's why they went on to persecute everyone who preached it.

So, hold onto that point – the Jewish leaders had a vested interest in stopping the message.

Fact 7 - The disciples were persecuted because of this preaching.

Initially they suffered at the hands of the Jewish leaders and were later persecuted by the government of Rome. Again, this is uncontested in history.

It is undeniable that the early Christian Church was persecuted mercilessly in an attempt to silence the resurrection message. The Bible declares this fact, but extra-biblical sources are rife with this information. Whether it was Peter's imprisonments, Paul's beheading, or the Christians fed to lions in the Roman circuses and used as torches for Nero's garden; there is no question that this message brought about all sorts of torture and persecution.

But, for our purposes here, we want to concentrate on the first evangelists. The first disciples to spread this message, the eyewitnesses whose accounts we rest on, were also horribly persecuted for this message. And, every record agrees that the earliest persecutions would have stopped immediately if the apostles would have quit preaching this message of the resurrection, the ascension and the miracles of Jesus.

That's real important. But, there's no question about it. All they had to do was admit they made it up and they were free men. But, we'll get back to that.

Fact 8 - The tomb was empty.

Common sense tells you that, really. If you consider the Jewish leaders who instigated the crucifixion (having an extra interest because their livelihood was at stake) and you agree that He was buried in a known, accessible tomb, then when the message of resurrection was preached they would have gone immediately to that tomb and checked it out for themselves. And, had they discovered the body, the whole thing blows up immediately and we certainly wouldn't be entertaining these ideas two thousand years later. It's axiomatic that the tomb had to be empty. Otherwise, nothing makes sense.

Now, regardless of how the tomb was vacated, it's historically untenable that the tomb remained occupied after the preaching of the resurrection began. The tomb had to be empty for the message to even get a footing.

Reviewing the Facts

These are the eight fundamental "points of agreement" that you have to start with if you're going to study the resurrection. If these eight facts hang you up, then we can not proceed to discussing the resurrection. Again, they are –

- 1) Jesus actually lived as a historic, human person.
- 2) He was crucified.
- 3) He was considered to be dead.
- 4) He was buried in a known, accessible tomb.
- 5) He was preached as raised from the dead and ascended to Heaven.
- 6) The Jewish leaders had a vested interest in stopping this preaching.
- 7) The disciples were persecuted for preaching this message.
- 8) The tomb was empty.

Those facts are historically provable and can be ascertained from researching the records. They have been scrutinized and debated for hundreds of years, but they remain intact. No definitive refutation of these facts has ever been put forward.

But, these facts will also drive you to an inescapable conclusion. That's why the facts are so important.

Theories and Explanations

Now, on the other side of this debate, multiple theories have been advanced through the years to explain the one physical attribute that we still have with us – the empty tomb. The empty tomb is very powerful. Like I said, without it the whole religion comes apart. So, critics of Christianity attack it. They don't deny that it was empty. Too much history attests to that fact. But, they have come up with explanations for why the tomb was empty. And, that's a sensible approach. I mean, if you can posit a credible proof for the empty tomb that is different from Jesus vacating it under His own power, then you can drive a decisive and potentially fatal hole through the middle of Christianity.

The most popular theory to explain the empty tomb, even found in Scripture, is:

The disciples stole the body.

That is the argument you find in Matthew 28:11-15.

“Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.” (Matt 28:11-15)

You see the collusion here. The Roman guard went to the chief priests to tell them that they'd lost the body. The priests give them money to tell the story that the disciples of Jesus took the body. And, if the Roman governor were to hear about his soldier's failure, the priests would back them up in their lie. Everyone's involved. In fact, it's almost funny to watch these political enemies join together to perpetuate a lie, save face and stumble over the fact of the empty tomb.

But, let's make this easy for the moment. If the disciples stole the body, they lied. And if the disciples stole the body then all the rest of the stuff they preached - they didn't just preach that the tomb was empty, they also preached that Jesus resurrected and that He ascended – is a lie. So, they're serial liars. They told a

whole bunch of extra lies on top of their first lie. They didn't just steal the body and say, "Well, He resurrected." They added, "We ate with Him. He ascended off into Heaven. He's going to come back and get us so that we will be with Him in Heaven." There's all this other stuff that they propagated – and it's all lies, if they stole the body.

The second explanation is: The Jews took the body.

This theory is one of the bases of "Holy Blood, Holy Grail" (which influenced the more recent book "The DiVinci Code"). But, the idea that the Jews actually took the body is untenable, unthinkable. Because, number one, nowhere in history do you find them ever claiming to have the body. And two, inasmuch as they were torturing and imprisoning people to stop this preaching, and if it's a given that the Jews had a vested interest in stopping this preaching, if they actually had they body, they'd show it! They'd produce the body and go, "Hey, guess what? He's not really raised! Here He is! Here's His dead body!"

Is that obvious enough? You cannot accept the historical fact of the Jewish leadership fighting so hard to quell the preachment of the resurrection if they were holding the trump card. If they had the body, they could have stopped Christianity in its tracks. But, they never produced it. Why? Because they never had it. That's the only answer that makes sense.

And, of course, if the Jews took the body, it begs the question: why did they petition Pilate for a band of centurions to guard the tomb? And, why did they pay off the guards later when they confessed? If the Jews had the body, they'd have assured the guards that everything was fine. "It's cool, don't sweat it. We have the body."

But, it didn't happen that way.

The next explanation is just as untenable: The Romans took the body.

It was an inside job. The Roman guards looked the other way while the Roman leaders made off with the corpse. But, if you take into account the Roman persecution of early Christians -- and if you take into account the Jewish riots over this religion in Rome until emperor cast all Jews, Christian or not, out of Rome -- all the Romans had to do, if they had the body, was produce it and the civil unrest would have stopped immediately.

But again, nowhere in history do you find a single shred of evidence that the Roman leadership had the body or could lay their hands on it. It's a convenient explanation for people who don't want to face facts; if you convince yourself that either the Jews or Romans took the body, it effectively explains the empty tomb.

But if either of those explanations is valid, they still don't explain the rest of the preaching. The disciples and writers of the New Testament are still liars. They found an empty tomb because the body had been stolen, but they went on to fabricate wild tales of Jesus resurrecting, walking and talking, and sailing off into the Heavens. The whole of the gospel message is a series of lies.

Nevertheless, history and sound logic make it obvious that neither the Jews nor Romans took the body.

The fourth explanation is: Wrong tomb.

That's a great one. It's not an argument typically posed by your more intelligent critic, but it is amusing. Those poor women, up too early, went to the wrong tomb, bleary eyed, didn't know what they were doing. Sure, the tomb was empty, but it was the wrong one. Naturally the tomb was empty; they went to the wrong place.

So, what's the answer? You go to the right tomb! It was a known, accessible tomb. So, go to the right one and his body will still be in it --- end of discussion. I remember reading an article that started with the premise that the women were likely to have gone to - who knows? - *any* tomb. And, all of Christianity stems from that single mistake.

But, the Biblical account tell us that the women stood and watched which tomb Joseph laid Jesus in, so they would know which one to go back to. Now, think about it with me. If you are a group of liars making up a story, why would you include that bit of detail? Why would you point out that the women knew where the tomb was? You'd cover that up detail if the whole thing began because of confusion over the correct tomb. You wouldn't want people checking the facts.

And, why would the entire tale of the Jews paying off the Roman guards exist if the tomb weren't actually empty? That's the power of the empty tomb. Everything else revolves around that empty tomb. I mean, if the women merely went to the wrong tomb, the guards wouldn't be confessing to the Jews.

If two women came running to you and told you that your best friend had risen from the dead, you'd go check it out. You would run to the place where your friend was buried. And, if they mistakenly went to the wrong gravesite, you would correct their error by going to the right one. And, that is exactly what the apostles did. They rushed to the tomb. He would have headed for the correct one. When they got there, Peter bent down and looked in. The stone was rolled away. There was an angel there. Well that's some wrong tomb!

But again, if the women got the wrong tomb, the apostles certainly went to the right one! And, you can bet that when the Jews and Romans heard the preaching that Jesus had risen from the dead, they certainly went to the right

tomb. Once again, that's the power of the empty tomb. There are lots of explanations for how it *became* empty, but there is no question that the tomb that originally held the body of Jesus actually was empty. Too many people had a stake in disproving it, but no one ever claimed to have found the corpse.

So, it's clear that the body was missing. The tomb was empty. The disciples, if they took it, are liars. The Jews and Romans couldn't have taken it, because it's historically untenable and there is not a single shred of evidence that they ever had it. And, if the women went to the wrong tomb, everyone else would have gone to the right one. And, if there were a body in the correct tomb, the whole thing falls apart.

It is really so incomprehensible to think that all of Christianity began because some women got their directions backwards. All the other preaching, all the other stories, all the other life-changes that accompanied the preaching began because of one logistical error.

That's just silly.

The next two go together: Hallucinations and/or Resuscitation.

The book "Jesus the Magician" - which I don't necessarily recommend - takes both of those ideas into account. They say that Jesus, during His youth -- the lost years when we don't know where He was -- went into India and into the Himalayas. He had become a Yogi and learned how to stop His blood flow and hold His breath for three days. He could be put in the grave for three days and nights and come out as if He had been brought back to life. That explains everything. Sure, they crucified Him and He lost all that blood. And they stabbed Him through the heart. Okay, yeah, sure. But, when He got into the tomb the cold air hit Him and He resuscitated! He waited there for three days, apparently to add to the suspense or appear to fulfill prophecy. Then He came dragging wearily out of the tomb, pushing the stone aside and announcing His resurrection. It was all a glorified magic trick.

But, that's nothing like the Jesus that the apostles preached. They preached a strong, vital person who walked and talked and ate with them. He had authority and even showed Thomas the wounds in His hands and side. He wasn't a bedraggled, anemic, soaked in blood and sweat, barely hanging on, lucky to be alive, ripped-skin, beaten and near-dead person. They said He was utterly resurrected to a new body that was as at-home on Earth as it was sitting at the right hand of God.

So, to emphasize the point: if it was just a cheap parlor trick, the rest of the apostles' preaching was a fabrication, and they are still liars.

Or, as a compliment to the magic trick, the women and apostles who arrived at the tomb suffered from a form of mass hallucination, where they *thought* they'd seen Him alive. But, they were just imagining it.

But, the hallucination theory does not sit well with most psychologists. According to the account, the apostles were in the completely wrong state of mind for hallucinations to occur. They had no expectancy. The women who were going to the tomb were carrying oils and spices to anoint a dead body! They were not going there expecting to find Him risen and alive. So, the idea that they would have a hallucination is unimaginable.

And, by the way, if it was just a hallucination on the part of the women, how did they manage to get everybody else to have the same hallucination? How was it that everybody else hallucinated an empty tomb? All you have to do is produce the body and the hallucination theory comes apart! No matter how convinced the women were, once they saw the body still lying in the tomb, the substance of their hallucination would have disappeared. And, Paul claimed that there were more than 500 witnesses! He went on to say that the greater part of those witnesses were still alive as he was writing. So, he adjured his First Century readers to go check with them. If this was a hallucination, it was the most remarkable mass hallucination in history.

Hallucination doesn't fly. Resuscitation doesn't fly.

The Veracity of the Witnesses

So we're down to this. We're really down to one of two choices. And, like in every good court case, it always comes down to: It's either true or it's not. None of us, 2,000 years after the fact, can be eyewitnesses. But, those who *were* eyewitnesses, those who were actually with Him, who wrote this stuff for our benefit, either told the truth or they were lying. It comes down to what legal experts call "the veracity of the witnesses."

I don't have time to go through all of the proofs of the veracity of the witnesses, but I'm going to lay out a few of the major ones, just so you get a sense of their credibility. The books I listed earlier go into copious detail to make this point.

The witnesses wrote their accounts at different times in different places. They all wrote under pain of death. They all preached under pain of death, at different times, in different places, and there are "internal indices of truth" - proof or evidence of their honesty - buried in their text.

For instance, the book of Mark is the shortest of the four gospels. Everyone agrees that Mark, tutored by Peter, wrote to Gentiles. Now, if you're a Gentile who knows nothing about historic Judaism, you don't know the book of Daniel and you've never looked at the apocryphal book of Enoch. You have no idea

that the phrase *Son of Man* is one of the most powerful Messianic phrases in the Jewish lexicon. *Son of Man* - that's a powerful Messianic phrase.

So, if you're writing to Gentiles, trying to convince them that Jesus is God, and you have all these quotes where Jesus refers to Himself as the *Son of Man*, that doesn't help your case. You're trying to prove that He is the Son of God, but you've got Jesus walking around saying He's the *Son of Man*. That helps Jews, but it doesn't help Gentiles. So if you're a liar, you're going to change that. You're going to write, "And He said He was the *Son of God*."

But, because Mark was an honest reporter, through Peter, of what actually happened, they quoted what Jesus actually said even though it hurt their case. If they were liars they would have said, "He called Himself the *Son of God*." Instead, go back and just count it: Mark - the shortest gospel - uses the term *Son of Man* more than any of the other three because that is what Jesus actually said.

That's an internal indication of the truth -- evidence of the honesty of the writers. They told the truth even if it hurt their case.

Mark also tells us more about Peter's failure than any of the other three. Now, if you are Peter and you are a liar making up a story about how your Master died and then didn't stay dead -- that He resurrected and ascended up into Heaven -- basic human nature would expect you to add stuff that would make you look good. Remember, it's a lie. And, you'd overplay your role. You would want your reputation in history to be glowing. You want people to read things like: On the night He was betrayed I stood right next to Him and I defied the Romans! I am now the stalwart of the new Church!

But, Peter didn't say any of that. Being an honest reporter, he admitted that he failed, he failed, he failed. He reported that he stuck his foot in his mouth. He admitted that Jesus called him Satan to his face. He told how he denied Him three times. He was an honest reporter of what actually happened.

Facts, little details, prove the veracity of the Gospel writers. In the book of John, you read about Jesus feeding the 5,000 with the fish and loaves and it says that before He did it, He turned to Philip and said, "Where can we go and buy bread in this area?" And, Philip replied, "Even if we had 200 pennyworth we couldn't feed all these people." But, it says that Jesus was testing him because He knew what He was going to do. (John 6:5-7)

Why Phillip? Well, you go to the book of Mark and you find out that they came across the Sea of Tiberias also called the Sea of Galilee. And when they got to the other side, according to Luke, they landed in Bethsaida (Luke 9:10). So, now you know that he fed the 5,000 in Bethsaida. Then you go to John's account of Jesus picking His disciples and it says that at one point some Greeks came who wanted to see Jesus and they went through Phillip, assuming Phillip would be

sympathetic to them because he was from Bethsaida (John 12:20-21). Oh, well that's interesting!

So, you take all these little bits and pieces, minutia, small details that all match up, to tell the story - even though these accounts were written by different authors at different times. Now, if they were lying - and remember, they only had seven weeks to concoct the lie - how were they able to concoct that much detail where even if you put them side-by-side they continue to compliment each other? Liars don't work that way.

And remember, too, that some of them wrote 50 years after the fact. Wouldn't they have taken the time to aggrandize the story? Wouldn't they have forgotten some of the facts? Wouldn't they tell some stuff that wasn't real? But, they don't! Put them side-by-side and they tell the same story. They appear over and over again to be honest men.

But, more importantly, there are dramatic transitions that happen to every one of these men - cataclysmic changes occur to every one of them. For instance, you see Peter? He's always walking around saying the wrong thing, doing the wrong thing, putting his foot in his mouth, always at the wrong place, always saying the wrong thing. You find him constantly blurting out the wrong thing. He's a headstrong fisherman who knows how to curse to drive home his point. He was always ready to fight, pulling out his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane and lopping off the ear of the high priest's servant. He had no sense of God's timing or plan.

And yet, cataclysmically, something happened to this guy where he was willing to stand up on the Day of Pentecost - under threat of death - before the Jews and boldly proclaim, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain; Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." (Act 2: 23-24)

What happened to that guy? How went from being Mr. Wrongheaded Foot-in-Mouth to standing up and declaring, even though they put him in prison time and time again, "We ought to obey God rather than man. The God of our Fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree." He preached it, and preached it, and preached it! Something cataclysmic changed in Peter!

He went from denying his Lord three times, cowering and running for his life, to being willing to hang his body and soul on this message. Do men act like for a lie? When they know it's a lie?

John? John and James, the two brothers, sons of Zebedee, were called the Sons of Thunder! It was Jesus' nickname for them, Sons of Thunder, because they wanted to call down fire from the sky and burn up people who didn't

understand what they were saying. These are hardheaded guys that sent their mother to ask Jesus for the best seats in the kingdom. And yet, this hardheaded Son of Thunder, walking around condemning people, wanting the primary seat, wanting to call fire down from Heaven, became known as the Apostle of Love. Something cataclysmic changed in him. Read his three epistles. He, more than any other New Testament writer, emphasizes Christian charity and sacrificial love. What happened to that John?

Thomas? Thomas walked around saying, "I do not believe, I do not believe." He has been dubbed with the nickname "Doubting Thomas." He's the one who, when the others told him that Christ had appeared to them, said, "I won't believe it unless I can put my fingers in the mark of His hands and feet and side." (John 20:25) He was pragmatic. He wanted proof. When I can touch the physical body, that's when I'll believe it! According to John's account, Jesus showed up a week later and said, "Here I am; touch me." That man, Thomas, got down on his knees and declared, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28)

Thomas is the one who, when Jesus said, "I'm going to Jerusalem." Thomas - always Thomas - turned to the rest and said, "Well, let's go with Him so we can die with Him!" Always doubting.

And yet, historically, it is Thomas who went into the Himalayas, into the area of the Vedanta faith, into Babylon, Persia and India. He took the gospel to the most difficult theological group to pierce with this idea of a man, a Christ, who was God living among us, who died and rose again. It was "Doubting Thomas" - never doubting - who went into one of the most difficult parts of the world to preach Christianity. That's a cataclysmic change! What happened to Thomas?

"Never mind; we made it up."

But the final evidence for me, the reality that convinced me - and I've read and I've read and I've looked and I've looked - is that these twelve men, if you count Paul, all scattered out into the world, separate from each other, and all suffered terrible, painful deaths for what they believed, preached, and taught. All they had to do was say, "Never mind; we made it up." That simple confession would have been sufficient to stop the persecution. "Never mind; we made it up." All the torture stops.

One was flayed with a Brahman Sword. One was whipped until his skin was peeled off. One was crucified upside-down. One was pierced through with swords. One was pierced through with spears. One was boiled in oil. One (or perhaps two) was beheaded in Rome. One was nailed to a cross, sideways. All of them died horribly painful deaths. And remarkably, they all died separate from each other.

Now, psychologically I can see where if we all conspired to tell a lie, and if we all stayed together, there would be power in numbers; honor among thieves. No one would want to be the first to break rank and bring disgrace on the whole group. But, these men were separated. And, they were liars. And, they knew they were liars.

This lie, by the way, has managed to last for 2,000 years and change countless people's lives for the better. Now, I can believe that a lie will change a person, but not for the better. A lie does not make people more charitable, more loving, kinder, more gracious, everything that Christianity brings out in a person. And I can believe that maybe everyone in this room could get together and tell the lie. But, separate us? Start peeling our skin off? Burn us at the stake? It won't be long before one of us says, "Never mind; we made it up! It's a lie! It's a lie!"

This is what Thomas Aquinas came to. It's the critical juncture. You have to contend with the historic fact that these men went to their painful, agonizing deaths without recanting. Not one of them changed their minds. They preferred death over denying the gospel. That's remarkable, if they are liars.

Aquinas came to the conclusion that it was just psychologically untenable to believe that you could take these guys, separate them and torture them the way they did, for a lie. Not only do the internal indices of their gospels show them to be honest men, but the cataclysmic change in their natures and personalities proves that something happened in their lives that was so inexplicable that they willingly preached to their deaths that Christ was dead and buried, that He raised, and that He ascended.

And the final, unshakable proof in all of this is that not once anywhere - you can't find it, go look for it, I've been looking now for 25 years - you won't find one place where any one of them recanted. Not a one!

Look in the Book of Acts. Read about Stephen. They were stoning him - and Paul himself was standing there, holding the coat while they did it - and as Stephen died, he looked up and declared, "I see the heavens opened; and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." (Acts 7:56) That's amazing! I simply cannot believe, from a psychological viewpoint, that not one of them would have said, "Okay it's a lie." Look at the list.

The next martyr we meet with after Stephen, according to Luke, is James the son of Zebedee. He had his head cut off under Herod Agrippa.

Philip labored diligently in upper Asia. He suffered martyrdom at Heliopolis in Phrygia. He was scourged, whipped, had his skin peeled off, was thrown in prison and afterwards crucified in A.D. 54. All he had to do was say, "Never mind; we made it up" to literally save his skin.

Matthew the Tax Collector wrote his gospel in Hebrew. Afterwards, it was translated into Greek by James the Less. His labors were in Parthia and Ethiopia, where he was martyred. Matthew was slain with a halberd, thrust through with a large spear, in the city of Nadabah in A.D. 60.

James the Less, who was supposed to be the brother of Jesus, at age 94 was beaten and stoned by the Jews and finally his brains were dashed out with a club. All he had to do was say, "We made it up. It's a lie."

Matthias was stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded.

Andrew, he was crucified on a cross where the two ends are fixed transversely into the ground; hence the derivation of the term *St. Andrew's Cross*.

The people of Alexandria dragged Mark to pieces and finally laid his body at the foot of Serapis, their idol. Then, they stoned him to death lying there before their god.

Peter was crucified upside down because he said that he was not worthy to be crucified in the same manner of His Lord. There's psychological conviction. Something happened to that man!

Paul was beheaded at Rome.

Jude, the brother of James, was crucified.

Bartholomew was cruelly beaten and then crucified by idolaters.

Thomas, called Didymus, as I mentioned, went into Parthia and India where he excited the rage of the pagan priests and was martyred by being thrust through by the pagan priests. Despite such opposition, Thomas stayed there! He could have left! He was in India. There were no other Christians in India. All he has to do is say, "We made it up." They would have let him go; he could go to a new city and start the lie all over. The others would never know. But, he died rather than recant in the slightest; doubting nothing about the veracity of the Christ he preached.

Simon was crucified.

The idolatrous priests of Greece hanged Luke on an olive tree.

John ended up on the Isle of Patmos and was later boiled in oil and possibly beheaded.

Barnabas, it's believed, was crucified in 73 AD.

Do men die like that for lies?

Now, it is true that religious zealots will die for what they believe. We've seen that throughout history. Every religion has its martyrs. But, they die because they believe it is true. My point here is that these men claimed to be, and are historically verified to be, the actual eyewitnesses to the events of Christ's life, death and resurrection. They actually *knew* whether or not what they were promulgating was true. The fact that they were all willing to die proves the veracity of their story. They were all, to the person, convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt that their preaching was true. And, they were willing to die rather than recant.

Again, men like these fishermen, tax collectors, zealots and the like, don't give up their lives for stories they know are untrue. It just doesn't happen. One of them – one of them – would have broken rank somewhere and admitted to the fraud. But again, you cannot find one single, solitary shred of evidence in any of the historic accounts, biblical or secular – even the accounts written by their fiercest critics - that any one of them ever showed the slightest hint that they were telling anything less than the whole truth.

And remember, they made up this lie in 50 days. They had a very short time to pull this together. That was one of the criticisms against the apostles that were brought up in the Jesus Seminar - the idea that they took seven weeks to concoct their tale before they started spreading it.

But, be logical. If you are smart enough to construct a lie that's going to last for 2,000 years and have the influence on the world that this one has had, then you are smart enough to know that that seven-week gap hurts your story. You are smart enough to know that those seven weeks are not good for you --- unless, of course, Jesus told you to wait the seven weeks, which He did. He instructed them to wait until Pentecost when they will be given power from the Holy Ghost. So, they waited. Even if it hurt their story, they did what their Lord told them to do.

They were convinced that He had risen. It doesn't matter how you look at it. It doesn't matter where you go. The evidence keeps saying that they would even hurt their story and willingly die torturous deaths, but they refused to deny their preaching or say, "We made it up."

At the risk of being redundant, it's psychologically untenable that these men were liars.

There's Only One Conclusion

Every one of them that preached that early message died. Not a one recanted. When I reached that point in my thinking, I couldn't help but arrive at the

inevitable, inescapable conclusion: These guys believed it! The historically verifiable eyewitnesses to these events believed every word they preached, and it changed them for the better! And, they all died praising God.

The witnesses believed their preaching. They were convinced. And, the historic account leaves you with only one conclusion. Jesus actually died and rose again from the grave. That's the only conclusion that makes any sense when you view the facts logically and honestly.

Now, if it is true - historically, factually, inescapably, pragmatically, logically, true - then He has every right, being who He says He is, to lay His claim on your life and say, "You're Mine now. I bought you with a price. Act like it."

I came to the conclusion that He had to have come out of that tomb! He couldn't still be in there because somewhere in history the lie would have been exposed. If the body was stolen or destroyed and the disciples concocted an intricate fabrication, it would have come out somewhere in a convincing way.

Go look. I've looked. I've been looking for twenty years. You won't find it! There's no evidence anywhere that the gospel is built on lies. There is no evidence anywhere that disproves it; all the evidence points to the veracity of the eyewitness accounts. The evidence shoves you into that corner and makes you admit, "All right, it's got to be true."

The one proof that Jesus offered as verification of His claims, the sign of Jonah, is true and accurately reported. There is simply no other explanation that makes sense.