

MAKING
SENSE OF

THE
RESURRECTION



Chris Price

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WHAT DOES RESURRECTION MEAN?

The resurrection of Jesus is the center of the Christian faith.

No resurrection, no Christianity.

No resurrection, no New Testament.

As the apostle Paul writes, "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith (1 Cor. 15:13,14).

No resurrection, and our faith is futile and useless.

Period.

Almost every sermon in the book of Acts—a book which describes the growth of the early church—has the resurrection of Jesus as the focal point or finale. According to the first Christian witnesses, the resurrection is, in every way, at the center of the Christian faith. The good news that followers of Jesus celebrate every Easter is the news that Jesus lived, died for our sins and conquered the grave for our salvation—not as myth or legend, but actually and factually.

But what did the word “resurrection” actually mean in the New Testament?

And what do Christians mean today when they affirm the claim that Jesus rose from the dead?¹

A TRANSFORMED BODY

Well, if we are to believe the Gospel writers, Jesus died, and then a few days later he appeared in a transformed physicality to different people in different places over a span of forty days. He was touched and he ate. He also demonstrated abilities that are not possible for normal physical bodies. For example, he was able to appear suddenly in closed-door rooms—hence the term “transformed physicality.” Despite the strangeness of the stories (and it seems clear that even the New Testament

¹The idea of resurrection is one that connects deeply with the psyche of humanity. It is almost archetypal in its reverberative power through the pages of history. The metaphorical resonance is perennially suggestive: it hints at transformation, new life, rising from the ashes like the Phoenix bird and overcoming obstacles. In fact, the pattern of death leading to life is writ-large all over creation. It is the testimony of the seasons—the death and rebirth that fall, winter and spring evoke in human consciousness. Death becomes a springboard for life. Every meal that nourishes us bears witness that death, whether vegetative or otherwise, imbues us with strength and vitality. The universe itself joins the chorus of witnesses. Carbon is produced at the center of giant stars. When the star dies, carbon is expelled into the universe. You and I are carbon-based creatures. In other words, stars had to die so that you and I could live. You are stardust and the breath of God. Out of death comes life. Is it that surprising that when the God of creation enters into history through His Son, He gives us spiritual life through His death? His sacrificial death is a catalyst for our eternal life. And then, after his death, he rises again as the first great act of New Creation. All of creation has been preaching this message from the very beginning. In light of the above, it is easy to see why resurrection is a powerful metaphor—both 2,000 years ago, and today.

authors grappled with the profundity and mysterious nature of what they experienced), the New Testament Jesus is described as being experienced bodily on that first Easter. This is what the word resurrection meant in first century Judaism—a physical embodiment after death.²

The resurrection of Jesus was also different from resuscitation—where an individual would be revived only to die again. First century Jewish people had the TaNaK (or what we would call the Old Testament scriptures) and, therefore, were familiar

² In first century Judaism, there were a wide range of beliefs about the afterlife. Different Jewish sects had divergent views. Resurrection was one option out of many. The Pharisees, for example, believed in resurrection. It is likely that the Essenes did as well. The Sadducees, who ran the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, did not. For those who did believe in the resurrection, the word was never a synonym to describe spiritual rebirth, or life after death. Instead, the meaning of resurrection was more specific; it meant a physical re-embodiment after death. As such, the idea of resurrection separated the after-life into two distinct stages. When a believer dies, their soul—the immaterial aspect of who they are—enters into the presence of God. As the apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, “Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For we live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” Here Paul is describing stage one. We die and our soul goes to be with the Lord, but that is not the end of the story.

God will give us a resurrection body and we will dwell with him in a renewed heavens and earth at the end of history, as described in Revelation 21 and 22. A resurrection body is stage two. To use N.T. Wright’s oft-repeated phrase, in this sense, resurrection is “life after life after death.” This two-stage process was reflected in the Jewish practice of revisiting the tomb of the deceased and collecting the bones once decomposition had done its work. The bones would then be placed into a bone box (or ossuary) to await for the general resurrection. In this sense, resurrection was something that would happen to humanity, or at least, righteous humanity, at the end of history. The most important point to note is that the word resurrection referred to humanity’s future state, which is not disembodied bliss; nor an immaterial existence.

with prophets resuscitating people from the dead (on the extremely rare occasion, of course).³ Nevertheless, these events were not described as examples of resurrection.

We see the above distinction reflected in the New Testament.

For example, the resurrection of Jesus was different than what happened to Lazarus in John 11. Though a remarkable miracle, Lazarus was revived, or resuscitated, only to die again. He came back with the same old frail body, destined to succumb to the ravages of time—as did those who were resuscitated by prophets like Elijah.

Not Jesus.

He left them behind, folded neatly in the empty tomb.

Because Jesus conquered death completely.

Never to die again.

That is what the word resurrection means—a transformed physicality no longer subject to decay, disease or death.

Therefore, if the resurrection of Jesus actually occurred in history,⁴ it would appear to be a miracle of the first order.

So one must ask, what is a miracle?

And are miracles possible?

Even more importantly, are miracles actual—do they happen in history?

³ See 1 Kings 17:17–24 and 2 Kings 4:32–37.

⁴ This sentence represents another important distinction. In first century Judaism, resurrection meant a re-embodiment after death, but it was to be experienced by all of humanity at the end of history. The resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous. There was no pre-existing Jewish belief that an individual would be resurrected in the middle of history as a foretaste of what was to come. Therefore, the resurrection of Jesus represented a novel perspective within first century Jewish beliefs about the resurrection.

Should we, living in the 21st century, believe in the miracle of the resurrection, as the first disciples proclaimed it?

To these questions we turn next.

DEFINING "MIRACLE"

"Miracle" is a common word.

Religious or not, we use it all of the time.

Even so, whether inside the church or outside, we rarely take the time to define what we mean by this popular word.

Many different definitions may be possible, but I will here define a "miracle" as such: *a supernatural act, performed by a supernatural agent, that disrupts the way things normally happen when nature is left to itself.*

Each part of the definition is important.

A miracle is a *supernatural act*.

The word "supernatural" implies that a miracle is not a product of nature alone. A miracle is not simply an improbable, surprising natural event, or a meaningful natural occurrence like a child being born. The term miracle is not, in its philosophically proper sense, a synonym for awe and wonder.

Rather, a miracle is a supernatural act from a supernatural agent.

Not only is it a supernatural act, it is an act that disrupts the way things normally occur when nature is left to itself.

In other words, miracles (and our ability to identify them) assume predictability in nature; they presuppose natural laws that describe how things normally happen.

To put it simply, we wouldn't recognize walking on water as a miracle unless people normally sank.

Miracles, like the scientific method in general, assume the regularity and predictability of nature.

In a way, miracles don't break natural laws, they just add an additional feature—a supernatural agent intervening to accomplish His special purposes. On a human level we encounter something similar. If an apple is falling and I catch it, I don't break the law of gravity. Instead, I use my conscious agency to intervene for the purpose of an illustration.

In a book I edited, *Everyday Apologetics*, a scientist (with his PhD in BioPhysics) named Kirk Durston pointed out that although Tesla has produced self-driving cars controlled by software, the engineers still build overrides into the system. In other words, there is the option for the driver to override the self-driving controls or intervene and do something special or unusual when compared to the software's standard design and running processes. He then writes,

The Christian understanding of miracles is that, in exactly the same way, if God designed the laws of nature to "self-drive" the universe, he can still intervene to perform special events the normal laws are not designed to do. Self-driving cars and the universe can both permit intervention by a person equipped to do so.⁵

⁵ Paul Chamberlain and Chris Price, eds., *Everyday Apologetics* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2020), 143–144.

Miracles would be rare exceptions, or interventions that disrupt the way things “normally” occur.

Now, it is important to note that, because miracles are exceptions, it is always preferable to first explore non-miraculous explanations of any surprising event. To throw up our hands and claim “miracle” every time we encounter something surprising, unexpected or unexplainable by our current knowledge might act as an impediment to deeper knowledge and a barrier to growing in our scientific understanding of the world. By doing so, we commit what has been labeled *The God-of-the-Gaps Fallacy*, which inserts God’s miraculous activity into areas of human ignorance. This can lead to intellectual laziness and a hindering of the often meticulous and grueling scientific exploration of creation.

On the other hand, assuming that miracles are *not* possible from the outset can also be an impediment. Such an assumption can act as a barrier to a deeper knowledge and understanding of the world, the nature of God, and the way He operates in history and in our lives. Scholars Gregory Boyd and Paul Eddy strike a good balance when they write:

Since we all agree that events generally happen in accordance with natural laws, it makes sense to prefer naturalist explanations over supernatural ones, all other things being equal. But this is quite different from assuming at the outset that all events must be explained in naturalistic terms. A more open-minded, scholarly approach would be to hold that, if all available natural explanations become implausible, we should

consider explanations that go beyond the known natural laws that describe how the world generally operates.⁶

The above is sound advice when it comes to investigating miracles. A miracle is a supernatural act, performed by a supernatural agent, that disrupts the way things normally happen when nature is left to itself.

JESUS' MIRACLES

In the New Testament, Jesus' miracles take on an even deeper religious significance.

According to the Gospel authors, Jesus' miracles testified to, or reinforced, his authority. His miracles, and ultimately his resurrection, acted as divine endorsement of his teaching. Not only that, Jesus' miracles were a sign of God's in-breaking kingdom. Jesus' miracles testify to the character of God and the nature of God's kingdom.

To say it another way: Jesus' miracles were not just a breaking of the natural order, they were a restoration of God's intended order. God did not originally intend for humanity to experience sin, infirmity and evil. The chaos in our world is the result of the curse of sin described in the opening passages of the Bible, specifically Genesis chapter three.

In His ministry, Jesus was liberating people from sin and the curse—a liberation which included physical healings and the forgiveness of sins.

⁶Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Lord or Legend? Wrestling with the Jesus Dilemma* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 23.

Jesus is restoring creation by healing the consequences of the fall.

Not only that, his miracles were also understood to bring God's promised future into the present. It is like Jesus' miracles bridge the gap between creation and new creation in the story of scripture. In God's renewed world, as promised in Revelation 21 and 22, people are not lame or blind. So when Jesus heals the lame and blind in his ministry, he is bringing God's promised future into our painful present.

In God's renewed world, death is no more either.

So Jesus raised the dead. His signs and wonders tell us that death does not have the last word. Jesus' miracles are a promise to our hearts that the world we long for is coming. This new world is on the horizon—the first rays of light have already started to push back the darkness. And one day the sun will rise completely, and all of the shadows of sin and evil will be chased away by the noonday brightness of God's love and the fully-realized nature of Jesus' Kingdom. Jesus' miracles were a downpayment on that future reality.

A foretaste of that approaching future.

It is important to note, however, that Jesus didn't heal everybody in his earthly ministry.

Jesus' signs and wonders live in what scholars call the now-and-not-yet tension of God's coming kingdom. When Jesus heals somebody in his ministry, or in response to prayer today, that is a sign, or an inbreaking of God's coming kingdom—God's future breaking into the present.

When someone is *not* healed, it is a reminder that the kingdom is not fully here yet. Sometimes it serves as a heart-breaking reminder, and our only appropriate response is lament—the

type of lament that is scattered throughout the Psalms. Nevertheless, a story of healing doesn't cancel out a story of someone not being healed, or vice versa. We have to live, love and pray in the tension of the now-and-not-yet of God's kingdom, where every miracle creates a problem at the exact same time it solves a problem. A healing miracle solves a problem for those who are healed. But at the same time it creates a problem for those who are not healed—a problem that sounds like, "Why them and not me?" "Why did God intervene miraculously here and not there?" "Why heal these cataracts, but not this cancer?" "Why heal a skin disease in a moment, in response to prayer, but not eradicate this slum?"

Whatever the answer to these questions (and I don't think anyone knows the specific answer, or reason why, when it comes to these mysteries—those who pretend they do often give terrible pastoral advice), we learned in our booklet on the cross that the answer can't be that God doesn't care.⁷ He has proven his care and concern on the cross. And, as we will see, he has given us hope through the resurrection that our healing is coming, even if it tarries.

In the time in-between, in the now-and-not-yet of God's kingdom, Jesus' miracles testify to his authority and act as God's endorsement of his life and ministry. They also highlight the nature of God's character and coming kingdom, bringing His promised future into our present.

In light of these theological reflections, it seems important to add to our definition of miracles. A miracle is *a supernatural act, performed by a supernatural agent, that disrupts the way things normally happen when nature is left to itself. And in Jesus'*

⁷Chris Price, *Making Sense of The Death of Jesus* (The Way Church, 2024).

ministry miracles act as signs that point to the nature of God and the reality of His coming kingdom. Miracles are not random, they are deeply significant and revealing of God's character and kindness.

Now that we have defined miracles philosophically and explored the theological significance of Jesus' acts of power, we are ready to ask the question, are miracles possible?

ARE MIRACLES POSSIBLE?

We've defined miracles as a supernatural act, performed by a supernatural agent, that disrupts the way things normally happen when nature is left to itself. We then added that in Jesus' ministry miracles act as signs that point to the nature of God and the reality of His coming kingdom.

All of which begs the question, are such events possible?
It depends.

How we answer that question is tethered to our prior world-view commitments. If we don't believe in God, if our view of reality is atheistic, then miracles, by definition, will be impossible. There is no supernatural agent to perform them.

Even though the Gospels don't reflect the literary genre of legends or myths the atheist will have to read them as such. Why? Because Jesus' ministry contains miracles and, in the words of Spock from Star Trek, "There are no such things."

For those with a prior metaphysical commitment to a godless universe, witnessing a miracle firsthand may not be enough to create belief in their occurrence. A miracle is always presented to our senses. And we can doubt what our senses tell us.

Sometimes we should.

If we don't believe in God, if God is not a valid explanation for any given phenomenon, then doubting our senses, or holding out for some future explanation for the seemingly supernatural event, will *a/ways* be the easier option.

On the other hand, if God exists then miracles *are* possible. To quote philosopher Norman Geisler:

If the world had a beginning, then God brought it into existence out of nothing—which is the biggest miracle possible. Thus, if God exists, not only are miracles possible, but the biggest miracle of all—making something from nothing—has already occurred. Making wine from water (as Jesus did in John 2) is no problem for a God who can make water from nothing.⁸

In other words, if you believe God created the universe, you already believe in a miracle bigger than anything else you will find in the Bible. Or, as C. S. Lewis once quipped: “If we admit God, must we admit Miracle? Indeed, indeed, you have no security against it.”⁹

There are, of course, many good reasons to believe in the existence of God. Examples include, but are not limited to:¹⁰

⁸ Norman L. Geisler, *Twelve Points That Show Christianity is True: A Hand Book on Defending the Christian Faith*, (Indian Trail, NC: Norman Geisler International Ministries, 2016), 47.

⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc.), 109.

¹⁰ To be clear, what follows are *not* actual arguments. They are insights that are suggestive of what the arguments could sound like. For formalized versions of these arguments and others see: www.reasonablefaith.org, or the book *On Guard* by William Lane Craig.

1) The fact that the universe came into existence. Despite standard Big Bang cosmology going through several recent revisions, particularly with inflationary scenarios in the early moments of the universe, the fact that the universe had a beginning is still the working assumption for most cosmologists. So either the universe brought itself into existence, which would require the universe to exist before it existed, in order to bring itself into existence—the ultimate bootstrap trick, but minus the boot, the strap, and everything else. Or something outside of the universe brought it into existence. Since the beginning of the universe represents the beginning of space, time and matter, the creation event would require a cause that is timeless, spaceless, immaterial, and powerful. At the very least, this points in the direction of some kind of supernatural force, or person. This isn't necessarily the God of scripture, who answers prayers and cares for us, but is also not incompatible with the God of scripture either.¹¹

2) Others have pointed to the rational substructure of the cosmos—imbued with mysteries that are somehow penetrable and accurately described by our mathematical models—as evidence for a divine mind behind the universe; a divine mind

¹¹My friend Kirk, who I mentioned earlier, points out that science and Christianity should not be in conflict when properly understood because the very foundations of science are supernatural. What he means is something similar to what I outlined above: the cause of nature must either be natural or not natural (that is, supernatural). Just as a woman cannot give birth to herself, so nature cannot give birth to itself. Since this is a legitimate either/or, and because the first option is logically impossible, the supernatural option makes the most sense. Therefore, science can only be done in this broader supernatural context. Or, as I once told my now 13-year-old son, science studies nature. Without God there would be no nature, so without God there would be no science. Therefore, science and God should be friends, not foes.

that shares its reasoning power with us. Two Catholic philosophers point out that “nature is strangely amenable to rational inquiry on multiple, integrated levels, and especially on far more abstract levels than natural selection tied merely to survival or sexual selection could provide.”¹² They then go on to suggest that, “in our experience, deep, multi-layered, and integrated intelligibility is always the result of a requisite intelligence.”¹³ The above line of thought has led some thinkers to suggest that the fact that the universe is comprehensible by mathematics at all indicates a divine mathematician behind the created order. God is not invoked here to explain what science cannot explain (like the God of the Gaps fallacy mentioned above). Rather, God is invoked to explain why science explains anything at all. There is law in nature, discoverable by our reason, because there is some sort of divine law-maker who has shared its reasoning power with us.

3) Then there is the anthropic principle, a fancy phrase used to refer to the astonishingly precise values embedded into the mathematical equations which describe the fundamental forces of our universe (gravitational force, electro-weak force, strong nuclear force, etc.). These values (or constants, as they are sometimes called) regulate the relative strength of the forces and are finely tuned to allow our carbon-based existence. The precision is astonishing, almost eerie. As Dr. Mark Wharton, a NASA scientist, writes, “If the balance between gravity and the expansion rate were altered by one part in one million, billion,

¹² Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker, *Answering the New Atheism: Dismantling Dawkins' Case Against God* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2008), 84–85.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 88.

billion, billion, billion, billion, billion, there would be no galaxies, stars, planets or life."¹⁴ Wharton is highlighting only one of many examples. To quote Stephen Hawking, "The laws of science, as we know them at present, contain many fundamental numbers, like the size of the electric charge of the electron and the ratio of the masses of the proton and the electron.... The remarkable fact is that the values of these numbers seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life."¹⁵ It is like the universe knew we were coming and threw out a welcome mat. How does one explain it? Chance, or design? For many, design appears like the more feasible option.

4) It is also worth mentioning the objectivity of our moral experience, which suggests that some acts are truly wrong for all people in all places and other acts are truly right for all people in all places. Think of just one chilling example: Is child abuse only wrong in Canada? And not wrong in Russia, or Iraq? Or, is child abuse wrong everywhere? In other words, is it objectively wrong, independent of one's opinion or agreement, for all people in all places? If child abuse is legalized by a culture, is child abuse still wrong, regardless of what the people who made those laws think? I want to say yes. I assume you do as well. Well, such a conclusion implies the existence of objective moral values that ought to be universally binding on our behaviour. And objective moral values and duties fit more snugly within a universe created by a God whose morally perfect character is expressed to us through our God-given conscience and His revealed commands. If there is no God it is

¹⁴ As quoted by Sean McDowell in a live talk about the fine-tuning argument.

¹⁵ Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), 125.

hard to ascribe any kind of objectivity to our moral experience. For example, Richard Dawkins, one of the most famous atheists and science popularizers of our day, wrote, “The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.”¹⁶ To quote Yuval Harari, “[many people have] imagined a reality governed by universal and immutable principles of justice...yet the only place where such universal principles exist is in the fertile imagination of *Sapiens*, and in the myths they invent and tell one another. These principles have no objective reality.”¹⁷ To talk about objective morality in such a framework is nonsensical. Not only that, the essential and universal sacredness of human life only makes sense within a theistic framework. Since many of us are committed to the sacredness of human life, many of us, religious or not, are unwittingly committed to a theistic framework—a point readily admitted (and even argued for) by well-known atheists like Peter Singer, Luc Perry and Yuval Harari.

All in all, it seems reasonable to conclude, as Oxford Mathematician John Lennox does, that, “This universe bears the signature of its superintelligent divine origins in its law-like behaviour, in its rational intelligibility, in the information-rich macromolecules in our DNA.... and in our human capacities for thought and language, feelings and relationships.”¹⁸

And, if God exists, miracles are possible.

The next question is: Are miracles actual?

¹⁶ Richard Dawkins, *River out of Eden* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 133.

¹⁷ Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens* (New York, HarperCollins, 2015), 108.

¹⁸ John Lennox, *2084: Artificial Intelligence and The Future of Humanity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2020), 117.

ARE MIRACLES ACTUAL?

If God exists, miracles are possible.

But do miracles actually happen in history?

Once again, it depends on your worldview, or prior commitments, when confronted with an event that appears miraculous. If you believe in a God who created the universe but then leaves it alone like an absentee landlord, or a God who wound up creation like a clock only to let it run down—then you won't believe in miracles.

This is a position called **deism**.

A Deist believes in God, but doesn't think that miracles actually happen.

Others believe that miracles are possible, and miracles *were* actual—God has performed miracles in the past, but he no longer does so.

This is a perspective called **cessationism** that some Christians hold to today.

Such a position allows for New Testament miracles, but disallows miracles in the 21st century. Neither position accurately

reflects the assumptions of the New Testament, or the reality of history.

In his book, *A Case for Miracles*, Lee Strobel points out that 38 percent of American adults in the last generation say they have had at least one experience in their lives that can only be attributed to a miracle of God. If you do the math, it implies that there were 94 million miracles reported in the United States alone.¹⁹

I am not asking you to believe in the reality of all these alleged miracles.

In fact, for the sake of argument, let us say that 99 percent of those people were wrong.

They thought they had experienced a miracle, but they were naïve, gullible, misled, intellectually lazy, unscientific or prone to wishful thinking. Concluding that 99 percent of those alleged miracles were false reports would still leave a million viable miracles in the United States in the last generation alone.

But, again, for the sake of argument, let's whittle it down even further. Let's say every miracle report is false, except one.

Well, only one of those 94 million reported miracles has to be an actual miracle for there to be a God who does miracles today.

I'm sure many of the reports are false—demonstrably false.

But all of them?

Every single one?

It is possible.

But it takes a lot of faith to believe that is the case.

And we probably shouldn't determine in advance that all of those stories are make-believe because that would be like

¹⁹ Lee Strobel, *A Case For Miracles: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2018).

determining the quality of the evidence before we even look at it.

In other words, a blanket denial prior to any investigation would be similar to blind faith, or a personal bias filtering out inconvenient data.

MODERN DAY MIRACLES

There was a youth group at a church near my home that was doing the Alpha Youth course. They watched the video on healing and afterwards they prayed for a young girl who had scars on her arms from self-harm. She often wore long sleeves because she was embarrassed about all the visible marks. But, as her friends prayed for her, they watched in amazement as the scars started to fade and disappear right in front of their eyes.²⁰

Early on in our journey of planting The Way Church, my friend Graeme sent us this testimony after a prayer meeting:

I went up to Joel and asked for him to pray for my back. He has been a friend who has helped massage the sore points in my back for years. He knows the areas which were most sore. He asked Vito and Sofia to join us. They prayed twice and nothing really happened. Sofia kept pressing. They prayed a third time and I felt warmth in my back. The numb pain was gone. I didn't trust it initially, so I waited until the next morning to run and see if it was actually healed, and I felt no pain. I haven't felt that same kind of pain since. Joel even felt the scar tissue in my back shrink in size. It was a miracle!

²⁰ Pastor Jason Ballard and I followed up on this story and received a detailed email from the youth pastor.

My other friend Steve told me about being at a church service where an older gentleman came up for healing. His left eye was normal, but he was completely blind in his right eye. The eyeball was a grayish color and looked like a small mass had grown over his pupil. His friend Nasir was in front of the man and the man's wife was to his left. As they began to pray nothing happened at first, but all of a sudden the man began to leap up and down saying, "I can see, I can see!" As he turned around to look at his wife, Steve could see his grayish eye was completely healed and matched his good eye.

My former mentor Dave Barker once prayed for a man who had been deaf in one ear for years. As they were praying, the man heard a pop in his deaf ear and regained his hearing.

Jeremy King, one of the pastors at The Way Church, was once leading worship at a church on the Sunshine Coast. A mom brought her son to church. He wasn't a believer and he had lost his taste buds and his sense of smell. He was willing to receive prayer after the service during a church-wide, shared meal in the basement. To his own surprise he was healed immediately and began running up and down the buffet line, completely blown away that he could taste again.

Rachel Sousa, another pastor at The Way Church, told me this story:

I'll always remember this one experience of healing I've been part of. I had just turned 17, fresh out of high school, and it was the very first week of university. We played this very full-contact game and one girl who was playing broke her foot. The next day her friend rolled her into the cafeteria in a wheelchair for lunch. I forget how it all started, but there was someone who

wanted to pray that she would be healed. And then more people started to gather around her wheelchair to pray. And then even more people. I was close by so I joined in. This one girl named Carrie prayed for her. I remember it was a simple prayer: “Lord, please heal Emily.

Nothing happened.

Carrie asked if she could pray again.

Again, nothing.

By this point, there were probably a dozen people praying for this girl bathed in the bright lights of the cafeteria.

Carrie prayed for the third time.

And I remember this clearly.

Emily, sitting in her rented wheelchair suddenly looked up and just said. “Woah.”

I’ll never forget the look on her face.

She bounced up and started skipping around the cafeteria.

No pain.

She got the cast taken off later that day. She was totally healed.

I don’t know *that* many people, but I have still heard quite a few stories—from people of character that I trust—about healing in immediate response to prayer.

Scholar Craig Keener wrote a two-volume work entitled, *Miracles*, in which he carefully documents over a thousand pages of present-day miracle reports. These reports are from all around the globe and contain events that seem to defy any type of naturalistic explanation. In some cases Keener even knew the people who had witnessed or experienced the apparent miracle,

including an incident in his own family.²¹

Here is what one open-minded skeptic, a trained physician, wrote after reading Keener's book:

I was ready to "see through" yet another theologian who didn't know much about psychosomatic illnesses, temporary improvements with no long-term follow up, incorrect medical diagnoses, conversion disorders, faked cures, self-deception, and the like.... So I opened the book, plowed through the philosophical chapters, and came to the chapters of case studies. I was blind-sided. Keener reports literally thousands of cases in these two volumes.

I read them with the critical eye of a skeptic having many years of medical practice under the belt. I found many reports to be unreliable. In most other cases where reporting seemed accurate, I could see alternative, naturalistic explanations for the cures. But "most" cases is not the same thing as "all." Not by a long shot. And it was the minority (still numbering in the hundreds) that I found to be stunning. They couldn't just be dismissed with a knowing answer and a cheery wave of the hand. With respect to my worldview, I had had the chair pulled out from underneath me.²²

²¹ Keener also writes a devastating critique of the philosopher David Hume's argument *against* miracles in the early chapters of his book, before he starts outlining his data. Hume was a famous 18th century skeptic who critiqued arguments for God's existence and wrote a highly influential essay against the miraculous. It is still referenced by skeptics today. For example, see the appendix in Richard Dawkins book, *The Magic of Reality*. Hume's approach has been subjected to repeated, withering criticism by religious and non-religious philosophers.

²² Philip Yancey, "Jesus and Miracles," *Philip Yancey Blog*, 20 August 2015, <http://philipyancey.com/jesus-and-miracles>.

I have read Dr. Keener's book as well. I don't share this critic's negative assessment in that I am willing to admit more credible reports than he is, but his admission above is important because it comes from an informed skeptic who is trained in the medical field.

It is curious that many people in our day complain that religious people are close-minded—but how many of us find ourselves too close-minded to admit even the possibility of a miracle? From our limited experience we cast a net over all of reality, through which no miracle can pass. And, unlike our unbelieving friend quoted above, we do all of this without even taking the time to investigate with an open mind all the claimed miracles in our world—many of them made by people raised in the secular west, educated in our universities and who, prior to witnessing the miracle, didn't believe that God performed them or that God even existed at all. Perhaps it would be wise to follow the advice of one of the greatest atheist philosophers of the 20th century, Bertrand Russell, who once wrote, "In all affairs it's a healthy thing now and then to hang a question mark on the things you have long taken for granted."

I hope we would do the same with the miraculous, as we transition to exploring the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.

EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION

Jesus is mentioned in historical literature outside of the New Testament scriptures.

Extra-biblical writers like Josephus, Pliny the Younger, and Tacitus reference aspects of Jesus' life and ministry in their histories. In fact, from extra-biblical writings alone we can learn that: the first Christians worshiped Jesus as God, he was crucified, miracles were attributed to him, James was his brother and a leader in the early church, and his first disciples claimed that he rose from the dead.

Non-Christian authors like Tacitus, Josephus, Pliny the Younger, Lucian of Samosota, Mara Bar-Seraphon and the Jewish Talmud²³ confirm the basic storyline of the New Testament.²⁴

²³ The Jewish Talmud is a reference to a collection of Jewish writings that contains the opinions of many Jewish rabbis. Much of the writing post-dates the Christian era, stretching from the first to the fifth century.

²⁴ Paul Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 34.

Nevertheless, our most relevant evidence for the resurrection is found in the pages of the New Testament in both the Gospels, which are theological biographies of Jesus' ministry, and the epistles, which are letters written to Christian communities in the first century. One doesn't have to believe in the divine inspiration of scripture to take this testimony seriously. In fact, in what follows, we will reference the New Testament not as a divinely inspired book, but as a normal historical text. In doing so, I will introduce you to some key data on the resurrection.

AN EARLY CHRISTIAN CREED

Let's turn to a significant New Testament text on the resurrection found in a letter the apostle Paul wrote to a first century church in the city of Corinth. It is important to note that Paul is writing to a church that is skeptical about the resurrection of Jesus.

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, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of

God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

1 Cor 15:3–11

What is curious from a historical perspective is that this passage is an earlier Christian creed that sums up the eye-witness testimony regarding the resurrection of Jesus. And scholars are confident that Paul did not write this creed himself, based on his use of the traditional rabbinic formula for passing on received tradition: “What I received I passed on to you.” Paul uses the exact same statement when he hands to the Corinthians the tradition of the Lord’s Table from the very mouth of Jesus (1 Cor 11). In addition, the formulaic manner of the writing and the non-Pauline phrases are evidence that Paul didn’t produce this material.

Paul likely picked-up this early Christian creed while visiting Peter (the leader of the disciples) and James (Jesus’ brother) in Jerusalem around 36 CE—a visit described in a letter he wrote to the Galatians, which is also found in the New Testament (Gal 2:1). Historians across the board date this creed to the very beginning of the Christian movement (so if Paul writes 1 Corinthians in the 50s, this creed goes way back into the 30s). E. P. Sanders, a New Testament scholar and critic writes, “Paul’s letters were written earlier than the gospels, and so his reference to the Twelve is the earliest evidence. It comes in a passage that he repeats as ‘tradition,’ and is thus to be traced back to the earliest days of the movement. In 1 Corinthians 15 he gives the list of resurrection appearances that had been

handed down to him."²⁵

What does this early statement of Christian beliefs tell us?
Let's walk through it line by line.

"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."

Paul says Jesus died for our sins and he did so according to the scriptures. Throughout the Torah, God gave a means of temporary provision for sin through the sacrifice of animals. New Testament writers pick up on this theme by calling Jesus the "lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). He is the once-and-for-all sacrifice for our sins, the pass-over lamb, slaughtered in our place, fulfilling the Old Testament sacrificial law.

We are so used to this statement it doesn't surprise us at all—whether we believe it or not.

But within the worldview of first century Judaism, the fact that any first century Jewish person came to believe Jesus' death atones for sin is, itself, akin to a miracle.

Let me explain.

The Jewish understanding of the messiah was as a political, military leader like King David. He would conquer the Romans, not die at their hands. Therefore, a crucified messiah was by definition a failed messiah. There were many would-be messiahs in the first century and the story always ended the same. The would-be messiah would gather a following, end up killed by the Romans, and the followers would either disband or find another messiah.

²⁵ E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993).

Why?

Because a crucified messiah was a failed messiah. Crucifixion was a terrible way to die. It was a state-sponsored means of dehumanization—declaring a person to be contemptible, not even worthy of being executed in a clean and quick manner. Roman citizens, even criminals, were not subjected to crucifixion.

The goal of Rome was to blot the victim's name out of the history books.

And it worked again and again and again.

Anyone crucified was not only written off by Rome, but from a Jewish perspective they were also considered to be under God's curse, abandoned by God.

Again, a crucified messiah was by definition a failed messiah.

The Jesus story follows a similar pattern to all the other would-be messiahs. He gathers a large following, he is killed by the Romans and his followers disband—at least for a few days.

Then something very surprising happens.

Shortly thereafter, the disciples start proclaiming that the messiah was crucified and then vindicated by God through a resurrection; a startling turn of events. In fact, it is such a strange historical twist that many have taken it as evidence in itself for the resurrection! Listen to Fleming Rutledge:

It cannot be said too often: if Christ was not raised from the dead, we would have never heard of him (or, at least, we would have never worshiped him). Tens of thousands were crucified in the Roman era; of all of these, the name Jesus of Nazareth is the only one known to us. He was consigned to the oblivion

designed by Rome for crucified victims, but within weeks was proclaimed as the name above all names (Acts 4:12).²⁶

Imparting saving significance to the death of Jesus, apart from the resurrection, is very difficult to understand. Paul then goes on to list some of the appearances of Christ.

"He appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve."

First on the list of people Jesus appeared to are his original disciples. When Jesus died the disciples were discouraged and fearful. A few weeks later, they reemerge as individuals committed to boldly proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus to the point of death.

What caused this radical transformation?

This early creed tells us that Jesus appeared to them.

We tend to think that Jesus' alleged appearances only occurred amongst his followers and people who might have been predisposed to think high and exalted things about him, but that is not entirely true. Jesus appeared to enemies like Paul and skeptics like James, which we will see in a moment. More than that, when Jesus died *all* his followers became unbelievers because a crucified messiah was a failed messiah.

When Jesus died they all became doubters.

They were all newly minted skeptics.

They were all biased *against* belief.

It was emphatically not, as some have suggested, their belief that created the resurrection stories. Rather, the resurrection

²⁶ Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), 493.

appearances created their faith and they were never the same again—this is why they came to worship a crucified man as Lord and God and Saviour. To quote William Lane Craig in his debate with John Dominic Crossan on the resurrection, “The faith of the disciples did not lead to the resurrection appearances, but it was the appearances which led to their faith.”²⁷

“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.”

This early creed also mentioned Jesus’ appearance to five hundred people at one time. Jesus’ appearance to the five hundred individuals is significant because Paul boldly proclaims that many are still alive. This is an invitation to the Corinthians to check up on his story. Paul likely knew many of them and had heard their stories and was confident enough in their testimony to mention it. Cambridge New Testament scholar C.H. Dodd writes, “There can hardly be any purpose in mentioning the fact that most of the 500 are still alive, unless Paul is saying, in effect, ‘The witnesses are there to be questioned.’”²⁸

The appearance to the 500 also indicates that the resurrection appearances describe a different reality from a hallucination, or a grief-induced vision. Such occurrences were known in the ancient world, but, from modern research, we

²⁷ Paul Copan, ed., *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up? A Debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 1998), 65.

²⁸ C.H. Dodd, *More New Testament Studies* (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1968), 128.

know hallucinations are individual events that only happen in very specific conditions, to people with very specific psyches. Moreover, hallucinations in general are like dreams—they are individual events, not shared experiences. Groups of people don't touch hallucinations, or visions, and eat with them over a span of forty days. Clinical psychologist Dr. Gary Collins writes, "Hallucinations are individual occurrences. By their very nature only one person can see a given hallucination at a time. They certainly are not something which can be seen by a group of people.... Since a hallucination exists only in the subjective, personal sense, it is obvious that others cannot witness it."²⁹

"Then he appeared to James."

The James mentioned above is Jesus' brother. Remarkably, James didn't believe in his brother during Jesus' earthly ministry, an embarrassing detail the Gospel writers wouldn't have made up. In fact, John 7:5 simply states, "For even his own brothers didn't believe in him." But we also know as a matter of history that James becomes a leader in the early church (Gal 1, Acts 15), worshiping his brother as messiah and Lord to the point of eventually dying for that belief.

Josephus, the non-Christian historian, records the context surrounding James' martyrdom in his work. He writes that the Jewish high priest Annas "convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others. He accused

²⁹ Josh McDowell and Dave Sterrett, *Did the Resurrection Happen ... Really?* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2011),125.

them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned" (*Antiquities* 20:197-203).

Hit the pause button for a moment.

Ask yourself, what would it take to worship your brother as God and then die for that belief?

Think of how you treated your siblings or how they treated you in turn. When my father was younger he made a spear out of wood and threw it at his younger brother in the backyard, impaling him in the leg—kind of similar to *Lord of the Flies*, I think.

Needless to say, his younger brother has never mistaken him for deity.

Yet James is one of the overseers of a movement in which his brother, whom he likely lived with under the same roof for a time while growing up, is called God over all, forever praised, and the one through whom all things came to be (Rom. 9:5, Col. 1).

And let me be clear as to what I mean when I use the language of deifying a sibling. This is not new-age spirituality or eastern religion. By "deity," I mean what the word must have meant for James. After all, we are talking about Jewish siblings here. Jesus and James were not new-age mystics comfortable with the claim of inherent divinity shared by all of humanity; they were not Greek polytheists, exceedingly happy to add one more deity to the pantheon of existing "gods." They were Jewish boys who from a young age had the belief drilled into their heads that there was (and is) only one God and he alone is to be worshiped; anything less than this unswerving commitment to the Creator of all was idolatrous and worthy of swift condemnation. All the reliable information we have about James shows him to be a sane, wise, politically savvy leader who was respected by

many in Jerusalem. Yet, stunningly, James came to worship his brother as messiah and Lord, and eventually died for that belief.

James' conversion is an extraordinary event that needs an extraordinary explanation, and here we are given one—Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to him.

“Then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.”

Most striking, perhaps, is the fact that Jesus appeared to Paul. Paul hated Christians and was hell-bent on destroying the church. What transformed him from a persecutor of Christians into a pastor who was willing to endure extraordinary hardship to proclaim the Gospel? Many modern scholars would offer a variety of opinions in response to this question.

But if you asked Paul, he claimed it was the resurrection.

Again, the appearances to Paul and James indicate that Jesus didn't just appear to friends or followers who already clung to high and exalted opinions about Jesus. James was a skeptic. Paul was an enemy.

THE MINIMAL FACTS

Scholar Gary Habermas has done the most comprehensive investigation of the resurrection to date. Habermas has collected over 4,000 scholarly works on the resurrection written from 1975 to 2023 by people who approach the Bible as a historical text. Some of these authors believe in God, some do not; some are Christians, some are not. After surveying all of the literature, he has come up with a list of bedrock facts that the vast majority

of historians and scholars, across the ideological spectrum, are confident occurred. Here are what Habermas calls the minimal historical facts:³⁰

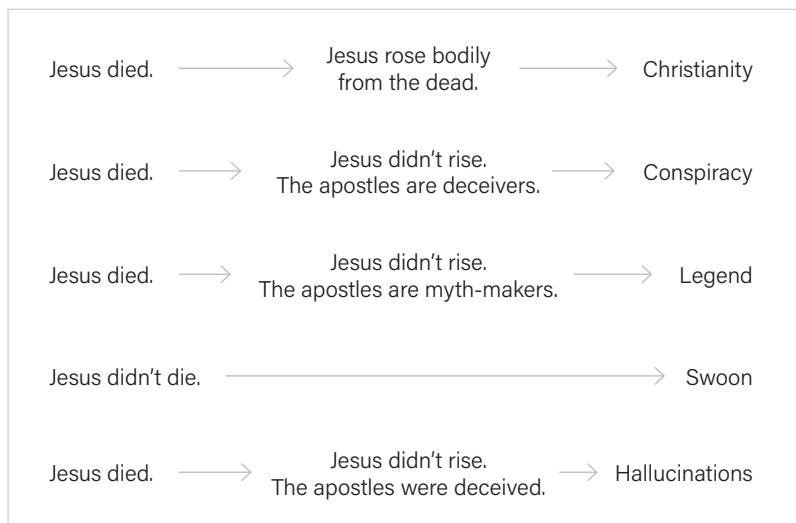
- 1) Jesus died by Roman crucifixion.
- 2) He was buried, most likely in a private tomb.³¹
- 3) Soon afterwards the disciples were discouraged, bereaved and despondent, having lost hope.
- 4) Jesus' tomb was found empty very soon after his burial.
- 5) The disciples had experiences that they believed were actual appearances of the risen Jesus.
- 6) Due to these experiences, the disciples' lives were transformed. They were even willing to die for their belief.
- 7) The disciples' preaching about the resurrection took place in the city of Jerusalem shortly after Jesus died and was buried.
- 8) The Gospel message centered on the preaching of the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- 9) James, the brother of Jesus, who was originally skeptical about Jesus, was converted and became a leader of the church in Jerusalem.
- 10) Saul of Tarsus, an enemy of the church, had an experience he believed to be about the risen Christ.

This is the widely agreed upon data that people have to explain historically. Once you agree on the relevant data, you need to construct a hypothesis that best explains it all. Both scholars and your everyday skeptics have tried and tried to

³⁰ See. Gary Habermas and Michael Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004).

³¹ As Habermas has consistently pointed out in his published work the burial in a tomb is the most controversial of these minimal facts. As a result, he doesn't always include it in his list. Regardless, because I think there are good historical reasons to include it, I have left it in.

explain these facts without resorting to God's miraculous intervention. The chart below provides us with the most frequently offered suggestions:³²



Any curious person is able to examine and critique each of the explanations above. Years ago, I realized that when it comes to all the non-miraculous alternatives, they all boil down to some sort of conspiracy theory.

Here is what I mean: the conspiracy theory implies that the disciples were lying about the story of Jesus. For example, if Jesus swooned and, therefore, didn't really die on the cross and the disciples went around telling people that Jesus died, they were lying. It is not plausible that they were simply mistaken about his death. The crucifixion was too public and notable of an

³² This chart was inspired by philosopher Peter Kreeft and his article on the resurrection.

event. So if Jesus didn't die, but his followers spread the rumour that he did, what we have on our hands is a conspiracy theory.

Or consider the legendary explanation, which is still popular in some circles.

There are many problems with the suggestion that the story of Jesus and his miracles are simple legends, or myths, that grew up around the person of Jesus. These problems include: not enough time existing historically between the events themselves and the first written documentation of them for legend to grow up and erase the historical core of facts³³; the literary genre of the Gospels are not myth-like or legendary³⁴; there is deep interest and accuracy around historical details in the Gospels³⁵; and finally, the fact that the writers of the New Testament insist that they were *not* writing legends. "For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of

³³ Remember the early creed Paul passes on to the Corinthians comes from James, Peter and John who were eye-witnesses. They, among others, were the source of the resurrection story. It is not the result of legendary development once the original eye-witnesses had died off.

³⁴ C.S. Lewis, in particular, has been very strong on this point. See his essay: *Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism* for a literary refutation of this view. You can find the essay via google. Or see Lewis' essay, *What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?*

³⁵ In the opening words of the Gospel of Luke: "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:1-4). Where we can check up on Luke and corroborate the historical details he mentions through archaeology and other ancient writers, he proves to be accurate again and again.

our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty" (2 Pet 1:16; see also 1 John 1:1–4).

If the authors of the New Testament were making up stories about Jesus, while insisting that they were *not* making up stories about Jesus, they were once again liars and we are right back to the conspiracy theory.

In addition, there are plenty of problems with the hallucination theory, like its failure to explain the empty tomb. Other potential problems are mentioned earlier in this chapter, not least of all being that the New Testament authors don't present the resurrection appearances of Jesus as a hallucination. So if the resurrection appearances *were* hallucinations, or subjective visions, the Gospel writers were fabricating what really happened and we are once again left with the conspiracy theory option.

Therefore, it is worth looking deeply into whether or not the conspiracy theory works as an explanation of the minimal facts explained above.

THE CONSPIRACY THEORY

I still remember when *The Da Vinci Code* was published and people were captivated at the thought that Christianity might involve a larger than life, world-changing, cover-up. I found Dan Brown's best-selling novel to be incredibly gripping, a page-turner to be sure. Yet, despite the popularity of *The Da Vinci Code* and the freshness of its presentation, the skeptical suggestion that some type of conspiracy is responsible for the rise of Christianity is an old one. The conspiracy theorists suppose that the disciples stole the body and perpetrated a

hoax—that the first Christians were deceivers who made up the appearances of Jesus, leading to the entire world being changed by a lie.

But does a conspiracy theory explain the empty tomb, the appearances of Jesus, the disciples transformed lives and the growth of the church?

Chuck Colson was a part of President Nixon's administration and was involved in the Watergate scandal and the attempted cover up, for which he was imprisoned. He later converted to Christianity and started *Prison Fellowship*, a ministry to prisoners.

Here is what he writes about the Watergate conspiracy:

Watergate involved a conspiracy to cover up, perpetuated by the closest aids to the President of the United States—the most powerful men in America, who were intensely loyal to their president. But one of them, John Dean, turned States evidence, that is, testified against Nixon, as he put it, “to save his own skin”—and he did so only two weeks after informing the president about what was really going on—two weeks! The real cover-up, the lie, could only be held together for two weeks, and then everybody else jumped ship in order to save themselves. Now, the fact is that all that those around the President were facing was embarrassment, maybe prison. Nobody's life was at stake.

Colson then compares his situation to that of the first disciples:

But what about the disciples? Twelve powerless men, peasants really, were facing not just embarrassment or political disgrace,

but beatings, stoning, execution. Every single one of the disciples insisted, to their dying breaths, that they had physically seen Jesus bodily raised from the dead. Don't you think that one of those apostles would have cracked before being beheaded or stoned? That one of them would have made a deal with the authorities? None did.³⁶

Colson outlines for us the first significant problem facing anyone who sincerely proposes that the disciples were part of a conspiracy. Conspiracies break down under threat of imprisonment—or worse, death—but the disciples were to proclaim the resurrection until their deaths. Elsewhere Colson wrote this:

I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because twelve men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, and then they proclaimed that truth for forty years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled twelve of the most powerful men in the world—and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me twelve apostles could keep a lie for forty years? Absolutely impossible.³⁷

Again, the disciples proclaimed the resurrection until their deaths. Obviously, brave or foolish people die for things they believe to be true, or for other various noble reasons, but no

³⁶ As quoted in Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004), 94.

³⁷ Charles Colson, "The Paradox of Power," *Power to Change*, www.power-tochange.ie/changed/index_Leaders

sane individual dies for something they knowingly made up that doesn't help anyone, especially themselves.

Jim Warner Wallace is a cold case detective who appears on dateline; and he makes our above point most powerfully when he writes:

Many people are willing to die for what they don't know is a lie. Martyrdom doesn't confirm the truth, especially when the martyrs don't have first-hand access to the claim for which they're dying. But this wasn't the case for the disciples of Jesus. They were in a unique position: they knew if the claims about Jesus were true. They were present for the life, ministry, death and alleged resurrection of Jesus. If the claims about Jesus were a lie, the disciples would have known it (in fact they would have been the source of the lie). That's why their commitment to their testimony was (and is) so compelling. Unlike the rest of us, their willingness to die for their claims has tremendous evidential value. In fact, the commitment of the apostles confirms the truth of the resurrection.³⁸

Years ago a friend pointed out to me that, in the Second World War, members of the French underground would lie to the Nazis and die defending that lie in order to conceal information from their enemy. They fabricated a story and willingly died for the deception. This historical example seems like an exception to my above claim, but it actually reinforces the point I am

³⁸J. Warner Wallace, "The Commitment of the Apostles Confirms the Truth of the Resurrection," *Cold-Case Christianity*, 8 December 2023, <https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/the-commitment-of-the-apostles-confirms-the-truth-of-the-resurrection/>.

making. The collusion of the members involved in the French Underground likely saved countless lives, helping many people escape Nazi death squads, and we have acknowledged already that brave individuals will die for noble causes.

The disciples' situation was entirely different. For the disciples, no lives were spared by telling lies about Jesus' resurrection—rather, lives would only be wasted by this tall-tale, including their own lives, spent frivolously propagating falsehoods until they were silenced by death.

Not only that, the disciples didn't have the motivation to tell this lie or create this story. They didn't get money, sex or power, which happen to be the three things that motivate most deception and crime. In fact, to quote cold case detective Jim Warner Wallace once again:

Sex, money and power are the motives for all the crimes detectives investigate. In fact, these three motives are also behind lesser sins as well. Think about the last time you did something you shouldn't have. If you examine the motivation carefully, you'll probably see that it fits broadly into one of these three categories.³⁹

The disciples of Jesus, however, were harassed by the authorities and chased from place to place by religious persecution, all with very little financial gain. In the book of Acts, when Peter confronts a beggar at the gate called Beautiful, he boldly declares to him, "Silver or gold I do not have," and we have no evidence that this changed throughout the course of

³⁹Jim Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2013), 241.

his life and ministry. The Apostle Paul, himself, had to work as a tentmaker to financially support his own preaching ministry. Here is how he describes his labours:

Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak?

2 Cor 11:24–27

Paul's testimony is not a rags to riches type of tale. In fact, if he had been motivated to *lose* power, *lose* money and endure suffering, then, and only then, would becoming a Christian leader have made sense. The disciples achieved minimal power by way of some influence over the fledgling Christian community, but certainly not political power, or the ability to impose their will on people. As for sex, well, there were other ways to have guilt free, promiscuous sex in the first century (like stopping by the local pagan temple on your way home) and, if that were one's goal, becoming a Christian wasn't the road to arrive at *that* destination.

Not only did the disciples lack the motivation to create this fiction, they also didn't have the moral character of liars. Jesus' disciples, from all the evidence we have, were transformed by the resurrection into selfless men who served and loved the poor, and provided us with some of our greatest moral teaching.

In the end, a conspiracy like this would be incredibly foolish. An early church writer, Eusebius, put this fictitious speech in the mouths of the disciples:

Let us band together to invent all the miracles and resurrection appearances which we never saw and let us carry the shame even to death! Why not die for nothing? Why dislike torture and whipping inflicted for no good reason? Let us go into all the nations and overthrow their institutions and denounce their gods! Even if we don't convince anybody, at least we'll have the satisfaction of drawing down on ourselves the punishment for our own deceit.⁴⁰

For reasons like those stated above, the consensus of scholarship is that a conspiracy theory doesn't explain the empty tomb, the appearances of Jesus or the birth of the church. E. P. Sanders, a celebrated and influential New Testament scholar—who is by no means a conservative, orthodox Christian—sums up scholarly opinion when he writes:

That Jesus' followers (and later Paul) had resurrection experiences is, in my judgment, a fact. What the reality was that gave

⁴⁰ As quoted in William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1981), 24.

rise to the experiences I do not know. *I do not regard deliberate fraud as a worthwhile explanation.* Many of the people in these lists were to spend the rest of their lives proclaiming that they had seen the risen Lord, and several of them would die for their cause. Moreover, a calculated deception should have produced great unanimity. Instead, there seem to have been competitors: 'I saw him first!' 'No! I did!' Paul's tradition that 500 people saw Jesus at the same time has led some people to suggest that Jesus' followers suffered mass hysteria. But mass hysteria does not explain the other traditions ... Finally we know that after his death his followers experienced what they described as the 'resurrection': the appearance of a living but transformed person who had actually died. They believed this, they lived it, and they died for it.⁴¹

As we have seen, all other proposed suggestions, in one way or another, represent a version of the conspiracy theory. To admit that conspiracy fails as an explanation calls into question the plausibility of all the other attempted explanations, leaving us with the only answer the church has ever given to explain its origin—Jesus rose from the dead!

As we have moved swiftly through these arguments, other objections may have arisen in the process. Possibly none more potent than the intuition expressed in these words: "Yes, the naturalistic explanations are implausible and, perhaps, unconvincing. Nevertheless, a conspiracy theory, however unlikely, is certainly more plausible than a resurrection from the dead."

The imagined objector raises a good point.

⁴¹ E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, (New York: NY, Penguin Books, 1983), 279–280; (emphasis mine).

Isn't *any* natural explanation, even an unconvincing one, more probable than a resurrection? Isn't the uniform testimony of nature against belief in a resurrection? Dead people stay dead. To overthrow that type of weighty evidence because of a lack of historical imagination seems preposterous to the serious-minded rationalist.⁴²

⁴² I read a debate on the resurrection between atheist Richard Carrier and Craig Blomberg. Carrier advanced a bunch of possible naturalistic explanations for the resurrection: cognitive dissonance, mistaken identity, grief-induced hallucination, a dream mistaken for reality, etc. All of the above are natural occurrences that are well documented in human cultures. A grief-induced vision, or hallucination, is the only one of the options seriously (or consistently) proposed by skeptical scholars in the field, of course, but Carrier mentioned all of these other explanatory avenues to pursue. To be honest, on a broad level some of them even sound a little compelling, whereas others are outright silly. Once you look into the details, or subject these proposals to any kind of real scrutiny, these suggestions fail to explain the concrete data mentioned above. When pointed out that the non-miraculous explanations fall apart, or don't really explain the bedrock historical data that we have, the response will be: "I am not saying this is what happened. We don't know what happened. But any of these well documented occurrences are more likely than a resurrection!" Atheist Bart Ehrman took a similar approach in his debate with philosopher William Lane Craig on the resurrection. Nevertheless, what the critic must *actually* mean is something far stronger: "*Absolutely any non-miraculous explanation* is more likely than a resurrection!" Why? Because a resurrection is a miracle and there is no God to perform miracles. So the conclusion has been decided before the debate has even begun and, as a result, the atheist must always weigh the historical evidence differently. One might even consider this the great divide that arguments about the historicity of the resurrection can never cross. Nevertheless, because there are good reasons to believe God exists and because there is good evidence that God is still performing miracles today, the resurrection is a live explanatory option for the beginning of the Christian faith. Not only that, it is the best explanatory option available by far, once one concedes the likely existence of God. The problem remains, to accept the resurrection as fact should result in the upheaval of our entire lives—a prospect that remains deeply threatening to many of us.

Nevertheless, such a line of thought neglects the fact that the skeptic does not possess any new information unavailable to the first followers of Jesus. The disciples knew dead people stay dead. Probably better than you or I know it. Modern science was not necessary to reach such an obvious conclusion. In the first century, death happened out in the open and it happened often. The ill weren't whisked away. The process wasn't sanitized. There was no modern medicine. They had first hand experience with decaying human remains.

N. T. Wright points out what should be obvious to the reader:

A modern myth circulating at the moment says that it's only we who have contemporary post-Enlightenment science who have discovered that dead people don't rise. Those people back then, poor things, were unenlightened, so they believed in all these crazy miracles. But that is simply false.... People in the ancient world were incredulous when faced with the Christian claim, because they knew perfectly well that when people die they stay dead."⁴³

If you went up to the first disciples and gave them a version of the famous skeptic David Hume's probability argument against the miraculous based on the uniform testimony of nature and the stubborn fact that dead people stay dead, they would surely respond, "We know! Jesus didn't stay dead. That is why Jesus is such a big deal!"⁴⁴

⁴³Quoted from the appendix of Antony Flew, *There is a God* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publisher, 2007), 198.

⁴⁴This is what philosophers call a question begging assumption embedded in one popular interpretation of Hume's argument. After all, we only know

In addition, the probability of an event occurring can only be determined once we consider the relevant background data. We have good reasons to believe that God exists, some of which were hinted at in this chapter. In addition, Jesus arrived on the scene possessing a unique sense of authority, he made astounding claims about himself, and seemed to have performed miracles, or acts of power, acknowledged by friends and enemies alike. Given the existence of God, and given the utter uniqueness of Jesus' life as background data, it is perhaps not altogether improbable that something unique happened after his death.⁴⁵

In the end, how does one assess the probability of a one-time miraculous occurrence which, if it happened, was a miracle unparalleled in the history of the world, the hinge on which all of God's story is meant to swing?

You see, Christ conquering the grave was never meant to be a brief moment of mischievous meddling on God's part into the affairs of men and women after long centuries of self-enamored silence and inactivity. God does not, as C. S. Lewis so aptly put it, shake miracles into history at random; there is always a bigger plan at work.

nature is uniform if we assume in advance that miracles don't happen. And to assume the very thing you are trying to prove is a fallacy. This is just one of many popular critiques of the "hard" interpretation of Hume's argument. There is also a "soft" interpretation of the argument that isn't question begging, but is still deeply flawed. For a refutation of Hume see Lee Strobel's popular book, *A Case for Miracles*.

⁴⁵ By the way, it is this line of thought that radically differentiates the appearances of Jesus, or the resurrection of Jesus, from alleged sightings of Elvis or the rapper 2Pac, which are sometimes wrongly suggested by skeptics as parallels to the Jesus story.

The New Testament book of Galatians states that, “But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Gal 4:4–6). When Jesus arrived on the scene of human history, Roman “peace” dominated. One predominant language was spoken across the empire. Travel was relatively safe. Infrastructure was superb by ancient standards. And the Greek “gods” had lost much of their oppressive grip on the imaginations of the people. After the long spiritual preparation of humanity, on the edge of an exponential growth in human population, when the time had fully come, God sent His Son to live, die and rise.

Strictly speaking, the resurrection as an isolated historical event doesn’t prove anything by itself, other than that the world is a stranger place than we once thought. The meaning of the resurrection is determined by the context in which it occurred. When you combine the resurrection with the story of Israel described in the Old Testament, climaxing in the person and work of Jesus, and when you add to the mix Jesus’ self-understanding, His teachings, His miracles, and His claim to be the one through whom God is restoring all things—then the resurrection becomes a validation of all this and more; almost like God pressed His signet ring into the wax of Jesus’ worldview, lifting it out of the realm of religious guesswork and speculation, infusing it with a divine stamp of approval.

Improbable or not...

It seems to have happened.

CONCLUSION

This short booklet has failed to provide the reader with other significant historical evidence for the resurrection including: a more thorough explanation of the improbability of the first disciples imparting saving significance to Jesus' death, a theological move that would be nonsensical and absurd apart from the resurrection occurring; or their surprising reworking of the standard Jewish messianic expectations that longed for a political military leader overthrowing the Romans, not a suffering servant, dying on a cross and being vindicated by a resurrection. Space doesn't permit us to discuss how the first disciples changed their day of worship from Saturday to Sunday, overthrowing centuries of religious observance, or the radical mutation that took place in their beliefs about the Jewish law in light of Jesus.

On and on we could go.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ For more thorough presentations see: N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Gary Habermas, *Evidences for the Resurrection*, Michael Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*, or William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises*.

If one thinks the above mutations that occurred in the distinctly Jewish worldview of Jesus' first followers are insignificant or humdrum, they fail to fully appreciate the religious life of Jewish people in first century Palestine, including their fierce commitment to their religious traditions— traditions that held together their unique cultural identity in the midst of hostile nations for century after century.

To make these significant changes in their theology and their understanding of the nature of God, apart from the resurrection actually occurring, is very difficult to understand.

So to conclude this brief exploration I will call to the stand the testimony of two expert witnesses. Cambridge historian C. F. D. Moule concludes: "The birth and rapid rise of the Christian church...remain an unsolved enigma for any historian who refuses to take seriously the only explanation offered by the church itself."⁴⁷

N. T. Wright ends with a flourish:

The easiest explanation by far is that these things happened because Jesus really was raised from the dead, and the disciples really did meet Him, even though His body was renewed and transformed.... The resurrection of Jesus does in fact provide a sufficient explanation for the empty tomb and the meetings with Jesus. Having examined all the possible hypotheses I've read about anywhere in literature, I think it is also a necessary explanation.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ C.F.D. Moule, *The Phenomenon of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1967), 13.

⁴⁸ Antony Flew, *There is a God* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publisher, 2007), 212.

If all this is true, why does the resurrection matter?

A DEFIANT HOPE

It matters for many reasons, of course, but hope might be the most significant.

The resurrection provides us with a defiant hope.

To practice resurrection is to be a defiant person. Make no mistake about it. Every "little Christ" is invited to be defiant in the face of death.

Defiant in the face of loss.

Defiant in the face of fear.

Our defiance is not an act of rebellion, unless, of course, the rebellion is against the insidious forces so intent on spoiling God's *shalom*. Our defiance is not a denial of grief, or a papering over of pain, either. We shed our tears without shame.

Rather, our defiance is an act of hope in the midst of heart-break, an audacious daring against the backdrop of an empty tomb; a stubborn insistence that death will not be allowed to have the final say.

Another voice has spoken.

God's Word, made flesh, defeated the grave.

Sunday has come once and it is coming again.

So, in the midst of a groaning creation, the resurrection invites us to fix our hearts and minds on Jesus—the resurrected one, the ruling Lord of the creation.

All in hope that we will one day bury our brokenness and rebellion in the grave too, leaving it behind like a discarded burial cloth as we step into the light of resurrection and the defiant hope of new beginning—for us and for all of creation.

Here are some specific ways the resurrection brings us hope.

Jesus rose from the dead, therefore, we will rise too.

We will rise as Jesus did. As the apostle Paul writes, “Jesus is the first fruits” of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:20–22). Or, if you like, the first and the best of the general resurrection. And, not unlike Jesus, we too will receive a resurrection body. For us resurrection will mean:

No frailty.

No deformity.

No walkers or wheelchairs.

No arthritis.

No migraines.

Our bodies will no longer languish under the objectifying, dehumanizing gaze of others.

No more body shame.

No longer at war with our bodies.

No longer at war with our reflection in the mirror, or our weight on the scale.

No longer worried about the possibility of our bodies turning against us.

No longer fighting invisible realities inside our bodies that we can't see.

Finally fully able to bless our bodies because there is no more brokenness.

No scars, I believe, except the ones we want to keep; the scars that tell stories of God's redemptive power in the middle of our hurt and pain; scars that tell people who we are, not unlike

the wounds Jesus showed the disciples to prove it was Him.

Our hope is that we will receive a resurrection body like Jesus' body.

We have hope for those we've lost In Christ.

The resurrection is empirical evidence that there is life after death and hope for those who fall asleep in Christ.

When my dad went into the hospital for the last time at age 66, his oldest sister rushed down from Kamloops to see him in the ER. He wasn't talking much at all. But I remember he whispered to his sister through dry lips, "I'm looking forward to seeing mom and dad again."

Their parents (my grandparents) had been gone for over twenty years. But my dad was thinking about them at his end and he was looking forward to seeing them again.

Healed and restored.

Made new and whole.

It was a tender and vulnerable moment; he was like a child again—a child who wanted to be in the presence of his mom and dad.

One day we will be in the presence of Jesus—the author and source of all life, the one who went through death and came out the other side.

And we will be in the presence of Jesus' family—the loved ones we've lost in Christ.

The death of a loved one separates your life into a sharp before and after. Before they passed away and after they passed away. The before and after come into sharp relief during the holidays, or on special occasions and key life events.

Every joy is made more tender by a touch of sorrow from that point onward.

I've thought about this a lot since the passing of my dad.

When my son was baptized, I was filled with joy. My whole family was there to witness the moment. My sister posted about the event online and on her Instagram story she mentioned how she wished our dad was there in person to see it. I resonated with the sentiment and it was a reminder that every happy moment, even the best ones, are filled with the same wistful longing and sense of loss.

Future graduations.

Weddings.

Any big life moment, or huge accomplishment.

That's just the way it is in the time in-between.

When sadness touches down on the joy, that grief is only testimony to the worth of the one loved and lost.

Sooner or later we will *all* carry the tension of joy and sorrow in our hearts.

But maybe not forever.

There is a rumor of another world whispering through the pages of history.

Where the old order of things will pass away. No more tears, no more mourning, no more crying and pain.

God made a promise through the prophet Isaiah: "God will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever" (Isa 25:7).

And God has made a down-payment on that promise through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Because Jesus shed tears on earth, He can wipe away our tears in a renewed heavens and earth. Because Jesus went

through death and came out the other side, we can go through our death and come out the other side into a whole new world.

That is the promise of resurrection.

That is our hope.

We will be in His presence.

And we will be in the presence of His family and all who have longed for His coming.

We have hope that our labour for the Lord is not in vain.

Someone once said to me, “We might as well speed up the destruction of this world so God gives us a new one quicker.”

The idea seemed to be that our world is not going to be healed until God brings about His New Creation so who cares about taking care of this planet. There is no point working for justice on earth. There is no point to environmental stewardship, or the elimination of poverty that is the result of greed and pride. The promise and threat of AI is not worth thinking much about either. This planet is doomed anyways.

Such a perspective represents a devastating, disembodied theology very far removed from the New Testament picture.

Imagine you gave a child a new toy and told them to take care of it.

Later that day, you went into their room and saw them smashing it on the ground. In surprise, you exclaimed, “What are you doing?” Only to receive the response, “Well, I am smashing the toy you gave me so that you’ll buy me a new one quicker.”

Would you experience their actions as an expression of gratitude for the gift?

Doubtful.

Would you be inclined to hurry up and give them a new toy?
Probably not.

Change the scenario for a second. What if someone said to you, "I'm not going to be sinless and completely holy until God gives me a resurrection body like Jesus' so there is no point trying to live a holy life now." You might reply, "Wait a minute. I agree with the first thing you said, but your conclusion doesn't follow. Life empowered by the Holy Spirit, life lived in obedience to the Lordship of Jesus; well, it should lead to radical transformation of our behavior in the present, which anticipates the life to come, even though we won't be complete and whole until then."

And you would be right.

The New Testament invites us to live in the present in a way that anticipates God's future. The world won't be healed, the curse of sin won't be fully removed, until God renews the cosmos.

Nevertheless, we are urged to live in the present in such a way that anticipates God's great renewal of all things.

Such an approach to creation led C. S. Lewis to point out a very obvious, but often neglected, fact in his chapter on hope in *Mere Christianity*. He writes,

If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the slave trade, all left their mark on earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with heaven. It is since Christians have largely

ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.⁴⁹

In other words, if the new heavens and new earth are a place without injustice, poverty, or disease, we should seek to eradicate those things now. If there are no tears in the new heavens and new earth, we should wipe away tears now. If there is no sickness in God's renewed cosmos, we should pursue and provide healthcare now. If there is no injustice in new creation, we should pursue justice now. If there is no loneliness, we should help create community now. If there is no racism in the new heaven and new earth, we should repent of racism now. If every person knows and loves Jesus in God's new creation, we should invite people to know and love Jesus now.

In doing so, we join God in the renewal of all things.

And we do so in confidence that, because of the resurrection, "our labour for the Lord is not in vain."

To quote the Apostle Paul directly, "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

We have never served in vain.

Prayed in vain.

Forgiven in vain.

Given in vain.

Preached in vain.

Told the truth in vain.

Suffered in vain.

⁴⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, Publishing, 1952), 134.

Loved in vain.

Fought for justice in vain.

Showed compassion in vain.

Wiped away tears in vain.

Wrestled with depression in vain.

"Vanity, vanity, everything is vanity," cried the preacher of Ecclesiastes.

With all due respect, that may be true of life *under* the sun.

Life without a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Life without grace.

Life without resurrection.

But Jesus is God the Son who has come from beyond the sun to live, to die and to rise again; and his resurrection is a promise to our hearts that nothing done out of faith, hope or love has ever been vanity of vanities.

In the words of Timothy Keller, who recently passed away, "If the resurrection is true, then everything's going to be alright."

I'm sure Keller won't mind if I tweak his line to better reflect his current experience.

The resurrection *is* true.

Everything is going to be alright.

All manner of things will be well.

Your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

Because of the resurrection.

That is our defiant hope in a hurting world.

APPENDIX

Some have suggested that the first Christians borrowed the idea of the resurrection, or a dying and rising god, from the Greco-Roman world outside of first century Judaism. Here is a brief response:

THE RESURRECTION AS A PAGAN MYTH

Did the first Christians develop stories about the resurrection of Jesus by borrowing from the Greco-Roman world of ideas?

N. T. Wright demonstrates, in his ground-breaking work on the resurrection (through the extensive quotation of original sources), that in the Greco-Roman world resurrection was not just impossible, it was undesirable. In Greek philosophy like Platonism, and later gnosticism (which did influence Christianity in the second and third century), the body was viewed as corrupt and corruptible.

Material existence was frowned upon.

The body was a prison to escape.

Death was your liberator releasing you from your fleshly shackles.

Therefore, resurrection wasn't just unbelievable in the ancient world, it was undesirable. To quote N. T. Wright directly, "The ancient worldview of Homer, Plato, Cicero, and the rest had no room for resurrection."⁵⁰ The Greco-Roman world had little patience for the absurdity of a physical re-embodiment after death. Most believed the dead were non-existent, or "living" in a shadowy underworld and, outside of Judaism, resurrection was dismissed.

Nevertheless, several years ago the mockumentary *Religious* attempted to show that the account of Jesus was borrowed from pagan mystery religions that flourished throughout the Roman Empire. Bill Maher presented these conjectures as fact, but scholars have certainly *not* been persuaded. The reasons for the scholarly dismissal are numerous. I will note a few.

Mystery religions were religious communities or cults in antiquity that involved initiation rights for followers to be accepted. The rituals and practices of these communities were kept secret, hence the title of "mystery." The first problem with Maher's proposal is that there is no significant historical data that the mystery religions were prevalent in first century Palestine. In addition to the absence of evidence, there is significant historical data that indicates first century Jews were fiercely resistant to pagan ideas, making it extremely implausible that the first Jewish disciples of Jesus would construct stories about His ministry or His resurrection based on these pagan mythologies, or mystery religions, especially considering how deeply they resented pagan rule.

Moreover, despite the popular but exaggerated claims on the world wide web, historians have long since refuted the

⁵⁰N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2008), 69.

sensational claim that the resurrection of Jesus was borrowed from pagan myths like the story of Osiris, Isis and Horus, or the cult of Mithras. Thankfully, one can read many of these ancient myths by searching the internet (primary sources being most helpful). In the case of Osiris and Isis, a cursory reading of this Egyptian tale will prove to any objective reader that there are no relevant similarities between the resurrection of Christ and this lurid tale of the Egyptian underworld, whether in teaching or literary genre. Osiris wasn't resurrected in the Jewish or Christian sense of the word; he undergoes a crude resuscitation, but only to live on in the underworld, his shredded body pieced together by his devoted wife, Isis.

The same is true about alleged similarities between the ancient first century teacher Apollonius and Jesus. The stories we have about Apollonius were written down in the early third century (hundreds of years after Apollonius lived) by an author named Philostratus. In an attempt to make Apollonius seem compelling to his audience, Philostratus borrows from the Christian writings about Jesus, which date well into the 1st century, over two hundred years before Philostratus' work on Apollonius was produced. In other words, Philostratus did the copying, not the authors of the New Testament.

Lastly, the points of contact that do exist between the pagan myths and Christianity represent commonalities that are prevalent in most religions and don't reflect any significant borrowing. Examples would include salvation motifs, promises of immortality and the use of light and darkness as metaphors; again, symbols and metaphors that are common across most religious traditions that stand in no direct relation to one another historically.

C. S. Lewis taught us how to think about these points of congruence between Christianity, paganism and mystery religions years ago in a remarkable essay entitled, *Is Theology Poetry?*

What light is really thrown on the truth or falsehood of Christian Theology by the occurrence of similar ideas in Pagan religion? Supposing for purposes of argument, that Christianity is true; then it could avoid all coincidence with other religions only on the supposition that all other religions are one hundred percent erroneous.... The truth is that the resemblances tell nothing for or against the truth of Christian theology. If you start from the assumption that the Theology is false, the resemblances are quite consistent with that assumption.... But if you start with the assumption that the Theology is true, the resemblances fit equally well. Theology, while saying that a special illumination has been vouchsafed to Christians and (earlier) to Jews, also says that there is some divine illumination vouchsafed to all men.... We should, therefore, expect to find in the imagination of great Pagan teachers and myth makers some glimpse of that theme which we believe to be the very plot of the whole cosmic story—the theme of incarnation, death, and rebirth.⁵¹

In conclusion, the occasional popularity of the suggestion reflects a tired, dated argument. These provocative assertions represent a school of comparative religion that was, at one time, prevalent in Germany, but is now more than a hundred years out of date. Responsible scholarship has moved on and so should we.

⁵¹ C. S. Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry?" *The Weight of Glory* (New York, NY: Harper- Collins Publishers, 2001), 127–128.

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