

## Why I Believe Jesus Rose Again

1 Corinthians 15

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One of the founding fathers of Harvard Law School was Simon Greenleaf (1783–1853). And as you would expect, he was no slouch when it came to the law. His most notable work was a three-volume set that was the standard textbook in American law in the nineteenth century, *Treatise on the Law of Evidence* (1842–1853). Greenleaf was also a skeptic concerning the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And eventually this giant in the legal theory of evidence was challenged by his students to apply his theory to the four Gospels' accounts of Jesus' resurrection. He did and ended up believing the resurrection really happened and then giving his life to Jesus Christ. I, too, believe Jesus rose from the dead. Why should you?

Note how Paul, known to his contemporaries as Saul of Tarsus, a Jewish rabbi who vehemently opposed the new movement of Christianity, states the resurrection of Jesus as a fact here in 1 Corinthians 15: **But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead** (v. 20). He said this in his letter to Christians in ancient Corinth, who were used to the Greek philosophy that said either death was the end and or that the soul left the prison of the body behind forever. In both cases, there was no resurrection of the body. These Corinthians Christians believed Jesus rose from the dead but did not believe that they would rise again. Paul's here for the resurrection of our bodies is based on the fact of Jesus' resurrection. He was so confident of this that he was willing to put it all on the line for the resurrection of Christ. Without it, we have nothing! My **preaching is in vain** (v.

14), I am **misrepresenting God** (v. 15), my **faith is vain** (vv. 14; 17), and worst of all, I am **still in [my] sins** (v. 17). So why do I believe Jesus rose again and why should you? There are four pieces of evidence God has left us:

1. ***The Evidence of Prophecy***
2. ***The Evidence of Jesus***
3. ***The Evidence of Eyewitnesses***
4. ***The Evidence of Transformed Lives***

## **The Evidence of Prophecy**

I believe Jesus rose again because of *the evidence of prophecy*. These ancient citizens of Corinth—which was the modern equivalent of Las Vegas—turned their backs on the hedonistic lifestyle captured in the phrase, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (1 Cor. 15:32). Why? Jesus **was raised...in accordance with the Scriptures** (v. 4).

Two thousand years before Jesus God told Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac (Gen. 22). Why? The New Testament explains that it was because Abraham believed God could raise Isaac up from the dead—which was prophetic of Jesus (Heb. 11:17–19).

A thousand years before Jesus David who prayed: “For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption” (Ps. 16:10). But he did die, he did disintegrate into ashes and dust, and “...his tomb is with us to this day” (Acts 2:29). The New Testament says this was a prophecy of the resurrection of David’s greater son, Jesus Christ (Acts 2:22–36). Ask yourself, if there was a tomb with a body, why didn’t the Jews or Romans or anti-Christian philosophers just point people to it to prove their point?

Seven hundred years before Jesus the prophet Isaiah spoke words of hope to devastated Israel. He prophesied of one to come whom the Lord would crush, put to grief, and die as “an offering for guilt.” But this one would “see his offspring” and “prolong his days” (Isa. 53:10). God would “divide him a portion with the many, and...divide the spoil with the strong” (Isa. 53:12). God would keep his promise to David to seat one of his descendants on his throne, which Isaiah called “the sure mercies of David” (Isa. 55:3; KJV).

Children, imagine tracing your family tree back one hundred, five hundred, or even one thousand years. Imagine that you discovered letters from several ancestors who lived at different times and in different places. Imagine in those letters they described a descendent to come—telling you where he or she would be born, what kind of things he or she would do, what kind of death he or she would die, and that he or she would come back to life. This is what the Old Testament does with Jesus. The greatest proof of the reliability and truthfulness of the Bible and the claim of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is the fact that the Bible makes astounding claims and then backs them all up.

## **The Evidence of Jesus**

I believe Jesus rose again because of *the evidence of Jesus*. The greatest prophecies of all are Jesus’ own. All four Gospels record Jesus predicting his death *and* resurrection:

“The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.” (Matt. 17:22–23)

“The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.” (Mark 9:30–31)

“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” (Luke 9:22)

“...I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.” (John 10:17–18)

Once, Jesus flipped over the money tables in the temple of God because the religious leaders were out for money more than serving God. Then we read:

So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. (John 2:18–22)

To make such claims makes Jesus was either a religious lunatic, a liar with a really good poker face, or the Lord over the universe and over your life whether you like it or not. Which one is it?

## The Evidence of Eyewitnesses

I believe Jesus rose again because of *the evidence of eyewitnesses*. Paul says:

**...he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (vv. 5–8)**

And this does even take into account the women, especially Mary Magdelene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and Joanna (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10). Of, and did you

know that a woman's testimony was not allowed in ancient Judaism? So if Jesus' followers were making Christianity up, why would they record that the very first witnesses of his resurrection were women? That's the opposite of what you would do—unless it really happened!

Even more fascinating is how Matthew's Gospel gives us the reaction of the tomb guards as well as those who delivered Jesus to Pilate for crucifixion (Matt. 28:11-15; cf. 27:62-66). Oh, and another thing, if you're thinking, "Of course they wrote this, they believed. But the real fact is that his disciples stole his body from the tomb." That myth has been around since the resurrection itself (Matt. 28:11-15). But do you know what Roman law said about a centurion who left his guard post? *He* was to be executed!

Another myth is that of the Qu'ran, which says that Jesus didn't even die, and therefore did not rise again, but instead, his disciples hallucinated and thought they saw him on the cross (4:157-158). More recently others have perpetrated the idea that the coolness of the tomb revived the passed out Jesus. In response, listen to modern Jewish historian, Pinchas Lapide:

If the defeated and depressed group of disciples overnight could change into a victorious movement of faith, based only on autosuggestion or self-deception—without a fundamental faith experience—then this would be a much greater miracle than the resurrection itself.<sup>1</sup>

Either Jesus was real, really died, and really rose again, or the entire Christian religion comes toppling down: "If Christ has not been raised" (vv. 14, 17). The evidence of these eyewitnesses is just as reliable as those who witnessed the battle of Thermopylae

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<sup>1</sup> Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 126.

between the Spartans and the Persians in 480BC, the assassination of Julius Caesar on the Ides of March, 44BC, the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70AD, or any other number of ancient persons and events that we all know actually happened. The fact that the Gospel narratives and the apostles describe in such honest ways their own doubts about Jesus' resurrection, their ease of denying Jesus and literally going into hiding after his death, and their dismissal of the first reports of the resurrection, is evidence that they were and telling the truth. "But you're arguing for the resurrection from the Bible." Yes, and I'm not even including what ancient Jewish rabbis, Roman historians, and non-Christian philosophers all wrote. There is more than one thousand times more manuscript data for the New Testament than for the average ancient Greco-Roman author. Further, the manuscripts of the ancient authors is no earlier than five hundred years after the time they wrote. For the New Testament, there are only decades between the events and the writing. The Lord is risen indeed!

These facts led Simon Greenleaf as Pinchas Lapide to accept the resurrection as really happening. In fact, Lapide, a Jewish rabbi, said in his 1982 book, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective*, "I accept the resurrection of Jesus not as an invention of the community of disciples, but as an historical event."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1982), .

## **The Evidence of Transformed Lives**

I believe Jesus rose again because of *the evidence of transformed lives*: **For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy 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 toward me was not in vain.** (vv. 9–10) Saul of Tarsus was one of the up and coming rabbis in Judaism in the early part of the first century. He had studied under the famed rabbi, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He described his education as “according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers” (Acts 22:3). This is why he says of himself elsewhere that he was “a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless” (Phil. 3:5–6).

But because of the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, Saul the persecutor became Paul the preacher; Saul the opponent became Paul the apostle. As Lapidé said:

When this scared, frightened band of apostles which was just about to throw away everything in order to flee in despair to Galilee; when these peasants, shepherds, and fishermen, who betrayed and denied their master and failed him so miserably, suddenly could be changed overnight into a confident mission society, convinced of salvation and able to work with much more success after Easter than before, then no vision or hallucination is sufficient to explain such a revolutionary transformation.<sup>3</sup>

What explains this transformation? Jesus of Nazareth is the Lord of the universe and his grace is the invincible power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes. His resurrection is the proof. That’s what we celebrate today. We do not celebrate with egg hunts, bounce houses, candy, and games, but we celebrate in sermon, sacrament, and

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<sup>3</sup> Lapidé, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 125.

song. We do not celebrate the feel-good religion you read about in those direct mail ads this week, but that a tomb that once held the body of a first century Jew is empty; it is the fact that this Jewish man, who is also God, is alive.

Why is the significance for you? Will you go on living like Jesus never rose again? Will you even say it happened but go on living your so-called agnostic life? Or will you realize how, that because Jesus rose again as he said he would, as the ancient prophets said he would, and as the eyewitnesses said he did therefore everything he said is true? And what did Jesus say and what can I proclaim to you today? If you turn away from life lived on your own terms and give your life to Jesus Christ you will be saved. If you believe in him, your sins will be forgiven. If you trust in him he will accept you into the family of God. What more proof do you need? What are you waiting for? Amen.