

*The Resurrection: Fact or Fraud?*  
*James Gray*

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: *Jesus Christ Superstar*

About 11 years ago, I played in the orchestra at the Cape Fear Regional Theatre in Fayetteville NC in a production of the rock musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*, a musical “very loosely” based on the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus.

The musical contains incredible music and acting, but among the many issues with the musical’s perspective of Jesus’ life and teachings, there’s one problem...in the last scene he dies.

Every night, as the audience began to file out, I wanted to shout from the piano, “Wait, there’s more. The story isn’t finished!”

TRANSITION

The world doesn’t really mind *Jesus Christ Superstar*, because at the end of the musical Jesus dies just like everyone else.

But when we move on past the cross of Friday to the empty tomb of Sunday, that’s when the world resists his story.

- Preach Jesus and his love, everybody will listen.
- Preach Jesus and his opposition to the religious leaders of the day, folks will appreciate his pushback.
- Preach Jesus and his lack of worldly possessions, people will accept your message.
- Preach Jesus didn’t just die but rose from the dead, your audience will suddenly shrink.

QUOTE: Josh McDowell, Christian author/apologist

*I have come to the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is (either) one of the most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever foisted upon the minds of men, OR it is the most fantastic fact of history.*

THE RESURRECTION: FACT OR FRAUD?

History or Hoax?

The truth or just some Sunday School fairy tale?

FACT #1: Non-Biblical, Historical Documentation

Josephus was a Jewish historian, writing at the end of the first century AD – only about 60 years after the Resurrection.

QUOTE: Josephus in his “Antiquities”

*This man was the Christ. And when Pilate had condemned him to the cross...he appeared to them alive on the third day...And even now, the race of Christians, so named from him,*

*has not died out.*

What makes the record of Josephus so amazing and trustworthy is that he was a Jew writing to Romans.

He would not have been sympathetic to Christians, and the Roman authorities would not have been pleased with this reporting.

He had no reason to lie!

Thomas Arnold, author of the three volume *History of Rome* and former chair of modern history at Oxford, was well acquainted with the value of evidence in determining historical facts.

QUOTE: Thomas Arnold

*I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proven by better and fuller evidence of every sort...than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead.*

There is so much more historical documentation that I could reference this morning; but if I did so, this would become more of a lecture and less of a sermon.

The fact remains that history proves the most important event in all of human history did take place – the bodily resurrection of Jesus!

## FACT #2: Biblical Record

The secular philosopher would argue that using the Bible to prove its most important assertion – that Jesus rose from the dead – is a form of circular reasoning.

Circular reasoning is a logical fallacy where the reasoner bases his argument on the same evidence he is trying to prove.

A is true because B is true; B is true because A is true.

Example: Everybody loves Jim because Jim is popular.

We can with confidence offer the Scriptures as proof of Jesus' resurrection.

The Bible is not just one book but 66 ancient documents written by dozens of individuals spanning many centuries.

The New Testament alone is a collection of 27 documents written by eight or so people.

Specifically speaking of the resurrection of Jesus, we have multiple eyewitness accounts in the New Testament, all written within 50 years or sooner of the event in question.

Consider the sources we have for other ancient historical events, and you will find that we have nowhere near the number of documented writings discussing those events.

The Bible record is reliable!

The first Biblical assertion of the resurrection was written by Paul when he wrote his first letter to the church in Corinth around 55 AD, barely 20 years after Jesus lived on earth.

<sup>3</sup> *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,* <sup>4</sup> *and that He was buried, and that He rose again the*

VERSES, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 NKJV

*third day according to the Scriptures,<sup>5</sup> and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.<sup>6</sup> After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.<sup>7</sup> After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.<sup>8</sup> Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.*

Paul tells us that over 500 people saw the risen Christ!

His account here is just one of many recorded in the New Testament, including those in the Gospels that were written later by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The story of Jesus, and specifically his resurrection, has plenty of independent documentation in this collection of books and letters we call the Bible, all of which provide factual evidence for that resurrection.

### FACT #3: The Empty Tomb

All four Gospel writers name women as the first witnesses to discover the empty tomb and to see the risen Lord.

Why is this significant? Because in ancient cultures, female testimony was widely dismissed.

To include as part of your story the important first eyewitnesses being women would have been a ridiculous and unnecessary lie.

Why create a story that everyone would reject?

Also, consider the fact that the center of this new religion was the very city where Jesus was crucified and buried.

If there were a tomb in Jerusalem where Jesus' body could be found, then these first preachers of the gospel would never have been able to convince people of their founder's resurrection.

One might would argue that the empty tomb alone does not prove the resurrection – Jesus could still be dead and his body just taken.

Considering all these assertions of his resurrection – including that of the NT writers, early secular historians, and so much more – all that needed to be done to refute the empty tomb was produce a body.

No body was every produced because Jesus rose from the grave and then 40 days later ascended into heaven!

Remember what the angel told Mary Magdalene at that empty tomb:

VERSE, Matthew 28:6 NCV

*He is not here. He has risen from the dead as he said he would. Come and see the place where his body was.*

### TRANSITION TO THE TEXT

I could offer so many more proofs, so many more facts that support the validity of the resurrection, but time does not permit me to do so.

With the time that I have left this morning I want to tell you that there is one more proof of the resurrection that is of extreme importance. For that, we go to our text.

## BACKGROUND TO THE TEXT

On that resurrection morning, Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene.

He then appeared to the group of ladies who had gone to the tomb to prepare his body for burial.

Hours later he appeared to the disciples.

Our text finds the disciples probably later on that evening or sometime during that week meeting again.

## TEXT, John 20:24-28 NKJV

*<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."*

*<sup>26</sup> And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" <sup>27</sup> Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."*

*<sup>28</sup> And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"*

Thomas missed that first meeting with Jesus.

It was in that first meeting where Jesus showed the other disciples his hands and his side. When Thomas heard all of this he said, "Unless I see his hands, unless I touch his side, I will not believe."

So Jesus bursts through the locked door to show Thomas that his resurrection was a reality!

Thomas wanted proof, and Jesus gave him that proof, not only showing Thomas his scars but letting him touch those scars.

## FACT #4: Personal Experience

Thomas' proof of the resurrection came when HE saw Jesus, when HE touched Jesus.

And that's the final and best proof of the resurrection.

Looking to historical, non-biblical documentation is valid.

Trusting in the reliable account of the Biblical record is right and reasonable.

Leaning on the logic that there's an empty tomb is certainly sensible.

But the best fact that proves Jesus is alive is the fact that he is working and moving in my life and my heart right now!

SONG LYRICS: "He Lives"

*You ask me how I know he lives*

*He lives within my heart*

The proof that Thomas needed of the resurrection was a personal encounter with Jesus. Maybe you are like Thomas this Easter morning. You don't want to just rely on the facts of others, but you're longing for God to move in your life, to make himself real to you today.

We like to criticize Thomas.

We read the words of Jesus to him – “stop doubting and believe” – and have even given the poor fellow a terrible nickname: Doubting Thomas.

But I don't think Jesus is criticizing him.

Thomas needed to see him, needed to touch him, and Jesus showed up for him.

Do you need that personal experience?

Do you need the reality of the resurrection to be made real in your life?

That same Jesus that showed up to delete all doubt, to eliminate all uncertainty, and to save all souls is here today for you.

See his scars; touch his side; call him “Lord” today.