

Apologetics 101

Week 6: Case for the Resurrection

Pastor Scott Kramer

1

Class Objectives

After completing this class, you will understand:

- the significance of the resurrection
- the key evidence and “minimal facts” case for the resurrection
- alternative naturalistic explanations for this evidence (and their flaws)
- how this strengthens our Faith
- how this empowers our Witness

2

Significance of the Resurrection

The significance of the resurrection to the Christian faith (and the entire world) cannot be overstated!!

1. The resurrection affirms Jesus was who he claimed to be

1. Jesus predicted his death and resurrection, and expressed authority over his own life (Mat 16:21-23; 17:9; 20:17-19; Joh 2:18-22; 10:17-18)
2. His death, resurrection, and atonement fulfills Old Testament prophecy (Isa 53:1-12)
3. He referred to himself as the resurrection (Joh 11:21-27)

2. If Jesus was who he claimed to be, his message and ministry have serious implications and must be heeded

1. Jesus claimed to be God and one with The Father (Joh 8:54-59; 20:26-29; 10:30)
2. Jesus claimed he was the Son of God, sent by God to teach His message, and the only way to God (Joh 14:1,6-7; 7:16-17; 8:42)
3. Jesus claimed to be the savior of the world (Joh 3:13-18)

3

3

Significance of the Resurrection

If the resurrection did not occur, Christianity collapses on itself

- if the resurrection is a hoax, Jesus' ministry is incoherent, his character is flawed, his authority is unfounded, and all Christian dogma and doctrine are mere man-made religion
- *"if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied."* -1 Cor 15:14-19 ESV
- if, however, *the resurrection did occur*, nothing in this world has greater implications!

4

4

Significance of the Resurrection

The resurrection serves as historically accessible evidence to factually ground the exclusive truth claims of Christianity

- *“he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.” Act 17:31 NIV*
- *“Most people . . . are happy to agree that God exists, but in our pluralistic society it’s become politically incorrect to claim that God has revealed himself decisively in Jesus. What justification can Christians offer in contrast to Hindus, Muslims, or Jews for thinking that the Christian God is real? Well, the answer of the New Testament to that question, at least, is clear: the resurrection of Jesus. . . . The resurrection is God’s vindication of Jesus’ radical personal claims to divine authority.”¹ -Craig*
- Since Jesus, according to Scripture, entered history as a man, his life on earth is subject to historical investigation

[Video: Gary Habermas and the Minimal Facts Case for the Resurrection²](#) (Start to 3:30)

1. William Lane Craig, “Did Jesus Rise From the Dead? | Yale 2014 | William Lane Craig” (video of lecture, Yale) April 18th, 2014, <https://youtu.be/NAOc6ctw1s>.
2. “The Historical Facts Argument for the Resurrection - Dr. Gary Habermas,” Capturing Christianity, November 4th 2019, <https://youtu.be/B8fKZ9yHH4>.

5

5

Evidence for the Resurrection “Minimal Facts” Case

Minimal Facts Case: focuses on a few key “minimal facts” contained in the New Testament that are accepted by most critical NT scholars (both liberal and conservative) and argues that the resurrection is the best explanation for them compared to any rival hypothesis.¹

Primary Evidence for Christ’s Resurrection:²

1. Christ’s death by crucifixion
2. The empty tomb
3. Christ’s appearances after his death
4. The origin of the disciples’ belief in the resurrection

If these evidences can be shown to be true, then the question must be asked:

“What is the best explanation of these facts?”

- *“if no plausible, natural explanation can account for them as well as the resurrection hypothesis, then we’re justified in inferring Jesus’ resurrection as the best explanation of the facts.”³ -Craig*

1. Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 539-540.
2. William Lane Craig, *On Guard* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2010), 219-220.
3. *Ibid.*, 220.
4. “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? - Part One: The Facts,” Reasonable Faith, February 14th, 2019, <https://youtu.be/4qhQRMhUK1o>.

6

6

Evidence for the Resurrection

1. Christ's Death by Crucifixion

Christ's death by crucifixion is a well-established historical fact

- this is attested to not only in the NT, but also outside of it (Josephus – Antiquities of the Jews, Tacitus – Annals 15.44, etc.)
- though the vast majority of scholars agree, some people have proposed alternative ideas
 - Possible Outcomes of the Crucifixion of Christ
 - **Jesus fainted or 'swooned'** – some have suggested, in order to avoid the quandary of a resurrection, that Jesus only swooned on the cross, and never actually died
 - **Jesus being God only pretended to die** – if Jesus was indeed 'God in the flesh' then it is impossible for him to actually die. So, he just pretended to be dead, but still paid the price for the sins of mankind by being hung on the cross.
 - **Jesus physically died** – his life on earth ended on the cross
 - We will examine this area of thought more later tonight.

7

7

Evidence for the Resurrection

1. Christ's Death by Crucifixion

So what *DOES* the Evidence say?

NOTE: from last week, we trust the reliability of the Gospel accounts for historically accurate information:

- Jesus was severely flogged *and* beaten, at the hands of professional torturers (called *lictors*), causing severe blood loss and energy drain.
- Jesus had a crown of thorns pressed painfully onto his head, furthering the loss of blood and agony
- Jesus was crucified by the Romans, where thick nails were driven through his wrists, and one through both feet
- Jesus hung on the cross for at least 6 hours
- The normal cause of death on a roman cross was asphyxiation, set on by having no strength left to lift the body to allow fresh air into the lungs
- Additionally, a spear was thrust into his side to confirm that his life had expired
- Eyewitnesses standing by confirmed that there remained no signs of life

Based on the evidence given to us by the reliable witness of the Gospels, it is a reasonable conclusion that Jesus actually died physically on the cross, and was subsequently buried in a borrowed tomb.

8

8

Evidence for the Resurrection

2. The Empty Tomb

Five key pieces of evidence point to the empty tomb¹

1. The historical reliability of Jesus' burial supports the empty tomb

- The burial site was well known by Jews and Christians alike. Thus, when people began preaching of Jesus' resurrection, exhuming the body to discredit their resurrection claims would have been easy to do
- The belief in Jesus' resurrection flourished in the very city where he was publicly executed and buried. So, if the people of Jerusalem knew that the tomb had been untampered with, preaching of his resurrection would have been nonsense (or at least easily disproven)
- There is no historical evidence that a dispute took place over the corpse of Jesus. This seems to suggest that his corpse was not found or examined to prove it was him
- Jesus' burial is recorded very early in independent sources (Mar 15:42-16:8)
- It is believed that Paul was told **as early as AD 36 of the tradition of Christ's burial** (1 Cor. 15:3-5)
- Luke records in Acts that the apostles preached of Christ's burial, thus supplying other independent sources of the fact (Act 13:28-31)
- ***"the burial of Jesus in the tomb is one of the earliest and best-attested facts about Jesus."***
-John A.T. Robinson, Cambridge University

1. Craig, *On Guard*, 220-230

Evidence for the Resurrection

2. The Empty Tomb

2. The discovery of Jesus' empty tomb has been independently reported in very early sources

- Mark's burial account, being very early
- Mark states that Jesus rose from the dead 'on the third day.' This implies that eyewitnesses visited and discovered the tomb empty on that day
- Matthew, working with a different source from that of Mark, talks about rumors being spread of Jesus' body being stolen (Mat 28:15) This obviously implies that the tomb was empty, or else there would be no rumor
- Luke likewise was working with a source separate from Mark's, as he includes detail of two disciples visiting the empty tomb to verify the women's report
- Peter also talks about the empty tomb in his sermon (Act 2:29-32)
- ***"Historians think they've hit historical pay dirt when they have two independent accounts of the same event. But in the case of the empty tomb, we have no fewer than six, and some of these are among the earliest materials to be found in the New Testament."***¹ -Craig

1. Craig, *On Guard*, 226-227

Evidence for the Resurrection

2. The Empty Tomb

3. Mark's story is simple and lacks legendary development

- Mark's account of the empty tomb is very simple, lacking the embellishment of a legendary story (stories of legend typically include embellished details)
 - It is noteworthy that these early accounts relate NO details about the actual resurrection. This is in stark contrast to how fictional accounts are written, typically including colorful details of the actual event so as to describe for the reader. No such effort is made by these authors!!
 - Compare this to the description of the resurrection in the apocryphal Gospel of Peter, which *"describes Jesus' triumphant exit from the tomb as a gigantic figure whose head reaches above the clouds, supported by giant angels, followed by a talking cross, heralded by a voice from heaven, and all witnessed by a Roman guard, the Jewish leaders, and a multitude of spectators."*¹ -Craig
 - This is the stuff of legends: colorful and fantastical.

1. Craig, *On Guard*, 227

11

11

Evidence for the Resurrection

2. The Empty Tomb

4. The empty tomb was discovered by women

- Gospel accounts uniformly record that the first people to discover the empty tomb were women!!
 - 5 women visited the tomb on Sunday morning only to find it empty (Mat 28:1, Mar 16:1-2, Luk 24:1-2, Joh 20:1)
 - The 2 male Apostles (Peter and John) visited the tomb on Sunday morning, also finding it empty
- Why is this significant?
 - In this ancient culture, women were not considered as credible witnesses.
 - Josephus gives account of the inadmissible quality of a woman's testimony: *"Let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex"*¹ reflecting the strong patriarchal society of the day.
 - Women were considered second-class citizens: *"Sooner let the words of the Law be burnt than delivered to women!"*²
- Given this cultural norm, it would be unlikely that the Gospel writers would choose to tell the story using women's testimony if they were **fabricating** the story trying to make it believable!!

1. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities* IV.8.15 quoted in Craig, *On Guard*, 228

2. Sotah 19a quoted in Craig, *On Guard*, 228

12

12

Evidence for the Resurrection

2. The Empty Tomb

5. The earliest Jewish response presupposes the empty tomb

- Matthew records that the Jews met and conspired to fabricate a story that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus (Mat 28:11-15). This of course presupposes that the tomb was indeed empty.
 - Matthew adds a comment that *"this story has been spread among the Jews to this day."* further showing that his focus was to debunk their falsified story (Mat 28:15)
 - The Jewish leaders did NOT deny the empty tomb, but rather made up a story to EXPLAIN why the tomb was indeed empty!! From the opponents of Jesus! This is strong evidence!
- Jacob Kremer, New Testament critic, has said *"By far most scholars hold firmly to the reliability of the biblical statements about the empty tomb."*

VIDEO BREAK: Video: RF Resurrection Part 1: The Facts⁴ (6:42)

13

13

Evidence for the Resurrection

3. Christ's Appearances After His Death

1 Cor. 15:3-8 (the earliest record of the resurrection)

This was written by Paul **only ~20 years** after the resurrection and contains testimony **that dates back further still**. Relatively speaking, **this is historical gold**

"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born." -1 Cor 15:3-8 NIV

- Paul makes VERY bold claims about how many people saw Jesus alive after the empty tomb!!¹
 - Peter
 - The Twelve
 - 500 Witnesses
 - James
 - Paul Himself

1. Craig, *On Guard*, 230-236.

14

14

Evidence for the Resurrection

3. Christ's Appearances After His Death

1. Jesus appears to Peter:

- John 21, Jesus Reinstates Peter, "Feed my sheep"
- Paul tells us he spent 2 weeks with Peter in Jerusalem 3 years after his conversion (Gal 1:18). *Surely Peter told Paul of Christ's appearance to him*, thus Paul conveying in his letter to the Corinthian Church
- Luke also tells us that Jesus appeared to Peter after his death (Luk 24:34)
- "Virtually all New Testament critics agree that Peter saw an appearance of Jesus alive from the dead."¹ -Craig

2. Jesus appears to the Twelve Disciples:

This refers to the original 12 disciples, minus Judas (Luk 24:36-42, Joh 20:19-20)

- Jesus physically appeared to the disciples, and shows his crucifixion wounds
- Jesus ate with them
- Jesus walked through walls
- This may give us a glimpse into our glorified bodies!
- These signs Jesus did also verify that he wasn't just an apparition!

1. Craig, *On Guard*, 231.

15

15

Evidence for the Resurrection

3. Christ's Appearances After His Death

3. Jesus appears to 500 people??

- Interesting that Paul mentions that many are still alive. Was he inviting the recipients of this letter to know that these eyewitnesses were still available to be questioned? (1 Cor. 15:3-8)

4. Jesus appears to James:

- This was the younger brother of Jesus (half-brother)
- This is interesting for sure, since Jesus' brothers had great trouble believing Jesus was who he claimed to be... (of course they did!)
- Numerous NT sources demonstrate that James had a significant leadership role in the early church, suggesting that his mind about Jesus' claims had been changed!!
- James was eventually martyred for his faith in his half-brother, stoned to death by the Sanhedrin around AD 60
- Paul further elaborates that Jesus' other brothers had also become active evangelists, suggesting that they too had either seen Jesus alive, or believed James! (1 Cor. 9:5)

16

16

Evidence for the Resurrection

3. Christ's Appearances After His Death

5. Jesus appears to Paul:

- Paul's dramatic career change seems to demonstrate the validity of Christ's resurrection!

6. Gospel Accounts

It is noteworthy that the Gospels provide multiple, independent sources complimenting Paul's accounts of Jesus' post-mortem appearances

Summary

- Appearance to Peter: mentioned by Paul, Luke, and John (1 Cor. 15:5; Luk 24:34, John 21)
- Appearance to The Twelve: mentioned by Paul, Luke, and John ((1 Cor. 15:5; Luk 24:36-53; Joh 20:19-31)
- Appearance to the women disciples: mentioned by Matthew and John (Mat 28:9-10; Joh 20:11-17)
- Appearance to the disciples in Galilee: mentioned by Mark, Matthew, and John (Mar 16; Mat 28:16-20; Joh 21)

17

17

Evidence for the Resurrection

4. Disciples' Belief in the Resurrection

Christ's resurrection would have been contrary to traditional first-century Jewish beliefs

1. *Jesus' resurrection did not fit the first-century Jewish understanding of the **resurrection**, which was understood as occurring at the end of the world and including all the righteous dead, rather than an isolated individual¹*
2. *Jesus' death did not fit the first-century Jewish understanding of the **Messiah**, which would have been a triumphant figure commanding the respect of both Jews and Gentiles who would have established David's throne²*

In other words, believing in Jesus' bodily resurrection would have required the disciples to abandon their traditional beliefs pertaining to the resurrection and the Messiah. *It is more likely the risen Jesus provoked such different, yet sincere beliefs, and compelled the disciples to proclaim His resurrection in a such hostile environment.*

1. Craig, *On Guard*, 249-250.
2. *Ibid.*, 241.

18

18

Evidence for the Resurrection

4. Disciples' Belief in the Resurrection

The transformation of the disciples leading to the rise of the Christian faith reflects a sincere belief in the resurrection

before:¹

- the disciples could not stay awake to pray on the night before Jesus' arrest (Mar 14:37-38)
- the disciples fled when Jesus was arrested (Mar 14:32-50)
- Peter publicly denied Jesus (Mar 14:66-72)

after:

- Peter was crucified upside-down in Rome
- Matthew died by the sword in Ethiopia
- Andrew was crucified in Greece

"The actual resurrection of Jesus is the best explanation for the disciples' transformation from cowardice, despair and confusion to confident proclamation and the willingness to suffer persecution, hardship and even martyrdom for the sake of Jesus and his gospel."² - Groothuis

1. Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 551.
2. Ibid.

Alternative Naturalistic Explanations

Alternative Naturalistic Explanations for the "Minimal Facts"¹ Video: RF Resurrection Part 2: The Explanation⁴

- 1. Conspiracy Hypothesis:** the disciples stole Jesus' body and lied about his resurrection. They willfully set out to deceive and perpetuate a knowingly false story
- 2. Apparent Death Hypothesis:** Christ had not completely died on the cross and revived in the tomb. He managed to escape the tomb and convince his disciples he'd risen from the dead
- 3. Hallucination Hypothesis:** all the post-mortem appearances of Christ were simply hallucinations

Criteria for Evaluating Alternative Explanations for the "Minimal Facts"²

- 1. explanatory scope:** the explanation accounts for all the evidence, rather than just some
- 2. explanatory power:** the explanation makes the evidence more probable
- 3. more plausible:** the explanation fits better with true background beliefs
- 4. less contrived:** the explanation does not require adopting more beliefs that are not grounded in independent evidence

1. Craig, *On Guard*, 244-258.
2. "Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? - Part Two: The Explanation," Reasonable Faith, February 1st, 2019, <https://youtu.be/6SbJ4p6WiZE>.

Alternative Naturalistic Explanations

Conspiracy Hypothesis

- **explanatory scope: PASS**

- accounts for Jesus' death (*assumes Jesus died and was buried in a known tomb*) ✓
- accounts for the empty tomb (*the disciples stole the body*) ✓
- accounts for Jesus' post-mortem appearances (*the disciples lied about Jesus' appearances*) ✓
- accounts for the origin of the disciple's belief in Jesus' resurrection (*the disciples just lied about this belief*) ✓

- **explanatory power: FAIL**

- it is not likely that the disciples did not *sincerely believe Jesus rose from the dead*. What motif would they have had for such a conspiracy? Not just one, but all the disciples went on to risk their lives for their message
- *"The hypothesis that the apostles were knaves is quite absurd. Follow it out to the end and imagine these twelve men meeting after Jesus' death and conspiring to say that he had risen from the dead. This means attacking all the powers that be. The human heart is singularly susceptible to fickleness, to chance, to promises, to bribery. One of them had only to deny this story under these inducements, or still more because of possible imprisonment, tortures and death, and they would all have been lost."*¹—Blaise Pascal

1. Blaise Pascal, *Pensees* 310/801, ed. and trans. Alban Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin, 1966), p. 125 quoted in Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 558.

21

21

Alternative Naturalistic Explanations

Conspiracy Hypothesis

- **plausibility: FAIL**

-to suppose that first-century Jews would have intended to fake Jesus' resurrection is to view their situation anachronistically through a modern lens:

1. For first-century Jews, *"there was no expectation of a Messiah who, instead of establishing David's throne and subduing Israel's enemies, would be shamefully executed by the Gentiles as a criminal."*¹
 2. Jesus' resurrection did not fit the first-century Jewish understanding of the resurrection, which was understood as occurring *after the end of the world and including all the righteous dead*, rather than an isolated individual
- In other words, *"the idea of stealing Jesus' corpse and saying that God had raised him from the dead is hardly one that would have entered the minds of the disciples."*²

- **less contrived: FAIL**

-this hypothesis is contrived because it takes what all the evidence seemingly points to and claims it is not what it seems. It then postulates the disciples had certain motives and ideas of which there is absolutely no evidence for

1. Craig, *On Guard*, 247.
2. *Ibid.*

22

22

Alternative Naturalistic Explanations

Apparent Death Hypothesis

- **explanatory scope: PASS**

- accounts for Jesus' death (*Jesus just appeared to die on the cross*) ✓
- accounts for the empty tomb (*Jesus escaped the tomb after reviving*) ✓
- accounts for Jesus' post-mortem appearances (*Jesus was actually alive when he appeared to the disciples*) ✓
- accounts for the origin of the disciple's belief in Jesus' resurrection (*disciples saw Jesus, but he never really died*) ✓

- **explanatory power: FAIL**

- it is just not possible Jesus would have survived the crucifixion (see earlier slide on Jesus' death by crucifixion)
- Even if he did survive the crucifixion, how could Jesus have moved the stone that sealed the tomb shut?
- Even if Jesus survived the crucifixion *and* escaped the tomb, when the disciples encountered him, he would have needed serious medical attention which likely would have convinced the disciples he had never really died, rather than that he had been resurrected back to life

23

23

Alternative Naturalistic Explanations

Apparent Death Hypothesis

- **plausibility: FAIL**

- again, it is just not possible Jesus would have survived the torture and crucifixion he endured. Recall that a Roman soldier pierced his side with a spear to ensure he was dead (Joh 19:33-34)
- *"The suggestions that a man so critically wounded then went on to appear to the disciples on various occasions in Jerusalem and Galilee is pure fantasy."*¹

- **less contrived: FAIL**

- *"The apparent death hypothesis, especially in its conspiratorial versions, can become enormously contrived. We're invited to imagine secret societies, stealthily administered potions, conspiratorial alliances between Jesus' disciples and members of the Sanhedrin, and so forth, all with nary a scrap of evidence in support."*²

1. Craig, *On Guard*, 252.
2. Ibid.

24

24

Alternative Naturalistic Explanations

Hallucination Hypothesis

- **explanatory scope: FAIL**

- accounts for Jesus' death (*assumes Jesus died on the cross*) ✓
- accounts for the empty tomb (*provides no explanation for the empty tomb*) ✗
- accounts for Jesus' post-mortem appearances (*post-mortem appearances were mere hallucinations*) ✓
- accounts for the origin of the disciple's belief in Jesus' resurrection (*does not adequately account for this*) ✗

Though some liken the appearances of Jesus to the disciples... to the appearances of recently deceased loved ones to those who are bereaved... there is *a key difference* between these types of appearances: For the latter, bereaved individuals do not conclude their loved ones have physically come back to life, regardless of how vivid and real their visions are. As N.T. Wright explains, "for someone in the ancient world, visions of the deceased are not evidence that the person is alive, but evidence that he is dead!"¹

1. N.T. Wright quoted in Craig, *On Guard*, 255.

Alternative Naturalistic Explanations

Hallucination Hypothesis

- **explanatory power: FAIL**

- the nature of Jesus' appearances make it highly unlikely they were simply hallucinations
- *"the diversity of the appearances bursts the bounds of anything found in the psychological case books. Jesus appeared not just one time, but many times; not at just one locale and circumstance, but at a variety of places and under a variety of circumstances; not to just one individual, but to different persons; not just to individuals, but to various groups; not just to believers, but to unbelievers and even enemies."*¹

- **plausibility: FAIL**

- there is no way to ground the presupposition that *all* the appearances of Christ were like that of Paul's on the road to Damascus. Paul gives no indication of this when he provides his list of eyewitnesses to the risen Jesus (1 Cor 15)

- **less contrived: FAIL**

- this hypothesis assumes that Peter and Paul suffered from extreme guilt to the point of projecting hallucinations and that all the disciples were prone to hallucinations

1. Craig, *On Guard*, 256.

Alternative Naturalistic Explanations

But what about the apparent discrepancies pertaining to the resurrection in the Gospels?

- the “minimal facts” case established in this class *does not depend on the details related to such apparent discrepancies. In other words, our case does not require us to harmonize or address such details.*
- All four Gospels attest that:
 - “Jesus of Nazareth was crucified in Jerusalem by Roman authority during the Passover feast, having been arrested and convicted on charges of blasphemy by the Jewish Sanhedrin and then slandered before the governor Pilate on charges of treason. He died within several hours and was buried Friday afternoon by Joseph of Arimathea in a tomb, which was shut with a stone. Certain female followers of Jesus, including Mary Magdalene, having observed his interment, visited his tomb early on Sunday morning, only to find it empty. Thereafter, Jesus appeared alive from the dead to the disciples, including Peter, who then became proclaimers of the message of His resurrection.”
- Our 4 “minimal facts” are accounted for!

1. Christ's Death by crucifixion	2. the empty tomb
3. Christ's appearances after his death	4. the disciples' belief in the resurrection

1. Craig, *On Guard*, 243.

27

27

**Thanks for Coming!!!
See You Next Week!!!**

28