

Sermon study Resurrection Day "Proof"

Use this outline as a guide. You can talk about it a different way if you like but whatever you do make sure the depth of this study is depth of APPLICATION. Do not make it your goal to get sidetracked determining the meaning. The goal is to move forward from the message into actual real life and specific application. Be creative and follow up about application. Imagine a church where the people actually applied what they learned. Wow.

The problem this sermon addresses

We sometimes get so caught up in trying to prove the truth of Christianity and the reality of the Resurrection that we forget the purpose of it.

This is the opening statement from William Lane Craig in his debate against Bart Ehrman:

William Lane Craig – Opening Statement

...For now, I want to sketch briefly how a historical case for Jesus' resurrection might look. In constructing a case for Jesus' resurrection, it's important to distinguish between the evidence and the best explanation of that evidence. This distinction is important because in this case the evidence is relatively uncontroversial. As we'll see, it's agreed to by most scholars. On the other hand, the explanation of that evidence is controversial. That the resurrection is the best explanation is a matter of controversy. Now although Dr. Ehrman says that there cannot be any historical evidence for the resurrection, we'll see that what he really means is that the resurrection cannot be the best explanation of that evidence, not that there is no evidence.

That leads me, then, to my first major contention, namely:

(I) There are four historical facts which must be explained by any adequate historical hypothesis:

- o Jesus' burial*
- o the discovery of his empty tomb*
- o his post-mortem appearances*
- o the origin of the disciples' belief in his resurrection.*

Now, let's look at that first contention more closely. I want to share four facts which are widely accepted by historians today.

Fact #1: After his crucifixion Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea in a tomb.

Historians have established this fact on the basis of evidence such as the following:

- 1. Jesus' burial is multiply attested in early, independent sources.*

We have four biographies of Jesus, by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which have been collected into the New Testament, along with various letters of the apostle Paul. Now the burial account is part of Mark's source material for the story of Jesus' suffering and death. This is a very early source which is probably based on eyewitness testimony and which the commentator Rudolf Pesch dates to within seven years of the crucifixion. Moreover, Paul also cites an extremely early source for Jesus' burial which most scholars date to within five years of Jesus' crucifixion. Independent testimony to Jesus' burial by Joseph is also found in the sources behind Matthew and Luke and the Gospel of John, not to mention the extra-biblical Gospel of Peter. Thus, we have the remarkable number of at least five independent sources for Jesus' burial, some of which are extraordinarily early.

2. As a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea is unlikely to be a Christian invention.

There was an understandable hostility in the early church toward the Jewish leaders. In Christian eyes, they had engineered a judicial murder of Jesus. Thus, according to the late New Testament scholar Raymond Brown, Jesus' burial by Joseph is "very probable," since it is "almost inexplicable" why Christians would make up a story about a Jewish Sanhedrist who does what is right by Jesus. 1

For these and other reasons, most New Testament critics concur that Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea in a tomb. According to the late John A. T. Robinson of Cambridge University, the burial of Jesus in the tomb is "one of the earliest and best-attested facts about Jesus." 2

Fact #2: On the Sunday after the crucifixion, Jesus' tomb was found empty by a group of his women followers.

Among the reasons which have led most scholars to this conclusion are the following:

1. The empty tomb is also multiply attested by independent, early sources.

Mark's source didn't end with the burial, but with the story of the empty tomb, which is tied to the burial story verbally and grammatically. Moreover, Matthew and John have independent sources about the empty tomb; it's also mentioned in the sermons in the Acts of the Apostles (2.29; 13.36); and it's implied by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthian church (I Cor. 15.4). Thus, we have again multiple, early, independent attestation of the fact of the empty tomb.

2. The tomb was discovered empty by women.

In patriarchal Jewish society the testimony of women was not highly regarded. In fact, the Jewish historian Josephus says that women weren't even permitted to serve as witnesses in a Jewish court of law. Now in light of this fact, how remarkable it is that it is women who are the discoverers of Jesus' empty tomb. Any later legendary account would certainly have made male disciples like Peter and John discover the empty tomb. The fact that it is women, rather than men, who are the discoverers of the empty tomb is best explained by the fact that they were the chief witnesses to the fact of the empty tomb, and the Gospel writers faithfully record what, for them, was an awkward and embarrassing fact.

*I could go on, but I think enough has been said to indicate why, in the words of Jacob Kremer, an Austrian specialist on the resurrection, "By far most exegetes hold firmly to the reliability of the biblical statements concerning the empty tomb."*3

Fact #3: On different occasions and under various circumstances different individuals and groups of people experienced appearances of Jesus alive from the dead.

This is a fact which is virtually universally acknowledged by scholars, for the following reasons:

1. Paul's list of eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection appearances guarantees that such appearances occurred.

Paul tells us that Jesus appeared to his chief disciple Peter, then to the inner circle of disciples known as the Twelve; then he appeared to a group of 500 disciples at once, then to his younger brother James, who up to that time was apparently not a believer, then to all the apostles. Finally, Paul adds, "he appeared also to me," at the time when Paul was still a persecutor of the early Jesus movement (I Cor. 15.5-8). Given the early date of Paul's information as well as his personal acquaintance with the people involved, these appearances cannot be dismissed as mere legends.

2. The appearance narratives in the Gospels provide multiple, independent attestation of the appearances.

For example, the appearance to Peter is attested by Luke and Paul; the appearance to the Twelve is attested by Luke, John, and Paul; and the appearance to the women is attested by Matthew and John. The appearance narratives span such a breadth of independent sources that it cannot be reasonably denied that the earliest disciples did have such experiences. Thus, even the skeptical German New Testament critic Gerd Lüdemann concludes, "It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus' death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ." 4

Finally,

Fact #4: The original disciples suddenly and sincerely came to believe that Jesus was risen from the dead despite their having every predisposition to the contrary.

Think of the situation the disciples faced following Jesus' crucifixion:

1. Their leader was dead.

And Jewish Messianic expectations had no idea of a Messiah who, instead of triumphing over Israel's enemies, would be shamefully executed by them as a criminal.

2. Jewish beliefs about the afterlife precluded anyone's rising from the dead to glory and immortality before the general resurrection of the dead at the end of the world.

Nevertheless, the original disciples suddenly came to believe so strongly that God had raised Jesus from the dead that they were willing to die for the truth of that belief. But then the obvious question arises: What in the world caused them to believe such an un-Jewish and outlandish thing? Luke Johnson, a New Testament scholar at Emory University, muses, "Some sort of powerful, transformative experience is required to generate the sort of movement earliest Christianity was." 5 And N. T. Wright, an eminent British scholar, concludes, "That is why, as an historian, I cannot explain the rise of early Christianity unless Jesus rose again, leaving an empty tomb behind him." 6

In summary, there are four facts agreed upon by the majority of scholars: Jesus' burial, the discovery of his empty tomb, his post-mortem appearances, and the origin of the disciples' belief in his resurrection.

Now in his early published work Dr. Ehrman expressed skepticism about these facts. He insisted that we cannot really affirm these facts. 7 Why not? Well, he gave two reasons:

First, he said, historians cannot say that a miracle probably occurred. But here he was obviously confusing the evidence for the resurrection with the best explanation of the evidence. The resurrection of Jesus is a miraculous explanation of the evidence. But the evidence itself is not miraculous. None of these four facts is any way supernatural or inaccessible to the historian. To give an analogy, did you know that after Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, there was actually a plot to steal his body as it was being transported by train back to Illinois? Now the historian will obviously want to know whether this plot was foiled or not. Was Lincoln's body missing from the train? Was it successfully interred in the tomb in Springfield? Did his closest associates like Secretary of War Stanton or Vice-President Johnson claim to have seen appearances of Lincoln alive after his death, and so on? These are questions any historian can investigate. And it's the same with the four facts about Jesus.

But Professor Ehrman had a second reason why he thought the historian cannot affirm these facts: the Gospel accounts of these events are hopelessly contradictory. But the problem with this line of argument is that it assumes three things: (i) that the inconsistencies are irresolvable rather than merely apparent; (ii) that the inconsistencies lie at the heart of the narrative rather than just in the secondary, peripheral details; and (iii) that all of the accounts have an equal claim to historical reliability, since the presence of inconsistencies in a later, less reliable source does nothing to undermine the credibility of an earlier, more credible source. In fact, when you look at the supposed inconsistencies, what you find is that most of them—like the names and number of the women who visited the tomb—are merely apparent, not real. Moreover, the alleged inconsistencies are found in the secondary, circumstantial details of the story and have no effect at all on the four facts as I've stated them.

So most historians haven't been deterred by these sorts of objections. And in fact Dr. Ehrman has himself come to re-think his position on these issues. Inconsistencies in the details notwithstanding, he now recognizes that we have "solid traditions," not only for Jesus' burial, but also for the women's discovery of the empty tomb, and therefore, he says, we can conclude with "some certainty" that Jesus was in fact buried by Joseph of Arimathea in a tomb and that three days later the tomb was found empty. 8

When I discovered that Professor Ehrman had reversed himself on this question, my admiration for his honesty and scholarly objectivity shot up. Very few scholars, once they've gone into print on an issue, have the courage to re-think that issue and admit that they were wrong. Dr. Ehrman's reversal of his opinion on these matters is testimony, not merely to the force of the evidence for these four facts, but also to his determination to follow the evidence wherever it leads. What this means is that my first contention is not an issue of disagreement in tonight's debate. The whole debate will therefore turn upon Dr. Ehrman's response to my second contention, namely:

(II) *The best explanation of these facts is that Jesus rose from the dead.*

This, of course, was the explanation that the eyewitnesses themselves gave, and I can think of no better explanation. The Resurrection Hypothesis passes all of the standard criteria for being the best explanation, such as explanatory power, explanatory scope, plausibility, and so forth. Of course, down through history various alternative naturalistic explanations of the resurrection have been proposed, such as the Conspiracy Hypothesis, the Apparent Death Hypothesis, the Hallucination Hypothesis, and so on. In the judgment of contemporary scholarship, however, none of these naturalistic hypotheses has managed to provide a plausible explanation of the facts. Nor does Dr. Ehrman support any of these naturalistic explanations of the facts.

So why, we may ask, does Dr. Ehrman not accept the resurrection as the best explanation? The answer is simple: the resurrection is a miracle, and Dr. Ehrman denies the possibility of establishing a miracle. He writes, "Because historians can only establish what probably happened, and a miracle of this nature is highly improbable, the historian cannot say it probably occurred." 9 This argument against the identification of a miracle is an old one, already refuted in the 18th century by such eminent scholars as William Paley and George Campbell, and is rejected as fallacious by most contemporary philosophers as well. Now I've promised to say more about this later; but for now, let me simply say that in the absence of some naturalistic explanation of the facts, Dr. Ehrman's hesitancy about embracing the resurrection of Jesus as the best explanation is really quite unnecessary. Dr. Ehrman would be quite within his rational rights to embrace a miraculous explanation like the resurrection—and so would we.

In conclusion, then, I think that there is good historical evidence for Jesus' resurrection. Specifically, I've staked out two basic contentions for discussion tonight:

I. There are four historical facts which must be explained by any adequate historical hypothesis: Jesus' burial, the discovery of his empty tomb, his post-mortem appearances, and the very origin of the disciples' belief in his resurrection, and

II. The best explanation of these facts is that Jesus rose from the dead.

(To read more go to: <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/is-there-historical-evidence-for-the-resurrection-of-jesus-the-craig-ehrman#ixzz2PAXhEQV2>)

The problem is that even though these facts are important in taking away ones excuse to deny the reality of the Resurrection - the disciples who were standing looking at the risen Christ STILL DOUBTED!

Read: Matthew 28:16-17; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:24-29; Luke 16:19-31

Notice that in each of their cases they had trouble believing. I believe that we miss the importance of the Resurrection because we are trying to show it happened. **Easter is not about what proves the Resurrection. Its about what the Resurrection proves.**

Main Idea:

Easter is not about what proves the Resurrection. Its about what the Resurrection proves...

CPT

The Resurrection proves that Jesus is who He says He is.

The Resurrection proves that God is who He says He is.

The Resurrection proves that We are who He says we are.

I. The resurrection is proof that Jesus is who He says He is -

A. Read Romans 1:1-4

1. Verse 4 tells us that Jesus was proven to be the Son of God through His Resurrection.
2. Regarding the term 'Son of God' check out this link: <http://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-Son-of-God.html>
3. Read Romans 1:3. Notice that the incarnation (son of David) is proof of His humanity.
 - a) Read: Matthew 1:1, 16-17; Luke 3:21-23, 38-4:2 (tempted to sin like Adam); Hebrews 2:14-18
4. Read Romans 1:4. Notice that the resurrection is proof of his deity.
 - a) Read: Hebrews 1:1-4; Colossians 2:15-20
5. Read 1 John 1:1-4. Notice that our faith is Historical. It is not based on an argument but on a person who lived in space/time history.
6. So then how does the Resurrection correct the false views of Christ out there then?
7. "If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead." — Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*
8. Lewis expressed his idea in more than one place, but the most definitive appears in *Mere Christianity*: "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of [Hell](#). You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."
9. Discuss.

II. The resurrection is proof that God is who He says He is

B. Read Romans 3:21-26.

2. The conundrum is that God is described as perfectly just (Deuteronomy 32:4 etc) and perfectly loving (1 John 4:7-10). The cross is where God showed He is both and the Resurrection is where He proved it.
 - b) Read <http://www.christianpost.com/news/reconciling-gods-love-and-justice-55506/>
3. Implication: Our Faith is logical. It is self consistent. It accounts for God's wrath and His Love.
4. So then how does the Resurrection correct the false views of God out there?

III. The resurrection is proof that we are who He says we are

- C. Read Ephesians 2:1-10.
- D. Read Ephesians 2:1-3. We were dead
- E. Read Ephesians 2:4. But God raised us up with Him. The Resurrection proves who we are. We were dead sinners but because of Jesus we are alive saints.
- F. Read Romans 3:9-20. The Resurrection corrects our false view of our inherent goodness. If we were inherently good or capable of good in and of ourselves there would be no need for a cross. The good news would need only be good advice. The Resurrection prove that we really were dead sinners slaves to sin and now by faith we are alive saints and slaves to righteousness (Romans 6:15-23).
- G. Implication: Our faith corresponds to reality. It has explanation power. Discuss
- H. So then how does the Resurrection correct our false view of self?

IV. Proof- 1 Corinthians 15:1-19 - everything hinges on the Resurrection

- D. Either our faith is in vain or it is not. The Resurrection is our receipt that its all true.
- E. The Resurrection proves that our faith is historical. It is logical and consistent. It corresponds to reality; it has explanation power.
- F. But more importantly it proves that our faith is not in vain. It proves the story. It proves your need. It proves His offer.

Application:

Spend time praying for all the people that came to church Sunday- that they would come back and live for this Christ, for this God, as this person. Whenever you are tempted to take a false conception of Jesus, remember the Resurrection. Whenever you are tempted to take a false view of God, remember the Resurrection. Whenever you are tempted to take a false view of mankind or of yourself, remember the Resurrection. Easter is not about what proves the Resurrection- its about what the Resurrection proves.