

The Irrefutable Resurrection of Jesus

N. T. Wright, a New Testament scholar, wrote a 700 page book on *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Wright gives a very important definition of resurrection: “Resurrection is not life after death, but life after life after death” (pages 30-31). This definition distinguishes between those who believe there is life after death but do not adhere to a physical resurrection of the body. For example, some people believe in resuscitation. An EMT can bring back to life a person clinically dead with CPR. Jesus resuscitated Lazarus, but Lazarus died again. That same person who believes in resuscitation may not believe in resurrection from permanent death.

Someone else may believe in reincarnation but not resurrection. Reincarnation is the Hindu and New Age belief that a person’s soul at death travels to another person’s body for succeeding generations until it reaches the ultimate reality of the divine. Hebrews 9:27 states correctly that “it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” There is no recycling of the soul.

Christianity began in a culture that did not believe in the resurrection of the body. The pagan thinkers and writers rejected a literal, physical resurrection of the body. Pagan influencers like Homer, Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero all dismissed resurrection as impossible and even undesirable. The physical body was considered evil and a prison from which the soul was set free at death.

Even in Judaism, the religion of the Jews of Jesus’ day, did not believe in an individual’s resurrection but for different reasons from the pagans. The Jews believed death to be a tragedy. But for an individual to be resurrected in the middle of history would be seen as unfair to the rest of humanity left suffering. William Lane Craig documents that Judaism believed that at the end of human history there would be “a general resurrection of the people, not the resurrection an isolated individual” (*Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship reinvents the historical Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, 160).

Today there are skeptics as well. Mark Driscoll exposes *The Jesus Seminar* member John Shelly Spong. Spong, an Episcopal bishop, denies resurrection and believes Jesus’ body was thrown in a common grave along with the other crucifixion victims. Subsequently, he says the ‘Easter moment’ happened to Peter, not to Jesus. Peter saw Jesus alive in ‘the heart of God’ and began to open the eyes of the other disciples to this reality. Spong writes, ‘That was the dawn of Easter in human history. It would be fair to say that in that moment Simon felt resurrected’ (Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears. *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2010, 300.)

Luke, in contrast to the skeptics, says in Acts 1:3 that there are “many infallible proofs” of the literal resurrection of Christ from the dead. One of the irrefutable proofs is the empty tomb; but not the empty tomb by itself. The empty tomb along with the many post-resurrection sightings of Christ in His resurrection body build an irrefutable case.

The Empty Tomb

The critics argue that the corpse of Christ could have been stolen to produce an empty tomb. This argument is refutable. Did the friends of Christ steal His body? Is it reasonable to believe that these followers of Christ who were men and women of integrity would lie about Christ being raised from the dead and then die for a hoax? People do not die for a fraud.

If the friends of Christ did not remove the body of Christ then His enemies must have, say the skeptics. If this were the case why did they not simply display the rotting corpse of Christ when the disciples were preaching that Christ was resurrected and end the nonsense? They did not, however, bring forth Christ's dead body as exhibit "A".

What makes the empty tomb irrefutable proof for Jesus' resurrection are the at least ten sightings of Christ during the forty days following His resurrection. Christ appeared to different individuals and groups in various locations for one month.

The Total Transformation of Jesus' Disciples

In addition to the post-resurrection appearances was the total transformation of the individuals to whom Christ revealed Himself. After Jesus was crucified by the Jews and the Romans, His followers feared for their lives and cowered behind bolted doors (John 20:19-21). But when Jesus appeared to them in His resurrection body, they believed. They saw the nail prints in His hands and feet. They touched His physical body. They saw Him eat. Then they rushed into the market place witnessing to His resurrection. The center piece of their preaching was the resurrection of Christ. 13 of the 28 chapters in Acts include resurrection preaching. Many of them died for this message. Pascal said, "I believe those witnesses that get their throats cut" (Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*. New York: Dutton, 2008, 210). They did not die for a lie but for their risen Savior.

James the Younger, Half-Brother of Jesus

One of the followers that I would like to focus on was James, the younger, half-brother of Jesus. Jesus was of course Mary's firstborn and virgin born Son. Mary was Jesus' mother but Joseph was not His father. God was Jesus' Father. After the birth of Jesus, however, Joseph and Mary consummated their marriage and had other children. The next born was James. We believe this because in the texts that list the brothers of Jesus, James is always first.

I have often thought, perhaps, it was frustrating to grow up as the younger, half-brother of Jesus. Any time James misbehaved, I imagine Mary saying, "James why can't you be like your brother Jesus?" Well, it is obvious why James could not behave like Jesus. Jesus was and is the perfect, sinless Son of God.

Or maybe Jesus would tell James to do something. For example, they were working in Joseph's carpenter shop and Jesus tells James, "James we need some more lumber." James could have responded, like my three younger brothers sometimes responded to me at home, "I ain't your slave!" It could have been difficult living with Jesus as your older half-brother.

These two brothers eventually grew up and James listen to Jesus preach, saw Him opened blinded eyes, and also heard Jesus claim to be the Old Testament predicted Messiah, Son of God, and Savior of the world. There is a remarkable statement in John 7:5 about the home life of James and Jesus: “For neither did his brothers believe in him.” The siblings who grew up in the same home with Jesus did not except Him as their Savior while He was in their home.

But then came that dark day when James saw his older half-brother crucified. James saw the Romans drive nails through the hands and feet of Jesus. James also observed the Roman soldier, the professional executioner whose duty was to ensure the death of the crucified criminal, drive the spear not only through the side of Jesus but into His heart. James painfully watched the soldiers take the dead, limp, and blood soaked body of Jesus off the cross and place him in the tomb.

On the third day, however, Jesus arose from the dead and started appearing to people. Paul records in 1st Corinthians 15 that Jesus in His resurrected body appeared to Peter, the twelve apostles, and five hundred brethren at one time. Then very significantly, Paul records that Jesus appeared to James, His younger half-brother. It seems almost as if Jesus determined to reveal Himself to His younger brother. Then James could pass on the news to the rest of the family. What a revelation that must have been for James when he saw Jesus with the nail prints in His hands and feet. Surely, James exclaimed, “You really are the Messiah, Son of God, and Savior of the world.” It is believed this is time when James trusted his older half-brother as his Savior.

James not only trusted Christ as his Savior but he surrendered to Him as His servant. James was eventually called to preach and pastor the most prominent church in the first century, the church of Jerusalem. He also wrote the Epistle that bears his name.

Remember how we imagined the way James must have responded to Jesus telling him to do something when they were younger and at home, “I ain’t your slave!” Listen now to how James opens his Epistle in James 1:1, “James, a bondman or slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Now when James’ older half-brother would tell him to do something, James’ reply was: “I am your slave!” “I am your slave and witness of your resurrection to my death if necessary!” And so he was. Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, reports that the enemies of James’ older half-brother threw James from the top of the temple and then beat him to death.

What transformed James from a sibling who refused to believe in Jesus as his Savior when they lived together at home to a follower who died for him? The resurrection of Jesus. James met his older half-brother in His resurrection body.

Practical Results of the Resurrection of Jesus

- Because Jesus arose from the dead, you and I can have our sins forgiven according to 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.
- Because Jesus arose from the dead, He is alive in you and I who know Christ. We can experience the power that raised Him from the dead to live for Him as explained in Ephesians 1:19-21. What enabled the disciple to live for Christ even to their death? The power of Jesus’ resurrection. They were not only eyewitnesses of His resurrection but

recipients of His power for living. We can say with Paul: “I am crucified with Christ nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me.”

- Because Jesus arose from the dead, you and I will also experience life after life after death.

Have you trusted the resurrected Christ and surrendered to be His slave? You can right now. Paul informs each sinner how to be saved in Romans 10:9, “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” Respond to the irrefutable evidence and bow before the Resurrected Christ.