



KYLE LAURIANO

REAL TESTIMONIES.
RADICAL TRANSFORMATIONS.

SKEPTIC

THE RESURRECTION EVIDENCE: WHY THE HISTORICAL CASE IS COMPELLING

Real Testimonies. Radical Transformations.

KYLE LAURIANO MINISTRY



THE RESURRECTION EVIDENCE: WHY THE HISTORICAL CASE IS COMPELLING



INTRODUCTION: THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION IN HISTORY

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not just a religious claim—it's a historical claim that can be investigated like any other event in history. If Jesus really rose from the dead, it validates everything he said about himself and transforms our understanding of reality itself.

This guide examines the historical evidence for the resurrection using the same methods historians use to verify other ancient events. We'll look at facts that even skeptical scholars accept, and see why many former atheists and skeptics have concluded that the resurrection is the best explanation for the data.

THE HISTORICAL METHOD: HOW WE KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE PAST

CRITERIA HISTORIANS USE

Historians determine historical facts using several established criteria:

1. **Multiple Attestation:** Multiple independent sources reporting the same event
2. **Enemy Attestation:** Even hostile sources confirming basic facts
3. **Embarrassing Details:** Information that authors wouldn't invent because it's awkward or problematic
4. **Early Dating:** How soon after the events were the accounts written?
5. **Explanatory Power:** Does the explanation account for all the data?

We'll apply these same criteria to the resurrection.

FACT #1: JESUS DIED BY CRUCIFIXION

VIRTUALLY UNIVERSAL ACCEPTANCE

Even the most skeptical scholars accept that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate around AD 30-33. This is confirmed by:

Biblical Sources:

- All four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)
- Paul's letters (written 20-30 years after the event)
- Acts of the Apostles

Non-Christian Sources:

- **Josephus** (Jewish historian, AD 93-94): "Pilate condemned him to be crucified"
- **Tacitus** (Roman historian, AD 116): "Christus...suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus"
- **Lucian of Samosata** (Greek satirist, AD 165): Mocks Christians for worshiping "the man who was crucified in Palestine"
- **The Talmud** (Jewish source): Confirms Jesus was executed

WHY THIS MATTERS

The fact of crucifixion is crucial because:

1. It means Jesus actually died (not just unconscious)

2. Roman executioners were professionals—they didn't make mistakes
 3. The spear thrust into his side (John 19:34) confirmed death
 4. Jesus was placed in a tomb, not left on the cross
-

FACT #2: JESUS' TOMB WAS FOUND EMPTY

MULTIPLE LINES OF EVIDENCE

1. All Four Gospels Report It

- Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John all explicitly state the tomb was empty
- Written within one generation while eyewitnesses were alive

2. Women as First Witnesses

This is perhaps the strongest evidence for authenticity:

- In first-century Jewish culture, women's testimony wasn't considered reliable in court
- If you were inventing a story, you would NEVER use women as your primary witnesses
- The fact that all four Gospels report women discovering the empty tomb suggests historical accuracy

Mark 16:1-8: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome find the tomb empty

3. Jerusalem Factor

- The resurrection was proclaimed in Jerusalem—the very city where Jesus was executed
- If the tomb wasn't empty, authorities could have simply produced the body

- Early Christian preaching in Jerusalem makes no sense unless the tomb was actually empty

4. No Counter-Narrative Exists

- Jewish authorities never claimed they had the body
- Instead, Matthew 28:11-15 records they bribed guards to say disciples stole the body
- This admission confirms: (a) the tomb was empty, (b) they couldn't explain it

WHAT SKEPTICAL SCHOLARS SAY

Gary Habermas surveyed scholarly literature and found that approximately 75% of scholars across the theological spectrum accept the empty tomb as historical fact.

Gerd Lüdemann (atheist New Testament scholar): "It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus's death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ."

FACT #3: THE DISCIPLES CLAIMED TO SEE THE RISEN JESUS

THE APPEARANCE TRADITIONS

The 1 Corinthians 15 Creed (AD 30-35)

This is the earliest record we have, written by Paul in the mid-50s AD, but containing a creed that dates to within 3-7 years of the crucifixion:

"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also."

— 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

Why This Is Remarkable

1. **Early Dating:** Written 20-25 years after Jesus' death, but the creed itself is 3-7 years after

2. **Multiple Independent Witnesses:** Peter, the Twelve, 500+ people, James, all the apostles, Paul
3. **Public Verifiability:** Paul says "most of whom are still living"—inviting investigation
4. **Enemy Attestation:** Paul was a persecutor of Christians before his conversion

THE GOSPEL ACCOUNTS

Different Perspectives, Same Core:

- **Matthew 28:** Women at tomb, guards bribed, Great Commission
- **Mark 16:** Women find empty tomb, young man announces resurrection
- **Luke 24:** Road to Emmaus, Jesus eats fish, ascension
- **John 20-21:** Mary Magdalene, doubting Thomas, breakfast by the sea

The variations in detail are exactly what you'd expect from independent eyewitness testimony. If the accounts were identical, that would suggest collusion or copying.

FACT #4: THE DISCIPLES WERE TRANSFORMED

BEFORE THE RESURRECTION: FEAR AND DENIAL

- **Peter denied Jesus three times** (Mark 14:66-72)
- **All disciples fled when Jesus was arrested** (Mark 14:50)
- **They hid behind locked doors in fear** (John 20:19)
- **They were utterly hopeless** (Luke 24:21)

AFTER THE RESURRECTION: BOLD PROCLAMATION

- **Peter preached publicly in Jerusalem** 50 days after crucifixion (Acts 2)
- **3,000 people converted in one day** in the city where Jesus was executed (Acts 2:41)
- **All apostles except John were martyred** for claiming Jesus rose
- **Early church exploded despite intense persecution**

WHAT CHANGED?

Something dramatic happened to transform cowardly fugitives into bold martyrs. The disciples didn't just believe Jesus rose—they claimed they saw him, talked with him, ate with him, and touched him.

Critical Question: What could cause such a radical transformation?

- Not mass hallucination (hallucinations are individual, not group experiences)
 - Not legend (too early, written while eyewitnesses alive)
 - Not delusion (they were depressed and hopeless, not expecting resurrection)
-

FACT #5: THE CONVERSION OF PAUL

FROM PERSECUTOR TO APOSTLE

Before:

- Pharisee, zealous for Jewish law
- Actively persecuted Christians (Acts 7:58-8:3)
- Witnessed and approved Stephen's stoning
- Sought to imprison and kill Christians

After:

- Claimed to see the risen Christ (Acts 9, 1 Corinthians 15:8)
- Immediately began preaching Jesus as Lord
- Suffered beatings, imprisonment, shipwrecks for the faith
- Ultimately executed in Rome for preaching Jesus

WHY THIS MATTERS

Paul had **everything to lose**:

- Status as a Pharisee
- Respect in Jewish community
- Personal safety
- Comfortable life

What He Wrote:

"But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things."

— Philippians 3:7-8

FACT #6: THE CONVERSION OF JAMES

JESUS' SKEPTICAL BROTHER

During Jesus' Ministry:

- James and Jesus' other brothers **did not believe** in him (John 7:5)
- They thought he was "out of his mind" (Mark 3:21)
- Growing up with Jesus, they saw his humanity—hard to accept his deity

After the Resurrection:

- **1 Corinthians 15:7** records Jesus appeared to James
- James became a leader of the Jerusalem church (Galatians 1:19)
- Wrote the Epistle of James
- **Martyred** for his faith according to Josephus (AD 62)

WHY THIS IS SIGNIFICANT

Family members are often the **hardest to convince**. They know you too well. James went from skeptic to martyr. What changed his mind?

The only explanation given in the sources: **he saw the risen Jesus**.

ALTERNATIVE THEORIES: DO THEY FIT THE FACTS?

THEORY #1: THE DISCIPLES STOLE THE BODY

Problems:

1. The tomb was guarded by Roman soldiers (Matthew 27:62-66)
2. Disciples were hiding in fear—not planning a heist
3. They were willing to die for what they claimed to have seen
4. People die for what they believe is true, not for what they know is a lie

Matthew 28:11-15 records that Jewish authorities bribed guards to spread this story, acknowledging the tomb was empty.

THEORY #2: JESUS DIDN'T REALLY DIE (SWOON THEORY)

Problems:

1. Roman executioners were professionals—they didn't make mistakes
2. Jesus was scourged (shredded back), crucified (nailed hands and feet), speared in the side
3. Even if he survived, he'd be a bloody, broken mess—not a triumphant risen Lord

4. How would a barely-alive Jesus convince disciples he conquered death?
5. Josephus records that even survivors of crucifixion rarely lived

Medical Analysis: The Journal of the American Medical Association (1986) analyzed Jesus' crucifixion and concluded he definitely died.

THEORY #3: WRONG TOMB

Problems:

1. Women knew where the tomb was—they watched the burial (Mark 15:47)
2. Joseph of Arimathea owned the tomb—everyone knew its location
3. If wrong tomb, authorities could have easily produced the body from the right tomb
4. Disciples proclaimed resurrection in Jerusalem—wrong tomb would be exposed immediately

THEORY #4: HALLUCINATIONS

Problems:

1. Hallucinations are individual experiences, not group phenomena
2. Different people at different times and places reported seeing Jesus
3. More than 500 people at once (1 Cor. 15:6)—mass hallucination is psychologically impossible

4. Hallucinations don't eat fish (Luke 24:42-43) or cook breakfast (John 21:9-14)
5. Jesus appeared to skeptics (James, Paul)—not just believers expecting it

Dr. Gary Collins (psychologist): "Hallucinations are individual occurrences. By their very nature, only one person can see any given hallucination at a time. They certainly are not something which can be seen by a group of people."

THEORY #5: LEGEND DEVELOPED OVER TIME

Problems:

1. **Too early:** 1 Corinthians 15 creed dates to 3-7 years after crucifixion
2. **Eyewitnesses alive:** Luke 1:1-2 emphasizes eyewitness testimony
3. **Hostile witnesses:** Jewish and Roman sources hostile to Christianity still confirm basic facts
4. **Not enough time:** Legends typically take generations to develop

A.N. Sherwin-White (Oxford historian): "For Acts, the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming...any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd."

THE BEST EXPLANATION: JESUS ACTUALLY ROSE

INFERENCE TO THE BEST EXPLANATION

Historians use "inference to the best explanation"—which hypothesis best accounts for all the data?

The resurrection hypothesis explains:

1. ✓ The empty tomb
2. ✓ The post-mortem appearances
3. ✓ The transformation of the disciples
4. ✓ The conversion of skeptics (Paul, James)
5. ✓ The emergence of the Christian church
6. ✓ The change of the Sabbath to Sunday
7. ✓ The willingness of early Christians to suffer and die

No naturalistic theory explains all the facts. Each attempts to explain one or two data points but fails to account for the others.

WHAT SCHOLARS SAY

Dr. William Lane Craig (philosopher): "The hypothesis of the resurrection...is greatly superior to any of its rival hypotheses in fulfilling the conditions for being the best explanation."

Dr. N.T. Wright (New Testament scholar): "The only explanation that accounts for all the data is that Jesus really did rise from the dead."

Dr. Gary Habermas: After surveying 3,400+ scholarly publications on the resurrection, he found that the majority of scholars—across the theological spectrum—accept:

- Jesus died by crucifixion
 - Disciples believed they saw the risen Jesus
 - Conversion of Paul
 - Conversion of James
 - Empty tomb (75% of scholars)
-

CONCLUSION: THE EVIDENCE DEMANDS A VERDICT

The resurrection of Jesus is not a blind leap of faith—it's a historically grounded conclusion based on solid evidence. As Lee Strobel (former atheist investigative journalist) writes:

"In light of the convincing facts I had learned during my investigation, in the face of this overwhelming avalanche of evidence in the case for Christ, the great irony was this: it would require much more faith for me to maintain my atheism than to trust in Jesus of Nazareth!"

The question is not whether there is evidence for the resurrection—there is substantial evidence. The question is: **Are you willing to follow the evidence wherever it leads?**

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

If Jesus rose from the dead:

1. **His claims about himself are true** (he is God in human flesh)
2. **His sacrifice for sins is effective** (death is defeated)
3. **His promises about eternal life are reliable** (we will also rise)
4. **Your response matters eternally** (what you do with Jesus determines your destiny)

The evidence is there. The decision is yours.

NEXT STEPS

FOR SKEPTICS:

1. **Investigate further:** Read Lee Strobel's "The Case for Christ" or N.T. Wright's "The Resurrection of the Son of God"
2. **Examine the primary sources:** Read the Gospels and 1 Corinthians 15
3. **Talk to a Christian:** Find someone who can answer your questions
4. **Pray honestly:** "God, if you're real, show me"

FOR BELIEVERS:

1. **Be confident:** The resurrection is not wishful thinking—it's historical
 2. **Share the evidence:** Help others see the solid ground Christianity stands on
 3. **Live in light of the resurrection:** If Jesus rose, everything changes
-

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

BOOKS

- **"The Case for Christ"** by Lee Strobel (beginner)
- **"Cold-Case Christianity"** by J. Warner Wallace (intermediate)
- **"The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach"** by Michael Licona (advanced)
- **"The Resurrection of the Son of God"** by N.T. Wright (comprehensive)

VIDEOS

- **William Lane Craig debates** on YouTube
- **"The Case for Christ"** movie (2017)
- **Gary Habermas lectures** on the minimal facts approach

WEBSITES

- **ReasonableFaith.org** - William Lane Craig's ministry
- **STR.org** (Stand to Reason) - Greg Koukl
- **Apologetics315.com** - Comprehensive apologetics resources

About the Author: Kyle Lauriano is a Christian apologist, evangelist, and teacher passionate about helping skeptics discover the historical reliability of the Christian faith. He has

personally witnessed hundreds of former atheists and skeptics come to faith through examining the evidence.

© 2025 Kyle Lauriano Ministry. This resource is free to share and distribute.