

Prove It To Me!

How Can We Find Confidence in the Resurrection?

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Each Easter an age old question comes to mind: did Jesus really rise from the dead? This is not an unimportant question. The Apostle Paul makes it clear that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, if the Resurrection is nothing more than a quaint holiday tradition with no factual basis, then we who profess him to be our Savior are at best silly and naïve. At worst, if Jesus died and that was it, end of story, we're still in a heap of trouble (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17).

So, how can we prove the Resurrection actually did happen? Can't watch the DVD (might be nothing more than Hollywood special effects). Can't run the science experiment (dead bodies stay dead). Can't claim supernatural proof (the resurrected Jesus is neither a Frankenstein nor a zombie).

Such proof is simply not available for the Resurrection. Yet that does not mean that no proof is available. The Bible offers an eminently reasonable form of proof for the resurrection: the testimony of eyewitnesses.

This kind of proof is actually quite common. It forms the basis of what we call history (all historical "facts" are initially eyewitness reports). Even more, we use this kind of proof every day in our lives. The testimony of eyewitnesses is considered reasonable proof for civil and criminal trials, business transactions, marriages, the nightly news reports, and even for determining who ate the last cookie!

At first glance we might think eyewitness testimony is weak. But if we are willing to base the majority of our day to day decisions upon such proof (and we do), how weak is it really? This is the very kind of proof the Bible offers us regarding the Resurrection. What is more, the Bible says this form of proof is essential to Christian faith (John 19:35; Acts 10:39; 1Corinthians 15:8; 1 Peter 5:1; 1 John 1:1).

So what does this evidence tell us? Quite simply: Jesus really did die, he really did rise from the dead in the same body he had before he died, and he really is still alive today. This is the consistent report of numerous eyewitnesses (Matthew 27:50-28:17; Mark 15:37-16:14; Luke 23:46-24:43; John 19:31-21:14; Acts 9:1-8; 22:7; 26:14-15; and 1 Corinthians 15:5-8). Briefly, these eyewitness accounts provide the following evidences that Jesus' resurrection did happen:

- *Death details:* the descriptions of Jesus' death match to an amazing degree what other historical sources tell us about Roman crucifixion practices. Further, the physical descriptions of Jesus' death are consistent with medical descriptions of death. Jesus really did die.
- *Burial details :* the details regarding the burial of Jesus' dead body are consistent with historical sources describing both Jewish *and* Roman burial practices.
- *Enemy eyewitness pre-resurrection:* Jesus' enemies knew he claimed that he would rise from the dead. Accordingly, they asked for and received from Pilate a squad of Roman soldiers to guard the tomb, just in case Jesus' disciples tried to steal the body.
- *Empty Tomb:* a cave tomb, with a large stone sealing it, guarded by Roman soldiers, was found empty on the first Easter morning. Yet Jesus' body was placed there just days before.
- *Empty burial cloths:* Jesus' burial cloths, the linens that were wrapped around his body and the cloth laid over his face, were found lying in the tomb, but not Jesus' body!
- *Enemy eyewitness post-resurrection:* faced with the fact of the empty tomb, Jesus' enemies bribed the Roman soldiers into offering false testimony, saying that the disciples stole Jesus' body (attested to by other historical sources).

- *Real human body* : Jesus' resurrection body is a real human body. It bears the wounds of his crucifixion and it consumes real food. The resurrected Jesus is not some sort of ghost.
- *Angelic eyewitness*: just like his birth, Jesus' resurrection was testified to by angels.
- *Individual eyewitnesses*: on the first Easter day numerous individuals saw the resurrected Jesus: Mary Magdalene, other women, Peter, and two disciples walking to Emmaeus. Later, the resurrected Jesus appeared to Paul. Each of these individual eyewitness accounts report the same details, without conflicts; Jesus who died is now alive.
- *Group eyewitnesses*: on the first Easter day the resurrected Jesus appeared to the disciples, and again eight days later. Finally, he appeared to over five hundred disciples at the same time. Their consistent testimony: the Jesus they saw die was now alive.
- *Eyewitness consistency*: eyewitness testimony is stronger when multiple witnesses provide consistent accounts. The eyewitness accounts to Jesus' resurrection are extremely consistent. No single detail from any one witness contradicts any details of the other witnesses. Such consistency is very rare.
- *Eyewitness credibility*: eyewitnesses of the resurrected Jesus willingly placed their lives on the line: the disciples (who ran away in fear before the cross), Jesus' natural brothers (who were ashamed of him before the cross), and even a one-time enemy (Paul, who persecuted Christians before seeing the resurrected Jesus).

This is only a brief review of the eyewitness evidence (see recommendations below for more). Yet these all offer the same testimony: Jesus died, he was buried, he rose, and he is still alive today!

It is understandable that some are given to skepticism, I understand. None of this really proves that the Resurrection did occur, maybe not even beyond a *reasonable* doubt. Yet such skepticism is all quite consistent with how the Bible really and truly proves that Jesus did rise from the dead. You see, there is another Eyewitness whose testimony cannot be denied.

Jesus himself said men would not believe the testimony of someone who came back from the dead (Luke 16:11). They can't, simply because they do not have the capacity to believe unless and until the Holy Spirit Himself provides eyewitness testimony (Jeremiah 17:9; John 8:43; 12:37-40; 15:26; 1 Corinthians 2:10-16).

And this He most certainly does, and is still doing today (1 John 5:6ff.). This Easter Sunday the Holy Spirit promises to show up wherever the gospel is preached. The Holy Spirit will show up and offer first hand eyewitness testimony that Jesus really did rise from the dead (Romans 10:13-17; 1 Peter 1:12).

The resurrection is true and you can truly know it is true (or, as a friend put it, you can "know in your knower"). Go to church this Easter and *ask the Holy Spirit to prove it to you*.

Here are some resources for examining the evidences of Jesus' resurrection a bit more fully:

- Warfield, Benjamin B., *The Resurrection of Christ: A Historical Fact* (homepage.mac.com/shanerosenthal/reformationink/bbwfact.htm)
- Hanegraaff, Hank, *The Resurrection: Myth or Miracle?* (<http://www.equip.org/free/DR153.htm>)
- *How do we know that Jesus really rose from the dead?* (www.christiananswers.net/q-eden/edn-t008.html)
- Carson, D. A., *Scandalous: The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus* (Crossway, 2010)
- Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (Riverhead, 2009)