

Truth Series: Lesson 6

How Do We Know that Jesus Rose from the Dead?

Life Question:

How do I know Jesus really rose from the dead?

Scripture:

Matthew 28:1-10

Key Passage:

Matthew 28:1-10

Reality Impact:

Students will understand the evidence that Christ rose from the grave.

Materials needed:

Napoleon Dynamite Video

Jesus Film

Communion Items

- I. **Prayer:** Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide students through **encouragement**, **ownership** and **conviction** of the truth of the **resurrection**.

II. Introduction

- a. **Illustration:** Video Clip—Napoleon Dynamite
Just before Pedro walked out on stage to give his class president speech to the student body, the principal told him he needed a skit. The news shocked Pedro—no one had told him he needed a skit! Pedro shrugged and delivered his speech. Meanwhile Napoleon grabbed a disco tape and took it to the sound guys back stage. Once Pedro finished his speech, Napoleon entered and performed... *THE DANCE*. Afterward, he and Deb renewed their friendship in a ferocious game of tetherball.
 - i. **Application:** *THE DANCE* is the capstone of the movie, Napoleon Dynamite. Every scene sets the audience up for the dance, (and it's probably the only funny scene in the entire movie). Without the dance, Napoleon Dynamite would not have made any sense. (Not that it made sense to begin with....) It all comes down to the dance scene.
- b. **Review**—Let's review what we learned these last five weeks:
 - i. The accuracy and authenticity of the Bible
 - ii. The truth of the Bible
 - i. The evidence that God exists
 - i. The evidence that Jesus is the Christ

- ii. The evidence that Jesus died on the cross.
- c. This week, we are going to discuss Christ's resurrection. Why is the resurrection important? Let's look at scripture.
- i. **Scripture:** I Corinthians 15:14, 17-19
¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.... ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.
 - ii. How important is the resurrection? Hank Hanegraff on the website, <http://www.equip.org/free/dr153.htm>, tells us, "The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the very capstone in the arch of Christianity. When it is removed all else crumbles. It is, in fact, the singular doctrine that elevated Christianity above all the pagan religions of the Mediterranean world. And it is precisely because of its strategic importance to the Christian faith that each person who takes the sacred name *Christian* upon his lips must be prepared to defend its historicity."¹
 - 1. **Scripture:** Matthew 28:1-10
¹After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.
²There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.
⁵The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."
⁸So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." NIV
- d. **Transition:** Yes, Christ did rise from the dead. This miracle is the foundation of our identity as Christians. If Christ did not rise from the dead, our faith is baseless, useless, and in all other ways, pointless.

- i. We do not mean for our discussion tonight to convert you. We want to allow the evidence stand on its own.
- e. If you think people arguments over Jesus' death, you should see their reactions when you tell them He rose from the dead! Countless times, many people have tried to disprove the resurrection. Unfortunately for them, the evidence in favor of the resurrection is too overwhelming. No one can intelligently dispute it. Even with the knowledge we possess today, skeptics still offer their own theories on the resurrection:
- i. Jesus never died—We covered this last week. The guy died. Get over it.
 - ii. The whole thing's a myth. Never happened.
 - iii. A resurrection is a miracle and therefore impossible.
 - iv. Those who saw Christ were hallucinating.
 - v. Mistaken Identity—they saw someone other than Jesus.
 - vi. They had the wrong grave.
 - vii. The disciples stole the body.
- f. **Illustration:** If God Appeared before You!

I first began to understand this the summer between my ninth- and tenth-grade years.

My next-door neighbor was two years ahead of me in school and a bright and argumentative nonbeliever. Many warm evenings we would argue about the existence of God until late at night. To a stalemate. It was so clear to me that God did exist, it was obvious to him that He didn't, or so he argued.

One evening the insight came to me from the parable Jesus told about the rich man and the beggar, Lazarus. In the parable, Jesus told of how the rich man, after a life of callous selfishness, ended up burning in hell and watching from afar the bliss of Lazarus in heaven at Abraham's side. The rich man begged for help. Would Abraham please dip his finger in water to cool his tongue? No, he couldn't. Would he then send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his brothers who awaited the same fate if they did not change their ways? No, he wouldn't. Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them."

The formerly rich man didn't think that was enough. But if someone actually came back from the grave to warn them—perhaps like Marley to Scrooge in Dickens' A Christmas Carol—then they would believe and repent, wouldn't they? Abraham's answer is instructive: "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:19-31). Even seeing won't be believing if they aren't willing to obey.

So I put the question to my friend: "If God appeared before us, right here, on the front porch of this house, and you knew beyond any doubt that it was actually God standing there, would you commit your life to Him to obey all His laws?"

In a moment of unguarded candor, he said, "Well, I'd have to think about that." His answer explained his inability to believe, to know. I've come to believe that I won't hear from God unless I am first willing to act on what I've heard.

God hides Himself from those who refuse to obey, so that “they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!” (Mark 4:12).²

- i. The challenge isn’t proof or facts—it is obedience to the convection of the Spirit and the salvation grace through faith alone (Romans 5).
- g. **Transition:** We need to understand that our job is not to convince, but to share truth through the love of Christ. Regardless of our level of intelligence or scholastic accomplishment, we need to educate ourselves about the resurrection so we can share that truth. Let’s dissect the arguments. We’ll start with the easiest ones first.

III. The resurrection was only a myth.

- a. Critics claim that the Bible’s stories of Christ’s resurrection are myth or a legend—not history. This claim fails for at least FOUR REASONS.³
 - i. Myths usually develop over a number of generations. The Bible’s story of Jesus developed over less than one.
 - ii. Many eyewitnesses to Christ’s public ministry were hostile toward the Jesus the Gospels describe (Matthew 12:22), which makes for a poor legendary hero.
 - iii. The Gospels are unlike both Greek myth and Jewish legend. The Gospels understate, lack embellishment, and contain details counterproductive to the invention of legendary heroes.
 - iv. No other culture has opposed mythically confusing deity with humanity as much as the Jewish culture.
- b. What do scholars have to say about it?
 - i. M. Grant writes, “Judaism was a milieu to which doctrines of deaths and rebirths of mythical gods seems so entirely foreign that the emergence of such a fabrication from its midst is very hard to credit.”⁴
 - ii. Oxford’s N. T. Wright demolishes the theory that that the Gospels are Jewish legend and therefore fantasy in his book, *Who Was Jesus?*⁵
 - iii. Paul Barnett, Peter Jensen and David Peterson wrote *Resurrection: Truth and Reality: Three Scholars Reply to Bishop Spong* (Aquila, 1994). (Bishop Spong proposed that Jesus was simply a product of Jewish legend.)⁶

IV. The resurrection was a miracle and therefore impossible.

- a. Many doubt Christ’s actual resurrection for one of two reasons:
 - i. They don’t believe in miracles. This means they don’t believe in God, which means you probably need to discuss how you know God exists before you discuss Jesus.

- ii. They believe Jesus could have done small healings, but actually rising from the grave is too difficult—more difficult than say, parting the Red Sea or making the earth stand still for a day.
- b. Let's look at the evidence. Christ's miracles and resurrection show us that He was and is the Christ.
- c. We might debate His authenticity over one two or possibly five miracles, but how can we explain away ALL of the miracles of Christ?

V. **Everyone was hallucinating!**⁷

- a. This theory summarized states, "They were seeing things."
- b. "The Christian gospel message about the death and resurrection of Christ breathes through virtually every New Testament document. So the real question is, how do we account for their obvious conviction? Were they just hallucinating?"⁸
- c. While perhaps at first sounding plausible, the facts surrounding Jesus' resurrection contradict such a notion. To name a few⁹:
 - i. Over hundreds of witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:5-8).
 - ii. The spectrum of the witness's personality types (e.g., John 20—Peter, Thomas, the two Marys, etc.) makes the theory of hallucinations difficult to believe. How could so many different types of people, from anal-retentive to laid back, see the same hallucination—and at different times.
 - iii. Hallucination visions don't appear to crowds. They usually appear to one person at a time, and that person must be expecting the vision and be in a highly emotional state. According to the Bible, none of Jesus' followers expected Him to rise from the dead. Luke said that when Jesus appeared to the disciples, "*They were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit*" (Luke 24:37).
 - iv. The changed lives of many of the converted overthrows any theory of hallucination.

VI. **Mistaken identity**

- a. Mistaken identity is almost impossible. The disciples spent three years with Jesus, and would certainly have spotted a counterfeit.¹⁰

VII. **Wrong Tomb**

- a. The facts prove this theory wrong immediately.
- b. Pilate placed his seal on the tomb, and Roman guards guarded the tomb. Hard to miss a tomb with a seal on it.

- c. The tomb was in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea. Again, it would be hard to miss.
- d. The Jewish authorities knew where Jesus was buried. If the disciples had gone to the wrong tomb, the Jewish officials would have been only too happy to correct them.¹¹

VIII. The Disciples stole the body

- a. Before we check this one out, let's examine a few things about Jesus' burial:¹²
 - i. They laid Jesus body in a new tomb—a tomb in which no one else had been buried (John 19:41).
 - ii. A tomb hewn from rock with a large stone over the door. (Matthew 27:60,61, Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53)
 - 1. Note that Jesus' body could not have been confused with that of someone else. The tomb was new. Jesus' body was the only one in there!
- b. Pilate ordered the tomb sealed and placed guards in front of it.
 - i. The Jews feared that the disciples would claim Jesus was resurrected if His body left the tomb so they sealed the stone over the opening and placed a guard outside the tomb to keep out would-be grave robbers. (Matthew 27:62-66)
 - ii. Rome executed any guard caught sleeping on duty (Acts 12:19; 16:27). What sane, non-bribed Roman guard would ever admit to sleeping on duty?
- c. The only things standing between the disciples and Jesus' body were a two ton rock and four to sixteen armed guards. Let's take a quick look at what the disciples would have needed to do to steal the Jesus' body:
 - i. The disciples would have had to reconvene—without the use of email or cell phones—*after* they all ran off in different directions, and *after* they got over their *extreme fear of death*.
 - ii. The disciples would have had to agree to steal the body—even though they knew four to sixteen *armed Roman guards*.
 - iii. The guards would have had to fall asleep—*all* of them.
 - iv. The disciples would have to move the *two ton* rock that guarded Jesus grave—quietly as not to wake all the sleeping Roman guards. No grunts!
 - v. The disciples would have had to unwrap Jesus, fold His head cover, and *then* sneak Him around all the *sleeping* Roman guards.
 - vi. Each of them lied about it for the rest of their lives. Not one of them, even after the whippings and floggings ever gave in and admitted the lie. How many of you have tried to keep a secret as a group? Does it work?
 - vii. Each even died a *martyr's death* for a *lie*—as we discussed last week.

- d. Another point: if the Roman government believed that the disciples stole the body, they would have hunted them down and prosecuted them. Why? Because the Roman seal was on the tomb, and the punishment for breaking such a seal was death.¹³

IX. Now that we have disproved the critics, let's examine the evidence that proves the resurrection.

- a. The Pharisees and the Romans could easily have silenced disciples. They only needed to produce Jesus' body, which would have still been buried at the tomb. They never did this.¹⁴
- b. Those who rejected Jesus while He was alive converted to Christianity after He died. (Paul is a good example.) Why would those who rejected Jesus when He was alive buy into Christianity when He was dead?¹⁵
- c. The disciple's commitment to the cause shows the truth in their claims. They faced horrible persecution for their claims about Jesus, yet not one of them retracted those claims. Not so before Jesus' death! Peter denied Jesus three times while the rest of the disciples (except John) ran off. Something transformed the early Christians into fervent witnesses to the resurrection. *What could have done that other than a genuine resurrection?*¹⁶
- d. Changed lives of those who believe. Again, the hardest evidence we have in favor of the resurrection is the changed lives of those who profess faith in Jesus Christ. Don't be afraid to share your testimony, or the testimony of someone else. This might be your strongest argument.¹⁷
- e. **Transition:** Everything we have studied about the TRUTH of Christ rests on this final point.

X. **Closing:**

a. **Lesson Recap:**

- i. Christ rose from the dead. We know this because:
 1. No one can historically prove otherwise.
 2. The disciples endured torture and death for their claim that he rose from the dead. Not one recanted.
 3. Those who believe in Christ show evidence of changed lives.

b. **Life Lessons:**

i. **The Final Truth**

1. **Illustration:** Movie—Jesus Film (Lord's Supper)

ii. All of the external and internal evidence of Christ presents arguments abroad.

1. However, the fact remains that NO ONE can argue with the unmistakable evidence of CHANGED LIVES. Does your life reflect the evidence of TRUTH?

iii. **Quote:** If you were to recreate yourself into another person would you be happy with the results?—John Stamper

XI. **Action Steps:** Now What?

a. Know what you believe

b. Practice what you believe

i. **Quote:** “I would have become a Christina had it not been for Christians”
—Gaudy¹⁸

c. Share what you believe

XII. **Lord’s Supper:**

a. Do this in remembrance of me (Christ).

¹ <http://www.equip.org/free/dr153.htm>

² Ben Patterson, Deepening Your Conversation With God (_____: Bethany House Publishers, 1999) 145-146.

³ <http://christiananswers.net/q-eden/edn-t009.html>

⁴ <http://christiananswers.net/q-eden/edn-t009.html> [Michael Grant, Jesus: An Historian’s Review of the Gospels (_____: Scribner’s, 1977) 199.]

⁵ <http://christiananswers.net/q-eden/edn-t009.html>

⁶ <http://christiananswers.net/q-eden/edn-t009.html>

⁷ Need note for this whole section

⁸ <http://christiananswers.net/q-eden/edn-t009.html>

⁹ <http://christiananswers.net/q-eden/edn-t009.html>

¹⁰ Need note

¹¹ Lee Strobel, The Case for Easter (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) 55

¹² Need Note for whole section

¹³ Need Note Michelle

¹⁴ <http://www.existence-of-god.com/resurrection-evidence.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.existence-of-god.com/resurrection-evidence.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.existence-of-god.com/resurrection-evidence.html>

¹⁷ <http://www.existence-of-god.com/resurrection-evidence.html>

¹⁸ Need Note