



In Defense of the Resurrection

By

Mark McGee

Chapters

Introduction	3
An Apologia for the Resurrection	6
Question One	6
Question Two	13
Question Three	17

Introduction

Four great attacks on Jesus Christ during the last 2,000 years have been:

His **Incarnation**

His **Crucifixion**

His **Resurrection**

His **Ascension**

If the Son of God did not become flesh – the Incarnation – if the Son of God did not die for our sins on the Cross – the Crucifixion – if the Son of God did not rise from the dead – the Resurrection – and if the Son of God did not ascend to the highest position of Power and Authority in Heaven – the Ascension – then our faith is in vain. It is empty, useless, worthless.

The Church received many warnings from the Lord's Apostles that Truths about Jesus Christ would be attacked – even by leaders and teachers inside the Church.

“For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom

I am well pleased.’ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.” 2 Peter 1:16 – 2:3

“I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jude 3-4

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in

among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.” Acts 20:28-31

An Apologia for the Resurrection

In defense of our Lord's Resurrection, we will ask and answer three important questions:

1. How do we prove with certainty that Jesus rose from the dead?
2. What does the Lord's Resurrection mean to Christians?
3. What does the Lord's Resurrection mean to the world?

Proving anything with certainty usually comes down to eye witness accounts and recorded documentation that are verifiable. Did anyone see the event? Are they credible witnesses? Did anyone record the event so that others would know what happened? Are the recordings credible? Is it reasonable to believe the event occurred as described?

The Apostle Paul wrote this about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ:

"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 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. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time." 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

Paul said there were credible documents (the Scriptures) and credible witnesses (Peter, all of the Apostles, more than 500 people at once, the Lord's half brother James, and Paul) to the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Critics of the Lord's Resurrection often say only a handful of people saw Jesus alive after His Crucifixion, but the Apostle Paul put the number at more than 500 people. That was more than sufficient to prove with certainty that Jesus rose from the dead at a time when most of the witnesses could come forward to refute Paul's claims. They didn't because what Paul said was true. They had seen the Risen Christ! Convincing proof that Jesus rose from the dead.

To that, critics will say Jesus didn't die on the Cross – that He fainted from exhaustion and the people around Him were mistaken about His condition when they took Him down from the Cross and that He awoke and was revived later by friends. Some say that Jesus faked His Death on the Cross and presented Himself as risen.

To understand the physical condition of Jesus, we need to look at the results of the Roman beating on His Body. If someone in the Lord's condition after the beating was rushed to a hospital, they would be pronounced DOA at the hospital or admitted in extremely critical condition. The beatings would have cut through flesh so severely that people would be able to see bones, tendons, ligaments, veins, and internal organs. Nerves would be slashed to the point that some bodily functions would be greatly disrupted. The amount of blood loss would place the cardiovascular system in shock and the heart would pump at an accelerated rate to try to meet the need for new blood to

keep vital physical functions moving. The body would be fighting for its very life!

The physical and mental shock of having giant nails driven through the hands and feet would have been extreme torture. In fact, the Latin word for torture is *excrucio* – “out of the cross.” We get our English word “excruciating” from it. The shoulders would come out of the socket because of the positioning of the arms nailed to the cross trying to hold up the weight of the body. The person being crucified would sink into a permanent position of inhale, so the only way to exhale was to use the feet and legs to push the body up long enough to exhale. The buildup of carbon dioxide in the blood would be poison the body. Many would die from asphyxiation as the feet and legs could no longer push the body up to exhale. After many hours or even days on the cross, soldiers would sometimes break the legs of people being crucified so they would die within a few minutes.

The Gospel accounts of the Lord’s Crucifixion are quite clear about the fact that Jesus was dead when Roman soldiers ran a spear into the Lord’s Body, took His Body off the Cross by pulling nails out of His Hands and Feet, checked for signs of life, then gave His Body to two Jewish leaders to be buried. Crucifixion was a common means of killing the enemies of Rome, so the soldiers were very familiar with death. They killed tens of thousands of men throughout the Roman Empire every year. It’s estimated that 30,000 Jewish men were crucified during the time that Jesus ministered in Israel. The soldiers who daily crucified these men knew a dead body when they saw it. They also knew they would be killed if they didn’t carry out their

responsibility. No enemy of Rome was to be left alive after their crucifixion. Forensic medical experts say that the mixture of water and blood that came out of Jesus' side when the spear was removed from it is proof that Jesus was dead and that He died of a ruptured heart. Convincing proof that Jesus died on the Cross.

To that, critics will say the Lord's disciples removed His Body from the grave, buried it elsewhere and made up the Resurrection story so they could keep the Messianic hope alive for Israel.

The Gospel accounts record that Roman soldiers were commanded to keep watch around the tomb if anyone tried to steal the Body of Christ. The tomb was sealed to make sure nobody could get inside without the soldiers knowing it. The soldiers were well armed and able to carry out their duty. The soldiers could have easily defeated the disciples. They told the chief priests about the great earthquake and the angel rolling back the stone in front of the tomb. The priests bribed the guards and told them to say that Christ's disciples came at night and stole His Body while the guards slept. The guards took the money and did as they were instructed. Matthew wrote that the guards' story was commonly reported among the Jews. More convincing proof that Jesus rose from the dead.

For those who say that the women went to the wrong tomb and the disciples only thought Jesus was raised from the dead because they couldn't find the body – the chief priests would have paraded Jesus' body through the streets of Jerusalem to show that He was still dead and that the disciples were mistaken. That didn't happen because the

women and the disciples went to the correct tomb and the Lord's Body wasn't there because He was Alive!

Another convincing truth is that while people will die for something they believe to be true – they will not die for a lie. Most of the apostles and many disciples died as martyrs saying they had seen Jesus Christ alive after His Crucifixion. They would not have died for something they knew to be untrue. We learn in the Book of Acts that Jesus spent 40 days with the disciples after His Crucifixion, teaching them about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). This is certainly strong evidence that proves the disciples did not hallucinate or see an apparition or a ghost. They spent 40 days (996 hours) with Jesus and knew Jesus was alive. They touched Him and He touched them. They ate together, talked together, and walked together. As Jesus said to them during His first meeting with them – “Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” (Luke 24:39) Again, proof that Jesus was alive and not a ghostly spiritual image floating around the disciples.

To that, critics will say the Gospels were not written in the 1st century by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, but by unknown people in the 2nd century who copied stories from pagan religions to bolster the claims of Christianity.

None of the Gospels mention the destruction of the Temple – which was a major prophecy of Jesus during His Ministry. The Romans destroyed the Temple in 70 A.D. If the Gospels were written before 70 A.D., then it is probable that the Lord’s apostles would still be alive. Luke wrote the Book of Acts after he wrote his Gospel account and Acts also does not mention the destruction of the Temple and speaks of Peter, Paul and other apostles as still alive at the time of its writing. The Apostle Paul – the most prolific writer of the New Testament – gave support in his writings to the Lord’s apostles. Mark and Luke traveled with Paul and Peter and some of what they wrote in their Gospel and Acts accounts would have come from the Apostles. An early copy of a portion of John’s Gospel – called The John Rylands papyrus fragment 52 – is dated about 125 A.D. Since it was a copy, John would have to have written the original prior to that. Most scholars date the original to the late 1st century. *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* – dated from the middle of the 2nd century – includes sayings of Jesus which have parallels from all the Gospels. Those passages were most likely copied from manuscripts from the early 2nd century. Post-apostolic leaders of the Church at the end of the 1st century and during the 2nd century – often called the Apostolic Fathers – quoted from the Gospel accounts and other New Testament writings. Polycarp – a student of the Apostle John – quoted from New Testament writings in the early 2nd century. Ignatius – another student of the Apostle John – quoted from Matthew’s Gospel at the end of the 1st or beginning of the 2nd century. Clement – thought to be a student of Peter and Paul –

quoted from New Testament writings at the end of the 1st century. Justin Martyr quoted from the Apostles' writings by the mid 2nd century. The Christian historian Papias – believed to be a student of John the Apostle – lived during the 2nd century and attributed Matthew's Gospel to the Apostle Matthew. Irenaeus was another prominent pastor and Church historian during the 2nd century and supported the early authorship of the Gospels and the Book of Acts. Tertullian – Christian author and apologist of the 2nd century – stated that by the middle of the 2nd century the Church in Rome had the same list of the New Testament Books that we have today. The Muratonian Canon Fragment of 170 A.D. lists the same New Testament we use. Convincing proof that the Gospel accounts and Book of Acts were written before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. More support of the credibility of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

To that, critics will eventually say they do not believe in the Bible, the God of the Bible, or the supernatural. Now, we're getting somewhere! The attacks on Jesus Christ are a smoke screen for what's really going on in the hearts and minds of skeptics and scoffers. They are naturalists and do not believe in the possibility of the supernatural. Of course they're going to deny the Resurrection. Paul stated it well in his letter to the Church in Rome -

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the

creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Romans 1:18-21

Many unbelievers do not want to face the truth about their sin nature and their need for God’s forgiveness, so they suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

2nd question - What does the Lord’s Resurrection mean to Christians? It means our Savior is alive! Jesus is Alive! We do not follow the traditions and teachings of a dead religious leader – like thousands of human religions in the history of our world. We follow the Teachings of the Living Son of God Who will Rule and Reign forever! It also means we will live and rule and reign with Him forever. If Jesus does not return for His children by the end of this century, most of us who are reading this right now will be dead – but that does not mean the end of our existence. We will “live” for eternity because Jesus Rose from the dead and is Alive in Heaven. Here’s how the Apostle Paul explained it -

“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.” 1 Corinthians 15:20-22

Isn't that amazing? Our resurrection is tied directly to Christ's Resurrection. Jesus has become the "firstfruits" of those who have died. The Greek word is *aparche* and was used for people or things consecrated to God. It was primarily the offering of the first and best of one's possessions to God. It was also used for people superior in excellence to others of the same class. Jesus was the first to rise from the dead. You and I will be among those who follow Christ in being raised from the dead. Our future depends on our Savior.

You probably think your resurrection from the dead will be physical, but many Christians now, and throughout the centuries, have not believed that. To them, the resurrection is spiritual rather than physical. That's because many of them believed Christ's resurrection was spiritual rather than physical. So which is it? Physical or spiritual resurrection?

The New Testament writings are clear that Jesus rose physically from the dead. People talked with Christ, walked with Him, touched Him, ate with Him – what anyone would do with someone who had a physical appearance. The disciples were terrified the first time Jesus appeared to them because they thought they had seen a ghost. Jesus told them – "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." (Luke 24:39) Jesus made it clear from the beginning of His relationship with His disciples after the Resurrection that He had a physical body (flesh and bones).

Jesus also had supernatural abilities to appear and disappear, walk through walls, ascend into the sky – but that did not change the fact that He had a physical Body. The truth is that the physical body of a resurrected being goes through an amazing change that actually affects it at the cellular level. Even as Christ's Resurrected Body was physically supercharged, so our bodies will be changed at our resurrection. Here's how Paul explained it.

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 15:51-58

The words “corruptible, incorruption, mortal, immortality” speak to the change our bodies will go through in the twinkling of an eye when Jesus returns for us. The Greek word for “corruptible” is *phthartos* and is something that is liable to decay and destruction. “Incorruption” is *aphthartos* and means not liable to decay or destruction. What happens when a body dies? It decays – “dust to dust.” What happens eventually to things? They decay – they rust and break – they are destroyed. People are mortal – *thnetos* – subject or liable to death. In the resurrection, God will change our bodies from mortal to “immortal” – *athanasia* – literally to “deathlessness.” We may die once, but never twice. That is the miracle of the resurrection!

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.” 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

So, what do Christians do while we're waiting for Christ to return for us? "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." The word "steadfast" – *hedraios* – means "seated" and speaks to being fixed on a belief. "Immovable" – *ametakinetos* – means "firm, not moveable." "Abounding" – *perisseuo* – means "exceeding measure, above the ordinary, extraordinary." "Work" – *kopos* – means "toil resulting in weariness, laborious toil, trouble". Paul said that in light of the Truth about the Resurrection, Christians should be fixed in our beliefs, firm in our position, and extraordinary in our labor for the Lord.

3rd question - What does the Lord's Resurrection mean to the world? Well, I have good news and bad news. First, the good news.

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you." Titus 2:11-15

The good news is that the Grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. In Romans 4:24-25, Paul wrote – “It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.” That’s the Grace of God! Jesus was delivered up because of our “offenses” (*paraptomata* – obstacle that causes someone to stumble and fall down) and was raised because of our “justification” (*dikaiosis* – act of pronouncing righteous). This present age is the time God wants us to learn about His Grace. It teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and live soberly, righteously and godly, while we’re looking for Christ to take us to Heaven to be with Him forever! That’s the good news.

Now for the bad news. The opportunity for an unsaved person to experience God’s Grace ends at their death. People who die without being saved will be raised from the dead when it’s time for Christ to judge them according to their works. It will not be a pleasant experience for them.

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then

Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Revelation 20:11-15

God gives everyone born into the world a lifetime to decide what they'll do about Him. However, once their lifetime is past so is the opportunity to receive the Gift of Eternal Life.

The Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ are the most credible and proveable events in ancient history. Everyone's future depends on what they do with Jesus – and what He does with them.

Copyright © 1990 – 2016, Mark A McGee, GraceLife Ministries™

“Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.”