

He's Alive
John 19:31 to 20:28
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We are here this morning to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But I think it is important as we begin to acknowledge that there are many, perhaps even some here this morning, who don't believe that such an event ever really happened, at least in a literal physical sense. In fact, let me just begin by asking you this straightforward question: are you convinced, personally, that a real historical person named Jesus of Nazareth lived and died in the first century in Israel? Are you equally convinced that on the third day after His violent death of crucifixion before His body began to decay that God raised Him literally, physically from the dead and that, this morning, He is as alive as you are? Do you believe His resurrection is as historically real as any event that you are familiar with from the pages of human history?

Let's acknowledge that there are those who don't, and again there may be some here this morning. Perhaps you struggle with these questions. Why is that? Why are people tempted to doubt the resurrection? It's because they have come to believe one of the primary six arguments against the resurrection. And I want to start by reminding you of what they are and then let's see the Scripture address them together.

Some claim that the resurrection is not a reality because Jesus of Nazareth never actually existed. Around every Christian holiday there are liberals in the entertainment industry who broadcast supposed documentaries in which they interview supposedly reputable scholars who question if Jesus ever really lived.

Now you need to understand that most scholars today, as well as through human history, reject this view out of hand because there is simply too much evidence even without the Scripture and without the thousands of Christian sources that validate the existence of Jesus Christ. There are nine ancient secular historical records that document the existence and major details of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. By the way, that's exactly as many as document the life and reign of Tiberius Cesar who reigned during the time of Jesus Christ. You see denying the existence of Jesus Christ is on par with believing in a flat earth. The fact that He lived is undeniable. It is whether or not what He claimed is true that is in question.

A second argument against the resurrection is that the simple life of Jesus of Nazareth actually grew into a legend and it's that legend that is recorded in the New Testament. Again, serious historical scholars reject this because all four gospels were written within 60 years of Jesus' life when many of those who witnessed these events were still living. It's simply not enough time for legend to grow. Now this is a different message for a different time but the truth is when you consider the sheer number of Greek manuscripts that we possess, some 5,000 of them, and when you consider the closeness of their proximity to the actual events they record, you are forced to accept the basic reliability of the New Testament documents even if you reject what they teach.

A third argument against the resurrection is that it was some sort of group hallucination or group delusion. This view also is patently impossible because it violates what we know about these things – all normal patterns of hallucinations and delusional thinking. Because in the biblical

record, Jesus appeared after His resurrection to more than 500 different people in at least 10 different locations. He appeared to individuals and he appeared to groups of disciples. He even appeared to a large crowd of 500. He appeared to men; He appeared to women; in public and in private; at different times of the day; in Jerusalem in the south and all the way in Galilee in the north. To think that all of these people were delusional is beyond all credibility.

The last three arguments against the resurrection are these. Number four, Jesus never really died. He just slipped into a coma because of the trauma that He had endured and later within the tomb revived. Number five is that the witnesses that morning went to the wrong tomb. In other words, Jesus' body was still in His tomb and perhaps still is. And number six, and this is the most familiar and common of all, someone stole Jesus' dead body. There are those who say it was His disciples who stole it and in other cases His enemies.

So let me ask you this morning, if you don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, if you don't believe that He was truly raised from the dead, which of those six arguments have you believed?

The truth is the evidence for the resurrection is overwhelming. That's why Luke, the physician, writes in Acts 1:3, Jesus "presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs." One writer puts it this way, "the disciples came to their Easter faith through inescapable, empirical evidence available to them and available to us through their written testimony." In fact, the testimony that they give and the evidence that they present in the New Testament documents answers every one of those arguments against the resurrection.

Why does this matter? It matters because the very core of the Christian faith is the resurrection. If the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not true, then Christianity is worthless and we all ought to just pack up and go home. Paul says if there is no resurrection then we are of all men most to be pitied. He understood the centrality of the resurrection. But that's not all that is at stake, not just the Christian faith as a whole, but the credibility of Jesus Christ Himself. He claimed that He would be raised from the dead. B.B. Warfield, the great Princeton theologian, writes "Christ himself deliberately staked His whole claim upon the resurrection." When asked for a sign He pointed to this sign as His single and sufficient credential. If there is no resurrection, then Jesus of Nazareth is merely one more charlatan in a long line of deceivers. The resurrection is everything. Philip Schaff, the great church historian, writes "the resurrection of Christ is emphatically a test question upon which depends the truth or falsehood of the Christian religion. It is either the greatest miracle or the greatest delusion which history records."

What makes the resurrection matter is the death of Jesus Christ that preceded it. Last Sunday, we looked at Mark's gospel and studied Jesus' death on the cross. Let me just remind you of its significance before we look at the importance of the resurrection.

Jesus was crucified at 9 a.m. and during the three hours from 9 to noon, Calvary was a very busy place. And yet, Jesus Himself remained largely silent speaking only three brief statements in those three hours. But after those three hours, something truly dramatic occurred. Here's how Mark records it. "Jesus cried out." Jesus cried out. In what context? Well listen again to Mark, "When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour." In other

words, Jesus' cry came out of the darkness. At noon the sky had become dark and stayed like that for three hours because the Father was making a point. As we saw last week, the darkness that surrounded the cross during those three hours pointed to the reality that God was judging sin, as darkness so often does in the Scripture. He was judging our sin in Christ on the cross.

We are told nothing that transpired during those three hours but suddenly around 3 p.m, out of that strange darkness came this cry. Listen to how Mark records it. "Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ... My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This tells us volumes about what was really happening to Jesus during those three dark hours. During those hours that he hung on the cross in darkness, the fellowship and communion that He as a man had always enjoyed with the Father throughout His earthly life was suddenly and completely severed. The Father abandoned His Son. He deserted Him during those hours as He would have abandoned and deserted us forever if it were not for the work of Jesus Christ. In fact, if you're tempted to doubt that a loving, good God could ever punish sin, let yourself think about the cross of Jesus Christ. God the Father abandoned His own Son when He bore the sin of those who would believe in Him as He would have had to abandon us forever.

Then Matthew says Jesus "yielded up His spirit." The Greek text literally says He sent away His spirit. Jesus was sovereign over the exact time of His death. No one took His life. Jesus didn't die because He was crucified. He died because He chose at that moment to lay down His life for all of those who would believe in Him. Understand this, in His dying is your only hope of redemption. In His death is your and my only hope of being right with God, our creator. That's exactly what Jesus taught. He said, "I came to give my life as a ransom in the place of many." That's why He died. The only way that God won't abandon us forever is if Jesus is abandoned for us, in our place. The only way that we can avoid an eternity of suffering for our own sins is if Jesus suffers for them on the cross, if He meets the demands of God's justice that our sins deserve.

What do you have to do in order to enjoy the benefits of Jesus' death? Jesus said you have to repent. He said, "I command that repentance for forgiveness of sins be proclaimed in my name." That's what I'm doing right now. The only way that you can be right with God, the only way that you can be forgiven is if you will turn from what you know to be sin in your life and acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Lord and your God. That's the death of Jesus Christ.

That brings us today to Jesus' resurrection. And I want us to turn to John's gospel to examine it. Turn with me to John chapter 19. Because here in the Gospel of John, the apostle John presents four irrefutable lines of evidence for the resurrection. Four lines of evidence to prove that, in fact, Jesus was raised from the dead. John does this because he wants us to know that our confidence in the resurrection is not some sort of blind leap of faith, but it is based on objective evidence. And as he presents this evidence, he completely demolishes every false theory about the resurrection that we began with this morning. So let's examine the evidence together.

The first evidence here in John's gospel for the reality of the resurrection is found in chapter 19:31 to 37. And it's this, Jesus was certifiably dead. Early in the history of the Christian church, there was a heresy that arose called docetism. Docetism comes from the Greek verb which means *to appear*. And docetism taught that Jesus just seemed to be a man and only appeared to die. This

heresy took hold. In fact, if you fast forward to the time of Mohammed some 500 years after this heresy arose, the father of Islam was clearly influenced by a docetic form of Christianity. That's why the Quran says this of Jesus, "they did not kill him, neither did they crucify him, it only seemed to be so." A couple of centuries ago, a man named Venturini again promoted this idea that Jesus didn't really die. He taught that instead, Jesus entered into this sort of coma-like state because of the trauma to His body. He was buried and then there in the coolness of the tomb, He was resuscitated.

In this paragraph, John completely shatters all of the ridiculous theories that say Jesus didn't die. Look at verse 31. "Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), [connected to the Passover] asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away." The process that John alludes to here was a particularly brutal and violent one. Those who were crucified by the Romans on average survived about 36 hours. Crucifixion was a slow death by suffocation. After they died, after an average of 36 hours on the cross, typically the Romans would leave their bodies hung there on the cross in order to rot and to be eaten by the vultures as a sort of deterrent to others who would rebel against their power.

But in this case, and in every case where the Romans desired that death occur quickly, there was a practice. A practice that even was given a Latin name, it was so common. The soldiers would take a heavy, iron mallet or an iron bar and they would back up from the person, much like an American baseball player, they would swing that iron bar to shatter the person's legs. I've actually seen the remains of a first century crucifixion victim there in Jerusalem that documents this very practice. One of the man's legs was broken cleanly, the other leg was completely crushed and shattered.

Why did they do this? Because breaking the legs made it impossible for the crucifixion victim to push and pull himself up with his legs in order to get the oxygen that his body was so desperately craving. And so he would quickly die of suffocation as he laid slumped there with broken legs against the weight of his body.

At sunset on Friday, the Sabbath began, and in this case, John tells us a special Sabbath connected to the Passover. And so, these three men who had just been crucified at 9 am, they needed to die a lot sooner than the average of 36 hours. They needed to die quickly so that they could be buried before sundown and the Sabbath began. And so, the soldiers began. They started with the men on each side of Christ. Verse 32, "So the soldiers came, and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who was crucified with Him; but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs."

Here these soldiers who had undoubtedly participated in crucifixions before this one. They were seasoned, hardened, Roman veterans. They knew exactly what death looked like and when they came to Jesus, they were very much aware that Jesus was clearly dead. But because their very lives could depend on it, it was important to be sure. Verse 34, so "one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified," John's talking about himself here, "he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is

true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe.” John was right there, standing in front of Jesus and he saw all of this transpire.

Now there’s a lot of discussion about the significance of the water and blood. There are three or four different theories, and we can’t be absolutely sure. But don’t miss the main point, the soldiers were absolutely certain that Jesus was dead. So certain they didn’t break His legs as they did the other men. Still to make sure that He was dead, one soldier took his spear and pierced His side. Now don’t think Renaissance paintings with a little pinprick in Jesus’ side. That wasn’t the point here. Instead this soldier took his spear and he plunged it up into the chest cavity of Jesus, piercing the heart. The point of this was to ensure that Jesus was in fact dead.

Why did this happen? Well in verses 36 and 37, John reminds us that it actually fulfilled two Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. One of them was that, like the Passover lamb, not one bone of Jesus could be broken, Numbers 9:12. And secondly, when He returns, they will look on the one they pierced, so Zechariah 12:10 says.

So, the soldier ensured with a plunge of his spear into the chest cavity of Jesus that He was in fact completely and fully dead. Mark tells us that before Pilate released Jesus’ body for burial, he called for this centurion to come and report to him. And he asked the centurion to officially certify that Jesus had died, Mark 15. So, understand then, Jesus didn’t swoon. He didn’t drop into a coma. He was certifiably dead. That’s a very important line of evidence for the resurrection.

John’s second line of evidence for the resurrection is found in verses 38 and 42 and it’s that Jesus’ body was carefully buried and secured. Jesus’ body was carefully buried and secured. Verse 38, “After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So, he came and took away His body. Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night [back in chapter 3 you remember, in those famous interchanges about being born again, and even John 3:16, Nicodemus] also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight.”

What’s going on here? Two very wealthy, influential members of the Sanhedrin, the highest ruling body in Israel. Seventy of them plus the high priest, two wealthy members of that ruling body who had been afraid to confess Jesus during His life, now prepare Him for burial. The first one is Joseph of Arimathea. All we know about him is in reference to the burial of Jesus Christ. We know that he went to Pilate and sought and received permission to take Jesus’ body.

Now this was highly unusual, because normally Roman law granted the bodies of executed criminals to their families, but never in the case of sedition. If the person was accused of rebellion against Rome, the bodies were never released because they didn’t want them to become a sort of rallying point for others in the rebellion. Jesus as you remember was accused of sedition against Rome. So, it was highly unusual for His body to be released.

Joseph uses his rank and his influence to gain access to Pilate, request the body, and Pilate remarkably allows it. I think that’s a testimony of Pilate’s own confidence that Jesus was

innocent of sedition. You remember six times in the trial he said, He's innocent, He's innocent, He's innocent. And so, he releases His body.

In the meantime, while Joseph is securing the body of Jesus, Nicodemus is out purchasing some 70 pounds of spices. We're told here that it was a mix of a resin called myrrh and aromatic sandalwood, a powder. This would have been hugely expensive. He was a very wealthy man. He expended this money on the burial of Christ. This was almost unheard of in the ancient world, in fact, the only other record like this is when Paul's teacher, Rabbi Gamaliel died we have a record that they used 80 pounds of spices with him. So, Nicodemus spares no expense on the burial of Jesus Christ. John records in detail the way that first century Jews prepared a body for burial.

Look at verse 40, "So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews." Unlike the Egyptians, the Jews never embalmed, instead, they would simply wrap the body and put these spices around it. Here's how the process went, typically the body was washed and then if death had occurred recently it was straightened and then it was wrapped tightly in strips of linen cloth. Typically, the linen cloth would be about a foot wide. Interspersed within the layers of that linen cloth were these 70 pounds of spices.

Now what purpose did the spices serve? Well they were mixed into a sort of gummy-like substance. They first of all served as a preservative so that the proper time of mourning could go on on this person's behalf. Secondly, they served as a perfume to hide the odor when the decay did in fact begin. And because of their sticky consistency, they actually served as a kind of cement to glue the strips of cloth into a solid covering. John Chrysostom, one of the early church fathers not far removed from this, described the process and said the end-result of this was like lead. So, they prepared the body.

Verse 41, here's the tomb. "Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid." Now it's important for you to understand a little bit of the lay of the land, just outside the west of the city of Jerusalem. Just outside the city gate, under what is now the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, there in Jerusalem, but at that time it was just outside the city gate, there was an old limestone quarry. Archaeologists have found this beneath the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, an old limestone quarry so it created an artificial sort of bowl in the ground. Most of that land around there is relatively flat, but as the limestone was quarried out for buildings around the city of Jerusalem, it created this artificial bowl. But right in the middle of that artificial bowl was an area of limestone that was too soft to be used for building, and so it was left. And it was on that artificial hill that was created by excavating and digging out the quarry all around it, it was on that artificial hill on which the crucifixion took place. Then around the edges of the bowl, around the edges of the quarry, the wealthier citizens of Jerusalem had begun to carve out tombs into the side of the hill there and plant gardens. This became a cemetery for the truly wealthy of the city.

Matthew tells us that this new tomb that's mentioned here in verse 41, in which no one had yet been laid, was in fact the tomb of Joseph himself. He had, as a wealthy citizen, bought the land, had excavated a cave in the soft limestone prepared for his own and his family's future burial. But Jesus ends up in this grave. Why is that? Why does it happen this way? Well obviously, it was convenient to the site of the crucifixion, but there is a reason far more profound than that.

Go back 700 years before these events to the time of Isaiah. Isaiah said this would happen. In Isaiah 53:9, it says Jesus would be with the wicked in His death. That's a reference to the thieves, the terrorists dying on each side of Christ. And then it says that the Messiah, this is Isaiah 53:9, would be with a rich man in His death and here's why, that's Joseph of Arimathea, He would be "with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth." God the Father arranged for Jesus to be buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea as His own testimony that Jesus was completely innocent.

Verse 42, "Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there." Matthew 27 adds that Joseph rolled a large stone against the entrance to the tomb. Now that would have made this tomb highly unusual because of the hundreds of first century graves that have been excavated and found all around the city of Jerusalem, there are only a few like this one. A huge stone rolled in front of the entrance, why? The stone served two purposes. First of all, it kept animals from scavenging the body, but more importantly, it prevented a huge problem in the first century which was grave-robbing. In fact, eventually, the Emperor Claudius would have to make grave-robbing a capital offense in order to prevent it. And so, the stone had to be large enough to require several men to move it. It couldn't be something that one man or even a couple of men could move who had conspired together to rob a grave. And the stone typically rolled downhill into place and had to be rolled uphill away from the entrance of the tomb. So, Jesus' body was very carefully buried and secured.

But it was even more secure than this. Keep your finger here and go back to Matthew's gospel chapter 27. Matthew 27 and notice verse 62:

Now on the next day [this would have been Saturday after the crucifixion on Friday, on the next day], the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and [they] said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'after three days I am [going] to rise again.' Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard, they set a seal on the stone.

Now that is a remarkable account because it tells us that Pilate authorized a Roman guard. It would have been at least four soldiers and more likely, for an issue of this importance, it would have consisted of twelve soldiers, three for each watch of the night. So that there were always several men on guard.

So the Roman guard went with the leaders of the nation to the tomb. Notice that's carefully worded that that's exactly what happened. And of course, on arriving at the tomb what is the very first thing that these men afraid that Jesus' body would be stolen and the guard responsible to keep it from being stolen, what's the very first thing they would have done? Confirm that the body was still in the grave. Having confirmed that the body was still there, we're told they added an official Roman seal. It was probably a rope or a chord that was stretched from the outer wall

of the grave to the stone and then at each end was sealed with wax and with the Roman insignia. And then they set up a 24-hour guard. This is really important because the most common attack on the resurrection is to claim that someone stole Jesus' body. That was the concern of the Jewish leaders. And yet what they do here ensures that that, in fact, can never be an adequate explanation for the resurrection. John and Matthew destroyed this theory by detailing exactly how carefully the body of Christ was both buried and secured.

This is another problem, by the way, for those who claim that Jesus just slipped into a coma. They have to explain how a man with such incredible physical trauma and loss of blood could have somehow managed to free himself from the linen strips and the 70 pounds of spices which bound his body, then have moved a stone designed to require several people to move it to prevent graverobbing, and then had eluded or overpowered highly trained Roman soldiers, probably 12 of them, and then have convinced His disciples that He was God risen from the dead. It takes far more faith to believe that than it does to embrace what the Scriptures teach. Jesus was certifiably dead and His body was carefully buried and secured.

John's third line of evidence for the resurrection is found in chapter 20, verses 1 to 10. And it's this, on Sunday, Jesus' grave was categorically empty. Now I need to begin by telling you this and let this register in your mind, from the very first Easter and for the next 400 years of church history, both Jesus' friends and Jesus' enemies, all agreed on this basic fact – that the tomb was empty on that Sunday morning.

John records exactly what it was that Jesus' disciples found. Look at chapter 20 verse 1.

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, [of course, she came with the other women as well] and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. [as we heard the story so beautifully sung just a few minutes ago by Phil. I love the little insight in verse 4,] The two were running together; and the other disciple [that's John, the writer] ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first. [Undoubtedly, he was younger and more fleet of foot. He arrives there before Peter does. Verse 5 says:] and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. And so, Simon Peter also came... [here comes huffing, puffing Peter catching up with John and, typically Peter, he] entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself.

Now John's language, both in the Greek text and to some extent in the English text as well, paints a fascinating picture. It is an intentional contrast to what is back in John chapter 11 with the raising of Lazarus from the dead. You remember when Jesus said, "Lazarus come forth." Lazarus shows up at the entrance to that tomb and he is still bound by the grave clothes, not so with Jesus. Jesus' wrappings, that sort of cocoon in which His body had been placed, is still lying

there undisturbed. It's as if Jesus' body just passed through those grave clothes, spices and all, in much the same way that He would appear in a locked room without opening the door. He just passed through those grave clothes and left them lying there in an orderly fashion. And nearby, He had folded up and neatly rolled up and laid to one side the burial cloth that had been around his head. The point of all of this is to say, this is no grave robbing.

First of all, if you were going to rob a grave, and the Roman soldiers were on guard, and you could somehow penetrate their defenses, you would take the entire body, wrappings and all and run. But if you were a grave robber and you did take the time to unwrap the body, it would be disheveled. The place would be a wreck. The point of this is this can't be explained in any normal human way.

Verse 8, "So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed." John sees that the tomb is empty, he sees that cocoon of the graveclothes having just sort of collapsed in on itself with no body and he believes there has been a resurrection. But not because of the Scripture, yet. In fact, that's what John says, "For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead." So, in other words, he's just captured by the empty tomb and John concludes He's been raised from the dead. "So the disciples went away again to their own homes."

The point is this: on that Sunday there were multiple witnesses to the empty tomb. If you put the gospel records together, there were, of course, the two angels. There were at least 12 Roman soldiers who were guarding the grave. There was Mary Magdalene. There were at least three other women. And, then in this account, there is Peter and John. In fact, even Jesus' enemies admitted that His grave was empty and that His body was gone. In the second century there was a famous debate between a Jewish apologist by the name of Trypho and the Christian pastor, Justin Martyr. And in that debate, Trypho admits that the tomb was empty. He simply argues that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body. So, in the second century and until 400 years later, friends and enemies alike agreed that the tomb was empty. And in fact, neither the Romans nor the Jewish leaders ever furnished the body to silence the apostles.

A famous liberal theologian by the name of Kirsopp Lake, just a couple of hundred years ago came up with a ludicrous theory that the women went to the wrong tomb on that Sunday morning. And they then asked the gardener where Jesus was and the gardener responded, "He's not here." And they ran off quickly to tell everyone that Christ had been raised from the dead before the gardener could say, "he's not here, he's over there." I'm not making this up. This is a position someone actually has held. But Matthew and Mark and Luke, all record that the very same ladies who attended the crucifixion, who were there to see Jesus die, watched to see where His body was buried nearby. Listen to Luke 23:55, "Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid." So, they actually watched Joseph and Nicodemus prepare the body. "Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes." On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment and of course early on Sunday morning, they come again to the tomb. You see there is no question, from the historical record of the New Testament and even from secular history that Jesus' grave was empty and it's still empty today.

So here is John's evidence for the resurrection:

1. Jesus was certifiably dead.
2. Jesus' body was carefully buried and secured.
3. Jesus' grave was categorically empty.

That brings us to John's fourth and final line of evidence, Jesus was certainly alive. We see this in John 20:11-28. Because as important as the empty tomb is, and it is important, most of Jesus' followers didn't believe in the resurrection because His body was not in the grave. Only John, John was the exception who saw the empty tomb and believed. But most of them came to believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead when they actually met the living Christ.

God chose to establish the reality of the resurrection through some 14 different post-resurrection appearances to more than 500 different people in at least 10 different locations. Let me just give you the list, very quickly. The first of these post-resurrection appearances is recorded right here in John. It's to Mary Magdalene beginning in John 20:11 running down through verse 18. Notice verse 11, "But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb;" and that's when she sees the two angels. She asks where they have put the body of Christ. And in response to that, verse 14, "When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but did not know that it was Jesus." And of course, He appears to her and makes Himself evident to her. Now this is an amazing remarkable story and it's one we will study in the future at great length, but in the interest of time, I just want you to see the bottom line. Look at verse 18, "Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord.'" She saw Him. She saw the resurrected Christ.

The second appearance was to the other women while they were leaving the tomb and going to tell the apostles still very early on that Easter morning. It is recorded in Matthew 28. The third appearance was to Peter recorded in Luke 24:34 and mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15, as well. We heard sung so beautifully just a few minutes ago about that event. The fourth appearance was late afternoon on that first Easter Sunday to the two disciples on the Emmaus road. And then around 9 p.m. on resurrection Sunday, Jesus appeared a fifth time to the 10 apostles. Of course, Judas wasn't there. He had taken his own life and Thomas wasn't there. Now all five of those appearances, and by the way that fifth one is recorded here in John 20:19-25, all five of those appearances occurred on that first Easter Sunday.

The next appearance is eight days later. It was on Sunday evening one week after the resurrection. The apostles had all gathered again. This time Thomas was with them and it's recorded here in John 20 beginning in verse 26. Look at it.

After eight days His disciples were again inside [the room that had become their sort of holed-up place], and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here [with] your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

Thomas, my namesake, has a pretty bad reputation. He's often called doubting Thomas. The truth is, he responded in faith in exactly the same way that the other apostles had when they saw the resurrected Lord and he responded in language more exalted than any other language in the gospels. He says, "My Lord," my Kurios, my Master, "and my God."

John records the seventh appearance of Christ in chapter 21. It's to the seven apostles at the sea of Galilee. Then the eighth was to the 500 brethren in 1 Corinthians 15:6. Number nine is to James, Jesus' half-brother, also recorded in 1 Corinthians 15. And then number 10 was to all of Jesus' disciples in Galilee when He gave the great commission. It's possible, and I personally believe, that is when the 500 were gathered so we should probably put those two together, but I've listed them separately here. Number 11 was to all of the apostles at the ascension recorded in Acts 1. And then to Stephen in Acts 7, just before his stoning. And the thirteenth was to Paul two years later when he was on the Damascus road. And then finally, the fourteenth was to John 60 years later on the Isle of Patmos recorded in Revelation 1.

What I want you to see is when you look at the evidence from the New Testament, it is completely impossible for the resurrection to be some kind of group hallucination or delusion. And the greatest evidence of the resurrection is seeing the resurrected Christ, which is what all of these people did. John Walvoord in his book on the person of Christ writes this, "taken as a whole, the appearances are of such various character and to so many people under so many different circumstances that proof of the resurrection of Christ [listen to this] is as solid as any historical fact that can be cited from the first century."

John's case for the resurrection is truly unassailable. Jesus was certifiably dead. Jesus' body was carefully buried and secured. Jesus' grave on Sunday morning was categorically empty. And Jesus was certainly alive. If you are here this morning and you are already a follower of Jesus Christ, then let me tell you that this evidence for the resurrection should strengthen your faith. It should encourage you. It should remind you, as was sung this morning, He's alive. He's alive.

But if you are here this morning and you are not a follower of Jesus Christ, then understand that John closes his case on the historical reality of the resurrection by urging you to respond. Look at verse 29. "Jesus said to [Thomas], 'Because you have seen me, have you believed?'" Now in the original Greek manuscripts, there is no punctuation, so it's probably best here to understand this not as a question, but as a statement. "Thomas, because you have seen me, you believed." And then Jesus adds, "Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." Jesus spoke those words for us. We who have not been allowed to see the resurrected Christ. He says "Blessed are they who did not see and yet believed." John includes those words of our Lord here, so that we, his readers, will apply those words to ourselves. In essence, Jesus is saying this to you and to me. He's saying, listen, I didn't give you the chance to see Me after My resurrection as I gave John and Thomas, but I gave you their eyewitness testimony. It's right here in these books that I, Myself, have caused them to write. And you must believe in Me, just as they believed in Me. And if you will believe the testimony of those eyewitnesses that I handpicked and chose, without seeing Me yourself, then you will be uniquely blessed by Me. "Blessed are [those] who did not see and yet believed."

John finishes with an invitation. Verse 30, “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book.” He pulled from all the available material. But he says these are written, both John’s intention and the Holy Spirit’s intention, “these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the [Christos, the Messiah, the one the Old Testament promised, and] the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” You see John wants you to respond to Jesus, just like Thomas responded to Jesus. He wants you to fall down at the feet of Jesus Christ and say, “My Lord, my Master, and my God.”

Perhaps you have sat here this morning in full agreement with everything I have said about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Maybe you can honestly say, “Yes, I believe the facts of the resurrection.” But do you know that that’s not enough? It’s not enough. The devil believes in the resurrection. The question is: Have you personally ever fallen down before Jesus Christ and confessed Him as your master and your God? If not, on the authority of John’s gospel and the authority of Jesus Himself, I can tell you this, you are not a Christian and you are still in your sins and you are headed to a Christ-less eternity.

Turn with me to Romans 10. The apostle Paul confirms this very point. Romans 10, he’s talking about the gospel that he preached. In verse 8, he says let me explain to you the word of faith, that is the message of faith which we are preaching. Here is what I mean when I tell you that you need to believe in Jesus. Verse 9, “that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Now let’s take the second one first. Why does he say “believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead”? The gospel is much broader than just the resurrection, why does he say the resurrection? It’s because the resurrection validates everything else. The resurrection validated Jesus’ claims to be truly man and truly God. The resurrection validated everything He taught and everything He did. The resurrection showed that God had accepted His sacrifice for sin. And so, the resurrection is at the very center of the gospel. So, when he says here that you must believe that God raised Him from the dead, that’s like shorthand for saying you must believe everything Jesus said about Himself. You must believe what He taught and you must believe that He died for sinners and that the Father accepted that sacrifice and that God raised Him from the dead.

But it’s not enough to just believe the facts. Notice again now the first part of verse 9. Here’s the rest of what true faith looks like. You must “confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord.” You see you must not only believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be and He did what the Scriptures record. You must not only believe that God raised Him from the dead, that He died for sins and God raised Him up, but you must be willing to confess Him as your Lord, your Master, your King, and your God. Only then, will you experience the power and reality of the resurrection.

The most powerful illustration that I’ve ever seen of the power of the resurrection, I first encountered in a man named Ron. Sheila and I met Ron’s wife Shirley at Grace Church in Los Angeles when we were there. Shirley was a member of the church, she was a member of our Sunday School class. She had faithfully prayed for her husband Ron for 20 years. But Ron had been an avowed atheist. But by the time I met Ron, he had softened to an agnostic. But he loved his wife. He loved his wife dearly and as a major anniversary was on the horizon, he offered to take his wife wherever she wanted to go to celebrate their anniversary, I’m sure hoping it would

be someplace like Italy. But, at the time, Grace to You was sponsoring a trip to Israel and that's really where Shirley wanted to go and she told him so and he reluctantly agreed.

Sheila and I had several opportunities during the 10 days we were together to sit over a meal with them and to talk about what we were seeing and experiencing, to talk about the claims of Jesus Christ, to talk about the historicity of Jesus Christ. After ten days of touring, they left a little earlier than the rest of us to go to Europe. But as they were taking off from Tel Aviv airport, soon after takeoff, Ron leaned over to Shirley and to her shock he said, "Shirley, I just wanted you to know that I've become a follower of Jesus Christ."

He explained to her that he had always sort of thought of Christ and all those events as a kind of fairy tale. After all He lived on the other side of the world, 2,000 years removed. But being there in the land forced him to deal with the reality that Jesus had in fact lived and died, and had made some remarkable claims that he had to deal with. And all of that came to bear on his heart. By God's providence, on our last day there, Ron found himself alone in the tomb at Gordon's Calvary. Now it's not the actual tomb of Christ, but it's much like His tomb would have been. And it was there in the garden tomb that all of the weight of everything he had seen and heard and learned from the Scriptures came to bear on Ron's heart. And it was there in the garden tomb that Ron confessed Jesus as Lord and believed in his heart that God had raised Him from the dead.

Every time I go back to Los Angeles, I see Ron, still a faithful Christian, still serving Christ. Folks, that's the power of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it's my prayer that God will use the reality of the resurrection to bring you to say with Thomas today, my Master and my God.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for the overwhelming testimony that You have given us. While not everyone could be there and observe these events unfold personally, You have given us such powerful testimony from their mouths and from their pens. Lord, help us to deal honestly with it. I pray for those of us who are already in Christ, that You would use what we have studied today to strengthen and encourage our faith. Remind us that our Lord is alive and that He sits even now on the throne, that the Father, You, have given Him. And Lord, we ask that You would drive those truths so much to home in our hearts that we would live in the light of them – that He's alive. And Father, I pray for those here today who do not know Jesus, who have not become His followers, who have never been willing to repent of their sins and fall at His feet and confess Him as Lord. I pray that today You would remove the blinders from their eyes. Help them to see their sin. Help them to see the truth of who Christ is, the truth of eternity. Bring that all to bear on their souls. And Father, before this day is done, may they cry out, my Lord and my God. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.