

- In light of the impressive weight of evidence which we have seen both in the gospels and the letters of Paul, we are led to conclude the truthfulness of two inseparable and fundamental historical truths
 - The Resurrection of Jesus from the Dead
 - The Conversion of Saul (Paul) of Tarsus to Christianity
- These two claims are demonstrated by the historical evidence of the new testament and other sources. And they form the foundation of the Christian faith. All alternative explanations of the evidence are unconvincing.
- 1 Corinthians 15:3-8,14
 - The conversion of Saul is itself a witness to the resurrection, because Paul claims in no uncertain terms that the resurrection is the foundation of his message and therefore his post-conversion identity and mission. And his confident claim for proclaiming this is that the resurrected Jesus appeared to him. And not him only, but to many other named and living witnesses.
- Today we will focus on the argument for the resurrection from the Gospels.

The Historical Consensus



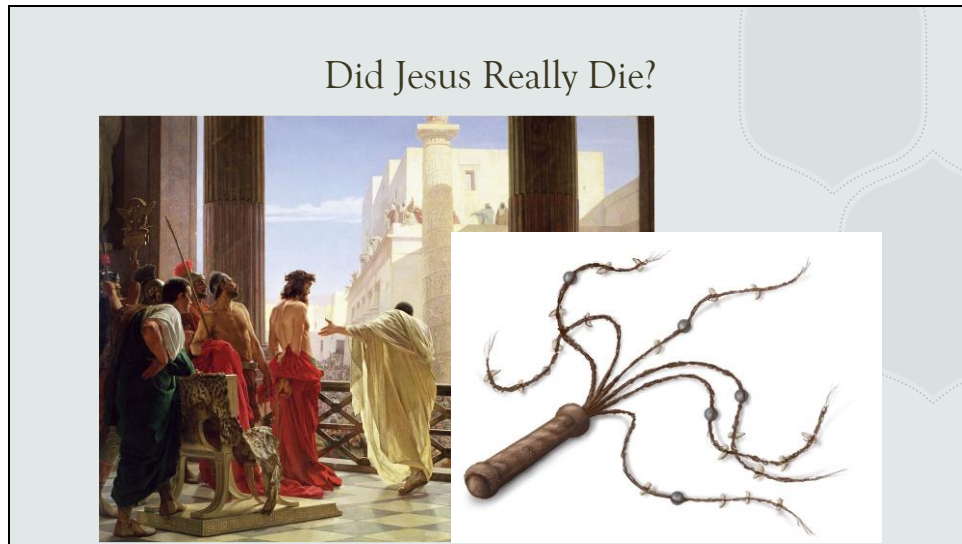
- Over the last number of weeks, we have considered several forms of evidence for the life of Jesus including non-Christian accounts of Jesus; early testimony to the authorship of the Gospels; verification of the gospel accounts through archaeology; and internal signs of accurately transmitted eyewitness testimony. The sum of all this is that even many non-Christians accept not just the existence of Jesus, but a general outline of his life that accords with the Gospels.
- E P Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. 1993.
"There are no substantial doubts about the general course of Jesus' life: when and where he lived, approximately when and where he died, and the sort of thing that he did during his public activity... I shall first offer a list of statements about Jesus that meet two standards they are almost beyond dispute; and they belong to the framework of his life, and especially of his public career. (A list of everything that we know about Jesus would be appreciably longer.)
 - Jesus was born c. 4 BCE, near the time of the death of Herod the Great;
 - he spent his childhood and early adult years in Nazareth, a Galilean village;
 - he was baptized by John the Baptist;
 - he called disciples;
 - he taught in the towns, villages and countryside of Galilee (apparently not in the cities);
 - he preached "the kingdom of God";
 - about the year 30 he went to Jerusalem for Passover,
 - he created a disturbance in the Temple area;
 - he had a final meal with the disciples;
 - he was arrested and interrogated by Jewish authorities, specifically the high priest;
 - he was executed on the orders of the Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate

"We may add here a short list of equally secure facts about the aftermath of Jesus' life:

- his disciples at first fled;
- they saw him (in what sense is not certain) after his death; as a consequence, they believed that he would return to found the kingdom;
- they formed a community to await his return and sought to win others to faith in him as God's Messiah."

The Case for the Resurrection

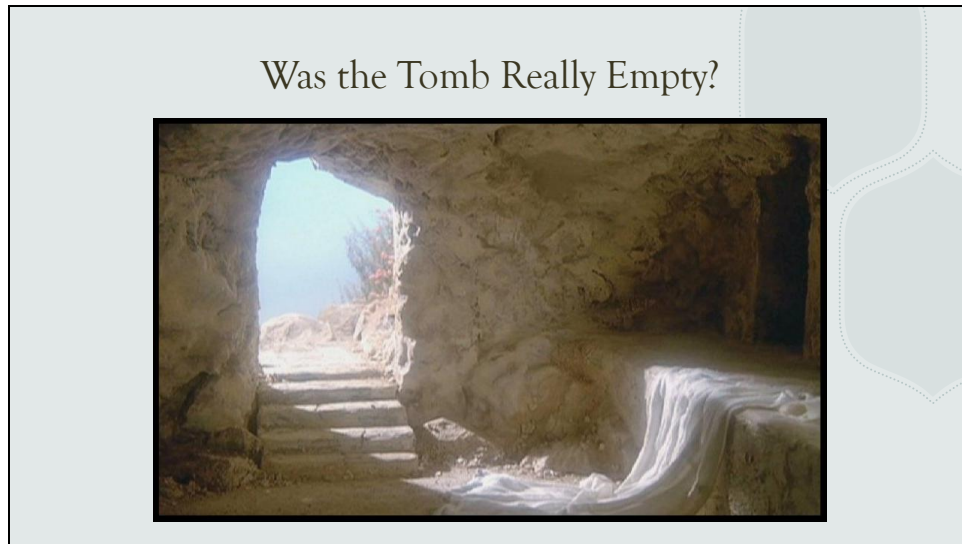
- To test the historical truthfulness of the resurrection (within the confines of the Gospels), we can ask:
 - Did Jesus really die?
 - Was the tomb really empty?
 - Did the disciples really see Jesus?
- We will consider each question briefly.



- Mark 15:15-21
 - Jesus was first Scourged, then had a crown of thorns placed on his head and was beaten
 - A Roman scourge (or flagrum) was made with multiple strands of rope embedded with metal balls, bones or spikes.
 - The brutality of the Romans clearly left Jesus extremely weak, so that someone had to carry his cross for him.

- Mark 15:44-45; John 19:31-34
 - The Roman authorities were surprised that Jesus died so quickly, but it was also unquestionable to them. In any case, a centurion confirms the death by piercing Jesus's side.
 - The flowing of blood and water no doubt takes on symbolic significance in John's gospel, but it is also clear medical evidence of death which was likely to be understood by people at the time. It was likely the result of Jesus' blood separating into red cells and plasma, which can occur after death. One suggestion is that this was evidence of a haemothorax.
 - Cardio-thoracic surgeon, Dr. Antony de Bono
"The body of Jesus had been hanging on the cross, dead, for some time. Obviously the fluid must have accumulated during life by a bleeding into the chest cavity, almost certainly due to the savage flagellation. It is well known that blood in these circumstances in a still dead body starts to separate out, to sediment, the heavier red cells sinking to the bottom leaving a much lighter, straw colored fluid, the plasma above. When a hole is made by the spear, the red cells, which John describes as blood, gushes out first, followed by the plasma, which John saw as water."

- It is hard to imagine that Jesus was not truly dead given these details. Even without them, we know that crucifixion was an effective form of execution. Even if somehow Jesus survived, and merely "swooned" (fainted) on the cross, as some argue, he would have been near death and in no position to impress his followers three days later with the notion that he had risen from the dead.



- All four gospels tell us that the initial sign of Jesus' resurrection was the empty tomb. This is important because it prevents us thinking of resurrection in spiritual terms. It was the actual body of Jesus which rose and lives again.
- Matthew 28:11-15
 - This is a very important historical detail. Matthew would not make up a story about a rumour that would negatively hurt the Christian message if there wasn't one. And this is even more true given he is thought to be writing primarily to a Jewish audience.
 - Even if Matthew were accused of making up the explanation for the rumour, the rumour itself is a strong confirmation that the tomb must have been empty. Otherwise, why was the rumour necessary? The authorities could have presented the body of Jesus and squashed the testimony of the disciples.

Did the Disciples Really See Jesus?

- The existence of Christianity is founded upon the claim of the resurrection. Christianity does not exist, let alone grow so dominant without this claim - the victory over death.
- This was true in the very earliest days of Christianity. We see this clearly and consistently in the earliest Christian writings - the letters of Paul, as well as the gospels and the other NT letters. We also see this in the earliest secular mentions of Christians.
- This claim requires an explanation, and when we consider it, there are really only three options:
 - The disciples were lying
 - The disciples were mistaken
 - The disciples were telling the truth.

Were the Disciples Lying?



- If the disciples were lying, why? What was their motive?
- When people lie deliberately, it is because they are trying to get themselves out of trouble or to gain something. But this cannot be said of the disciples. This "lie" got them into a lot of trouble. The book of Acts, as well as the histories that follow, show us the mockery, persecution, and physical suffering faced by many of the disciples of Jesus. They were often ostracised by their Jewish communities and viewed as naïve and foolish (see 1 Cor. 1:26-29).
- If they were lying, the body of Jesus could have been presented by the authorities as proof he didn't.



- The claim is not just that the tomb was empty, but many disciples had personally and collectively seen Jesus alive from the dead over a number of occasions, not just seeing him, but talking with him and eating with him. Can we imagine a possible way in which they could be mistaken about this?
- The effect on the disciples was extreme. People have seen many apparitions throughout history. But when do we see people so dramatically converted by their experience? The confidence of the disciples in spreading the message of the gospel is compelling. The people were devoted Jews. Why would they abandon and blaspheme their religion in such a dramatic way, especially Paul who was so accomplished and highly respected.
- Also, their theology is in harmony with the miracle resurrection. This is not a bunch of grief-stricken people having random hallucinations. But the appearances are consistent with the message of Jesus and the disciples are in no doubt what to do with what they've seen. They quickly begin to preach the gospel.

Were they telling the truth?



- This is the only explanation that makes sense in light of the historical evidence of the gospels, the letters of Paul and the reality of early Christian history.
- And if the resurrection is true, then the implications are massive. We can trust Jesus. We can know there is a God who acted in history to save us from our sin by sending his Son to die on the cross and rise again.