



RESURRECTION 101

Introducing Reasons for Confidence

6 ~ We Have Witnesses / Declaration and Validation

- A. Review: the two New Testament claims offered as evidence that Jesus rose from dead.
- 1) Unlike David's, *Jesus' tomb was empty* (Acts 2.29-31).
 - 2) The disciples were *witnesses that Jesus had risen* (Acts 2.32).
- B. The witnesses had a vested interest in what they said had occurred (Luke 1:1-3). Their bias does not automatically discredit their testimony, but it is appropriate to examine their credibility as witnesses.

Four Traits of the Witnesses

1. *The witnesses were not expecting Jesus' resurrection (despite his predictions) - Mark 16.3; John 20.2, 13-16; cf. Mark 8.31.*
2. *The witnesses were not inclined to believe the resurrection reports; there was skepticism among the disciples - Luke 24.9-12; John 20.3-9; Luke 24.22-24; John 20.25-28; Acts 8.1-3; 9.1-5; Philippians 2.5-11.*
 - a. Peter and John went to the tomb to investigate the story the women told and were amazed by what they saw when they arrived. (An additional factor is that the first witnesses were women, not generally accepted as credible witnesses in that culture.)
 - b. The men on the Emmaus Road didn't know what to make of the initial reports.
 - c. Thomas and Saul, the latter of whom spared no effort in trying to discredit and eradicate the Jesus movement, eventually exalted Jesus as the risen Lord, but were initially skeptical.
3. *The witnesses were careful not to be deceived - Luke 24.11-12, 25-30, 32, 39-43; John 20.24-27; Galatians 1.13-17.*
 - a. Peter did not believe the women and went to the tomb to see for himself; Thomas did not believe the other ten and wanted to see for himself; Saul tried to destroy the church.
 - b. They expected and were given evidence before they accepted the testimony: they ate and talked with Jesus, listened again to his teaching, and touched him to discover he was no ghost.
 - c. Think how you would react if you thought you saw someone who had died. Their reaction was no different. They did not report they had seen someone they *thought* was Jesus, but that they recognized their teacher and friend. Their determined effort to investigate and the fact they did not expect or first believe the resurrection reports make their reports more compelling.
4. *There was a variety of witnesses, at different times and in different places - Acts 1.3; 1 Corinthians 15.5-8.*

"Exile was made endurable by hope, and hope—a living, vital force—was based on a risen Christ" [cf. 1 Peter 1.3-4]. - E. M. Blaiklock, *1 Peter: A Translation and Devotional Commentary*, 24

The Transformation and Commitment of the Disciples

“How have they turned, almost overnight, into the indomitable band of enthusiasts who braved opposition, cynicism, ridicule, hardship, prison and death in three continents, as they preached everywhere Jesus and his resurrection?” - Michael Green, *Man Alive!* 23-24, in Josh McDowell & Bill Wilson, *He Walked Among Us: Evidence for the Historical Jesus*, 121. The following chart was developed from a list on pp. 118-119.

Early Church Tradition Regarding the Disciples' Deaths			
Disciple	Death By	Disciple	Death By
Peter	Crucifixion	Matthew	Sword
Andrew	Crucifixion	James (of Zebedee)	Sword (Acts 12.2)
James (of Alphaeus)	Crucifixion	Thaddaeus	Arrows
Philip	Crucifixion	James (Jesus' brother)	Stoned
Simon	Crucifixion	Thomas	Spear thrust
Bartholomew	Crucifixion	Paul	Beheaded

The death of John (of Zebedee) was attributed to natural causes.

Declaration and Validation

“The question of Jesus’ resurrection *lies at the heart of the Christian faith*. There is no form of early Christianity known to us . . . that does not affirm at its heart that after Jesus’ shameful death God raised him to life again. Already by the time of Paul, . . . *the resurrection of Jesus is not just a single detached article of faith. It is woven into the very structure of Christian life and thought, . . .*”

- N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Understanding Who Jesus Was and Is*, 126; emphasis added.

In Romans, Paul used the words “raise” and “resurrection” (ESV) with reference to Jesus eleven times (Romans 1.4; 4.24-25; 6.4, 5, 9; 7.4; 8.11, 34; 10.9; see also a passage like 5.9-11 where the “life” of Jesus refers to his resurrection), often in conjunction with and as the consequence of his crucifixion and death. Three passages are especially important for seeing why the resurrection matters in practical terms:

1. Because Jesus’ resurrection is the means by which we are justified (i.e., acquitted, declared not guilty) (Romans 4.25; 8.31-34; cf. 1 Corinthians 15.17).
2. Because Jesus’ resurrection empowers us to live with “more than conquerors” confidence in a world that is troubled and suffering (Romans 8.18, 23, 31b, 33-35a, 37-39).
3. Because it is through the resurrection that we have new life (Romans 6.1-11) and the power to live as new people (6.12, 14, 17-18, 22-23).

A Final Word

“Your book has opened the eyes of the most doubting Thomas there ever was. Thank you for writing so clearly about the resurrection. I had known about it since childhood, but the penny has only just dropped, and I’m nearly fifty.

“Why, oh why, isn’t the resurrection *shouted* out in our churches every Sunday? This is the good news I’ve been looking for for so long. I had always thought the good news was the forgiveness of sins—and it didn’t make much sense and certainly I wasn’t very grateful. This is far, far more!” - Michael Green, *Running from Reality: Is Christianity Just Another Escape*, 58-59; quoting a letter in response to a previous book.