

The Resurrection of Jesus is either the greatest HOAX of history OR it is the greatest HOPE of History. Today we explore the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, and what impact this event from 2000 years ago should have on us today.

If Jesus rose from the dead, we can trust what He said...about everything - relationships with God & people, money & material possessions, sin & forgiveness, heaven & hell. If Jesus DIDN'T RISE from the dead, then Christianity crumbles, as it's most important claim - the resurrection of Jesus - is a LIE. Look at how the apostle Paul put it.

1 Corinthians 15:14-19 (NLT) ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, **then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless.** ¹⁵ And we apostles would all be **lying about God**—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. ¹⁶ And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁷ And **if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins.** ¹⁸ In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! ¹⁹ And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.

The early followers of Jesus recognized that His resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. If Jesus rose from the dead, we can trust what He said - this is our great HOPE. If not, **we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world** for being duped by this hoax.

While **Good Friday** as the most appreciated day in all of history, **Resurrection Sunday** is the most celebrated day in all of history...

WHAT 'CHRISTIAN' SKEPTICS SAY

"The Jesus Seminar", a group of liberal 'Christians' have concluded that much of what is in the Gospels about Jesus is simply mythical, voting that 82% of the words ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels were not actually spoken by him.¹

🕒 Seminar Co-Founder **John Dominic Crossan** disputes Jesus healed diseases and says, *"I do not think that anyone, anywhere, at any time brings dead people back to life."*²

Any wonder that many in *The Jesus Seminar* conclude Jesus was not raised from the dead either?

🕒 **Jarl Fossum** is another skeptical scholar (not part of the Jesus Seminar) confidently claims: *"It can be asserted that Jesus really did raise the girl from the dead—which would only reflect fundamentalist naïveté."*³

In other words, it is naive, childish, immature - to believe that Jesus raised people from the dead. IS THAT RIGHT?

¹ Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1996), 122.

² Ibid., 123

³ Ibid.

WHAT NON-CHRISTIAN SKEPTICS SAID

- **Josephus**, Jewish historian for the Romans, wrote *The Antiquities* (AD 90–95). Though not a follower of Jesus, Josephus speaks about many persons and events of first century Palestine and makes two references to Jesus.⁴ Although there is a Greek document that has long been disputed, an Arabic document has been discovered which proves its basic contents true.

At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.⁵

- **Tacitus** writing around AD 115 about the great fire in Rome during the reign of Nero:

Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome... - Tacitus⁶

- **Emperor Claudius** orders prohibition against disturbing graves.

In **1878** a marble slab was discovered at Nazareth, describing itself as an “ordinance of Caesar.” The message was a strict prohibition against the disturbing of graves. Scholars generally agree that it was **issued by Claudius between AD 41–54** (just a few years after the resurrection of Jesus). The inscription was written in Greek, translated as follows:

Ordinance of Caesar. It is my pleasure that graves and tombs remain perpetually undisturbed...Let it be absolutely forbidden for anyone to disturb them. In case of violation I desire that the offender be sentenced to capital punishment on charge of violation of sepulchre.⁷

- **Pliny**, a Roman governor **wrote to Emperor Trajan around A.D. 112** to see how to deal with these Christians, who were causing some real trouble. Pliny noticed that the Christian influence caused many of the pagan temples to become nearly deserted, severely impacting businesses that profited from selling idols and sacrifices. Pliny writes:

*They (the Christians) were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when **they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god**, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.⁸*

⁴ Habermas, 192.

⁵ Ibid., 193-94.

⁶ Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44.

⁷ Paul Maier, *First Easter*, 119.

⁸ Habermas, 199.

Pliny interrogated Christians under the threat of death. If they continued firm in their belief, he ordered them to be executed. Sometimes the punishment included torture to obtain desired information. If they denied being Christians, they followed Pliny in a prayer to pagan gods, and worshipped an image of Emperor Trajan. Afterwards they “finally cursed Christ.” Pliny explained that his purpose in all this was that “multitudes may be reclaimed from error.”⁹

To recap, here's what the extra-biblical, non-Christian sources say:

- Followers of Jesus claimed Jesus was alive (and no body was found).
- Shortly after the crucifixion of Jesus under Pontius Pilate, a “mischievous superstition” spread from Judea to Rome.
- It is likely that the claim of Jesus' resurrection influenced Claudius to warn of capital punishment for those who disturbed tombs and corpses in the future.
- Although Jesus had been crucified, this ‘superstition’ of resurrection caused people to live with integrity and sing songs to Jesus as if He were a God. Many endured harsh persecution & even death because they claimed to follow a resurrected leader.

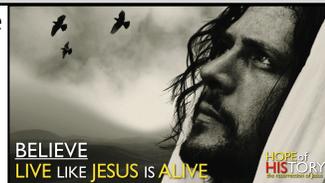
WHAT 3 FIRST CENTURY SKEPTICS SAID

JAMES. James is believed by most scholars to be the half-brother of Jesus, that is - a son of Mary and Joseph. The eyewitnesses write that James and his brothers didn't believe in Jesus for quite a long time. But something happened that changed all that. He later calls himself “*a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.*” (James 1:1) James becomes the leader of the church in Jerusalem, the very city Jesus was crucified in...and where He rose from the dead. What could account for this transformation?

1 Corinthians 15:3-7 (NLT) ³ I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. ⁴ He was buried, and **he was raised from the dead** on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. ⁵ He was **seen by Peter** and then by **the Twelve**. ⁶ After that, he was **seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time**, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he was seen by **James** and later by all the apostles.

James was skeptical. It wasn't until AFTER Jesus raised from the dead, that Jacob (aka James) began to BELIEVE.

BELIEVE: Live like Jesus is ALIVE



PAUL. Paul is writing this letter.

1 Corinthians 15:8-9 (NLT) ⁸ Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him. ⁹ For I am the least of all the apostles. In fact, I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted God's church.

Paul wasn't just skeptical. Paul was killing Christians. But something happened! He changed teams! Paul began to...

BELIEVE: Live like Jesus is ALIVE

⁹ Ibid., 198.

'Doubting' THOMAS. When Jesus first appeared to the other apostles Thomas was absent. Thomas had to see for himself to believe.

John 20:26-28 (NIV) ²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. **Stop doubting and believe.**" ²⁸ Thomas said to him, **"My Lord and my God!"**

This was no mere statement of surprise or even praise to God. It has been written that the phrase "My Lord and God" was 'the birth-cry of Christendom.'¹⁰ Jesus is both our Lord and our God - our **Leader** & our **Creator**.

And it is *this belief* that transformed the followers of Jesus **from fearful spectators** to **courageous participants**. This is what led to many of their deaths as they chose to DIE rather than DENY their resurrected Lord and God. These men and women began to...

BELIEVE: Live like Jesus is ALIVE

John 20:29 (NIV) ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, **you have believed;** blessed are **those who have not seen and yet have believed.**"

Now WHO is THAT? **Those who have never seen but have believed...that's us!** In fact, this writing we call John, gives us the reason WHY we're even reading this:

John 20:30-31 (NIV) ³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written **that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

Get honest with yourself. **Do YOU believe?**

Do you LIVE like Jesus is ALIVE? Evaluate your life for a moment. Do your Attitudes, Abilities, Words, Thoughts, Relationships, Job, Stuff, Time...reflect what you say you believe?

2 RIGHTEOUS RESPONSES

1. **Thank Jesus.**

2. **Turn TO Jesus.** Trust Him with your past. Trust Him with your future. **Believe!**