Lesson 1:
The Case for the Resurrection

LESSON OVERVIEW

Series: The Resurrection
Lesson: 1 of 2
Estimated Length: 20 Minutes
Audience:
Spiritually curious high school or college students with little or no biblical background.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this lesson, students should:

- Understand why the resurrection is central to Christianity.
- Recognize that Jesus' death was confirmed before His burial.
- Understand the significance of the empty tomb.
- Recognize that the resurrection claim included multiple eyewitnesses.
- Understand how the disciples changed after believing they had seen Jesus alive.
- Feel comfortable asking honest questions about Christianity.
- Be encouraged to continue investigating the resurrection for themselves.

TEACHING APPROACH

Every group is different, and every leader has their own teaching style. This lesson can be taught as a discussion, a devotional, or a combination of both.

The goal is not to pressure students into agreeing with Christianity. Instead, invite them to investigate the resurrection honestly and consider whether the evidence supports the claim that Jesus rose from the dead.

This lesson follows the investigative approach popularized by The Case for Christ: ask questions, examine the evidence, and consider which explanation best fits what happened.

Allow students to express doubt or disagreement without making them feel judged.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

To help students understand that belief in the resurrection is not based on blind faith alone.

Students will examine four important parts of the case:

1. Jesus truly died.
2. His tomb was found empty.
3. People claimed to see Him alive.
4. His followers were radically transformed.

The lesson should encourage students to consider whether the resurrection is the best explanation for the evidence.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The resurrection is not a small part of Christianity.

It is the foundation of the Christian faith.

Jesus did not simply claim to be a teacher, prophet, or moral example. He claimed authority over sin, death, and eternal life.

If Jesus remains dead, then Christianity loses its foundation.

But if Jesus rose from the dead, then His claims must be taken seriously.

Students need to know that Christianity welcomes honest investigation. They do not have to ignore their questions or pretend to believe something they have never examined.



LEADER INSIGHT

Throughout the lesson, continually reinforce this truth:
Christian faith is not the absence of questions. It is a willingness to honestly investigate where the evidence leads.

Do not turn the lesson into an argument.

The goal is not to prove that every alternative explanation is foolish. The goal is to help students see that the resurrection claim deserves serious consideration.

? BIG QUESTION

Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

KEY SCRIPTURES

- 1 Corinthians 15:3–8
- 1 Corinthians 15:14–17
- Mark 15:42–45
- John 19:31–35
- Luke 24:1–8
- Luke 24:36–43
- John 20:19
- Acts 4:18–20

BEFORE YOU TEACH

Lesson Goal
Many students have heard the phrase:
“Jesus died and rose again.”

But they may never have stopped to ask what that statement means or why Christians believe it.

Some may assume the resurrection is simply a religious story that Christians accept without evidence.

Others may already believe it but cannot explain why.

This lesson gives students permission to ask:

- Did Jesus really die?
- Was the tomb actually empty?
- Could someone have taken the body?
- Can we trust the people who claimed to see Him?
- Why did the disciples change so dramatically?

You do not need to answer every possible objection in one lesson. Your responsibility is to introduce the evidence clearly and create space for honest discussion.

REVIEW & CONNECT
(Optional)

If this lesson follows another series or topic, briefly connect it to what students have already learned.

You could say:
“We have talked about who Jesus is and why He came. Today we are going to investigate the event that Christianity is built upon, the resurrection.”

Ask:

- What have you heard about the resurrection before?
- Do you think most people see it as history, faith, legend, or something else?
- What questions do you already have about it?

There is no pressure for students to give the “right” answer.

ICEBREAKER

Ask:
If a friend told you that something unbelievable happened, what would you need before you believed them?

Allow discussion.

Students may respond with:

- A video
- A picture
- Multiple witnesses
- Physical evidence
- A trustworthy source
- Seeing it personally

Then ask:
Would one witness be enough? What about several witnesses?

Transition:
“Christianity makes an unbelievable claim: Jesus died, was buried, and then was seen alive. Today we are going to look at the case and ask whether the evidence supports that claim.”

TEACHING POINT 1

JESUS TRULY DIED

MAIN IDEA

Before there can be a resurrection, there must first be a real death.

READ TOGETHER

Mark 15:42–45
John 19:31–35

TEACHING

One explanation sometimes offered against the resurrection is that Jesus may not have actually died.

Maybe He fainted.

Maybe He became unconscious.

Maybe He later woke up inside the tomb.

But the Gospel accounts do not describe Jesus as someone who was simply injured. Jesus was executed by Roman crucifixion.

He was beaten, nailed to a cross, and left there until His death.

In John 19, the soldiers came to the people being crucified and broke the legs of the others. This was done to speed up their deaths.

But when they came to Jesus, they did not break His legs because they saw that He was already dead.

One soldier then pierced Jesus’ side.

John 19:34–35 provides another important detail. When the Roman soldier pierced Jesus' side with a spear, John records that blood and water immediately flowed out.

Why is this significant?

Some medical interpretations suggest that the separation of blood and fluid could be consistent with severe trauma, including fluid accumulation around the heart or lungs. A ruptured heart has also been proposed as a possible explanation.

Mark adds another important detail.

Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for permission to take Jesus' body.

Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so quickly, so he called the Roman centurion and asked him to confirm it.

Only after the centurion confirmed Jesus' death did Pilate release the body.
This matters because the Roman soldiers were responsible for carrying out the execution.

Their job was not to almost kill Jesus.

Their job was to make sure He died.

Before we ever discuss an empty tomb, eyewitnesses, or the disciples, the accounts first establish something important:

Jesus was dead.

DISCUSSION QUESTION



Why is confirming Jesus' death important before discussing whether He rose again?

ILLUSTRATION IDEAS

Choose one that best fits your group.

Medical Confirmation: Before doctors officially declare that someone has died, they examine the evidence and confirm it. The resurrection claim begins with the confirmation that Jesus was truly dead.

Crime Investigation: Investigators must first establish that a death actually occurred before asking what happened afterward.

Finished Job: Imagine being assigned to complete an important task and being held responsible if you failed. The Roman soldiers were responsible for completing the execution.

TRANSITION

If Jesus truly died, the next question is:
What happened to His body?

TEACHING POINT 2

THE TOMB WAS FOUND EMPTY

MAIN IDEA

Jesus was buried, but when His followers returned, His body was no longer there.

READ TOGETHER

Luke 24:1–8

TEACHING

After Jesus died, His body was taken down from the cross and placed inside a tomb.

A group of women later returned to the tomb with spices they had prepared for His body.

Notice what they expected to find.

They expected to find Jesus dead.

They were not walking toward the tomb saying:
“Jesus is about to rise.”

They came prepared for a burial.

But when they arrived, the stone had been moved.

They entered the tomb and could not find Jesus’ body.

Then they heard the words:
“He is not here, but is risen.”

The empty tomb is an important part of the case.

However, an empty tomb by itself does not automatically prove that Jesus rose from the dead.

It creates a question:
Where was the body?

At this point, allow students to suggest other explanations.

They may say:

- Someone stole the body.
- The disciples moved it.
- The women went to the wrong tomb.
- Jesus was not actually dead.
- The story was invented later.

Let them speak.

The purpose of an investigation is to consider possible explanations.

There is also an important detail in the Gospel accounts.

The first people presented as discovering the empty tomb were women.

In the culture of that time, women did not generally carry the same public or legal authority as male witnesses.

If someone were inventing a story simply to make it sound persuasive, choosing women as the first witnesses would have been an unusual decision.

The Gospel writers do not appear to be removing inconvenient details.

They report that the women were the first to discover the tomb.

DISCUSSION QUESTION



What are some possible explanations for the empty tomb, and which explanation do you think deserves the most investigation?

ILLUSTRATION IDEAS

Choose one that best fits your group.

Missing Item: Imagine locking something valuable in a room and returning later to discover it is gone. The empty room tells you something happened, but you still need to determine what.

Crime Scene: An empty space is evidence, but investigators must ask what explanation best accounts for it.

Unexpected Witness: Sometimes a true story includes details that a storyteller would not choose if they were trying to make the story sound perfect.

TRANSITION

An empty tomb tells us that Jesus' body was gone.

But the resurrection claim does not stop there.

His followers claimed something much greater:
They said they saw Him alive.

TEACHING POINT 3

PEOPLE CLAIMED TO SEE JESUS ALIVE

MAIN IDEA

The resurrection was not presented as one person's private experience.

READ TOGETHER

1 Corinthians 15:3–8
Luke 24:36–43

TEACHING

Paul gives one of the clearest summaries of the Gospel in 1 Corinthians 15.

He says that Jesus:

- Died for our sins
- Was buried
- Rose again
- Appeared to multiple people

Paul names Peter.

He refers to the apostles.

He mentions James.

He says Jesus appeared to more than five hundred people at one time.
He also says Jesus appeared to him.

The early Christian message was not simply:
"Jesus' body disappeared."

It was:
"We saw Him alive."

Luke 24 also describes the disciples' reaction when Jesus appeared to them.

They were terrified and thought they were seeing a spirit.

Jesus invited them to look at His hands and feet.

He told them to touch Him.

Then He ate in front of them.

The Gospel accounts are not describing only a feeling, dream, or emotional memory.

The claim was physical:
The Jesus who had been crucified was standing before them alive.

One person claiming to see something unusual could be mistaken.

But the resurrection claim included appearances to different individuals and groups.

That does not force someone to believe, but it gives us evidence that should be taken seriously.

DISCUSSION QUESTION



How does the claim of multiple eyewitnesses affect the way you think about the resurrection?

ILLUSTRATION IDEAS

Choose one that best fits your group.

School Incident: If one student tells a teacher something happened, the teacher may investigate. If many students independently report the same event, the claim becomes harder to dismiss.

Courtroom Witnesses: A judge does not simply count witnesses but considers whether their testimony fits the evidence.

Group Experience: A private dream is different from a group claiming they all interacted with the same person.

TRANSITION

The disciples did not simply claim to see Jesus.

Their lives changed because of what they believed they had seen.

TEACHING POINT 4

THE DISCIPLES WERE TRANSFORMED

MAIN IDEA

The disciples changed from fearful followers into bold witnesses.

READ TOGETHER

John 20:19
Acts 4:18–20

TEACHING

Before the disciples believed Jesus had risen, they were afraid.

John 20 says they were gathered behind locked doors because they feared what might happen to them.

This makes sense.

Their teacher had just been publicly executed.

Peter had denied knowing Jesus.

The movement looked finished.

They were not planning how to spread Christianity around the world.
They were hiding.

But when we read the book of Acts, we meet very different people.

The same disciples are now speaking publicly about Jesus.

They are confronted by authorities and ordered to stop preaching.

Their response is:
“We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

Something changed them.

They went from hiding behind locked doors to publicly proclaiming that Jesus had risen.

This transformation is important evidence.

People can suffer for something that is false if they sincerely believe it is true.

But the disciples were not simply repeating something someone else told them.

They claimed that they had personally seen Jesus alive.

If they had invented the resurrection story themselves, they would have known it was false.

Yet they continued preaching even when it brought opposition, threats, and suffering.

Their courage does not automatically prove the resurrection.

But it raises an important question:
What caused such a dramatic change?

Their answer was simple:
They had seen the risen Jesus.

DISCUSSION QUESTION



What do you think could turn frightened followers into bold witnesses who refused to stop talking about Jesus?

ILLUSTRATION IDEAS

Choose one that best fits your group.

Made-Up Story: Imagine creating a lie with friends. When the lie begins costing you relationships, safety, and freedom, how long would everyone continue protecting it?

Before-and-After Picture: Transformation becomes evidence that something significant has happened.

Fear to Courage: Think of a person who is terrified of something but later becomes willing to face it because they have learned new information.

TRANSITION

Now we have to bring the pieces of the case together.

BRINGING IT TOGETHER

.Today we examined four important parts of the resurrection claim.

Jesus truly died.

Roman soldiers confirmed His death before His body was released.

The tomb was found empty.

His followers expected to find His body, but it was gone.

People claimed to see Jesus alive.

The resurrection message included multiple individuals and groups who said they encountered Him.

The disciples were transformed.

Fearful followers became bold witnesses who continued preaching even when threatened.

None of these pieces should be examined alone.

The real question is:
What explanation best accounts for all four?

The Christian answer is:
Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

That is the claim every student must eventually consider for themselves.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which part of the case stood out to you the most?
2. Which part do you find most difficult to believe?
3. Why do you think Christianity places so much importance on the resurrection?
4. What explanation do you think best accounts for the empty tomb and eyewitness claims?
5. What questions are you still wrestling with?
6. If Jesus truly rose from the dead, what might that tell us about Him?

PRACTICAL CHALLENGE

This week, read 1 Corinthians 15:1–20.

As you read, ask yourself:

- What does Paul say happened to Jesus?
- Who does Paul say saw Him?
- Why does Paul believe the resurrection matters?
- What would Christianity become if Jesus did not rise?

Write down one observation and one question.

Bring both to the next discussion.

CLOSING
PRAYER GUIDE

Prayer Points

- Thank God for giving us the freedom to ask honest questions.
- Pray for wisdom and understanding as students investigate the resurrection.
- Pray for students who are struggling with doubt.
- Ask Jesus to reveal who He is.
- Pray that each student would be willing to follow the truth wherever it leads.
- Pray over any questions or needs shared by the group.

You could close with a simple prayer such as:

“Jesus, thank You for meeting us in our questions. Help us understand the truth about Your death and resurrection. Give us open minds, honest hearts, and the courage to follow the evidence wherever it leads. Amen.”

LEADER REFLECTION

After the lesson, consider:

- Did students feel safe asking difficult questions?
- Which piece of evidence connected most strongly with the group?
- Did the lesson feel like an investigation rather than an argument?
- Were students able to explain why the resurrection matters to Christianity?
- Which questions need further research or follow-up?
- Is there anyone I should speak with personally before the next lesson?

FINAL ENCOURAGEMENT TO LEADERS

You do not need to have every answer.

Some students may raise questions you have never considered before.

It is okay to say:
“That is a good question. I do not know the full answer yet, but I would be happy to investigate it with you.”

Honesty builds trust.

The purpose of this lesson is not to force students to reach a conclusion immediately.

It is to show them that the resurrection is worth investigating.

End the conversation by preparing them for the next lesson:
“Today we asked whether Jesus really rose from the dead. Next time, we will ask an even more personal question: If He rose, what does that change for us?”

This lesson follows the leader-ready structure you provided, including the teaching approach, purpose, outcomes, teaching-point format, practical challenge, prayer guide, and leader reflection sections.