

Defending the Resurrection

A couple of preliminaries:

- 1) When Jesus was pressed for a sign, He did not perform on demand. However, He did not completely refuse to give a sign. He pointed to His coming resurrection. See Matthew 12:38-40 and John 2:18-22.
- 2) Even if someone has doubts about the existence of God, try to make the point about Jesus' resurrection. Even an atheist has reason to take seriously everything that Jesus had to say if Jesus did what He said He would do and rose from the dead.

Below are three encouragements, A, B, and C. Each of them stands independent of the others. Perhaps you will encounter a situation in which you can use more than one of these three suggestions. However, please bear in mind that they are not listed here with the intention that you will utilize the second one only after using the first one, etc.

A. Watergate

None of the Watergate defendants in the 1970s were threatened with execution, only jail time. Yet the conspiracy unraveled shortly after they were arrested. If the resurrection story had been made up, why did none of the apostles or other early Christians retract their story that they had seen Jesus alive after He had died, not even when they themselves were threatened with death?

Someone may say, "People die holding to untruths all the time," which is correct. But do people willingly die for something they know to be false, quite possibly because they themselves made it up?

B. How did Jesus' tomb come to be empty?

- a. Christianity could have been proven false by producing the decaying body of Jesus, which has never happened.
- b. The tomb was empty, either by natural or supernatural means
 - i. Possible natural explanations for empty tomb
 1. The disciples stole the body (Matthew 28:11-15)
BUT: They were in no condition to mount a "Mission: Impossible" operation.
Guards slept in shifts.
 2. Swoon – buried alive after being taken down from the cross, Jesus revived. He got himself out of the tomb and convinced his followers that he was alive and well before he finally succumbed to His wounds, went somewhere, and died soon thereafter.
BUT: Would Jesus have been able to convince them he was really all right?
How could Jesus keep secret his real death?
 3. Mass hallucination
BUT: While individuals may see what they want to see, would all the disciples do so together, and several times?
Jesus ate a piece of broiled fish in their presence (Luke 24:42-43).
Why would they all have stopped hallucinating after 40 days?
 - ii. Supernatural explanation: Jesus rose, as He said He would.

C. Facts that even critical scholars acknowledge as true

These facts are found below in **bold type**, as listed in Gary R. Habermas, *On the Resurrection: volume 1 Evidences* (Brentwood, Tennessee: B & H Academic, 2024)

a. Jesus died by crucifixion

b. Christians had experiences that they thought were appearances of the risen Jesus

- i. Paul, an eyewitness (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8; see Acts 9, 22, 26)
- ii. Early creeds (Romans 1:3-4, 4:25; 1 Corinthians 15:3-7; see Philippians 2:5-11)

c. Jesus was proclaimed as risen very soon after He died

- i. Some of those who received early appearances (1 Corinthians 15:3-8) preached that Jesus had risen (1 Corinthians 15:11-15)
- ii. Summaries of sermons in Acts: 2:14-36; 3:12-26; 10:34-43; 13:16-41
- iii. Apostles were in agreement in their proclamation of Jesus' resurrection (Galatians 1:18-2:10; note: "*those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me,*" v. 6 and they "*gave the right hand of fellowship*" to Paul, v. 9)
- iv. Paul appealed to the resurrection when discussing a variety of topics: Christians no longer continuing in sin (Romans 6:1-14), sexual purity (1 Corinthians 6:14-20), his own assurance in proclaiming the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:13-14), his expectation of being raised in a glorified body (Philippians 3:20-21), and comfort for Christians who survive after death strikes their believing loved ones (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

d. Jesus' disciples were transformed

- i. Jesus' disciples fled when he was arrested (Matthew 26:55-56; see Mark 14:27; John 18:8-9), and Peter in particular denied knowing Jesus (Mark 14:66-72)
- ii. After appearances of Jesus to the disciples starting on Easter evening (Luke 24:36ff; John 20:19-28) and continuing for 40 days (Acts 1:1-11), the disciples became emboldened and proclaimed the risen Christ (Acts 2:36; 4:8-13; 5:27-32).
- iii. They were ready to die for the resurrection message.

e. James, Jesus' brother, was converted

- i. James had been an unbeliever (Mark 3:20-21, 31; 6:3-4; John 7:5)
- ii. Jesus appeared to James (1 Corinthians 15:7), who was with the believers in Acts 1:14
- iii. James became bishop of church at Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:18ff.)
- iv. He died by stoning in 62 A.D. (Josephus)

f. Saul the persecutor was converted and became Paul the apostle

- i. Once a proud Pharisee (Galatians 1:14; Philippians 3:4b-11), Saul of Tarsus was a persecutor of the church (Acts 7:58; 8:1-3; 9:1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13), as was well-known (Galatians 1:22-23).
- ii. He saw Jesus on road to Damascus (Acts 9, 22, 26; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8).
- iii. Note Paul's whole career thereafter as an apostle and proclaimer of Christ, including numerous hardships (e.g., Acts 14:19-21; 2 Corinthians 1:8-10; 4:7-12; 6:4-10; 11:21b-12:10)