

Easter, 2023

“He Has Risen!”

For Christians, the resurrection of Jesus is the centerpiece, the cornerstone, the foundation of our faith. Paul wrote.

1 Corinthians 15:14 (NIV) And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

In the summer of 1982, almost 41 years ago, immediately after I graduated from college with a Religious Studies degree from a Christian college, I began ministry as a Youth Minister. That first summer, seemingly out of nowhere, I was deeply unsettled by this question:

But how do we know it's true?

Why was I doubting suddenly? I wasn't sure.

Have you ever been there?

Doubting questions can cause such a dark and hopeless uncertainty.

I knew just the person I should call. My mentor. He was a Missionary and Pastor and Professor at a Christian College, and he was also my dad.

What a helpful phone conversation that was. The part I remember most was when he said something like:

“If I were you I would start at the center, at the most important miracle.”

Then he said, *There is actually more evidence for the **crucifixion** and **resurrection** than for any other event in the Bible. That's where I'd start.”*

That was all I needed. I knew where to turn next.

I. BELIEVING doesn't mean leaving your MIND BEHIND

When historians study history, it is a bit like sorting through whether something is fake news or real news.

Historians check sources, motivations, and cross check collaborating data.

NEW TESTAMENT documents are not the only first century docs about Jesus.

Here are three examples of first century historians who wrote about Jesus. They were not believers or allies of Jesus.

Josephus was a famous Jewish historian of the first century.

"At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good, and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders."

Tacitus was a Roman historian who wrote in the late first and early second centuries. In his Annals, Tacitus writes about a man named Chrestus (a likely misspelling of Christ), who he describes as being executed by Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius. Tacitus confirms that the followers of Chrestus were persecuted by the Roman authorities.

Pliny the Younger wrote in the early second century. Pliny was a Roman governor who encountered Christians in the course of his duties. In one of his letters to the emperor Trajan, Pliny described the activities of the Christians he had encountered, including their propensity to worship Jesus as a god.

HISTORIANS value these quotes because these writers have no motive for promoting the movement.

These confirm

1. Jesus was a real person in history.
2. He was crucified.
3. His following GREW right after his crucifixion!
4. Because of the claim that he had risen from the dead!

Because of the nature of the documents themselves fitting in every detail with first century detailed facts, and because of objective corroborating evidence Historians themselves say that the New Testament accounts must be seriously considered.

Now let's consider the sequence of events described in the first century documents of the New Testament.

THAT MORNING

In Luke 24 we learn that

- On the first day of the week (Sunday, very early), the day after Passover/Sabbath, a group of ladies who were there for his burial, can finally return to the tomb, hoping to finish the rushed embalming job.
- The stone was rolled away, and the tomb WAS empty.
- Angels appeared, bright as lightning, and said ...

Luke 24:5-6 (NIV) ... *“Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 He is not here; he has risen!*

- The ladies run to tell the disciples.

Luke 24:9-11 (NIV) *When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ...” But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.*

Look again at this reaction: **The first reaction of all 11 remaining disciples was SKEPTICISM.** *“their words seemed to them like nonsense.”*

- IF the claim, “HE HAS RISEN” ever sounded like NONSENSE to you, PLEASE REMEMBER: It sounded to them like nonsense as well...
- BUT SOMETHING CHANGED THAT!

Here’s what we read next.

Luke 24:12 (NIV) *Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.*

I. BELIEVING doesn’t mean leaving your MIND BEHIND

II. **Run toward the EVIDENCE**

- An **EMPTY tomb by itself** was not enough to convince Peter.
- He wondered to himself... NOW HE’S PROCESSING
 - *That’s Weird. The tomb is undeniably empty!*
 - *Nobody taking the body would have left the linens behind like this. So what happened here?*

None of the Apostles relied on hearsay.

Later that first evening Jesus appeared and revealed himself to all the disciples except Thomas.

What a bummer for Thomas... but he wouldn't budge from his skepticism. The church has called him "doubting Thomas" for years. That's not fair. All the disciples doubted until they saw him themselves. None of them believed it based on hearsay... and for good reason.

THE FIRST 40 DAYS

Jesus ascended to heaven in full view of a crowd of disciples on day 40, but before that, for those 40 days, Jesus appeared to MANY people. (Read 1 Corinthians 15 for a short list). One time 500 at one time.

- Several of the appearances were private and personal meetings. The first of these was with Peter.
- **Poor Thomas.** All this buzz and talk. But he wouldn't budge from his skepticism.
- Finally, 8 days later while with the others he too met the Resurrected Jesus for the first time (in the same room as before, with locked doors as before, but this time Thomas was present).
- Detail: Why the locked doors? (FEAR)
- Finally Thomas is convinced, so convinced, he addresses Jesus as, "**My Lord, and My God**" and Jesus does NOT deny it.

Once they were **ALL FULLY CONVINCED**, Jesus said:

Luke 24:48–49 (NIV) You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

A prerequisite for an APOSTLE. Jesus also appeared to two other NON BELIEVERS. James Jesus' brother (during those 40 days). He too becomes an APOSTLE.

Jesus appears to the last apostle a bit later.

50 DAYS AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION

- The promised Holy Spirit came with power, filling them. (Acts 2)
- **This changed everything.** No more timid & hiding disciples. They preach publicly and BOLDLY from that day forward.
- 3,000 converts were baptized on day 50 (Acts 2).
- BECAUSE of the occasion, these 3000 were from all over the world, and the news spreads like wildfire.

THE FIRST FEW YEARS

- **How everything changes is quickly APPARENT:**
- **The APOSTLES HAVE NO FEAR OF DEATH.**
- **Peter and John are arrested and threatened ... on trial for their lives...** They don't back down. **THEY BECOME MORE BOLD!**
- **STEPHEN is martyred.** A young ambitious Pharisee is in full agreement of his Stoning. SAUL / PAUL.
- NEXT James (the brother of John, the inner circle) is martyred.
- The Jewish leaders are attempting to **stomp out the wildfire by killing Christians.**
- **Paul is the ringleader of the Persecutors!!**
- **Then suddenly,** To everyone's surprise: Paul becomes **the most UNLIKELY convert ever!**

WHAT CHANGED the greatest persecutor to the greatest Promoter! How do you explain that one? Read ACTS 9 HE MET the glorified JESUS.

We started with the SKEPTICISM thinking "HE IS RISEN!" is NONSENSE.

It's nonsense to think these leaders fabricated the story and then were willing to die for the lie they made up.

Many historians who don't believe in the resurrection nevertheless conclude that the Apostles were convinced Jesus did in fact rise from the dead. And even though these historians don't believe in the resurrection, they believe the primary source documents of the New Testament should be considered seriously.

**WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES THIS MAKE?
ARE YOU READY FOR THE GOOD NEWS!?**

III. The resurrection is believable and RECEIVABLE

[READ FROM BOOK]: If Jesus did come back to life, it means the Maker of all time and space has stepped into the universe for love of you. It means that you were worth his death and that he wants you in his life. It means you are more seen and known and loved than you could dare to hope and that the greatest offer ever made is sitting on the table, waiting for you to take it up.

–Rebecca McLaughlin, *Is EASTER Unbelievable?* (p. 6)

Your Next Step: 4 options for your consideration

1. **Tio Questions...** Great questions to help us understand *“the greatest offer ever made”*.
2. **40 Books, [HOLD UP BOOK] If you are a SKEPTIC but OPEN to pursuing the evidence.** (Go to the prayer team for one.)
3. **Take A Bible Home:** Suggestion: Read Luke then Acts.
(If that’s too big a step for you)
4. **(after we pray (don’t immediately get up) There’s A Short Video** that may be the right next step option for you.



“HE HAS RISEN!”

SMALL TALK

1. What was one of the best gifts you received as a child?

VIEWPOINT

2. **READ Ephesians 2:1-10.** Which phrases from Paul here line up with what Rebecca McLaughlin wrote: She stated that if the resurrection actually happened, *“It means you are more seen and known and loved than you could dare to hope and that the greatest offer ever made is sitting on the table, waiting for you to take it up.”* McLaughlin, Rebecca, *“Is EASTER Unbelievable?”* (p. 11)
3. What “riches” of God are described? (2:4, 2:7)
4. What promises are stated that are related to the resurrection of Jesus? (2:5-7) How is this gift received? (2:8-9)
5. **READ Romans 6:1-9.** What words does he use to describe what the baptized person receives as a gift? How does he describe the believer’s connection to Christ’s death, and resurrection?

GETTING PERSONAL

6. Spiritually, do you feel more dead or alive this week?
7. "God raised us up...in order that ...he might show the incomparable riches of his grace" (Ephesians 2:6-7) How does this make you feel?

MAKING PROGRESS (THIS WEEK)

1. How will you celebrate the fact that "God's kindness to us in Jesus" (2:7) means that our fallenness and sinful brokenness is now no longer an obstacle to enjoying God's love, acceptance, and forgiveness forever.