

The Growth Institute @ FBC Springfield

Apologetics: The Case for the Resurrection

Biblical Texts: Luke 24 & 1 Corinthians 15

The resurrection is necessary for Christianity to be true (1 Cor. 15:19)

Notes from Luke 24:1-12

The Christian faith is a reasonable faith and the resurrection is the best explanation for what happened then and the changes that occurred right after that.

Evidence for the resurrection from 1 Corinthians 15:3-7

1. Paul says Jesus appeared to his closest followers
2. Paul says Jesus appeared to 500+ people at once
3. The gospels and 1 Corinthians were written a few decades after the events
4. Paul mentions James, the brother of Jesus

Other evidence from the early church:

1. Jesus' original followers were good Jews who worshipped their entire life and whose entire culture worshipped on Saturday. They began worshipping on Sunday almost immediately.
2. Jesus' original followers were good Jews who regularly repeated that there is one God. They were strict monotheists who were now developing the concept of the Christian trinity and worshipping Jesus as God's son.
3. Starting a new religion wasn't exactly lucrative or prestigious. Christ's followers had nothing to gain and everything to lose by creating a religion.
4. The development of Lord's Supper and baptism as Christian symbols only make sense if there was a resurrected Savior.

Evidence and answers to common objections:

1. Jesus was buried in a known tomb
2. There was no body found
3. He was buried because he died
4. From Luke 24, the first people to go there were the women
5. From Luke 24 the leaders initially doubted (putting them in a bad light)

If you are not believing in the resurrection of Jesus then you need to come up with an alternative explanation that is more reasonable.

Bart Ehrman, atheist scholar who studies Christianity agrees with the crucifixion, death, and that people believed they saw a physical Jesus. He just thinks it they didn't see what was real.

Responding to the resurrection (Luke 24:13-53):

The resurrection should persuade us of his death.

His death should persuade us of the necessity of his death.

The necessity of his death should persuade us of our sinfulness.

Our sinfulness should persuade us of his love for sinners.

His resurrection should persuade us to respond.

Our response should be of rejoicing in worship and relying upon the Spirit to proclaim the gospel to others.

Recommended Resources: Tim Keller, *Hope in Times of Fear*

NT Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*

Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*

Class Activity: Debunking Hitchcock's article

Homework: <https://www.namb.net/apologetics/resource/the-empty-tomb-of-jesus/>

For Next Week: [6 Principles for Sharing Your Testimony \(thegospelcoalition.org\)](http://thegospelcoalition.org)

Article to Debunk in Class:

DID THE RESURRECTION REALLY HAPPEN?

By Leonard Hitchcock September 2, 2018

Two months ago a column appeared in the “Faith” section of the Idaho State Journal in which the author attempted to prove that Christ’s resurrection was a historically-verifiable event.

The column was written by Aaron Hayes, and seemed to have been prompted, in part, by columns of mine in which I have expressed an atheistic viewpoint. Mr. Hayes’ argument was largely the usual array of Biblical quotations, and he also proposed an explanation of why I (and my ilk) might find his argument unpersuasive.

On that latter issue, Mr. Hayes told his readers that a person’s “interpretation of the evidence, based on one’s worldview or presuppositions, is often as important as the evidence itself,” and he pointedly suggested that “a philosophical commitment to naturalism or a bias against people of faith can also play a role in resurrection studies.”

I think that comment was directed at me, on the assumption that I, as an atheist, have made just such a “philosophical commitment,” am biased against Christians, and consequently incapable of an objective assessment of the Biblical evidence that he presents.

Am I biased against Christians? Well, I find the basic doctrines of Christianity to be false. It follows that I consider those people who accept those doctrines to be mistaken, insofar as they do so. I don’t think this is a case of bias, but of judgment.

As to my “philosophical commitment,” to naturalism, it is certainly true that I am not convinced that supernatural beings exist, nor that supernatural events occur, but I do not regard that conclusion as particularly “philosophical;” it simply reflects my understanding of the findings of science.

Neither is it a “commitment,” if by that is meant that nothing could make me change my mind. It is far more likely, I think, that it is Mr. Hayes who has made a “commitment,” a specific commitment to the historical occurrence of the resurrection, which is, after all, a belief that Christians are required to profess.

In any case, my “naturalism” affects only one element of an assessment of an historical fact: its intrinsic probability. The resurrection of the dead is certainly a conceivable event, but, even in the age of miracles, it was rare. Its intrinsic probability is therefore quite low, which means that the evidence for such an event must be exceptionally strong if we are to be persuaded that it actually occurred.

The only evidence cited by Mr. Hayes are those passages in the New Testament. Is the N.T. a trustworthy source of historical information? What historians know about it is that it is an ancient document, and essentially a compiled and edited collection of stories and letters, most of which emerged from an otherwise inaccessible oral tradition.

The authors of the component texts, with the exception of Paul, are unknown. All of the stories deal with the life of Jesus and the religious movement which he founded. Some of the historical events related in N.T. are corroborated by other ancient documents; most are not.

Historians also know that, by the time that the N.T. was created (sometime in the 4th century C.E.), a great many stories about Jesus had been circulating within Christian communities, and Christians had long quarreled with one another about what they should believe — especially regarding the nature of Jesus and his message.

The stories selected for inclusion in the N.T. were said to be those that were most “authentic,” but there is every reason to believe that one thing “authentic” meant was, “in agreement with what the Christian church authorities have decided are the essential doctrines of the faith.”

In other words, the N.T. represented the church’s effort to put an end to the squabbling and impose uniform beliefs upon the faithful, i.e. to create a Christian orthodoxy.

The evidence of that intent is plentiful. Though the N.T. editors may have felt compelled to include a specific story because it was widely known and respected, if it contained serious doctrinal defects, they altered it.

The ending of the gospel of Mark, for example (verses 16:9 through 16:20), was clearly not the work of its original author, but added by someone else. And that was done because Mark (at least in the copies of Mark that they had), contained no account of Christ’s post-death appearances, which had become part of official doctrine.

So the N.T. is a collection of texts selected and edited to establish and propagate a particular religious doctrine. As a repository of facts it is about as trustworthy as the Communist Manifesto. Certainly it provides evidence of something, but, at least with respect to Christ’s resurrection, that something is only what some Christians believed, not the truth of those beliefs.

The doctrine of the resurrection was, to be sure, not only what the church hierarchy taught, but a belief that was attractive to many of Christ’s followers. It replaced despair with hope.

It assuaged the grief caused by his death, and gave them a reason to perpetuate the movement. The corollary doctrine of Christ’s sacrificial atonement for human sin and promise of salvation was also an appealing one.

And, the occurrence of a resurrection was not totally implausible to people of the time, who had heard tales of resurrections, and who, because they had no scientific understanding of the world whatsoever, believed in the possibility of miracles. Even then, not all Christians were convinced. The unanimity of Christians on the resurrection was, to some extent, a consequence of those who didn't believe it leaving the church.

As a footnote to the "naturalism" argument, it's worth mentioning, I think, that there are hundreds of millions of people in the world who reject naturalism and believe in supernatural beings and events, and who also, just like me, are unconvinced by the Biblical evidence for Christ's resurrection.

Leonard Hitchcock of Pocatello is an alumnus of the University of Iowa and did graduate work at Claremont Graduate University and the University of California, San Diego. He taught philosophy in California and Arizona for 15 years. In 1985, after earning a library degree, he was hired by Idaho State University. He retired from ISU's Oboler Library in 2006.

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Apologetics

The Empty Tomb of Jesus



by Gary R. Habermas

An intriguing development in recent theological research is that a strong majority of contemporary critical scholars seems to support, at least to some extent, the view that

Jesus was buried in a tomb that was subsequently discovered to be empty. I will list several of the more than 20 arguments that have been cited in favor of the empty tomb.

Major Arguments for the Empty Tomb

(1) Perhaps the most powerful argument favoring the empty tomb concerns its location and the events surrounding it. The Gospel accounts are unanimous that Jesus was buried in a tomb that was located in Jerusalem. Few critics question this, holding that Jesus died and was buried in the city. Most also agree that early Christian preaching took place here, leading to the birth of the church.

But it is precisely since Jesus' grave was located nearby that we have a serious problem if it was anything but empty. Unless Jesus' tomb was unoccupied, the early Christian preaching would have been disproved on the spot. How could it be preached that Jesus had been raised from the dead if that message were starkly confronted by a rotting body? Exposing the body would kill the message and be an easy disproof of Christianity before it even gained momentum. Thus, Jerusalem is the last place for the early Christian teachings to gain a foothold unless Jesus' grave was empty. A Sunday walk to the tomb could have settled the matter one way or another.

A creative response might be to assert that perhaps the body was indeed in the tomb, but that, very soon afterwards, the body would have been unrecognizable, due to its decomposition. Or perhaps the tomb was still simply closed without being opened for inspection.¹ But these questions miss entirely the point of the Christian preaching that the tomb was empty. Therefore, if any body was found in Jesus' tomb, whether Jesus' or even someone else's, or if it were still closed, this would have contradicted the teaching that it was *empty*. In Jerusalem, the mistake would have been exposed in no time.

(2) The most-mentioned argument in support of the Gospel accounts is the unanimous agreement that women were the first witnesses to the empty tomb. While it is not strictly true that women were disallowed from testifying in a court of law, it was clearly the case that there was a strong prejudice against using female testimony for important matters.²

Notwithstanding this common stance, the Gospel accounts insist in their proclamation that the women were the star witnesses to the empty tomb. But why should these writers

highlight female testimony unless the women really were the first to discover this fact? To do so would be to weaken their case considerably in the eyes of most listeners. Given this situation in first century Palestine, we can only conclude that the Gospel authors were clearly convinced that the women had discovered the empty tomb. They were more interested in reporting the truth than they were in avoiding criticism. This argument is very widely recognized and few scholars have challenged it, which testifies to its strength.

(3) While the empty tomb accounts in the Gospels are later than Paul's writings, it is crucially important that the empty tomb accounts are witnessed by many. In other words, whichever major view of Gospel origins one takes, the empty tomb narratives arose from more than one independent source. In fact, scholars think that there could be as many as three or four independent traditions in the Gospels, which very strongly increases the likelihood that the reports are both early and historical. Along with the Jerusalem location and the testimony of the women, I think that these are the best arguments in favor of the empty tomb.

(4) Most recent scholars seem to agree that, while Paul does not explicitly mention the empty tomb, the early tradition that this apostle reported to others in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 implies an empty tomb. The listing of the Gospel content moves from Jesus' death, to his burial, to his resurrection from the dead, to his appearances. This sequence strongly suggests that, however it may have been transformed, Jesus' body that died and was buried is the same one that was raised afterwards. Thus, what was placed in the ground is precisely what emerged. In short, what went down is what came up. Such a process would have resulted in the burial tomb being emptied.

That Paul does not specifically mention the empty tomb keeps this from being as strong a point as it could have been. Still, to say so clearly that Jesus' dead body was buried, raised, and appeared would be a rather strange process unless the tomb had been vacated in the process.

(5) Many scholars also concede that Acts 13 may very well contain another early tradition, an early sermon account that was included in a book that was written at a later date. This report, found in Acts 13:29-31, 36-37, is attributed to Paul and clearly teaches that Jesus' body was placed in a tomb. Then he was raised and appeared to His followers without undergoing any bodily decomposition. If so, here we would have an early text where Paul

even more strongly acknowledged the empty tomb, because Jesus appeared and his body did not experience any decay.

(6) According to reports that are found in Matthew 28:11-15, Justin Martyr³ and Tertullian,⁴ for almost two centuries or more, the Jewish leaders tried to explain that the tomb was empty because Jesus' disciples stole His body. This means that the Jewish hierarchy even acknowledged the fact that Jesus' body was no longer there!

However, even skeptics freely recognize that the explanation provided by the Jewish leaders was exceptionally weak. For example, if the disciples stole Jesus' body, how can we account for their incredible transformations, such as forfeiting their family years, as well as their jobs, health, and even their peace, all for the right to be chased for decades around the Roman Empire, just so they could preach a message that they clearly knew was a false tale? Further, how do we explain their willingness to die for what they knew was a false proclamation of Jesus' resurrection? Moreover, how does this explanation allow us to account for the conversion of Jesus' brother James, who had rejected Jesus' message? And we also lack any convincing reason for Paul's conversion from Judaism. So, all for the sake of providing a clearly unconvincing alternative account, the Jewish leaders even admitted the empty tomb!

(7) A word should be said about the scholarly thesis of N.T. Wright⁵ and others. In the ancient world—whether pagan, Jewish, or Christian—writings up until the second century A.D. were in complete agreement that the very definition of resurrection was clearly a bodily notion. In fact, there are almost no exceptions to this ancient view that being raised from the dead is something that, if it ever occurred, could happen only to the body. So it had this same meaning throughout the Old Testament and Gospel accounts, as well as in Paul's writings and the rest of the New Testament teaching about Jesus. This would indicate that Jesus' resurrection was conceived in a bodily manner, necessitating that the tomb was empty.⁶

Conclusion

These are some of the reasons why a majority of contemporary scholars recognize the fact of the empty tomb. Still other arguments could be provided, as well. That is why historian Michael Grant concludes that “the historian . . . cannot justifiably deny the empty tomb”

because if we apply the same historical criteria that we use elsewhere, then “the evidence is firm and plausible enough to necessitate the conclusion that the tomb was indeed found empty.”⁷

In light of arguments such as those we have produced here, this conclusion seems to be very difficult to avoid. The normal application of historical rules to the various data indicates that, just shortly after his death, Jesus’ tomb was indeed found empty.

End Notes

¹Regarding the suggestion that Jesus was never buried in a tomb, see the nine criticisms listed in Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996), pp. 127–129.

²An excellent discussion of these issues is provided in Carolyn Osiek, “The Women at the Tomb: What are they Doing There?” *Ex Auditu*, Vol. 9 (1993), pp. 97–107.

³Dialogue with Trypho 108.

⁴On Spectacles 30.

⁵*The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

⁶Wright, pp. 32–479, especially pp. xix, 31, 71, 82–83, 201–206, 273, 314, 710.

⁷Michael Grant, *Jesus: An Historian’s Review of the Gospels* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1992), p. 176.

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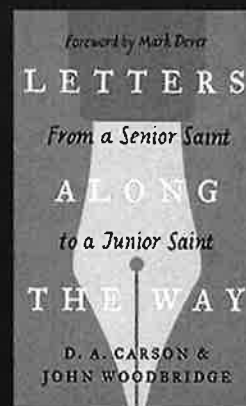
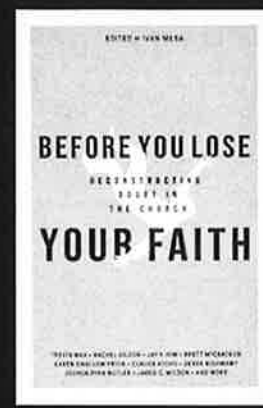
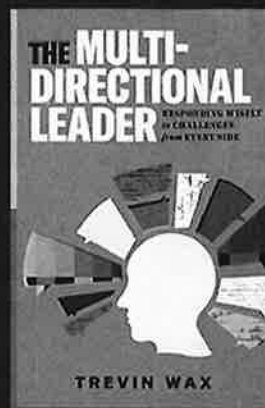
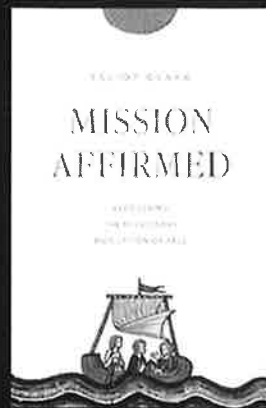
6 Principles for Sharing Your Testimony

JUNE 1, 2021 | [SHELBY ABBOTT](#)

I love telling people my spiritual story. The testimony of how Christ came into my life and made me a different person is always exciting to share, and pretty easy to do. It's the story of my restored relationship with God that came to me through no effort of my own, but solely through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In over two decades working as a full-time minister, I've learned that personal testimonies are one of the most influential tools the Holy Spirit uses to stir spiritual interest and point people toward Christ. There's no more poignant and powerful way to communicate the gospel than by sharing our story—not because we're so great, but because Jesus is so great.

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“Personal testimonies are one of the most influential tools the Holy Spirit uses to stir spiritual interest and point people toward Christ.

Your story is authentically and uniquely you. It's versatile and can be used in a variety of situations—from sharing with an individual to addressing a group. It's not a debate, it's not pushy, it's not fake, and it doesn't feel like relig propaganda, since it's coming from your heart. Very rarely will people argue with you about your story. In fact, th more likely to engage and ask clarifying questions, which in turn pushes the dialogue about Jesus to a more persc level.

Six Simple Principles

If you've never thought about preparing and communicating your story, that's fine (most Christians haven't). Here six simple principles to get you started.

1. Keep it short.

Communicating too many details about your life can distract listeners from the central point: how you met Christ. Keeping it short can help with that. Three minutes is a good target. Remember that the purpose of telling your story is not about you; it's about God. Clearly and succinctly communicate what *he* has done in your life. Listeners today have a very low tolerance for long-windedness. Being concise helps keep people engaged.

2. Have a before, how, and after.

There should be a pretty clear timeline and logical flow to your story. Talk about what your life was like before Christ, how you met him, and what your life's like now. This timeline is different for everyone, of course, but it brings a sense of structure to what you're saying and helps keep your listener tracking.

For those who've been Christians since childhood, be vulnerable about your struggles as a growing Christian—the “how” may be a time when the gospel really sank in, and you understood it at a deeper level. Everyone's story is unique, and there's flexibility in how to share it, but thinking in terms of a timeline can be very helpful.

3. Have a theme.

A theme helps people walk away from your story remembering one main idea. There may be many themes in your story, but try to boil it down to one. Loading your testimony with multiple main points makes your story muddier, more poignant. It's much more likely to stick with people when there's a single, memorable theme.

4. Clearly present the gospel.

You want people to clearly grasp the source of your transformation: Jesus Christ. If people aren't pointed to Christ, they'll be pointed in another direction, which will (of course) ultimately fail them. We want people to come away from our story thinking, “Isn't Jesus amazing? I want him in my life, too.”

Your testimony should show people that God loves them, they're sinful, Jesus is the payment for the penalty of the sin, and they need to trust Christ as the payment for the penalty of their sins in order to have a personal relationship with God.

“If you haven't shared the gospel in your testimony, you haven't really shared your testimony.”

Don't be tempted to omit this part of your story—it's the most important element. It's the message that changed everything about you and brought you to where you are now. If you haven't shared the gospel in your testimony, you haven't really shared your testimony.

5. Avoid ‘Christianese.’

Avoid Christian slang—those words believers use all the time in everyday Christian circles but make no sense to anyone else. We're trying to be clear about what we're communicating, and we need to understand the importance of speaking a language that can be easily understood. We want anyone and everyone to have intellectual access to what we're saying, so eliminate alienating language (or at least be willing to quickly define it).

6. Practice, practice, practice!

You should know your testimony by heart without having any notecards or outline in front of you. If someone asks about your life at the public swimming pool, you won't be able to whip out a piece of paper for reference—so have your story memorized and ready at a moment's notice. It's a good idea to write it out or make an outline, then practice it aloud on your own or with a friend. Eventually you'll know it by heart.

Your Story as Part of God's Story

Remind yourself as you prepare that it's not just about how God and the gospel fit into your story, but also about how your story fits into the greater story of the gospel. God will use your testimony to affect those around you if you're faithful to speak up. How he has changed you can change someone else. Isn't that amazing?

“Remember it's not just about how God and the gospel fit into your story, but also about how your story fits into the greater story of the gospel. ”

Your testimony is significant because it's the personal miracle of how God transformed your heart of stone into a heart of flesh, and only you can uniquely bear witness to that miracle. He has been behind every detail of your life, even using the ugly and terrible things to form and shape you with the utmost care and attention. He is still working on you right now. What a joy to tell others of his miraculous work!

Shelby Abbott is an author, radio host, campus minister, and conference speaker on staff with FamilyLife, a ministry of Cru. He is the host of a podcast for 18–28 year-olds called *Real Life Loading...* and is the author of several books, including *Pressure Points: A Guide to Navigating Student Stress*. He and his wife, Rachael, have two daughters and live in Downingtown, Pennsylvania. You can find him at shelbyabbott.com or follow him on [Twitter](#).