

SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 27 MARCH 2016



Eight Reasons Why I Believe That Jesus Rose from the Dead

John Piper

1. Jesus himself testified to his coming resurrection from the dead.

Jesus spoke openly about what would happen to him: crucifixion and then resurrection from the dead. “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31; see also Matthew 17:22; Luke 9:22). Those who consider the resurrection of Christ unbelievable will probably say that Jesus was deluded or (more likely) that the early church put these statements in his mouth to make him teach the falsehood that they themselves conceived. But those who read the Gospels and come to the considered conviction that the one who speaks so compellingly through these witnesses is not the figment of foolish imagination will be unsatisfied with this effort to explain away Jesus’ own testimony to his resurrection from the dead.

This is especially true in view of the fact that the words which predict the resurrection are not only the simple straightforward words quoted above, but also the very oblique and indirect words which are far less likely to be the simple invention of deluded disciples. For example, two separate witnesses testify in two very different ways to Jesus’ statement during his lifetime that if his enemies destroyed the temple (of his body), he would build it again in three days (John 2:19; Mark 14:58; cf. Matthew 26:61). He also spoke illusively of the “sign of Jonah” – three days in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:39; 16:4). And he hinted at it again in Matthew 21:42 –

“The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.” On top of his own witness to the coming resurrection, his accusers said that this was part of Jesus’ claim: “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise’” (Matthew 27:63).

2. The tomb was empty on Easter.

The earliest documents claim this: “When they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus” (Luke 24:3). And the enemies of Jesus confirmed it by claiming that the disciples had stolen the body (Matthew 28:13). The dead body of Jesus could not be found. There are four possible ways to account for this.

2.1 *His foes stole the body.* If they did (and they never claimed to have done so), they surely would have produced the body to stop the successful spread of the Christian faith in the very city where the crucifixion occurred. But they could not produce it.

2.2 *His friends stole the body.* This was an early rumor (Matthew 28:11-15). Is it probable? Could they have overcome the guards at the tomb? More important, would they have begun to preach with such authority that Jesus was raised, knowing that he was not? Would they have risked their lives and accepted beatings for something they knew was a fraud?

2.3 *Jesus was not dead, but only unconscious when they laid him in the tomb.* He awoke, removed the stone, overcame the soldiers, and vanished from history after a few meetings with his disciples in which he convinced them he was risen from the dead. Even the foes of Jesus did not try this line. He was obviously dead. The Romans saw to that. The stone could not be moved by one man from within who had just been stabbed in the side by a spear and spent six hours nailed to a cross.

2.4 *God raised Jesus from the dead.* This is what he said would happen. It is what the disciples said did happen. But as long as there is a remote possibility of explaining the resurrection naturalistically, modern people say we should not jump to a supernatural explanation. Is this reasonable? I don’t think so. Of course, we don’t want to be gullible. But neither do we want to reject the truth just because it’s strange. We need to be aware that our commitments at this point are much affected by our preferences – either for the state of affairs that would arise from the truth of the resurrection, or for the

state of affairs that would arise from the falsehood of the resurrection.

3. The disciples were almost immediately transformed from men who were fearful after the crucifixion (Luke 24:21, John 20:19) into men who were bold witnesses of the resurrection (Acts 2:24, 3:15, 4:2).

Their explanation of this change was that they had seen the risen Christ and had been authorized to be his witnesses (Acts 2:32). The most popular competing explanation is that their confidence was owing to hallucinations. There are numerous problems with such a notion. The disciples were not gullible, but level-headed skeptics both before and after the resurrection. (Mark 9:32, Luke 24:11, John 20:8-9, 25). Moreover, is the deep and noble teaching of those who witnessed the risen Christ the stuff of which hallucinations are made? What about Paul's great letter to the Romans? I personally find it hard to think of this giant intellect and deeply transparent soul as deluded or deceptive, and he claimed to have seen the risen Christ.

4. Paul claimed that, not only had he seen the risen Christ, but that 500 others had seen him also, and many were still alive when he made this public claim.

"Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:6). What makes this so relevant is that this was written to Greeks who were skeptical of such claims when many of these witnesses were still alive. So it was a risky claim if it could be disproved by a little firsthand research.

5. The sheer existence of a thriving, empire-conquering early Christian church supports the truth of the resurrection claim.

The church spread on the power of the testimony that Jesus was raised from the dead and that God had thus made him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). The Lordship of Christ over all nations is based on his victory over death. This is the message that spread all over the world. Its power to cross cultures and create one new people of God was a strong testimony of its truth.

6. The Apostle Paul's conversion supports the truth of the resurrection.

He argues to a partially unsympathetic audience in Galatians 1:11-17 that his gospel comes from the risen Jesus Christ, not from men. His argument is that before his Damascus Road experience when he saw the risen Jesus, he was violently opposed to the Christian faith (Acts 9:1). But now, to everyone's astonishment, he is risking his life for the gospel (Acts 9:24-25). His explanation: The risen Jesus

appeared to him and authorized him to spearhead the Gentile mission (Acts 26:15-18). Can we credit such a testimony? This leads to the next argument.

7. The New Testament witnesses do not bear the stamp of dupes or deceivers.

When a witness is dead, we can base our judgment of him only on the content of his writings and the testimonies of others about him. How do Peter and John and Matthew and Paul stack up?

These men's writings do not read like the works of gullible, easily deceived or deceiving men. Their insights into human nature are profound. Their personal commitment is sober and carefully stated. Their teachings are coherent and do not look like the invention of unstable men. The moral and spiritual standard is high. And the lives of these men are totally devoted to the truth and to the honor of God.

8. There is a self-authenticating glory in the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection as narrated by the biblical witnesses.

The New Testament teaches that God sent the Holy Spirit to glorify Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus said, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...He will glorify me" (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit does not do this by telling us that Jesus rose from the dead. He does it by opening our eyes to see the self-authenticating glory of Christ in the narrative of his life and death and resurrection. He enables us to see Jesus as he really was, so that he is irresistibly true and beautiful. The apostle stated the problem of our blindness and the solution like this: "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God...For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4, 6).

A saving knowledge of Christ crucified and risen is not the mere result of right reasoning about historical facts. It is the result of spiritual illumination to see those facts for what they really are: a revelation of the truth and glory of God in the face of Christ – who is the same yesterday today and forever.



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Edited from: www.desiringgod.org/articles/eight-reasons-why-i-believe-that-jesus-rose-from-the-dead

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