

# Down But Not Out!

## Expositional Study Of Luke's Gospel

Luke 7:11-17

Written By

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**B**ecause I have twin grand-daughters, I don't know how many times I've seen the Disney movie *Frozen*. You know you've watched it beyond normal human limits when you start quoting the dialogue before the characters speak. I think I'm at that point, but it is a cute movie, and it does have a theological message if you are paying attention. To prove me point, let's just tap into the closing scene where Elsa is about to be done in by the thrust of a sword from one of the Duke of Weaselton's men. Right before it strikes her defenseless body is when her sister, Anna, steps and thrusts her right arm up to block the blow. That's when she is instantly turned into a cold, hard, lifeless block of, you guessed it, ice. [Show the clip]

What just happened? Just when you thought one of the lead characters in the plot was finished, just when you thought they were most certainly down for the proverbial count, love, unexpectedly and surprisingly, brought life. That, my friend, is the story of Easter. Perhaps we could re-phrase the timeless theological motif this way:

### Where There Is Death, The Lord of Love Brings Life (Luke 7:11-17)

There are many passages in the New Testament which validate this premise, but one I find most instructive is tucked away in Luke chapter 7, verses 11 through 17. Come with me and read the divinely inspired historical narrative and you'll readily see what I mean:

<sup>11</sup> Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd. <sup>12</sup> Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her. <sup>13</sup> When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, "Do not weep." <sup>14</sup> And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" <sup>15</sup> The dead man sat up and began to speak. And *Jesus* gave him back to his mother. <sup>16</sup> Fear gripped them all, and they *began* glorifying God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and, "God has visited His people!" <sup>17</sup> This report concerning Him went out all over Judea and in all the surrounding district.

What a jaw-dropping, eye-brow raising, and smile producing story. From a literary perspective, it has all the ingredients of a powerful, instructive narrative. We have a protagonist, Jesus, and an unnamed antagonist, Death. We have an unexpected hero pulling off an unexpected work.

We have an episodic plot which can be taken as a single snapshot in the life of Jesus. We have a contrast between the negative and the positive sides of the story, or a foil to be more exact. And, then, there is most definitely a powerful and emotional never-to-be-forgotten climax, coupled with a heavy dose of irony, too. Death is always final regardless of who you are, but in this case, life one the day. Buried also in rich soil of this lesser story is a greater story about Jesus. Yes, Dr. Luke's narrative is ingeniously designed to cause thinking people to consider how the untimely death and resurrection of one young man points logically and naturally to the death and resurrection of another young man who also died at the prime of life. His name? Jesus, the Lord of love and life. Hence, there are two levels to this intricate story, but to appreciate the higher level we must focus our minds on the lower level. Once we finish this quest, we will discover that the opening premise is truth: *We there is death, the Lord of love brings life.*

Three movements will help us appreciate this all-important theological concept which forms the bedrock of every Easter since A.D. 33.

## The Plot

The plot is actually quite simple. Dr. Luke wants us to see what happens when Death runs headlong into the Lord of Life, Jesus. And the good doctor builds his recounting of the story around a life event we can all identify with: The tragic loss of someone we love. Who doesn't cringe when the phone rings in the middle of the night, or when the officers or soldiers show up at your front door unannounced? Who hasn't lost someone you thought would always be there for you? Who hasn't stared at a coffin wondering things like: Where did the time go? How did this happen? Why did this happen? Yes, from the second verse, our hearts are pulled into the story and by the end of the account our heads are left, as we shall see, with a decision we should make based on the incontrovertible facts.

But before we get into the plot, we must first understand the context.

First, please note how all the narrative panels from chapter 6, verse one to chapter 7, verse 10 set the tone of Jesus as one who has the divine power to solve complex issues.

- *Panel 1* (Luke 6:1-5): Issue? Sabbath work. Were his disciples guilty of working on the Sabbath by rubbing heads of wheat together and eating them? The Pharisees said, "Yes," based on religious tradition, but Jesus said, "No." Point? God is more concerned about our needs than man's traditions.
- *Panel 2* (Luke 6:6-11): Issue? Sabbath healing. Was Jesus wrong to heal a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath? "Yes," said the Pharisees, "No" said Jesus. Point? God is more concerned about meeting our needs than in observing man-made traditions.
- *Panel 3* (Luke 6:12-16): Issue? How would Jesus chose his leaders? He would spend an entire evening in prayer before he selected them. Point? Great leadership in God's kingdom calls for great prayer to the living God.
- *Panel 4* (Luke 6:17-49): Issue? How should Jesus's follower live? In the Sermon on the Mount he shows them how their lives should reflect biblical, kingdom principles, not man's. Point? God's teaching is more important than Pharisaical, traditional teaching.
- *Panel 5*: (Luke 7:1-10). Issue? Would Jesus help a Roman military officer's servant who hovered near death? "No," would be the unexpressed thinking of

- a Pharisees, “Yes,” would be the statement of Jesus. Point? The Lord of love loves all people and seeks to meet their needs.
- *Panel 6* (Luke 7:11-17): Issue? Would Jesus steer clear of death so as not to contaminate himself ritualistically speaking, or would he roll up his sleeves and get to work? As he had done to this point, he hit the hard issue head-on. He didn't even blink one time, but stepped into the sadness to bring gladness. What a plot. What a story.

Now, what is most interesting about this story from a grammatical point is how many times Dr. Luke, a gifted physician and writer employs the conjunction/connective “and” (Καί). Within just these seven verses it occurs a whopping thirteen times. In the preceding fifty-nine verses he employs the conjunction a staggering seventy-two times. What's the deal? Does Luke have a grammar problem? No. He is making a literary point. The literary device he employs is called polysyndeton, or the use of “many ands,” and (no pun intended) it is designed not only to weave a story together but to force the read to stop and consider the content of each verse before they move on.<sup>1</sup> Luke's story of the raising of the dead man is so illustrative of polysyndeton's purpose and power, Bullinger actually uses it as an illustration in his book.<sup>2</sup> Ostensibly, this means that Luke, as a medical doctor familiar with death, wanted people to really stop and ponder the import of this one particular episode in a day of Christ's ministry. Even death couldn't hinder him in touching lives.

With all this structural information in hand, let's now turn back to the plot development.

Immediately after Jesus healed the Roman centurion's servant in Capernaum, located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, Luke tells us Jesus and his disciples, along with a throng of excited, joyous worshippers, followed him some thirty miles southwest to the little village of Nain. Is there any significance to this backwater, *Smallsville* place? Yes. Please, take note: God never does anything without it having a great message attached to it. Further, some of God's greatest works in history came to people and places located off the so-called grid. Nain is certainly no exception to the providential purpose and plan of the living God.



Nain was located at the base of what is called the Hill of Moreh. This hill is, in turn, located on the southern edge of the Valley of Jezreel, or the Valley of Harnegiddo, or Armageddon. During the period of the Judges (1390-1051 B.C.), the massive Midianite army gathered in the plain around this mount as they prepared to wipe the Israelites out under the leadership of Gideon. We all know how that turned out. God made Gideon whittle his army down to a mere three hundred men, and then He miraculously

gave them the victory (Judges 7-8). Again, where the Devil wanted to bring death, God brought

<sup>1</sup> E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), 209.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 220-221.

life and deliverance. During the period of the kings (1051-586 B.C.), Nain is where King Saul, in desperation to hear a word from the deceased prophet, Samuel, about his failing empire went to the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28:7-14). Shockingly, God permitted the prophet, who was quite alive in heaven, to appear and speak with the king. His news wasn't good. As Samuel had prophesied when he was alive, God would take the kingdom from Saul and give it to David (1 Kings 28:17). Interesting. Through a resurrection of sorts, God spoke of the Davidic king who would reign over Israel. Now, in the city of Nain, walked the greater David, Jesus, the prophesied Messiah (Psalm 2; Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:1-2). He and he alone would take on a greater enemy than the Midianites or the Philistines. He, the Lord who gave Samuel life after death, would take on death itself during a funeral procession and walk away the ultimate victor.

The plot develops Christ's movement has Israel's true prophet and king by introducing us to a funeral procession coming out of Nain as He and his weary group approached. At the head of the procession, according to Jewish custom, would be professional mourners and tambourine and cymbal players. Behind them would be the mother, then the wicker bier which held the body, and all the mourners would follow immediately behind. Luke is careful to give us precise information about this particular mother. One, she is a widow, and, two, she had now tragically and shockingly lost her only young son. The fact he was young causes us to see the loss as a great loss because he didn't get to live life to the fullest. Really, it smacks of injustice, of the death being somewhat unfair.

All of this, of course, sets us up for the next movement of the story. Jesus sees the sadness of the situation. Did you hear me? Jesus pays attention when we grieve. He also has great compassion for us when we grieve (Exodus 33:19; Psalm 72:13; 103:4; Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; James 5:11), even though He is the Lord of life. Because He has walked in our sandals, He knows firsthand how death rocks our worlds and breaks our hearts. Gone forever is someone we love. Gone forever are the dreams of the person we cared about. Gone forever is the joy of life and all this means. Gone forever, as in this instance, is the hope of a marriage, or grandchildren, and of new joys and new memories. Yes, Jesus knew all about this, and that's why when he saw this sobbing widow, He gave her an unexpected command that, in and of itself, sounded compassionate in Greek, "Do not weep" (Μὴ κλαίετε).

At this juncture, the plot hits an emotional wall. For one, the mother must have thought, "What did you say? Who are you to tell me not to weep? Do you not know what I've been through?" Scripture is silent about what she thought, but can well imagine what would have gone through our minds had we been in the similar situation. All we know is she said nothing. Why was she verbally quiet? Because she's emotionally shattered. The grief is so great it seems to burst forth from the marrow of her bones, leaving her speechless as Christ attempted to arrest her attention.

The plot then takes another unexpected turn. Walking past the grieving mother, with her tears probably fresh on his hand from wiping her cheeks, Jesus breaks all cultural and procedural rules and walks toward the funeral bier bearing the body of her only son and touches it forcefully enough to get the procession to come to full stop. Nobody had EVER seen anyone do this, but nobody challenged Jesus either. They simply watched and listened.

At this juncture, the plot takes a third interesting turn. Jesus speaks to the young man's lifeless, stiff, dead body: "Young man, get up!" Nobody would forget those words, ever: *Νεανίσκος σοὶ λέγω ἐγέρθητι*. *Immediately*, necrosis and rigor mortis were replaced by living organs, supple tissue, blood flow, a beating heart, eyes which could see, and ears which could hear, again.

Immediately, the young man who had been in God's presence in the next life, sat up and came back to life in this life. A fourth plot twist occurs as the young man started speaking. I wonder what he said, "What happened? Why am I on this funeral brier? Why is my mother crying? Why is the entire town gathered around me? And who is this Galilean?" Don't tell me God does not have a sense of humor. And don't tell me He doesn't have great power, either.

How did the people respond to this funeral procession to end all funeral processions? Immediately, they who had witnessed an outright miracle saw Jesus as a great prophet and an emissary of God. They were partially right, you now. He wasn't just a great prophet, He was THE prophet Moses had prophesied about in Deuteronomy 18. He was also more than a visitor from God. He was God (John 1:1-3; 8:58), the author of love and life.

What a story. What a Savior.

As we think about how the Lord brought the dead to life with a mere word here in the ancient city of Nain, I think it appropriate for us to consider how this historical, miraculous narrative really serves to paint a perfect picture of that first Easter Sunday some 2,000 years ago.

## The Picture

You can't help but see the life of Jesus woven all through this story. Quite honestly, you can't help but see how this story prepared the people back then and the people since then for the resurrection of the greater Son, Jesus. Come with me as I work through how this resurrection story pointed to the resurrection story of all stories, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave.

One, this story causes us to think of how Jesus resembles the person and work of the great prophet Elijah in the Old Testament (1 Kings 17:10ff). During a time a severe famine, he ventured to another no-named city called Zarephath, and, like Christ, he encountered a widow at the city gate. And like Christ, he lovingly touched the young boy when he suddenly died. And, like Christ, he was instrumental in raising the child from the grip of death. The major difference between the two prophets was this: Elijah offered a prayer for God's mercy upon the

life of the boy, while Jesus merely gave a divine command, "Rise!" Truly, a greater prophet than Elijah had arrived because He raised the dead with a mere word, as only God could do. All of this leads us to another conclusion: Since Jesus could raise a young man from death with a word, then it was no problem for him, who is the Word (*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten, (μονογενής)*



from the Father, full of grace and truth," John 1:1, 14) and the essence of life (*"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men,"* John 1:4) to raise himself from the grave just as He prophesied He would: *"For this reason the father loves me, because I lay down My life that I may take it up again"* (John 10:17). That's exactly what He did on the third day in the tomb after His crucifixion. He re-energized his lifeless body and resurrected himself. Confucius never did this. Neither did Buddha. Muhammad didn't attempt this and couldn't have pulled it off either. Only the God-man Jesus,

the prophet of all prophets could, and did, lay His life down only to pick it up again three days later. That, my friend, is power. . . the power of God.

Two, the Hill of Moreh, which the village of Nain was nestled up against, really pointed to a greater hill called Golgotha (John 19:17). A young man died on each hill, as it were, but the second young man didn't die by means of natural causes. No, as prophesied, He was crucified on trumped up charges, and put to death on Passover. The major difference was the second young man bore our sin, not His, so we might have the opportunity to experience resurrected life when we come to Him in repentant faith. As He said, "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:40). He showed He possessed resurrection power that day He stopped the funeral procession and said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" (Luke 7:15).

Three, the death of the one and only son of a mother, and the costly nature of this death, causes us to look to the death of the one and only son of the heavenly Father. Both sons, interestingly enough, are called by the unique Greek terms "the only son," (μονογενής).<sup>3</sup> Jesus, the second member of the Holy Trinity, is labeled from the beginning of the book of John as the Father's one and only son (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18, 1 John 4:9) much akin to Isaac being Abraham's only son (Hebrews 11:17). The use of this term by Dr. Luke is no accident. He knew the

<sup>3</sup> William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 658. **μονογενής, ἕς** (μόνος, γένος; Hes.; LXX; PsSol 18, 4; TestSol 20:2; TestBenj 9:2; ParJer 7:26; ApcEsdr 6:16; ApcSed 9:2; Joseph., Just.; loanw. in rabb.) acc. μονογενῆ (-ῆν **J 3:16** v.l.; **Hb 11:17** D; also ApcEsdr 6:16)

① **pert. to being the only one of its kind within a specific relationship, one and only, only** (so mostly, incl. Judg 11:34; Tob 3:15; 8:17) of children: of Isaac, Abraham's only son (Jos., Ant. 1, 222) **Hb 11:17**. Of an only son (PsSol 18:4; TestSol 20:2; ParJer 7:26; Plut., Lycurgus 59 [31, 8]; Jos., Ant. 20, 20) **Lk 7:12; 9:38**. Of a daughter (Diod S 4, 73, 2) of Jairus **8:42**. (On the motif of a child's death before that of a parent s. EpigrAnat 13, '89, 128f, no. 2; 18, '91, 94 no. 4 [244/45 A.D.]; GVI nos. 1663–69.)

② **pert. to being the only one of its kind or class, unique (in kind)** of someth. that is the only example of its category (Cornutus 27 p, 49, 13 εἷς κ. μονογενής ὁ κόσμος ἐστὶ. μονογενῆ κ. μόνα ἐστίν= 'unique and alone'; Pla., Timaeus 92c; Theosophien 181, §56, 27). Of a mysterious bird, the Phoenix 1 Cl 25:2.—In the Johannine lit. (s. also ApcEsdr and ApcSed: ὁ μονογενής υἱός; Hippol., Ref. 8, 10, 3; Did., Gen. 89, 18; ὑμνοῦμέν γε θεὸν καὶ τὸν μ. αὐτοῦ Orig., C. Cels. 8, 67, 14; cp. ἡ δύναμις ἐκείνη ἢ μ. Hippol., Ref. 10, 16, 6) μονογενής υἱός is used only of Jesus. The renderings *only, unique* may be quite adequate for all its occurrences here (so M-M., NRSV et al.; DMoody, JBL 72, '53, 213–19; FGrant, ATR 36, '54, 284–87; GPendrick, NTS 41, '95, 587–600). τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μ. ἔδωκεν **J 3:16** (Philo Bybl. [100 A.D.]: 790 Fgm. 2 ch. 10, 33 Jac. [in Eus., PE 1, 10, 33]: Cronus offers up his μονογενής υἱός). ὁ μ. υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ vs. **18**; τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μ. ἀπέσταλκεν ὁ θεός **1J 4:9**; cp. Dg 10:2. On the expr. δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός **J 1:14** s. Hdb. ad loc. and PWinter, Zeitschrift für Rel. u. Geistesgeschichte 5, '53, 335–65 (Engl.). See also Hdb. on vs. **18** where, beside the rdg. μονογενής θεός (considered by many the orig.) *an only-begotten one, God* (acc. to his real being; i.e. uniquely divine as God's son and transcending all others alleged to be gods) or *a uniquely begotten deity* (for the perspective s. **J 10:33–36**), another rdg. ὁ μονογενής υἱός is found. MPol 20:2 in the doxology διὰ παιδὸς αὐτοῦ τοῦ μονογενοῦς Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Some (e.g. WBauer, Hdb.; JBulman, Calvin Theological Journal 16, '81, 56–79; JDahms, NTS 29, '83, 222–32) prefer to regard μ. as somewhat heightened in mng. in J and 1J to *only-begotten* or *begotten of the Only One*, in view of the emphasis on γενᾶσθαι ἐκ θεοῦ (**J 1:13** al.); in this case it would be analogous to πρωτότοκος (**Ro 8:29; Col 1:15** al.).—On the mng. of μονογενής in history of religion s. the material in Hdb.<sup>3</sup> 25f on **J 1:14** (also Plut., Mor. 423a Πλάτων ... αὐτῷ δὲ φησι δοκεῖν ἓνα τοῦτον [sc. τὸν κόσμον] εἶναι μονογενῆ τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἀγαπητόν; Wsd 7:22 of σοφία: ἐστὶ ἐν αὐτῇ πνεῦμα νοερὸν ἅγιον μονογενές.—Vett. Val. 11, 32) as well as the lit. given there, also HLeisegang, Der Bruder des Erlösers: Αγγελος I 1925, 24–33; RBultmann J (comm., KEK) '50, 47 n. 2; 55f.—DELG s.v. μένω. M-M. EDNT. TW. Sv.

ramifications of this particular term. By applying it, therefore, to the young son of the widow, he knew it would cause us to consider, by definition, the greater young son, Jesus, the only Son of the Heavenly Father. And just as the loss of both sons was great to the parents, the loss of Jesus was far greater because He, the sinless one, experienced the most gruesome death for our sin (Romans 5:1-9), so that He might raise Himself on that first Easter Sunday as the victor over sin and death. Imagine the love the Father has for us as sinners. He sent His only Son to die at the prime of His young life, so that through His resurrection we might be recipients of His salvation. Our to put it in another way, where there is spiritual death, Jesus, the Lord of love waits to bring life. Life to who? Life to you. But that life will not come until you first consider what I'll call . . .

## The Proof

Let's get back to the story of the resurrection in the village of Nain. The precise moment that young man sat up in that funeral brier, everyone who witnessed the event had incontrovertible and irrefutable evidence a real resurrection had occurred the very moment Jesus said, "Get up!" Anyone who said, "Come on, Akabah. The guy was just asleep and Jesus got extremely lucky with waking him up. It was just perfect timing."

Right. Had anyone devised that shaky, unfounded skeptical argument they would have been laughed out of town. They had all heard how he had died. They had seen and smelled the body. Some of them had even prepared him for burial. Many had seen what necrosis does to a body once the soul is gone.

- The blood settled in those parts of the body closest to the earth.
- The skin changed color as the oxygen-laden blood in the capillaries ceased functioning.
- Within minutes, liver mortis kicked in as the body began to slowly turn a purple color.
- The muscles became relaxed and flaccid, and then with a few hours they started becoming rigid, first in the eyelids, neck, and jaw, as they had seen many times before.

The young man had died dead. That wasn't a question.

The question was now, "How is he alive?"

The answer couldn't be dodged. He enjoyed life because Jesus, the Lord of life had commanded him to "Get up!" He, the created, *had to respond* to Him, the Creator. Logic suggests, therefore, that the only way this miracle could have occurred is if God had spoken, and, indeed, He had. Where there was death, He spoke life. Every person who witnessed the event had every reason, from that point forward, to believe Jesus was God in the flesh. From that moment forward, everyone had incontrovertible evidence to move from unbelief to faith . . . based on valid, verifiable reasons.

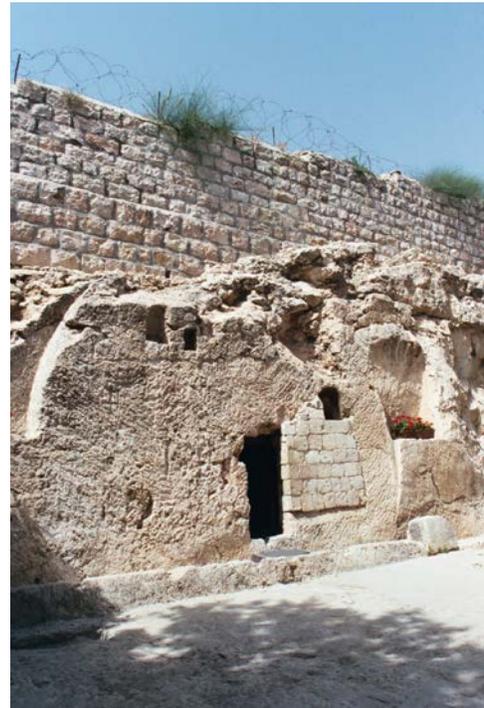
This same line of reasoning points to the resurrection of Jesus. We, too, have incontrovertible evidence that He rose from the grave. Really, we have what is classified as "A Cumulative Case Inference to the Best Explanation," where multiple lines of data all converge to inform you that reasoned belief is warranted in light of the combined weight of the proofs. Such is what occurs in the resurrection of young man number two, Jesus.

First, let's just establish Jesus was as dead as the young man.

- Ancient non-biblical sources all validate that Jesus did, in fact, die by crucifixion: Josephus, Tacitus, Lucian, Mara bar Serapion.
- Nobody could survive a Roman crucifixion, and many died in the pre-crucifixion beating.
- There is no way a body double was substituted for the Romans were the best in the world at capital punishment by crucifixion. To think they'd let a beaten prison slip through their hands is specious, at best.
- Modern medical descriptions of what happened to Christ before, during, and after the crucifixion clearly demonstrate He did, in fact, die.<sup>4</sup>

Second, the historical lines of cumulative evidence leads us to conclude He did rise from the grave as He said He would:

- Jesus was crucified and buried publically in Jerusalem. Had his body been in the tomb, all the Jewish and Roman authorities had to do was produce His body. They never did because He had risen, but they did admit to the fact the body was gone (Matthew 28:13).
- Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene (John 20:10-18). This episode, in and of itself, tells you the story is genuine because a woman's testimony in the Jewish culture didn't hold the weight as that of a man. The story is told in this fashion because this is what occurred.
- Jesus appeared to other women who saw Him, touched His nail-scarred feet, heard Him speak, and saw the empty tomb (Matthew 28:1-10).
- According to Dr. Luke, Jesus appeared to over 500 people for forty days prior to His ascension (Acts 1:3). Any one of these people could be interviewed to ascertain their viability as witnesses.
- How do you account for how the fearful disciples turned into the fearless disciples, being willing to go to their deaths for the gospel of Jesus unless he had truly risen? As they say, liars do make poor martyrs. These men had seen the risen Lord as the gospel account recount and they lined up to die to tell His story to the world.
- How do you account for Christ's brother, James, becoming a believer and worshipping his older brother unless He had incontrovertible evidence His brother was risen?



- How do you get thousands of Jews, steeped in the Torah and Traditions, not to mention endless rituals, to walk away from all of this and start worshipping Jesus on Sunday and not Saturday, Sabbath? How does that occur unless they actually knew Jesus had risen from the grave?

I'll stop there because I'm sure you get the point. Multiple lines of hard evidence converge to inform you that the most logical way to process what happened to Jesus post-crucifixion is to believe He did, in fact, rise from the tomb just as assuredly as that young Jewish young man did in Nain.

The question then is clear: What will you do with this Jesus? He is the Lord of love and life, and He waits this Easter to give you both, but you must first come to Him in faith. The moment you do, you are raised from spiritual death to spiritual life.