

6 THE LIFE

KEY POINTS

1. *If Jesus Christ DID NOT rise from the dead, He is not the Truth and He is not the Way.*
2. *If Jesus Christ DID rise from the dead, He is truly the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*

IN THIS LESSON YOU WILL STUDY THESE QUESTIONS:

- What if Christ did not rise from the dead?
- Did Christ rise from the dead?
- What about scientific evidence?
- What about historical evidence?
- Is testimony regarding the resurrection reliable?
- Is the evidence provided by former skeptics valid?
- Are you guilty of closed thinking?

The last part of His statement is the key to the first two claims. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth.” And then He said, “And I am the life.”⁴³ This is the most important aspect of Jesus’ claims. His claim to be “life” implies that He must live for eternity if He is to give us eternal life. This claim had to do with His resurrection, the most important aspect for the credibility of Christianity. If Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead, He is not the truth and He is not the way. The whole basis for the credibility of the life of Christ is found in the Resurrection.

WHAT IF CHRIST DID NOT RISE FROM THE DEAD?

If Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead, thus conquering death, Christians are the biggest fools in the world. If Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead, I am communicating nothing but lies to you. If Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead, your faith and my faith and the world's faith is useless and in vain. The whole focus of the life of Christ related to substantiating His claims was His statement that He must be rejected and "must be killed and after three days rise again."⁴⁴

Historian **Philip Schaff**, who wrote *History of The Christian Church*, said the ultimate test question to Christianity is the resurrection. "It is either the greatest miracle or the greatest delusion which history records."⁴⁵

The most powerful sign that Jesus is who He claims to be is His resurrection from the dead. This is a question with huge implications: did it happen?⁴⁶

DID CHRIST RISE FROM THE DEAD?

We are left with a question: Did Christ rise from the dead? If so, what proof exists to reach that conclusion with intellectual integrity?

WHAT ABOUT SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE?

Evidence leading to proof is usually gathered in one of two ways. First is the scientific method—an experiment conducted in a controlled environment, usually a laboratory. This means exact circumstances must be recreated and the experiment repeated. Scientists form hypotheses from the data gathered.

WHAT ABOUT HISTORICAL EVIDENCE?

What evidence exists to prove that Christ rose from the dead?

Historical events, on the other hand, occur at one moment in time and may not be duplicated. Since we cannot use the scientific method to prove that Julius Caesar existed, we then apply another method of proof, the legal historical method. It is used in courts of law

to prove guilt or innocence. It is also used to verify the reliability of reported historical events. To safeguard our intellectual integrity, we should not be afraid to apply this method to our study of Jesus Christ. It helps us substantiate His claims that He is the Savior of the world and the personal Savior and Lord of those who receive Him. After all, His life, death, and resurrection are reported in many historical documents.

Professor **Wolfgang Pannenberg** of the University of Munich argues that whether the resurrection of Jesus took place or not is an inescapable historical question. Therefore, the question must be decided on the level of historical argument. For Pannenberg “the resurrection of Jesus is a publicly accessible, objective event in history.”⁴⁷ If our knowledge of the past is always based upon evidence and testimony from the past, then the next logical question related to that premise is whether the testimony is reliable.

IS TESTIMONY REGARDING THE RESURRECTION RELIABLE?

When testimony is being evaluated, it must be open to both verification and falsification for those evaluating it. If someone says it is raining outside, that statement is open to verification or falsification. Therefore, when we deal with the testimony regarding the resurrection, we must apply those same principles used in a court of law in examining the reliability of any historical evidence. Listen to what some legal experts whose thinking is guided by these principles have to say about the evidence related to the resurrection.

Professor **Thomas Arnold**, for fourteen years the Lord Master of Rugby University, author of *The History of Rome*, and holder of the Chair of Modern History at Oxford University, was well acquainted with evaluating evidence to determine historical fact. After carefully sifting the historical evidence for the resurrection of Christ, this great scholar said:

I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proven by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God has given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead.⁴⁸

John Copeley, a professor at Cambridge University who rose to the highest office in the judgeship in England was recognized as one of the greatest legal minds in British history. He said, “I know pretty well what evidence is; and I tell you, such evidence as that for the resurrection has never been broken down yet.”⁴⁹

After investigating the evidence of the Resurrection, **Lord Darling**, former Chief Justice of England said, “There exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial, that no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring a verdict that the resurrection story is true.”⁵⁰

IS THE EVIDENCE PROVIDED BY FORMER SKEPTICS VALID?

Many skeptics throughout history started out to disprove the Resurrection, but came to faith in Christ when confronted with the evidence. One was Professor **Simon Greenleaf**. He was professor of law and head of the law department at Harvard University, one of the finest universities in the United States. He wrote a book entitled, *The Principles of Legal Evidence*. Three of his students challenged Professor Greenleaf to take his book, apply it to the resurrection of Christ, and investigate the reliability of the evidence of Jesus rising from the dead. Professor Greenleaf accepted their challenge. After his study he said, “There’s no better documented historical evidence than that for the resurrection of Christ.” Greenleaf concluded that according to the jurisdiction of legal evidence the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the best supported event in all of history.⁵¹

Two other skeptics were professors at Oxford University. One was **Lord Lyttleton** and the other was Dr. **Gilbert West**. They wanted to destroy the myth of Christianity. They knew that they must disprove first the resurrection of Christ and, second, the changed lives of the disciples. Dr. West intended to show the fallacy of the resurrection and Lord Lyttleton was to explain away the radical conversion of Saul of Tarsus who had tried to destroy first-century Christians. One year later both men had become Christians. West went on to write a book entitled, *Observations on the History and Evidences of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, and Lyttleton wrote, *The Conversion of St. Paul*.⁵²

Frank Morrison, a British lawyer who set out to write a book repudiating the resurrection of Christ, did write a book. However, it was not the book he had meant to write. As he examined the evidence for the resurrection of Christ, this skeptical lawyer found it so overwhelming that he was forced to accept it and became a believer. The book he did write, *Who Moved The Stone?*, sets forth the evidence for the resurrection of Christ.

Lew Wallace also set out to write a book disproving the deity of Christ and His resurrection. Instead he, defended it in his famous book, *Ben Hur*. After six years of impartial investigation he said, “I have come to the deliberate conclusion that Jesus Christ was the Messiah of the Jews, the Saviour of the world, and my personal Saviour.”⁵³

ARE YOU GUILTY OF CLOSED THINKING?

It needs to be said that some people, no matter what the evidence presented, would refuse to believe it. Many people reject the claims of God and the person of Christ based not upon intellectual investigation but upon philosophical presuppositions. Author Dallas Willard says, “If a person doesn’t want to know God—well, God has created the world and the human mind in such a way that he doesn’t have to.”⁵⁴ On the university campus one can often

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find people who say they do not believe in the resurrection because they do not believe in God, or in the supernatural, or in miracles. Instead they adhere to a closed system of thought. The philosophers Spinoza and Hume said that even if presented the evidence for the resurrection, they would not believe it. Why? Not because of a lack of evidence but because they already believed that there is no God, no supernatural, and no miracles.

What governs your thinking—intellectual integrity or philosophical myopia?

It is not necessary to add that such thinking is not intellectual integrity, but philosophical myopia (meaning tunnel vision or narrow-minded thinking). Even if all evidence says $2+2 = 4$, the closed mind argues, I choose to believe it can only be three.

Therefore, the appeal is to earnest seekers, those with genuine desire to know God. The appeal is to your intellectual integrity, like that of earlier skeptics who set out to objectively disprove God.

Here is a quote from the Book of Acts in the New Testament, which Sir William Ramsey, the well-known archaeologist, called one of the most accurate histories of the first century:

In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.⁵⁵

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the Life.”⁵⁶ When He rose from the dead, He proved it. The Life of God is now available for all who will receive it through Jesus Christ.

A QUESTION FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION:

“If the historical evidence about the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is reliable and valid, do you agree that this qualifies Him to make the claim, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life’ ”?